

**A Study to Identify Stressors Perceived by
Health Science Lecturing Staff within a School
at a South African University.**

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ABSTRACT


This study aimed to describe the stressors perceived by a group of Health Science lecturers in a School in a South African University, and to describe the coping strategies these lecturers used. The sample consisted of thirty, full-time lecturers in the three Disciplines that constituted the School. Three focus groups, one in each of the Disciplines, were held to gather the research material. The study revealed that change in Tertiary Education and organisational issues such as the image of the institution, lecturing to a diverse student group, curriculum transformation and leadership issues were perceived as enduring stressors. An increased workload, brought about through the training of future health professionals, trying to stay abreast both professionally and as an academic and the nature of their academic appointments were further identified as potential stressors. Role conflicts in terms of juggling home and work responsibilities and role ambiguity with respect to being both a teacher and researcher were presented as additional stressors, as were certain day-to-day occurrences. Lastly, the lecturers identified a number of personal issues that were perceived as stressors. The study failed to highlight meaningful differences in the three Disciplines within the School, which is in keeping with other published research. The study also showed that the lecturers in each of the Disciplines had access to, and knowledge of, a wide range of coping mechanisms, both problem-based and emotion-focused. The lecturers in the three Disciplines used very similar coping strategies, and once again meaningful differences were not reported.

DECLARATION

I, Cathy Holland, registration number 991240795, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled:

**“A Study to Identify Stressors Perceived by Health Science Lecturing Staff
within a School at a South African University”**

represents original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another University. Where use was made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged in the text.


Signed: _____

4.4.2002
Dated: _____

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- T.J. It had potential!
- And finally to Greg. You can have the computer back now, my boy. Thank you.

Use of the word **she** – this word has been used to simplify the text and is used in the context of covering both men and women. It look friendlier and reads easier than he/she each time. The participants in this study were mostly women, and for this reason it seemed appropriate to use **she**, but in no way should imply, or detract from, the role and contribution played by the male participants.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

From the literature perused, it appears as if as far back as 1978, stress, as a phenomenon in teachers was receiving attention. Stress and its effects have, been identified as a serious concern amongst teachers and college administrators. In a study done in 1978, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (as cited by Fontana and Abouserie, 1993), reported that 72.6% of their sample comprising of teachers experienced moderate levels of stress, whilst 23.2% experienced serious levels of stress.

A 1983 study cited by Benjamin (1987) revealed the existence of fairly diffuse problems of stress in University settings. Mills (1986), researching in a South African setting, reported that stress should be viewed as an inherent part of a teacher's job. Further work by Cherniss in the 80's (cited by Rodgers and Dodson, 1988) reported that teaching and various health professions could, in fact, be viewed as high-stress occupations.

Sweeney, Nichols and Kline (1993:89) reported: "Work-related stress has been found to permeate the lives of helping professionals", and Loate and Marais (1996) wrote that one of the most impelling aspects of stress is that it affects people from all walks of life, from cleaners to teachers and professors. In their research Fontana and Abouserie (1993:261) observed that teaching practitioners were subject to a high incidence of potentially stressful situations. In another study, Abouserie (1996) concluded that about 15% of academic staff might need professional help in order to reduce their stress. A 1998 study conducted in the United Kingdom, and reported by Coxon (2001), found that 70% of lecturers found their jobs stressful.

More recently, Edworthy (2000:2) wrote: "Although the role of the lecturer is not traditionally considered by society to be one that elicits high levels of occupational stress, the situation has now

changed." She pointed out that as we go into the next millennium, the incidence of stress is likely to increase. Fourie (1999) inferred that education transformation in this country had numerous implications for academic staff. Fourie (1999) cited low morale amongst staff, and feeling stressed as just two of the implications. As transformation is an ongoing process, it can be assumed that this low morale and stress will not spontaneously disappear.

The popular press has also recently afforded more and more column space to stress in academia. Coxon (2001:21) reported that: "Stress and mental health issues are showing a worrying rise in higher education". According to Coxon (2001) a recent survey in one British tertiary institution found that 88% of staff had suffered from some form of health related problem in the year preceding the study.

1.2. ACADEMIC STRESS

Academics are not, however, the only group of professionals that suffer from stress. Benjamin (1987) noted that stress is an unavoidable part of daily living, and necessary in some way as well, because without some stress individuals would not be motivated to participate in activity. Fontana and Abouserie (1993:261) concurred, noting that: "Stress is a natural and unavoidable feature of life experienced at one time or another by the vast majority of those engaged in professional work". However, while a certain amount of stress is essential to counter apathy, too much stress or distress should not be a natural or inescapable consequence of work (Edworthy, 2000).

1.3. THE RESULTS OF STRESS IN ACADEMIA

With distress, or high levels of stress, individuals might experience physical and/or mental ill health, lowered job satisfaction and a loss in sense of achievement (Edworthy, 2000). The findings of Gmelch, Lovrich and Wilke (1984:477) fifteen years earlier concurred with this sentiment when they stated: "...occupational stress adversely affects the productivity, performance, job satisfaction and health of professionals". In 1986 Mills recorded work done by Belcastro and Gold, who reported that stress in teachers could lead to a decreased capacity of the teacher to perform and that stress produced various somatic, physical and/or emotional problems in the teacher. Further research by

Abouserie (1996) reported an inverse relationship between stress and job satisfaction amongst University academic staff. The lower job satisfaction can have further implications according to Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978), who noted that absenteeism and an intention to leave the profession might result. Abouserie (1996) warned that without help to reduce stress levels, academics might not be able to work satisfactorily and ill health could result.

Benjamin (1987) recorded some of the effects of stress on lecturing. She noted that a stressed academic might be so self-absorbed with what was happening to him/her personally, that inspiring teaching and empathetic listening might be hampered. Stress could also undermine job performance, with resultant disappointment and frustration.

A study done in the United Kingdom in 1998 highlighted the actual extent of ill health amongst academics. Twenty five per cent of the respondents in the study reported losing time at work as a result of a stress-related illness, whilst 53% were reported to be suffering from anxiety and/or depression. Other reported stress-related health problems included cerebro-vascular accidents (stroke), high blood pressure and alcohol abuse.

Two concerns appear here. Firstly, stress can lead to lower job satisfaction and a loss of a sense of achievement, which in turn can contribute to a feeling that academic excellence is compromised. This dissatisfaction in turn leads to higher stress levels, and a vicious cycle develops (Abouserie, 1996). Secondly, if academics are not functioning adequately, and if they constantly need time off work because of stress-related illnesses, the efficient functioning of higher education institutions is compromised (Edworthy, 2000).

1.4. RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

As a practising health professional in the field of Mental Health and as a lecturer in a Health Science Discipline, the researcher is interested in the stressors and concomitant stress that she and her colleagues have to contend with. The researcher and her colleagues are all currently employed as lecturers in a School within a Health Science Faculty at a South African University. The School consists of three unspecified Health Science Disciplines. Within the School, tearoom

and corridor discussions hint at lecturers being 'stressed' and 'not coping'. Staff make reference to untenable demands, time constraints, tension at home and work, among colleagues and loved ones, tiredness and not being able to cope with all the demands made on them. Academics have a vague idea of what events and/or situations are perceived as stressful, but these have not been documented in any way to really gain insight. There is also little information about how effective and efficient a 'stressed lecturer' really is.

A preliminary review of the literature has revealed that much work has been published on stress and how it relates to undergraduate students in the respective Disciplines that the researcher and her colleagues practice and lecture within (Gilbert and Strong, 1997; Kruger *et al.*, 2000). Much has also been written about the stress experienced by health care workers/professionals (Payne and Firth-Cozens, 1987; Rees and Smith, 1991; Sweeney *et al.*, 1993; Kromberg *et al.*, 1998), but the three Disciplines within the School were in many instances not included in these studies. Research also tended to focus on burnout, the last stage in unmediated stress (Mills, 1986; Brown and Pranger, 1992; Swindler and Ross, 1993; de Witt and De Luca, 1995; Gomez and Michaelis, 1995). There is a need, therefore, to look at these three Disciplines *per se*. Moreover, the stressors for this particular group of lecturing health professionals are also, the researcher believes, possibly different from those stressors experienced by clinical therapists in the respective Disciplines.

A literature search has revealed that considerable data are available from the United Kingdom and United States of America, but very little research material about South African academia could be traced. Also, many of the studies consulted attempted to put figures to the level and prevalence of stress amongst academics, but little work appears to have been done on identifying the actual stressors.

Gmelch, Wilke and Lovrich (1986), Abouserie (1996) and Loate and Marais (1996) all agree that whilst work is often the main source of stress in the lives of professionals, there is a lack of information about stressors among academics. Abouserie (1996) pointed out that 74% of academics in her study listed work as a major stressor in their daily life.

Fontana and Abouserie (1993) concluded that their research results called for further investigation into the actual stressors. In support of this, Abouserie (1996:50) noted that: "The plethora of roles and the existence of numerous factors, demanding attention produce a multifaceted complex of strains on individuals in academic roles". The researcher acknowledges that while stress in academia appears to be a complicated occurrence, stress is always initiated by a certain event and/or situation. Hence these so-called stressors need to be identified. The research undertaken used the Transactional approach (Folkman, 1984) to understanding the development of stress. In this regard, Durham (1984:3) noted: "This ... approach emphasises the importance of identifying the demands which teachers perceive and experience as stressful and the behaviour they use to tackle these demands".

Under current legislation affecting employee/employer relationships, universities in the United Kingdom are becoming more aware of their responsibility for the health and welfare of their employees (Coxon, 2001). It is therefore argued that having available data about stressors could assist in informing any Employee Assistance Programmes being developed in South African institutions. The data obtained from a study such as this could also assist in the planning and introduction of staff development and mentoring initiatives within institutions.

To emphasise the seriousness of the situation, Coxon (2001:21) reported that the Higher Education Funding Council for England had commissioned a national study of occupational stress in the tertiary education sector. The three-year project, to carry out a bench marking exercise in seventeen universities and colleges, would enable comparisons to be made with other employment sectors and within the profession itself. The study would further lead to the development and establishment of strategies to combat stress among employees in these institutions. The project leader was reported to have said: "We realise stress is a major problem in higher education and through this project we want to try and identify and tackle the structural problems in institutions that cause stress and to make these environments less stressful".

Bearing this in mind, it appears of little consequence to attempt to quantify stress, but rather the emphasis should be on attempting to identify the potential stressors that lecturers experience in their working lives. In this way the necessary 'structural problems' alluded to above can be

identified and redressed, if at all possible, and systems put in place to assist staff who are suffering from stress.

1.5. IN CONCLUSION

It was hoped that the study would add to the Discipline's, the School's and the Faculty's knowledge base about perceived stressors.

The research questions the researcher addressed in this study are;

- What are the stressors and daily occurrences perceived and/or identified by Health Science lecturing staff within a School at a South African University?
- Are these perceived stressors similar or different for the three Disciplines that make up the School?
- What coping mechanisms are commonly employed by the lecturing staff within the School?
- Are these coping mechanisms similar or different for the three Disciplines?
- Do gender, rank, number of years service, nature of appointment, racial grouping and/or age play any role in the perceived stressors and the coping mechanisms commonly employed?

"...knowledge of the professional situations that are stress-producing for faculty can assist university administrators in creating a more desirable working climate, facilitative of both productivity and greater faculty satisfaction. Identification of the sources of faculty stress can be utilised in two important ways: first, through institutional action such as adjustments in structure, policies, administrative assignments, and managerial behaviours to provide a less stressful atmosphere; and second, individual faculty members can, by awareness of the situation that are stressful to them, develop coping techniques known to reduce job-based stress" (Gmelch, Lovrich and Wilke, 1984:488).

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK and LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

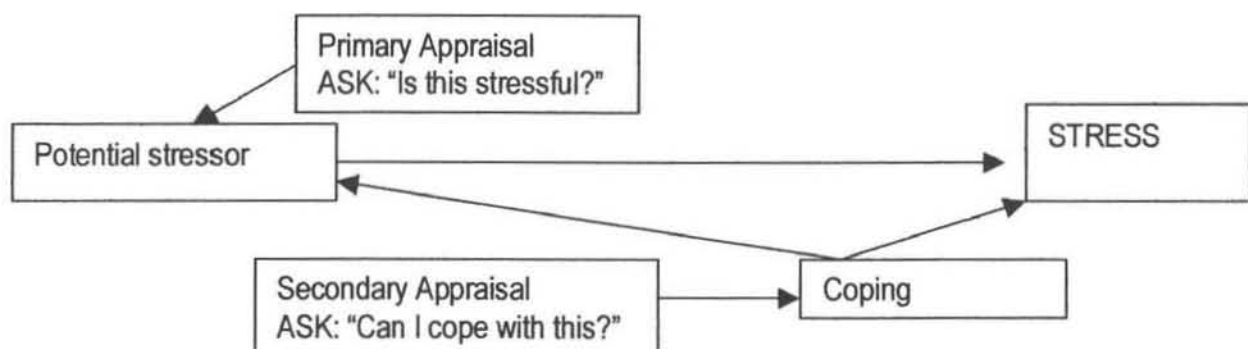
In this chapter of the dissertation, the researcher proposes a conceptual framework for the research undertaken. This is done using a variety of literature drawn from medical and educational studies. The researcher starts by attempting to define the terms 'stress' and 'stressor' from a psychological perspective, and the Transactional Theory of Stress is used as a starting point. From this initial discussion, the potential stressors in higher education today are identified, and the stressor/stress interplay described. The nature of stressors is explored, and an interpretation of what is perceived as stressful is discussed. It is important to understand why an individual may sometimes perceive something as stressful while another individual may not perceive it as such. From this point, the discussion focuses on coping strategies that are used in an attempt to ameliorate the distress caused by a variety of stressors. Individual differences reported in the literature with respect to the three Disciplines under review are briefly highlighted.

2.2. WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress can be defined as a state of psychological tension within an individual produced by social, psychological and/or physical pressures in that individual's world. Stress is therefore seen as an interaction between an individual and her environment. Lazarus (Folkman, 1984) first proposed this approach to stress in the 1970's. The gist of the Transactional Theory of Stress is that an individual experiences stress if s/he interprets or views a situation/event as actually being stressful (Ogden, 1996). The situation may be actually threatening, or (merely) perceived as being threatening by the individual. The individual, therefore, construes a situation or event as being threatening based on his or her personal interpretation of the situation (Folkman, 1984; Kearns and Lipsedge, 2000). The Transactional Theory views stress as an individual perceptual incident (Edworthy, 2000:6). Thus

what may be perceived as stressful by one individual may not be perceived as especially threatening by another (Sweeney, Nichols and Kline, 1991; Edworthy, 2000; Benjamin, 1987). Also, the same event can be a stressor at one time and not at another (Benjamin, 1987). The 'number' of event/situations occurring at the same time can also overload an individual's capacity to cope successfully. The effect can therefore be cumulative (Benjamin, 1987). The evaluation of situations/events is based on an individual's personal characteristics including beliefs, values and ideas, previous experiences with similar stressors and their repertoire of coping strategies and resources (Rees and Smith, 1991; Benjamin, 1987).

In the Transactional Model, an individual is not seen as passively reacting to their world, but rather actively interacting with it. Inherent in the Transactional Theory of Stress is the concept of 'appraisal'. According to Lazarus (Folkman, 1984; Ogden, 1996 and Edworthy, 2000) there are two types of appraisal. The first form, 'primary appraisal', occurs when the individual appraises or evaluates an event/situation as (i) irrelevant, (ii) positive or (iii) harmful and negative in respect of their well-being. The second form of appraisal, 'secondary appraisal', involves the individual appraising her repertoire of coping strategies and resources in order to judge if they can cope or not. The individual thus asks: "Is this event/situation stressful?" and, if the situation is perceived to be stressful, the individual asks: "Can I cope?" in relation to the event or situation. Constant reappraisal occurs as the situation changes and the individual copes with the situation. Stress within an individual arises when there is an imbalance between their perception of the 'harmfulness' of the situation/event and their perceived ability to cope with the perceived threat (Folkman, 1984; Moller, 1990; Edworthy, 2000; Kearns and Lipsedge, 2000).



The role of primary and secondary appraisal

(from Ogden, 2000:206)

2.3. WHAT IS APPRAISAL?

Appraisal is in essence an assessment or 'sizing up' of an environmental event/situation by an individual. In the words of Folkman (1984), appraisal is determining the meaning of an event/situation. According to Gage (1992) this appraisal is influenced, within the individual, by their personal values and beliefs, their physiological arousal, social support and their feelings of empowerment and self-efficacy. Gender, mood, age, the nature (novel versus enduring) of the stressor and information and skills at the individual's disposal at the time are also thought to influence the appraisal process.

According to Gage (1992) primary and secondary appraisals influence one another, but do not occur in any particular order or sequence. Both the processes are of equal importance. The cycle of appraisal is a continuous one, with reappraisal following appraisal.

2.3.1. PRIMARY APPRAISAL

This involves appraisal of the outside world, and asking the question: "Is this stressful?" (Ogden, 1996). In order to appraise, an individual has to perceive the outside world. But perception includes appraisal. According to Reber (1985:527) perception includes the perception of an event and the processes that follow (the appraisal). In order to do this the individual needs to focus on the event, be motivated to attend to the event, organise the event into some coherent whole and assume some stance in relation to the event. This relates to the individual deciding on whether the event is irrelevant, positive (beneficial and challenging) or harmful (threatening) to them. Previous learning and experience also play a role in the sense that while some perception is innate (hereditary), other perception is gained through learning (experience). An individual can thus learn to cope with a situation/event. An event/situation will not be assessed as harmful, unless the individual concerned views themselves as vulnerable to that particular stressor (Gage, 1992).

2.3.2. SECONDARY APPRAISAL

This relates to asking the question: "Can I cope with this?". It generally comes into effect when the individual perceives a situation/event as being stressful (harmful). According to Folkman (1984) and Moller (1990), secondary appraisal entails the individual judging their options and resources available for coping with the perceived stress. This relates to a number of factors including the perceived efficacy of the available coping strategies, the individual's previous experiences with similar stressors and the availability of resources like personal morale and energy (motivation), social support and material resources (Moller, 1990:320). Coping strategies are defined as conscious, rational ways of dealing with perceived stressful situations/events.

2.4. ARE INDIVIDUALS ALWAYS STRESSED?

Loate and Marais (1996) and Sweeney, Nichols and Kline (1993) noted that stress is unavoidable and affects all individuals at some or other time in their lives. "Regardless of how resourceful we are in coping with problems the circumstances of life inevitably involve stress" (Loate and Marais, 1996:92).

Increased perceptions of not coping/being stressed are listed in Edworthy (2000) as:

- Being exposed to enduring or long term pressure without letting up;
- A feeling of powerlessness over the demands that are being made;
- Ongoing tension between conflicting demands;
- An ongoing threat of violence or aggressive behaviour with little or no defence;
- Organisational change that impacts on individuals.

This can be exacerbated by:

- A feeling that staff needs are not important or an indifference to these needs;
- The organisation lacking leadership and/or clear direction;
- Inflexible or imposed deadlines/demands;

- Staff experiencing a high degree of uncertainty about their direction, purpose, objectives and job.

2.5. WHAT IS A STRESSOR?

According to Gage (1992:354) a stressful situation can be defined as a particular relationship between an individual and her environment that is appraised by the individual as being greater than her resources, and thereby endangering her well-being.

A stressor is an external environmental pressure or demand perceived as being harmful or threatening to an individual or group of individuals. It is the 'causal agent' of stress in an individual (Reber, 1985). The situations/events creating stress can be short term (transient) or long term (enduring), (Ogden, 1996; Edworthy, 2000). Just about any situation or event that an individual is exposed to could be a potential stressor. Potential or perceived stressors are far more frequent than actual stressors (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980).

Viljoen *et al.* (1987) noted three broad clusters of stressors using Lazarus' work as a starting point. The first cluster involves universally threatening situations that will affect large numbers of individuals, for example an earthquake or war. This cluster can be likened to wider environmental stressors. The second cluster involves similar threats, but involves fewer individuals, for example threatening situations within an organisation. Fewer individuals share in the stressful situation/event at the same time by the very nature of the situation/event, for example the termination of employment contracts within an organisation. The third cluster involves recurring daily hassles/problems like noise, commuting or a lack of privacy. These third cluster stressors are seen as enduring, but an individual may not necessarily recognise the situation/event as a potential stressor. It should also be noted that it is not the presence of an identified stressor *per se* that causes stress, but rather a combination of factors and individuals' perceived ability to cope with the stressors at the time.

2.6. WHAT ARE THE STRESSORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

Edworthy (2000:39) was of the opinion that stressors in higher education were specific and associated with current tensions within higher education. But, as far back as the early nineteen eighties, studies cited by a variety of authors consulted, mentioned stress as an area of concern in higher education at that time. Mills (1986), citing Belcastro and Gold (1983), recorded that stress was an inherent part of a teacher's (lecturer's) job. Benjamin (1987) cited a 1983 study that revealed the existence of a fairly diffuse problem of stress in university settings. Stressors and stress in Higher Education have been around for some time, and Edworthy (2000) predicted that as we entered the next millennium, the incidence of stress was likely to increase. Edworthy (2000) listed a number of situations/events that could be perceived as stressors in higher education. The stressors identified by Edworthy (2000) and a host of other authors consulted, broadly fall into cluster two and cluster three as described by Viljoen *et al.* (1987). There are specific circumstances, constraints, limitations and conditions, peculiar to Higher Education that limit the number of individuals touched by the stressors. These events/situations are subjected to primary and secondary appraisal by those individuals involved and are rated by the individuals concerned as benign, positive or harmful. Individuals will appraise each event/situation in their own personal way. The reported stressors in Higher Education include:

2.6.1. CHANGE

According to Loate and Marais (1996), stress is caused by the rapid changes that are part and parcel of life. Edworthy (2000:41) noted that during the past few years, lecturers had witnessed much change in their work environments. These changes included an increased workload, a decreased level of control over their work, increasingly competitive environments, fewer available resources and greater expectations. It can be argued that present day South African academics have not been spared this accelerated change, and in addition, South Africa is also currently debating the future size and shape of her tertiary institutions. "A National working group on Institutional Restructuring has been established to investigate and advise the Minister of Education on 'appropriate arrangements for consolidating the provision of Higher Education on a regional

basis through establishing new institutional and organisational forms...' " (Ramashala, 2001b:1). All Higher Education institutions had until 30 July 2001 to submit their proposals in this regard.

Fourie (1999) identified five interlinked and interdependent issues characterising transformation in Higher Education in South Africa. These are:

- Democratisation of governance structures within institutions;
- Increased access for educationally and financially disadvantaged students;
- Curriculum restructuring;
- Community service and focusing on developmental needs in research;
- The redressing of past employment inequalities.

Fourie (1999) wrote that these issues demanded frequent change, adaptation and paradigm shifts, as the transformation required was comprehensive, and radical. Fourie (1999) warned that the implications of these changes for members of the academic staff were more profound than generally believed. She wrote: "...it does seem as if academics have been growing more negative about transformation over the past few years" (Fourie, 1999:287). Kenny (1999) wrote that: "the idea of 'academic freedom' in which academics decide for themselves what should be taught and how it should be taught, is considered a form of self-indulgence, inappropriate for a developing country such as South Africa." He added that academics were learning to keep quiet and do as they were told (Kenny, 1999). Writing in a daily newspaper about change at a local Historically Advantaged Institution (HAI), Kenny (1999) pointed out that while university management might be upbeat about changes effected, academic staff: "...are fearful and demoralised." This perhaps relates to Edworthy's (2000) earlier points that enduring pressure and a general feeling of powerlessness over the demands being made increase individual perceptions of not coping. This growing 'negativity' could also relate to staff feeling that their own needs are not being heard and that there is uncertainty about the direction and purpose of the transformation. Kearns and Lipsedge (2000) noted that change within an organisation, as for example mooted in the National Plan for Education, enhanced an individual's perception of the job as threatening.

Mills (1986) noted that added stressors at this point were a perceived lack of effective communication and consultation about the changes happening, and a perceived lack of participation in the decision making process. In addition, change in Higher Education in South Africa has also been characterised by a considerable degree of conflict (Fourie, 1999:278). This has meant that lecturing staff have on occasion been prevented from performing their duties. Academics, particularly in Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDI's) have found themselves working in unpredictable and volatile environments, which may be viewed as a stressor by many individuals.

Walsh (1999) writing about the calling of lecturing as a vocation, listed five factors that academics have to contend with today. These are globalisation, a shift from an industrial to a knowledge economy, diversity and multiculturalism, a shift in traditional values and change as a fact of life.

Globalisation, aided by technology: "...has accelerated time, collapsed space and erased national borders" according to Walsh (1999:20). Ideas, thoughts, individuals, money and culture move speedily from place to place through channels like the World Wide Web, international markets and the Internet. The world we find ourselves in is increasingly high-tech and fast paced. In addition, Habu (2000) and Walsh (1999) commented that globalisation brought with it the notion of 'internationalism' and, therefore, a more diverse and multicultural society. This shift brings with it tensions related to 'who we are' and 'what we value' as individuals and a society as a whole. Multiple, contested and shifting identities become the order of the day, according to Walsh (1999:21).

The nature of the roles and functions performed in academia has changed with this globalisation and the related shift from an industrial to a knowledge economy. The competencies that are now required from faculty members are an: "ability to read critically, write persuasively, speak cogently and reason quantitatively", according to Walsh (1999). Habu (2000) referred to the 'enlightenment idea': "the idea that the desire for unimpeded pursuit of knowledge can unite people of different backgrounds" (Habu, 2000:40). As Walsh (1999) noted, change is the order of the day.

Walsh (1999) concluded that higher education had to deal with change in the following ways. A focus on new, fast paced, all-inclusive technology, experiential learning, multiculturalism, global education, collaboration with peers and the scholarships of discovery, application and integration. It appears as if it is a case of 'adapt or die' for academics.

Higher Education has also had to confront the concepts of commercialism – academic institutions competing for students as a source of revenue (Habu, 2000:44). Walsh (1999) wrote that academics were, therefore, hard tasked finding meaning and purpose in their work lives and that this was a major stressor in their lives. According to Walsh (1999:21) the socio-economic pressures on higher education are deflecting academics from the central source of meaning and purpose in their work.

2.6.2. WORKLOADS

Edworthy (2000) reported that due to the measures put in place to rationalise staff complements, the remaining staff might find themselves in the position of dealing with ever increasing workloads, and feeling that they are often not being afforded the necessary time to complete tasks to the best of their ability. Staff might also find themselves undertaking roles and functions for which they feel unprepared and unqualified. In one United Kingdom survey cited by Edworthy (2000), lecturers reported working approximately seventy hours per week, resulting in increased stress levels within the individuals. Lecturers, in the reported study, also recorded having insufficient time to stay abreast of current developments as a stressor. The 'publish or perish' call has also proved to be a stressor. Workloads in academic departments also include a multitude of administrative tasks inherent in the job. These include student selection, supervising student research, fieldwork co-ordination, planning meetings and student counselling.

On the opposite side of the coin, Loate and Marais (1996), Mills (1986) and Keams and Lipsedge (2000) reported that having too small a workload could also be regarded as a stressor, as the individual might not experience any self-fulfilment.

2.6.3. ROLE CONFLICTS

Role conflicts can be caused by a failure to reconcile the demands of work and home (Kearns and Lipsedge, 2000). Loate and Marais (1996), in their research, noted that women appeared more prone to experiencing the home – work interface as a stressor, because of a conflict of interests and/or societal pressures. Women find themselves having to balance career and home responsibilities. Bailey (1990b:31) reported that the employed health professionals used in her study: "...spoke of the stresses of juggling their jobs and the needs of their families". It appears as if time conflicts between the job and family activities are viewed as a major stressor by individuals (Bailey, 1990b).

While working women are confronted with similar stressors to men (Long, 1995), women are confronted with certain unique stressors, including gender discrimination, stereotyping, social isolation and work/home conflicts. In addition, Long (1995) recorded taking care of children and ageing parents as stressors for women working outside the home. Long (1995) further reported that whilst working had certain beneficial health effects for women, a woman's ability to cope depended on her individual family situation and the nature of her job.

Long (1995) listed barriers to career progress as a stressor for many women. It was argued that this was because women often occupied the lower levels of the academic hierarchy. This fact was echoed by Mabokela (in press) who wrote: "...the majority of women are employed in the lowest academic rank...". Upward mobility of women academics appears severely constrained (Long, 1995; Mabokela, in press). Edworthy (2000) who listed promotion issues and thwarted ambition as stressors shared these sentiments.

In the particular instance of the School included in the research, the researcher queries if role conflict could arise from the tensions associated with being both a practising health professional and a lecturer at the same time. Durham (1984) identified contradictory expectations as a role conflict stressor. On the one hand the lecturers are employed by the University to teach, and on the other hand the Provincial Authority employs them as clinicians.

2.6.4. ROLE AMBIGUITY

Role ambiguity is often the result of an inadequate job description (Edworthy 2000). Durham (1984) echoed this feeling and added uncertainty about what colleagues may be expecting of an individual, a perceived lack of information to perform certain roles and functions adequately, a feeling of uncertainty about staff assessment practices and uncertainty about career opportunities in the institution. Durham (1984:30) added that role ambiguity was often perceived as a more severe stressor during times of organisational change. The restructuring of the curricula in Higher Education has in itself produced many challenges that may be perceived as stressful. Academics have to assimilate paradigm shifts from teaching to learning, modularisation, programme-based offerings, continuous assessment and outcomes-based education amongst other changes. Fourie (1999:284) noted that: "academic staff are not only unsure of their role in the design and implementation of programmes, but have real fears regarding the survival of their Disciplines in this new dispensation". Disciplines, previously with full department status, have been amalgamated as Schools, and some Faculties have been integrated into other Faculties. While these changes bring many positive aspects with them, for instance the promise of greater inter-disciplinary collaboration in programme offerings, individuals can also perceive these changes as stressful.

Mitchell (1985) writing from the perspective of a health professional, noted that most health professional academics saw themselves primarily as teachers and professionals rather than researchers and scholars. Mitchell (1985:371) reflected that the reward and promotional system for good teaching was not sound, and that unless academics thought of themselves as scholars and researchers they would not succeed in academic life. Teaching is a large claimant of an academic's time (Mitchell, 1985) and research and scholarly activity therefore often take a back seat. Mitchell (1985:372) reported that health professionals in an academic role tended to retain the attitudes acquired as health clinicians and needed to acquire the values, attitudes and behaviours associated with research and intellectual discovery.

2.6.5. RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK, JOB SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Fourie (1999:279) was of the opinion that academics often felt that their interests were not adequately represented. Academics were often uncertain about their future and faced job security issues as a result of transformation issues (Fourie, 1999). Many Higher Education institutions in South Africa are faced with mounting student debt and diminishing state subsidies, posing a real threat to their continued survival.

The need to redress past employment inequalities in terms of race and gender may also prove to be a stressor to some individuals. Many Higher Education institutions have put formal systems in place to redress past imbalances. This has brought both positive and negative (threatening) connotations with it. Many women and black academics are being afforded new opportunities and this is seen as being very positive. On the negative side, however, these same individuals lack role models and may initially lack the necessary experience and expertise for their new-found positions.

2.6.6. FACTORS INTRINSIC TO JOB AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Intrinsic in the job of lecturing is the need to be many things to many people. Rodgers and Dodson (1988) wrote that the processes of teaching, counselling and reprimanding involved in teaching/helping were perceived as being stressors. Fourie (1999:284) recorded that the need to rethink teaching strategies proved to be a challenge to many academic staff members. Many students come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and this is increasing the workload of academics, in the sense that additional tutoring, and mentoring need to be offered.

Benjamin (1987) cited a 1983 study where academic staff reported that interruptions from telephones and drop-in visitors were stressors, as were meetings. Intrinsic to the job, and cited as stressors (Benjamin, 1987) were a lack of progress in the individual's career, insufficient time to keep abreast with current events in the field, securing financial support for research and publishing the research.

2.7. WHAT OF LECTURER DEMOGRAPHICS?

According to Mills (1986), demographic characteristics have produced varied results in the research she consulted as part of her own research:

2.7.1. AGE

There are mixed research findings here, with some references cited by Mills (1986) reporting that age did not correlate with perceived stress (Mills, 1986, citing Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). On the other hand, Mykletun (1984) and Zabel and Zybel (1982) referred to by Mills (1986) and Gage (1992) found that age did in fact play a role, and that 31–44 year olds were most at risk. Teachers close to retirement also reported more perceived stress.

Age also plays a role in how individuals cope with stressors (Gage, 1992). Younger individuals reportedly attempt to alter the stressful situation whilst older individuals tend to attempt to ameliorate the emotions stressors evoke.

2.7.2. GENDER

Contrary to age, gender was found to correlate with perceived stress. Mills (1986) reported that male teachers reported experiencing stress with administrative tasks, whilst female teachers found large classes and noise levels stressful. Gage (1992) cited Folkman and Lazarus (1980) as recording that women generally perceived more family stressors (home/work interaction) and men perceived work, *per se*, as a stressor. Loate and Marais' (1996) research found, contrary to what they had expected, that gender biases in promotion and male dominance did not feature highly as being a stressor.

Women are also exposed to unique stressors such as discrimination, stereotyping and social isolation in a 'man's world' (Long, 1995). Mabokela (in press) found that female academics comprised 89% of the Junior Lecturers and 45% of the Lecturers level at Historically Advantaged Institutions in South Africa (HAI's). Less than 3% of the professors were women (Mabokela, in

press). If a lack of career progress is perceived as a stressor, it will be especially so for women who are clustered in the lower levels of the hierarchy (Long, 1995). Mabokela (in press) wrote eloquently that the stressors perceived by black female academics were greater still, as they are also experiencing racial inequalities.

Marital status of women is reported as being of importance in stressors perceived. Some married women apparently gain greater satisfaction from employment roles than the more traditional roles of wife, mother and homemaker (Long, 1995). Unmarried women experience greater health benefits from employment than do their married colleagues.

2.7.3. LENGTH OF SERVICE

Mills (1986) reported that shorter lengths of service were found to correlate with stress levels according to research done by Zabel and Zabel (1982). With increasing years of service comes a greater maturity and stability that might temper the stressor appraisal process (Swindler and Ross, 1993).

2.7.4. RANK

Teachers with more years of education were reported as experiencing more stress (Mills, 1986 citing Zabel and Zabel, 1982). If rank can in some ways be equated with more years of post school education, then higher ranked individuals should perceive more stressors. Rees and Smith (1991:293) noted that the higher the rank of the individual, the greater the stressor value attached to role duties became.

2.8. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF STRESS FOR LECTURING?

Durham (1984) listed headaches, muscular tension and stomach ailments as being indicative of stress. Ineffectiveness in performing the necessary roles and functions required of the individual, and a lack of confidence, were also listed by Durham (1984).

Durham (1984) listed three stages that teachers (lecturers) go through during the individual/environment interactions. The first stage sees individuals develop new coping strategies while continuing to use their familiar, workable coping strategies. If the stressors persist, and the individual appraises the interactions as even more threatening, the individual is likely to experience a range of emotional reactions. These include frustration, anger, anxiety, a loss of attention and concentration and decreased capacity to remember. Durham (1984) reported that an individual's personal appraisal of their inability to 'cope' (as in stage one) may in itself be perceived as a stressor, thus adding to the stress, frustration and anxiety the individual experiences. Certain physical manifestations are also seen. These include increased blood pressure, heart attack, ulcers and skin manifestations. If the stressors persist unabated, the possibility of exhaustion, extreme fatigue and burnout occurs (Durham, 1984).

In relation to the roles and functions of lecturing, the first stage referred to above is seen as a positive step by Durham (1984:86). Having to employ a variety of coping strategies and develop new ones may promote personal and professional growth in terms of certain traits like increased self-control, adaptability and tolerance. The onset of the second stage may see the lecturer less able to manage the daily roles and functions required. The anxiety a lecturer experiences in stage two could be immobilising and the lecturer could find hi/her ability to make decisions impaired. Panic reactions may be experienced, further reducing the lecturer's ability to perform. The final stage is lecturer burnout. This is characterised by feelings of emotional exhaustion, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment and depersonalisation (Rodgers and Dodson, 1988). In order to cope, the lecturer withdraws emotionally from the work situation. "This withdrawal is often accompanied by apathy, cynicism, rigidity, and a loss of concern and empathy for the recipients of one's services as well as for one's co-workers" (Rodgers and Dodson, 1988:787).

Edworthy (2000:84) approached the effects of stress from the angle of what might be seen in the organisation. She wrote that changes in work performance, employee morale, relationships at work and an increased sickness/absenteeism record, are tell-tale signs of employees being exposed to high levels of stress.

According to Cherniss (1980), cited in Rodgers and Dodson (1988), human service providers like health professionals, teachers and lecturers are viewed as being employed in high-stress occupations and are therefore potential burnout candidates.

2.9. THE LINK BETWEEN STRESS AND COPING

From the above, it appears as if stress is a fact of life and will affect all academics/individuals at some or other time in their lives. The roles and functions involved in lecturing will prove stressful to some or all those involved in academia at some or other time in their lives. The use of the appraisal method means that an individual develops a coping plan for the stressor, using a variety of coping strategies. According to Fourie (1999), academics have to cope with the stressors they perceive in the execution of their chosen careers. How then do individuals cope with their perceived stressors? The continued well-being of the individual experiencing stress is related to how the individual appraises and copes with the stressor (Folkman, 1984; Mitchell and Kampfe, 1990).

2.10. WHAT IS COPING?

According to Folkman (1984:843), Moller (1990:320) and O'Brein and Donnelly (1997), coping refers to all those mechanisms and/or strategies used by individuals to meet perceived stressors/demands so that they can continue to function effectively. It is thus all the efforts an individual makes in order to master, reduce or tolerate the demands created by a stressor (Folkman, 1984). Coping, a complex process, is not the automatic adaptations an individual makes on a daily basis to meet the demands of daily living (Gage, 1992). Coping refers to cognitive and behavioural efforts made by the individual (Folkman, 1984). Folkman (1984), Moller (1990:320) and Gage (1992) list two types of coping mechanisms/strategies. Firstly, 'problem-based coping' mechanisms and secondly, 'emotion-focused coping' mechanisms. Both types of coping mechanisms are used in most stressful situations. Gage (1992) quoting work done by Lazarus and Folkman in 1987 noted that individuals used an average of 6.5 coping strategies for every stressful event they encountered.

2.10.1. PROBLEM-BASED COPING MECHANISMS

These mechanisms of coping see the individual change her interaction with the environment, through direct action, problem-solving and/or active decision-making (Folkman, 1984). This direct action could involve changing the situation/event and/or the self in order to remove the source of the stress (Moller, 1990). This implies coping directed at managing or altering the source of the stress (O'Brein and Donnelly, 1997).

These coping strategies include:

- Preparation, upfront, by the individual for a known perceived stressor by marshalling personal resources. This could include attending Stress Management Courses (Swindler and Ross, 1993; Kromberg *et al.*, 1998; O'Brein and Donnelly, 1997; Loate and Marais, 1996). It could also entail seeking social support, information and advice (Mitchell and Kampfe, 1990).
- Engaging in problem-solving behaviour (O'Brein and Donnelly, 1997; Loate and Marais, 1996). This could include making a plan of action and following it (Folkman, 1984).
- Avoiding the stressor entirely, for example, finding a more suitable job or blocking the stressor out of one's consciousness.
- Avoiding the stressor by, for example, relinquishing certain goals or by maintaining realistic self-expectations (Swindler and Ross, 1993; Loate and Marais, 1996).
- Trying to change the environment directly through assertive behaviours, for example creating a working environment that is more rewarding (O'Brein and Donnelly, 1997; Loate and Marais, 1996) or getting someone to change their mind about something (Folkman, 1987).

2.10.2. EMOTION-FOCUSED COPING MECHANISMS

These coping strategies aim at reducing the impact of the perceived stressor if the stressor cannot be altered or avoided (Moller, 1990). These strategies are seen as palliative in nature, as the problem is not solved. The coping allows only for a lessening of the distress the individual experiences, therefore coping is directed at regulating the resultant emotional response (Folkman,

1984; O'Brein and Donnelly, 1997). The individual thus feels better but the problem is not solved. At best, the meaning of the outcome is changed in some way to lessen the distress felt.

These coping strategies include:

- Regular exercise (Swindler and Ross, 1993; Loate and Marais, 1996).
- Involvement in religion, hobbies (Swindler and Ross, 1993; Loate and Marais, 1996).
- Smoking, sleeping, eating and drinking (Swindler and Ross, 1993; Loate and Marais, 1996).
- Self-blame, wishful thinking (Mitchell and Kampfe, 1990). This includes rationalisation, trying to forget the whole thing and focussing on the positives (Folkman, 1984).
- Devaluing the stakes that are at risk (Folkman, 1984), for example saying, "It didn't matter anyway".
- Engaging in positive comparisons (Folkman, 1984), for example saying, "It could have been a lot worse".
- Seeking 'secondary control' (Folkman, 1984), for example vicarious control – control achieved by associating with powerful others. Folkman (1984) also lists illusionary control as a strategy here. In this type of situation an individual aligns himself with the forces of chance and so shares in the control exerted by this force.

2.11. IN CONCLUSION

Stress is an unavoidable and sometimes much needed accompaniment to lecturing as a profession. Stress is necessary in the sense that without stress, much work and good would not be done, and unavoidable, in the sense that an individual faced with a barrage of daily events/situations in the course of her job, may appraise some or all of the experiences as stressors. It has been predicted that as we progress further into the new millennium, we will encounter more stressors in our day-to-day role execution. Using the Transactional Model of Stress, stress in lecturers is seen as an interaction between individual lecturers and the environment they find themselves in. Stress is seen as the resultant emotion or tension evoked in an individual exposed to a stressor. The stressors are not generally 'stressful' in themselves, but are perceived and assessed as stressors by individuals facing the event/situation. Lecturers are

thus seen as not being passive 'puppets on a stress string', but rather as perceiving, thinking beings that are capable of judging the 'stressor value' of a particular situation.

Stressors in Higher Education are wide-ranging and differ from academic to academic and within an individual academic from time to time. The potential stressors relate to change within the Higher Education milieu and the execution of those roles and functions innate in a lecturers' job. There do appear to be differences in what men and women perceive as stressful and also in certain age, qualification and rank characteristics that predispose individuals to perceiving certain event/situations as being stressful. Various studies over time allude to problems of stress in University settings.

Two types of coping mechanisms have been proposed in the literature. These are problem-based coping and emotion-focused coping. The former involves an individual making a decision or consciously manipulating him- or herself or the stressor in order to change their interaction in some way to alter the situation/event. The latter involves strategies aimed at reducing the emotional impact of the stressor.

Stressors and the resultant stress experienced have serious implications for the continued efficient functioning of Higher Education Institutions. Stress brings with it ill health, decreased job satisfaction and a loss of a sense of achievement.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

3.1. DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE METHODOLOGY

The focus of this research is on perceived stressors in academia and how academics in a Health Science School cope with the resultant stress. The research material gathered focuses on the subjective perceptions, views and opinions of these lecturers and is reported from a qualitative stance. Subjective experiences do not lend themselves to 'quantification', and it is the nature of the perceived stressors that the researcher wishes to highlight, rather than attempting to justify how 'stressed' one individual is compared with another. This chapter explores some of the issues associated with the qualitative research approach and provides some justification for the method chosen to gather the research material.

3.1.1. ON TAKING A QUALITATIVE STANCE

The researcher wishes to acknowledge that both the researcher and the subjects have their own personal values and realities, and that these experiences are real to these individuals and should therefore be taken seriously (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996; Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999). The research focused on the everyday life and perceptions of the lecturing staff within a School of Health Science at a University, and by documenting what the lecturers were prepared to tell the researcher about their own lives, the researcher's understanding was enhanced. These perceptions and experiences do not easily lend themselves to 'quantification' and, therefore, qualitative methods were employed. According to Holloway and Wheeler (1996), qualitative research is especially useful when there is little known about the area of study. From the literature study executed by the researcher, little was published about this specific field in Higher Education.

The present study adopted a person-centred and holistic (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996) perspective. It was hoped that the research findings would add to the understanding of what lecturers in Health Science perceive as stressors. The nature of the research required that the method focused on these lecturers within their social and cultural worlds. The research also focused on the reported perceptions of an identified group at a specific point in time, rather than over time. It can be argued that the perception of what constitutes a stressor is a qualitative experience. The setting that these lecturers found themselves in, the support they had and their repertoire of coping strategies all had an effect on their lives as lecturers.

Holloway and Wheeler (1996:3) listed six elements of qualitative research that bear mentioning here:

1. Qualitative research takes the insider's point of view. In the present study, the researcher attempted to examine the experiences and perceptions of what was perceived as stress-inducing to lecturers in the School under review. The researcher is herself a lecturer in the School and therefore has a close relationship with the majority of the staff and in-depth knowledge of the situation and context.
2. The researcher is immersed and involved in the setting and culture under study. The research sought to gain insights into a group of lecturing staff, and how these lecturers perceived their world. The researcher took the entire context these lecturers found themselves in, into account. This included the location of the lecturers, the time and the conditions they found themselves in. The researcher also acted within an empathetic framework, using researcher/subject interaction to elicit responses with which to better understand the concept of perceived stressors in lecturing.
3. The research material has primacy. The qualitative focus adopted is not predetermined by the research material but is derived from it. The research process saw the researcher collecting research material from the subjects and then theorising about the material gathered. The researcher has attempted not to impose assumptions but rather to provide an account of 'reality'. (I.e. What is real for these specific lecturers?).
4. Qualitative methodology includes 'thick description'. The researcher provides a fairly detailed portrayal of the lecturers' experiences in their daily interaction with their world, as proposed in

the Transactional Theory of Stress. Further, the researcher described the stressors perceived by the lecturing staff in a text format.

5. The relationship between the researcher and the subjects is close and is based on them being equals. Holloway and Wheeler (1996) are of the opinion that it is important for the research subjects to realise that the researcher, too, has similar experiences and can therefore empathise with them. In this study the researcher was employed as a lecturer in the School under review and thus shared much with the lecturers.
6. Collection of research material and analysis interact. No hypothesis has been developed, and as research material was gathered, the researcher started to analyse the material. This allowed for constant evolving and the development of propositions.

Using a scheme proposed by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), the ontology (subjective perceptions of lecturers), epistemology (empathetic, knowing involved researcher) and methodology (interpretive and qualitative) of the research, all argue for working in an interpretive paradigm. The researcher comes from within the School and is, therefore, also exposed to the same individual/environment interactions that the other academics in the School are exposed to. The stress reaction is one of perception – i.e. “Is this event/situation harmful to me as an individual in some way?” and “Have I the necessary resources and skill to cope with the event/situation?” A perception of what is potentially harmful is essentially a qualitative experience.

3.1.2. THE INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

The researcher operated within an interpretive paradigm. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), the interpretative paradigm accepts that an individual's subjective experiences are real and, therefore, should be taken seriously (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:123). “The approach centres on interpretation and the creation of meaning by human beings, and their subjective reality” (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996:12). It is hoped that greater understanding of the stressors perceived by lecturing staff will be gained through this research. The researcher, as a Health Professional by training, needed to see the ‘subjects’ as individuals. Understanding their individual perceptions, in the context they found themselves in was important and valued by the researcher. According to Holloway and Wheeler (1996:12), the sociologist Weber is acknowledged

as the 'father' of the interpretive approach. Weber wrote that the people included in a study should be treated 'as if they were human beings', and that by listening and observing them, a researcher could attempt to gain access to their experiences and perceptions (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996:12). The Transactional Theory of Stress proposes that an individual will experience stress if s/he interprets or perceives a situation/event as actually being a threat or harmful to them in some way. The perception of stress is therefore an individualistic experience needing interpretation. Individuals in their daily interaction with the world are creating 'meaning', and it is these person-environment interactions (meanings) the researcher wishes to understand and describe. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:127) noted that: "interpretive researchers want to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomena as they occur in the real world ...".

3.2. COLLECTION OF RESEARCH MATERIAL

The data collection or gathering of "research material" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:127) needed to conform to a qualitative methodology, and also catered for gathering research material in a format that could be analysed in a 'thick description' as described by Holloway and Wheeler (1996). According to Morgan (1998a), focus group methodology is essentially a qualitative research method. Focus group methodology uses guided group discussion to generate a rich understanding of the group participants' experiences and perceptions. According to Barbour and Kitzinger (1999:5), focus groups: "...are particularly suited to the study of attitudes and experiences around certain topics". It was further decided to rely entirely on the focus groups as, according to Morgan and Krueger (1993), as cited in Holloway and Wheeler (1996:148): "...it is not necessary to validate focus groups by other methods". From the literature perused, it appears as if the focus group method assists a researcher in gaining an in-depth understanding of a range of experiences and events and assists in understanding diversity. The research focuses on the personal experiences of the subjects concerned, and is limited to their subjective perceptions rather than attempting to confirm these perceptions through other means.

3.2.1. FOCUS GROUPS

According to Morgan (1998a) and Barbour and Kitzinger (1999), focus groups are ideal for exploring individuals' experiences. Morgan (1998a) wrote that essentially, focus group methodology is a way of listening to individuals and learning from them. There is interaction between the focus group facilitator and the group participants, and among the group participants themselves and in this way research material is generated. A goal of the present research is to learn more about the stressors perceived by lecturers in a School within a South African University. Morgan (1993) wrote that focus groups are advantageous here, as the interaction that focus groups elicit can provide the explicit basis for exploring the individual/environment interaction sought in the research.

There are, according to Morgan (1998a), three essential features of focus groups used as a qualitative method:

1. Focus groups are useful on a journey of exploration and discovery. There appears to be little written on the particular situations and events that the subjects included in this research might perceive as stressors. The researcher was also unsure of exactly which questions to ask to elicit discussion, and Morgan (1998a) noted that these two conditions were important indicators for employing a focus group method.
2. Focus groups are also useful when attempting to gain an in-depth understanding of a range of experiences and views. Group-elicited responses encourage participants to contribute and share their own personal experiences. There is a feeling of universality (we're all in the same boat), altruism (giving of oneself to assist others), cohesion (feeling accepted by others) and interpersonal learning. These characteristics of any group are naturally also part of a focus group and are known as the healing properties of a group. One important ethical consideration is that the good of the group should outweigh any potential risk or harm to the group participants.

The researcher did have some concerns about whether individuals would be willing to share their personal perceptions in a group setting. The researcher used a 'captive audience' in the

research, and with this came a range of tensions, agendas and interaction 'rules'. Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) wrote that certain individuals, especially in a captive group – as was employed in this research - may not be prepared to share personal insights and perceptions within the group, as their position in their respective Discipline may be compromised by these disclosures. Certain individuals may indeed be silent within the setting. The issues of privacy, confidentiality and beneficence need to be considered when the focus groups set their own group rules for dealing with the information that arises during the course of the focus groups. Morgan (1998a:50) wrote that: "...focus groups *can* produce conformity", but added that careful formulation of the questions and judicious management of the group, would mitigate against excessive conformity.

3. Focus groups are also good for interpreting why things are the way they are. In focus groups individuals are generally interested in, and curious about, finding out about one another's experiences and this discussion provides interpretive insights according to Morgan (1998a).

Further advantages of using focus groups include the following:

4. A number of researchers attest to the fact that individuals are likely to disclose and share more within focus groups than in other dyadic settings (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). This has relevance for the researcher, in that it is hoped that individuals would share and learn from one another. One of the characteristics of focus groups is that the researcher can discover how individual group participants think and feel about specific issues by using the interaction generated amongst the group members (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996). The focus group format allows a researcher to learn/discover a great deal about a range of opinions and experiences among the group participants.

While it is acknowledged that individual interviews might generate much more research material about individual lecturers' perceptions of stressors, it was necessary to select the very best method of gathering research material, taking time into account as well. It is also evident from the literature, that a certain saturation point is reached during research material gathering, and that new subjects do not always add to the existing developing knowledge base (Morgan, 1998a). It was thus argued that focus group discussions would be an efficient way of obtaining

the research material needed. Moreover, the nature of group interaction would also be a valuable factor (i.e. the universality, altruism and interpersonal learning mentioned above). The researcher also attempted to focus on the differences and similarities between the three Disciplines in the School, rather than between the thirty individual lecturers employed in the School.

5. Focus groups are focused (Morgan, 1998a). The groups were set up and managed in such a way as to gather research material on a specific topic. In this instance, the focus was on the perceived stressors experienced by a group of identified academics.
6. Focus groups may provide a safe forum for sharing (Morgan, 1993). There is some security in being amongst a group of other individuals who share the same or similar perceptions. One of the perceived stressors confronting lecturers, according to the literature consulted, is the fact that individual academics often feel that their interests are not adequately represented or heard (Fourie, 1999). These planned groups are one way to express their interests and perceptions. Focus groups are reported as being a viable option when there is a power differential between the participants (lecturers in this case) and the decision-makers (University Management in this case). Morgan (1993) is of the opinion that focus groups can allay feelings of powerlessness.
7. Focus groups are also indicated when investigating complex behaviour and motivation. Opportunity might not exist for lecturers to share their perceived stressors, which the focus groups could provide, and secondly, group members may gain insights into how their colleagues cope with their perceived stressors and leave the group with greater insights and support. Participants may be curious to know how their colleagues cope with the same perceived stressors (Morgan, 1998a).
8. Focus groups can provide insights into the degree of consensus on a topic. This factor was seen as especially valuable as it could possibly provide the researcher with a basic hierarchy of stressors for each of the three Disciplines included in the research.
9. Focus groups also assist when attempting to understand diversity. According to Morgan (1998a) focus groups assist the researcher in understanding the variety of experiences within the group. In this study, three focus groups were run, one in each Discipline, and the fact that each group consisted of lecturers from a different Discipline allowed the researcher to assess how similar or different the perceived stressors were in each of the three Disciplines. Holloway and Wheeler (1996:146) also note that while the group participants may be homogeneous in

some ways (lecturers in a particular Discipline), they are heterogeneous in other ways (age, gender, experiences, background), and so the topic under discussion can be illustrated from a variety of angles.

10. Focus groups are also seen as a friendly, respectful research method. The fact that the researcher is part of the focus group conveys a willingness to listen and be part of the process. According to Morgan (1998a) a focus group brings with it an enjoyable set of interactions and a sense of being listened to.

The researcher is mindful of the following disadvantages in using focus groups:

1. Implying any commitment that cannot be kept. According to Morgan (1998a) this disadvantage arises from the 'friendliness' aspect of focus groups, as friendships bring with them a degree of mutual obligation and commitment. The focus group participants may want and need more than merely 'being heard'. They may feel that something needs doing about their perceived stressors. The researcher bore this in mind when establishing the focus groups, and the purpose of the focus group was made explicit when the participants were asked for their consent.
2. The participants in the focus groups must be compatible. If the participants sense they are 'similar', their individual comfort levels will rise, and they should be more willing to participate (Morgan, 1998a). Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) noted that while differences between participants might be enlightening, grouping individuals with shared, common experiences was frequently most productive. Holloway and Wheeler (1996) also reported that having similar educational backgrounds aids interaction. The focus groups were made up of lecturers from a specific Discipline that functioned as a team and it was argued that they would be comfortable with one another.
3. Focus groups should be avoided if the topic is not appropriate for the group members. The lecturers themselves were in the best position to discuss their perceived stressors and coping strategies. The researcher is of the opinion that the participants are the only people that can discuss their perceived stressors.
4. No statistical data will be generated. Firstly, the nature of the research lends itself to qualitative methodology as previously discussed. Also, Morgan (1998a) comments on the

fact that the most dangerous statistical misuse of focus groups arises when a researcher attempts to generalise the analysis and results of the research to a larger population. As focus groups emphasise depth and insight and not rigorous sampling procedures, no useful numerical results are produced.

"Focus groups work best when a limited number of compatible people have the opportunity to discuss their shared interests within an open and non-threatening environment..." (Morgan, 1998a:63).

This study attempted to discover new insights into what stressors were perceived by lecturing staff in a School in a South African University, and aimed to generate in-depth information about such particular stressors. The researcher also attempted to interpret what coping strategies the lecturers had at their disposal. Bearing this in mind, focus groups were an appropriate choice of research method.

3.2.2. SELECTION OF THE SUBJECTS

Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) and Holloway and Wheeler (1996) noted that with focus group research, as in this case, statistical 'representativeness' is not the main aim. The number of focus groups depended on the research questions being asked, the range of individuals that needed to be included as well as time and resource considerations.

There seems to be a range of numbers bandied about in the literature when asking the question: "What is the ideal number of participants in a focus group?" Barbour and Kitzinger (1999:8) suggested between three and six participants. Holloway and Wheeler (1996) proposed six as the optimum number. Morgan (1998b) on the hand appeared to take a more pragmatic approach, writing that the focus group needs to be big enough to generate discussion and small enough so as ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Morgan (1998b) added that the typical group size is between six and ten individuals. Likewise, the question: "How many focus groups in total?" raised a variety of responses in the literature. The total number of focus groups appears to be related to the research questions posed, and the diversity of responses

expected from the subjects. Morgan (1998b) concluded that the typical number of focus groups is three to five.

Focus group researchers employ 'qualitative sampling', according to Barbour and Kitzinger (1999). Morgan (1998a:30) used the term 'purposive sampling' in this regard. In effect, a researcher attempts to compose a structure guided by the particular research questions, in other words, the researcher uses their judgement to put together subjects who will meet the need of the proposed research. Holloway and Wheeler (1996) cited Carey (1994) who stated that: "...the selection of participants generally proceeds 'on the basis of their common experiences related to the research topic' " (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996:146).

Bearing the above discussion in mind, the research questions implied that all the full-time lecturing staff employed in the School at the time of the study should be part of the focus groups. In order to ensure maximum participation, all full-time lecturing staff employed in the School were therefore invited to participate. Full-time lecturers were defined as those staff members with either a permanent academic appointment or a contract academic appointment of greater than twenty-five (25) hours per week. The researcher purposefully kept the selection of focus group participants to full-time staff, as it was argued that part-time staff would bring with them a multitude of additional stressors outside the scope of this research.

A further ethical issue was how to identify the Disciplines within the school. For the purposes of this research, the researcher assigned the following symbols to the three Disciplines, namely, Discipline A, B and C. Thirty (30) full-time lecturers were employed in the School at the time of the study, eight (8) in Discipline A, ten (10) in Discipline B and twelve (12) in Discipline C.

3.3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Holloway and Wheeler (1996:39) wrote that four principles were of importance when considering ethical concerns:

First, the researcher should respect the autonomy of the subjects. The subjects must be free to make an independent and informed choice to participate or not in the study or withdraw from it should they so wish. In order to achieve this, the researcher should request that each individual forming part of the research group complete a consent form. According to Holloway and Wheeler (1996), informed consent might prove difficult in this type of research (qualitative), as gathering research material will occur simultaneously with analysis. While an individual might consent at one stage of the research process (e.g. focus group participation), their consent can only be assumed at later stages as the research write up is finalised. While this is acknowledged, the researcher believes that individuals must be made aware of their autonomy, and their right to withdraw from the research at the start. The participants should also be made aware of any potential risk foreseen in the research process and the envisaged benefits of the research (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996:43).

Secondly, the research should do little (no) harm, or hold few (no) risks for the individuals concerned, their respective professions, the School in which they work or the Institution that employs them. The focus groups should 'do no harm' according to Morgan (1998). Related to this issue is one of anonymity. Individual identities should not be revealed and access to who said what in the focus groups should be restricted and kept anonymous and confidential. The researcher should ensure that the group participants can share freely without fear of victimisation by ensuring this confidentiality. Holloway and Wheeler (1996) noted that in 'thick description', the identity of the research participants can unwittingly be disclosed, and that researchers should guard against this. During focus groups, a second issue around privacy is raised, namely that of sharing among the participants. Morgan (1998a:91) suggested that group participants be requested to set their own rules for protecting their privacy.

An additional point raised by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:70) that relates to this concept, is that when publishing the research, the researcher should continue to pay careful attention to the participants as outlined above.

Thirdly, the principle of beneficence should apply. The benefit derived from the research should outweigh any possible potential harm or risk. Also, the good of the whole should also be factored

into the process. The issues of group universality, altruism, group cohesion and interpersonal learning are important factors here, when considering the 'good' of focus groups.

Lastly, is the principle of justice. The research focus, approach and procedures should be fair and just. All participants should retain their dignity and self-respect (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996).

3.3.1. ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Permission to conduct the study was requested from the Ethics Committee of the University concerned, the Dean of the Faculty and the Director of the School involved. Each Discipline Chair was personally contacted and requested to discuss with, and inform their respective staff of the proposed research and research process. A suitable, mutually appropriate time for each focus group was then established with the individual Disciplines.

Ethical clearance, number 01087B was granted by Research Administration of the institution concerned (Appendix 1).

3.3.2. INFORMED CONSENT

In response to the principles highlighted above, each individual who participated in a focus group completed and submitted a "Statement of Informed Consent" (Appendix 2). The researcher has the completed forms in safekeeping.

3.4. METHOD

The purpose of the focus groups was:

- (i) to ascertain the stressors and daily hassles perceived by the academic staff within each Discipline

- (ii) to ascertain the coping strategies employed by the academic staff to cope with their perceived stressors.

3.4.1. STRUCTURE OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

1. Three separate focus groups were held, one in each Discipline, namely Disciplines A, B and C. The reason for doing this was to attempt to highlight possible similarities and differences amongst the three Disciplines in the School. The staff members in each Discipline are known to one another, and it was hoped this familiarity would encourage discussion as argued for by Morgan (1993) and Barbour and Kitzinger (1999).
2. According to the literature, there is no 'fixed ideal size' for focus groups, and as purposive sampling (Morgan, 1998a) was employed, the entire full-time lecturing staff from each Discipline was invited to participate in the focus group. The actual group sizes were:
 - Discipline A : 6 participants ($n = 8$)
 - Discipline B : 8 participants ($n = 10$)
 - Discipline C : 8 participants ($n = 12$)
3. It was envisaged that each group would take about 60-90 minutes. No time limit was imposed on the focus groups, and the discussion was allowed to run its course. The groups were terminated when it appeared that all points the participants wished to air had been raised. It was interesting to note that the groups all took approximately 100 minutes.
4. A group facilitator was used and this individual managed the groups, facilitating discussion amongst group members. The researcher was part of the group as a co-facilitator and note-taker. The facilitator is a skilled groupwork practitioner and fellow health professional who has insights into the topic under discussion. The use of a facilitator held certain advantages for the researcher. The researcher was free to document the main points raised as a record of the discussion for the participants in the group. A flip chart was used to summarise the discussion. The researcher was also able to concentrate on the content of the discussion rather than attempting to manage the group. The facilitator was known to many of the participants not only as a colleague but also as a fellow health professional in the clinical field. This implies that the facilitator was seen as a 'one of us' and her 'identity' did not adversely affect the outcome of the discussions (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999:14). The facilitator also brought with her all the

skills and qualities of a 'good' facilitator, namely flexibility, open-mindedness and skill in eliciting information (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996:149).

In preparation for the focus groups, the researcher and facilitator met to familiarise themselves with and prepare for the focus groups. The researcher was afforded the opportunity to inform the facilitator about the purpose and ethos of the research and determine the group management principles. After each group that the facilitator ran, a debriefing session between the researcher and facilitator was held to inform the management of the next group. In practical terms the facilitator was able to run two of the three focus groups, with the researcher managing the third group independently due to circumstances beyond their control.

5. Each focus group was audiotaped for transcription into text. The tape recorder was placed in the middle of each group and the use of the tape recorder was briefly discussed with the group prior to commencing the discussion. Consent of the group members was obtained before taping began.
6. The groups met in their own departments, in a venue that was especially set up for the focus group (i.e. chairs in a circle, free from disturbances and private). This meant that as little inconvenience was created as possible and the participants were comfortable in a known environment.
7. Tea and eats were provided for the group participants after each focus group. The researcher and facilitator joined the group participants for tea and free discussion. This conveyed a feeling that the researcher and facilitator were appreciative of the participants' involvement.

3.4.2. PRINCIPLES APPLIED DURING THE FOCUS GROUPS

1. Each individual staff member was asked to complete a consent form prior to the group being held. In order to obtain the necessary biographical information, each group member was also requested to complete a short biographical profile (Appendix 3).
2. At the start of each group, the facilitator, with the group, established some rules in order to facilitate open and frank discussion and set basic ground rules for ensuring the 'safety' of each group participant after the group.

3. While the discussion was brought back to the topic if the discussion strayed, frank, open discussion was encouraged. The topic was presented in a semi-structured format, and no rigid guidelines were imposed. The overall purpose of the focus groups guided the discussion.
4. All participants were encouraged to contribute to the discussion, and all contributions were acknowledged, accepted and respected. This conveyed a feeling of respect during the discussions.
5. The groups were audiotaped for later transcription, and the content of the discussion was summarised on a flipchart by the researcher during the sessions. This served the purpose of keeping a visual track of the points raised during the discussion, and also served the purpose of confirming the content of the discussion for the participants, facilitator and researcher. The summary made on the flipchart was used as a form of data validation during the groups.

3.4.3. ACTUAL FORMAT OF THE GROUPS

1. Introduction

- The group facilitator welcomed those present and thanked them, in advance, for participating.
- The purpose of the discussion was presented. The consent given (done prior to the group) was highlighted once again. The purpose of recording the group was presented.
- The facilitator and the group established rules for participation and post-group management.
- Any queries raised by group members at this point were dealt with.
- No 'ice-breaker' exercises were necessary, as the group participants were familiar with one another. The focus groups were also held during Discipline planning days when the respective Disciplines were already engaged in planning exercises.

2. Actual group

The discussion started at the point of: "How are you feeling today?" to elicit discussion on the individual/environment interaction that formed the basis of the study. This discussion set the scene for identifying the types of situations and events that group participants experienced as stressful. It

was hoped that participants would raise the following broad areas but if not, the facilitator prompted discussion through the use of verbal prompting. The broad theme areas identified were;

- Change
- Workloads
- Role conflicts
- Role ambiguity
- Relationships at work (students, colleagues, management)
- Factors intrinsic in the job (the daily hassles)
- Coping strategies employed to ameliorate the stress experienced.

Each group was allowed to progress with as little facilitator 'interference' as possible, and these prompts were only presented if the group failed to elicit any discussion around a particular theme. The facilitator and researcher were mindful of the fact that the group should not be unduly influenced or swayed in any way to perceive a certain event/situation as indeed stressful.

3. Conclusion of the group

- The discussion was terminated and a brief summary of the main points raised, as documented on the flipcharts was presented to the group, once it appeared as if every participant had said what they needed and wanted to say.
- The group members were asked to confirm that they were comfortable after the discussion, and the facilitator dealt with any problems identified.

The group members were thanked for their participation and invited to share in the tea provided.

3.5. ENSURING VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity, or trustworthiness, is defined as the: "extent to which the researcher's findings are accurate, reflect the purpose of the study and represent reality" (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996:209). According to Holloway and Wheeler (1996:163), credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability provide the basis for showing trustworthiness (validity) in qualitative research.

The researcher attempted to reflect credibility and dependability by clearly identifying and describing the research subjects, namely lecturers in the School under investigation. The research is, therefore, context and situation specific (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:120). The researcher, as a fellow lecturer in the School, had contact with and in the School over a period of time, and was therefore, familiar with the setting. This personal involvement in the research setting meant that the researcher had insights into the relevance and representativeness of the issue under review and could be seen as trustworthy by the research participants. During the focus groups, a written summary of the discussion was developed on a flipchart. This ensured that during and at the conclusion of the discussion the researcher and group participants could ensure the accuracy of interpreting what was said. The debriefing session between the researcher and group facilitator after each focus group also, to some degree, ensured the veracity of the discussion. The researcher was mindful of the fact that the research participants could express different opinions at different times, depending on a number of variables at play and because of the nature of stressor appraisal (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999:64). The individual/environment interaction, central to the research being undertaken, is a fluid and mutually interactive concept. The research material gathered was, however, a fair and accurate reflection of the current stressors experienced by this group of lecturers at the time. The audiotaping of the focus group discussion at the same time as well as developing a written summary on a flipchart was an attempt to ensure dependability of the research material.

While the findings emanating from this research project may not be transferable to other groups of lecturers *per se*, the stated purpose of the research was to explore the stressors experienced by an identified group of lecturers at an identified Tertiary Education Institution at a certain point in time. The research was therefore purposeful and relied on the voluntary participation of the lecturers involved. The research project can however be duplicated at a later stage, if necessary, and stressors perceived by those participating at that point identified and analysed. Transferability is therefore ensured through careful documentation of the research journey.

Attempting to limit the amount of bias during the focus groups by using concepts proposed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:121) further enhanced the trustworthiness of the research project. The researcher used a group facilitator to limit the researcher's own biases and

preconceived ideas from taking preference and influencing either the discussion or the recording of the discussion. The facilitator reflecting and paraphrasing the main ideas back to the group and developing a written summary of the discussion, limited misperceptions about what was being discussed. The facilitator also cleared any misunderstandings the group participants might have had during the group.

Confirmability will be achieved if the reader of the research can link the analysis and conclusions to the research material, and thus confirm that the research journey was clear, detailed and unambiguous.

The ability of the focus groups to achieve consistent results (reliability), was ensured by defining and documenting the procedure, format and management of the focus groups. The use of the same facilitator also enhanced reliability.

3.6. THE PROCEDURE OF DATA ANALYSIS

The taped focus group research material was typed verbatim. The typed text includes all that was discussed, and indicates which individual said what. The scope of the study did not allow for recording of the contextual factors and the non-verbal aspects of the discussion. The researcher is mindful of the fact that the transcripts are, therefore, divorced from the context and the dynamics of the situation. The transcripts, therefore, do not tell the 'whole story' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:282). What was said has been transcribed into text format and expresses the verbal discussion that occurred.

Thematic content analysis as proposed by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:140) was then used to analyse the research material. Prior to the identification of common themes or threads, the researcher familiarised herself with the transcripts, reviewed the flipchart summaries and re-listened to the audio-cassettes to ensure that the transcription was a fair and accurate reflection of the actual discussion. The research material was colour coded to reflect the identified themes, and this coded information served as the basis for the analysis chapter.

CHAPTER 4

AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH MATERIAL

PART A : THE STRESSORS IDENTIFIED BY LECTURERS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

"Stress is a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of daily living..." (Benjamin, 1987:1).

A British lecturer, as part of a 1998 survey of university staff in the United Kingdom, cited by Coxon (2001:21) had the following to say about his life as a lecturer: "I'm stressed and overworked – there's no doubt about it ...Stress is everywhere I look". The survey, conducted for the Association of University Teachers in the United Kingdom, found that 70% of university staff considered their jobs stressful (Coxon, 2001). The survey also listed a range of stress-related illnesses and health problems experienced by university staff. The study, further, included findings that more than half of the staff surveyed were suffering from depression and anxiety and that just over a quarter of respondents reported needing time off work due to stress-related illness. According to Coxon (2001) another survey conducted in 2001 reported that 88% of their respondents had suffered from stress-related health problems during the previous year. This study highlighted Cerebro-Vascular Accidents (strokes), high blood pressure and alcohol abuse as the most serious consequences of stress. The Association of University Teachers has also noted an increase in the number of retirements due to ill health and a rise in the incidence of reported bullying of staff by managers in the last few years. Coxon (2001) reported that the Higher Education Funding Council for England viewed these increased stress levels and health problems as an area of serious concern, and had consequently commissioned a national study of occupational stress in Higher Education. The study, to be conducted over a period of three years, will be undertaken in seventeen universities and colleges. The exercise will serve the purpose of benchmarking levels of stress in Higher Education so that comparisons can be made within the Higher Education sector and with other

professions. Coxon (2001:21) quoted the project leader as saying: "We realise stress is a major problem in higher education...". Edworthy (2001) concurred, and noted that: "...high levels of stress can have serious implications for the efficient functioning of a college". The negative impact of stress and stress-related illness on the functioning of staff has been reported in the literature. Mills (1986) reported that stress can lead to a decreased capacity of a teacher to perform, and Edworthy (2000) noted that stress could lead to a lowering of job satisfaction and a loss of a sense of achievement in university staff. Loate and Marais (1996) have also published their findings on stress as experienced by Batswana lecturers.

Stress, therefore, appears to be a feature of higher education, and not unique to any one country or campus. But, what are the stressors that induce this stress reaction? Benjamin (1987) noted that stress is unavoidable with respect to any external event and or situation. What then were the 'external events' that induced stress in the subjects of this research project? While the studies cited above, aim to quantify the stress reactions, little reference was made of the potential stressors. This study conducted by the researcher at a South African University aimed to identify the stressors perceived by a group of Health Science lecturing staff. In the course of focus groups held within three Disciplines, lecturers indicated specific events and situations that they found potentially stressful in their professional capacity as lecturers in Health Sciences. When considering all the stressors, a number of themes emerged. Some of these, namely change issues, workloads, role conflicts and ambiguity, relationships at work and daily occurrences, mirror those referred to in the conceptual framework. The researcher sought to add an additional category, viz. organisational issues, that appears to straddle some of the others, but is related specifically to Tertiary Education Institutions. Some personal factors that were reportedly perceived as stressors are also presented, although essentially outside the scope of this research project.

4.1.1. CHANGE AS A PERCEIVED STRESSOR

4.1.1.1. CHANGE AS A POSITIVE (and therefore viewed as both challenging and beneficial)

Benjamin (1987:1) noted that: "...stress is a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of daily living, necessary because without some stress we would be listless and apathetic creatures ...". Stress is

therefore necessary to keep individuals motivated and feeling challenged, and affording opportunities for increased levels of job satisfaction and improved self-esteem. Edworthy (2000) commented on the fact that not all individual/environment interactions are necessarily bad or destructive. The term 'eustress' was coined to describe stress that is beneficial for an individual. If, during primary and secondary appraisal, an individual perceives an external event as positive and judges that they can cope, the event or situation will be perceived as being beneficial and challenging rather than harmful. This relates well to the point also raised by Reber (1985) and Gage (1992) that individuals may appraise some situations and/or events as beneficial and challenging. Edworthy (2000:8) wrote: "It is the demanding and challenging aspects of work that elicit improved performance from workers...". In line with this, lecturers in all three Disciplines talked about the challenges and opportunities presented by the changing scenario in Higher Education in South Africa. Lecturers discussed the challenges in their lives as academics as follows:

"... I think we're living in very exciting times, ... in this country and tertiary institutions..."

"The tension is creative, it holds you down. ... you have to produce new things and do new things..."

"... in the last year a real sense of growth and creativity and achievement and development..."

"... our agendas are about transformation..."

"...so you're constantly having to problem solve, ... for me that is positive, ... constantly churns out new challenges, ... it challenges you all the time..."

There were also sentiments expressed that the Disciplines were assuming responsibility for embracing change and that they should in fact be proactive in dealing with the challenges as they arise. The changes occurring in Higher Education and on university's campus were, therefore, viewed as a positive in some senses, but on the other hand, change was viewed as a major potential stressor. Eustress has the potential for turning into distress, or a harmful stress reaction under certain conditions.

4.1.1.2. CHANGE APPRAISED AS STRESSFUL (and therefore harmful)

Edworthy (2000) noted that as tertiary education institutions went into the new millennium, the incidence of stress was likely to increase. Lecturers in all three Disciplines noted with some concern how change in their work environment had increasingly become a stressor. Worksafe (Western Australia), identified a number of conditions that are likely to instigate or lead to increased perceptions of situations and/or events being potential stressors. There is an increased chance of external events being appraised as potentially harmful if:

- There are prolonged or increasing pressures without relief;
- Staff perceive a sense of powerlessness over demands being made on them;
- The demands placed on individuals are perceived as conflicting with one another, and no easy resolution is seen;
- There is a continuous threat of violence or aggressive behaviour with little or no defence; and
- The organisational change is seen to impact personally on individuals.

Stress reactions can also be initiated or worsened by:

- The presence of bullying, conflict and/or indifference to staff needs;
- An organisation that lacks leadership and/or clear direction;
- Demands and deadlines set without consultation and viewed as being inflexible; and
- Staff experiencing a high degree of uncertainty about their direction, purpose and jobs.

The presence of these conditions leads to lecturers perceiving their work situation as potentially stressful.

Change is part and parcel of life, and without it there would be little growth and development. Edworthy (2000) noted that during the last twenty or so years academics have witnessed much change in their work environment and to their roles and functions. Fourie (1999:275) echoed this sentiment by citing Green and Hayward who wrote: "...it (*Higher Education*) has undergone rapid transformation throughout the world in the last 25 years and may be in a period of unprecedented

change". In South Africa as well, the last ten years have seen a number of changes in both the country and in Higher Education. The country has moved from government by a minority to a democratically elected, representative government, there has been racial integration on all levels and South Africa has been invited to enter the global arena. In essence there has been broad political and socio-economic transition (Fourie, 1999). In addition and simultaneously to this change in the country, there have been a number of changes in the Higher Education sector. Fourie (1999) recorded this change as being both comprehensive and radical. The country saw the establishment of a Commission on Higher Education, which initially published its findings in 1997. A South African Qualifications Authority has been established and a National Qualifications Framework devised. The move to Outcomes Based Education has commenced, and Higher Education is currently locked in debate around the National Plan for Higher Education released by the Minister of Education in March 2001. Transformation is a necessity and permeates all sectors of the country and Higher Education. Transformation is defined as considerable change in the character, condition, function and nature of an entity (The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary, 1981: 902). Inherent in transformation is this considerable change (Fourie, 1999).

Someone once asked: "When will we be transformed?" This seems to be the key to the prolonged and increasing pressure that lecturers are feeling. Fourie (1999) wrote that for transformation to be comprehensive, frequent change, adaptation and shifts in paradigms are necessary. She continued by noting that these changes have a more profound impact on academics than generally believed. "Stress is connected to changes... and too many changes at one time can overload an individual's capacity to adapt successfully...." (Benjamin, 1987:1). The prolonged, increasing pressure to 'change', coupled with feelings of powerlessness over the demands being made, uncertainty and a feeling that lecturer needs are not important, leaves these lecturers anxious and stressed. Added to this is a sentiment expressed by Pretorius (2000(b)) who wrote: "It will take years to change higher education...". The lecturers included in the focus groups noted:

"...constantly, constantly changes every day, it has to deal with that level of change, and I think I can deal with change, it's just the pace..."

"...it changes from, not day to day, but hour to hour..."

"... the goal posts are constantly changing... every year you think you're coming to the end of it and it's going to be better next year and next year comes and, if anything, it's worse..."

"...each year there's been a new hugely demanding thing put upon us..."

"...it is such a multiplicity of things and it's the boomerang effect of all that's happening..."

The perception that pressures are enduring and even increasing without relief has left some lecturers feeling quite powerless over new situations and/or events they are exposed to. Kearns and Lipsedge (2000) noted that change within an organisation enhances an individual's perception of their job as threatening. This created opportunity for perceiving any new individual/environment interactions as potentially harmful rather than positive or beneficial. This point may relate to the reported low morale in Higher Education institutions (Macfarlane, 2000). As noted by a number of authors consulted, distress can lead to a decreased feeling of job satisfaction and a lowered self-esteem. (Mills, 1986; Benjamin, 1987; Edworthy, 2000)

Many of the lecturers who participated in the focus groups also expressed how change in the broadest sense within the organisation was impacting on them personally. The institution is faced with the scenario that many academics are leaving the institution. With the departure of colleagues, it may be that the lecturers feel that they are being left on a 'sinking ship' while others jump ship and 'save themselves'.

"...right now there are so many academics leaving, right, and you tend to think what is going to happen to this institution as an academic institution..."

This departure of staff is demoralising and brings with it a number of additional stressors. The process of advertising for, and appointing staff is a long one, and often a period of time passes where lecturing staff have to take on additional duties to cover for the person who left. The eventual appointment of new staff also means that these new staff members need to be inducted before they can become full contributing members in the teaching team. New staff members also often shift and alter existing relationships within the department and the departmental ethos may also be affected.

4.1.2. ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES AS A POTENTIAL STRESSOR

A number of smaller themes featured here. These included dealing with the image of the institution and the professions *per se*. Another factor was the task of lecturing itself, which demands that a lecturer be many things to many people and lecturing to a changing student body. Curriculum transformation in Higher Education and governance and leadership issues were also recorded as potential stressors in the organisation. Another potential stressor identified here was the effect these changes had on the lecturers as individuals and collectively.

4.1.2.1. THE IMAGE OF THE INSTITUTION

The image of a number of Higher Education institutions in the country has featured in a variety of forums over the last few years. The issues and debates seem to remain fairly distant, however, if one is not intimately involved with the institution(s) under discussion. The institution from which the subjects were drawn is thus no different, except that the lecturers interviewed were directly linked to the institution and its image in the broader educational context in the country. Lecturers in all three Disciplines raised the issue of the institution's image as being an area of potential stress. How the institution was received and perceived by the outside world was of serious concern to the lecturers. This aspect was seen as a potential stressor as it meant that lecturers felt that they were seriously compromised before even starting. Lecturers expressed being on the defensive much of the time and having to defend the institution. The sentiment was that generally lecturers had to work 'very hard' to maintain the standing of their profession outside the campus.

"... I definitely battle with identifying myself with the institution. One almost has to immediately explain oneself outside when you say you're from (*name of institution*) by either admitting that it is this notorious place, or admitting that you are aware of what people think about it before you even say you work at (*name of institution*). I find that pretty stressful and very degrading."

"...the image of (*name of institution*) I find is such a negative force in us trying to maintain a positive outlook for ourselves and attracting students...." "...it is stressful for me to maintain the positivity within the department which is a real thing, within the crumbling edifice of (*name of institution*) ..."

The institution also has, on many occasions, featured in the public arena related to 'domestic disputes'.

".. I find quite annoying is so many commissions we have into everything..."

Conflicting messages from the university community were also a potential stressor, with lecturers saying they often found it hard to reconcile the two divergent messages.

"...and sometimes I just think I'm not quite sure what people are, when people say things in meetings, whether it's actually the truth or a strategy. So when they make positive comments or plans, what their agenda is, and whether it actually relates to ours ... it's a source for stress. I feel I should believe what they're saying and not doubt it..."

These potential stressors are very specific to the institution in question and are of an enduring nature. The enduring nature of this stressor is one of the factors identified by Worksafe (Western Australia) as a condition heightening the perception of the event and/or situation as being a potential stressor. The researcher can only postulate that the image of the institution in question has added to the demoralisation of her staff which, in turn: "...is leading to an exodus of the most talented academics" from the institution (Macfarlane, 2000:14).

4.1.2.2. LECTURING ISSUES

Lecturers continue with the tasks of facilitating learning, despite the image of the institution. The roles and tasks of lecturers have of necessity had to change due to increased access of educationally disadvantaged students, curriculum restructuring initiatives, shifts in emphasis to include more research activity and redressing gender and race inequalities (Fourie, 1999). The lecturers who participated in the focus groups discussed and identified a number of potential stressors within the roles and functions of being a lecturer.

1. STUDENTS *PER SE*

Students were reported as needing constant assistance, support and guidance. The Disciplines have, the researcher believes, fostered a very close relationship with their respective students. This can be related back to having comparatively small numbers of students and also being in the business of training future health professionals and colleagues. This has meant that students have

traditionally had direct access to the lecturers – an 'open door policy' has been fostered. Not one of the lecturers mentioned having 'consulting hours' for students. Students, therefore, call on lecturers at all times of the day and this was raised as a potential stressor by all three Disciplines.

"...students just walking in and saying I went on prac and I've got this patient and it ends up being a one hour discussion."

In turn this means that the tasks earmarked for that day have to be put aside as the Disciplines expressed a firm belief that their teaching responsibilities came first. This 'just walking in' is also often accompanied by certain unspoken needs/demands by the students. The need for students to consult with lecturers also appears to go beyond the traditional 'eight-to-four' day.

"I have to take calls from students and I counsel students in the evenings..." "...and holidays are interrupted..." "...and supper time gets interrupted."

"Students have no insight to the amount of workload that we have. They'll come in and expect you do everything..."

This 'open door policy' appears to have created its own tensions. On the one hand lecturers pride themselves on being available for their students, but on the other hand, they feel as if they are being taken advantage of. The situation warranted discussion as a potential stressor in all three Disciplines.

2. THE MILLENNIUM STUDENT

The students themselves, 'who they are', was also perceived as a potential stressor. Discipline C described what their perception was about the student of the 2000's.

"It's the kind of students we get and the demands that that requires."

"I think it's not only the student bodies (*that*) change, but also generally the attitudes. ... now everything is negotiated, contested, at every step of the way and I think it's good ... because it makes you stop and think and it makes you more accountable, but on the other hand, it's also a tiring process in that there's none of that certainty..."

One lecturer described it as not having a 'template' about how to work with the students. This lack of a template meant that lecturers had no 'recipe' to follow for quick fix solutions.

For one, the motives and reasons behind why students are doing these courses is thought to be different, and secondly, political change in the country is thought to play a role.

One lecturer described it as follows:

"...there is a different generation of students,... different kind of thinking ... very much more money orientated, ... just want to get this degree and get out and start to have a practice and the tensions of all that are very different - you don't know how to work with that kind of ..."

The second factor was described as follows;

"...here at (*name of institution*) I think it comes with a political thing, the students' struggle has always preceded any other educational issue. ..."

The situation has arisen where lectures feel that they are at the 'beck and call' of students:

"It's this expectation, that you will be there for the students when they need you."

3. THE DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS

Fourie (1999) and Macfarlane (2001) identified the increased access of educationally and financially disadvantaged students as one of the issues of transformation in Higher Education. Current students are not as 'fortunate' as previous students might have been. Not only is their home language not English, but they also often don't have access to unlimited financial resources. This implies that students have to study in a second (or sometimes for them a third) language and they cannot readily purchase resource material.

"...your lecturing requires that you have to always compensate for the fact that the students often can't afford to purchase the text books..."

Also, the fact that the programmes were originally designed for a certain sector of the population is seen as both a challenge and a potential stressor.

"... we have a very traditional course designed for say middle class students who come from a certain educational background ...part of transformation you recognise that you need to change, but obviously there's nobody or nothing that signals this change ... So you're constantly having to problem solve, trying to be relevant..."

The lecturers have to deal with both prepared and educationally underprepared students in one classroom. This is a potential stressor in its own right for the following reasons:

"...when you see you've got straight A students and you think you're being boring to those students and you've got these students who are struggling to understand you because it's the second language."

"...maybe actually if I motivated that straight A's they would be better.... But I don't have the time in a broad class of 42 to say ... I can't address their side...."

The issue of a diverse student population, too broad to pursue in greater depth here, served as a potential stressor in all the Disciplines. The lecturers were aware of the enormous challenges offered by this diverse student group, and the researcher was left feeling that the challenge was seen in a positive light. A lecturer in Discipline B summed it up as follows;

"And so it's been an experience, ... a rewarding experience and I get the feeling that it's across the board."

The underpreparedness of the students might relate directly to lecturers feeling ill equipped to deal with the demands placed on them. This aspect is dealt with in greater detail under role ambiguity experienced by the lecturers.

4.1.2.3. CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

The curriculum format at the university in question was modularised from year one offerings in 1998. The build-up to modularisation included curriculum reviews and the development of a purely modularised format across the university. The modularisation process, *per se*, was perceived as stressful, and many of the comments from the focus groups relating to change, imposed demands, lack of consultation and uncertainty, related to this period of curriculum transformation. The nature of modularisation raised a number of potential stressors in each focus group. One of the major stressors identified in Disciplines A, B and C was the perception that the modular degree system was not well suited to all their students or to the nature of the their programmes.

"...it (*modularisation*) is not in fact accommodating particularly the weaker student, and it's becomes academically or professionally unsound or unacceptable the way the modules are working, especially the fieldwork modules..." "...the students are in a difficult situation and so are we ... and that places an enormous burden on the staff."

"...you know the students aren't getting the work ... and that is essentially wrong."

"The worst thing for me is in teaching, knowing that in four months, in a semester, I cannot possibly lecture and develop the skills ... that I'm supposed to do and that gives me the deepest frustration."

"... the modular system has a lot of problems because students are not performing well. There's admin problems. There's financial problems and the co-ordinating! And that's stressful."

A second stressor was the time constraints placed on the programme by the very nature of modularisation.

"if you miss a period, there is no way you're going to catch up the period at any stage..."

Comments like this were made with prior knowledge of how difficult it is to accommodate the lecturing programme if any teaching time is lost due to student boycotts. The programmes are all finely tuned and lectures scheduled in such a way that certain learning must precede future learning. If any time is lost due to student boycotts the entire flow of the programme is disrupted. This fact is in itself a potential stressor for lecturers.

Modularisation, and the subsequent creation and development of programmes in keeping with the move to vocationally based training, were perceived as a potential stressor in all three Disciplines. Firstly, lecturers felt powerless in the face of the demands placed on them and the deadlines and demands were often made without due consultation and secondly, much of the curriculum transformation was felt to impact personally on the lecturers.

While many debates related to curriculum transformation occurred on the campus, many lecturers felt that the curricular change to a modular format had been 'enforced' and thus they experienced a sense of powerlessness. The modularisation process meant that certain deadlines and timeframes were set, and it was a case of 'do or die'. At the same time the university was embarking on a process of rationalisation and a number of departments were earmarked for closure. Lecturers in all three Disciplines expressed concern about their perceived lack of power and autonomy in the face of all the 'imposed' demands being made on them from a variety of quarters. In this context, only the institutional demands were taken into consideration. The professions, students and health care sector all have their own demands and are dealt with in subsequent sections in the research project. Kenny (1999:12) commenting about another tertiary education institution in the country

wrote: "The idea of 'academic freedom' in which academics decide for themselves what should be taught and how it should be taught, is considered a form of self-indulgence, inappropriate for a developing country such as South Africa". The institution in question and its staff are not alone in this, as the following comments reveal:

"...had a meeting with us and literally told us to get on board, they will tolerate nothing else..."

"...we almost feel as if we're just being pushed into other people's agendas again..."

One lecturer summed up the situation of feeling powerless in the face of demands:

"You often don't have control over it because... leave your students in clinics or rearrange lectures 'cause there's a meeting we have to go to... you know you should be marking (*evaluating*) students but you must leave them alone and go off to a meeting..."

The feelings of powerlessness over the demands being made are compounded by lecturers feeling that deadlines and demands are made without due consultation. Lecturers in the three Disciplines discussed the fact that demands placed on them by the various change initiatives on campus were a potential stressor, in the sense that cognisance was often not taken of their existing work loads, or in fact with any due consideration of the demands of lecturing. In line with Fourie (1999:287), lecturers expressed this feeling of powerlessness as:

"... you know the university puts out these deadlines forand we follow on... and that in itself is stressful."

"...the restructuring process which took place 12 – 18 months ago was absolutely a nightmare, I think it was done so rushed..."

"...why did we have to rush and put aside other things..."

In relation to this point, Discipline B felt that they needed to take some responsibility for this, and proposed that the Discipline needed to be more proactive and negotiate deadlines in order to limit the impact of imposed deadlines as a potential stressor.

"We need to be more proactive ...we need to sit down and arrange for this, can we meet those deadlines?"

4.1.2.4. LEADERSHIP ISSUES

Hogarth (Sunday Times, 2001:20) noted, rather tongue in cheek, that a new term, 'Bundy jumping', had been coined for university Principals who quit their posts, as this appeared to be happening all too regularly. On a more serious note, he remarked that: "...managing a university in South Africa is not one of the most attractive jobs around...and several university principals have cut their tenures short and fled to more tranquil surroundings". Macfarlane (2000) in a review of the state of Higher Education in 2000, referred to 2000 as: "Education's year of turbulence". One University passed a vote of no confidence in their Principal, a Commission into the affairs of another institution recommended that the principal be sacked, and impending mergers at other institutions of Higher Education meant that jobs at a very senior level might be lost in the rationalisation process.

The Institution where the study is based has a long record of 'acting' leadership. The mission statement of the University developed in the early 90's is thought by some to be outdated and in need of reconceptualisation. A new vision and mission statement are currently being developed as part of the restructuring debate taking place on the campus. The University is also one of the 'Historically Disadvantaged Institutions' (HDI's) in the country, which conjures up certain connotations. The lack of a permanent, full complement of management in the institution was perceived by the lecturers in the school as being a potential stressor for the following reasons:

"...we've had so many changes in management ...there hasn't been continuity and firmness in terms of implementing things ..."

"...talking at a management level. There is very poor organisation on a very high level..."

The lack of efficient and effective management, in addition to the transformation of higher education as a whole in the country, was identified as a further stressor;

"... unclear statement from the Minister's desk as to what they want from the university. They've done this in education, at school level, ...and now they are starting with us, they do not know what they want nationally."

This left the lecturers in the three Disciplines uncertain about the direction and purpose of the transformation process. In an institution that was perceived by many to lack strong, informed and caring leadership, change might be seen as even more threatening than it actually was.

4.1.3. WORKLOADS

The lecturers in all three Disciplines felt very strongly that they carried 'heavy' workloads. This was not a unique feature, however. The literature consulted often referred to workload as a stressor within Higher Education. Coxon (2001) referred to a lecturer who regularly clocked a sixty-hour week, which was not considered the exception. Edworthy (2000) cited a 1994 study in the United Kingdom whose findings included that, on average an academic worked a fifty-three hour week with an additional seventeen and a half hours a week spent on various administrative tasks. A number of reasons were cited for this increased workload. These included the loss of staff and subsequent freezing of the posts, insufficient resources and lack of support which meant academics had to do tasks that previously might have been done by others. This included, for example, student recruitment and selection (Edworthy, 2000). An additional factor adding to increased workloads was the need to engage in research and publish this research. Edworthy (2000) also referred to the fact that curriculum change was time-consuming as were the various written submissions that needed to be made for the accreditation of programmes, quality assurance measures and university audit structures.

Within the three focus groups, a number of the factors discussed above were presented as adding to existing workloads. These included training health professionals, with generally small staff complements, having to cope with a range of commitments and changes occurring on the campus and in Tertiary Education. Some lecturers also referred to personal characteristics, like doing a task to the very best of their ability, as playing a role. While the amount of work an individual was required to do and can cope with was a very personal issue and relatively hard to quantify, all three Disciplines strongly expressed the view that they carried 'heavy loads'. As one Discipline noted, it is very hard to put a time to everything they did because of the very nature of the commitments and/or requirements. One lecturer likened it to being a 'twenty-four-hour' thing.

"...a lot of things that we do we can't explain on paper..."

"Management is asking us to put hours to what we do and it doesn't actually work ..."

The reasons raised by lecturers in these Disciplines that could relate to this feeling of being overloaded, include the following:

4.1.3.1. TRAINING FOR A PROFESSIONAL DEGREE

The training offered by the three Disciplines is the only training that is offered in these fields of expertise in the Province. The training is also happening in an institution that battles with negative public perceptions and biases. The lecturers thus have to contend with these public perceptions, whilst meeting equity needs in the Province and country in terms of the students they recruit and the graduates they produce, and producing health professionals equipped to cope with the challenges currently facing health workers in the country. The nature of the training includes both classroom based learning and teaching as well as clinical experience in a variety of community settings. Staff and students are also actively involved in service provision to mainly disadvantaged communities through outreach programmes and campus clinics.

"...within the national context of (*health professional*) training institutions it's very important for me and I think for all of us, to see our training programme as considered equitable with every other one and for people not to look askance at us, and not to question our students and that's what drives us. ...its harder for us for various reasons to achieve the same standards of student graduates than for other universities."

Teaching and learning in the context of the Discipline is also wider than just merely delivering a lecture. The Disciplines are also responsible for setting up and maintaining clinical teaching venues outside the campus so that their students can gain clinical experience. Included in this concept is promoting the appropriate professional ethics and values in students.

"If we were traditional sort of ivory tower academics, I would just go and give my lecture and come out. And most people have that impression of what an educator does... the general perception is that you have a soft job. It involves so much more..."

"...our teaching sometimes may be a smaller percentage wise in the day ...you're doing all sorts of other things just for that teaching..."

"Because it's a professional degree I think our accountability to eventually clients and to the community .. and that's also a major stressor because you can't just go in there and lecture, you need to produce a particular kind of student hopefully ... and that's also a big stressor it's because of the nature of our professions."

"...have small numbers of students, knowing them personally... and we're also trying to retain students ... as well in terms of a mentoring type role and I think clinically... there is also the thing of setting up services and liaising with people ..."

In setting up services in hospitals for the clinical training of students, the lecturers in Discipline B had much to add. These problems, within the health sector itself, were outside the scope of this study, but, nevertheless featured during discussions in the Disciplines. These problems are beyond the control of the institution and the Disciplines, but impact on the lecturers in the Disciplines in terms of how effectively they can use the health centres.

"...there's something about the lack of resources at the places where we go, or the lack of personnel so that we don't have backup from ... so we're on our own there..."

"...struggling to get enough patients There's no equipment... the inadequacies of the patients"

In respect of additional duties, these were identified by the three Disciplines as being wider than the more traditionally held roles and functions of being a lecturer and researcher. These functions were seen as vital, not only in the sense of keeping abreast of change in the health care sector, but also as a community responsibility and part and parcel of the ethos of being a health professional.

"...also the importance of the academic institution being represented .. like on the Cerebral Palsy Association, like in other professional bodies which are totally outside the mandate of the University, there is an expectation in society that the academic institution participate, and it's important that they do, to keep in touch with what's going on the ground..."

"...it's also like Continuing Professional Development... being part of the Faculty... public relations, marketing... registered for post graduate degrees ..."

"...there's also Health Professions Council roles"

"...additional bodies and additional meetings that you have to attend that takes up a lot of time as well"

The perceived heavy workload was not an independent stressor. The workload, together with the additional factors of transformation and research, was perceived collectively as potential stressors.

4.1.3.2. THE NATURE OF STAFF APPOINTMENTS

Many of the lecturers in the focus groups were on what is known as the 'Joint Establishment'. The Joint Establishment implies that the Tertiary Education Institution and the Provincial Health Authority jointly employ the lecturer concerned. This brings with it enhanced access into clinical settings for the clinical fieldwork training of students. The joint appointments have both positive and negative aspects. It is positive in the sense of providing an opportunity for maintaining personal clinical skills and access and contacts in hospitals, and negative in the sense of having 'two' jobs – one as lecturer, the other as clinician. Each partner in the subvention has their own concept of what the subvention should entail and it often leads to potentially stressful situations. These responsibilities were described as being unique to the subvention that the staff find themselves in. Fourteen of the lecturers that participated in the focus groups were on the Joint Establishment. The other eight lecturers had pure University appointments. The Joint Establishment has for many years been a bone of contention as it implies differing pay packages and conditions of service for Joint Establishment versus University lecturers employed in the same Discipline to do the same functions.

The effect of the perceived prejudice with respect to the nature of their appointments was raised in all three focus groups. The feeling of being 'unfairly treated' permeated all discussions. The reason for this could be that the nature of their appointments had, for a long time, been a bone of contention and little appeared to have been done to relieve the situation. This was one of the situations where feelings of powerlessness had left staff perceiving the appointment issue as a stressor and where management was perceived to have a certain indifference to the needs of staff on the Joint Establishment. A certain degree of resentment was felt and this issue was perceived as an enduring, unrelenting stressor.

"...and whereas in other faculties ... they come to lecture about three times a week or 4 times a week,.... we're here every single day."

"...on the e.mail today staff members in the (another *Faculty named*) are required to be present four days a week and at least five hours per day on those days...Now I mean, can you imagine that going down here. This causes friction between me and the rest of the staff..."

"...I get slightly resentful that they come in for their two lectures and they leave campus and they run their own businesses..."

"...we are in our offices from 8 – 5 ... that is a long day"

While all staff in the School are essentially required to work the same number of hours and all the lecturers are involved in the training of health professionals, the Joint Appointees perceive the nature of their appointments as an enduring stressor. Certain potential stressors are, therefore, related purely to the Joint Appointees. They are purely practical matters, but have serious time and inconvenience aspects related to them. A lecturer on the Joint Establishment described the submission of a leave form, for example, as follows:

"...that is a frustration, administrative as well. Because they're (*joint Appointee staff office*) sitting down at (*name of hospital, 16km away from the campus*)...I've got to take a trip down there, find parking, have my car bumped in, and, in order to deliver a leave form you know! ...you feel you're being unfairly treated all the time..."

The increased use of contract type appointments, in favour of offering tenure, in Higher Education did not feature in the three focus groups. Nineteen of the lecturers who participated in the focus groups had permanent appointments. The other three were on contract appointments. This might have influenced the fact that the changing nature of university appointments, contract versus permanent, did not feature very strongly in any of the focus groups. The issue of appointment was brought up by a 'contract lecturer' in one of the Disciplines, but was related to her own specific problems with her employment contract rather than a broader university issue.

A further area of potential tension identified by the researcher before running the focus groups, was that of being both a practising health professional and a lecturer at the same time. One lecturer described this dual role as being stressful for the 'lecturer', for the following specific reason:

"I feel very stressed at the fact that I can't treat them (patients), that I can only go through the students. ...you're constantly on the edge because students are not competent, and anything could go wrong at any point in time".

The researcher felt that being both a lecturer and clinician at the same time created tensions in the lives of the academics. The need and desire to work in a 'hands-on capacity' was perceived as a potential stressor to some of the focus group participants.

4.1.3.3. STAYING ABREAST BOTH PROFESSIONALLY AND AS AN ACADEMIC

With reference to having a 'heavy' work load, the duality of the profession (being both a teacher and a health professional) and the apparent unrelenting transformation needs in the professions and on the campus, lecturers expressed that pressure on them to do research was a potential stressor. Edworthy (2000:43) noted that many lecturers were acknowledging research as a source of anxiety and distress. Research output was linked personally to career progression and institutionally, in South Africa, to the potential viability and continued existence of the institution as it currently exists. The ability to produce research could influence the eventual role and purpose of the institution, and lecturers were ever mindful of this. There appeared to be two separate but interlinked factors that contributed to the potential stressor 'value' that engaging in research has for lecturers on a personal level. Lecturers in two of the Disciplines expressed concern about feeling 'under qualified' as a lecturer and therefore needing and wanting to improve their teaching qualifications. Also, in order to be promoted, lecturers must increase their research output and obtain additional qualifications. Lecturers are also having to keep abreast professionally of developments in their respective areas of expertise within their professions and to keep their teaching relevant.

"...we've never been trained as educators .. which means that you are very under-prepared for the job, which means ... the stress level..."

"...everybody has pressure to get qualifications..."

"... the institution is saying that you should do that (research) because you don't get promoted if you don't..."

This pressure to produce research was a common perception among all the Disciplines.

"...I think that if we're going to be big in the world, people would recognise the university by their academic contribution to knowledge and I think we want to make that contribution to knowledge, but at the same time with all the other things we are busy with, we are doing clinics, we are doing

service, we are doing community work, we're developing programmes, all that...the university doesn't recognise in real ways to say that it's okay (if) you have a deficit..."

How to effectively deal with lecturers' workload and provide the time and resources for doing research is an issue that the institution will have to look at creatively.

Permeating the three focus group discussions were feelings that university management failed to adequately grasp the special needs of lecturers in the Health Sciences. Edworthy (2000) citing Worksafe, listed indifference to staff needs as a factor that compounds the perception of stressors.

4.1.3.4. STAFF NEEDS WITH RESPECT TO MANAGEMENT

The staff of the Faculty in which the School and Disciplines are housed has felt for a long time that the university does not adequately consider their unique needs and potential. This is, however, not an isolated feeling. Edworthy (2000:45) cited a 1988 survey undertaken by Snape that found: "...staff perceived a breakdown in communication between lecturers and management and each party felt the other had no conception of the other's role". As Fourie (1999) noted about academia in South Africa, academics within this School were of the opinion that their interests were not adequately represented or respected by management. This aspect was perceived as a serious threat and many academics laid the blame for the deteriorating relationship squarely at the door of University management.

At the time of the study, most of the staff in the Faculty were registered and practising health professionals in addition to being lecturers. Some of the staff of the Disciplines were appointed on the Joint Establishment and the very nature of their appointment demanded other insights. The training of Health Professionals is by its very nature labour intensive and costly. It is labour intensive in terms of the staff to student ratio in the clinical teaching aspect of the programme and costly in terms of the training equipment and range of staff required. The Disciplines all admit relatively small numbers of students into their programmes because of constraints, for example, finding sufficient clinical training options in the provincial health structure. All these aspects call for greater insights and understanding on the part of the university community as a whole. The

lecturers who participated in the focus groups had the following to say about their perceptions of what the greater university community's insight levels are:

"...a complete lack of understanding from anyone beyond the Dean...."

"...University management does not have a clue of what's going on..."

"..there is almost an unwritten law amongst all of them that Health Sciences is a problem... there's even a lack of appreciation for the graduates we're producing so that the whole concept of producing a *therapist* is considered not so serious..."

"...feeling unappreciated, feeling unrepresented..."

The perception that their specific and unique needs were met with some contempt and indifference was acknowledged and presented as a stressor by the lecturing staff in all three Disciplines. The discussion around how the institution managed its staff was not only related specifically to the lecturers in the three Disciplines. There was much discussion on how the institution failed to recognise the role that academics in general should play:

"...at (*the institution*) academics aren't valued as much as.... Inversion of social order here, to be the worst thing around would be to be an academic...academics are at the bottom..."

Macfarlane (2001) citing research undertaken by Webster and Mosoetsa during 2000, noted some interesting insights in this regard. On the one hand, academic staff expressed serious concern about university management, whom they believed, did not adequately consider their unique needs and potential. On the other hand, management had tough words about academics. Management, as cited by Macfarlane (2001:1) reported: "In the universities you have prima donnas who earn respect as academics not managers". This complicates and jeopardises the move within Higher Education to a more corporate style of university executive management, where universities are now being run as businesses. Another university manager noted: "Academics need high maintenance. They are hypersensitive. If there is a slight to their professional qualifications or status they get offended" (Macfarlane, 2001:1). There appeared to be two sides to the story, with both sides feeling some antagonism towards the other. Academics believed that their relationship with management saw them categorised as employees rather than as colleagues, and this move was potentially stressful.

4.1.3.5. THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN INCREASED WORKLOAD

The result of the unrelenting workload pressures and the perception that this was not always understood and accepted by management, had some serious implications for individual lecturers and the Disciplines. It was felt that little personal or Discipline growth and development was possible.

"...workloads causes us to sort of tread water all the time."

"...there is very little time for your own development."

"I'd love to do that (*clinical work*) but it is **absolutely impossible** given the kinds of loads we've got at the moment."

"...you might have a list of what to do. 10 things on that list and of those you've maybe done 3 or 2 and it's a feeling of unsatisfaction that causes stress....."

"...we are working outside of these hours in order to do a conference presentation ..."

Due to small staff complements, many lecturers personally felt that they 'could not let the team down'. One lecturer described this as a feeling as though "life depends on you".

"there's no sort of leeway If someone doesn't turn up, ... there's no back-up, nothing like back-up at all."

"I think we're short staffed, so it's not like people are being loaded unfairly, ...we just have to take whatever work there is because there isn't other people to do the job."

Edworthy (2000) was of the opinion that lecturers expected to be afforded the opportunity to use their specific skills and knowledge and have sufficient time to complete tasks to the best of their ability. As noted in the discussion emanating from the focus groups, the lecturers included in the research felt that this expectation was not always met, and this was perceived as a stressor.

4.1.4. ROLE CONFLICTS

A conflict of roles: "...arises when an employee has to play roles that, by their very nature, are not compatible" (Edworthy, 2000:29). Ivancevich and Matteson (1980:110) added: "Role conflict is present whenever compliance with one set of pressures makes compliance with another set

difficult, objectionable, or impossible". According to Edworthy (2000), role conflicts can lead to low job satisfaction, stress and physiological strain in an individual. During the focus groups a number of issues were identified as giving rise to a conflict of role duties. These included reconciling the demands of home and work, operating as a dual professional and the perceived lack of career opportunities for the lecturers concerned.

4.1.4.1. THE DEMANDS OF WORK AND HOME

Role conflicts often arise from failure to reconcile the demands of work and home (Kearns and Lipsedge, 2000). Interesting to note is that all three Disciplines included in the research can be described as 'female dominated'. This fact brought with it its own unique set of data, as the majority of female lecturers were reticent to present the home/work interface as a major stressor. The discussion around whether home and work life were easy to accommodate had to be facilitated in many cases and as one group pointed out, the demands of juggling a home and family with work is not something that is unique to (female) lecturers. All workers have to contend with these issues. It was also pointed out by certain lecturers that whilst having small children brought with it certain practical problems and issues, having grown children did not mean that one worried less about these children. It appeared as if the types of problems and concerns parents have with grown children are just different.

Lecturers in all three Disciplines identified high workloads coupled with other commitments, family or otherwise, as a perceived stressor.

"...just makes for a lot of stress..."

There appeared to be general consensus that being a partner, parent, friend and homemaker added to the lecturers' perceived stress. Lecturers described this as being 'unavailable' and/or 'preoccupied'. The fact that lecturers perceived their life outside work as stressful was attributed to carrying an above average workload. The high workload spilled over into more traditionally held 'family time'. One lecturer described the life of a lecturer in the school as:

"...it's almost like you live to work philosophy."

"...you're literally living your life so that you can work and there's pretty little time left for anything else."

"...that, (being a parent, mother) becomes the small part of your big life. This takes the bigger part."

"...work dominates your relationships with other people like you family and friends, that suffer..."

"...my home life revolves around work..."

Interestingly enough, one lecturer described doing normal household chores as a coping strategy she used. Doing household chores on occasion (not daily) was presented as being both relaxing and therapeutic.

Many of the studies consulted, viz. Bailey (1990a), Long (1995) Loate and Marais (1996) and attested to the fact that while working women are often faced with similar stressors to men, the home – work interface was reported as being more stressful for women. In the current study, while lecturers reported that juggling the demands of work and home was indeed stressful, the perceived stressor was not as prominent as some of the other stressors listed. This 'reluctance' to afford the work-home interface a 'greater' stressor value might be related to the fact that the majority of group participants were women employed in a female dominated profession, and that they were therefore more accepting and resigned to the concomitant stressors. There was also a great deal of mutual understanding and support for, and of, colleagues in the respective Disciplines. Many of the lecturers were also possibly not willing to bring home issues into the discussion, which essentially related to stressors that lecturers perceived and they therefore tended to focus more on work issues that were found stressful. A further point of note is that only ten ($n = 22$) of the lecturers had small children, that is; less than half the sample group. This might also have impacted on the fact that home responsibilities did not feature very strongly. The findings here in no way preclude the lecturers from possibly perceiving career and home responsibilities as stressful at other times. This research sample was not large enough to make meaningful assumptions on this point.

The discussion around the interaction of work and home raised an interesting and unique angle that has not been presented in the literature consulted. One of the male lecturers expressed a type of 'reverse gender discrimination' as a stressor. The role conflict stressor as experienced by the male lecturer was stated as follows:

"I think if I was a married man ... you know how difficult it would be for me given all that unkind social pressures for what men have to be doing in society. I have my own gender issues, it actually would have been incredible for me to havehow would I have this powerful job ... how would I be able to support this family You know that kind of thing. I would not be able to if I even had one child and wife ... you know what I mean."

During the discussion on home roles and responsibilities in Discipline C, the topic broadened to include remuneration. The comment above, made by a male lecturer, is inextricably tied to the perceived status of the profession and the remuneration package the professions attract. Discipline C discussed how and why the profession is so poorly paid (in their estimation). The remuneration problem raised a number of pertinent issues around role conflicts. Many lecturers, both male and female, experienced the perceived under-remuneration as a stressor.

"...because it is a female dominated profession it is actually poorly paid, versus other similar – a four year engineering degree, whatever the case may be, that's male dominated."

This perceived under-remuneration was blamed on a number of factors including that it is female dominated, positioned in the health sector and as one lecturer said:

"...we're female dominated plus we're working with the sector of society that is largely ignored, not considered as important, that our roles are seen as unimportant."

This perceived poor remuneration also generated much discussion about what this perceived economic viability/status brought about in terms of self-esteem and feelings of self worth in a family context. This point related very closely to the perceived stress brought about by wanting 'to do your very best' as discussed under personal issues

"...in terms of my own self image I know that if I was a women on my own I would really battle..."

"I think that (being a single parent) puts great stress on me and I don't have any choice ...I have to bring in money at the end of the month ... it's all very well to say, oh why don't you go and work in a less stressful job? But I've got to think about my housing subsidy ... I must be a useless parent if I'm putting work before my role as a parent, let alone maintaining a house, cooking food, washing clothes, whatever else."

4.1.4.2. CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Career progress or the lack thereof was also perceived as a stressor. Edworthy (2000) and Mabokela (in press) both listed promotion issues and thwarted ambition as potential stressors.

"As a lecturer, one comes with the notion I think, realistically, that there's going to be a little bit of time for self development, capacity building, ... this is never realised ... you're leaving a clinical post because you feel you had enough clinical, now you want to input into the academic side"

Fourteen of the lecturers who participated in the focus groups were employed on the level of lecturer. The School had four Senior Lecturers, one full Professor and two lecturers on the Associate Lecturer level. Each Discipline, in turn, during their respective focus groups pointed out concerns and stressors related to the current promotional policy employed by the institution. The concerns ranged from not having the time and resources to actually do what the University rewards with promotion, to the University not understanding the multiplicity of demands that lecturers in the School have to deal with. Another point raised was that the University did not offer lecturers the support they needed in order to do research and present their findings. The lack of understanding was expressed as follows:

"...the staff in the Discipline contribute an enormous amount to the Faculty and the Varsity, but when it comes to promotional recognition, there is just nothing there. And in the meantime they say what you need is publications to get promotions, but if the person didn't work so hard for the Faculty or the Varsity, there'll be lots of time to work on publications.... Your role is not as a teacher, researcher or scholar, it is also as a clinician and an administrator. And that's often what takes most of the time."

The heavy load issue was raised again in this context. Many lecturers said they found juggling heavy workloads and producing research publications and podium presentations potentially stressful.

"...you won't get promoted if you don't do your research, ... so if you're the type of person who wants todo research.... you're looking at doing that outside your normal duties..."

"... we were working outside of 8 to 4 in order to do a conference presentation that's going to bring recognition to this university ..."

There was, however, an expressed understanding of the importance of research work, and an expressed desire to become involved. This is an important point here, coming at the end of a seemingly endless list of perceived stressors related to career development.

"...they (*the university*) do reward you for your research output ... which is ok, because I think that if we're going to be big and in the world, people would recognise the university by their academic contribution to knowledge and I think we want to make that contribution..."

One of the Disciplines (C) also recognised the fact that work done on a daily basis could serve as research. The following quote is included here to reflect, what the researcher believes is a growing understanding that opportunities for growth and career progression exist as part and parcel of an academic's day to day academic life.

"...there is a conscious understanding amongst all of us that our work is in itself a research in the sense..."

There appeared to be a growing understanding of the importance of research and an expressed desire to become involved. The researcher is aware of the fact that lecturers in all three Disciplines are currently involved in regional and national collaborative research initiatives that cross the more traditionally held empirical positivist paradigm. The majority of lecturers in the School are also involved in research for the purpose of acquiring additional post-graduate qualifications, and the number of research publications and presentations from the School has risen noticeably over the last few years.

4.1.5. ROLE AMBIGUITY

Three interrelated factors seemed to feature here. Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) noted that all workers would experience some degree of role ambiguity at some point in their career. "Role ambiguity is a lack of clarity about one's role, job objectives, and the scope of the responsibilities of one's job" (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980:111). The first role ambiguity identified during the focus groups was the teacher/researcher debate, the second, that lecturers often feel ill equipped to cope with the various demands made on them and, the third, feeling some ambiguity about how to present the role of lecturing to prospective new lecturers.

4.1.5.1. THE TEACHER / RESEARCHER DEBATE:

From the literature it appeared that health professional academics often see themselves primarily as teachers and professionals rather than researchers and scholars (Mitchell, 1985). This sentiment was mirrored in what transpired during the three focus groups held. The concept of doing research featured a number of times and a certain degree of role ambiguity was evident. Tension between doing research because it was right and appropriate to 'discover' and not being able to 'fit' research in because of the multitude of other responsibilities that appeared to take precedence, was voiced. Furthermore, lecturers questioned certain tasks that form part and parcel of University life, as the importance of doing the task was often unclear or obscure.

"...sometimes you spend hours and hours going through SAPSE forms, which you can't see the importance of...."

"...most people have that impression of what an educator does, you go and do your thing and you come out. ... the general perception is that you actually have a soft job ... you get paid to think ... it involves so much more..."

"...everybody has pressures to get qualifications ... but I think on the professional side we don't get any recognition....but I think also it's not valued..."

"...the message it sends is that what you're doing other than publications is in fact not worthwhile. It's not even that teaching's worthwhile. And I think the stress here, is what we're doing is all the other things and the teaching, and not the publications, because those are priorities for us."

As discussed under the previous heading, while there appeared to be some role ambiguity as to what the actual roles of an academic should be, and who should determine these roles and functions, there was a visible move towards being involved in research. Many of the lecturers thought that that their teaching was the most important role and function, but a visible shift towards an understanding of the importance of research was evident.

4.1.5.2. FEELING ILL-EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH DEMANDS

As noted by Fourie (1999:284) the discussion in the focus groups included debate around how skilled, equipped and capable lecturers felt about designing and implementing new and innovative

programmes, modules and teaching methods. These changes proved to be a potential stressor as much of the discussion revolved around whether the lecturers felt they were able to cope.

"...not necessarily feeling qualified..."

"Without the proper support, they expect you to do ... without the proper resources"

"...you're interviewed as a lecturer, not a clinical supervisor or anything, you're interviewed only to be a lecturer and that ends up being not what you actually do and my feeling is that you end up being jack of all trades and master of none, because you have to learn how to do recruitment, selection, admin, computer expert, whatever else..."

"we've never been trained as educators or teachers. ... I mean all that you had to do was have a degree to get into the thing, not to be what the job asks you to be... you didn't have to have any teaching qualifications to come in. ... which means you are very underprepared for the job, which means the stress level..."

The need to remain relevant and viable was viewed as both a threat and a challenge. The potential stressor arose from, for example, not feeling entirely equipped to do the necessary programme development, and the challenge emanated from needing to create a niche area to remain viable and employable.

"...there is no alternative place to go at present,... but my philosophy is that we have to make our department so good that somebody's going to want us, and as long as we keep doing that we are going to be fine".

Lecturers in Discipline C viewed the changes in their curriculum as very positive:

"...in the last year a real sense of growth and creativity and achievement and development."

The ambivalence of feeling both overextended and ill-equipped to deal with the changes happening, and the stimulation and personal growth that change brings, was expressed in all three focus groups.

An additional point raised here, referred to individuals being exposed to conflicting demands without the possibility of an easy resolution. The most serious and complicated issue that Discipline C raised here, involved having on the one hand to admit an increased number of students for the Discipline to remain financially viable, but on the other hand, producing health professionals for a

dwindling employment market in the province. This need to remain financially viable as a Discipline, therefore, brings with it certain tensions.

"...we have 'x' number of places to fill and we've got to ... and we want to fill this and we've got to fill this because we have to reduce our financial debt...deficit. So there's a lot of pressure on us... But, there is also, and I must confess it, a feeling that I know there aren't that many jobs out there and yet I'm pulling one more student, and I'm slightly whitewashing that aspect and not ...it's got nothing to do with training, it's got nothing to do with the profession, it's got to do with the country and the Department of Health and the Department of Education and other sectors.... We are being forced to and it's a slightly dishonest thing".

The problem highlighted has no easy solution, and it is not the intention of the researcher to answer the question here. The issue remains a contentious one, and was indicated as a factor that led to a certain degree of stress within all three Disciplines.

4.1.5.3. STAFF MORALE

This issue, related possibly to the institution itself, is included under role ambiguity, as it is argued that it encapsulates the ambiguity felt by the lecturing staff. The first is about the institution itself, and the second relates to how participants perceived their roles and tasks as lecturers. The sentiments expressed possibly mirrored the broader Higher Education scenario. Macfarlane (2000:14) noted: "...widespread academic demotivation...", Kenny (1999:12) wrote: "...they (*Academics*) are fearful and demoralised", and Edworthy (2000) referred to low levels of staff morale and motivation in Higher Education internationally.

"...you get people saying to you what's it like to work there, and they have this rosy idea of academia and lecturing and this is going to be their step to glory and it's very hard because you want people to come and work here but on the other hand if you tell them this, who in their right minds would..."

Worksafe (Western Australia) as cited by Edworthy (2000) mooted that stress can be initiated or worsened when staff experience a high degree of uncertainty about their direction and purpose.

None of the focus group participants questioned their involvement in the training of future health professionals for the market place, being involved in offering a clinical service, or outreach programmes. The uncertainty about direction and purpose was related to the institution as a whole.

The comments below need to be read in the context of the countrywide size and shape debate occurring on the country's campuses. The purpose and content of the debate are outside the confines of this research project, and the researcher merely wishes to highlight the role this debate plays as a potential stressor in the lives of the lecturers interviewed. The institution is currently engaged in a University-wide planning process. In the midst of the focus groups the University community was presented with an update on University planning initiatives. The preamble began with the following statement: "We have only 39 days left to submit to the National Department of Education a report that will determine the survival of (*the institution*) as a University in (*the province*)" (Update on University Planning Initiatives, 2001). While the spirit of the statement contains a positive, motivating undertone, the researcher cannot but wonder if the choice of the word 'survival' was a good one? At the time, lecturers were coming to terms with the last restructuring process, viz., that of the amalgamation of Faculties and Departments into Schools and Disciplines, and now they were confronted once again with restructuring and a threat of closure. The last restructuring process saw the amalgamation of seven Faculties into four, and the loss of many Departments in the languages and arts. The closure of these Departments meant that many staff members left the University in a voluntary severance package deal, through retrenchments and/or enforced 'early retirements'.

"...if you think of poor Professorsitting without a department, I mean they just closed down"

The perceived threat of amalgamation and/or closure was very real to many staff who experienced it as a potential stressor. The lack of clear, unambiguous messages from the planning facilitators also compounded the issue.

"I find the uncertainty stressful. That there is always a threat of uncertaintya general uncertainty at the university."

"...do you plan for this scenario that scenario..."

"...this whole things of what is going to happen, who we are, and what is going to happen and the work that it is going to entail to restructure once again..."

"...we do not know exactly what is going to happen at the end of all this exercise."

Discussion around the future of the institution permeated all the discussion throughout the three focus groups. Lecturing staff appeared to be experiencing a high degree of uncertainty about the direction and purpose of the institution.

4.1.6. DAILY OCCURRENCES EXPERIENCED AS STRESSORS

The daily occurrences and events experienced in the School were very similar for the three Disciplines. The day to day events that lecturers have to contend with ranged from slight irritations to major stress-inducing events. As noted by Viljoen *et al.* (1987), these recurring daily occurrences are seen as enduring stressors. It is not the presence of an identified stressor *per se* that causes stress, but rather a combination of factors. Edworthy (2000) writing from an educational perspective, also noted that being exposed to enduring pressure without letting up leads to increased opportunities for perceiving events as stressors. In this regard one lecturer remarked:

“...quite a few daily hassles that may be little, but they really accumulate and really irritate us...”

The minor potential stressors were identified as, for example, having to wait for the switchboard to answer to put a call through and individuals on the campus either not answering their telephones or talking on them for much of the day so that the engaged tone is obtained. In addition, the fact that many lecturers have to share telephones and telephone lines was identified as a stressor. Some lecturers also share office space and/or feel they have insufficient space to keep all their belongings. There not being tea or coffee in the ‘tea kitty’ at certain times of the year was identified by one Discipline as being a potential stressor. One staff member identified the fact that equipment (photocopiers, fax) was frequently out of order in the Discipline as a potential stressor.

The day to day stressors that were reported to impact severely on the functioning and morale of the staff themselves, the Disciplines and the Institution as a whole, included the library that was perceived as being inefficient and user unfriendly. This was a stressor in the sense that staff expressed concern about accessing and obtaining reading materials they needed for their studies and students accessing resources for their studies. A second stressor that was emphasised by lecturers in each Discipline was the feeling that things needed to be done over and over again before anything happened.

"...you've got to do the same task 40 times before it actually gets heard by the right person or you get something done."

"...unless you go and do it yourself, it does not happen ... I mean the time that goes to waste on that extra effort that you put in is so frustrating..."

It is interesting to note that this stressor was not only identified by the Discipline Chairs, who in theory should be carrying an additional administrative load, but by a number of individual lecturers as well. The Disciplines function with individual lecturers assuming responsibility for a whole range of administrative functions, and therefore having to liaise with a range of administrative and support structures on the campus. This perceived stressor of knowing, upfront, that a certain request, for example, will have to be made a number of times before anything gets done featured very strongly. The repetition of tasks is not only time-consuming in already overloaded days, but finds the lecturers concerned, questioning the motives of the Institution.

"Look at that file that was lost for ... I don't know, three files on one topic, big fat files, lost. Nobody's heard about them."

"You (*lecturer*) run around and arrange all the technical things."

"...when you're already in a heavy workload kind of situation, it just sort of compounds everything"

One of the daily stressors identified was being concerned about the physical state of the campus itself. Lecturers in all three Disciplines expressed concern that while on the one hand they wanted to be proud of the institution that employs them, on the other hand, the physical environment of the institution precluded this. For instance, the audio-visual equipment frequently doesn't work properly or had been removed from lecture venues.

"All the facilities are disgusting, broken, no toilet paper..." "...physical state of the university ... it's disgusting, and it's not conducive to academic ..."

"I've got an appalling lecture room..."

Fingers were not only pointed at the Institution for this state of affairs. In two of the focus groups, the lecturers themselves felt that they needed to accept that they are often responsible for creating situations that might be stress-inducing. It was pointed out that often lecturers are irresponsible in the way they look after equipment or leave a venue. This was seen as a positive point, in the sense of the lecturers identifying that they themselves may be responsible at times for creating potential

stressful situations. Sharing these views in a group setting meant that the group participants were possibly more aware of how their own behaviour could impact on the lives of other lecturers.

"...that you don't find the OHP or you have to restructure the room when people did not restructure it before they left ... I find that quite time-consuming so that when you are actually supposed to be lecturing ..."

The daily stressors that lecturers experienced were very similar among the Disciplines. Whether day to day events and situations were perceived as stressful was linked to the ongoing tensions between conflicting demands and a feeling that often, lecturers' needs and concerns were met with some degree of indifference by the Institution.

The researcher noted with interest that violence on the campus didn't feature during the focus groups. The institution, as many other campuses in the country, has had a rather unsettled past with almost annual boycotts, strikes and varying degrees of unrest. The year 2001 was marked by restraint, and while many issues appeared to be simmering below the surface, no teaching time was lost. The relative peace therefore meant that lecturers could concentrate on other issues and violent or aggressive behaviour did therefore not feature as a potential stressor.

General safety issues in the country were, however, fleetingly presented in two of the focus groups. This related to the general crime rate being experienced in the country and lecturers then worrying about family and possessions at home during work time.

4.1.7. PERSONAL ISSUES RAISED AS POTENTIAL STRESSORS

The researcher acknowledges that in any individual/environment interaction the individual plays a big role in deciding whether the interaction is perceived as a potential stressor. "Whether an event causes distress depends upon the individual's perception of the situation" (Benjamin, 1987:1). The beliefs, values, ideas and previous experiences of an individual all impact on that individual's appraisal of events and situations. This area is, however, very wide and deserving of a research study of its own. This study, therefore, did not focus on individual characteristics of the lecturers. Certain items were raised during the course of the focus groups and these are presented as they featured in all three groups.

4.1.7.1. NEEDING TO DO TASKS WELL

A common thread that ran through all three focus groups was the issue of not personally being satisfied or content with the way certain tasks were done. Lecturers in the various Disciplines expressed this as:

"... we're just getting the basic jobs done and I find that quite stressful for me personally. I want to see things being developed ... but we seem to be always in a process of fixing and not getting to the point when you can say it's really well done."

"...not being able to do the work ... and the required quality that you set yourself ..."

"...constantly trying to stay ahead where you want to be..."

The need to 'get things done really well' was a need expressed by lecturers in all three Disciplines. It also related to a questioning of the effectiveness of their teaching.

"I ... find it stressful ... and it worries me that I might not be teaching well enough..."

One lecturer felt most intensely about this point:

"I'm thinking about how I understand work right now and how it is guilt... guilt that maybe I'm not performing adequately. ...you constantly think you are impotent, you know what I mean."

A further point raised in this context was having to deal with a multitude of roles and tasks at one time as discussed under workloads. The researcher wonders if this relates to the kind of individuals employed in the Disciplines - the kind of individuals who take on too many tasks as they cannot say no, or because if they didn't do the task there would be no one else to do it.

"I feel guilty." "Guilty, if you don't do it you feel guilty."

These two points create a "chicken and egg" situation, as taking on too many tasks and/or having too many tasks to do means that the quality of work invariably suffers. Feelings of decreased job satisfaction and an increased perception of situations and events as being potentially stressful accompanied this.

Interesting confirmations of the literature perused were raised in the focus group with Discipline A. Here, the visible, direct results of operating in a stressful environment were highlighted. The

lecturers themselves identified that when they experienced stress, they became less tolerant of others and overly sensitive, possibly leading to increased perceptions of being stressed.

"I find when I am stressed any small thing that before wouldn't have meant that much to me, I tend to take it more personally and it affects me more than it would usually."

Discipline C referred to the fact that most lecturers succumbed to the 'flu during holidays. They also referred to certain physical symptoms of operating in a stressful environment, namely teeth grinding and other physical ailments. Mills (1986) confirmed that stress could produce various physical, somatic and/or emotional problems in teachers (lecturers). Ahuja (2001) pointed out that stress lies behind many common diseases such as heart disease, strokes and cancer.

Edworthy (2000:10) noted that high levels of stress could seriously compromise the effective functioning of a university. Edworthy (2000:10) noted further that: "Stress can result in physical and mental ill health, a lowering of job satisfaction and loss of sense of achievement".

4.1.7.2. PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS, NEEDS AND GOALS

Lecturers in the focus groups also made reference to having personal goals and needs over and above those at work. One lecturer expressed a serious stressor for herself as follows:

"...something that affected me quite severely, is that you have no time for yourself...years are slipping by and half the things you wanted to do, you can't."

This comment was raised during a discussion on the workloads carried by the lecturers, but the researcher believes it also possibly relates to the kinds of individuals who lecture in the Disciplines, namely, Type A personality types, who seek to give of their best at all times. Type A individuals are also strongly committed to their work (Edworthy, 2000:18), a factor that came over very strongly in the focus groups. This has further implications, in that staff in Discipline A and C expressed concern about their ability to form and maintain a social support structure outside of the University. This has implications for coping, as the existence of a social support system outside the stressful environment is thought to mitigate against the effects of stress and possible burnout (Sweeney, Nichols and Cornack, 1993).

"... your ability to then form new friendship groups actually becomes affected"

"I find that the only people who really understand ... are people in the same situation as you."

"...your work buddies are also your social life."

4.1.7.3. CULTURAL ISSUES

A further point touched on by the lecturers related to certain cultural issues that may be potential stressors. The first related to how an individual in the role of 'lecturer' is cast in their community, and that this image was not really a true reflection of the reality. The fact that their roles and functions demand far more than the commonly held views of what a lecturer does all day, makes for difficulty in social settings.

"I don't know whether it is a generalisation, or I don't know whether it's a cultural thing, but ... if people think you're a doctor, a lahnee, and if you're a lecturer it's almost glamorised. And the fact that you're going to have to it does not fit in with their image of what a lecturer does and people don't fully understand exactly..."

These cultural issues should be read in conjunction with the home/work interface discussed earlier, as cultural factors further influenced the potential stressor of balancing home and work responsibilities.

The second point related to culture and age. A lecturer in one of the Disciplines noted that a potential stressor was returning as a lecturer to a Discipline where you qualified as a student. An additional potential stressor was the fact that younger lecturers often had to relate to older individuals. The stressors for this lecturer were described as follows;

"...mine is actually working with people who may have been your lecturers, ... people who are actually older, are actually your mother's level, ... but I think it becomes a cultural issue to confront someone who is older than you, who has been your lecturer, and that's my stress."

On a positive note, a lecturer in one of the Disciplines summarised the reasons why individual lecturers continued to work in this potentially stressful environment:

"I think the driving force is very strong one has. Although the situation looks stressful and a lot of stress runs in our lives we still work, and the reason that we work so hard is to, umh... there is a lot of maybe that drive, and a lot of different reasons, like for some people have political motivations, and others have humane or social, in accordance with our needs, wants"

"...a lot of us have a weird kind of allegiance... and I think it's important for us that the university as a whole is successful and that it survives..."

PART B : COPING STRATEGIES AS EMPLOYED BY THE LECTURERS

4.2. INTRODUCTION

Coping refers to all those mechanisms and/or strategies used by individuals to cope with their perceived stressors (Folkman, 1984; Moller, 1990; O'Brein and Donnelly, 1997). According to Folkman (1984), merely believing that an event is controllable does not necessarily lead to a reduction in stress. Coping is also not the automatic adaptations made by an individual on a daily basis to meet the demands of life. Rather, coping refers to those cognitive and behavioural efforts made by an individual to cope with perceived stressors and the individual's belief about the possibilities for control of the situation. This coping could involve attempts to master, reduce and/or tolerate the demands placed on the individual by an event and/or situation.

There are two essential processes inherent in the coping theory presented by Folkman (1984). The first process is the cognitive appraisal, which involves an individual evaluating their coping resources and options in response to an event or situation that they have perceived as potentially threatening or harmful. According to Folkman (1984), coping resources at the disposal of an individual include physical (i.e. health and energy levels), social (i.e. support systems), psychological (i.e. problem-solving skills, self-esteem and morale) and material assets (i.e. money, equipment). These assets are evaluated in relation to the demands of the perceived stressor. The appraisal poses and answers the question: "What can I do?" The second process is referred to as a 'situational appraisal of control' (Folkman, 1984:842) and refers to an individual's judgement and/or beliefs about the possibilities for having control in a specific situation. The process relates to an individual weighing up the possibility that certain cognitive and behavioural efforts on their part will have the desired outcome, and are therefore worth attempting, and that the cognitive and behavioural efforts they propose are able to be accomplished. This is a very complex process according to Folkman (1984), who records that evaluating coping is difficult to do because of its variable nature.

An interesting aspect of the concept of coping as proposed by Folkman (1984) is that coping refers to the cognitive and/or behavioural efforts made to manage demands, regardless of the success of these efforts. Coping is, therefore, defined independently of its outcome. Coping is therefore not about success (coping) or failure (not coping), but rather about efforts made to master, reduce or tolerate the demands made.

According to Folkman (1984) and Gage (1992), there are essentially two types of coping mechanisms. The first are problem-based coping mechanisms directed at managing or altering the source of the stress. The second are emotion-focused coping mechanisms, which aim to lessen the distress an individual may experience. Research by Lazarus and Folkman, and cited by Folkman (1984), indicated that both forms of coping are used in stressful encounters, and that the relative proportions of each type would vary according to how the individual appraised the event and/or situation. Their research further highlighted the fact that problem-based forms of coping tended to be favoured in situations where the individual appraised the situation and/or event as changeable, and emotional-focused forms of coping were increasingly used in situations appraised as unchangeable.

During the three focus groups, each individual was asked to consider her coping strategies and present these to the group for discussion. All the staff in the three Disciplines presented very similar strategies and these can be grouped as follows:

4.2.1. PROBLEM-BASED COPING MECHANISMS

All three Disciplines identified a number of problem-based coping strategies. These mechanisms, aimed at managing the problem that is causing the distress, included strategies like doing something personally to the 'self' – for example consciously separating work and other time, maintaining realistic self expectations, getting someone to change their mind, engaging in problem-solving behaviour, and goal setting and planning. Another strategy, aimed at the source of the stress, included changing and manipulating their working environment.

4.2.1.1. COMPARTMENTALISING WORK AND OTHER TIME

Individual lecturers in all three Disciplines made reference to separating work and other time. The lecturers confirmed that they had in fact consciously made a decision to separate work from their personal lives. This decision was seen as stress-reducing and appeared to work for these individuals. The individuals concerned appeared to compartmentalise their lives.

"...keep my weekend university-free..."

"...to take a break when you actually can't afford it ... That's useful because it forces you to actually chill out and just take a break..."

"...get time away from (*city named*)..."

"...I just sort of switch off..."

"...but it's important to always think of yourself outside (*the university*), outside work. Make sure you have conceptual space for seeing yourself outside your roles here."

Two lecturers in Discipline B referred to 'blocking' stressors out of their consciousness entirely. This was referred to as 'not having a stress compartment'. The lecturers were adamant that they did not perceive their work environments as stressful in any sense or at any time. The fact that a certain number of individuals can express that they feel no stress is confirmed by the research done by Loate and Marais (1996:93). In their study of university lecturers, eighteen per cent of the respondents experienced no stress.

"I just don't have a compartment for stress in my head."

"I would agree with it is that we've 'copped out' of it, that's exactly what we've done... So we're no longer battling with..."

4.2.1.2. MAINTAINING REALISTIC SELF-EXPECTATIONS

Swindler and Ross (1993) cited maintaining realistic self-expectations as a problem-based coping mechanism. Folkman (1987) also included getting someone to change his or her mind about

something as a strategy here. Lecturers in all three Disciplines made reference to consciously changing what they perceived as rewarding in order to create a more rewarding work environment.

"...but we never gave ourselves credit for what we were doing right. ... every single person here does really nice things and I think it's just a conscious effort to focus on that as well."

One lecturer described the benefits of using this approach in a very positive light:

"...we're actually seeing benefits of what we're doing."

Other comments were:

"I set myself really small goals. I get a good sense of relief from that."

"I try and just get something done that's concrete and that I can see there, then I feel I haven't wasted the whole day."

"...having shorter rather than year-long goals."

4.2.1.3. ENGAGING IN PROBLEM-SOLVING BEHAVIOUR

Individual lecturers in all three Disciplines made reference to engaging in problem-solving behaviour. This type of strategy could, for example, include making a plan of action and following it. This strategy links closely with a strategy of preparing, upfront, for known perceived stressors by marshalling personal and other resources.

"I try to locate myself in time for example...but I'll say to myself right it's March, I know what happened last year...but we can get them through and by June if I ask them they'll light up and ..."

"...think I cope better with my work at work because I take it home..."

"...planning in advance. We try to do that..."

"...planning time better or make changes in goals..."

"...a conscious decision that you are now going to forget about it, and then set another goal..."

"I think you also use your personal resources. I use my own computer entirely for this job."

The overwhelming majority of respondents in a study conducted by Loate and Marais (1996) reported that planning for each day was a coping strategy they consciously employed.

4.2.1.4. GOAL SETTING AND PLANNING

Related to maintaining realistic self-expectations, and having short term rather than long term goals, is thought a very appropriate way of managing potential stress. Discipline C described this as follows;

"Some of us can recognise that as a sign of maturing ... but I know for me I've become a lot less idealistic and a lot more realistic in a way."

4.2.1.5. CREATING A SUPPORTIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

It is interesting to note that Discipline C had consciously and deliberately 'appointed' one of their staff members as their Discipline specific staff development facilitator. This strategy appeared to be working well, and the Discipline presented a number of effective coping strategies that were obviously enjoyed and appreciated by the all the lecturers in the Discipline. The Discipline described the concept as follows:

"...we have a policy, its called 'SUAP'. We account for each other's work, we're going to sing our praises, use each other's work, applaud each other and praise... Sing, Use, Applaud and Praise. ... We actually developed this very consciously..."

While lecturers in the other two Disciplines also referred to creating caring, supportive and rewarding working environments, Discipline C has 'formalised' the arrangement. O'Brein and Donnelly (1997) and Loate and Marais (1996) all identify changing the working environment directly and assertively as a problem-based coping mechanism. Discipline C was aware that they had consciously manipulated only the internal Discipline environment, as what was beyond the Discipline was often beyond their control. This ties in with the research conducted by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) who record that the use of problem-based coping mechanisms increased if a situation and/or event was appraised as changeable.

"...all these kinds of internal stuff has been promoted and enabled, whereas beyond what goes on here we have little control over,..."

"Make a formal decision to support each other"

"...so it's very much, don't want to say a team...but it is there."

"if we didn't have teamwork in this department, we would be kaput..."

All the above coping mechanisms presented by the lecturers are directed at managing or altering the individual/event interaction. This is achieved by either doing something personally to the 'self' or the source of the stress (the perceived stressor) through direct action, problem solving and /or conscious decision-making.

4.2.2. EMOTION-FOCUSED COPING MECHANISMS

Both types of coping mechanisms (i.e. problem-based and emotion-focused) are used, often simultaneously, to cope with perceived stressors. The emotion-focused coping mechanisms don't attempt to solve the problem as problem-based coping mechanisms do, but rather, they serve the purpose of reducing the impact of the perceived stressors. According to Folkman (1984) emotional-based coping mechanisms tend to be favoured in situations that are seen as unchangeable. The impact of the perceived stress on the individual is, therefore, the crucial aspect here. A number of emotion-focused strategies, identified in the literature consulted, featured in the three focus groups.

4.2.2.1. SOCIAL SUPPORT STRUCTURES

The researcher was struck by the amount of camaraderie voiced in all three focus groups. This generated a feeling that one of the emotion-focused coping strategies consciously employed, is that of creating and fostering a social support structure within the respective Disciplines. Lecturers in all three Disciplines commented on the supportive spirit they experienced within their peer group. There appeared to be many shared experiences and on numerous occasions the focus group participants laughed together or finished sentences for one another. Many of the reported coping strategies were prefaced with 'we ...'. This finding correlated well with findings reported on in the literature. Coping resources and options of a social nature, according to Folkman (1984), included an individual's social network and support system. From these, the individual can draw emotional support, tangible assistance and information. In an earlier section of the analysis, reference was made to the fact that the focus group participants listed their colleagues as their friends, 'buddies'

and social support. The fact that work colleagues are viewed as being a valuable support system can be viewed positively, and confirmed the findings of Sweeney, Nichols and Cormack (1993), who reported that a social support system could mitigate against the effects of stress. The fact that the lecturers in the School reported that they were concerned about their ability to form and maintain a social support structure outside of work is maybe not as problematic for coping as first reported. Lecturers appraised their social assets as an emotional-focused coping mechanism.

Other emotion-focused coping mechanisms reportedly used, included:

4.2.2.2. EXERCISE

Engaging in regular exercise (Swindler and Ross, 1993) as a coping strategy. Almost half of the respondents in a study conducted by Loate and Marais (1996) reported using regular exercise as a coping mechanism.

"...physical exercise definitely does help...."

"...do yoga..."

4.2.2.3. RELIGION AND HOBBIES

Each focus group raised ideas around involvement in a religion and/or actively engaging in hobbies (Swindler and Ross, 1993). The need to be creative was verbalised in all three Disciplines.

"For me it's doing something creative..."

"...my religious commitments..."

"... play music."

"...doing mundane home chores ...when I'm stressed...I find it therapeutic..."

In the study conducted by Loate and Marais (1996), 'leading a spiritual life' was cited as the second most important coping strategy employed by their research group. The same group also listed developing a hobby as a way of managing their stress. It is argued that Batswana female lecturers,

could be favourably compared with the predominantly female sample that was involved in this research.

4.2.2.4. SMOKING, EATING AND DRINKING

A few quick references were made to smoking, sleeping, eating and drinking as a way of ameliorating the effects of stress (Swindler and Ross, 1993). In a similar study (Loate and Marais, 1996) smoking and drinking were not referred to as coping strategies, as the research group came from a culture that disapproved of women using alcohol or smoking. It might be that this strategy of coping with stress, was also not reported by the focus group participants as similar gender and cultural norms relating to alcohol consumption and smoking played a role. Moreover the focus group participants were all lecturers in the field of Health Sciences, and would have insight into the health risks that these habits pose.

"...usually on Fridays, I actually sleep for almost fourteen hours..."

"...I end up shopping..."

"I find order in my environment, if I've packed right something, .. it definitely reduces my stress levels."

"...a couple of beers..."

"...watch TV..."

4.2.2.5. BLAMING SELF AND WISHFUL THINKING

Rationalisation, self blame and/or wishful thinking (Mitchell and Kampfe, 1990) were referred to by a few of the lecturers. This strategy also includes focusing on the positives and verbalising what is stressful. In research undertaken by Mitchell and Kampfe (1990) it was found that their subjects used self blame and wishful thinking, which were referred to as less adaptive strategies, far less frequently than problem-based coping mechanisms. Self-blame and wishful thinking are examples of emotion-focused ways of coping that are generally employed in situations that individuals perceive as unchangeable. The reason for these coping mechanisms being used so infrequently

could imply that the focus group participants still appraised potential stressors as changeable and problem-based coping mechanisms as being able to be accomplished and worth the effort.

"...released quite a lot of stress just by talking about what I've done and what worries me..."

"I like to ignore it..." (*An example of wishful thinking*)

"I fantasise..."

"...helps to dream..."

4.2.2.6. RATIONALISATION AND SEEKING SECONDARY CONTROL

As the focus groups did not set out to focus on specific stressors and how these were dealt with, the focus groups failed to raise two of the emotion-focused coping mechanisms identified by Folkman (1984). No mention was made of devaluing the stakes at risk (e.g. "It didn't matter anyway") or engaging in positive comparisons (e.g. "It could have been a lot worse")

Another emotion-focused coping strategy identified in the literature, namely seeking secondary control (Folkman, 1984) was also not presented as a coping strategy. Folkman (1984) described this as seeking vicarious control, achieved by associating with powerful others. The researcher believes this is a strategy that might in fact be used, but is possibly not the kind of behaviour that would be willingly presented in a group format because of the connotations attached to admitting employing this type of strategy.

4.2.3. THE VERY PERSONAL NATURE OF COPING

One lecturer in Discipline C noted astutely that how an individual copes is a very personal thing. This fact was borne out very strongly in the literature where the nature of stressors and coping was described as the belief of the individual, *per se*, concerning the extent to which the event and/or situation is appraised as potentially harmful and whether the individual, *per se*, believes they have the ability to cope with the stressor. Implicit in coping was how the individual would decide to cope, which coping mechanisms they would employ, and whether the coping strategies employed would change and evolve in the continued interaction between the individual and her environment.

Folkman (1984) recorded that the perception of an event was influenced by the situation and environment the event takes place in, as well as the individual's unique characteristics.

"...our own identities have a lot to do with how we cope with stress."

These personal factors were, however, identified as being a potential stressor in their own right, as often the individual had to make changes to themselves that they didn't like or agree with, in order to cope.

"...you have to become someone else and that was a big hassle....have to be somebody I don't like almost, and that kills me."

4.2.4. IN CONCLUSION

The researcher was left with a very positive sense of how the lecturers were coping with the stressors they encountered. The lecturers continue to engage daily in their roles and tasks, and look to their colleagues for much support, encouragement and validation.

Fourie (1999:288) concluded her article on the implications for academic staff of institutional transformation by noting that academics will: "...have to face and cope with the challenges posed by transformation...". She continued by citing Charles Darwin: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives nor the most intelligent but rather the one most responsive to change."

One lecturer in a focus group echoed this sentiment most succinctly:

"If you're weak you can't survive and weakness means that you're just human, so that it literally means you're not allowed to be sad, you're not allowed to feel like you can't do ... you must be an extremely confident being with all the skills in the world to do this job and it's super human basically, you know what I mean."

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1. SUMMARY

Work is at the core of life for most people. It is estimated that any one individual will spend about 40% of their life in the worker role. While the role of an academic has not traditionally been considered one that conjures up visions of 'stress', this appears to be rapidly changing. A number of authors (Mills, 1986; Benjamin, 1987; Loate and Marais, 1996; Edworthy, 2000) attested to the fact that the lives of academics are steadily becoming more stressful. According to the Transactional Model of Stress (Folkman, 1984) used in this research, stress is the result of exposure to an event or situation that an individual subjectively appraises as a threat and something they feel they do not have the resources to deal with. This potentially harmful or threatening event or situation is known as a stressor. Stressors for an individual vary over time, and two individuals might not perceive a certain event or situation as a stressor in the same way either. While a certain amount of stress must be viewed as beneficial and motivating, once an individual appraises the event or situation as outside their coping ability, it is viewed as potentially harmful and stress develops. Stress poses a threat to an individual's physical and mental well-being. According to Mills (1986) and Edworthy (2000), stress can lead to a decreased ability of a lecturer to perform at their best, and this in turn has serious implications for the effective functioning of our tertiary institutions. Lecturers then experience little job satisfaction and staff morale might plummet. Moreover, if academics constantly feel 'stressed', they are more likely to lose time at work because of illness, and stress lies behind many life-threatening illnesses. (e.g. cancer, high blood pressure)

The lecturers included in the study perceived a number of stressors in their lives as academics. The study did not seek to quantify this stress and because of a relatively small sample number, failed to adequately highlight significant differences in the three Disciplines within the School. The

researcher is, however, mindful of the fact that differences amongst the three Disciplines might not actually be found at all, no matter how large the sample. A large study reported in *Research in Higher Education*, by Gmelch *et al.* (1984;1986), found that more similarities than differences existed amongst disciplinary groupings. The stressors that the focus group participants highlighted were not essentially unique to their situation or institution, but rather, have permeated all institutions of higher learning in the country. From literature available about the state of tertiary education in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, it is clear that South Africa is not unique in this sense. Further, the coping strategies employed by the lecturers appear to come from a broad range of possibilities and lecturers appear to be proactive in this sense.

The stressors that were identified include the rapidly ever-changing academic world and organisational issues such as the image of the institution, lecturing *per se*, curriculum transformation and leadership issues within the institution. Further stressors were increased workloads related to the training of health professionals and the need to stay abreast of change. Role conflicts and role ambiguity also featured as potential stressors. An interesting aspect that arose during the course of the focus groups was the role of male lecturers in a traditionally female dominated professional milieu. Role conflicts and ambiguity meant that the lecturers concerned felt ill-equipped to deal with the lecturing and research demands made on them and that staff morale was low. Research by Mitchell (1985) reported that health professional academics tend to view themselves primarily as professional and teachers rather than as researchers and scholars, and this was also found to be the case in this research. A number of day to day issues were also highlighted as stressors. The day to day frustrations and irritations served as stressors when they accumulated in already overloaded days. Personal issues related to who the lecturers were, and their personal aspirations and needs were also targeted as being innately stressful. The lecturers had a certain amount of insight into this aspect, but this did not lessen the impact these personal characteristics had for being potential stressful. Over-arching issues relating to feeling powerless over demands being made and a certain degree of perceived indifference on the part of management to the specific needs of the Disciplines were also aired.

If coping is viewed (Folkman, 1984) as any effort made to master, reduce and tolerate stressors, irrespective of the success of that coping, then it can be argued that the lecturers had access to,

and knowledge of a wide range of coping strategies. While the lecturers voiced their belief that they were stressed, and this belief was very real, the researcher was left feeling that the lecturers concerned were equipped to cope adequately at the time. The lecturers had insight into the stressor/stress process and this would certainly stand them in good stead when coping was required coping. Each focus group highlighted steps that the respective Disciplines and individuals had taken in order to either manage the source of the stress, or lessen the distress the individual was feeling. One of the Disciplines included in the study had proactively appointed a co-ordinator for staff development and this was obviously paying dividends. The Discipline, while acknowledging the effects of stress, had consciously put certain measures in place to provide the staff with coping mechanisms.

Perusal of the literature helped identify certain steps that could be taken to ameliorate the stressor – stress link, and a few of the options available to lecturers in the School will be highlighted. The recommendations are by no means a complete and definitive list of options available. In most cases, the recommendations listed were presented as possible options by the focus group participants.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2.1. TRAINING IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Change was the first, and most pressing stressor identified by the research sample. Walsh (1999) wrote that a number of challenges face academics today. She noted that change is now a fact of life. She concluded that staff need, therefore, to learn to cope with change and the speed of responsiveness required. In order to ensure that the future practitioners being trained in the Disciplines are adequately prepared, the lecturers need to ensure that our students can cope with the stress created by change. The graduates of tomorrow also need to be able to cope with the speed with which ideas, people and culture now move in a global world. They need to be self-motivated, life-long learners, able to cope with an ever-changing world by being enterprising and demonstrating initiative. Change management skills need to be taught and fostered in our graduates and the lecturers themselves.

5.2.2. STRESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING

In order to cope with our rapidly changing world as academics, lecturers are going to need assistance in increasing and developing the repertoire of coping mechanisms at their disposal. It is estimated that six and a half coping strategies are employed per perceived stressor, and the more coping strategies individuals have at their disposal, the better they are able to cope and function effectively. Walsh (1999) recorded the provision of stress management courses as a possible option here. This has implications for the individual lecturers involved in the research, as they are in some cases stress management practitioners themselves. The lecturers should therefore ensure that colleagues are adequately prepared for the resultant stress. It is also important that the students are assisted in attaining effective stress management techniques. Benjamin (1987;3) noted that: "Those who help students deal effectively with stress are performing a service of lasting value, as healthy stress management is one of the most important life-long learning skills that an individual may acquire".

5.2.3. ADDING TO 'TEACHING and RESEARCH SKILLS'

During the focus groups, a number of references were made to feeling ill-equipped to cope with the demands made on lecturers to be scholars and with the changing and diverse student body. Walsh (1999) noted that demands for more experiential learning, multiculturalism, self-directed learning, peer collaboration and research, amongst other changes, highlighted the need for adding to teaching and research skills. This, the researcher believes, should be the responsibility of all concerned, namely: the lecturing staff themselves, the Disciplines, Faculty and University.

5.2.4. CREATING SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Sweeney, Nichols and Cornack (1993) recorded that social support can lessen the effects of stress. In this study, social interaction amongst colleagues was seen as an important source of support.

The Department of Health (2001), in a service to the greater working community during Mental Health Awareness Month, highlighted the following suggestions for creating better work environments: Individuals should have sufficient time and space within which to manage their workloads. Workloads should also be distributed wisely and fairly. The article highlighted the fact that a heavy workload was one of the major sources of work stress. Carrying a heavy load also meant that the individual might not be able to produce the quality of work they might aspire too, leading to further stress. Clear job descriptions should be provided so as to limit any role ambiguity. The Department of Health article further highlighted the need to foster trust relationships at work so that individuals trusted one another to do their best.

Rewarding effort in ways other than purely financial should be investigated to ensure greater job satisfaction (Walsh, 1999; Sommer, 1999). Kearns and Lipsedge (2000) cited the work of Herzberg *et al.*, who listed a number of factors (motivators) thought to stimulate and encourage workers, thereby promoting greater job satisfaction. The factors are listed here as the researcher sees them as assisting in the creation of a supportive working environment. The factors are providing a sense of achievement and recognition, opportunity for taking on greater responsibility, and providing opportunity for advancement and personal growth.

Success at work should also be made public and shared, as success breeds further success. The system of staff development, as established and functioning in Discipline C, could possibly serve as a blueprint for other Disciplines in the School. "If those of us who are called to be educators in these times of great ferment and change can support one another in our efforts to cultivate our own inner resources, then we can create healthy learning environments" (Walsh, 1999:23).

5.2.5. ENSURING STRONG MANAGEMENT

The Department of Health (2001) highlighted the need for setting a future direction for any business venture. This sense of direction for the institution was recorded in the article as a 'gift from the top'. Strong management is, the researcher believes, related to all levels, namely, the Discipline, School, Faculty, University and Departments of Education and Health. Related to this

aspect is the need for all stakeholders to be heard and included. Inclusion, information and fostering a sense of belonging need to be encouraged.

Cotton (1995) listed a number of suggestions for managers to help curb the current levels of stress in teachers. The list included encouraging a team approach, and using problem-solving models to resolve issues.

5.2.6. A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF SELF

Sweeney, Nichols and Cormack (1993) recommended a number of stress management techniques for individuals that focused on the individual having insight into their own strengths and weaknesses as far as coping was concerned. While the researcher acknowledges that the focus group participants appeared to have good insight, the ability to regularly evaluate their own stress/coping interaction will further enhance their ability to limit the effects of stress. Edworthy (2000) also recorded the ability to recognise the signs of stress as an essential feature of containing spiralling stress reactions.

5.3. IN CONCLUSION

Three main themes appear to emerge at this point. First, occupational stress, as experienced by this group of lecturers, is detrimental to productivity, performance standards and levels of job satisfaction. Secondly, increased levels of stress can adversely affect the health of the individual. Thirdly, the lecturers included in the study are training future health professionals and colleagues, and therefore act as role models. Mitchell and Kampfe(1990:543) reported that a role model:"... is often the most influential factor in a student's success and enthusiasm for the profession". As lecturers in three of the Health Science Disciplines, the lecturers are ever mindful of their responsibilities as role models for a new generation of Health Professionals. The lecturers need to ensure that this new generation has the necessary skills and attitudes to cope with, and learn in a rapidly changing world.

Due to the small sample size used in this study, and the natural limits imposed by the research questions asked, wide ranging generalisations should be avoided. The research project has, however, served to highlight the particular stressors experienced and coping strategies employed by a group of Health Science Academics in a particular institution. These stressors mirrored those reported on in the literature, and, if not contained, could have serious implications for the future effective functioning of the School. Pervasive and unrelenting stress could result in eventual burnout of the individuals concerned.

Further research in this field could easily build on the initial research material gathered. By broadening the subject base to include a number of other institutions in the country, or by including all the Schools within the Faculty of Health Science at this particular institution, a larger subject group would be obtained. A larger subject group brings with it opportunity to further investigate age, gender and Discipline differences and similarities. The current subject group was not large enough to make any meaningful comparison between Disciplines, although this is now considered insignificant. In discussion with other Disciplines within the Faculty of Health Science, it appeared as if the physiological measurement of stress reactions could assist in the quantification and verification of 'degrees' of stress experienced and may prove a valuable bench marking exercise.

"It seems very likely that occupational stress will continue to present a major threat to the financial health and efficiency of (*Higher Education*). Hopefully we will witness (*higher education*) becoming more proactive. Nevertheless, we owe it to ourselves to ensure that our jobs do not damage our health..." (Edworthy, 2000:90).

CHAPTER 6

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



University of
Durban-Westville

PRIVATE BAG X54001 DURBAN
4000 SOUTH AFRICA
TELEGRAMS: 'UDWEST'
TELEX: 6-23228 SA
FAX: (031)204-4383
☎ (031)204-4111

RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION



TEL: (031)204 5008
FAX: (031)204 4883



ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO BE ADDRESSED
TO: THE HEAD - RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

19 JUNE 2001

**MS. C HOLLAND
UND C/O THERAPEUTIC AND REHABILITATIVE SCIENCES**

Dear Ms. Holland

ETHICAL CLEARANCE: NUMBER 01087B

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

"A study to identify stressor perceived by Health Science lecturing staff within a school at a South African University."

Thank you

Yours faithfully

Nelson Moodley

**NELSON MOODLEY
HEAD: RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION**

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS

cc. Director of School
cc. Supervisor

APPENDIX 2
STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, agree to participate in the research project entitled "**A study to Identify Stressors Perceived by Health Science Lecturing Staff within a School at a South African University**" that is being conducted by Cathy Holland.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to hold a group interview to find out about stressors experienced by lecturing staff in the discipline. We will discuss our general ideas about what we perceive as stressful and how we cope with this stress.

I understand that the study involves a focus group interview that will last about an hour and a half, and that will be audiotaped.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that if I wish I may decide before the focus group not to participate in the group. I do not need to give any reason or explanation for not wanting to participate, and my non-participation will not effect my relationship with the researcher or any other individual or body.

I understand that because of the study I may disclose information that I consider private and disclosed for the purposes of the group only. To prevent violations of my own or others' privacy, I am asked not to talk about any of my own or others' private experiences that I would consider too personal or revealing.

I also understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group by not disclosing any personal information that they share during our discussion.

I understand that all the information I give will be kept confidential, and that the names of all the people in the study will be kept confidential.

I understand that I may not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study, but that my participation may benefit others in the future.

The researcher has offered to answer any questions I may have about the study and what I am expected to do.

I have read and understand this information and I agree to take part in the study.

Signature

Date

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at home on Tel: 262 1355 or 082 584 4345. Thank you.

APPENDIX 3
BIOGRAPHICAL DATA QUESTIONNAIRE

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please would you complete this questionnaire. It should only take you about 2 minutes! I need the information for my study entitled "A study to Identify Stressors Perceived by Health Science Lecturing Staff within a School at a South African University" Thank you. Cathy Holland.

1. Position held: (Please tick appropriate box)

Associate Lecturer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lecturer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Senior Lecturer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Associate Professor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Full Professor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (Please specify): _____

2. Nature of Appointment: (Please tick appropriate box)

Joint Appointment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pure University Appointment	<input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Permanent versus Contract Appointment: (Please tick appropriate box)

Permanent appointment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contract Appointment	<input type="checkbox"/>
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4. Highest Educational Qualification Obtained to Date: (Please tick appropriate box)

National Diploma	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bachelors Degree/Honours	<input type="checkbox"/>
Masters Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Doctorate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please specify): _____			

5. Current Employment Period with University: (Please tick appropriate box)

1 – 2 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	3 – 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	5 – 10 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 – 15 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	15 – 20 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	20 years +	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Discipline: (Please tick appropriate box)

Occupational Therapist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Physiotherapist	<input type="checkbox"/>	S.& H. Therapist	<input type="checkbox"/>
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7. Gender: (Please tick appropriate box)

Female	<input type="checkbox"/>	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
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8. Age: (Please tick appropriate box)

20 - 29 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	30 – 39 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	40 – 49 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
50 – 59 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	60 years +	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>