

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

WORKPLACE STRESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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Abstract

Stress, very simply, is a built-in condition. Humans are hard-wired to have a physical and psychological “stress” reaction when facing a perceived threat, whether it is real or not. Irrespective of its definition or its source, excessive workplace stress has serious repercussions for both employees and employers. Everyone experiences stress differently because of various reasons and reacts differently to stress in the face of the same stressor. Stressors produce different stress levels in different people: combined with the external factors of stress (potential stressors) it has been found that how one is affected by that stressor depends on how one perceives this stressor, based on its relative importance to the person and the traits and characteristics of the person e.g. reactions in face of a challenge or threat. As an effect of stress, one reacts physically, psychologically and behaviourally, and has negative consequences rather than positive consequences, which affect both physical and mental well-being and performance at work. These have serious implications for businesses, especially in this highly competitive and dynamic environment.

This study endeavoured to identify the causes of workplace stress at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and whether the merger between the former Universities of Natal and Durban-Westville has contributed to workplace stress. The sources of stress were identified and its effect on work performance was acknowledged. The main aim of this study was to assist employees and management alike to address the disparities of stress and to cope with stress.

To prove the objectives of this study an on-line questionnaire was sent out to respondents using QuestionPro to obtain their views on the effects of stress that they have felt in the past 2 years and how they rate their workplaces. The results of the survey found that 90.3% of respondents experienced stress in the last two years while 9.7% had no experience of stress over the same period. In terms of the impact of workplace stress on work performance, 64% of the respondents indicated that stress has had a negative impact on their work performance while 26% indicated that workplace stress had no impact on their work performance. The majority of respondents felt that in order to reduce stress at UKZN, management should increase pay (rated as most relevant) followed by line managers should show more respect and empathy towards staff. Staff also indicated that stress management workshops and counselling should be provided for staff. After embarking on this research and identifying with the stress within UKZN, it was recommended that UKZN increase the awareness of stress counselling and management programmes to effectively help employees cope with stress.

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Chapter One

Overview of Study

1.1 Introduction

Stress has become a regular term in everyday language which has become prevalent in industrial societies. Prolific writings have emerged about stress and numerous factors have been identified together with a multitude of management programmes which have been initiated to deal with it. Stress related illnesses and disorders are costing organisations millions of rands. Those affected by stress encounter not only physical afflictions but also manifest a range of psychological and behavioural problems. There is growing evidence that universities no longer provide a low stress working environments that they once did (Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, Hapuararchchi & Boyd, 2003). As a result of the changing landscape of postsecondary education (Hendel & Horn, 2008), occupational stress levels among academic and administrative staff of universities are generally high (Michailidis, 2008), alarmingly widespread and increasing across the globe (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Stough, & Dua, 2001). It has been commonplace in many universities for some years to hear employees comment that morale has never been lower or that employees are at breaking point (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997). This chapter will provide an overview of this study which includes the motivation for the study, the focus and problem statement.

1.2 Motivation for the study

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) strives to be the premier university of African scholarship. The employees play an integral part in achieving this goal. The university acknowledges the well-being of its employees and has introduced strategies to acknowledge their worth and retain talent at UKZN.

The organisation constantly looks for answers as to why certain individuals remain loyal to UKZN and whilst at the same time there is growing staff turnover. Since the merger of the former Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal, there has been constant change in the

form of restructuring and the emergence of different leadership styles over the past seven years (2004 – 2011). This has resulted in staff experiencing feelings of anxiety, uncertainty culminating in workplace stress.

This study will provide the organisation with valuable knowledge on the causes of workplace stress at UKZN and its effect on staff performance. The results from this study will provide UKZN with information on how to deal with workplace stress and provide mechanisms to reduce and prevent stress thus improving staff morale and productivity.

Employees will benefit directly from this study if the management of UKZN were to focus on job satisfaction and pay attention to the perceptions and concerns of their employees. The Human Resources Department of UKZN will benefit from this study as they will be better equipped to provide proper mechanisms to deal with stress based on proven research which would add value at UKZN. Lastly, senior management at UKZN will be made aware of the areas of concern in terms of the well-being of staff and this could be used as valuable information for future decision making.

1.3 Focus of the Study

The focus of this study is to remind, highlight and sensitise managers about the causes and problems of stress at UKZN, that is explore the factors and causes of stress in the workplace and how it affects the behaviour of staff and which will subsequently have an impact on their attitudes and behaviour at work.

This will identify factors of stress within the work environment which has an effect on the behaviour of staff. To achieve this, the study will first identify the most significant factors which cause stress, then understand how individuals differ in their understanding and handling of stress.

1.4 Problem Statement

The environment of higher educational institutions are in a constant state of change due to the pressures of government to streamline processes and cut costs with the aim of achieving greater efficiency (Gillespie, 2001). As a result, UKZN has been faced with the challenge of

retaining staff members. This study will answer the question: Does Workplace stress have a direct impact on work performance and on the wellbeing of staff at UKZN?

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1.5.1 To determine the causes of employee stress at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 1.5.2 To determine if the merger between the former Universities of Natal and Durban-Westville has contributed to workplace stress.
- 1.5.3 To establish if workplace stress has an impact on work performance.
- 1.5.4 To establish what interventions can reduce stress in the workplace.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study include: a small sample was relied on and some of the respondents were unable to access Questionpro to complete the questionnaires. Each limitation has been discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this study.

1.7 Overview of the study

The study was undertaken in a manner that allowed for a clear understanding of the problem, a review of the literature, a description of the methodology used, presentation of the data, discussion of the data and concluding recommendations and comments. These subsections are divided into the following chapters:

- 1.7.1 Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the research problem, which reflects on the background of the study, the research objectives and the limitations of the study.
- 1.7.2 Chapter 2 is primarily focussed on a literature review. The literature review focuses on the definition of stress, causes and consequences of stress and its impact on the organisation.
- 1.7.3 Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and data collection techniques used in the study. Data analysis will be done using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).
- 1.7.4 Chapter 4 is dedicated to the presentation of the data that was gathered using Questionpro sent to the staff at UKZN.

- 1.7.5 Chapter 5 analyses and discusses the primary data, presented in Chapter 4, taking into consideration information extracted from the literature review.
- 1.7.7 Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter and will attempt to measure the level of stress and how the employees are affected so as to help the staff concerned to rebuild a healthier environment and to better cope with stress and alleviate it. It offers recommendations that contribute towards improving workplace stress at UKZN and provides recommendations for any future research that can be undertaken.

1.8 Summary

Organisations consist mainly of people, therefore its effectiveness ultimately depends on their efforts as individuals. Outcomes for the individual – job satisfaction and performance represent key components of effectiveness. The impact of stress has negative consequences on individuals, which causes high absenteeism, high rates of turnover, job dissatisfaction and poor work performance amongst staff.

This chapter has highlighted the problem statement, the research question and the objectives of the empirical study. Chapter 2 will present the literature which serves as a background to the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In modern society one spends at least eight hours of the day at work. This does not include the hour that it takes to travel to and from work on a daily basis. People today, have to deal with amongst others, not only work-related stress but also manage their personal relationships, their finances, information technology such as e-mail, cell or mobile phones and pagers (Cohen, 2002). They also have to contend with their fears of crime, failure and loneliness, as well as manage the different changes in their lives which can be extremely stressful. Workplace stress is a critical issue that affects one's health and safety with devastating effects if not discovered timeously. Stress can give rise to anxiety and depression which are known as psychosocial illnesses. It can also be a factor in the cause of physical illness such as muscular aches and pains and even worsen ergonomic injuries (Doyle & Hind, 1998).

Employees working within a demanding environment experience the effects of modern day business and in many instances this leaves the employee feeling overwhelmed and stressed. This chapter will provide an overview of the relevant literature on stress management, focusing on stress experienced in organisations, causes and the consequences of stress in the workplace.

2.2 Definition of Stress

The word stress is a common term that is frequently used in everyday life. Workplace stress is considered to be a rising concern in many organisations in South Africa. It can be described as any adjustment demand caused by physical, mental or emotional factors that requires coping behaviours (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2011). The attempts to define stress have resulted in a whole host of definitions and confusion and misunderstanding of the concept. There have been varied and differing views of stress and a general lack of agreement on a common definition and understanding in the literature. According to

Williams and Cooper (2002), stress is defined as an outcome of a process where the challenges and demands of the pressures of life, work or home are felt by the individual.

Modern definitions of stress emphasise that stress is a rather personal experience caused by the pressures and demands on an individual and impacts on the individual's ability to cope and their self-awareness in terms of coping with pressure. According to Blaug, Kenyon and Lekhi (2007), an individual's appraisal of his stress will be affected by a range of socio-economic factors which may not be directly work-related, and may include gender, race, age, as well as geographical location, housing, health, number of children, family arrangement and community networks as well as other psychological factors including past experiences and personality traits.

According to Ivanchevich and Matteson (1993), stress is simply described as an interface of the individual to his or her surroundings. According to Greenberg and Baron (2000), stress can be described as a multifarious blueprint of expressive states, physiological reactions and associated feelings in reaction to exterior burden. They further refer to the demands emanating from the environment as stressors. Some examples of stressors are demands of work allocations, interpersonal relations amongst co-workers, the relationship with an individual's spouse and children and social obligations. The accumulated effects of stress as expressed by Greenberg and Baron (2008) can be described as deviations from normal patterns of behaviour or activity and thus creating an outcome to the exposure of stressful events.

According to Baron (2008), the word stress suggests thoughts of something that is unpleasant and beyond one's control. Many accidents, diseases and suicides are a result of high levels of stress. Stress in the workplace has detrimental effects on the economy. Brun and Lamarche (2006) stated that since early 2000, job-related stress costs the European community 20 billion Euros and the United States 300 billion dollars. They further indicate that stress in the workplace causes staff to leave their employer, causes increased absenteeism and affects employee productivity.

Stress affects everyone in one way or another. It occurs due to the ever changing environment that we live in and are required to adapt to as well as the consequence of our relations. (Looker & Gregson, 1994). There are two types of stress, Eustress or positive stress – commonly known as good stress; it is the one that inspires achievement, exhilaration and

encouragement and distress or negative stress which is the bad stress. The individual displays traits of irritation; their spirit is decreased displaying feelings of insecurity and inadequacy which eventually results in a shorter life cycle (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2011). For the purposes of this research paper, the term stress will be conceptualized according to Blaug, Kenyon and Lekhi (2007).

2.3 Consequences of Stress

Stress at work is unavoidable and, in many cases undesirable. At moderate levels stress is a motivator and enhances job interest and involvement. When it becomes excessive, however, it may become distracting, demotivating and even dangerous. (De Frank and Ivancevich, 1998). De Frank and Ivancevich, (1998) further state that employers should determine whether there are excessive levels of stress present in their organisations. If potential stressors are identified, programs can be developed and evaluated to address these concerns, both by giving employees broader coping skills but also by attempting to eliminate unnecessary sources of pressure in the workplace.

According to Blaug, Kenyon and Lekhi (2007), it is crucial that in every organisation all levels of management must be committed to dealing with the effects of stress. It is necessary for them to make the necessary resources available to deal with stress. This in turn helps convince the employees that the organisation is serious about their welfare. The lack of this commitment on management's part will result in confusion and cause even greater stress levels amongst employees. People suffering from stress are more likely to drink more alcohol and smoke more excessively. It also causes sleep disorders whereby individuals find it difficult to sleep because adrenaline and cortisol will interfere with the body's ability to switch off and relax (De Frank and Ivancevich, 1998).

2.4 Causes of Stress

In today's western world, work is the primary cause of stress. This is as a result of jobs being more demanding and continually changing (Ornelas and Kleiner, 2003). Every organisation faces new challenges that force them to change their working conditions. Employees are required to work longer hours for the same amount of pay. As a result of our ever increasing

population, our economic situation gets more challenging; job security is diminished due to an overextended workforce. More and more people find themselves in jobs that are not fulfilling but are consistent. This gives rise to an increase in job stress and related costs (Ornelas and Kleiner, 2003).

Stress is caused by a number of factors called stressors. A stressor can be defined as environmental factors that produce stress (Krietner and Kinicki, 2008). This affects the physical and psychological well-being and requires action to restore that balance. Stressors can be grouped into two categories i.e. organisational and personal. According to Feldman & Arnold (2001), organizational stressors can be identified as role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, technological advancements, downsizing and restructuring and it should be noted that there is no shortage of factors within the organisation that cause stress.

Workplace stress and the organisational structure can be in direct relationship with each other. According to Martin (1996), work related stressors such as retrenchments, work relocations, work overload (Sparks and Cooper, 1999), augmented family work clash (Anderson, Coffey & Byerly, 2002) increased inter-company politicking (Cropanzano, Rupp & Byrne, 2003) and behaviours of the leader are all stressors found in an organisation. Other organisationally induced stressors could be job ambiguity and role conflict (Anderson et al, 2002).

Bacharach, Bamberger & Sonnenstuhl, (2002) claim that differing expectations by the organisation and the employee gives rise to and are the main causes of stress in the workplace. Conner and Douglas (2004) conclude that the key to the successful reduction to workplace stress is for both parties to work together, combining both their expectations thus alleviating any confusion that arises. Furthermore, other hazards such as physical environment, high noise levels, too many employees crowded in the workspace and the lack of privacy in the workplace all contribute towards employee stress (Burke, 1988). According to Cox, Griffiths and Houdmont, (2006), when an individual experiences stress, they exhibit physical changes closely linked to flight or fight reflex. The two hormones called Adrenalin and cortisol are among 40 other hormones produced by the body when one experiences the effects of stress. Cox et al, (2006) further state that research reveals that sustained exposure to stress can develop into psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression as well as cause other illnesses such as heart attack, back pain and headaches.

A research study conducted by Melchior, Caspi & Milner, (2007) revealed that employees who are employed in highly stressful jobs stand a much higher risk of developing severe anxiety or acute depression as compared with employees working in less stressful positions. According to the Health and Safety Executive Report, (2005) the main causes of work-related stress are increased job demands, excessive power in the workplace, lack of support, undefined roles, poor working relationships with co-workers and continuous change. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Research through their studies identified excessive workload and poor management style as the top two main causes of work-related stress.

Green (2001) identifies various characteristics that have aided in the escalation of work, including demanding pressures increasingly being imposed upon workers and the failure of proper representation and power of trade unions. Green (2001) also cites Human Resources policies as another major source of stress as they are in his view designed to encourage greater employee participation and commitment with a direct link to performance based pay. The remaining attribute contributing towards high levels of work stress reported by Green (2001) is the advancement of technology. The pace of work has been considerably increased with the on-going development of the mobile phones, the internet, emails, laptops and this has also obscured the work life balance for many employees, making it much more difficult to dissociate themselves from their work and restore their batteries (Green, 2001).

Green, (2001) further sites that the advent of instant messaging, mobile phones like the blackberry and social networking websites such as the Internet, Facebook and Twitter have caused people to be more reliant on electronic communication and as a result there is no longer face-to face communication or conversations amongst colleagues, family and friends that would ordinarily help individuals with their life problems.

According to Sparks and Cooper, (1999), stress levels have also increased over the last few years as a result of increased consumer spending resulting in an increase in personal debt, the rising unemployment rate has affected job security as well as the high cost of living. This has had an impact on the positive mental health of employees. As the economic environment becomes more challenging, it is more likely that these trends will continue and increase, thus causing greater anxieties for individuals both at work and at home (Sparks & Cooper, 1999).

According to three recent surveys employers are complaining of higher stress and heavier workloads. Moreover, taking over the additional burden of other employees is extremely stressful. The latter also contributes to people worrying about their future stability regarding employment (Enough Overwork: Taking Action on Workload, 2002). The report also explains that there is an increase of demands and people do not take care of themselves. Furthermore, when things are rough they need to work 24 hours a day. However, this aggravates negative perceptions, resentment and fatigue is built (Enough Overwork: Taking Action on Workload, 2002).

This is an ideal opportunity for business executives to take careful note of their health situation in their organisations and invest in the well-being of their staff by taking steps to identify and manage stress more effectively (Blaug, et al, 2007).

2.5 Occupational Stress at Higher Education Institutions

There is on-going research that suggests higher education institutions are no longer noted for being the low-stress environment they once used to be (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua and Stough, 2001; Winefield, Gillespie, Sough, Dua and Hapuararchchi, 2002; Winefield and Jarrett, 2001). Higher education institutions face an overload of demands but have an undersupply of response capabilities, especially concerning finances (Viljoen and Rothmann, 2002). According to Winefield and Jarrett (2001), the main characteristics of a higher education institution as a work organisation are its two distinct social structures, namely, academic employees and administrative and support staff. These two constituencies have different job profiles and supervisory structures, and this gives rise to radically different employee problems and difficulties. According to Gillespie et al, (2001), the use of the term support staff in this article refers to that sector of employees within the higher education sector that are regarded as non-academic staff. These include administrative support, academic support and staff employed in technical areas. The role of support staff should not be underestimated as they provide an important role in the creation and development of knowledge and innovation in higher education institutions (Gillespie et al. 2001).

It appears that support personnel in higher education institutions experience different

problems from academic staff members (Smewing and Cox, 1998). This is evident when the pressures and demands of academic and senior support staff are placed on to secretarial and administrative employees, whose workloads are unfairly increased and there is unequal distribution of work. As a result, support staff are left to contend with the problem of meeting strict deadlines, control of workflow and added work pressures. In addition, support staff are required to learn and master new technology without the necessary training provided and they also have to contend with working with individuals who do not respect their roles or understand the intricacies of the tasks involved. According to Gillespie et al, (2001), the workloads of technical staff seem to be increasing and there is a general perception that they are no longer being recognised for their expert knowledge and therefore not being effectively utilised. Due to the demands of a manager, there is increasing pressure and demand for managers to come in earlier to work and stay beyond normal working hours (Smewing and Cox, 1998).

According to Woods, (2010), support staff at many universities and technikons have fundamentally been ignored in recent literature especially with regards to the importance of total quality management; stress and burnout have come under scrutiny. According to Pitman (2001), who stated that firstly, higher education institution's main aim is to focus on research and teaching while administrative functions predominantly exist to facilitate these aims. Secondly, majority of published studies have been conducted by academics, whose focus have been on those areas that they specialise in or which are of greater concern to them. The role of higher education support staff and their stress and burnout levels have thus largely been overlooked. Banata and Kuh (1998:P41) have drawn attention to this oversight, stating, —A faculty cannot by itself accomplish the higher education institution's objectives for a student's intellectual and personal development; it needs the cooperation of others who work with students where students spend the majority of their time.”

In recent studies by Winefield and Jarrett (2001), several key factors were acknowledged as being common contributors of stress and burnout amongst support and academic employees. These factors are excessive workloads, strict time constraints, lack of promotion opportunities, no recognition for work done and unequal pay, continually changing job roles, poor management, inadequate resources and insufficient funding, and excessive student interaction (Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, and Blix, 1994; Gillespie et al., 2001; Winefield and Jarrett, 2001). Support staff indicated that occupational stress impacted on them both

professionally and personally (Gillespie et al., 2001).

(Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, and Blix, 1994; Gillespie et al., 2001; Winefield and Jarrett, (2001) further indicated that since the effectiveness and health of staff members at higher institutions are important in delivering quality service (by which the higher education institution is evaluated), burnout and ill health, and their causes, should be investigated. It is essential to identify the stressors that the staff members experience and to search for variables that lessen the impact of these stressors.

In line with global trends, the South African Higher Education sector has also had to adapt to changing circumstances, while maintaining the desire for excellence among employees. Literature by Zohar (1980), suggests that on-going high levels of occupational stress, if undetected and not treated appropriately, undermines an employees' ability to be creative or productive in the workplace as well as is detrimental to their health, well-being and morale. This then begs the question: What are institutions in the higher education sector doing to help their support staff overcome the feelings of powerlessness, anxiety and stress that they experience as a result of current transformations? Evidence suggests that transformations can be overwhelming to these employees, whose effectiveness is fundamental to the functioning of a modern tertiary institution (Zohar, 1980).

An academic career was once viewed as offering low stress, providing a safe and secure environment with a high academic reputation and the opportunity to work independently. (Willie & Stecklein, 1982). Over twenty years later, these perceptions of the academic environment however have drastically changed. Akerlind and McAlpine, (2009) recount the pressures for change acting upon academia, which include substantial growth in student numbers at institutions of higher learning, increased emphasis on research, concerns for equity benefits of education and emphasis on job-training. These changes are coupled with constraints imposed by economic pressure and downturns in the economy (Akerlind & McAlpine, 2009).

Reported stress in academia now exceed levels found in normative data from the general population (Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper and Ricketts, 2005) as a number of stressors have emerged: Academic salaries lag behind other professions; positions are increasingly untenured or on a contractual basis; workloads have increased; career advancement is often slow and pressure to obtain external funding and publish has increased (Blix, et al., 1994;

Winefield, Gillespie, Stoup, Dua, Hapuararchchi and Boyd, 2003).

Research conducted in the United Kingdom reveals that there is increasing evidence that suggests that academic staff at higher education institutions are being exposed to higher levels of workplace stress (Altbach, 1996; Kinman, 2001). According to Sharpley, Reynolds, (1996), a considerable number of academics who were exposed to unfamiliar stress levels showed signs of weakened physical, social and psychological functioning. The quality, productivity and creativity of employee's work will be undermined if no resolution is taken with regards to the high levels of organisational stress. This will also affect employee health, their well-being and morale (Nowack, 1989; Terry et al. 1995). Alternately, the well-being of employees and work performance will be sustained if organisations take precautionary measures to prevent chronic stress in their work environment.

According to studies conducted in both Australia and the United Kingdom, prevalent stressors included a lack of trust in senior management, high levels of job insecurity and diminishing or sparse resources (Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper, & Ricketts. 2005), Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, Hapuararchchi, & Boyd, 2003). In the study conducted in Australia it was revealed that the increase in teaching workloads and student/staff ratios, the challenges of attracting external funding, poor management and a lack of recognition and reward were noted stressors in the Australian sample (Winefield et al. 2002). In the United Kingdom academics pointed to lax co-workers, low decision control, poor organisational communication, work-life conflict and time pressure as prevalent stressors. Studies conducted around the world on stress show that there seems to be a common thread amongst stress and academic staff who all experienced work overload, time constraints, lack of promotion opportunities, insufficient recognition, inadequate salary, changing job role, inadequate management and/or participation in management, inadequate resources and funding and negative interaction with students (Boyd and Wylie: 1994; Daniels and Guppy: 1994; Harrison, 1997; Sharpley et al. 1996; Seldin, 1987).

(Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Stough, & Dua, 2001), identify five key areas in their research on stress among university staff. They are the experience and level of stress, causes of stress, consequences of stress and moderators and recommendations for stress reduction. The stressors identified as causing most distress were: insufficient funding and resources, work overload, poor management practice, job insecurities and insufficient reward and recognition. He further suggested that work-related stress not only influences professional effectiveness,

but also affect the employee's personal well-being. The most important coping mechanisms identified were, the need for adequate support from co-workers and management, more recognition and achievement, high morale, and the provision of more flexible working conditions (Gillespie et al. 2001).

According to Cartwright and Cooper (2002) when workers perceive an imbalance between demands placed on them and environmental or personal resources, this can cause a number of possible reactions. These may include:

- physiological responses such as increase in heart rate, blood pressure and hyperventilation
- emotional responses such as feeling nervous or irritated
- cognitive responses such as reduced attention, perception, and forgetfulness
- behavioural reactions such as aggressive, impulsive behaviour or making mistakes.

The stress process can be summarised in a model (Figure 2.1) that illustrates the causes of stress, short-term stress reactions, long-term consequences of stress and individual characteristics, as well as their interrelations.

Figure 2.1, below illustrates the causes of stress in the workplace.

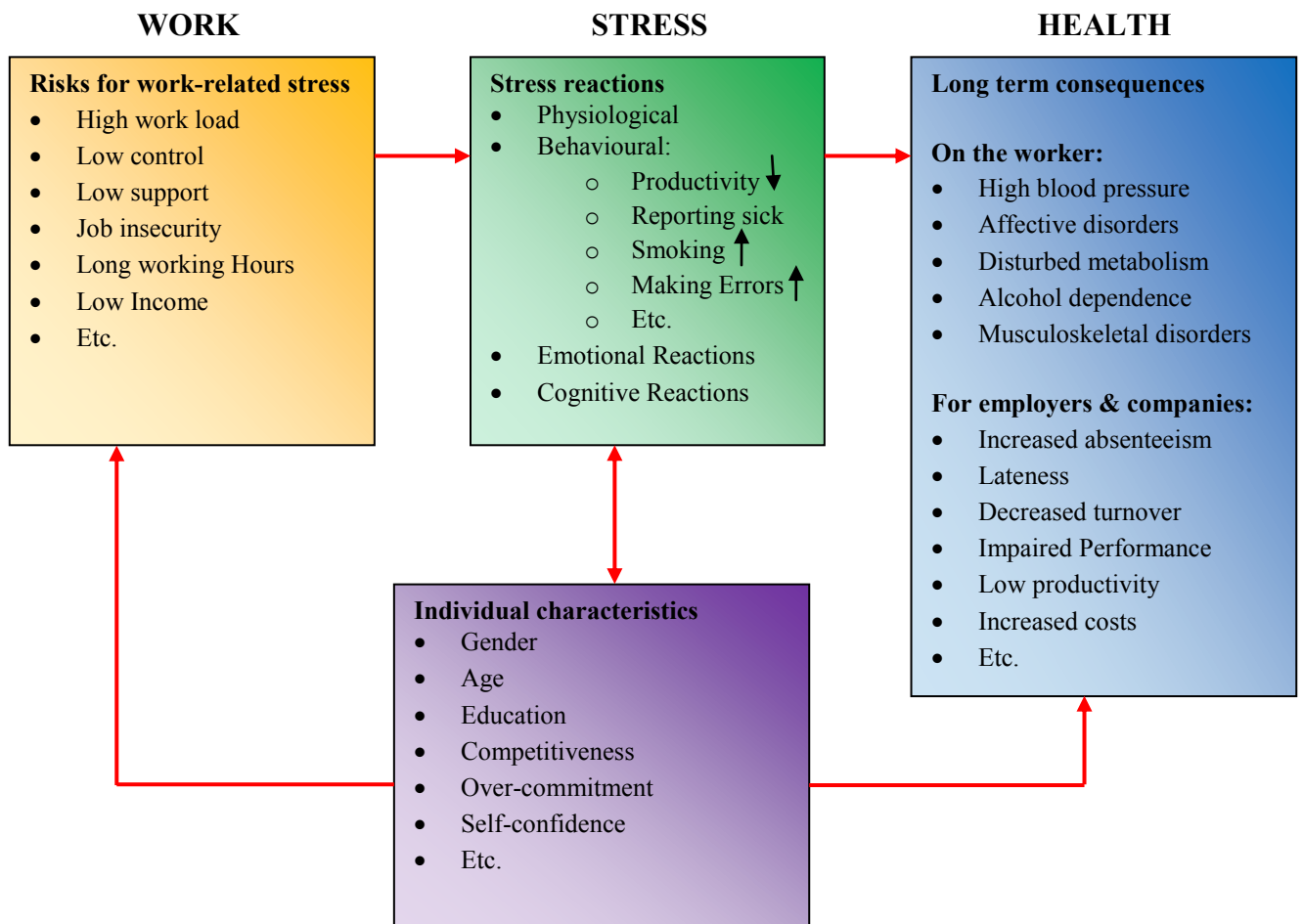


Figure 2.1: Model of causes and consequences of work-related stress

(Schaufeli, van Dierendonck, & van Gorp, 1996)

Figure 2.1 illustrates the causes of stress, short-term stress reactions, long-term consequences of stress and individual characteristics, as well as their interrelations (Schaufeli, 1990). There are many ways of classifying work-related stressors. More commonly ‘demands’ may be related to time pressure or the amount of work (quantitative demands), or may refer to the difficulty of the work (cognitive demands) or the empathy required (emotional demands), or even to the inability to show one’s emotions at work. Demands may also be physical (that is, high demands in the area of dynamic and static loads). When workers perceive an imbalance between demands placed on them and environmental or personal resources, this can cause a number of possible reactions. These may include:

- physiological responses such as increase in heart rate, blood pressure and hyperventilation;
- emotional responses such as feeling nervous or irritated;
- cognitive responses such as reduced attention and perception, forgetfulness;
- behavioural reactions such as aggressive, impulsive behaviour or making mistakes.

When demands exceed one's abilities and knowledge, but one is able to perceive this as an opportunity to work towards achieving a state of balance, a situation of learning and development may arise.

According to Schaufeli, (1990), when stress reactions persist over a period of time, they may develop into more permanent, less reversible health outcomes such as chronic fatigue, burnout, musculoskeletal problems or cardiovascular disease. (Schaufeli, 1990) further indicated individual characteristics such as personality, values, goals, age, gender, level of education and family situation influences one's ability to cope. These characteristics can either exacerbate or alleviate the effects of risk factors at work. Physical and psychological characteristics, such as physical fitness or a high level of optimism, may not only act as precursors or buffers in the development of stress reactions and mental health problems, but may also be changed by stress. On the other hand, stress reactions like fatigue and long-term health problems will often reduce a person's ability to perform well and thus aggravate the experience of stress, which will ultimately result in exhaustion and breakdown ((Schaufeli, 1990).

2.6 Impact of Stress on the Organisation

Stress affects people who are an integral part of organisations and their most important asset. It is therefore natural that the implications and consequences of stress on organisations are highlighted. Humans who are an organisation's most important asset are negatively affected by stress which impacts on their behaviour. It is important to determine the implications of employee stress on the organisation in order to manage sources of workplace stress, stressed employees and the resultant negative behaviours which has the potential to affect other employees and the organisation. The most common behavioural measures in the workplace are work performance, absenteeism and labour turnover (Warr, 1987). Stress can have a profound effect on an organisation's productivity in terms of increased employee absence, staff turnover and work performance.

2.6.1 Stress and absence due to stress

It is very easy to calculate the cost of the organisational implications of stress. It is not surprising that the impact of stress on an individual is closely linked with the high levels of absenteeism due to stress related illnesses. There are a number of reasons for an employee experiencing stress to take absence from work due to stress-related ill-health.

Stress in the workplace is associated with a number of health problems in employees (Vézina, Bourbonnais, Brisson & Trudel, 2004). It is also linked to low job satisfaction, reduced productivity (Cotton & Hart, 2003) and an increase in occupational accidents (Clarke & Cooper, 2004). These negative consequences for employees affect the success of organisations and their competitive edge in the marketplace. Even if the employer cannot protect employees from the sources of stress arising in their private lives and personal problems, he can protect them from sources of stress emerging in the workplace (Leka, Griffiths & Cox, 2003).

According to Clark & Cooper (2004), employees suffer from depression and cardiovascular problems as a result of chronic exposure to stress. This is reason enough for absence from work in such cases. In other cases ill-health is indirectly due to stress or exacerbated by stress. Here stress has an indirect or contributory impact on ill-health. The individual's immune system is weakened and is more vulnerable to infections such as colds and flu or stomach infections.

According to Leka, Griffiths & Cox, (2003), taking a spell of absence from work due to stress related sickness is a way of the individual coping with the situation or recovering from its effects. This maybe the situation in cases where poor relationships with co-workers or bullying are the cause of the stress. They further explain that there are cases where stressful work situations gives rise to poor employee commitment and the employees are not motivated enough to come to work even though they are not ill enough to be absent from work. There are however valid situations where absence due to stress related problems both directly and indirectly are not recorded as such. This occurs where the individual is afraid of being victimised or stigmatised if they admit to the real cause of their illness, especially if it is related to mental health problems. In this case, another reason is provided for their absence and stress related symptoms such as headaches or hypertension, is recorded as so rather than as stress related (The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2008).

2.6.1.1 Negative Health Outcomes

There is ample evidence that occupational stress has an impact on workers' mental and physical well-being (Kahn, 2003). According to Siu (2002) and Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua and Hapuararchchi (2002), there is significant evidence to suggest that chronic and high levels of occupational stress, left unchecked, are related to mental and physical well-being, job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, stress-related injuries, turnover, and intention to quit. They have shown significant correlations between higher levels of psychological strain and incidences of self-reported stress-related health symptoms, such as sleeping difficulties, headaches, and viral and cold infections. Furthermore, these symptoms significantly associate with stress-related medical conditions reported by staff members, such as migraines, hypertension and coronary heart disease.

According to Kinman (2001), research has demonstrated that stressors can have a wide-ranging negative impact on the individual. Strain refers to reactions to the conditions of stress (Winefield et al, 2003), and is observable at a cognitive level (a decline in the quality of decision making, lower levels of creativity, impaired memory); behavioural level (absenteeism, poor time management, substance abuse, irritability); physical level (headaches, digestive disorders, cardiovascular disease) and psychological level (depression, anxiety, low self-esteem) (Rothmann & Cooper, 2008).

2.6.1.2 Psychological disease and social and behavioural changes

Psychological problems caused by stress include burnout, alcohol abuse, unexplained physical symptoms, absenteeism, chronic fatigue and accidents, sick building syndrome and repetitive strain injury (Hothopf & Wesseley, 1997). They further estimate that occupational stress causes half of absenteeism, 40% of turnover and 5% of total lost productivity.

According to Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua and Hapuararchchi (2002), psychological health refers to clinical symptoms indicative of stress-induced mental ill-health (for example, constant tiredness and irritability), while physical health refers to physical symptoms often associated with stress (for example, insomnia/sleep loss and headaches.) Marchand, Demers, Durand & Simard, 2003) state that psychological distress if untreated, can cause more serious

reversible health problems (psychosomatic illnesses, arterial hypertension, severe depression, alcoholism), and over time, it can also lead to irreversible damage (permanent disability, premature deaths, suicide, cardiovascular and neuropsychiatric diseases). Overall, the presence of psychological distress is a sign that something is going wrong in the individual psyche (Marchand, Demers, Durand & Simard, 2003).

2.6.1.3 Burnout

Burnout can be defined as a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding“ (Harrison, 1999:P25). It is a societal problem with no quick cure that affects people from all walks of life.

Harrison (1999) further states that as a result of the lack of emotional rewards, acknowledgements, and successes, people are more prone to experience burnout. This is viewed as a gradual erosion of their spirit and zest for life and is due to their day to day struggles and chronic stresses that have become part and parcel of their daily lives and work environment. Individuals suffer from burnout when stress outweighs support and rewards and their job loses all meaning. According to Maslach, Leiter and Schaufeli (1996), there are six major influences on burnout: the intense workload, strict deadlines and timeframes, loss of control over day-to-day priorities; not adequately being paid for the job and having to do more for less, relationships become impersonal and teamwork is undermined; the absence of fairness, trust and transparency, lack of respect for self and others; and conflicting values - we don't always practice what we preach.

University staff members also suffer from the effects of burnout. Harrison (1999) outlines the various issues and characteristics that staff at higher institutions are exposed to on an on-going basis. These include work pressures, conflicts, demands, and the lack of or too few emotional rewards, accomplishments, and successes,“ the use of unrealistic goals and expectations set for people without their input, and frustrations in achieving professional growth (Harrison, 1999:P26).

Burnout is as a result of physical and mental exhaustion caused by exposure to toxic stressors through continually working under stressful conditions. Harrison, (1999) outlines a few of the

symptoms of burnout as emotional exhaustion, feeling emotionally overextended and nearly depleted of emotional resources, negative feelings, irritability, and a deteriorated sense of self-image and a decline in feelings of competence and a decrease in work performance, feeling helpless and hopeless (Harrison,1999). Burnout is directly associated with stressors at work and differs from depression which is linked to many causes that maybe outside of their work environment. Role conflict at work, lack of control over one's job, and lack of social support on the job are but a few stressors that cause burnout. Those individuals that suffer from burnout often withdraw from their daily life and may be absent or on extended leave to recover from burnout for long periods of time.

2.6.2 Stress and Performance/Productivity (Presenteeism)

According to Harrison, Newman, & Roth, (2006) who suggested that while absence from work due to stress related sickness costs organisations large sums of money, decreased productivity at work due to mental distress and ill-health is actually much higher than the cost of absence. The 2007 Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health report, 'Mental Health at Work' - Developing the business case, suggests that the overall cost to employers of mental ill-health are the equivalent of £1,035 per employee per year. Of this total, the report suggests that only £335 (32.4%) was due to absenteeism, while £605 (58.4%), was due to 'presenteeism'. Presenteeism is defined as "the loss in productivity that occurs when employees come to work but function at less than full capacity because of ill health." CIPD. (2008a). It is much harder to calculate the cost of presenteeism than it is to calculate the cost of absence. Individuals feel obligated to come to work even when they are experiencing stress related problems and as a result do not perform at their optimum levels. They may be suffering from fatigue leading to reduced concentration and forgetfulness and this has an impact on their ability to perform well in the job (Harrison, 1999).

2.6.3 Stress creates conflict among workers

According to the Workplace Guide, 2000, stress often manifests itself in the form of anger, so it comes as no surprise that conflict amongst co-workers in an organisation is rife. According to Karasek and Theorell, (1990), the atmosphere in many organisations is often described as

being full of mistrust and hostility in facilities where employees are being overworked or run by insensitive managers. When in this state, workers tend to have feelings of isolation, resentment and feel powerless and stay away from their fellow colleagues who could support them during this period. (Karasek and Theorell, 1990).

2.6.4 Low motivation and apathy

According to Stranks (2005b), research has shown that individuals who are experiencing high levels of stress can lose their motivation to work or fail to learn new skills. They lack the confidence to take on new risks and lose their ability to be more creative. This has a great impact on work performance as well as one's ability to participate and enjoy their life outside of their work environment. Everyone is affected when toxic stress gives rise to burnout and passivity.

In short, toxic stress leads to burnout and passivity. Everyone suffers when this happens. The worker is cheated out of a rewarding job and a brighter future. The employee is not regarded as a valuable asset to the employer who can no longer draw on his/her full talents. As a result society is deprived of an engaged, active citizen (Work Safe Report, 1996).

2.6.5 Mergers and Acquisitions

According to Marks & Mirvis (1997), mergers, rationalisation, cost-efficiency, and outsourcing have become the terms defining the "transformation" of the universities in post-apartheid South Africa. According to an article by van der Walt, (2004), recent debates on the changing institutional landscape of post-apartheid universities have been left deafeningly silent about the fate of university workers- academics and administrative staff. It is these "ordinary people," who have borne the brunt of the neo-liberal restructuring of the sector. At the same time, the emerging model of the post-apartheid universities - lean, mean, and cost-conscious- has begun to modify higher education, making education a luxury available only to the more affluent (van der Walt, 2004).

According to Schweiger and DeNisi, (1991), the large-scale organisational changes resulting from mergers are having serious impacts on the organisations and their employees. The

effects of a merger on employees' stress and anxiety often persist over time (Schweiger and DeNisi, 1991). Marks and Mirvis (1997) suggest that stress and anxiety are often intensified by the sense of loss associated with organisational members who were victims of mergers, retrenchments or downsizing.

Marks and Mirvis (1997) claimed that even the friendliest and best managed mergers have signs of stress present. The first sign of the merger syndrome is heightened self-interest. People struggle with the thought of change and become preoccupied with what the merger means for themselves, their incomes, and their careers. They develop a plethora of emotions that usually lead to stress and anxiety. They develop a story line about the implications, often a mix of fact and fantasy (Marks and Mirvis, 1997).

Chawla and Kelloway (2004) observed that employees surveyed reported counter-productive sentiments more than one year after the merger took place. It suggests that resistance to change can last for a very long time and that commitment does not obligatorily improve with time. They further stated that people get distracted from doing their jobs as they search for information regarding what a combination means for themselves and their careers. This remark is clearly in line with Covin, Kolenko, Sighler & Tudor, (1997), who mentions that five to seven years are needed for employees to feel assimilated in the merger.

Morrell, Loan-Clarke and Wilkinson (2004) investigated the relationship between organizational change and employees' turnover. They suggested that understanding the role shock plays in precipitating decisions to quit is directly relevant to understanding the relationship between organizational change and employees' turnover. They noted that changes could result in both avoidable and unavoidable turnovers. In the event of change, the firm might decide to act preventively and limit its negative side effects (prevent) or simply react to the effect of turnover (control). According to Marks and Mirvis (1997) when people hear an announcement of a merger, they think downsizing. They fear that what they have experienced or heard about past combinations, e.g., politics predominating over merit in staffing decisions, careers dead-ending, and redundant positions being dealt with insensitively, may very well be their own fate (Marks and Mirvis, 1997).

Management need to realize that downsizing and restructuring can also result in the loss of key technical expertise as well as experienced personnel (Quinlan, 2007). Takeover survivors fear

not only job loss but also the frustrations of working for strangers. Workplace consultants say employees frequently become depressed, sleep less, gain weight, resume smoking or increase their alcohol consumption. The stress level "is more intense the higher you go" in management, Marks (1997) reports. Consequently productivity often suffers and seasoned managers often resign from their positions. Merger-related stress is why people leave a merged organization "well over 50% of the time," Marks and Mirvis (1997).

2.6.6 Stress and staff turnover

Costs relating to stress also include staff leaving the organisation for stress-related reasons. The 2008 CIPD annual Recruitment, Retention and Turnover survey reveals that 19% of respondents in the United Kingdom, stress of the job is a key reason for employee turnover. In addition, 19% cite level of workload, 16% cite lack of support from line managers and 14% cite number of working hours as being key reasons for employee turnover: these working conditions can also be associated with stress. Furthermore, there are people who state that their reason for leaving is change of career or promotion outside the organisation (the most frequently cited reasons) for whom stress or stressful working conditions contributed to their considering leaving the organisation, but who do not specify this (The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2008).

From the perspective of the impact that stress can have on employees, as outlined above, research studies show that stressful work decreases wellbeing in the workplace, increases absenteeism and affects employee productivity (Brun and Lamarche, 2006). Although existing empirical research provides many findings showing that job stress is associated with undesirable organizational outcomes, the basic logic behind these findings is that job stress increases job dissatisfaction, thereby motivating decisions to quit and absenteeism (LeRouge, Nelson, & Blanton, 2006).

2.7 Organisational Stressors

Organisational stress results from the interplay between an individual's personal characteristics (examples of such variables could include personal goals, confidence, emotional intelligence), their environment, the demands placed upon them, and their ability

to cope (Siegrist, 1996). It is important to recognise that an optimal level of organisational stress can enable an individual to work effectively and with greater satisfaction (Greenberg, 2002). Stress levels that extend beyond these optimal parameters can reduce performance. An individual's optimal level of stress is influenced by the way in which stress is appraised and accommodated (Lazarus, DeLongis, Folkman, Gruen, 1994).

In the higher education sector, Winefield and Jarrett (2001) found that stress was highest and job satisfaction lowest among staff whose workloads involved a combination of teaching and research. Staff in that situation reported feeling overwhelmed by a workload that required them to deliver research outputs in addition to other demands. The challenge to secure external research funding was reported to be the major stressor. Taris, (2001) also explored the precursors of job-related strain and found that stress was highest in the same group of teachers, indicating both limited resources and elevated job demands. Clearly, further research is needed to explore personal and environmental factors perceived to influence stress appraisals and the mechanisms used to cope with stress.

2.7.1 Normal and toxic stress

In normal circumstances, the stress response is a powerful protective mechanism that allows individuals to deal with sudden changes, dangers or immediate demands (Wainwright and Calnan, 2002). Instinctive reaction to stress is to combat or flee the source of stress – known as the fight or flight reaction. With normal stress people can fight or flee. The response occurs fairly quickly and then the stress ends. There are three phases of normal stress, namely, stress comes (facing an immediate threat/demand), and stress goes (dealing with the stress), and Stress is over (the body relaxes, no longer feeling stressed) (Enough Workplace Stress: Organising for Change, 2003). Human bodies were not designed for prolonged or chronic stress. When it occurs, the natural stress response is thwarted and serious problems may arise, one has little control over the situation with no relief in sight. This is called toxic stress. It has three phases, too: facing a demand/threat that doesn't stop, having no way of dealing with it and hence never relaxing (Enough Workplace Stress: Organising for Change, 2003).

2.7.2 Physical environment

Physical demands of the work environment are considered to be an intrinsic job factor (Sutherland & Cooper, 1988). However, the experience of environmental factors is highly subjective, different people having different threshold levels in terms of temperature, noise and light. Sutherland and Cooper (1988) included the following possible environmental stressors in their conceptualisation of physical environmental demands: noise, vibration, temperature variation, ventilation and humidity, lighting and illumination levels, hygiene and climate. In South Africa, Shadwell, Schlebusch and van Niekerk (1996) investigated the effects of environmental variables in places where they could not be controlled by employees and found that many of the employees displayed symptoms indicative of sick-building syndrome when thresholds of noise and air pollution were exceeded. According to Shadwell et al (1996), an ergonomically designed workplace attempts to reduce/eliminate the hazards listed above. Ergonomics looks at the relationship between people and their physical work environment. Ergonomics tries to maximize productivity by designing work areas and equipment to fit the worker, rather than by forcing the worker to fit unsafe, inefficient designs. It is a sound approach that benefits both employees and employers Shadwell et al (1996).

2.7.3 Bullying

Workplace bullying is a reality in the modern workplace as it has been estimated that one-fifth of all employees have experienced bullying and harassment (Godwin, 2008). Bullying is another source of interpersonal stress. Bullying is a persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating or insulting behaviour, abuse of power or unfair penal sanctions which make the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable. It undermines their self-confidence and results in feelings of shame, fear, embarrassment and guilt (Schafer, 2002). Workplace bullying has consequences for both employees and organisations alike. It has been well documented that individuals who have been exposed to workplace bullying suffer from low self-esteem and poorer physical, psychological and emotional health (Einarsen and Mikkelsen, 2003; Keashly and Jagatic, 2003; Ayoko et al., 2003). More specifically, Poilpot-Rocaboy (2006) points to increased anxiety, depression, psychosomatic symptoms (hostility, hyper sensibility, loss of memory and feelings of victimisation), aggression, fear and mistrust,

cognitive effects (such as inability to concentrate, or think clearly, and reduced problem solving capacity), isolation, loneliness, deterioration of relationships, chronic fatigue and sleep problems". With such a range of potential effects, organisations must not underestimate the effects of bullying on individuals nor assume that the behaviour was "just a bit of fun". In short, bullying can be a "rippling and devastating problem" (Adams and Crawford, 1992:P13).

2.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined the stressors and consequences of stress in the workplace. This is of particular importance to the purposes of this study as it serves to identify which stressors could be related to the higher education environment, and the possible consequences of such stressors on the individuals employed in particular at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Stress is affecting more and more people nowadays and has become an epidemic, due to longer working hours, hectic lifestyle' and uncertainty in the environment around workers. The consequence is less healthy individuals who are suffering from numerous diseases and decreased performance at work and increased costs associated with stress for organisations. It is a growing concern and both organisations and their employees must reduce stress factors as well as try to cope with it through the different methods and techniques available. The review of the literature has indicated that the work environment is made up of a complex set of processes and relations that impact on an employee's well-being and perception of stress and the ability to cope with such stress factors. Being employed within the higher education industry brings with it its own challenges and issues which need to be managed and addressed by the organisation in order to ensure that the wellbeing of the employee is prioritised. The following, chapter will focus on the research process that will be undertaken in the study to obtain data.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Any good research depends on careful planning and a systematic way of collecting, collating and analysing information. Research begins by asking a question resulting from finding a solution to a problem. The scientific method is used in order to find solutions to a question or problem. The objectives of research according to Kothari (2008) may fall into the following broad categories of research studies – explorative, descriptive, diagnostic, hypothesis testing and through the means of case studies.

3.2 Research methodology

Research methodology involves not only knowing which of the research methods or techniques to employ in the study, but also considers the logic underlying those decisions. Research methodology explains why a particular method has been chosen, and why others methods are not being used, so that the research results can be evaluated either by the researcher himself or by others (Kothari 2008). Research methodology provides one with the knowledge and skills required to solve problems after a thorough study and analysis of situational factors (Kothari, 2008) Research methods alludes to the systematic, focused and orderly collection of data for the intention of acquiring information to answer or resolve research problems or questions (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2002).

The literature review in Chapter Two provided the foundation for the empirical research. This study will be descriptive in nature which will explore employees at UKZN's " attitudes towards workplace stress, what they believe are causes of stress and what can be done to reduce stress in the workplace. This chapter focuses on the methodology and the manner in which research will be conducted. In this study, a quantitative analysis will be performed. Quantitative research is conceptually concerned with discovering facts about social phenomena, and assumes measurable reality (Golding, 2002).

3.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is determined from the research question proposed in Chapter One –“Do daily stressors experienced by employees at the University of KwaZulu-Natal impact on the lives of the employees and does it give rise to high stress levels?”

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To determine the causes/sources of stress at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- To determine if the merger between the former Universities of Natal and Durban-Westville has impacted on high levels of stress.
- To establish if high stress levels have an impact on work performance.
- To establish what interventions can reduce stress in the workplace.

3.4 Participants and Location of the Study

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) has a total of approximately 5000 staff members which comprises of both permanent and long fixed term staff of one year and longer. In this study, the researcher will be focusing on both academic and support or administrative staff employed at UKZN. For this study to be feasible, the researcher will utilise a sampling frame consisting of staff members across all five campuses namely; Howard College, Westville, Pietermaritzburg, Medical School and Edgewood.

The target population was determined using simple random sampling which is the most elementary form of probability sampling. Each unit of the population has an equal probability of being included in the sample (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The advantage of the simple random technique includes the fact that it is easy to implement.

3.5 Sampling

According to Cooper and Schindler, (2003), sampling is centred on two principles. Firstly that the elements in a population includes adequate similarities and that a few of these elements will adequately represent the characteristics of the total population. The second principle states that while a few elements in a sample underestimate a population value, others overestimate this value. Cooper and Schindler (2003) further state that a good sample

has both accuracy and precision. Beri, (2008) indicated that a sample is a finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole. When dealing with people, it can be defined as a set of respondents selected from a larger population of a survey. According to Beri (2008) accuracy in the sample size may be determined by the interval range in which one would anticipate to find the parameter estimate and the degree of confidence one wishes to have in that estimate.

Despite all proper attention, the valid sample achieved will not accurately match the sample that is originally drawn (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). People in some instances will decline to participate and others will be challenging if not impossible, to find. The latter represent the well-known "not-at-home" problem and require that enough call-backs be made to ensure that they are adequately represented in the sample.

3.5.1 Population

According to Webster, (1995) a population can be defined as a group of individuals or items from which samples are obtained for measurement, for example a population of professors, books or students (Webster, 1995). According to Bryan & Bell (2007), the bigger the sample size, the more representative it is likely to be (provided the sample is randomly selected), regardless of the size of the population from which it is drawn. In other words as sample size increases, the sampling error decreases.

Cooper and Schindler (2003) list the following principles that have an impact on the sample size. These include:

- The greater the dispersion of variance within the population, the larger the sample must be to provide estimation precision
- The greater the desired precision of the estimate, the larger the sample must be
- The narrower the interval range, the larger the sample must be
- The higher the confidence level in the estimate, the larger the sample must be
- The greater the number of subgroups of interest within a sample, the greater the sample size must be, as each subgroup must meet minimum sample size requirements
- If the calculated sample size exceeds five percent of the population, the sample size may be reduced without sacrificing precision.

3.5.2 The Sampling Process

The sampling process is the procedure right from defining a population to the actual selection of sample elements.

There are seven steps involved in this process as shown in Figure 3.1.

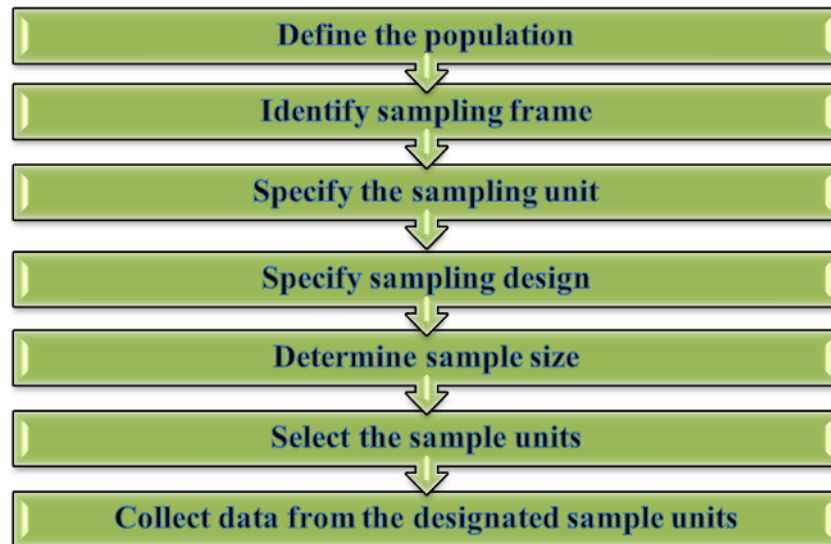


Figure 3.1 The Sampling Process (Beri, 2008)

The steps of the sampling process are explained below according to Beri (2008).

- Step 1: Define the population - the population comprises of elements, sampling units, extent and time. These four specifications must be contained in the designated population. Omission of any of them would render the definition of the population
- Step 2: Identify sampling frame – a perfect frame is one where every element appears on the list separately once, and nothing else appears on the list. However this type of sampling frame is rather rare. In reality, the sampling frames have one deficiency or another and the researcher has to ensure that the frame is not too deficient so as to give it up altogether. The sample should be representative of the sample frame which ideally is the same as the population but which often differs due to practical problems relating to the availability of information (Welman & Kruger, 1999).
- Step 3: Specify the sampling unit – the sampling unit is the basic unit containing the elements of the target population.
- Step 4: Specify the sampling method – This indicates how the sample units are selected. One of the most important decisions in this regard is to determine which of the two –

probability or non-probability sample is to be chosen. Probability samples are also known as random samples is considered the best technique of selecting a representative sample as it ensures that every element has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample, which will have the same composition and characteristics of the population (Beri,2008). Probability sampling enables the researcher to measure the sampling error and thereby determine the degree of precision. This is not possible when non-probability sample is used.

- Step 5: Determine the sample size – Here the researcher has to decide how many elements of the target population are to be chosen.
- Step 6: Specify the sampling plan – This means that one should indicate how decisions made so far are to be implemented. The survey will be conducted at UKZN - the sampling plan will define the university and provide instructions to the interviewer as to how s/he should take a systematic sample of the population of staff employed at UKZN.
- Step 7: Select the sample – This is the final step in the sampling process and involves lots of office and fieldwork in order to select the sampling elements. Problems faced by the researcher in this stage are those of contacting the sample respondents for completion of the survey.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010) the sample size should be a function of the following factors:

- The research objective
- The extent of precision desired
- The acceptable risk in predicting that level of precision
- The amount of variability in the population
- Costs and time constraints
- The size of the population itself

There are two types of approaches when choosing the sample size, the practical approach and the statistical approach. Beri (2008) advises that although the former is widely used, it is more reliable for the researcher to follow the statistical approach which is based on well-defined principles. The compliment of permanent and long fixed appointments at UKZN is approximately 5000 employees across all race groups and gender in all earning brackets. In this study the researcher will be using probability sampling and the sample size required is determined according to the Sample Size Table (The Research Advisors, 2006, MBA Guide), which is 357. The feedback from the respondents will represent the subjects only and will not be generalized to the entire population of UKZN.

3.6 Research Design and Methods

3.6.1 Description and Purpose

A research design is the outline according to which the researcher acquires research participants and gathers information from them. According to Cooper and Schindler (2003: P146), “the research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data.” It aids the researcher in the allocation of limited resources by posing crucial choices: is the blueprint to include experiments, interviews, observations, and the analysis of records, simulation or some combination of these? Are the methods of data collection and the research situation to be highly structured? Is an intensive study of a small sample more effective than a less intensive study of a large sample? Should the analysis be primarily quantitative or qualitative?

There are different types of research design which can be classified by various authors in various ways. According to Beri, (2008) these different research designs have emerged as a result of diverse viewpoints from which a research study can be considered. Research design can be classified under three broad categories, namely, exploratory, descriptive and causal.

3.6.1.1 Exploratory research

Exploratory research focuses on the discovery of ideas. This type of research is usually used where the objective of the research is to generate new ideas and the respondents are given sufficient freedom to express themselves. Exploratory research is usually based on secondary data that is readily available. It does not have a rigid or a formal design as the researcher may have to change his focus or direction depending on the availability of new ideas and relationships among variables. An exploratory study is in the nature of a preliminary investigation wherein the researcher does not possess adequate knowledge and therefore unable to frame detailed research questions (Beri, 2008).

3.6.1.2 Descriptive studies

Descriptive studies are conducted in various circumstances. This type of study may be necessary when the researcher is interested in finding the characteristics of certain groups for

instance, age, sex, educational level and occupation or income. A descriptive study is also undertaken when the researcher wishes to know the proportion of people in a given population who have behaved in a particular manner, making projections of a certain thing or in order to determine the relationship between two or more variables. The main objective of this type of study is to answer the “who, what, when, where and how” of the subject being researched. (Beri, 2008).

3.6.1.3 Causal designs

This type of study investigates the cause and effect relationship between two or more variables. The basis for this design of research is influenced along well tested lines. The use of inductive logic is applied for purpose of confirming or rejecting hypothesis with the help of further evidence. According to Beri, 2008, John Stuart Mill formulated a set of principles based on logic for causal research. These principles are as follows – the method of agreement, the method of negative agreement and the method of concomitant variation. The method of agreement states that “when two or more cases of a given phenomenon have one and only one condition in common, then that condition may be regarded as the cause or effect of the phenomenon.” (Beri, 2008: P48)

In a causal relationship, it is necessary for the cause to precede the effect. In human behavioural sciences however, it is often difficult, or sometimes impossible to fulfil this requirement. Often, causal factors are not events which take place and are concluded at some or other identifiable point in time due to a common link between the variables (Welman & Kruger, 1999).

3.6.2 Secondary Analysis of data

Secondary data are information collected by individuals or institutions other than the researcher (Welman & Kruger, 1999). Secondary analysis is the analysis of data by researchers who will probably not have been involved in the collection of those data, for purposes that in all likelihood were not envisaged by those responsible for the data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2007). According to Beri who stated that by using secondary analysis data, the researcher will benefit as follows:

- By saving considerable time and costs
- Opportunity for cross-cultural analysis
- Obtaining high quality data
- More time for data analysis
- Re-analysis may offer new interpretations

3.6.2.1 Quantitative research

This type of research according to Creswell (2003), involves the use of structured questions where the response options have been predetermined and a large number of respondents are involved. Researchers seek sample sizes which yield findings with at least 95% confidence interval (which means that if the survey is repeated 100 times, 95 times out of a hundred, you would get the same response) and approximately 5% points margin error. Qualitative analysis involves a continual interplay between theory and analysis. In analysing qualitative data, the researcher seeks to discover patterns such as changes over time or possible causal links between variables (Creswell, 2003).

3.6.2.2 Qualitative research

This is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It involves collecting, analysing and interpreting data by observing what people do and say. Whereas quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things, qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. Qualitative research is more subjective in nature than quantitative research and uses very different methods of collecting information which involves mainly individual, in-depth interviews and focus groups. The nature of this type of research is exploratory and open-ended. Small numbers of participants are interviewed in-depth and relatively small focus groups are conducted (Creswell, 2003).

3.6.2.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

Table 3.1 Differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Methods (Chambers, 2009)

QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
Seeks to capture the complexity of issues in their interrelatedness rather than discrete variables (a holistic approach)	Separates and simplifies processes into variables for analysis purposes
Used to give depth to findings, usually by focusing on information from individuals	Looks at trends and prevalence's within a population area (breadth of information)
Largely answers the questions –why” and –who”	Largely answers the questions –what,” –how many,” and –for whom”
Based on a school of thought that recognizes a multitude of realities	Based on a school of thought that assumes a single, objective reality
Often inductive process of inquiry – discovering, letting issues evolve, looking for patterns	Mostly deductive – based on pre-determined questions and hypotheses
Information generated expressed mostly verbally or visually	Information generated expressed mostly in numbers (proportions and percentages)

Since this particular study aims to understand the impact of workplace stress on the employees of UKZN's work performance, the researcher will attempt to understand if employees have experienced workplace stress. Another parameter of interest will be if employees are interested in stress management in their lives as well as workplace stress management. The study will look at employees who are interested in participating in an employee assistance programme, at their work environment. This will apply as UKZN does not as yet have an employee assistance programme at work. The study will also look at employees who have performance appraisals at work and try and ascertain their responses on issues on performance management e.g. if it is a fair assessment of their work, taking into account their personal circumstances.

3.7 Data Collection Strategies

Once the research design has been established, the next step is selecting the appropriate method for collecting data. There are two types of data: primary data, which is collected for the first time by the researcher, or secondary data which has been collected by someone else and which has passed through the statistical processes (Kothari 2008). Primary data, collected through experimental research or descriptive studies can range from a simple observation at

one location to a multicentre survey that spreads across a wide spectrum. The type of data required will largely determine the collection method to be employed. The focus of this study is based on the perceptions of individuals in conjunction with organisational outcomes.

With reference to the above, the research instrument that will be utilised is a self-completion/administered questionnaire that will be available to respondents on-line using the programme, QuestionPro. Some of the advantages of utilizing this method are as follows:

- Cheaper to administer
- Quicker to administer
- Convenience for the respondent
- Absence of interviewer effects
- No interviewer variability
- Greater accuracy of results,
- Data is collected at a much faster pace with greater accessibility of population elements.

3.7.1 Research instrument – Questionnaire

Questionnaires are the most popular method of data collection and are more flexible to capture a wide range of data from attitudes to specific statistics (Phillips & Stawarski 2008). Sekaran and Bougie (2010) stated that questionnaires are an efficient method of data collection when the researcher knows what is required and how to measure the variables of interest. Questionnaires can either be structured or unstructured. According to Beri (2008), a structured questionnaire is a formal list of questions structured in a manner so as to obtain the facts and is used when it is known at the outset what information is required and comprises of definite, concrete and predetermined questions. Thus a structured questionnaire is one in which all the questions and answers are specified and the respondents own words are kept to a minimum. Beri (2008) states that a non-structured questionnaire is one which the questions are not structured and the order in which they are to be asked from the respondent is left entirely up to the researcher. Questions are asked to fit the particular situation and this is found mainly in exploratory research.

3.7.2 Design of the Questionnaire

Questionnaires that are completed by respondents themselves are one of the main instruments for gathering information (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In this study, the researcher made use of structured questions as a tool to gather data which were worded in a manner that was easily understood and to the point and provided the relevant information to prove the objectives of the study. This is to ensure that even if the participants do not complete the entire questionnaire, at least some information will have been salvaged

Questionnaires will be forwarded via electronic mail to all the employees of UKZN and will be completed on-line at their leisure. A time frame of two weeks will be set by which time all questionnaires should have been answered. Once the data has been obtained, it will then be analysed using the SPSS tool to provide analysis of a descriptive nature.

The method of data collection will be of a communication nature with self-administered surveys being the data collection instrument. In order to reduce bias, the researcher will not influence the variables. The researcher will be limited to holding factors constant by careful selection of subjects according to strict sampling procedures and by statistical manipulating of findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The purpose or design of the study will be a causal study and the researcher will try to explain the effects of workplace stress and its effect on employees' performance. The research method predominantly used in this study is quantitative in nature. It will involve the collection of data through the use of primary data (questionnaires) and secondary data (the use of journal articles, books, internet and other sources).

The topical scope of the study will be statistical (quantitative approach) which will attempt to capture a population's characteristics by making inferences from a sample's characteristics. In this study, the researcher will attempt to establish the level of stress felt by employees at UKZN with different demographics (age, level of education, level of employment (administration or management, marital status etc.).

3.7.3 Data collection technique

There are several factors that the researcher has to take into account before deciding on the instrument to be used for his/her research. These factors include,

- Technical adequacy (reliability, validity, freedom from bias etc.);
- Practicality (cost, political consequences, duration, personnel needs, etc.); and
- Ethics (protection of human rights, privacy, legality).

Surveys represent one of the most common types of quantitative research. In this study, a sample of respondents will have a self-administered questionnaire to complete.

3.7.4 Pretesting of the questionnaire

A two stage design is envisaged for this study. A pilot study was conducted initially to validate the questionnaire and the requirements. The pilot study consisted of five participants who were employees at UKZN.

The aim of the pilot study (pretesting) will be to discover errors as well as establish the effectiveness and understanding of the instruction. It also gave the researcher an indication of the time required to complete the questionnaire. Pretesting will enable the researcher to discover the participants' reactions to the questions. It will also help discover where repetitiveness or redundancy is present or what topics were not covered that the participant expected. Pretesting will enable the researcher to look for questions or even sections that the participant perceives to be sensitive or threatening or topics about which the participant knows nothing.

Participants were requested to provide constructive criticism on the questionnaire and amendments were made after feedback was received from all the participants. The participants were acknowledged for their input and were excluded from participating in the study to avoid repetition.

There are two important criteria for ascertaining whether the scale developed is good or not. These are reliability and validity and will be discussed as follows.

3.7.4.1 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which a test measures what the researcher wishes to measure. According to Bryman & Bell (2007), validity refers to what degree the research reflects the given research problem and is concerned with whether or not the item actually elicits the intended information. According to Beri (2008), validity implies the success of the scale in measuring what it sets out to measure, so that differences between individual's scores can be taken as representing true differences in the characteristic under study. Validity tests can be distinguished into three approaches, namely, content validity, construct validity and criterion-related validity.

- (i) Content validity: this implies that the contents of the scale correspond to the contents of the attitude system and that they are comprehensive enough to cover the full range of the attitude (Beri, 2008). According to Kothari, (2008), Content validity is the extent to which a measuring instrument provides adequate coverage and representation of the topic under study. Face validity is also likened to content validity (Bryman & Bell, 2007).
- (ii) Construct validity: The instrument used to measure a variable must measure that which it is supposed to measure. This is referred to as the construct validity of the scores obtained on a measuring instrument (Welman & Kruger, 2000). According to Sekaran & Bougie (2010), construct validity signifies the extent to which the results from the use of a measure fit the theories around which the test is designed.
- (iii) Criterion-related validity: this refers to the degree to which diagnostic and selection measurement or tests correctly predict the relevant criterion. The relevant criterion refers to the variable which is to be diagnosed or on which success is to be predicted, respectively (Welman & Kruger, 2000).

3.7.4.2 Reliability

Reliability is fundamentally concerned with issues of consistency of measures (Bryan & cell, 2007). A reliable questionnaire item consistently conveys the same meaning. Reliability is a test of how consistently a measuring instrument measures a concept it is measuring and practicality is concerned with a wide range of factors of economy, interpretability and convenience among others (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). It is generally agreed that "good"

measures must be reliable and without bias. Reliability is usually concerned with stability over time and can be defined as "Yielding the same or compatible results in different clinical experiments or statistical trials" (Experiment-Resources.com, 2008). Research methodology lacking reliability cannot be trusted. Replication studies are a way to test reliability.

The three types of methods of estimating the reliability of measurement are discussed below;-

- (i) Test-retest reliability is a form of reliability that involves repeated measurement of the same respondent or group using the same scaling technique under similar conditions. The final result is then determined via correlation (Beri, 2008). Due to time constraints this method of testing was not employed by the researcher in this study.
- (ii) Parallel form reliability is utilised by interchangeable versions of a measurement or test which have been compiled to measure the same construct equally well but by means of different content (Welman & Kruger, 2000).
- (iii) Internal consistency implies a high degree of generalizability across the items within the measurement. In other words if someone performs well on a few items in such a measurement or test, then the chances are good that he or she will fare equally well on the remaining items in the test (Welman & Kruger, 2000).

Both validity and reliability are important aspects of the research methodology to get better explanations of the world (Experiment-Resources.com, 2008).

3.8 Administration of the Questionnaire

Prior to the administration of the questionnaires, ethical clearance had to be obtained from the Ethical Clearance Committee. Secondly, a gatekeeper's letter had to be obtained from the Registrar of the university granting permission to conduct the study amongst the employees of UKZN. The letter included information pertaining to the purpose of the study and that participation is voluntary and the participants' confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

3.9 Analysis of Data

The first step in data preparation for analysis will be to edit the collected raw data to detect

errors and omissions that would compromise quality standards. The researcher will ensure that the data is accurate, consistent with other data, uniformly entered and ready for coding (Beri, 2008). Cooper and Schindler (2003), explains that the data will be coded so as to classify the responses into categories. Coding involves assigning numbers or other symbols to answers so that responses can be grouped into a limited number of classes or categories. The classifying of data into limited categories sacrifices some data detail but it is necessary for efficient analysis. The coding method to be used in this study will be numeric. Coding also helps the researcher to reduce several thousand replies to a few categories containing the critical information needed for analysis. In coding, categories are the portioning of a set; and categorization is the process of using rules to partition a body of data (Cooper and Schindler, 2003).

Variables being studied in research may be classified as objects or as properties. In a literal sense researchers do not measure either objects or properties (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). They measure indicators of the properties or indicators of the properties of an object. In this study, it will not be easy to measure properties like "the ability to tolerate stress"; however inferences will be made by observing some indicator or pointer of measurement e.g. working hours, relationship with manager, volume of work and so forth.

The study will attempt to find a relationship between workplace stress and work performance. The distribution of data is expected to be normal. Raw data from the research instrument will be captured using a statistical package, the SPSS programme for analysis of the data. This will establish the general response rate of the questionnaire.

3.10 Analysis of the Questionnaire

In order to measure the employee response at UKZN, the researcher chooses to use a questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises of 19 questions that was constructed in a manner that is easily understood by the participant. The questionnaire is divided into different sections, A & B. The first section of the questionnaire comprises of demographic information. Section B contains exploratory data analysis and deals with the subject matter for the purpose of understanding the response distribution.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the research methodology used in this study. Identifying the appropriate research methodology is crucial to conduct any research. The main research methodology chosen for this study is the quantitative approach using a self-administered questionnaire for data collection. The differences between quantitative and qualitative analysis was explained. A pilot study was conducted consisting of five participants to validate the questionnaire and the requirements.

Chapter Four deals with the presentation and discussion of results obtained from completed questionnaires.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a presentation of the results obtained from the survey. This has been achieved with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The sample size and response rate as well as demographic characteristics of the population will be explained and in particular: age, gender and race distribution and qualifications of respondents. Current stress levels of respondents will be explained as well as factors that contribute to the respondents stress levels will be analysed.

4.2 Data collection

A total of 277 respondents viewed the survey. Of the respondents that viewed the survey, 178 respondents started the questionnaire and 125 respondents completed the survey representing a completion rate of 70%. The data from incomplete questionnaires were used only to the extent that the responses completely and adequately answered questions relating to a particular objective. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was eight minutes.

4.3 Treatment of data

The data collected has been screened for errors, after which only complete and accurate data were used for further analysis. Most of the data are presented in a diagrammatic and tabular format to make the interpretation and understanding of the information easier.

4.4 Demographic information

The demographic profile of the respondents included the gender, race, marital status, age group, number of children, university sector, the number of years in the current position and their employment status.

The demographic data is illustrated in Table 4.1

Table: 4.1 Presentation of demographic information

Demographics		Percentage (n)
Gender	Male	25
	Female	75
Race	Black	28
	Coloured	7
	Indian	42
	White	22
	Other	1
	Marital status	Single
	Married	62
	Divorced	9
	Widow	2
	Widower	.0
Age group	21-25 years	1
	26-30 years	11
	31-35 years	15
	36-40 years	18
	41-45 years	16
	46-50 years	18
	51-55 years	13
	55 years and older	7
No of children	None	25
	1	19
	2	37
	3	17
	more than 3	2
	University sector	Academic
	Support	75
How long in current position	Less than one year	8
	1-5 years	36
	6-10 years	21
	11-15 years	15
	16-20 years	8
	More than 20 years	11
	Type of employment contract	Full time
	Part-time Fixed term contract	6
	Temporary	1

It is evident from Table 4.1 that 75 % of the respondents were females and 25% were male. The frequency of the response in terms of race revealed that 28% of the respondents were Black, 7% were Coloured, 42% were Indians, 22% were White and 1 % represented Other. The majority of the respondents were Indians and the minority was Other. Majority (28%) of the respondents were single, 62% were married, 9% were divorced and 2% were widowed. The age distribution indicates that respondents between 36 -40 years and 46-50 years represent the largest portion of the sample at 18%. The results revealed that 25% were from the Academic sector of the university and 75% were from the Support sector. It is also evident from Table 4.1 that majority (93%) of the respondents were employed full-time.

4.5 Stress

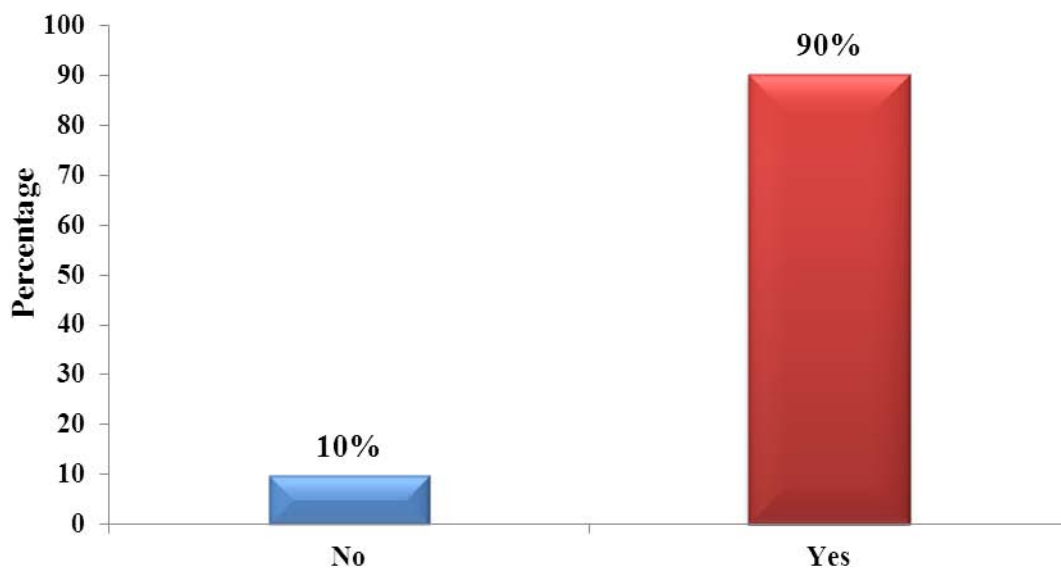


Figure 4.1 Stress in the past two years

It is evident that 90% of the respondents indicated that they experienced stress in the past two years whilst 10% indicated that they have not experienced stress in the past two years (Figure 4.1).

4.6 Nature of stress

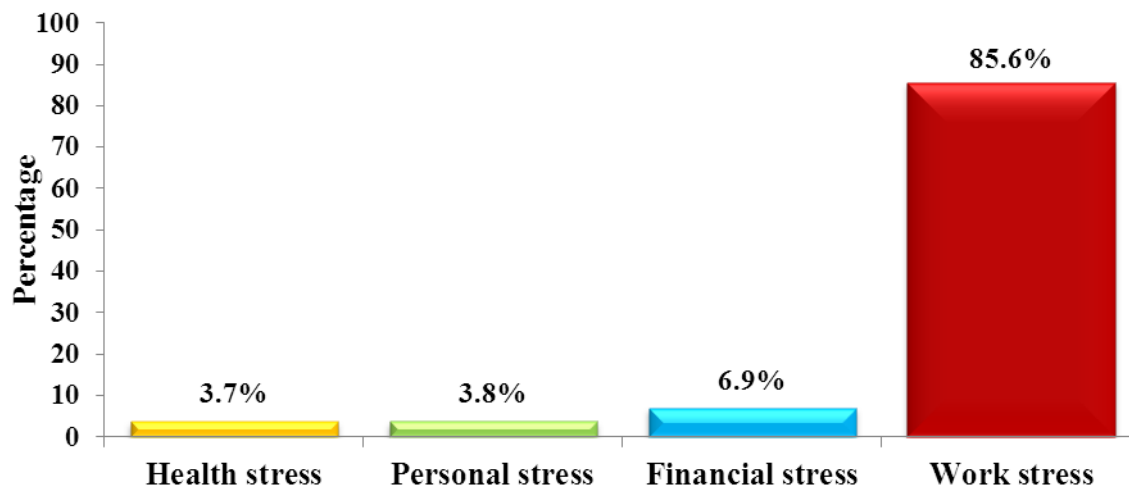


Figure 4.2 Nature of stress

It is evident from Figure 4.2 that 85.6% of the respondents experienced work stress. The rest of the results were irrelevant to this study as only workplace stress was being researched. Up to this question, 10 people responded. Those who did not experience workplace stress were directed to the end of the questionnaire and were thanked for their participation.

4.7 Causes of workplace stress

The causes of workplace stress as indicated by the respondents are tabulated in

Table 4.2

Table 4.2 Causes of workplace stress at UKZN

Description	Mean
No recognition	12.44
Regular changes	12.21
Inadequate pay	11.03
Insensitive line managers	9.39
Long working hours	9.15
Lack of respect	7.75
Discrimination	7.28
Job insecurity	6.57
Intimidation	6.10
Poor relationship with line manager	5.87
Inability to take leave	5.16
Working conditions	4.93
Poor OH&S	2.11

It is evident from Table 4.2, that the five highest causes of workplace stress at UKZN as indicated by staff were that they were not recognised for the work that they did (mean=12.44), there were regular changes in the work environment (mean=12.21), inadequate pay (mean=11.03), insensitive line managers (mean=9.39) and long working hours (mean=9.15). The mean summated score for the thirteen causes of workplace stress was 7.69.

4.8 Feelings about work situation

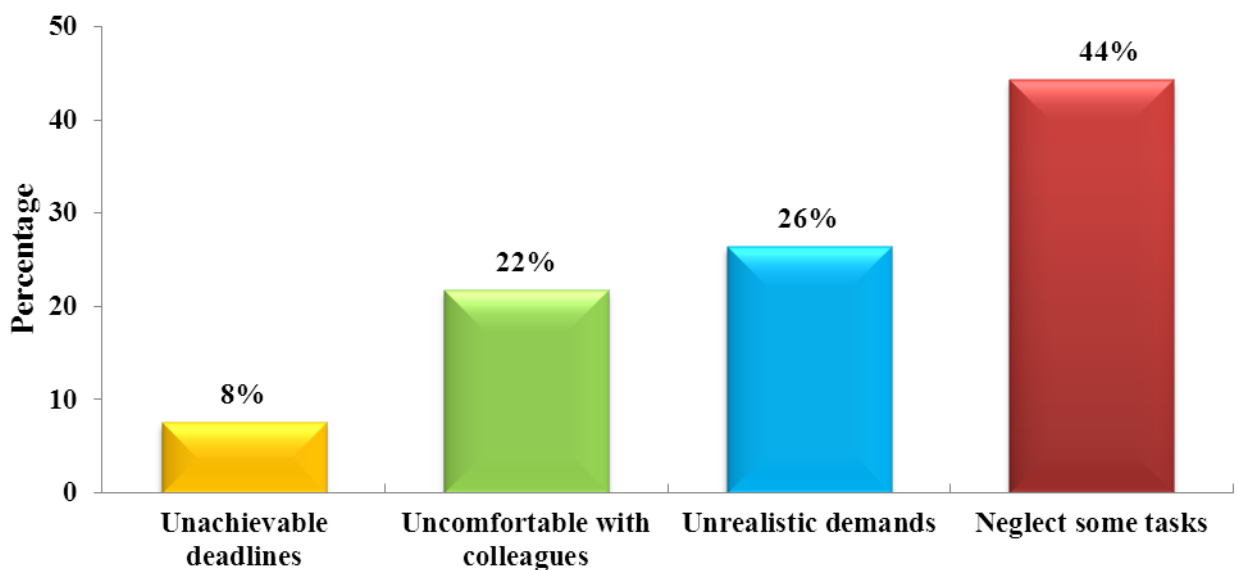


Figure 4.3 Current feelings about the work situation

The results indicated that majority (44%) of the respondents had too much to do and tended to neglect some tasks, 26% had unrealistic time pressures placed on them and 22% were uncomfortable with their colleagues. These statistics are in keeping with research by Treven (2011) who stated that employees in educational organizations are quite often overloaded as a consequence of constant changes or reforms of educational programs, excessive working requirements and hours, feelings of inadequacy or lack of training for tasks, and other s. Employees are also more prone to conflict amongst co-workers due to workplace stress (Treven, 2011).

4.9 Job conditions

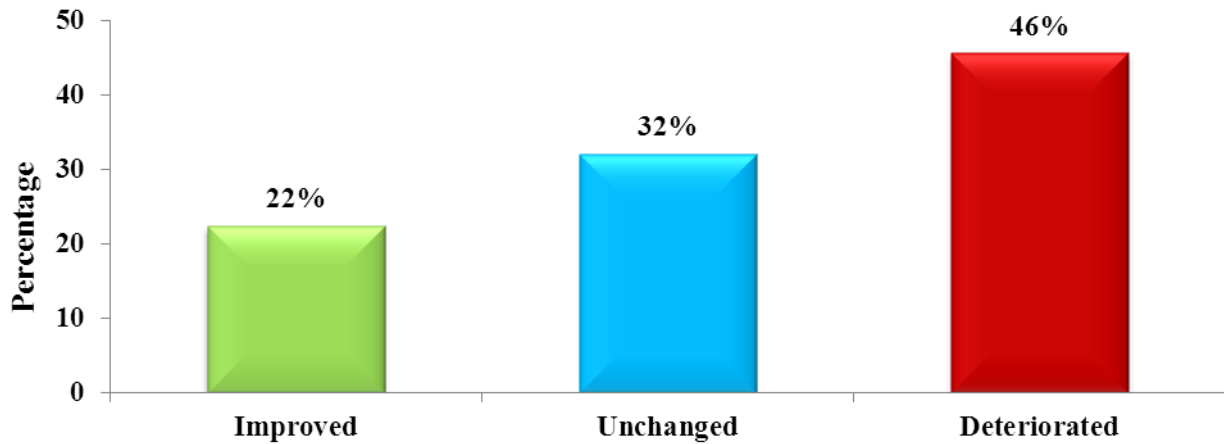


Figure 4.4 Job Conditions in the past two years

Figure 4.5 indicates that in terms of job conditions in the past two years 22% have improved, 46% have deteriorated and 32% have remained the same. It is evident from the results that UKZN is a high stress environment.

4.10 Deterioration of job conditions

The respondents were asked to indicate the reasons for the deterioration of their job conditions. Based on a rating scale of 1 being highly important, to 6 being the least important, the mean rating score is listed in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Deterioration of job conditions

Description	Mean
Merger issues	5.14
No tools	5.00
New technologies	4.00
New duties	3.00
Greater demands	2.00
Job expansion	1.00

It is evident from Table 4.3 that staff had ranked job expansion as the most relevant (mean=1.00) followed by greater demands (mean=2.00) and new duties (mean=3.00) in terms of deterioration of job conditions. Merger issues were ranked as the least relevant

(mean=5.14) by the respondents as the merger took place six years ago.

4.11 Workplace changes

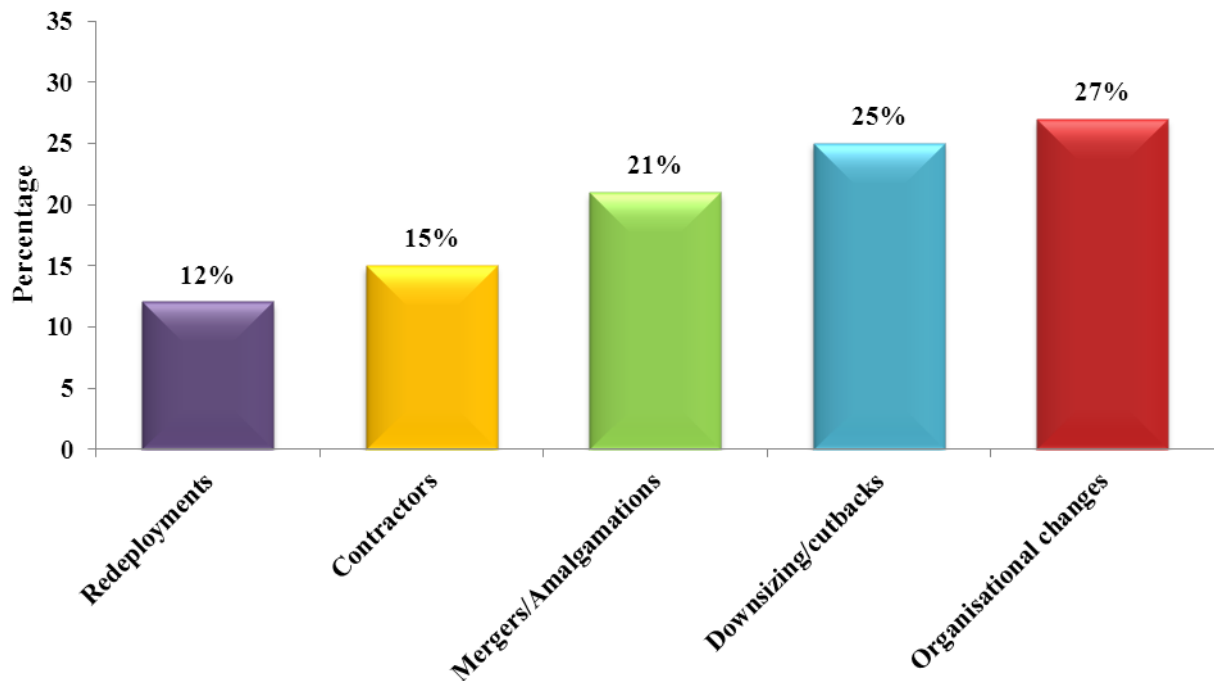


Figure 4.5 Changes in the workplace at UKZN

The majority of the respondents felt that organisational changes were the greatest cause of workplace stress at UKZN. This is evident in Figure 4.5 which reveals that 27% of the respondents believed that UKZN has been affected by organisational changes. Redeployments on the other hand were found to be the least cause of stress with only 12% of respondents choosing this category. The second highest cause of stress as indicated by 25.3% of the respondents was staff cutbacks or downsizing.

4.12 Impact of workplace stress

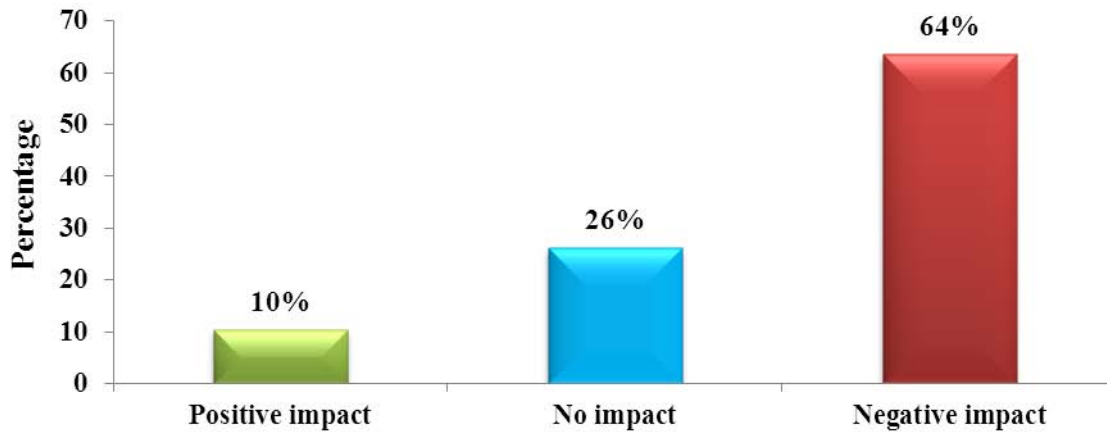


Figure 4.6 Impact of workplace stress on work performance

In terms of the impact of workplace stress on work performance, 64% of the respondents indicated that stress has had a negative impact on their work performance, 26% indicated that workplace stress had no impact on their work performance and 10% indicated that workplace stress had a positive impact on their work performance.

4.13 Working outside of core hours of duty

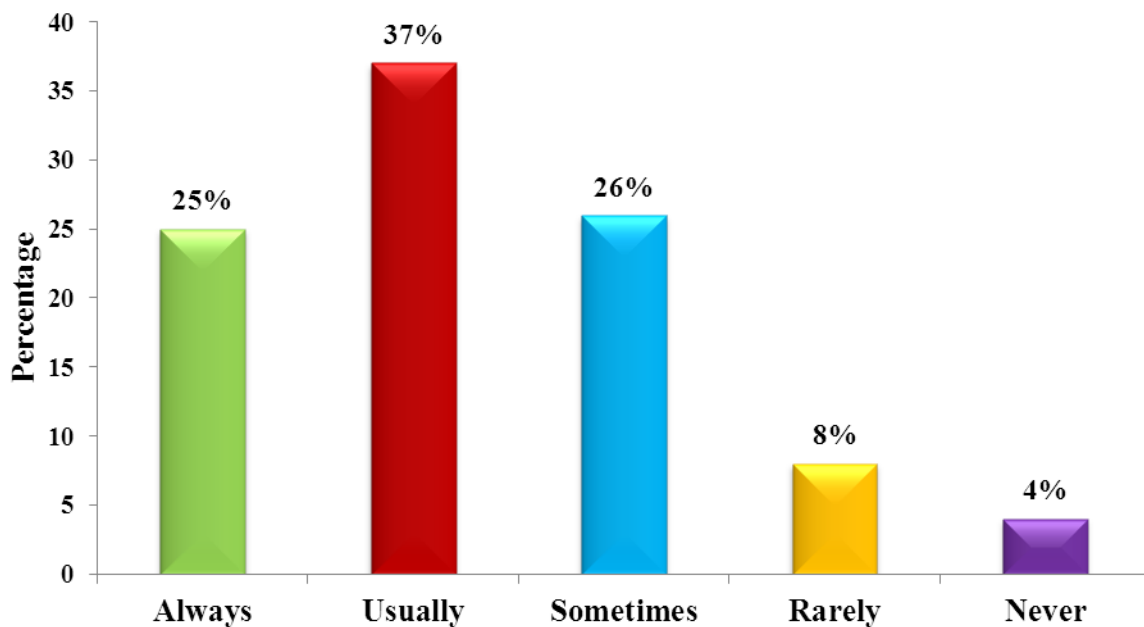


Figure 4.7 Working outside of normal working hours

Figure 4.7 indicates that 37% of the respondents usually worked beyond their normal working hours, 26% sometimes stayed late or come in early to work and 25% always stayed late or came in early to work. It is evident that the majority (88%) of the respondents have worked outside their normal working hours.

4.14 Booked off by doctor for work related stress

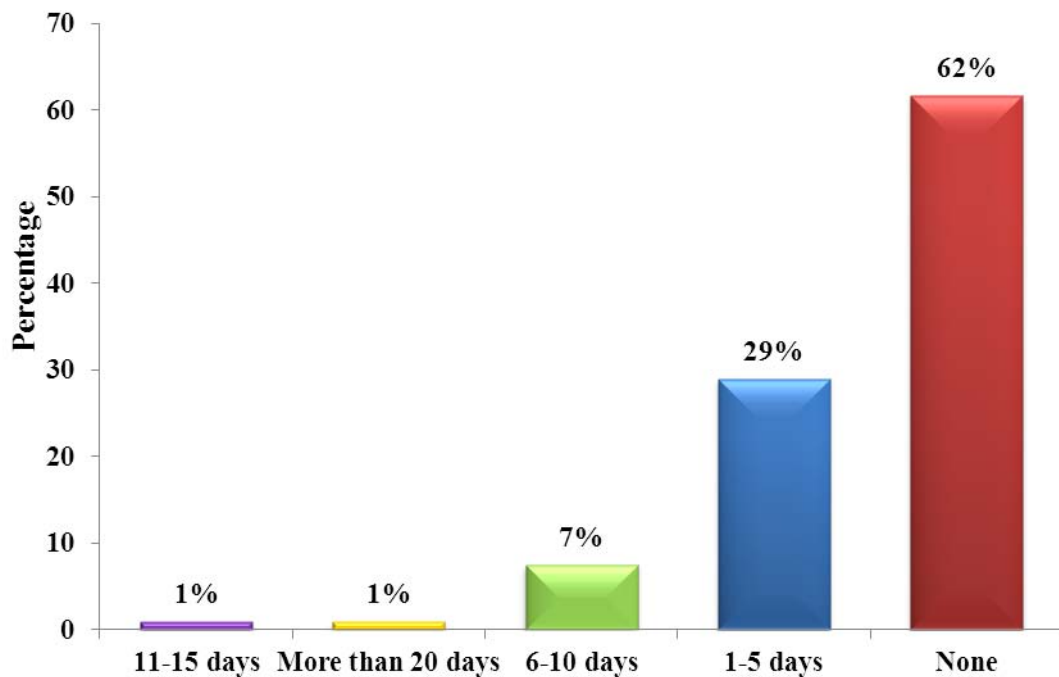


Figure 4.8 Number of days off sick for work related stress in the past year

Figure 4.8 indicates that the majority of the respondents had not been booked off work by a doctor for work related stress in the past year and this was represented by 61.7 percent of the total respondents. Twenty nine percent of the respondents indicated that they were put off work for a period of 1 to 5 days – this formed the largest category during which staff was booked off work for stress. It is also evident that a much smaller percentage (9.3%) of respondents was booked off for longer than 10 working days for work related stress.

4.15 Mechanisms to reduce stress

The respondents were asked to choose from a list of mechanisms to reduce stress at UKZN. Based on a rating scale of 1 being highly important, to 8 being the least important, the mean rating score is listed in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 Suggestions to reduce stress at UKZN

Description	Mean	Std. Deviation
More empathy towards staff	* 4.18	0.197
Stress management workshops	* 4.87	0.207
Improve communication	* 4.38	0.224
Stress management counselling	5.08	0.228
Managers must be more helpful	* 4.39	0.252
Respect	* 4.05	0.252
Increase pay	* 3.41	0.252
Up-skill employees	* 4.25	0.258
*Significantly more than Stress management counselling p = 0.0001 (ANOVA)		

As illustrated in Table 4.4, respondents ranked increase in pay as the most relevant (mean=3.41) followed by respect (mean=4.05), and more empathy towards staff (mean=4.18). Respondents also indicated that staff should be skilled and trained for their jobs. Lack of training and development contributed towards stress in the workplace. Improved communication, stress workshops and stress management counselling were ranked lower but are equally important in alleviating stress. The mean summated score for the eight mechanisms was 4.5 which suggested that overall; the respondents believed that the principles were rated from important to highly important. Statistical analysis (One way ANOVA) showed that stress management workshops, managers must be more helpful, improve communication, up-skill employees, empathy towards staff, respect and increase in pay were significantly more important than stress management counselling (p=0.0011).

The following section represents the results obtained when specific variables were cross tabulated with each other and can be viewed in the tables below.

4.16 Gender and stress in the past two years

Table 4.5 Cross tabulation between Gender and stress in the past two years

n = 175		Stress in the past two years		
		Yes	No	Total
Gender	Male	20.6%	2.9%	23.4%
	Female	69.7%	6.9%	76.6%
	Total	90.3%	9.7%	100%

In today's workforce, stress is more prevalent than ever and while demands and pressures are the main fuel for the fire, gender can also play a pivotal role. This is evident from the results depicted in Table 4.5, above which indicated that females experienced higher levels of stress as compared to males in the last two years at UKZN. This is highlighted in a study by Hart (2005), from the University of Missouri-Columbia whose study concluded that teaching loads, students, publishing and research demands, review and promotion processes and committee work produced much more stress for women than men.

4.17 University sector versus stress in the past two years

Table 4.6 Cross tabulation between university sector and stress in the past two years

n = 175		Stress in the past two years		
		Yes	No	Total
University Sector	Academic	24.6%	1.1%	25.7%
	Support	65.7%	8.6%	74.3%
	Total	90.3%	9.7%	100%

The results from Table 4.6 reveal that support staff at UKZN experienced higher levels of stress as compared to the academic staff. Support staff plays an important role in the creation and development of knowledge and innovation in higher education institutions (Gillespie et al., 2001). This is in keeping with research conducted by Smewing & Cox (1998) who stated that many of the pressures on academic and senior support staff are passed on to secretarial and administrative employees, who are required to take on more duties and work for a greater number of people. This produces problems with regard to their control of workflow, deadlines, and conflicting pressures.

4.18 Gender versus stay late or come in early to work

Table 4.7 Cross tabulation between gender and stay late or come in early to work

n = 105		Stay late or come in early					Total
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	
Gender	Male	1.9%	.9%	6.6%	8.5%	7.5%	25.5%
	Female	1.9%	7.5%	18.9%	28.3%	17.9%	74.5%
	Total	3.8%	8.5%	25.5%	36.8%	25.5%	100%

As seen in Table 4.7, the majority (46%) of females stays late or come in early to work as compared to 16% of males. The results have indicated 62% of males and females stay late that or come in early to work at UKZN.

4.19 Gender versus length of service

Table 4.8 Gender cross-tabulated against length of service at UKZN

n=125		Length of service in current position						Total
		>1 year	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	16-20 yrs	<20 yrs	
Gender	Male	0%	4.5%	5.7%	3.4%	2.8%	7.4%	23.9%
	Female	8%	31.8%	15.3%	11.9%	5.1%	4%	76.1%
	Total	8%	36.4%	21%	15.3%	8%	11.4%	100%

When gender was cross tabulated with length of service of respondents in their current positions, it was found that 32% females in service at UKZN between 1 – 5 years of service experienced the highest levels of stress as compared to males in the same category with only 5% experiencing stress. It was evident from the table that 12% of females employed between 11 – 15 years of service were the next highest category of staff that experienced stress. From the table 4.7, it is evident that across all the age groups females are dominant except between the age groups of 6 – 10 years and more than 20 years of service where males are dominant i.e. 2.3% and 7.4% respectively.

4.20 Types of stress versus gender

Table 4.9 Cross tabulation between types of stress and gender

n = 160		Types of stress				
		Work stress	Health stress	Financial stress	Personal stress	Total
Gender	Male	16.9%	1.9%	2.5%	0.6%	21.9%
	Female	68.8%	1.9%	3.8%	3.1%	78.1%
	Total	85.7%	3.8%	6.3%	3.7%	100%

The main focus of this study was on work stress. When the different types of stress was cross tabulated against gender, results reveal that work stress was the highest type of stress experienced by the respondents. Health, financial and personal stress was reflected as being quite insignificant as compared to work stress. Females experienced the highest percentage of work stress at 68.8% while males experienced 16.9% of work stress.

4.21 Summary

In this chapter the data that was collected from respondents was analysed and the key findings identified. The findings were related to the objectives of the study that was set out in Chapter One. Some of the salient findings are that females experienced more stress than males and that the majority of respondents experienced some sort of stress in their work environment which was brought about by the stressors identified. A review of the findings of this chapter will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five

Discussion of results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter follows on from Chapter four which presented the data gathered from on-line questionnaires from the staff of UKZN. This chapter engages in a discussion concerning the interpretation of the analysis presented in Chapter Four. The interpretation of the results focuses on the findings related to the objectives of the study. The findings of this study are discussed with reference to the relevant literature pertaining to the objectives of the study. It is recognised that the results obtained from this study may not be generalised to the entire population at UKZN, however, the findings may show a trend that possibly exists within the population.

5.2 Demographic variables

The demographic results show that the majority of respondents were females. The predominant race employed by the company is Indian people which became evident in the demographics of the sample and the largest age group of respondents was between the ages of 36 to 40 years and 46 to 50 years. The results also indicate that majority of the respondents were from the support staff sector. The majority of the demographics of the sample represent the predominant demographic profile of the workforce employed by UKZN.

5.3 Stress in the last two years

Respondents were asked if they experienced stress in the last two years. Results have shown that 88.8% of the respondents indicated that they had experienced stress in the last two years. This is in keeping with the current literature on workplace stress by Tytherleigh et al, (2005) who indicated that stress has become an inherent part of an employee's life and also discovered that work relationships, job security, and resources and communication caused the highest levels of strain.

5.4 Nature of stress

The results indicated that 77% of the respondents had experienced work stress at UKZN. These results indicate that UKZN has a fairly high environment for stress as compared to health, financial or personal stress. These statistics indicate that the environment at UKZN is conducive to high levels of stress. This is also in keeping with the current literature on workplace stress where studies have established that stress has become an inherent part of an employee's life. According to Olsen (1993), the strains and conflicts of daily life are found to be most stressful. These findings are particularly relevant to faculty staff who must perennially deal with "excessive demands to perform too many discrete tasks," poorly defined work-role boundaries, and perpetual time pressures as part of their work life.

According to Arnold, Cooper & Robertson (1998), who emphasised that there are numerous work-related causes of occupational stress. Some jobs are more stressful than others due to the nature and features of the job and these may include unpleasant physical conditions, shift work and long working hours. According to Swanson, 2001, organizational change and restructuring is often perceived as leading to increased occupational stress, impacting negatively on the psychological well-being of employees.

5.5 Causes of stress at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

The main risk factors for work-related stress include heavy workload, long working hours, lack of control and autonomy at work, poor relationships with colleagues, poor support at work and the impact of organisational change. According to Swanson, (2001) who stated that employees who feel they have little control over their work in one way or another report higher stress levels. In order to determine the respondent's causes of stress at UKZN, this will be dealt with in research objective one.

5.5.1 Research objective one: Causes of employee stress at UKZN

The causes that were most often cited by the respondents are explained and discussed below.

5.5.1.1 No recognition for work done

The results revealed that no recognition for work done by staff was cited as the greatest cause of workplace stress at UKZN. According to the UKZN Climate Survey (2008), 76% of the surveyed employees believe that UKZN staff members are not always recognised for good work. This sentiment is shared across all colleges and support divisions as reflected in the diagram below whereby over 70% of surveyed employees in all five colleges and support divisions agreed with the statement –Staff at UKZN is not always recognised for good work.” This is supported by Overman, (2010) who stated that people want to feel valued and know if their job contributes towards the welfare of the organisation and that they are being recognised by the employer for their efforts. The lack of recognition also leads to job satisfaction.

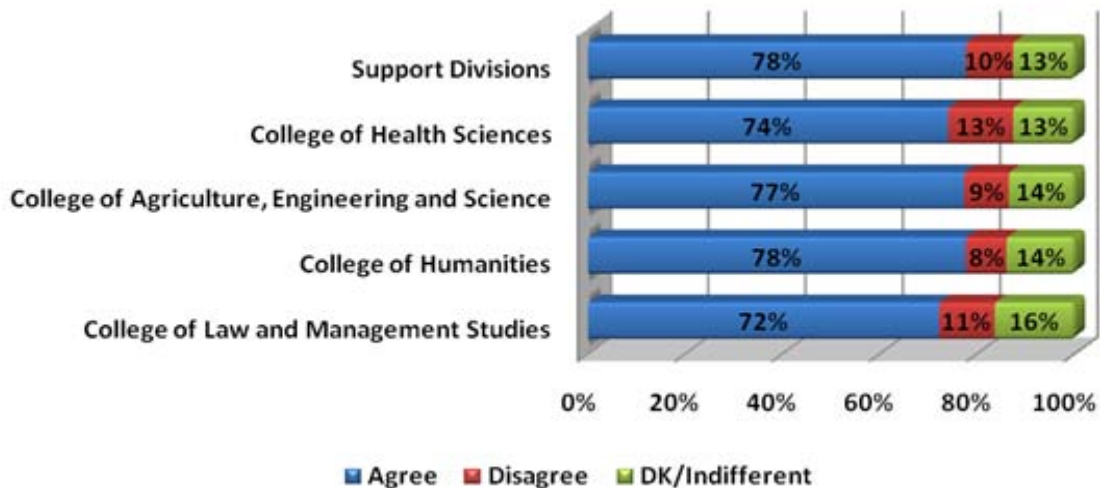


Figure 5.1 Staff not always recognised for good work at UKZN

According to the Performance Policy Document of UKZN (2008), the University of KwaZulu-Natal accepts that its staff is its greatest asset and is key to its ability to fulfil its Mission and Vision and achieve its strategic objectives. The University further recognizes that managing and reviewing staff performance and fostering staff development are critical factors in achieving institutional strategic priorities and overall success. The University is committed to recognizing and rewarding individual performance and encouraging career mobility for staff that are enthusiastic, driven to excel and embracing of individual accountability (Performance Policy Document of UKZN, 2008).

5.5.1.2 Regular changes in the work environment

UKZN is currently undergoing major change and according to the College Reorganisation Model document on the UKZN website, the purpose of this change is to simplify and streamline processes to achieve success. The restructure is a cost-cutting measure and it is a more effective and efficient way of doing things. As illustrated in figure 4.7, the majority of respondents (27%) specified that the reorganisation and restructuring of the Colleges was of great concern to them. This is supported by Dolan (2007) who stated that employees in insecure and casual forms of employment are more likely to suffer from stress at work. It has a detrimental effect on the health of employees, leading more frequently to drug and alcohol abuse, depression and stress, compared with employees in more secure forms of work.

Dolan (2007) further stated that employees are adversely affected by the reconfiguration as there is the immediate insecurity of job loss due to redundancy or simply not fitting into the new structure. Employees feel the need to protect themselves and their livelihoods by applying for every possible position external to UKZN. Most often, it is the best performers that give their notice to leave first, as they don't feel valued and as a result UKZN may lose their high calibre talent.

5.5.1.3 Inadequate pay

As depicted in Table 4.2, inadequate pay features amongst the top three causes of stress amongst the respondents at UKZN. This finding adds support to assertions by Greenberg (2004), who indicated that people desire to be equitably rewarded for the work that they do. Those who believe they are paid less than comparable others are said to be in a state of underpayment inequity, leading them to experience distress due to feelings of anger. Employees feeling underpaid tend to respond negatively, such as by withholding effort, stealing from their employers, being poor organisational citizens and, in extreme cases, resigning from their jobs (Greenberg, 2004). According to the UKZN Climate Survey (2008), academics at UKZN felt that they are not adequately paid as compared to their counterparts in other higher education institutions like the Universities of Witwatersrand and Cape Town.

5.5.1.4 Insensitive line managers, lack of respect from supervisors and poor relationship with my manager.

These three causes are grouped together as they relate to the line manager and the supervisor. From these results, it is evident that employees at UKZN experience stress caused by the behaviours of their line managers or supervisors. As highlighted in the UKZN Institutional Climate Survey (2008), the management of staff is of concern as indicated by 52% of staff who indicated that staff management at UKZN is of a poor standard. This problem is prominent at all colleges and support divisions with proportions of those who saw it as a major problem ranging between 43-58%. This is in keeping with literature by Treven (2005) who stated that effective leadership and efficiency of organizations depends to a large extent on a managers' capability to organize and lead their employees. Modern educational organizations require a modern style of leadership and management, i.e. one that allows for a creative and innovative work in which new methods of educating students can be applied (Treven, 2005).

According to Viljoen & Rothmann, (2009), commitment of the organisation to the employee in terms of organisational commitment, refers to employees' expectations to be trusted and respected and feeling that it is worth 'going the extra mile' for the organisation.

5.5.1.5 Long working hours and the inability to take leave

As illustrated in Figure 4.4, unrealistic deadlines and the neglect of some tasks were rated as the two highest feelings as described by the respondents about their work situations. This coincides closely with long working hours and the inability to take leave as people who have unrealistic deadlines tend to work longer hours. According to the UKZN Institutional Climate Survey (2008), the results of the survey indicated that overall 60% of employees felt that they are overextended at work in terms of time. This observation is also true at college level and even among support divisions, with the College of Humanities (67%) having the highest percentage of respondents who feel that they are overextended at work in terms of time. This is emphasised in the report, Enough overwork: Taking Action on Workload, (2000), where stress is described as being among the many negative health effects caused by overwork and accelerated paces of work. Overwork, like stress is a health and safety issue that is

characterized by long and difficult hours, unreasonable work demands, multi-tasking, pressure to work overtime (paid and unpaid), fewer rest breaks, days off, holidays and vacation, faster, more pressured work pace, performance monitoring, and unrealistic management expectations (Enough Overwork: Taking Action on Workload, 2002).

According to Internal Resignation and Retirement reports (2011), many employees have resigned or have taken early retirement as a result of the restructuring at UKZN. This occurrence has resulted in greater workloads for support staff employees as the subsequent vacancies have not been filled. In order to meet the deadlines of their jobs, employees have had to work extended hours. This is illustrated in Figure 4.9 where majority of the respondents (88%) have worked outside their normal working hours to complete their tasks.

5.5.1.6 Discrimination (Sexism, Racism, Age) and Intimidation

Discrimination may take on many forms such as subtle and not-so-subtle forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other harmful attitudes. Harassment can manifest as name-calling, jokes, slurs, insults, threats, rudeness, and written or physical abuse. According to research by Pollak & Nadeau (2006), women who are sexually harassed at work often have stress-related symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, insomnia, nausea, digestive problems, loss of self-esteem, and severe depression. Again, just the threat of harassment is stressful to the body and spirit (Pollak & Nadeau, 2006). According to the UKZN Senate Report (2009), racism at UKZN, while not pervasive, was found to be below the surface, largely resulting from people making careless comments, misunderstanding remarks taken out of context, or failing to take into account differences in backgrounds. The report further highlighted that staff from designated groups, particularly Africans, are not treated fairly and that the institutional environment is not welcoming.

5.5.1.7 Physical working conditions (Workplace noise, Poor ventilation, Poor lighting).

Poor occupational health and safety and working conditions at UKZN is not perceived as a major contributor of stress. This stressor however cannot be ignored by the organisation. Burke (2008), points out that the physical environment can be a major contributor to the inability to concentrate or perform effectively, which in turn could be a source of stress.

Constant interruptions, temperature extremes, high noise levels and poor illumination are all examples of such environmental factors. The physical work environment can be a source of intense stress, especially if employees are unable to work safely, comfortably, and efficiently.

5.6 Current feelings about work situation

This question describes how the employees of UKZN feel about their work situation. From the results, it can be concluded that the respondents have too much to do and tend to neglect some tasks. This is highlighted by Winefield and Jarrett (2001) who stated that stress was highest and job satisfaction lowest among staff whose workloads involved a combination of teaching and research and where the expectation is to deliver research outputs in addition to other demands.

According to the current moratorium in place at UKZN, no vacant support staff positions are being filled until the conclusion of the College Reorganisation process. This has resulted in staff having to take on additional tasks and this has resulted in work overload. According to Overman, 2010, in this "new normal" economy, there can be confusion about exactly what tasks the "survivors" are supposed to perform in the restructured workplaces. She believes that if new responsibilities are not well defined, it can increase uncertainty and add to the stress.

5.7 Job conditions in the past two years

It would be reasonable to state from the results received that staff are experiencing some form of work related stress as the majority (26.4%) of the respondents indicated that their job conditions have deteriorated. This would be a potential stressor, as it causes burnout and psychological strain on individuals. This is highlighted by Overman (2010), who asserted that stress in the workplace occurs when demands are too high and employees perceive that they do not have enough resources to cope. With fewer workers, there is pressure to do more with fewer resources. "If the demands are too high, it could lead to burnout and exhaustion" (Overman, 2010).

5.8 Deterioration of Job Conditions

The results illustrate that the respondents have indicated job expansion as being the most relevant in terms of the deterioration of job conditions. The merger was ranked as the least relevant as it took place in 2005.

5.8.1 Research objective two: To determine if the merger between the former Universities of Natal and Durban-Westville has contributed to workplace stress.

As illustrated in Figure 4.6, the merger between the former Universities of Natal and Durban-Westville was found to be of least relevance in terms of contribution towards stress in the workplace. It has been over five years since the merger and the focus has shifted to the restructuring of the colleges and the support sector.

5.9 Workplace changes and its effect on staff

Universities in South Africa have responded to a neo-liberal macro-economic policy environment either by attempting to transform themselves into market universities, or by survivalist strategies of cost cutting and austerity (van der Walt, 2004). The majority (27%) of the respondents indicated that UKZN has been affected by organisational changes such as the reorganisation of colleges and the support sector. Organisational change can be very stressful for employees within an organisation undergoing restructuring. This is highlighted by Vakola & Nikolaou (2005), who stated that organisational change causes lots of anxiety and stress amongst staff who experience uncertainty and start having fears about the potential failure in coping with the new situation.

5.10 Impact of workplace stress on work performance

The results reveal that the majority (63.6%) of the respondents indicated that workplace stress had a negative impact on their work performance. This is in keeping with a South African study by Willingham (2008), who found in a study conducted in the Western Cape that job demands and job expectations were the major sources of job stress for employees.

Willingham (2008) highlights that in the modern day work world, being under stress can serve as a useful motivator to perform, provided it is in the right degree and does not produce job strain. He further stated that researchers discovered as far back as 1908 that once stress reaches a mid to high level, productivity drops off remarkably, and when productivity drops off, the bottom line suffers.

5.10.1 Research objective three: To establish if workplace stress has an impact on work performance

The majority (63.8%) of the respondents indicated that workplace stress had a negative impact on work performance at UKZN. This is in keeping with a study conducted by Greenberg (2002) who stated that high levels of organisational stress, if not resolved, will undermine the quality, productivity and creativity of employees' work, and detract from their health, well-being and morale. He also stated that it is important to recognise that an optimal level of organisational stress can enable an individual to work effectively and with greater satisfaction and stress levels that extend beyond these optimal parameters, can reduce performance. In other literature by Black (2008), who stated that while absenteeism is probably the most obvious cost associated with stress, recent research has suggested that the cost of reduced productivity at work due to mental distress and ill-health is actually much higher than the cost of absence (Black, 2008).

The results as indicated on figure 4.8 indicated that 10.3% of respondents reacted positively to stress. This is highlighted by Nowark (1989) who stated that some people are more successful in facing stressful situations. They have confidence in themselves, they know their capacities and potentials and act accordingly. Self-esteem seems to moderate how one responds to stressors. Further research by Treven (2011) claims that flexible people experience different stressors and have different stress reactions than rigid people and it is characteristic for flexible personalities that they are relatively adaptive to change, somewhat free and open and responsive towards others.

5.11 How often do you stay late or come in early to complete work?

As illustrated in figure 4.9, the three highest responses received were respondents usually stay late (21.9%), always stay late or come in early (15.2%) and sometimes stay late or come

in early (15.2%). Due to the overload of work and in order to stick to strict deadlines at UKZN, it is evident from the percentages above that a fair number of respondents have indicated that they stayed late or came in early to complete work. This is highlighted by Wyatt (2008), who stated that almost half of employers report that work performance is being affected by the stress of employees working long hours, and other impactful factors. Working overtime can result in poor mental performance, increased illness and workplace injuries (Wyatt, 2008).

5.12 Number of days you were put off work by a doctor for work related stress in the past year?

According to figure 4.10, the highest number of days (1 to 5 days) booked off for work related stress as indicated by the respondents was 29%. The analysis has established that staff at UKZN suffered from workplace stress and booked off work by a medical practitioner in the past year. This would not only affect the employee but also cost the organisation in the long run. According to the conditions of service at UKZN, employees receive the benefit of 90 days sick leave over a three year cycle. When a staff member is booked off sick due to work related stress for example depression, this has a great impact, financially on the university, as a leave replacement has to be sourced, taught the new job and paid a salary. This is highlighted by Barton (2010) in that failure to address ill health due to work related stress can have financial and non-financial implications for employers in the form of lost productivity, an increase in costs through temporary disability cover, overtime, recruitment advertising and training. Non-financial implications include low morale among staff.

5.13 Suggestions for UKZN to reduce stress in the workplace

The results revealed that in terms of relevance, respondents indicated that increase in pay, line managers must be more helpful, line managers must treat employees with respect and they must be more empathetic to staff featured as the most relevant mechanisms that can be used at UKZN to reduce stress. According to the Senate report (2009), despite Council's approval of a new remuneration policy that raises entry level academic salaries to the 50 percentile nationally, and includes retention strategies and allowances for scarce skills, with a commitment to migrate to the 75 percentile, UKZN's academic salaries still lag behind those

for positions at equivalent levels in the public service and in the commercial sector. According to the UKZN Institutional Climate Survey (2008), many employees at UKZN felt that there is not enough adequate training and development to up skill staff to be able to do their jobs appropriately. The report revealed that the majority (39%) of the respondents felt that their line managers had not helped them develop.

The respondents also believed that stress management counselling and stress management workshops should be introduced at UKZN. The university does not have any formal workshops that assist staff experiencing any forms of stress. According to research by Cooper et al (2001), stress management programs teaches one to reduce stress in his life and may consist of various workshops in order to introduce employees to topics of stress and stress management. Such workshops can give the employee general knowledge about the causes of stress, its consequences and the stress management methods, or they can be oriented to train an employee in a particular technique (Cooper et al, 2001).

5.13.1 Research objective five: To establish what interventions can reduce stress in the workplace

From the results above, it can be established that employees feel strongly about reducing stress at UKZN. The results are fairly similar which indicate that almost all are important suggestions that can be taken to management as a mechanism to reduce or deal with stress at UKZN. It is evident from the rankings that the university should improve pay. Line managers played a significant role in how employees are affected by stress and this could be a potential stressor for staff. According to Robbins, Judge, (2009), wellness is the human process of being aware and actively working toward better health and a healthier lifestyle. Wellness programs in organizations provides a concept for all employees with the design and implementation of a network of smaller, topical programs that move individuals toward a healthier, more vital, safe, secure and fulfilling way of living. Respondents felt strongly about the university providing stress management counselling and workshops as a tool to assist in dealing with stress in the workplace.

Baime (2005) highlights that stress management workshops that educate employees about the sources of stress, effects on their health and how they can reduce stress can be effective if

backed by practical stress management techniques that employees can use on and off the job. This is further emphasised by Robbins & Judge (2009) who stated that employees who are able to manage stress effectively enjoy better health which in turn means reduced absenteeism from work and increased productivity.

5.14 Summary

It is evident from the analysis that majority of the respondents were Indian females between the age groups of 36 – 40 and 46 – 50 years of age. A larger percentage of support staff answered the questionnaire as compared to academic staff. The results found that a large number of the respondents experienced workplace stress at UKZN in the last two years. From the analysis and interpretation, it can be assumed that the majority of the respondents indicated that they had too much to do and neglect other tasks, job expansion with no additional pay, greater demands from supervisors, new duties with no training, new technologies with no training and that they were not provided with the proper tools to perform their duties. The merger issues was found not to be such a threat to staff as they currently have to deal with more changes in the form of the college reorganisation. Change in the workplace is a potential stressor as staff showed tendencies to resist change and as a result suffered from stress. Due to the changes, staff were also fearful of job loss and job insecurity. Stress has an impact on work performance and a large number of respondents indicated that it had a negative impact on work performance. Those employees that indicated that stress had a positive impact on their work performance – this may be because they were coping well with their work and its challenges either because of their personality and how they perceived their stressors, or because they get a lot of support from colleagues which acts as a buffer and which makes the problems seem less challenging. It could also be because their work does not contain many or serious stress factors.

Chapter Six

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The causes of stress cover a wide range. Stress can be motivating and invigorating, bringing forth excellence in an individual and a company - but stress that is unrelenting can damage a company's greatest resource: its human resources. Because stress stems from many different sources, its complete elimination is impossible, but it can however be managed. The University of KwaZulu-Natal has a legal obligation to protect the occupational health and safety of all its employees, a duty which also applies to problems of work-related stress. As seen in the study, 77% of the respondents have indicated that they have experienced workplace stress in the last two years. It is evident stress is a reality at the institution and that management at UKZN has to make a concerted effort to try and minimise stress in the organisation. This chapter focuses on the conclusions drawn from this study, limitations identified, recommendations based on the findings and further research studies that are to be undertaken in future.

6.2 Recommendations based on findings

The following are recommendations that should be implemented at UKZN which will benefit both the organisation and its employees.

6.2.1 Organisational strategies

UKZN should design a constructive, organisation-wide policy aimed at management of stress which will provide a sound framework in which individual managers can deal with stress-related issues as they arise in themselves or among their subordinates. Stress can be addressed through collective bargaining. Its purpose should always aim to improve workers' health and safety. Because stress is largely caused by how work is organized, collective agreements can be used to re-organise work to eliminate stress hazards. Some of the major causes of stress as indicated by the respondents were regular changes to the work environment, non-recognition for work done, inadequate pay, insensitive line managers, long

working hours and discrimination. Each stressor and the strategies to improve this at UKZN will be dealt with as follows:

6.2.1.1 Organisational change

In South Africa we do not have a successful national framework to deal with the prevention and management of stress in organisations. As a result managers and individuals are not adequately equipped to deal with stress. It is easier to ignore rather than deal with the problems. If an organisation is aware of the main issues and problems, it can put into place targeted measures that address these issues. In Portugal, there is a national strategy for health and safety at work, which runs from 2008 to 2012, covering among other things the promotion of well-being at work. Additionally, the national plan for mental health 2007–2016 aims to promote mental health in workplaces, to reduce and manage work-related stress factors, and to reduce absence due to mental illness (the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010).

At UKZN change management workshops must be conducted to help employees deal with change in the workplace. A stress policy is a good starting point for change. The health and safety committee at UKZN should be instrumental in tabling and pushing for the adoption of a workplace stress prevention policy. In this way stress can be addressed through collective bargaining, as agreements should always aim to improve workers' health and safety. As stress is largely caused by how work is organised, collective agreements can be used to reorganise work to eliminate stress hazards.

6.2.1.2 Performance management (PM)

Performance appraisal must identify employees' goals, clarify their roles and responsibilities and strengthen communication. This can reduce stress by eliminating uncertainty in critical aspects of employee's jobs (Grobler, 2011).

PM was first implemented in 2010 as a pilot study and has gone live from 2011. Feedback in the performance appraisal means that employees will be provided with an objective appraisal of the current situation to let them know how their performance can be improved. The performance appraisal interview provides an excellent opportunity to sum up the performance

of the past year by pointing out incidents of success or failure. It is important to note that feedback is most effective when it takes place immediately or as soon as possible after the appraisal.

At UKZN employees' performance should be handled with great care by managers and supervisors. There is a perception by many employees, especially academic staff that the PM model implemented at UKZN is a waste of time. Employees who do not receive good performance reviews believe that the tool has been implemented by UKZN as a mechanism to get rid of staff. This causes stress and anxiety among staff. Managers should explain the purpose of performance management to staff and also provide proper feedback and ensure that the process is free from bias and subjectivity.

6.2.1.3 Physical environment

Reducing stress in the physical environment requires altering the physical environment by reducing noise and better control of temperature. Secondly, to protect employees from the environment by providing improved safety equipment (Grobler, 2011). At UKZN, this factor was not found to be a stressor in the workplace. However, maintaining proper health and safety in the workplace is crucial in any organisation. This is in line with literature as indicated in *Enough Overwork: Taking Action on Workload* (2002), which stated that physical factors, such as the absence of windows and natural light in a workplace, have likewise been linked to higher stress levels for workers.

6.2.1.4 EAPs (Employee Assistance Programs)

EAPs are typically offered by the Human Resources department as part of the employer's health insurance plan to assess and address personal issues that affect employee performance and productivity. Issues can range from substance abuse to family problems, and EAPs often include counselling benefits.

Respondents in this study have indicated that they place a high priority on stress management counselling and workshops. At UKZN, an employee wellness programme has only recently been introduced. At the time of the study, this was not approved for circulation to staff.

Educational organizations that provide wellness programs for their employees consider such programs a sensible investment with positive financial effects.

6.2.1.5 On-campus support groups.

Stress can be alleviated when employees share concerns about work issues, life crises, family issues, care-giving and stress management methods. These support groups can be on-going and include employees at all levels (Pettinger 2002). UKZN will definitely benefit from support groups as it is therapeutic and healing to talk about your stressors. Emerging studies from around the world indicate that stress management in the workplace helps stem the tide of healthcare costs, and may be especially important in the face of the current global economic climate (GlaxoSmithKline, 2008).

6.2.1.6 Build in exercise breaks

Research has found that light to moderate exercise such as walking or yoga can lower the cortisol levels that can lead to stress. A short walk each day may refresh employees during the work day, reducing stress and increasing productivity.

A good diet and physical exercise, which are two factors known to enhance physical fitness, have been found to indeed be beneficial to restore equilibrium in the body and mind and aid in coping with stress. It has been hypothesised that, exercise training and aerobic fitness may exert an effect by altering the way in which we respond to stress. Indeed, physical fitness and exercise, it has been suggested, may afford us protection against the effect of psychological stress (Carroll & O'Malley, 1996).

Especially during this period of change, employees at UKZN are tense, fearful of the future and experiencing levels of stress. One technique that is under-utilised in the workplace is laughter. Laughter is positively associated with reducing stress. Create a Laugh Day such as a Wacky Wednesday or Fun Friday, to reduce stress in the workplace and among staff members.

6.2.1.7 Recover, Refocus, Regenerate

According to Parlay International, 1990, major life changes occur in all of our lives, for example, promotions, relocations, parenthood, layoffs, divorces, and deaths are just a few of the many major stressors we experience throughout our lives. Whether these events are positive or negative, they can all be very stressful. It is important to take time to recover, refocus, and regenerate following major life changes.

- Recovering— New situations are often stressful, challenging, and unfamiliar. Individuals should step back from their new situation. Plan a weekend getaway or just take some time for yourself. Take small breaks to go to the movie, exercise, or share feelings with others. These activities can reduce one's stress level and help them get back on track (Vail, 2005).
- Refocus - by looking at the "big picture" one can gain a greater peace of mind about the change in their life. Think about what has happened, why, and what it might mean for an individual. This can cause mixed emotions. For example, a promotion may increase a person's salary, but give them new and excessive responsibilities. In time, these feelings will change. Talking to a trusted friend, family member, or counsellor may speed the healing process (Vail, 2005).

6.2.1.8 Remuneration

Management needs to ensure that remuneration packages are in line with that of industry standards. While employees are unsatisfied with the salary packages they receive, there is some comfort in the benefits available to them. According to the UKZN Institutional Climate Survey (2008) staff was unhappy with their remuneration and dissatisfaction among the various colleges and support divisions ranged between 63-68%. As a result of non-competitive salaries offered at UKZN, the organisation is losing their top employees to other educational institutions that are able to remunerate them with more acceptable salary packages. Management should conduct benchmarking exercises against other tertiary institutions to determine the correct salary packages for staff at UKZN and provide higher incentives for their high achievers thus retaining the talented employees at the institution.

6.2.1.9 Communication

Communication and information dissemination processes needs to be put in place that facilitate communication between colleges/divisions and between employees and the organisation. According to the results from the study, many respondents are of the view that there should be an improvement in communication at UKZN. In order to achieve this, top or senior management can hold meetings with small groups of employees to answer questions and provide an opportunity for employees to raise questions that interest them. These regular meetings may also be used to address special issues such as the status on the restructuring and reorganisation of the colleges – this seems to be an uncomfortable issue affecting employees at present, causing stress and anxiety among staff. If such meetings are held regularly and employees develop a sense that management has a sincere interest in their concerns, they can provide an excellent source of upward communication at UKZN.

6.2.1.10 Training and development

Training, development and education programmes are big business in South African and is now valued at R5 billion per year. Despite this, South Africa spends less than 1% of total employment costs on training in contrast to 5% spent by our major partners such as USA & Japan who spend 10%. Training and development (T&D) is seen as a key factor in meeting the employer's strategic, business and operational goals (Grobler et al, 2011).

Respondents indicated that Human Resources should up-skill employees. An important way to attract, retain and motivate personnel is through a systematic programme of career development. If staff at UKZN is adequately trained thus acquiring the necessary skills required for promotion, the transition from their present job to one with greater responsibilities will be easier. If UKZN fails to provide such training, they could lose their most promising employees.

6.2.1.11 Recognition

While most employees seem to be unsatisfied with the recognition in the organisation, the problem resides not so much with the lack of recognition but more with a simple 'thank you',

however this is not sufficient. Failure to recognise and respond effectively to performance can affect one's behaviour.

It is recommended that management extend the recognition they give to communication with customers and clients. Performance should be linked to rewards. This may be more appreciated by employees. Examples of such rewards include time off, vouchers to restaurants or spas depending on the employee's preferences. According to studies conducted in both Australia and the United Kingdom, prevalent stressors included a lack of trust in senior management, high levels of job insecurity and diminishing or sparse resources (Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper, & Ricketts, 2005), Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, Hapuararchchi, & Boyd, 2003).

6.3 Limitations of this study

The limitations that arose during this study and ways to overcome these are discussed below.

- A larger sample should be used for future studies to ensure the sample is representative of the entire UKZN.
- The study was limited to the unique environment of UKZN, culture, and management style associated with the organisation. Time constraints and inexperience limited the depth of questioning. In hind-sight, it was felt that interviews would have elicited more detailed data and a better sample size.
- The instrument used to collect data was by means of an on-line questionnaire, QuestionPro. Due to technical and network problems experienced during the time, not all of the respondents who attempted to answer the survey could access the direct link on the website. As a result the researcher did not receive the required sample size to analyse the data. It is recommended that for any future research conducted at UKZN that the researcher makes use of hardcopy questionnaires. It would be a more reliable source of data collection.
- As a result of the technical problems, the researcher had to constantly follow-up with participants to complete the survey. This was time-consuming and the analysis could commence only once an acceptable sample size was received. In future, the researcher will use a much smaller sample size to conduct research for example only the staff employed in the College of Humanities. In this way, it would be easier to pursue the recipients to complete the survey.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

The following should be considered for any future research.

- Workplace stress and how it affects women
- Violence against women in the workplace
- The glass ceiling
- Stress as experienced by senior management
- Psychological and social factors of stress at work
- Factors outside the workplace: personal influences on stress
- Theories of stress: factors in the work environment

6.5 Summary

The purpose of this study was to establish if workplace stress exists at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Results of the study conducted revealed that workplace stress does exist at UKZN. The objectives of the study were confirmed. The underlying causes and sources of stress among employees were determined. Coping mechanisms were identified. The most salient findings were identified and elaborated. Relevant recommendations were made to reduce workplace stress at UKZN. Extrinsic factors that management need to address as priority are the establishment of a stress policy, improve remuneration packages for all staff and provide staff with some form of recognition for the job well done. They need to improve communication and provide adequate training and development to all staff. The recommendations may also assist in curbing the high levels of employee turnover rates, absenteeism rates, and attrition rates thus reducing costs incurred through recruitment and selection, and training and development as well as improving overall performance and service levels. When stressful situations arise in the work environment, it is important that the organisation's management and its employees jointly address the stressors in the work environment through employee participation in assessing the problem. Most importantly, relieve your own stress through exercise, muscle relaxation, colour, scent and massage. A stress-free work environment begins with a stress-free individual.

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Appendix I
Questionnaire

Dear Respondent

I, Shantha Maharaj, an MBA student at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership of the University Of KwaZulu-Natal invite you to participate in this study titled "Workplace stress at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)." There are 19 questions and it will take less than 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. It is very important for us to learn your opinions.

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact me or my supervisor on the numbers listed below.

Researcher: Shantha Maharaj at Tel. 031-2603806 or by email: maharajsh@ukzn.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof AM Singh 031-2607564

Research Office: Ms P Ximba 031-2603587

Thank you very much for your time and support. Please start with the survey now by clicking on the "I agree" button below.

I Agree

1. Gender:
 - Male
 - Female

2. Race:
 - Black
 - Indian
 - Coloured
 - White
 - Other

3. Marital Status:
 - Single
 - Married
 - Divorced
 - Widow
 - Widower

4. Age Group:
 - 25 – 30 years
 - 31 - 35 years
 - 36 – 40 years
 - 41- 45 years
 - 46 – 50 years
 - 51 - 55 years
 - Over 55 years

5. How many children do you have?
 - None
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - More than 3

6. How long have you been working in your current position?
 - Less than one year
 - 1-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - More than 20 years

7. What sector of the university are you employed in?
 - Academic
 - Support

8. Please indicate the type of employment contract you have at UKZN?
 - Full time
 - Part-time (Fixed term contract)
 - Temporary

9. Have you ever been diagnosed with stress by a medical practitioner in the past two years?
 - Yes
 - No

10. If yes, what is the nature of your stress? (Choose one)
 - Work stress
 - Health stress
 - Financial stress
 - Personal stress

If your choice above has not been work related stress, you are not required to continue with this questionnaire. I thank you for your time and participation.

11. What do you think are the main causes of your workplace stress? (Select as many causes as are applicable to you.)
 - I am not recognized for the work I do
 - I have a poor relationship with my line manager

- Insensitive line managers
- Job insecurity
- Long working hours
- Intimidation (Harassment, Bullying & Violence)
- Lack of respect from supervisors
- Discrimination (Sexism, Racism, Age)
- Physical working conditions (Workplace noise, Poor ventilation, Poor lighting)
- Inadequate pay
- Inability to take leave
- Poor occupational health and safety
- Regular changes in the work environment

12. How would you describe your current feelings about your work situation?

- I believe I have unachievable deadlines
- I have too much to do and I tend to neglect some tasks
- I have unrealistic time pressures placed on me
- I am uncomfortable with my colleagues

13. My job conditions in the past two years:

- Have improved
- Have deteriorated
- Have not changed

14. If your job conditions have deteriorated, what has happened? Rank your choices where 1 is the most relevant to you and 6 is the least relevant to you.

- Job expansion with no additional pay
- Greater demands from supervisors
- New duties with no training
- New technologies with no training
- I am not provided with the tools to perform my duties
- Merger issues haven't been resolved

15. Has your workplace been affected by any of the following (select as many as apply to you):

- Staff cutbacks/Downsizing
- Use of Contractors
- Mergers/Amalgamations
- Redeployments
- Other organizational changes(specify)

16. How has your workplace stress impacted on your work performance?

- It has had a positive impact on my work performance
- It has had no impact on my work performance
- It has had a negative impact on my work performance

17. How often do you stay late or come in early to complete work (i.e., unpaid work outside of your regular hours of work)?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

18. How many days were you put off work by a doctor for work related stress in the past year?

- 1-5 days
- 6-10 days
- 11-15 days
- 16-20 days
- More than 20 days

19. What suggestions do you have for the University to reduce stress in your workplace?

Rank your choices with 1 being the most important for you and 8 being the least important.

- Line managers must be more helpful
- Line managers must treat employees with respect

- Line managers must be more empathetic to staff
- The university must improve communication
- The university must provide stress management workshops
- The university must provide stress management counselling
- Human resources must up skill employees
- The university must improve pay

11 July 2011

Mrs S Maharaj (209534556)
Graduate School of Business
Faculty of Management Studies
Westville Campus

Dear Mrs Maharaj

PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0475/011M
PROJECT TITLE: Workplace stress at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

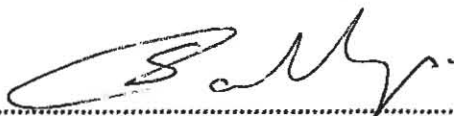
In response to your application dated 6 July 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisors: Prof AM Singh
cc. Mrs C Haddon

6 July 2011

Mrs S Maharaj
Human Resources
Westville Campus
UKZN

Email: maharajsh@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Mrs Maharaj

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards your MBA qualification in the following project, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained via the Research Office.

- 1) Workplace Stress at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Please note that the data collected must be treated with confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely



Mr EN Zuma
Assistant Registrar

Office of the Registrar

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