THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRESS MANAGEMENT MODEL FOR STAFF AT THE NATIONAL HEALTH LABORATORY SERVICES (NHLS)

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters Degree in Business Administration at the Port Elizabeth Technikon.

PROMOTER: A WERNER

DECLARATION

This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God for giving me the ability and talent to engage in this kind of study and complete it successfully. I also want to express my gratitude to the following people for their assistance and support during the compilation of this study:

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Bandla, and children Avuyile and Piwe.

ABSTRACT

The research problem addressed in this study, was to identify strategies that could be employed to reduce stress related problems in the workplace. As the business environment is increasingly subjected to fast changing forces which include increased competition, the pressure for quality and advanced technology, innovation, and an increase in the pace of doing business, the demands on employees have grown equally dramatically.

It is therefore essential to develop strategies for managing stress to give employees the required additional energy to handle particularly difficult and stressful work situations. It is important that organisations provide the assistance and support on the issue of stress as part of their proactive approach to managing employee health and safety, by drawing up contingency plans, and to have the necessary infrastructure to deal with such problems.

This study investigates the strategies that can be implemented in organisations to reduce stressful situations affecting employees. The information gleaned from the literature and empirical studies enabled the development of a model for stress management in the workplace.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The concept of stress in the workplace needs to be given attention as many people spend most of their time at work rather than at home. The need for education and training about stress in the workplace is more important now than ever before. According to Peiffer (1996: 17), the work environment is a veritable breeding ground for stress. Wherever several people get together on a regular basis, tension becomes a possibility. Personalities may clash and roles within a group may be unclear and consequently influence the effectiveness of the group as a whole, and rivalries may develop. It is therefore essential for each employee to learn how to deal with stress in a positive way in order to ensure good health, general well being, and to maintain a good working relationship amongst colleagues.

According to Buelens, Kreitner & Kinicki (2002: 476), the biggest contributor to work stress arises from fundamental changes that are made in organisations. As a result of increased competition, employees are expected to deliver a better quality and a greater quantity of work in less time, with fewer resources. Technological advancements contribute by making it harder for employees to completely disconnect from the office. Pagers, fax machines, emails, and cellular phones make it easy to disrupt a person's free time while at home or on holidays. Therefore, the dynamics of modern life make it difficult to balance the demands of work and home. Research demonstrates that work related stress spills over into one's personal life and vice versa.

Schultz, Bagraim, Potgieter, Viedge, and Werner (2003: 210) mention that some occupations are more stressful than others. For example in South Africa, police officers experience extremely high levels of stress due to the escalating incidence of crime and violence, and the lack of organisational support mechanisms (Schultz et al; 2003: 211). They therefore present their distress in symptoms such as: absenteeism and a lack of interest in meeting their job requirements. The researcher, a previous employee at the NHLS felt that there is a need to perform a study on employee related stress, and develop a stress management model for the employees in the workplace. In this chapter the main research problem, sub-problems, delimitation of the research, definition of main concepts and research methodology are presented.

1.2. THE MAIN PROBLEM

As the world around us, especially the world of work and business has become increasingly subjected to fast changing forces such as increased competition, pressure for quality, innovation, and an increase in the pace of doing business, the demands on employees have grown equally dramatically. This creates stress within employees (Erasmus, van Wyk, & Schenk, 2000: 603). According to Hughes (1983: 78), stress involves individuality and subjectivity. What one person finds stressful might not be stressful to another person at all.

Renaud (1997: 168) found that "stress is at the same time, the aggravation and the way in which we react to it, and that to cope with stress, we need to control ourselves during moments of emotion". Viljoen, van Staden, van DeVenter & Grive (1987: 151) state that stress involves behavioural as well as physiological and psychological factors, and may even occur without awareness of discomfort. It is not always possible to discover the origins of a stress experience. The work environment is a major source of stress for many people, because most people work at jobs and under conditions which they would not have chosen if given a choice.

Burns (188: 10) view stress as a natural and essential part of living and growing which we can not avoid even if we wanted to, and that moderate levels of stress and stimulation are actually necessary for healthy functioning. Dessler (1997: 640) identified the two main sources of job related stress as environmental and personal, and that no two people react to the same job in the very same way, since personal factors also influence stress. Job stress has serious consequences for both the employee and the organisation. Yet, stress is not necessarily dysfunctional, as some people are more productive under stress.

The above discussion leads to the following problem, which will be addressed in this research:

How can the negative effects of work-related stress be managed by staff at the Port Elizabeth National Health Laboratory Services?

1.3. SUB-PROBLEMS

In order to develop a research strategy to deal with and solve the main problem, the following sub-problems were identified:

(a) What does the literature reveal with respect to the causes, consequences and management of work-related stress in the workplace?

(b) What are the causes and consequences of stress experienced by staff at the PE NHLS Laboratory, and what stress management strategies do they employ?

(c) How can the management at the PE NHLS improve the work environment to reduce the negative effect of stress levels experienced by their employees?

1.4. DELIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

1.4.1. The size of the organisation

The NHLS Laboratory PE branch employs less than 80 employees. The researcher was able to distribute questionnaires to the majority of the staff members.

1.4.2. Geographical delimitation

The empirical component of this study was limited to the NHLS Laboratory in Port Elizabeth.

1.4.3. Stress management

This research will be limited to examining the meaning of stress, causes, consequences and stress management techniques.

1.4.4. Subject evaluation

The field of stress management can be divided into the following:
(a) Model of occupational stress
(b) Model of burnout
(c) Stress coping model
(d) Stress management strategy

1.4.5. Basis for the models

It was intended in this study to develop an integrated model of occupational stress, burnout, and the stress coping process from the current literature.

1.5.   DEFINITION OF SELECTED CONCEPTS

1.5.1. Stress

According to Brewer (1995: 3), stress is the way we react physically and emotionally to change. Like change, stress can either be positive or negative. In its positive aspect, stress helps us concentrate, focus, and perform, and can often help us reach peak efficiency. Stress becomes negative when a person stays geared up and does not or can not relax after meeting the challenge. Erasmus, Van Wyk, and Schenk (2000: 603) define stress as the arousal of mind and body in response to an environmental demand (the stressors).

1.5.2. Stressors

According to Buelens et al (2002: 478), the most common examples of stressors are job demands, work overload, role conflict, role ambiguity, everyday hassles, perceived control over events occurring in the work environment, and job characteristics. The outcome can be: psychological, or attitudinal leading to job satisfaction or depression; behavioural, leading to absenteeism or accidents; and cognitive, leading to poor decision making or forgetfulness.

1.5.3. Model of occupational stress

The occupational stress model shows that the four major types of stressors: individual, group, organisational and extraorganisational   stressors lead to perceived stress, which, in turn, produces a variety of outcomes. The model also specifies several individual differences that moderate the stressor-stress-

outcome relationship as: age, sex, diet, personality traits, and heredity (Buelens et al, 2002: 477).

1.5.4. Model of burnout

According to Gerber, Nel, and Van Dyk (1998:492) burnout is a response to chronic emotional stress with three components:

a) Emotional and / or physical exhaustion,
b) Lowered job productivity,
c) Over-depersonalisation.

Dessler (1997: 642) refer to burnout as the total depletion of physical and mental resources caused by excessive striving to reach an unrealistic work-related goal. Burnout is often the result of too much job stress, especially when that stress is combined with preoccupation with attaining unattainable work-related goals. According to Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy (1998: 506) burnout is a stress syndrome characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment and can lead to serious negative consequences for the individual and for the organisation.

1.5.5. Stress management strategy

Schultz et al (2003: 217) divide the strategies of managing work related stress into individual and organisational stress management strategies. Individual stress management strategies include:

- Clarification of role expectations.
- Adopting cognitive restructuring and constructive self-talk.
- Time management and planning.
- Coping with stress through emotion-focused coping or problem-focused coping.

- Lifestyle management.

Organisational stress management strategies include:

- Supportive organisational strategies, where employers provide support to employees.
- Job design.
- Wellness programmes.

1.6. ASSUMPTIONS

It was assumed that even though all employees in our sample worked under the same conditions, they responded differently to similar situations. It was also assumed that the stress management techniques explained by this research, were able to help improve the employees' stress management strategies.

1.7. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

According to Erasmus et al (2000: 603) the topic of work-related stress has been receiving increasing attention in the area of occupational health over the last three decades. As the world around us, and especially the world of work and business has become increasingly subjected to fast changing forces such as increased competition, the pressure for quality, innovation, and an increase in the pace of doing business, the demands on employees have grown equally dramatically. This creates stress within employees. Apart from the stress that arises from the work situation, other sources of stress may relate to personal factors such as relationships with others and the use of free time.

It is therefore essential to develop ways of managing stress, as all human beings require additional energy as soon as they have to face up to a particularly difficult and stressful situation at work. It is important that organisations provide the necessary assistance and support on the issue of stress as part of the proactive approach to managing employee health and safety at work. Organisations need to draw up contingency plans, and have the necessary infrastructure to deal with any emergencies (Erasmus et al, 2000: 606). According to Buelens et al (2002: 476), "the biggest contributor to work related stress arises from the fundamental changes that are implemented in organisations".

Buelens et al (2002: 479) further mention that, "it is important to manage the individual level stressor of job security as it is associated with increased job satisfaction, organisation commitment, and performance". Organisations need to develop stress reduction techniques to help employees pace themselves more realistically and achieve better balance in their lives.

1.8.RESEARCH DESIGN

In this section, the broad methodology that was followed in the research study is described.

1.8.1.Research methodology

The following procedure was adopted to solve the main sub-problems:

1.8.1.1.Literature survey

The different techniques that organisations employed to reduce stress at work were identified from the literature. The literature study presented a definition of stress, the types, causes, and consequences of stress and stress coping

techniques. Based on the literature study, a model was developed for the management of occupational stress.

1.8.1.2. Empirical study

The empirical study consisted of:

(a) Mail survey

A mail survey was conducted among all employees, including managers and supervisors in the organisation.

(b) Measuring instrument

The researcher developed a comprehensive questionnaire for this research project to determine the stress affecting all employees in the organisation. The questionnaire covered the causes of stress, consequences and coping techniques.

(c) Sample

The researcher used the National Health Laboratory Services- Port Elizabeth main branch staff as a sample. This organisation has employed less than 70 employees in this branch. The researcher obtained 70 percent contribution from the employees.

(d) Statistical analysis of data

The statistical procedures to be used in interpreting and analysing the data was determined in consultation with the promoter at the time the questionnaire was drawn up.

1.8.1.3. Integration of the study

The results of the literature survey and the empirical research were integrated to develop recommendations for the management of stress at the PE branch of NHLS.

1.9. ORGANISATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

In chapter one the main and sub-problems of the research were identified. The important definitions were mentioned and the research design was outlined. In the next chapter, theory related to the main problem will be discussed. The discussion will cover the definition of stress, and then the causes and consequences of stress.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE STUDY: THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

2.1. INTRODUCTION

In chapter one the main problem and sub-problems of this research paper were identified. The main problem of this study is to find ways of managing the negative effects of work-related stress for the employees at the National Health Laboratory Services Port Elizabeth main branch. This chapter provides an overview of what stress is, the causes and the consequences of stress.

2.2. DEFINITION AND TYPES OF STRESS

2.2.1. Definition of stress

According to Schultz et al (2003: 207), stress is a state that occurs in a person, when the perceived demands facing an individual exceed that person's ability to deal with those demands. Stress can be anything that upsets our ability to maintain critical variables, which can either be social, psychological, spiritual or biological in nature, within acceptable limits (Schomer, 2001: 7). Job-related stress is an uncommon feeling experienced by an individual who is required to change a desired behaviour as a result of opportunities, constraints or demands related to important work objectives. It is perceived as a weakness or vulnerability or an inability to handle pressure at work (Brewer, 1995: 18).

Like Schomer (2001: 7), Powell et al (1990: 3) view stress as a broad class of problems differentiated from other problem areas, as it deals with any demands which tax the system, which may be a physiological system, a social system, or psychological system and the response of that system. This theory also corresponds with that of Buelens' et al (2002: 477) who view stress as an

adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics and / or psychological process that is a consequence of any external action, situation or event that places special physical and / or psychological demands upon a person.

Considering the above definitions, it can be concluded that stress is a condition which develops when the demands made on people exceed their adaptive or coping abilities. These demands can be physical, social, or psychological demands.

2.2.2. Positive and negative stress

Brewer (1995: 3) and Schafer (2000: 6), agree that stress can also be defined as the way a person reacts physically and emotionally to change. Like change, stress can be either positive or negative. Schafer (2000: 11) further explain that excessive chronic arousal can seriously threaten health, productivity, satisfaction and relationships. Moderate, occasional elevations of anxiety can help prepare one for meetings, difficult conferences, and complex business negotiations. Stress can therefore have both negative and positive implications.

➢ **Positive stress**

In its positive aspect, stress may help a person concentrate, focus and perform, and can often help a person to reach peak efficiency. Many people , in fact work better when under pressure. When the challenge has been met, they take time to relax and enjoy their achievements. This relaxation response then allows them to build up physical and emotional reserves to meet the next challenge (Brewer, 1995: 3).

➢ **Negative stress**

Stress becomes negative when a person stays geared up and does not or can not relax after meeting a challenge. When stress becomes a constant, ongoing cycle, health and well-being may suffer. Negative stress has been linked with

many physical ailments - from tension headaches to heart attacks. According to Powell et al (1990: 19), there are two types of stress, namely: eustress and distress.

Eustress refers to the level of stress which motivates a person to perform well, solve problems, be creative, and grow in confidence. Eustress can be experienced when a person's perceived ability to cope outweighs his or her perceived demands (Looker & Gregson, 1997: 27). The eustress situation gives rise to a feeling of confidence, of being in control and being able to tackle and handle tasks, challenges and demands. The stress response is activated by just the right amount to provide the alertness with the mental and physical performance required to be productive and creative.

Distress is where a person's performance deteriorates, the adaptive bodily functioning becomes disrupted, the response, whether physiological, cognitive, emotional, or behavioural becomes maladaptive. According to Looker & Gregson (1997: 26), distress may also arise from having too few demands to stimulate a person, resulting in boredom and frustration. In this case the perceived ability to cope outweighs the demands. Having too little to do or too few demanding tasks can be just as distressful as having too much to do or tackling complex jobs. It is therefore evident that eustress is regarded as positive stress and distress as negative stress.

2.2.3. Stress and personality

According to Schultz et al (2003: 214), a person's reaction to stress can be categorised into two basic types- distress prone and distress resistant. Distress resistant personalities tend to experience positive moods and feelings in most situations, while distress prone personalities tend to experience life situations as negative.

Hatvany (1996: 44) identified characteristics of a **type A** personality person as follows:

➢ Excessive competitiveness and search for advancement and achievement.
➢ Continual drive towards imprecise goals.
➢ Pre-occupation with deadlines.
➢ Abhorrence of delays and postponements.
➢ Mental alertness which tips over easily into aggression.
➢ Constant impatience or hurry sickness.
➢ Feelings of guilt when relaxing.

Type B personality traits include:

➢ Relaxed and thoughtful appearance.
➢ Plenty of interest outside work.
➢ Tends to walk slowly or amble.
➢ Patient and takes time to make a decision.

Type A personality is associated with some serious negative consequences that include time-related factors, emotional tension, less life and job satisfaction, less fun and more health problems. **Type B** on the other hand tends to be ambitious and achievement-oriented and approaches life in a less competitive and less time-oriented way. Schultz et al (2003: 216) further identified a **type C** personality pattern, which is characterised by peak performance under pressure. Type C personality traits are a combination of the most effective aspects of type A and type B personalities. Instead of feeling exhausted after an effort, a type A employee feels energised and committed. Schlebusch (1998: 63) expands on this theory by stating that type C personality comprises a behavioural pattern of excessive passivity, co-operativeness and emotional non-expression. Ideally, a person should strive to modify the negative aspects of his or her behaviour

pattern to improve and increase his or her level of achievements in a healthy and beneficial manner.

It therefore seems that not all people experience the same amount of stress, even when they are subjected to the same stressors, but that personality is a moderating factor in the stress process.

2.3. CAUSES OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

Wherever several people get together on a regular basis, tension becomes a possibility. Personalities can clash and roles within a group can be unclear and consequently adversely influence the effectiveness of the group as a whole (Peiffer, 1996: 6). The common causes of work-related stress will be discussed under four major types; namely: individual-level stressors, group-level stressors, organisational stressors, and extra-organisational stressors.

2.3.1. Individual level stressors

According to Buelens et al (2002: 478), individual-level stressors are directly associated with a person's work responsibility. They may be caused by:

➢ **An increase in job demands.**
➢ **Role conflict.** Role conflict occurs when two conflicting demands compete with one another and the employee is unable to fulfil both sets of expectations. For an example, having to work on Saturday when your religion requires you in church (Schultz et al, 2003: 210).
➢ **Role ambiguity.** Role ambiguity refers to unclear or confusing expectations about job duties, demands put upon an employee by different people-colleagues and customers, level of authority, social expectations and related job factors.

- ➢ **Perceived environmental control.** According to Buelens (2002: 480), if the organisation is in a negative economic situation or there is a perceived probability that negative changes will occur over the next three years, employees experience feelings of low self esteem. The insecurities may lead to higher job exhaustion and higher absence rates later on.

- ➢ **Interpersonal demands.** The most stressful factor for many employees remains the interpersonal demands required to maintain effective customer and collegial relationships. These interactional factors include lack of sensitivity and critical work attitudes of colleagues, autocratic leader behaviour, team pressure to conform and diversity issues (Schultz et al, 2003: 208).

- ➢ **Work overload or underload.** Stress can occur from under or overstimulation. Good performers are often loaded with additional responsibilities due to their competence. At a certain point, the weight and demands of the task render them incapable of performing actively. On the other hand, workers may feel that their work is boring, their skills are under-utilised and they are forced to stretch their jobs into an eight hour period. Over a period of time they fail to respond to minor maintenance tasks and become job dissatisfied, alienated or depressed (Schultz et al, 2003: 210).

- ➢ **Monotony.** There may be lack of variety in occupation or wearisome uniformity.

- ➢ **Lack of recognition and feedback from management** (Brewer, 1995: 13).

2.3.2. Group-level stressors

Group-level stressors are caused by group dynamics and managerial behaviour (Buelens et al, 2002: 480). According to Bergh and Theron (2003: 13), **group dynamics** refer to the psychological dynamic phenomena in groups - the psychological influences that the group has on members, and members on each other and the group. The three common explanations for group dynamics are:

- People bring **unfulfilled family needs** into the group. For an example, if one was not loved enough by his or her mother, and now, without realising it, expect the group to give him or her that love that was missed out.
- Sometimes people have **unresolved and unconscious conflicts** that they bring into the group. A person raised by a strict parent may unconsciously get angry quickly with the group leader.
- One may also enter into **competition and power struggles** with team members as he or she consciously associate them with his or her parents or brothers/sisters.

Group dynamics may present itself in a form of groupthink. Groupthink can be defined as a situation where group members share similar thinking patterns that they neglect considering creative alternatives. According to Buelens et al (2002: 333), the symptoms of groupthink lead to defective decision-making. These symptoms may include the following:

- Invulnerability: An illusion that breeds excessive optimism and risk taking.
- Inherent morality: A belief that encourages the group to ignore ethical implications.
- Rationalisation: Protecting pet assumptions.
- Steriotyped views of opposition: Causing the group to underestimate opponents.
- Self-censorship: Stifling critical debate.
- Peer pressure: Questioning loyalty of dissenters.
- Mindguards: Self-appointed protectors against adverse information.

The decision-making defects may include the following:

- Few alternatives.
- No re-examination of preferred alternatives.
- No re-examination of rejected alternatives.

➢ Rejection of expert opinions.

➢ Selective bias of new information.

➢ No contingency plans.

According to Buelens et al (2002:480), managers create stress for employees by:

➢ Exhibiting inconsistent behaviour.

➢ Failing to provide support.

➢ Showing lack of concern.

➢ Providing inadequate direction.

➢ Creating a high-productivity environment.

➢ Focusing on negatives while ignoring good performance.

2.3.3. Organisational stressors

These include issues of culture, structure, technology and introduction of change in work conditions (Buelens et al, 2002: 480). Organisational culture, for instance, a high-pressure environment that places chronic work demands on employees fuels the stress response. Many South African organisations still have mechanistic and bureaucratic structures. This inhibits employee flexibility, risk taking and career development, causing frustrations (Schultz et al, 2003: 208). Other job design factors such as severe time constraints, lack of clear objectives, complex problems, lack of intellectual demands, repetitive routine work, unpopular decision making, and lack of creative opportunity are possible organisational stressors. Poor physical working conditions such as noise, lighting problems, temperature and workstation design also have a negative effect on the stress levels of employees.

The increased use of technology is another source of organisational stress (Buelens et al, 2002: 480). Some people are technophobic and therefore anxious

and fearful about using computer related technology. On the flip side, other people are so drawn to the use of electronic mail and Internet that they developed an addiction called Internet Addiction Disorder. According to Schultz et al (2003: 208), change and job insecurity are stressful for employees. These changes may include restructuring, downsizing, acquisitions, closures, and retrenchments. All of the above, leave the survivors facing job loss, extra work demands and anxiety about the next wave of change.

2.3.4. Extra-organisational stressors

According to Buelens et al (2002: 481), extra-organisational stressors are those stressors caused by factors outside the organisation. For an example, conflicts associated with balancing one's career and family life may be stressful. Schultz et al (2003: 211) refers to the above condition as time-based conflict. Strain-based conflict may also occur when stress from the work and non-work domains spill over into one another. An example of this will be retrenchment of a spouse, putting pressure on the other partner to secure income. Significant life events such as divorce, death of a spouse, personal illness, job loss, change to a different job, etcetera, may also have a negative effect on an individual and may indirectly affect the whole organisation. Other external factors include politics, economics, technology and labour market (unemployment).

2.4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

in organisations where stress levels are high, there is likely to be growing dissatisfaction and resentment from workers and a high labour turnover. Stress causes agitation, annoyance and aggression, which in turn lead to poor industrial relations and conflict between employees. Excessive stress causes forgetfulness and diminished concentration, which in turn increases carelessness. Accident rates have been shown to rise in an organisation where stress levels are too high. According to Schomer (2001: 11), in the long term, the effects of stress on

an organisation will be extremely costly. The costs of stress to the organisation may include the following;

➢ Lost workdays.

➢ Hospitalisation.

➢ Outpatient care

➢ Providing psychiatric care and counselling.

➢ Down time due to accidents.

➢ Litigation.

➢ Staff turnover.

➢ Reduced performance.

➢ Muted creativity.

➢ Lack of motivation.

➢ Loss of morale.

➢ Sabotage and theft.

Stress can also result in a broad spectrum of physical, emotional, behavioural, cognitive and occupational consequences.

2.4.1. Physical consequences

Buelens et al (2002: 482) and Markham (1989: 6) agree that stress negatively affects our physical health. Stress contributes to the following health problems:

➢ Breathlessness and/or palpitations.

➢ Nausea and vomiting.

➢ Headaches/migraine.

➢ Asthma.

➢ Anxiety attacks.

➢ Insomnia.

➢ Neck or backache.

➢ Constant tiredness.

- Chronic indigestion.
- Constipation or diarrhoea.
- High blood pressure.
- Strokes.
- Heart disease.
- Cancer.
- Loss of appetite or increase in appetite.
- Dizzy spells.

Physiological responses begin in the brain and spread to organs throughout the body. Catecholamines from the adrenal medulla cause the kidneys to raise blood pressure and the liver to release sugar into the blood stream. The pituitary gland stimulates the release of corticosteriods, which help to reduce stress but, if left in the system for a prolonged period of time, suppress the immune system (Schomer, 2001: 10). These responses are adaptive for dealing with stress in the form of fight or flight but this response is rarely useful in an urban work environment. Instead, the accumulation of stress products in the body is immuno-suppressive, playing a part in degenerative processes and the already listed diseases.

Schafer (2000: 133) also mention that the way a person moves his or her body conveys a great deal about internal tension. For an example: toe jiggling and foot tapping often reflect impatience and irritability. Nail biting often conveys worry, tension, anxiety-and low self esteem. Tightly folded arms may signal disapproval, anger, apprehension, or the desire to be left alone. A jutting jaw often shows apprehension and tension. Furrows and frowns in the forehead are another sign of worry, fatigue, or depression. Sometimes these signals occur in clusters, at other times singly. In many instances, they are only minor irritants, but interfere with behaviour and performance.

It can be concluded that prolonged exposure to stress has profound and detrimental effects on health. Minor physical stress consequences, when cumulative, do not remain minor, but often turn into full-blown stress illnesses.

2.4.2. Emotional/psychological consequences

Burns (1988: 8) categorises emotional consequences into transitory effects and neuroses.

a) Transitory effects

Some people suffer some of the more immediate transitory stress effects like insomnia, undue irritability and loosing temper too easily, while some people experience more long-term effects such as general pessimism coupled with persistent feeling of loneliness and being unloved, mistrusting even closest friends, lacking self esteem and wanting to withdraw socially.

b) Neuroses

Neuroses are illnesses caused by circumstances or one's inability to adapt to circumstances. A person suffering from neurosis does not loose contact with reality, but difficulties appear greater for him or her than for the normal person. Neuroses include emotional disorders like anxiety; depression; hysteria and obsessions. **Anxiety** is characterised by a persistent feeling of tension and fear which is out of proportion to the cause of anxiety. Often the person does not know why he or she is feeling anxious. This person may have difficulty in getting to sleep, and during the day, may suffer from undue panic and confusion. Physical symptoms such as: palpitations, chest pain, vomiting, fatigue, lack of appetite, etcetera may also be seen. Anxiety is not just an emotional state, it is intellectual, physical and behavioural as well.

Depression is characterised by feelings of extreme sadness, fatigue, a loss of interest in one's social environment and consequent self-neglect, agitation and

insomnia. This condition mostly occurs in compulsive, hard-driving perfectionists who feel that they can not afford the incapacity of illness. A lowered self esteem goes hand in hand with depression.

Hysteria may also manifest itself in constant doubts, chronic hesitancy, an inability to make decisions, feeling compelled to attend to all kinds of unimportant details and not accomplishing anything, but taking forever to do so. Hysterical behaviour is a subconscious response to extreme emotional stress which causes a split between what a person wants to do and how he or she responds. A person suffering from **obsessions** has a strong and established habit which he or she can not break. If the routine of doing something at a particular time or way is upset, the obsessive person becomes very distressed because of the belief that disaster is now inevitable.

Reduced job satisfaction and or involvement and a lack of organisational commitment are the noticeable symptoms of work-related emotional/ psychological stress consequences (Buelens, 2002:479).

It is clear that stress affects our emotions on a daily basis. Excessive stress is harmful, destructive and detrimental to human well-being and productivity.

2.4.3. Behavioural consequences

According to Hatvany (1996: 125), the following are the signs which may point to a behavioural problem in the organisation:

a) Work performance

➢ Reduction in output or productivity.
➢ Increase in wastage and error rates.

➢ Poor decision making.

➢ Deterioration in planning and control of work.

b) Staff attitude and behavior

➢ Loss of motivation and commitment.

➢ Staff working increasingly long hours but for diminishing returns.

➢ Erratic or poor time keeping.

c) Relationships at work

➢ Tension and conflict between colleagues.

➢ Poor relationship with clients.

➢ Increase in industrial relations or disciplinary problems.

d) Sickness absence

➢ Increase in overall sickness absence, in particular frequent short periods of absence.

Other symptoms that show behavioural distress include: substance abuse; verbal attack on others, talking faster than usual; significant interpersonal conflict and crying spells (Schafer: 2000: 132).

2.4.4. Cognitive consequences

Work-related cognitive stress consequences are usually associated with poor decision-making, lack of concentration, and forgetfulness (Buelens et al, 2002: 479). Schafer (2000:132) agree that sometimes stressful situations produce a lack of concentration, poor memory, fuzzy or illogical thinking, inward pre-occupation or confusion. He uses an example of assembly line workers. After

doing the same type of a job for several years, the assembly line workers may become board, dull, and intellectually stifled. These people may be victims of intellectual distress from understimulation rather than from overload. It can therefore be concluded that distressed thinking can be associated with a distressed body.

2.4.5. Specific occupational consequences associated with stress

a) Burnout

Burnout is a condition of emotional exhaustion and negative attitudes (Buelens et al, 2002: 485). Schultz et al (2003:213) further expand on this theory by defining occupational burnout as a condition where the employee's coping resources have been consumed by work and life demands, to the point of poor job performance and exhaustion. Dessler (1997: 642) looks at a different angle and mention that burnout involves a total depletion of physical and mental resources caused by excessive striving to reach an unrealistic work-related goal. It can therefore be concluded that burnout is the result of too much job stress, especially when that stress is combined with a preoccupation of attaining unattainable work-related goals.

Dessler (1997: 642) regards the following as the signs of possible impending burnout:

➢ Being unable to relax.
➢ Identifying so closely to activities that when they fall apart you do too.
➢ The positions a person worked so hard to attain often seem meaningless now.
➢ A person may be working more now but enjoying less.
➢ There may be a sudden increased need for a particular crutch such as smoking, liquor or tranquilisers.

➢ A person may be constantly irritable, with family and friends commenting that he or she is not looking well.

➢ A person may describe himself or herself as a workaholic and constantly strive to obtain his or her job-related goals to the exclusion of almost all outside interest.

Burnout particularly occurs with goal-oriented individuals, who are over-dedicated to what they undertake. Burnout victims often do not lead well-balanced lives as virtually all their energies are focused on achieving their work-related goals (Dessler, 1997: 642). The burnout victim is usually a workaholic for whom the constant stress of seeking an unattainable goal, to the exclusion of other activities, leading to physical and perhaps mental collapse.

According to Buelens et al (2002: 485), burnout may have devastating impact on employee well-being. Typical characteristics include withdrawal, fatigue and less job involvement. Burnout develops in three key phases namely:

i. **Emotional exhaustion.** May be due to a combination of personal stressors and job and organisational stressors. People who expect a lot from themselves and the organisations in which they work for tend to create more internal stress, which in turn, leads to emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion may also be fuelled by too much work to do, role conflict, and by the type of interactions encountered at work.

ii. **Depersonalisation.** After a long period of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation occurs. A person reaches a state of psychological withdrawal from the job. This results in a feeling of being unappreciated, ineffective or inadequate.

iii. **Feeling a lack of personal accomplishment.**

b) Aggression

According to Bandura (1973: 3), aggression is always a consequence of frustration. The occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the

existence of frustration and the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression. Frustration can be defined as an interference with the occurrence of an instigated-goal response to its proper time in the behaviour sequence. Whenever a barrier is interposed between persons and their desired goals, an extra amount of energy is immobilised. Such energy mobilisation, if continued and unsuccessful, tends to flow over into generalised destructive behaviour. The strength of the instigation to aggression can be expected to vary with (1) the strength of instigation to the frustrated response; (2) the degree of interference with the frustrated response; and (3) the number of frustrated response-sequences.

Schultz et al (2003: 213) identified the following four aggressive ways of reaction:

➢ **Verbal aggression:** a person may verbally lash out at another person. This is most common in workplace meetings and group discussions.
➢ **Physical aggression:** involving violence towards others and sometimes damage to work equipment.
➢ **Internalised aggression:** occurring when the hurt and frustration repress the feelings that a person have, leading to an explosion of emotions at a later stage. Later, depression and anxiety may occur.
➢ **Corporate aggression:** referring to aggression towards the company a person works for. This may not really be directed to colleagues or peers, but rather at the company itself. An employee may develop a negative external locus of control against the company and end up with counterproductive anger.

2.5. STRESS AND HEALTH

According to Looker & Gregson (1989: 81), a stress response involves all body functions, therefore, too much distress overtaxing our adaptive resources can

lead to exhaustion and a variety of other health problems which can be fatal. Almost all illness and premature deaths can be associated with distress. Excessive, frequent and prolonged action of the stress response, particularly without the normal outlet for the accompanying physical activity, can lead to a variety of disorders and diseases. This is most clearly observed in the cardiovascular system, which is extremely involved in the alarm reaction. The digestive system is also very vulnerable.

Chronic stimulation of the immune system by cortisol reduces the body's ability to deal with infection and increases susceptibility to disease such as cancer (Looker & Gregson, 1989: 81). According to Schlebusch (1998: 36), stress can suppress the immune system and lead to poor immuno-competence. When the immune system is compromised by stress, the body's natural resistance to fight off disease becomes impaired. The body's immune response depends upon its ability to distinguish between itself and foreign matter. This means that the immune system works as the body's own surveillance mechanism which serves to protect it from attacks on normal body tissue, and helps to resist or fight disease. The mind and the body function holistically and not as separate entities. Health is not just the absence of the disease, but a state of complete physical, psychological and social wellbeing.

Looker & Gregson (1997: 67) view the following as some of the **distress-related disorders and diseases:**

CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM

➢ Coronary heart disease leading to angina and heart attacks
➢ Hypertension or high blood pressure
➢ Strokes
➢ Migraine

DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

- Indigestion
- Nausea
- Heartburn
- Stomach and duodenal ulcers
- Ulcerative colitis
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Flatulence

MUSCLES AND JOINTS

- Headaches
- Cramps
- Muscle spasms
- Back pain
- Neck pain

OTHERS

- Diabetes
- Cancers
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Allergies
- Asthma
- Common cold and flu
- Sexual disorders- reduced sex drive, premature ejaculation, failure to reach orgasm, infertility
- Skin disorders

- Sleep disorders

BEHAVIOURAL

- Overeating-obesity
- Loss of appetite-anorexia
- Increased cigarette smoking
- Increased caffeine intake
- Increased alcohol consumption
- Drug abuse

EMOTIONAL

- Anxiety, including fears, phobias and obsessions
- depression

2.6. CONCLUSION

Stress is caused by a broad spectrum of stressors, but the stress that people experience ultimately depend on their personalities and coping resources. Stress can have a devastating effect on mental and physical capabilities. If ignored, it can bring impaired performance, ill-health and even breakdown.

Chapter three focuses on stress management strategies and coping abilities.

CHAPTER 3

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS: THE MANAGEMENT OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 focused on the causes and consequences of stress. The contents of this chapter are aimed at identifying the stress management strategies that can be used both by the individual and the entire organisation. Attention will also be focused on crisis management techniques.

Stress affects everyone. Although stress can lead to stimulation, creativity and success, it can also be detrimental to our health, relationships and performance. Each individual needs to be able to assess his or her own stress, identify the sources and how stress affects his or her health, and learn some coping strategies (Looker & Gregson, 1997: 19).

3.2. STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Stress management involves several strategies which may be employed to help control the employees' responses to stressful situations. According to Burns (1988: 75), the effective management of stress involves two stages, namely:

- **Awareness:** identifying personal stress reactions and stressors, and
- **Control:** working towards self-responsibility.

Stress is diminished where the individual concerned has a management style that fits the corporate culture of the organisation (Hatvany, 1996: 58). Stress management can be divided into individual stress management strategies and organisational stress management strategies.

3.2.1. Individual coping strategies

To deal with stress effectively, a person should adjust his or her stress balance to keep it in and around the normal zone. This means not going too far and too often into the distress zone, and making it easier to enter and remain in the eustress zone when the need arises. There are two ways in which this can be achieved; either by altering demands, or by improving coping ability (Looker & Gregson, 1997: 100).

Individual stress management strategies can be divided into general coping strategies, job coping strategies, boundary / role management strategies, cognitive strategies, time management and planning, and lifestyle planning strategies.

3.2.1.1. General coping strategies

According to Buelens et al (2002: 492), coping strategies are characterised by the specific behaviours and cognitions used to cope with a situation. People use a combination of three approaches to cope with stress and stressors:

- ♦ **Control strategy.** A person directly confronts or solve the problem.
- ♦ **Escape strategy.** This includes avoiding or ignoring the stressors and problems.
- ♦ **Symptom management strategy.** Focusing on reducing the symptoms of stress through methods such as relaxation, meditation, medication and exercise.

Brewer (1995: 18) identified four phases of the coping mechanism as: (a) **Hoping it will go away**, which occurs when a person feels that the stress is not causing enough pain to make it worth the effort to do something about it. (b) **Seeking fast relief.** At this stage people may turn to medication, drugs or alcohol

to numb themselves against the unpleasant mental or physical discomfort of stress. (c) **Take it out on others.** This may range from lashing out on colleagues or family members and annoying them with angry comments or physical abuse. (d) **Seeking help.** Discussing one's feelings with spouse or friends, or seeking professional counseling.

According to Schultz et al (2003: 218), coping strategies are used as intervening variables on the effects of mood and performance caused by disturbed sleep, work, family and social life. Coping is often categorised into two distinct types, namely:

♦ **Emotion focused coping,** which is aimed at regulating the emotional response to stress.

♦ **Problem-focused coping,** which is aimed at dealing directly with the problem.

It can therefore be concluded that stress can be controlled. There are methods that one can learn in order to be able to deal with stress.

3.2.1.2. Job coping strategies

A lot of damaging stress can be pre-empted if a person knows what is expected of him or her in a job. Dore (1990: 21) viewed the following as the employee's keys to coping with stress:

♦ **Job description:** a clearly defined, sufficiently detailed description of exactly what one's job consists of, is one of the best ways to avoid the uncertainty which can so often lead to stress. One should also make sure that the job description is brought up to date as necessary, for example, if the responsibilities change.

♦ **Feedback:** an employee should make sure that he or she gets feedback on his or her performance together with anything else he or she may need to know that affects his or her job on a regular basis. If a person is facing an end of the year assessment, it is his or her duty to make sure that he or she is aware in advance of the major criteria according to which his or her performance will be judged.

♦ **Reporting back:** a person needs to be clear from the start about how much his or her boss expects him or her to do on his or her own initiative, and how much he or she will want this person to consult with him or her. This is really about defining the extent of each individual's own responsibilities and can be very important for an ideally stress-free working relationship between the leader and his or her subordinates.

♦ **Resilience:** one of the best guide-lines for minimising stress at work is to learn not to take things personally. One must learn to accept constructive criticism and not be put off by colleagues attempts to undermine him or her. If the manager or leader seems abrupt or offhand at times, a subordinate needs to remember that it is most likely nothing to do with him or her, the manager is probably having a hard day.

♦ **Communication:** stress feelings always intensify if they are bottled up, and this is as true at work as anywhere else. Ordinary work problems will be diffused before they become damagingly stressful if each individual can get into a habit of talking them through with the right people: at home with family; with colleagues that are known by experience to be trustworthy; and in particular with acquaintances who work in similar jobs.

♦ **Physical conditions:** a person should do everything he or she can to make sure that his or her working environment is comfortable and efficient. For an example, if a person spends long periods of the working day seated, his or her chair should support him or her in a comfortable position and be in the right relation to the desk height to enable the person concerned to read, write, type and word-process without experiencing any backache or shoulder or neck pain in all these notoriously stress-prone areas. Also, a person needs to

be as well organised as possible with filling systems and desk drawers, and leave a tidy desk when going home at night to give him or her a stress-free start at the next day of work.

3.2.1.3. Boundary / role management

Many jobs and situations involve unrealistic performance expectations. A person may need to remove the stressor entirely in order to avoid unnecessary tension and stress. However, this is not always possible. Employees need to clarify role expectations especially when working in a matrix structure. (Schultz et al, 2003: 217). A person may reduce stress when dealing with others by establishing realistic and mutually compatible expectations. This can be achieved through clear communication. This includes identifying expectations and how others see them, determining if any person is capable of meeting them, discussing these expectations with others, summarising the agreement, agreeing on the deadline for fulfilling the commitment, and evaluating if necessary in order to determine whether the commitment was fulfilled (Brewer, 1995: 30).

3.2.1.4. Cognitive strategies

According to Schultz et al (2003: 217), cognitive restructuring enables individuals to substitute irrational and negative thoughts about their jobs with more positive and healthy mental thoughts. A person may start to feel responsible for the happiness of those around, and enjoy some constructive self talk. Brewer (1995: 69) mentions 10 commandments to manage stress which include various cognitive techniques for dealing with stress as:

i. **Do not let aggravation get to you. One should not try to ignore feelings of aggravation**, but rather acknowledge them, then look beyond them to specific solutions, or, if that is not possible, review them the next hour, day or week, when the situation will change. Secondly, one should

keep his or her perspective. Small stressors loom large in the present but quickly fade if one lets them. Once this is understood, these stressors can be seen as small irritants, not earthshaking crises.

ii. **Do not succumb to guilt.** if a person has done something he or she regrets, he or she should fix it if possible or learn whatever lessons available. One should not let others manipulate him or her. If there is a legitimate problem, steps should be taken to make sure it does not happen again.

iii. **Develop strategies.** The development of strategies to achieve a specific solution or a coping strategy for adapting to the situation should be done.

iv. **Learn to accept and adapt to change. Look for the opportunity**. People have a tendency of often focusing on solutions that return them to the comfort of the status quo and ignore opportunities that require more energy, effort and flexibility. Also, a person should **take a leadership approach** and use an action or coping strategy to keep moving. Take an active approach when contacting prospective employers, friends and business colleagues who might act as referrals.

v. **Change the way one looks at stress.** Stress is not an external force. One has to look at stress producers from more than one angle, and look for choices and alternatives. For example, if a person is overwhelmed by an unfamiliar task, he or she can begin with his or her existing skills or knowledge. Then break the task into logical steps and figure out whether help is needed. Change focus. View the problem as enjoyable and challenging.

vi. **Development of a support system.** Everyone needs at least one person who acts as a sounding board, a close friend, family member or a professional counselor. Just verbalising these feelings eliminates stress. In addition, these people can provide valuable insight and perspective.

vii. **Learning to accept the things we can not change.** Contemporary society has been spoilt by its ability to control daily life. There are so many things that we can moderate or control that we have little experience, and even

less patience in dealing with. **Life is cyclical**. Therefore, on should look to the future, when things will improve. We should also learn to **accept our feelings**. If a person feels depressed, overwhelmed, anxious or confused, these feelings should no be hidden, but a support system can be used. One should **keep busy**, and avoid too much free time to think about problems. **Changing the environment** could also work, depending on the circumstances, it can be as simple as taking a walk, or if time and money are available, a trip can be taken. We can also **pamper ourselves** and indulge in a personal luxury.

viii. **Developing an anti-stress regimen.** The best way to do this involves a combination of diet, exercise and relaxation. An effective problem involves: **convenience**, as it should fit into a person's daily schedule; **time effectiveness**; it must be **inexpensive** and **enjoyable**. One should not take up meditation, running or other activities that he or she will have to force himself or herself to complete, but choose activities that are fun.

ix. **Do not take it personally.** Others' negative behaviour might be directed towards other people, but, in many cases these people are just convenient targets for stress, frustration or helplessness they feel. By not taking others' negative behaviour personally, one can break a stress cycle. One should not accept the unpleasantness passively. People must assert the right to be treated with respect or temporarily remove themselves from the situation.

x. **Believing in ourselves.** First and foremost, a person should believe in himself or herself. In a nutshell, this means believing that, one way or another, a person has the inside stamina and fortitude to handle whatever life dishes out. A person must have enough self-confidence to believe he or she will find the necessary means to withstand stress and look forward to brighter days.

3.2.1.5.   Time management and planning

Managing time and planning are core skills for dealing with a stressful job (Schultz et al, 2003: 217). A person can manage time by structuring his or her activities in such a way as to reduce the number of stressors that have to be confronted, and by organising the day so that there is enough time to accomplish the essentials in day-to-day activities. A person must not overload the schedule, as that may lead to failure. There must be time planned for tasks that produce enjoyment. A person needs to set priorities, both short term and long term (Burns, 1988: 188). According to Brewer (1995: 28), the keys to practising good time management include: (a) finding one time management system that is convenient to use. A good time management system will allow a person not only to keep track of appointments, but to organise important aspects of his or her life (work projects, deadlines, telephone calls, long range planning). (b) Picking a system that can be used at home and at work. (c) Using the same system daily. Evaluating the convenience of the system continuously.

3.2.1.6.   Lifestyle management

Balancing work and non-work roles requires a purposeful appraisal of one's career goals, strategies and conception of success (Schultz, 2003:218). One needs to make time for friends and relatives. Take time to relax, exercise, eat well and sleep. According to Brewer (1995: 54), relaxation stimulates the body's parasympathetic nervous system, which controls stress responses like respiration, heart rate and digestion. When a person relaxes, he or she feels more calm. It is useful to consider ways in which one can relax before work: by arriving 15 minutes early to read the news paper; during work: by talking to people outside your department or going out to eat at lunchtime; immediately after work: by listening to a few songs on a radio; and before a person goes to bed: by trying a crossword puzzle (Hatvany, 1996: 138).

Exercise counters the negative effects of stress by limiting the increase in adrenaline triggered by stress, allowing the body to react to the fight or flight alarm more efficiently, and improving the circulation and respiration while relieving stress. Walking, jogging, rowing, skipping and swimming are some of the good exercises for this (Brewer, 1995: 54). Walking is a perfect way to keep fit with a non-strenuous aerobic exercise, whilst at the same time the fresh air and attractive scenery can only be doing a person good. Swimming can also be fun, especially if a person goes with other people. Swimming exercises all muscles of the body without putting strain on a person's back (Hatvany, 1996: 136).

A well balanced diet can help the stress management process by replacing the important vitamins and minerals depleted by stress, making a persons' system more resistant to the negative effects of stress (Brewer, 1995: 65). According to Brewer (1995:65), certain foods can effectively reverse or moderate the physiological effects of stress. Vitamin C (citrus fruits) helps one combat short term, intense stress. Protein (lean meats or fish), calcium (milk products) and potasium (vegetables and fruit) help offset the negative effects of long term stress. Carbohydrates (sugars and starches) can settle nerves. Some foods can make stress worse. High-fat foods (fatty meats, fried foods, chips) are hard to digest and can produce fatigue. Alcohol causes mental depression and dehydration and depletes the body of important vitamins and minerals and should therefore be avoided.

Caffeine is a stimulant that can cause increased tension and should also be avoided. Although caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol may give a person a boost in the short term, they actually increase fatigue, and excessive amounts exhaust the nervous system. A person needs to eat regularly, as skipping meals leaves a person working on insufficient energy. A person should also try to reduce intake of fats, sugar and red meat and rather go for fruits, vegetables, salads and whole grains.

Looker & Gregson (1989: 191) view the following as the skills that can improve an employee's personal lifestyle and increase his or her coping resources by:

♦ Increasing love and support: from family, friends and colleagues. It is absolutely essential for a person to be loved, appreciated and accepted at all times. People with low love and social support succumb to health problems more easily than those with high levels of love and support.

♦ Enhancing self-esteem: based on how competent, significant, likeable and successful a person thinks he or she is. Feeling good about ourselves reduces distress and provides the platform for uestress, personal growth and development, effectiveness and creativity.

♦ Thinking positively: being positive and constructive in attitudes towards others, self and events. A person gains more in life by thinking positively than by taking a cautious and negative approach. " If we can be more positive about ourselves, we are more likely to view our environment in a more favourable light" (Burns, 1988: 141).

♦ Learning to be assertive: being assertive is the effective way of increasing coping resources simply by communicating effectively. A person should know what he or she wants to achieve, as well as the alternatives available in negotiating with other people. State personal opinions in a sensible way. Express compliments and appreciation if others make a move to meet your wishes. Ask for assistance and make requests of others.

♦ Smiling, laughing and developing a sense of humour: smiling relaxes most of the person's facial muscles, thereby improving blood flow to the brain. More facial muscles are used for frowning and in anger than when smiling. One should avoid going about the daily activities with a worried or angry look on the face. Laughing and humour can have a powerful effect on the mind and body of an employee. Laughter can induce changes in the body activity that improve the circulation and digestion and reduce muscle tension. People who have a sense of humour have learnt to laugh at themselves and not to take life too seriously.

3.2.2. Organisational stress management strategies

Organisational stress management strategies can be divided into supportive practices; job design factors; relationships at work; decision-making and planning; wellness programmes; Employee assistance programmes (EAPs); and management and culture.

3.2.2.1. Supportive organisational practises

Schultz et al (2003: 218) and Schomer (2001: 22) maintain that organisations are challenged to provide stress support to employees by employing the following methods:

♦ **Role classification and goal setting.** Clarifying individual job responsibilities and giving performance feedback.

♦ **Providing social support.** Organisations needs to support employees' efforts. They should have an employee assistance programme in place for individuals who have problems that they can not cope with, which may have potentially negative impact on their work performance and personal lives.

♦ **Removal of unnecessary stressors causing anxiety.** These may include safety aspects or communication barriers. Employees should be allowed to talk freely with one another.

♦ **Employ flexible work schedules.** If possible employees should be allowed to work flexitime. Interactional situations should be designed to encourage team building and diversity management.

♦ **Make use of positive reinforcement.** Employees must be rewarded for work well done rather than focusing on punishment for shoddy work.

♦ **Teaching staff how to relax.** Offering in-house biofeedback machines, mediation, visualisation or yoga will help staff members cope with stress. Staff

must be encouraged to take time-out short, revitalising breaks allow people to re-energise and optimise their performance.

♦ **Providing for staff's special needs.** The working environment must be disability-friendly.

♦ **Becoming a caring organisation.** There is more to business life than accumulating millions of Rands. The organisation needs to show some interest on employee well-being and provide counselling or health services that will allow them to work through difficulties and crises. Believing in employees' abilities and letting them know may also make them feel that they play an important role in the company's success.

3.2.2.2. Job design

Job design changes can enrich or enlarge jobs. The following can assist in reducing the stress factors related to autonomy, routine and complexity:

♦ Well defined tasks and responsibilities.

♦ Plenty of variety avoiding short work cycles.

♦ Proper use of skills.

♦ Proper training for those dealing with the public or client groups.

♦ Proper hazards control.

♦ Workloads or work pace targets that are stretching but reasonable.

Job enlargement and enrichment can reduce stress by making work more stimulating and rewarding. On the other hand, where employees are overloaded, reducing their workload, perhaps by hiring more staff or allocating responsibilities more evenly may help. Management should make sure that there is no role conflict or ambiguity.

3.2.2.3. Relationships at work

According to Burns (1988: 158), the development of satisfying relationships is important for mental health. Mental health and stress management are greatly helped by living in a network of close, warm, sharing relationships in which love, acceptance, support, advice and respect are present. According to Hatvany (1996: 126), management can assist the relationship building process at work by:

♦ Offering training on interpersonal skills.

♦ Having an effective system for dealing with interpersonal conflict, bullying and racial or sexual harassment, including agreed grievance procedure and appropriate investigation of complaints.

♦ Supporting team-building. Organisations that encourage unity and helpfulness among employees will find they run more smoothly and effectively as opposed to those that encourage competition. Individual staff members will also benefit from being supported by their colleagues. Organisations should organise events and activities that allow the staff to develop meaningful social relationships and make sure that the emphasis is on fun rather than work.

3.2.2.4. Decision-making and planning

Hatvany (1996: 126) and Schomer (2001: 22) agree that staff should be given opportunities to contribute ideas, in particular in planning and organisation of their own jobs.

According to Burns (1988: 80), decision making is the first skill to be learned in stress management. If one can not make decisions, then that person can never get round to positively deciding to adopt the major stress management skills available. When under stress, having to make decisions causes even more stress. So, everybody, especially people in management positions should learn to make decisions. Decision making, like relaxation and assertiveness, is a skill that can be learned, and stress can be reduced. Being able to make decisions

gives a person confidence, and is part of the positive outlook on life and on the self.

3.2.2.5. Wellness programmes

According to Erasmus et al (2000: 592), it has become increasingly common for managers to consider the potential benefits of a system focused on proactively promoting and maintaining the mental and physical well-being of employees rather than dealing with health and safety problems as they occur. The old adage that prevention is better than cure can be taken one step further in the context of employee wellness: it has been proven that not only prevention is better than cure, it is also cheaper than cure.

According to Gomez-Mejia et al (1998: 507), health care costs have skyrocketed over the last two decades. Organisations have become more interested in preventive programmes. Recognising that they can have an effect on their employees' behaviour and lifestyle off the job, companies are encouraging employees to lead more healthy lives. They are also attempting to reduce health-care costs through formal employee wellness programmes. Where Employee Assistance Programmes focus on treating troubled employees, wellness programmes focus on preventing health problems.

A complete wellness programme has the following three components:
♦ It helps employees identify potential health risks through screening and testing.
♦ It educates employees about such health risks as high blood pressure, smoking, poor diet, and stress.
♦ It encourages employees to change their lifestyles through exercise, good nutrition, and health monitoring.

Wellness programmes may be simple and inexpensive as providing information about stop-smoking clinics and weight-loss programmes or as comprehensive

and expensive as providing professional health screening and multimillion-dollar fitness facilities at work (Gomez-Mejia et al, 1998: 508).

Wellness programmes should focus on the improvement of emotional, physical and spiritual wellness of employees. According to Erasmus et al (2000: 610), all organisations need to have measures to prevent unsafe acts, behaviour and conditions in the workplace. Although stress management remains, at the end of the day, the responsibility of each individual employee, it is important for organisations to provide the necessary assistance and support. Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) are a type of health management intervention that should be offered by the organisation. The EAPs offer services that assist employees to cope more effectively with personal and organisational stressors. These programmes include assistance for drug addiction problems, HIV/Aids policies and programmes, family counseling and Post Traumatic Stress Debriefing (PTSD) service. Bailey (2002: 79) claim that counselling reduces the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in victims who submit to their therapeutic ministrations. He also mentions a grief counselling programme called "Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), which is currently very popular in developed countries like in the United States of America. The CISD Programme encourages employees to relieve their traumatic experiences usually in group sessions.

3.2.2.6. Employee Assistance Progammes (EAPs)

According to Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, & Cardy (1998: 506), the Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) are designed to help employees whose job performance is suffering because of physical, mental, or emotional problems. EAPs are generally quite prevalent, but tend to be more common in larger organisations. The South African Labour Guide (2002) identifies the purpose of the EAPs as to offer confidential assistance to employees who have the potential to be adversely affected by personal problems. Organisations need to recognise

the variety of personal problems that can disrupt employees' personal and work lives.

Many organisations create EAPs because they recognise their ethical and legal obligations to protect not only their worker's physical health but their mental health as well. The ethical obligation stems from the fact that the causes of organisational stress- climate, change, rules, work pace, management style, work group characteristics, and so forth are also frequently the causes of behavioural, psychological, and physiological problems for employees. According to Gomez-Mejia et al (1998: 506), The ethical obligation becomes a legal obligation when employees sue the company or file for workers' compensation claims for stress related illnesses. The success of the EAPs depends on how well they are planned and implemented within the organisation.

The following are nine important steps that need to be followed by companies during the implementation of a successful and accredited employee assistance programme:

i. EAP Policy and Procedures

According to the South African Labour Guide (2002), the following are the **Basic Principles** of the EAP policy:

♦ The management and unions need to work cooperatively through the EAP in order to assist employees in dealing with personal problems.
♦ The supervisor or manager is responsible for identifying with the employee when the job performance is below standard. The supervisor is not responsible for diagnosing the nature of a problem, and the EAP is not designed to interfere with an employee's private and social life.
♦ The EAP applies equally to all company employees, dependents and significant others.

- ♦ The EAP encourages employees to voluntarily seek help for personal problems. The EAP is strictly voluntary, mandatory referral is not used.
- ♦ Confidentiality is the corner stone of the EAP. Information is not released to anyone without the employee's written consent.
- ♦ The employee's current job and opportunity will not be jeopardised by using the services of the EAP.
- ♦ The EAP recognises the need to grant leave for the purpose of counselling and or treatment; existing agreements covering employee health benefits will be used.
- ♦ The EAP does not alter the management's responsibility to maintain disciplinary measures within the framework of the agreement, nor does it alter the union's prerogatives.
- ♦ The EAP is not designed to assist in conflict resolution between employees and/or managers. These matters should be resolved through established administrative procedures and/or collective agreements. The EAP can help the employee deal with personal consequences of conflicts which may be work related.

ii. Access to the Company EAP

Access to the company EAP can not be offered to everyone. But, the labour law requires that the EAP be given at least to:

- ♦ Employees;
- ♦ Casuals with over six months of accumulated service;
- ♦ Retirees;
- ♦ Any of the above who are on long-term disability;
- ♦ Other groups might be added, due to mobility of departments, with approval of the advisory committee.
- ♦ Spouses;
- ♦ Dependent children as defined under benefits plan.

The EAP provides assistance with a broad range of personal concerns, including, but not limited to:

♦ Marital, family and relationship problems;

♦ Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, prescription medication) and other addictive behaviour such as gambling;

♦ HIV/AIDS counselling;

♦ Workplace violence and trauma counselling;

♦ Workplace discrimination or victimisation against people with disabilities or from designated groups;

♦ Personal debt and financial management problems;

♦ Stress (family, social, job);

♦ Family violence;

♦ Psychological problems;

♦ Sexual harassment;

♦ Work related conflicts.

iii.   Programme operation

The EAP acts as an intake and referral system, using agencies and services in the community to provide ongoing assistance when appropriate and required. Participation in EAP is not an alternative to discipline nor is it to be used by management as a disciplinary measure. An employee can consult on a confidential basis, with the EAP co-ordinator concerning access to the programme or to ask general information. Each organisation should have an EAP advisory committee of three members from management, three members from the company employees' union, two members from the union, the EAP co-ordinator as advisor, and advisors as agreed upon by the advisory committee. There is no cost for employees to consult with the EAP co-ordinator. If further counselling is necessary, the EAP co-ordinator will outline community and private services available. Any costs associated with private services are the responsibility of the employee unless otherwise advised.

iv. Rights and responsibilities

Declining job performance should be addressed from a number of perspectives. The organisation must have policies and procedures in place for setting standards and measuring performance as well as documented procedures to consistently respond to the results, both positively and negatively.

Personal information concerning employee participation in the EAP is maintained in a confidential manner. No information related to an employee's participation in the programme is entered into the personnel file. Access is limited to EAP staff. It is the responsibility of the employee to maintain satisfactory job performance. In the event that personal problems cause deterioration of work performance, the employee has a responsibility to obtain the necessary help to bring job performance up to an acceptable level. The EAP offers means to obtain this help.

v. Manager's responsibilities

The employee assistance programme requires full commitment from all levels of the company's management. Management commitment will ensure that the programme comply with the following requirements:

♦ Address work performance problems through normal supervisory procedures.

♦ Be consistent and treat employees fairly.

♦ Make employees aware of the EAP in instances where declining job performance has been determined, if appropriate.

♦ Not to attempt to diagnose personal problems of the employee or offer a personal opinion.

♦ Provide follow-up and support to employees upon return to work, if appropriate.

- Not to require the employee to divulge the nature of the problem when requesting leave for an appointment with the service providers under the EAP. If necessary the employee can provide verification of attendance through the EAP coordinator.
- Maintain a strict level of confidentiality with all cases.

vi. Union's responsibilities

Unions also play an important role in the EAP process. Their main responsibility includes the following:

- To be knowledgeable about the programme and the referral procedure.
- To encourage members to use the Employee Assistance Programme if appropriate.
- To maintain a strict level of confidentiality with all cases.

vii. Employee Assistance Programme coordinator's responsibilities

The EAP coordinator plays the major role in facilitating the programme. The responsibilities of this person include the following:

- To oversee the EAP to ensure effective and consistent application of the policy and procedures.
- Provide information sessions to management and union personnel regarding the Employee Assistance Programme.
- Promote EAP in the workplace.
- Develop and maintain an accurate, current data bank on helping resources and services in the community including a brief description of services available and the cost, if any, of the service.
- Liase with service providers to assure service standards are acceptable and meet the requirements of clients.

♦ Conduct screening and preliminary assessment for persons contacting the EAP for assistance. Provide full information regarding participation in the programme.

♦ Referral to a professional counselor for detailed assessment and treatment as appropriate.

♦ Follow up as appropriate as possible with the individual to assure assistance was beneficial.

♦ Assist the employee in his or her return to the work environment as appropriate.

♦ Provide consultation to managers regarding the EAP services.

♦ Organise and / or facilitate, on an ongoing basis, educational programmes for employees about EAPs' services.

♦ Maintain all information on employees participating in the EAP in a confidential, secure manner.

♦ Provide feedback to management as to areas where special attention or training is required.

viii. Advisory committee's responsibilities

The EAP coordinator can not carry out the programme on his or her own. An advisory committee is usually formed to:

♦ Review established policy to ensure agreement and understanding of procedures and practices.

♦ Develop and recommend changes in programme policy as necessary after receiving input from interested parties.

♦ Develop strategies in conjunction with the EAP coordinator to ensure that employees are aware of the Employee Assistance Programme.

♦ Oversee an evaluation of the programme.

♦ Prepare a report on the activities of the committee as deemed necessary or required.

ix. Access, referral and offers of assistance

Access to the EAP can either be self initiated or employer initiated. The decision to seek assistance through the EAP is always voluntary. When an offer of assistance is made by the employer, it is not mandatory for the employee to accept the offer. The contact details of the designated EAP coordinator and committee members may be obtained from the Human Resources Manager.

The employee is responsible to make contact with the EAP coordinator. During the initial contact, the EAP coordinator will explain the EAP, including confidentiality of the programme and the exceptions, the employee's rights and responsibilities and full information about participation in the programme. The EAP coordinator and the employee will conduct a preliminary assessment of the problem. The coordinator will provide information and if appropriate, encourage the employee to accept referral for counselling and treatment.

A primary principle of the Employee Assistance programme is to maintain confidentiality throughout every level of the programme. An employee accessing the EAP needs confidence in the privacy of this relationship. Legally, confidentiality refers to the obligation to refrain from willingly disclosing information that has been received in confidence and not to situations in which a court statute compels a person to disclose information.

An EAP worker who is subpoenaed to surrender records or to testify in court is not in breach of his or her confidentiality obligations. An EAP worker who would not be in breach of confidentiality obligations by complying with the mandatory reporting provisions of the provincial child abuse legislation or the obligation to warn the intended victims of violence.

The EAP staff will maintain the minimum amount of information required to assist the employee. Files will be available for review by the employee at any reasonable time. EAP files shall be destroyed after seven years following closure

of the case. In many cases, the EAP coordinator will wish to remain anonymous. Personal identifying information will not be required to carry out preliminary assessment and referral to a helping resource in the community.

3.2.2.7. Management and culture

The organisational culture influences the amount of stress employees experience, as well as how they cope with stress. In order to create a culture that supports healthy work behaviours, management should ensure that:

♦ Company objectives are clear and known by all employees.
♦ There is good communication amongst employees and with management.
♦ There is close employee involvement, particularly during periods of organisational change.
♦ Good management support and appropriate training and development of staff.

3.3. CRISIS COMMUNICATION

According to Caponigro (2000: 1), too many businesses take their employees for granted. It is easy to assume that they are well-informed, loyal, and positively motivated to help the business succeed in any way possible. This is often true, but many times it is not. Employees are the most complex and sensitive of all publics. They believe they have earned the right through loyalty and hard work to be communicated with on a regular and ongoing basis. Employees believe that they have developed a strong sense of ownership by working in the business, and therefore, feel that they have the right to be particularly critical of all decisions made.

Employees also consider everything as it relating to them personally. They worry about job security, and are concerned about morale and teamwork. Employees fear staff layoffs and pay reductions. Most of all, they think about how all these

could affect their careers, quality of life, paychecks, and family obligations. All of these may cause stress to employees and lead to serious problems regarding their work performance and productivity. These are also communication issues - managing expectations, keeping employees focused, allaying fears and concerns and maintaining a sense of excitement and confidence in an organisation. Employees can be an organisation's strongest ally or its greatest opponent, and communication can play a major role in which way they will go.

According to Caponigro (2000: 2), employees should be the company's first line of communication in a crisis. They can be the company's most credible allies or most damaging antagonists. Employees are like family members who often do not appreciate their parents and are bothered by the smallest faults of their brothers or sisters. Like children in the family, employees need to feel as if management cares for them and that their contribution to the group is appreciated. Failure to meet their expectations during a crisis almost always leads to employee morale problems and an increase in complexity and difficulty in managing events. Employees who have sufficient information and feel that the company has met their level of expectation in communicating with them are more likely to:

♦ **Support the company's position.** Employees who feel that they are treated well are more likely to be strong supporters of the business. A sense of family loyalty is established in supportive businesses, but employees will not be loyal unless strong support is first given to them.

♦ **Avoid spreading rumors about the situation.** Supportive employees, who feel they are communicated with effectively, are less likely to spread damaging rumors about the business or its problem. They will avoid doing anything that they believe might hurt the company, particularly while the business is in a vulnerable state during a crisis.

♦ **Believe that the senior executives are managing the situation as effectively as possible.** When morale slips in a business, it is often because

employees have lost confidence in the leaders of the organisation. Employees should be led to feel confident about their organisation's leadership during a crisis. They are most likely to be supportive if the level and manner of communications meet their expectations.

♦ **Reinforce core messages to fellow employees and other publics.** Cooperation of employees is needed to understand and help communicate the organisation's core messages during a crisis.

♦ **Maintain focus on employees' day-to-day responsibilities.** Informed employees are less likely to be distracted and overwhelmed by the crisis-speculating about the company's future plans and second-guessing management decisions.

♦ **Keep a positive attitude with customers, suppliers, and other employees.** The company will need workforce more than ever during a crisis to become goodwill ambassadors. If they are supportive, they are most likely to project a positive attitude that can help persuade customers, suppliers, and other employees to feel the same.

3.3.1. Keys to communicating effectively with employees

The following principles can guide the organisation's management in communicating with employees during a crisis (Caponigro, 2000: 3):

♦ **Communicate with employees quickly after a crisis has occurred.** Employees believe that they have earned, through hard work and loyalty, the right to be told anything affecting the business before they learn about it elsewhere. This is among the most important factors in a well-managed crisis. Anticipate employees questions, and communicate with all employees openly and honestly about the situation.

♦ **Clearly state the core messages and reinforce them.** Make it clear to the employees what messages will be communicated by the organisation. Ask for their help in communicating them.

- **Maintain a regular level of communication.** This will help managers reinforce to the employees their importance to the business and improve the likelihood of keeping support. This policy also helps confirm their assessment that management have control over the situation and are competently managing the crisis.

- **Tell them as much as you believe is appropriate to communicate.** It is important to convey to employees that they are trusted and important to the business. They are more likely to be supportive if they feel that they are getting the whole picture in an honest, non-manipulative manner.

- **If management think that employees want to know something that is considered confidential, explain why it can not be discussed.** If an area exists in which management simply cannot level with employees, management need to explain to employees why they are unable to talk about the subject at this time. They will appreciate the honesty and the fact that management have considered their interest.

- **Convey some factors that led to any major decision.** One of the biggest mistakes most companies make, is telling employees what was decided without amplification or explanation. Employees are more discerning and judgmental than that. They want to hear not only about the decision made, but also about the determinants involved. They need to be given a feel for the rationale and thought processes that were used in arriving at the decision.

- **If management is announcing a difficult decision, such as employee downsizing or plant closing, they should do so in a fair and compassionate manner.** In these types of cases, the employees often remember more about how they were treated than what they were told.

- **Provide more than one opportunity for employees to ask questions, offer feedback, make suggestions, and express concerns.** Employees need opportunities during and after the crisis to ask questions, speak out frustrations, and work through issues with supervisors and others. These opportunities can be given through one-on-one, department, group, and company-wide meetings; employee town-hall meetings; special employee

phone lines; intranet bulletin boards; electronic mail messages; and employee surveys.

♦ **Treat employees the way you want to be treated.** This is a good guiding principle to follow in all communication processes. Management should view the situation by putting themselves in the employees' shoes about the situation.

♦ **Make certain that all employees are informed about important news at approximately the same time.** Releasing news to all employees at one time keeps the message consistent, and reduces the chances of someone first hearing it from another party.

♦ **Communicate with employees in an appropriate manner.** Consider whether the most effective vehicle is a staff meeting, one-on-one meetings, an employee memo, a letter sent to the home, a mention in an employee newsletter, or some means. The mode depends on the message to be communicated, and whether everyone in the business is hearing the same thing.

♦ **Use an appropriate and effective spokesperson.** Give thought to what is being communicated and who, in the business is the most appropriate and effective person to communicate it.

♦ **Inform employees that management will continue to update them as events dictate and follow through with the promise.** It is important to remind employees that they will receive communications as new information becomes available or as events change. Reinforce to them that they are a top priority.

♦ **Give employees a call to action.** Employees want to be clear of what management is asking them to do. They need to be encouraged to do something. In a crisis, the action might be to help communicate the company's core messages, remain focused on their jobs, maintain confidence in the company, and refrain from spreading rumors.

3.3.2. Ways of communication during a crisis

Many avenues exist for the company's management to communicate with employees during a crisis. Caponigro (2000: 5) regards the following as an overview of some possible ways of this communication process along with suggestions on when each might be most appropriate to use during a crisis situation:

- **Staff meetings.** A staff meeting usually works best when the company's number of employees is small enough to accommodate everyone in the same venue or at multiple sites via video teleconference. This format is practical when the announcement will greatly impact on the organisation, and everyone needs to hear the same messages communicated by the same person at the same time. Plenty of time should be left to answer employee questions and listen to their comments and suggestions.

- **Departmental meetings.** Meetings at the departmental level are most appropriate when the announcement is less critical or when the company is too large to conduct a meeting with the entire staff. Departmental meetings work best when the information affects some departments or functions in a company more than others. After being briefed by the CEO or other senior officials, managers of each department can put the announcement in perspective for their specific areas, and convey their support and confidence in the company's actions. As in staff meetings, it is important to leave sufficient time for answering questions and listening to employee concerns and comments.

- **One-on-one meetings.** Individual meetings are most effective when an announcement affects only a few employees, and it is important that they understand the decision and its particular impact on them. One-on-one meetings should be held when especially sensitive and serious information is being communicated. This would include notification of layoffs and

terminations, government or company investigations, quality problems, and lawsuits affecting the employee.

- **Memo to employees at work.** A memo can either be in the form of an electronic mail or an actual paper copy. Employee memos can help underscore key points after staff or department meetings or provide information that does not warrant separate meetings.

- **Letter to employees at home.** Letters are an option when an announcement is of sufficient importance that spouses and significant others will be greatly interested in learning about the company's official position on the matter.

- **Q&A document.** A document with answers to likely questions could accompany memos or letters. The Q&A provides opportunities to restate the key messages as well as suggest way to answer similar questions when they are addressed to the employees.

- **Telephone calls.** Phone calls should be considered when communicating news that dictate fast dissemination but are not so personal that the employee will be offended by being told in that way.

- **Toll-free phone line.** This can be useful when employees total into thousands and are dispersed among several geographic areas. The phone line can be used to provide answers to employee questions, or relay, questions that can be answered through some other vehicle such as electronic mail, voice mail or company newsletter.

- **Employee newsletter or special bulletin.** Newsletters can be handy vehicles to reinforce key messages and remind employees about company information and actions. However, most company newsletters are published on a monthly or quarterly basis, and are therefore of limited benefit during a crisis.

- **Bulletin-board notice.** Most companies provide bulletin boards in or near employee-gathering locations in the offices where notices and memos are displayed. These outlets are useful in maintaining a longer life for important information, but should not be treated as the sole means of informing employees about critical, sensitive items.

♦ **Paycheck stuffers**. Key messages can be repeated in memo or notice form and placed inside employee payroll envelopes. This can be a good way to reinforce previously communicated messages but should not be used to convey important news about policies or decisions that have never been communicated before to employees.

♦ **Videotape presentation**. A video backgrounder can be useful when the information to be presented involves seeing or touring something that is impractical for all employees to view in person. The video medium can be used to deliver a "personal" message from the CEO to employees, with copies of the tape distributed to each department or sent to employee homes. This format can be adopted to help illustrate and emphasise key points, to explain something complex, and to convey from the CEO a sense of concern and empathy.

♦ **An intranet**. Many large corporations have intranets for communication. These are internal web sites on the internet that are accessible only through previously approved company servers and/or by using confidential domain names or specific passwords known only by employees. These internal web sites are used to update employees about important information, provide details on new pricing policies, disseminate Q&A interviews, and seek input and questions from employees. Intranets are also used to convey a strong sense of proactive communication, however its effectiveness is limited because employees must access the information themselves.

3.4. CONCLUSION

The stress management strategies discussed above may be employed to help control a person's response to stressful situations. At the work place the management techniques may vary from delegating tasks, leaning to accept change, boosting self esteem, good communication skills between colleagues, and taking time to relax, exercise and eat well. The organisation, on the other

hand can assist employees by providing social support programmes and wellness programmes, flexible working hours or reduced work load, and perhaps involve all employees when making decisions that will bring about change within the organisation.

Organisations need to ensure that their employees are told about the crisis affecting their company before they learn about it elsewhere. Managers must learn to treat the employees the way they would want to be treated if they were in their shoes. Employees should always be given the opportunity to make suggestions, ask questions and be heard.

The Employee Assistance Programme can benefit everyone. Employees obtain help with personal problems which may be affecting their well being, family life or work performance. The employer benefits by retaining employees with valuable skills and knowledge. Early use of the programme can contribute to the prevention of serious problems for the individual employee, family and employer.

Chapter four focuses on the development of a stress management model.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRESS MANAGEMENT MODEL

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In chapter three, individual stress management strategies and organisational stress management strategies were discussed. Focus was also extended to crisis management techniques. The theory of sources of occupational stress and the consequences of stress discussed in chapter two, together with the stress management techniques that were discussed in chapter three was used to develop a stress management model. This model is presented on the next page and is followed by a short discussion.

4.2. Table 4.1: THE STRESS MANAGEMENT MODEL

SOURCES OF STRESS AT WORK

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL STRESSORS	GROUP LEVEL STRESSORS	ORGANISATIONAL STRESSORS	EXTRAORGANISAT-IONAL STRESSORS
• Increased job demands • Role conflict • Role ambiguity • Environmental control • Interpersonal demands • Work overload or underload • Monotony • Little or no participation in decision-making • Lack of social support • Lack of recognition and feedback	• Managerial behaviour • Lack of cohesiveness • Conflict between groups • Status incongruence	• Organisational culture • Mechanistic / bureaucratic structures • Job design factors • Poor physical working conditions • Technology	• Time based conflict • Strain based conflict • Significant life events
½	½	½	½

–

CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

Physical	Emotional/psychological	Behavioural consequences	Cognitive	Occupational:
Ill-health: • Cardiovascular system • Digestive system • Muscles and joints	• Reduced job satisfaction/ involvement • Lack of organisational commitment • Depression	• Absenteeism • Reduced turnover • Poor work performance • Accidents • Substance abuse	• Poor decision-making • Lack of concentration • Forgetfulness	• Burnout - Withdrawal - Fatigue - Less job involvement • Aggression - **frustration**
½	½	½	½	½

–

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

INDIVIDUAL COPING	ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES
• Boundary/ role management • Cognitive strategies • Time management and planning • Lifestyle management	• Supportive practises • Job design factors • Relationships at work • Decision-making and planning • Wellness programmes / EAPs • Management and culture • Crisis communication

Source: Developed from the theory discussion on chapter two and three.

4.2.1. Sources of stress at work

The sources of stress at work can be divided into four groups, namely: individual level stressors; group level stressors; organisational stressors; and extra-organisational stressors.

4.2.1.1. Individual level stressors

Stress can be caused by a number of factors in the work place. Individual level stressors are those directly associated with a person's work responsibilities (Buelens et al, 2002: 478). Factors that cause stress to individuals in the workplace include: increased job demands; role conflict; role ambiguity; perceived environmental control; interpersonal demands; work overload or underload; monotony; little or no participation in decision making; lack of social support; and lack of recognition and feedback.

All of the above factors have the ability to upset a person beyond acceptable limits causing stress, and may expand, if not managed and affect many people within the workplace.

4.2.1.2. Group level stressors

There are many stresses that affect groups and team working. Group level stressors can be caused by a number of group defects and group pressures. The common causes of group level stress are: managerial behaviour; lack of cohesiveness; conflict between group members; and status incongruence. Group level stressors need to be managed very well, especially by organisations that make use of team work structures.

4.2.1.3. Organisational stressors

Stress sometimes affects large numbers of employees. Such stressors may arise from: the culture of the organisation; the mechanistic or bureaucratic structure of the organisation; job design factors; poor physical working conditions or / and technological stressors. Organisational stressors need to be monitored and eliminated.

4.2.1.4. Extra-organisational stressors

Extraorganisational stressors are those stressors caused by factors outside the organisation (Buelens et al, 2002: 481). These are stressors brought by employees to the workplace. They occur when a person fails to balance life outside of work and at work, and may arise from: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and significant life events.

4.2.2. Consequences of stress

Stress has physical, emotional/psychological, behavioural, cognitive and specific occupational consequences (Buelens et al, 2002:481).

4.2.2.1. Physical consequences

Stress can cause a number of illnesses affecting, the cardiovascular system, the digestive system, muscles and joints, and eventually death if not managed well or left for long periods of time.

4.2.2.2. Emotional / psychological consequences

Under stress, the employees may show a lack of job involvement and satisfaction, a lack of organisational commitment, and depression.

4.2.2.3. Behavioural consequences

Stress can lead to a number of behavioural effects like: absenteeism, reduced turnover, poor work performance, accident proneness, substance abuse and many more. A stressed person may present with one or several of these effects.

4.2.2.4. Cognitive consequences

Stress may affect the thinking processes leading to difficulty in making decisions, difficulty in concentrating and forgetfulness. These effects may be intensified by substance abuse (Shomer, 2001: 10).

4.2.2.5. Specific occupational consequences associated with stress

These can be divided into burnout and aggression.

a) Burnout

Burnout is a stress-induced condition that occurs over time (Buelens et al, 2002: 485). Burnout may have a devastating impact on employee well-being. Its typical characteristics are: withdrawal, fatigue, and less job involvement.

b) Aggression

Aggression is always caused by frustration. A person that is keeping a frustration in, may become aggressive towards others without knowing about it.

4.2.3. Stress management strategies

Stress management strategies can be divided into individual coping strategies and organisational stress management strategies.

4.2.3.1. Individual coping strategies

Coping strategies are characterised by specific behaviours and cognitions used to cope with a situation (Buelens et al, 2002: 492). Individual coping processes can be explained under the following headings:

a) Boundary / role management

A person may reduce stress when dealing with others by establishing realistic and mutually compatible expectations through clear communication. In other words role expectations must be clear.

b) Cognitive strategies

Employees need to try to stay positive in order to maintain a healthy working environment. Each person should try to ignore negative feelings, learn to accept change as well as things that can not be changed, develop a support system to assist in eliminating stress, and believe in himself or herself.

c) Time management and planning

According to Burns (1988: 188), many people under stress claim that they have no time to do everything they need to do. Therefore, a good time management system will allow a person not only to keep track of appointments, but to organise important aspects of his or her life. With more control, there will be less stress in finding time to do what needs to be done.

Employees need to formulate a clear life goal and review it annually (Schultz et al, 2003: 218). This can be in a form of a "To Do" list, with times and tasks prioritised. This list will help employees in planning their daily activities well, thus eliminating stress of what to do next on their daily tasks.

d) Lifestyle management

There are various methods that can be used by employees to balance their work and non-work roles. Good lifestyle management skills can be achieved by: increasing love and support from family and friends, enhancing self esteem based on competence, being positive and constructive towards others, being assertive by communicating effectively with others, learning to laugh as humour is protective and immune enhancing, taking time to relax, getting enough sleep, and eating well.

4.2.3.2. Organisational coping strategies

Just as there are things individuals can do to help deal with stress, so organisations can make changes that ameliorate organisational stressors (Schomer, 2001: 22). In order to create a better, optimum stress environment for staff, organisations' management can do the following:

a) Provide **supportive organisational practices** by clarifying individual job responsibilities and giving performance feedback, having EAPs in place for needy employees, removing communication barriers in the workplace, and if possible allowing flexible work schedules.

b) Change **job design** to reduce stress factors related to autonomy, routine and complexity. This can be achieved by ensuring well defined tasks, having plenty of variety and avoiding short work cycles, training employees well, controlling hazards properly, and allowing workloads or work pace targets that are challenging but reasonable.

c) Encourage development of good **relationships** among employees, offering training on interpersonal skills, and have an effective system in place for dealing with interpersonal conflict, bullying and racial or sexual harassment complaints.

d) Staff should be given opportunities to contribute ideas and make **decisions**, especially in planning and organisation of their own tasks.

e) Offer **wellness programmes** such as financial management skills programmmes, HIV/AIDS awareness programmes, stress management programmes, and any other processes that can improve the personal lifestyles of employees and reduce the risk of having people affected by these conditions.

f) Have **Employee Assistance Programmes** in place to help those employees that need professional assistance to cope with personal or organisational stressors. These stressors can be associated with some diseases of lifestyle that an employee or his or her family member is suffering from, drug addiction problems, stress, trauma, or any other problem the employee may need counselling for.

g) Make sure that the **organisational culture** of the company supports healthy work behaviours. Company objectives must be clear to all employees. There must be good relationships between management and staff.

h) When there is a **crisis** affecting the organisation, employees should be the first line of **communication**. Employees who have sufficient information and feel that their company has met their level of expectation in communicating with them, are more likely to support the company's position, avoid spreading rumors about the situation, and keep a positive attitude with the company's customers, suppliers, and other employees. The crisis will not cause stress as it would if they were not informed properly by management and perhaps heard about the problem somewhere else.

4.3. CONCLUSION

Stress can be managed. There are several skills that one can learn in order to manage stressful situations well, and the organisation can also assist this stress management process by creating a stress free working environment. Most stress form part of daily life, and can be coped with adequately by individuals. Prolonged and more serious stress, however may require professional help.

Chapter five focuses on research methodology, the structure of the questionnaire and analysis of response.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, THE STRUCTURE OF THE   QUESTIONNAIRE AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In chapter four, a model for stress management strategies was developed from the theory discussed in chapter two and chapter three. The aim of this chapter was to explain the methodology used to carry out the research on the problems highlighted in chapter one. Methodology is defined as the analysis of data, the rationale for a particular method or methods used in a given study (Zikmund, 1994: 43). The research design was discussed in order to explain the steps taken during the study.

The method and procedure used in this research for collecting and analysing the needed information was a survey method. According to Leedy & Omrod (2001: 196), a survey is a research technique whereby information is gathered from a sample of willing participants by means of a questionnaire. The development and structure of the questionnaire, the design and the administration of the questionnaire was discussed, followed by an analysis of the responses.

5.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

Leedy & Omrod (2001: 91) define design as the complete strategy of attack on the central research problem, and research design as planning. Research design can also be defined as a master plan that specifies the methods and procedures used in collecting and analysing needed information (Zikmund, 1994: 43). Research involves seeking solutions to problems or answers to questions. It is the framework of the research plan of action.

Non-experimental research was adopted as the research design and was used to measure employees' opinions on occupational stress. The empirical study was an investigation into stress affecting employees in the workplace.

The data was collected from the National Health Laboratory Services-Port Elizabeth Main Branch. The main objective of the study was to develop a model of stress management for the employees at the NHLS Laboratory.

The questionnaire was the primary data collection method used to explore the perceptions of employees on work related stress. The researcher used a computer programme, Microsoft Excel to analyse the results from the survey. All data from questionnaire was tabulated, and the analysed results were presented in this chapter.

Conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study were discussed in chapter six.

5.3. TECHNIQUES FOR DATA COLLECTION

According to Leedy & Omrod (2001: 94), research is a viable approach to a problem only when there are data to support it. Data are those pieces of information that any particular situation gives to an observer. After identifying the research design and methodology, considering issues related to validity and reliability, and addressing the ethical implications of a project, the researcher must also make decisions about how to acquire and interpret the data necessary for resolving the overall research problem (Leedy & Omrod, 2001: 111).

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (1997: 249), the majority of management and business research involves the data collected via questionnaires being used for descriptive or explanatory purposes. For questions where the main purpose is to describe the population's characteristics either at a

fixed time or at a series of time intervals to enable comparisons, the questionnaires need to be administered to a sample. The sample needs to be as representative and accurate as possible, as it will be used to generalise about the total population. Saunders et al (1997: 250) classify the sort of data that can be collected through questionnaires into four distinct types of variable, namely:

- Attitudes
- Beliefs
- Behaviour
- Attributes

These distinctions are important as they influence the way the questions are worded. Attitude variables record how respondents feel about something. They differ from belief variables, where the researcher records what respondents think or believe is true or false. Questions about belief should imply neither good or bad.

In contrast, data behaviours and attributes are more straight-forward to collect (Saunders et al, 1997: 251). When recording what respondents do, the researcher is recording their behaviour. Behavioural variables contain data on what people did in the past, do now, or will do in the future. By contrast, attribute variables contain data about the respondents' characteristics. They are best thought of as something a respondent possesses, rather than something a respondent does, and are used to explore how attitudes, beliefs and behaviour differ between respondents, as well as to check that the data collected is representative of the total population. Attributes include characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, education, occupation and income.

5.3.1. Survey questionnaire/the self administered questionnaire

According to Saunders et al (1997: 243), the greatest use of questionnaires is made by survey strategy. Questionnaire is used as a general term to include all techniques of data collection in which each person in the chosen sample is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order. It therefore includes structured interviews and telephone questionnaires, as well as those in which the questions are answered without an interviewer being present.

The questionnaire is a common instrument for observing data beyond the physical reach of the observer (Leedy & Omrod; 2001: 197). The questionnaire used in this study was developed from the literature study discussed in chapters two and three. The questions were selected to address each of the topics outlined on the stress management strategies model in chapter four.

5.4. THE DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

As each person in the selected sample is asked to respond to the same set of questions, questionnaires provide an efficient way of collecting responses from a large sample prior to quantitative analysis. The researcher needed to ensure that precise data was collected and the answers to the questions would assist in achieving the required objectives of the research (Saunders et al, 1997: 244).

5.4.1. The development of the questionnaire

Leedy & Omrod (2001: 202) mention the following 12 guidelines for developing a questionnaire that will encourage people to be cooperative and yield the response the researcher can use and interpret:
1) The questionnaire must be as short as possible and solicit only that information essential to the research problem.

2) The researcher must use simple, clear and unambiguous language.

3) Unwarranted assumptions implicit in the questions must be checked.

4) The questions must be worded in ways that do not give clues about preferred or more desirable responses.

5) The researcher must check for consistency.

6) The researcher must determine in advance how the responses will be coded.

7) The respondents' tasks must be kept simple.

8) Instructions must be clear.

9) A rationale must be given for all items with unclear purposes.

10) The questionnaire must be attractive and look professional.

11) A pilot test must be conducted to check if the expected response is achieved before the questions are given to the actual sample.

12) The nearly-finished product must be scrutinised carefully to make sure that it addresses the researcher's needs.

The researcher paid great attention to the wording of the questions. Questions were kept simple and short. Complex questions were broken into simpler ones so as to encourage the respondents to answer the questionnaire. Also, the researcher avoided ambiguous questions. Words that are too general, too vague, or which could give rise to different interpretations were replaced with more specific terms. Double-barreled questions were avoided. Leading questions were also avoided. These include questions that favour one type of answer over another, or associate a particular response with an important personality.

5.4.2. The structure of the questionnaire

According to Saunders et al (1997: 254), the reliability of the data collected and the response rate to be achieved depend, to a large extent, on the design of the questionnaire. This means that each part of the structuring stage will involve substantial rewriting in order to get the questionnaire right. An improperly structured questionnaire can lead to respondents missing questions, confusing

them, and even result in them throwing the questionnaire away (Babbie, 1998: 158). For the purpose of this study, closed-ended questions were used. Closed-ended questions provide a number of alternative answers from which the respondent is instructed to choose. They are usually quicker and easier to answer. Responses are also easier to compare as they have been predetermined. A Likert-style Rating Scale, where the respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement on a five point scale, was used to measure responses.

The researcher structured the questionnaire carefully. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The researcher found it necessary for the NHLS staff to indicate firstly their biographical information including age, gender and length of service at the NHLS, as well as the type of job the respondent was doing. This kind of information was asked in section one. The questions in section two were based on the sources of stress. If the respondent was to choose strongly agree with these questions, it would mean that he or she was less likely to be stressed in the workplace. If the respondent was to choose strongly disagree on any of these questions, it meant that this particular individual was exposed to a lot of stress in the workplace.

Section three was based on the theory of the consequences of stress. The respondents who strongly agreed with these questions were most likely to be affected by stress, and vice versa regarding those who strongly disagreed. Section four was developed to measure the coping abilities of the respondents to work-related stress. Those who coped better were expected to choose strongly agree and those who did not cope so well, strongly disagree. The respondents were encouraged to be honest when answering the questionnaire as the data gathered was to be used only for study purposes and would not jeopardise their positions in the organisation.

There was also a right to privacy for the respondents. Anonymity of the respondents was assured in order to encourage them to be as honest as possible, as the researcher wished to collect quality data.

5.5. ADMINISTERING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaires were delivered by hand to the NHLS staff and collected for analysis a week later. The researcher checked at random to confirm that the questionnaires were completed correctly. Trained staff from the Port Elizabeth Technikon helped the researcher perform the statistical analysis.

5.6. SAMPLING METHOD AND SAMPLE SIZE

Saunders et al (1997:126) divides the sampling process into four stages, namely:

- ❑ Identification of a suitable sampling frame based on research questions or objectives.
- ❑ Deciding on suitable sample size.
- ❑ Selecting the most appropriate sampling technique and sample.
- ❑ Checking that the sample is representative of the population.

The researcher chose the NHLS Port Elizabeth branch staff as a sample. This sample allowed the researcher to collect responses from the majority of the employees at the SAIMR which helped in ensuring accuracy of the results. The SAIMR has +/- 70 employees and the researcher managed to obtain a 70 percent response of the total number.

5.7. THE ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSE

Altogether 46 out of 66 questionnaires were completed by NHLS staff, resulting in a response rate of 70 percent. The following results were obtained:

5.7.1. Biographical information

Figure 5.1 illustrates the different age groups of the respondents. Of the respondents, 37 percent were between the ages of 18 years and 30 years. Twenty-two percent were between 31 years and 40 years of age. Another 22 percent of the respondents were between the age of 41 years to 50 years, while 17 percent of the respondents were between the age of 51 years to 55 years, with only two percent 56 years old and above.

Figure 5.1: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

17% 2%

37%

22%

22%

☐ 18-30 years ☐ 31-40 years ☐ 41-50 years ☐ 51-55 years ☐ "+56 years
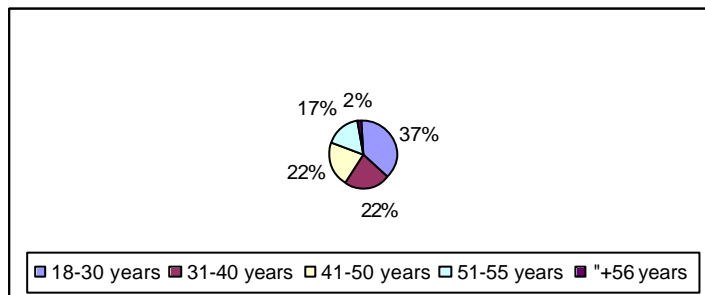
Eighty-nine percent of the respondents were females while 11 percent were males. Refer to figure 5.2 below.

Figure 5.2: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

11%

89%

☐ Male ☐ Female
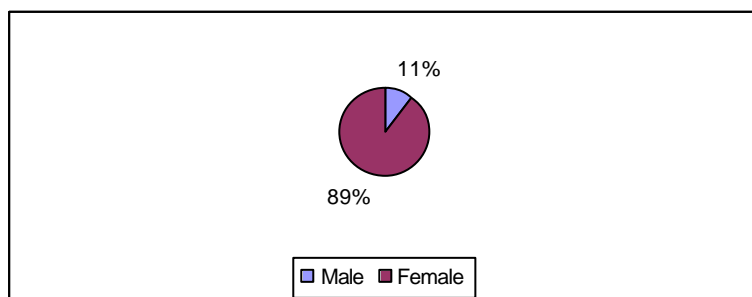
As illustrated in figure 5.3, 49 percent of the respondents had been working for the NHLS for more than 11years, while nine percent of the respondents were new employees that were working for the NHLS for a year or less than a year.

Figure 5.3: PERIOD OF EMPLOYMENT OF THE RESPONDENTS
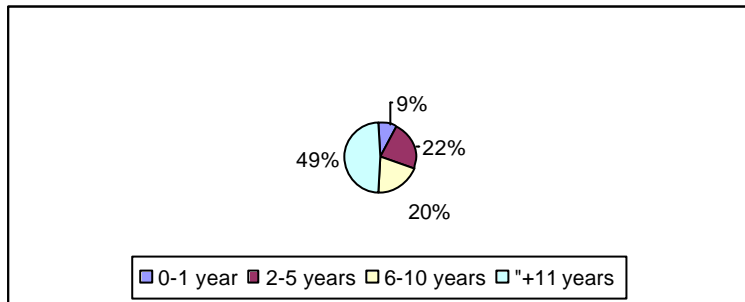
Fourty-eight percent of the respondents were technologists and technical staff. Twenty-eight percent were administration staff, and 24 percent were supporting staff, which included receiving clerks and mailing clerks. Refer to figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: TYPE OF JOB DONE BY THE RESPONDENTS
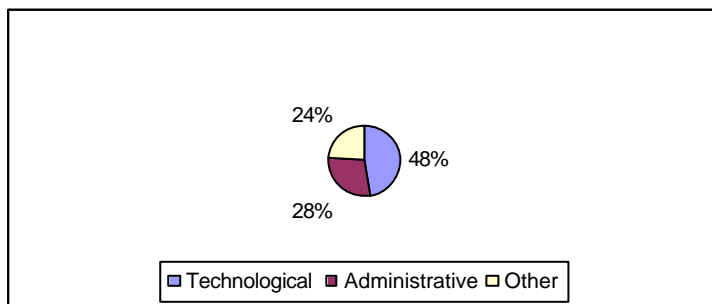
5.7.2. Sources of stress at work

A number of stressors in the workplace had negative effects on employees. Table 5.1 below illustrates the responses obtained in section two of the questionnaire. Some of the results are shown by means of diagrams to highlight interesting responses. The majority (46 percent) of the respondents agreed that their work environment was comfortable and safe, 22 percent agreed strongly, while another 22 percent disagreed. In question six, 35 percent of the respondents indicated that they did not determine their own work schedules, while 26 percent did (refer to figure 5.5). Even though the table indicated a lack of control over work schedule, 89 percent of the respondents seem to have control over their jobs (question 10). In question seven, 80 percent of the respondents found their colleagues supportive, while 17 percent strongly agreed that their colleagues were indeed supportive.

Twenty-eight percent of the respondents agreed that their ideas were considered by their bosses. Seven percent strongly agreed that their supervisors show interest on their ideas, while another 28 percent of the respondents disagreed. Eleven percent of the respondents strongly disagreed while the remaining 26 percent of the respondents were uncertain (Refer to figure 5.6). Most of the respondents indicated that they had no problem in balancing their work and family life and also had control over their jobs. Quite a number of the respondents indicated that they were not reporting to one person. This can create a lot of confusion and stress when one has more than one person to report to.

Table 5.1: Sources of stress at work

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total No. of respondents
5. My work environment is comfortable and safe.	10	21	3	10	2	46
6. I determine my own work schedule.	3	12	8	16	7	46
7. My colleagues are supportive.	8	29	6	2	1	46
8. I cope well with my job.	10	31	5	0	0	46
9. My boss uses my ideas.	3	13	12	13	5	46
10. I have control over my job.	6	18	13	7	2	46
11. I have a balanced work and family life.	8	29	3	5	1	46
12. I report to one person only.	4	18	5	13	6	46
13. There is variety in my job.	8	24	7	6	1	46

Figure 5.5: Response on work schedule arrangement
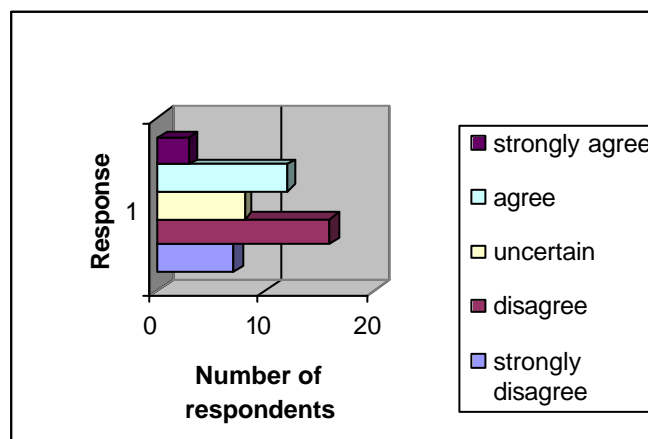
Figure 5.6: Consideration of respondents' personal ideas
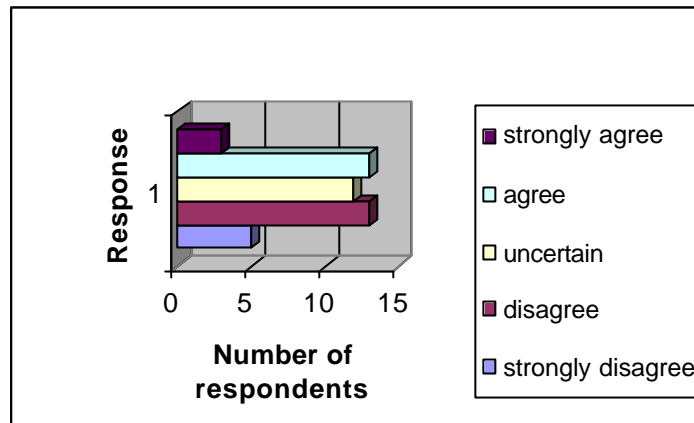
In conclusion, the respondents' results indicated that some of the respondents were at high risk of being affected by the sources of stress in their work environment.

5.7.3. Consequences of stress

Stress may influence employees physically and psychologically, i.e. their thoughts and behaviours. Table 5.2 illustrates the responses of the respondents to the consequences of stress (section 2 of the questionnaire). Some of the results are also illustrated by diagrams. About 63 percent of the respondents indicated that they suffered from either a stiff neck or sore back muscles (refer to figure 5.7). This may indicate that they are experiencing some physical stress effects. Fifty-six percent of the respondents indicated that they frequently experienced unusual tiredness from their daily work while 30 percent were not seriously affected by this (refer to figure 5.8).

Most of the respondents indicated that they enjoyed the work they did and did not take sick leave more often than necessary. The majority of the respondents were not prone to accidents and did not have substance abuse problems. The above proves that the majority of the respondents were not seriously affected by stress psychologically and behaviourally.

Fifty percent of the respondents felt that they did not get enough chance to make their own decisions. Of that 50 percent, 13 percent strongly agreed that they are not given the chance to make decisions while 34 percent were happy about their supervisors' decisions (refer to figure 5.9). The results also indicated that the majority of the employees were not yet victims of occupational burnout and aggression, as they were still happy to come to work every morning and did not loose their temper with other colleagues (table 5.2, question 28 and question 31).

Table 5.2: Consequences of stress

Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total No. of respondents
14. I often have stiff neck or back muscles.	9	20	6	10	1	46
15. I am suffering from high blood pressure.	1	5	6	20	14	46
16. I frequently get headaches.	6	14	5	17	4	46
17. I frequently experience unusual tiredness.	3	23	6	12	2	46
18. I do not enjoy the type of work that I do currently.	1	6	4	22	13	46
19. My colleagues often irritate me.	0	12	11	20	3	46
20. I take sick leave at least once every month.	1	0	0	16	29	46
21. I can not handle the pressure my boss puts on me.	2	5	10	20	9	46
22. I have been involved in more than one accident at work this year.	0	3	1	18	24	46
23. I smoke daily.	2	3	0	8	33	46
24. I take on average two alcoholic drinks per day.	3	1	0	8	34	46

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total No. of respondents
25. I often forget important details.	5	6	5	22	8	46
26. I often feel that I could have made a better decision.	6	17	7	14	2	46
27. I do just what is expected of me, nothing less, nothing more .	1	9	5	17	14	46
28. I feel that I have to drag myself to come to work in the morning.	2	7	7	21	9	46
29. I can never wait for the weekend or my next holiday.	6	14	4	17	5	46
30. I often see my job as a burden.	2	4	6	23	11	46
31. I often loose my temper with other people.	0	5	3	27	11	46

Figure 5.7: Response on how often the respondents suffered from stiff neck or sore back muscles

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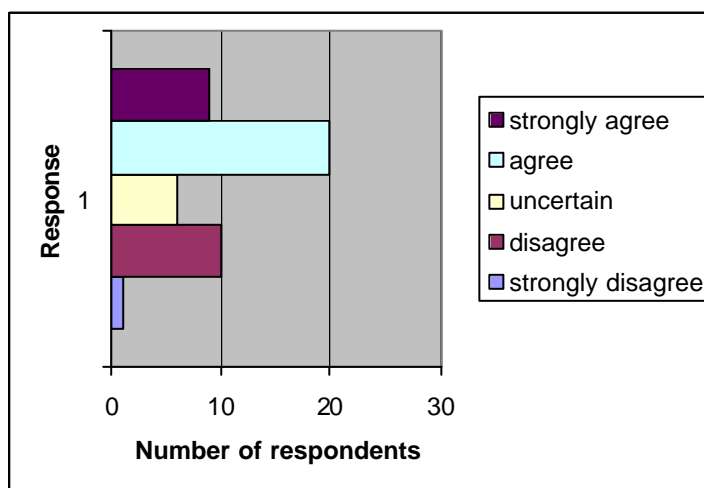**Figure 5.8: Respondents' response on how often they suffered from unusual tiredness**
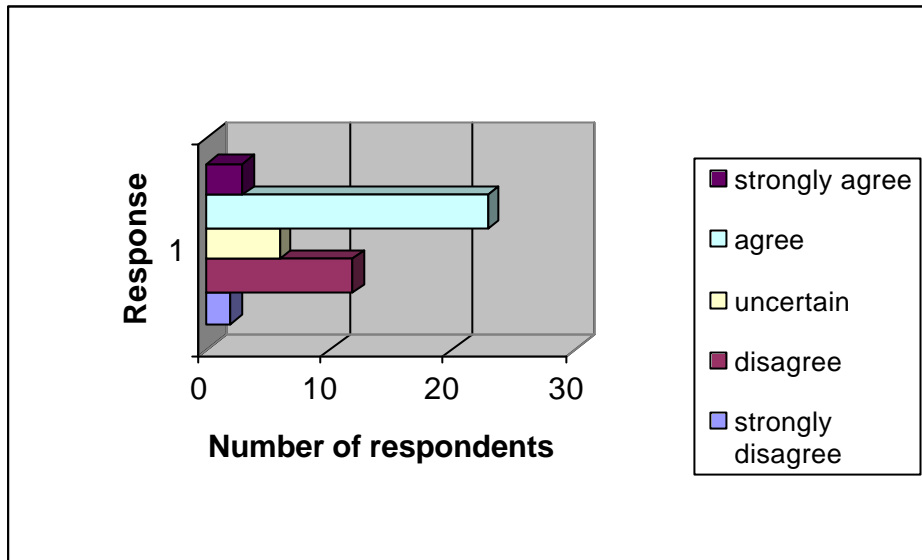

Figure 5.9: Respondents' response on decision-making
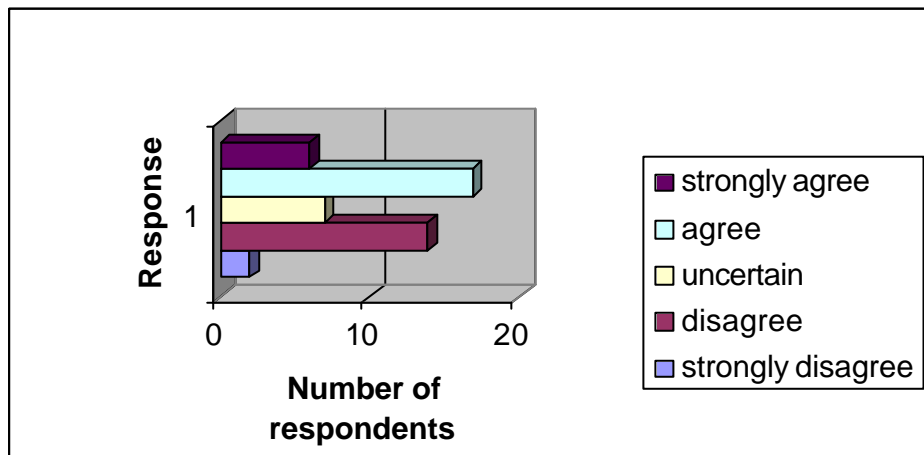
In conclusion, the results of the respondents indicated that the majority of the employees were experiencing some stress effects in their lives, with a few of the respondents more strongly affected than others. Twenty-five percent proved to be free from stress consequences.

5.7.4. Stress management techniques and coping ability

Table 5.3 represent the responses obtained from section four of the questionnaire, related to stress management techniques and coping ability.

Table 5.3: Stress management strategies

Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total No. of respondents
32. I tell my supervisor which tasks I prefer to be involved in.	0	6	6	24	10	46
33. I ask if I'm not sure what is expected of me.	**14**	**26**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**46**
34. I consider my own abilities before I choose to get involved with a project/task.	4	30	5	6	1	46
35. I remind myself that I am not responsible for keeping those around me happy all the time.	7	17	10	11	1	46
36. I focus on the positive aspects of change.	9	31	5	1	0	46
37. I recognise that I make a positive contribution in my group.	10	27	8	1	0	46
38. I manage my time well.	8	24	10	2	2	46
39. I never take work home.	10	26	6	3	1	46

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total No. of respondents
40. I arrive early at work to have time to myself before I have to start with a task.	8	17	7	9	5	46
41. I get at least 20 minutes exercise three times a week.	**8**	**10**	**2**	**15**	**11**	**46**
42. I use medicine to help me sleep.	1	5	1	13	26	46
43. I get a lot of support from my family and friends.	13	27	3	3	0	46
44. I make sure I get feedback on my performance.	5	18	11	10	2	46
45. I negotiate with my manager when I feel targets are set too high.	2	18	9	13	4	46
46. I maintain a good working relationship with my supervisor.	7	29	4	5	1	46
47. I make sure my ideas are considered in the workplace.	4	21	10	9	2	46
48. My manager is interested in my wellbeing.	7	16	12	6	5	46

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total No. of respondents
49. My manager keeps me informed of the company's future plans/goals.	5	17	6	9	9	46
50. Management provides enough opportunities for training to help me do my job better.	2	8	5	16	15	46
51. I have attended a training course on stress.	0	0	0	21	25	46
52. I would like to attend a course on stress.	9	19	10	5	3	46
53. My organisation promotes wellness.	2	12	15	10	7	46
54. I do make use of our sisters' rooms when I am stressed.	5	8	4	18	11	46
55. My organisation facilitates rehabilitation for substance abuse.	2	2	19	11	12	46

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total No. of respondents
56. My organisation does offer help in the following areas: • Financial management • HIV/AIDS support	0	4	12	13	17	46
	2	5	18	11	10	46
• Post traumatic stress debriefing	0	2	19	15	10	46
• Drug addiction	1	2	20	13	10	46

There are several strategies that can be employed by employees to control their responses to stressful situations. There are also techniques that management of the organisation can offer in order to reduce stressful situations in the working environment. Table 5.3 illustrates the responses of the respondents on their coping abilities and their organisation's stress control strategies.

Seventy-four percent of the respondents indicated that they did take orders from supervisors and were not given the opportunity to make their own decisions, while 13 percent did (refer to figure 5.10). The respondents indicated they coped very well as individuals, as their majority recognised they were making a positive contribution to the organisation. This sense of belonging was previously proven by theory to be helpful to the company during times of crisis. The majority of the respondents did not take work home and could manage their time quite well. Thirty-three percent of the respondents agreed that they did not exercise for the required 20 minutes three times a week, while another 24 percent also strongly disagreed. Twenty-one percent of the respondents indicated that they did take

time to exercise while another 17 percent strongly agreed to be exercising at least three times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes (refer to figure 5.11). The respondents indicated that they were building good relationships with both colleagues and their managers, while another 39 percent of the respondents felt that they are being left out when it comes to information sharing about the company's future.

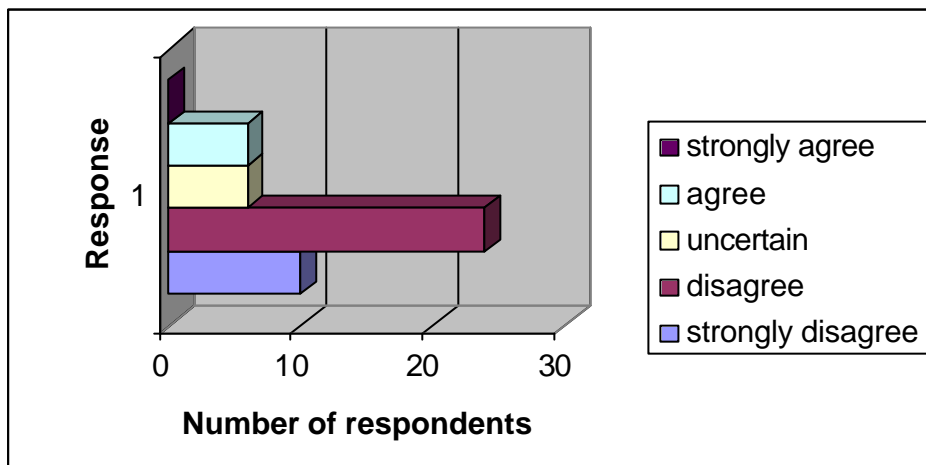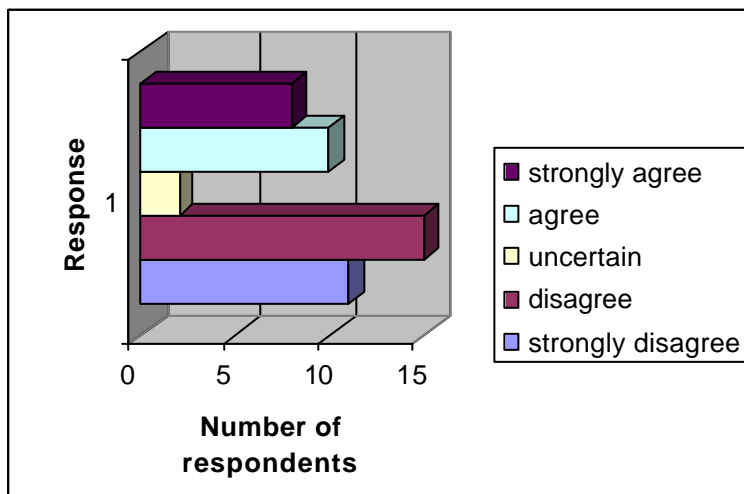**Figure 5.10: Respondents' response on choosing preferred tasks**

Figure 5.11: Response on how often the respondents undertake physical exercise

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents felt that they were not given enough opportunities for training, while 22 percent agreed that they did get training opportunities. The respondents responses indicated that their organisation was not offering enough support to improve their lifestyles. The respondents indicated that there was a lack of programmes offered on rehabilitation for substance abuse, financial management, HIV/AIDS, PTSD and drug addiction. More than 40 percent of the respondents indicated that they were not sure if these services were available or not, while the rest of the respondents denied and strongly denied the presence of these services for them.

Figure 5.12: Respondents' response on the availability of training opportunities in his or her workplace
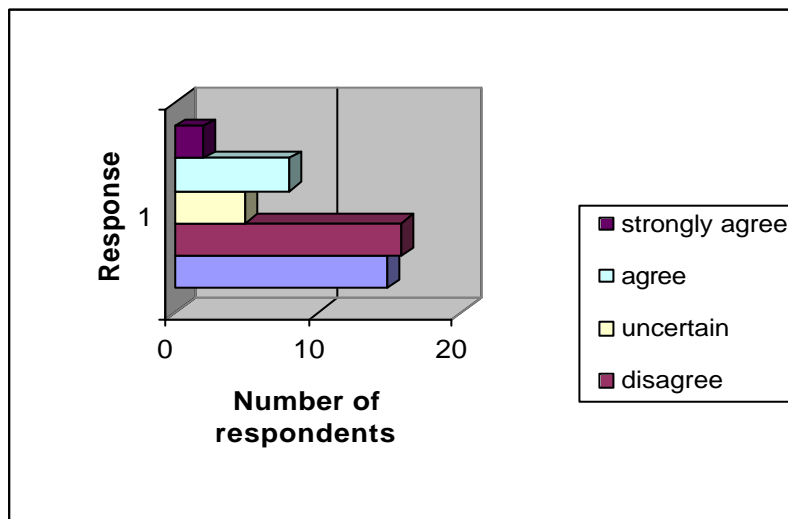
In conclusion, the respondents' response on personal coping abilities indicated that most of the employees were coping well, and that there was room for improvement for those that did not seem to be handling work pressure well. Again, on the organisational stress management techniques side, most of the respondents indicated that they were not offered the necessary support to deal with work-related stress.

5.8. CONCLUSION

In this chapter the research methodology and the development of the questionnaire was outlined. The sampling method used as well as the method of collecting data were discussed. The data collected from the questionnaire was analysed and supported by means of figures and tables.

Chapter six focuses on drawing some conclusions and recommendations on certain areas of this research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter five focused on research methodology, development and structure of the questionnaire, sampling method and sample size, and the analysis of the response from the empirical survey. The aim of this chapter is to draw some conclusions from the data collected through the empirical survey and make recommendations on the areas of concern.

6.2. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were reached, based on the findings of the empirical survey:

❖ Although the majority of employees found the working environment at the NHLS comfortable and safe, half the number of them did not feel the same way. According to Bergh and Theron (2003: 439) and Schultz et al (2003: 208), poor and unsafe physical working conditions have a negative effect on stress levels experienced by employees.

❖ Most employees indicated that they did not determine their own working schedule. This can be caused by a number of factors such as the type of the job a person is doing. In a laboratory situation, just as in hospitals, some days are busy and some are quiet. Therefore, the work schedule sometimes depends on the amount of work received on that particular day, especially if the work is marked urgent or if the samples can not be stored and analysed some other time.

❖ There was also a fair split of opinions where some agreed, with the same number uncertain and disagreeing that the employees ideas were considered by their bosses. Having three views on this issue made it difficult to detrmine the cause of this feeling. It could be lack of confidence from the individuals that felt that their ideas were not considered, or the ones that were uncertain about the consideration given to their opinions may be implying that they did not receive any feedback even if they did make those suggestions.

❖ Although most staff members agreed that they report to one boss, more than half their number disagreed. The theory revealed that having too many people giving orders might lead to confusion and many other role ambiguity problems. People end up not knowing what their duties are.

❖ Most of the employees might be physically affected by stress, as they agreed that they often suffered from back pains and stiff neck muscles and often experienced unusual tiredness. Stiff neck and back pains could also be caused by uncomfortable chairs which may be old, too long or too short to allow the user to work freely and easily while working from the bench or table. Some of these employees were employed as data collectors or typists. This type of work sometimes puts a strain on back muscles and eyes.

❖ A majority of employees felt that they were deprived of the right to make their own decisions about their jobs. This was a point of concern as it may lead to loss of interest on the job and demotivation, as the minds of the employees might not be stimulated enough to think and become creative. The lack of practice on decision-making might affect the company in the future.

❖ Most of the employees did not seem to have a say on how their daily tasks should be carried out. They indicated that they did just what was required of them by their supervisors.

❖ The majority of the employees seemed to cope well with most of the individual factors of stress, except that they did not take time to exercise for the minimum time required by their bodies to obtain a healthier body and mind.

- ❖ Again, most of the employees seemed to agree that they had good working relationships and support from their colleagues, family and managers. What raised concern, was the fact that more than half their number did not complain when workloads were too much, they just did the job. This may be because they did not want to cause trouble and look lazy in the eyes of their supervisors. However, this could be the cause of all the headaches, stiff necks, backaches and unusual tiredness they were experiencing.

- ❖ The majority of the employees indicated they felt strongly that management was not offering enough opportunities for job training, skills development and lifestyle management skills. Some of them agreed that they were eager to learn more about stress management.

- ❖ Most of the employees were uncertain, while some disagreed with the presence of rehabilitation programmes for staff exposed to substance abuse in their workplace. It could be because these employees had seen people being dismissed when found drunk on duty without being given an option of receiving counselling and treatment for their condition.

6.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions in paragraph 6.2, the following recommendations were made:

- ❖ Subordinates should be given opportunities to make suggestions, especially when it comes to preparation of their own work schedules. This will make them feel important and part of the team.
- ❖ Reporting to different people confuses employees and should therefore be avoided.
- ❖ Management at the NHLS should consider employing more staff to avoid the unnecessary tiredness and headaches experienced by the majority of staff members due to increased work load, as it may affect the company's efficiency and productivity in future.
- ❖ Employees should be encouraged to contribute their ideas especially on matters related to their daily jobs.
- ❖ Subordinates may need to be given opportunities to choose the tasks they prefer to be involved in. This contributes positively to job satisfaction and reduces the chances of boredom due to repetition of tasks and working without enjoying the actual job.
- ❖ Management should seriously consider offering job training to help employees improve their job performance.
- ❖ Training on lifestyle management, stress management, financial management, offering support to employees or employees with family members suffering from HIV/AIDS or trauma and those with substance abuse problems should also be considered. Exercise, good diet, and any other methods of relaxation should be encouraged to ensure that the employees are always kept at their best performance level. Organisations that put money into preventing stress before it arises will find that workers perform more effectively and have more job-satisfaction, with overall improvement of organisational functioning.

❖ Employees should be kept informed about the company objectives at all times in order to reduce the chances of stress during times of crisis and change. The business world is full of change which has the potential to cause stress and burnout if this knowledge is introduced too late to the employees.

6.4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to solve the main problem by answering the questions asked as sub-problems. The following sub-problems were outlined in the first chapter as follows:

(a) What does the literature reveal with respect to causes, consequences, and management strategies of stress in the workplace?

(b) What are the causes and consequences of stress experienced by staff at the PE NHLS laboratory and what stress management strategies do they employ?

(c) How can management at PE NHLS improve the work environment to reduce the negative effect of stress on their employees?

All of these sub-problems have been addressed in this research paper. Chapter two and chapter three revealed the available literature on sources of stress, consequences and management techniques that can be used to eliminate stress at work. The empirical survey which was analysed in chapter five together with the conclusions drawn from the survey in chapter six are an indication of what causes stress, the consequences of stress and the management strategies that the employees at the PE NHLS used to reduce stress in their lives and working environment. In this chapter, recommendations for improvement on the points of concern of the empirical survey have been made.

Everybody experiences stress to a certain level on a daily basis. Not all stress is bad for people, a certain amount stimulates creativity and success. But, excessive exposure to stress can be detrimental to our health and occasionally fatal. Each individual should make an effort to take control and eliminate the factors that can be stressful and harmful in their lives and get the balance between a work and non-work lifestyle correct.

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ANNEXTURE A

QUESTIONNAIRE ON STRESS MANAGEMENT

This questionnaire focuses on stress at work. Answer as honestly as possible. Confidentiality is guaranteed as no names are required and no reference to any individual answer will be made. The data is purely gathered for study purposes and will not be used by the **NHLS** whatsoever. **No** names and departments will be identified.

SECTION 1 -   BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Please mark off the appropriate block with an **X**.

1.   How old are you?

18-30 years	
31-40 years	
41-50 years	
51-55 years	
+56 years	

2.   Are you male or female?

Male	
Female	

3.   How long have you been working at NHLS?

0-1 year	
2-5 years	
6-10 years	
+11 years	

4.   What type of a job are you in?

Technological/Technical	
Administrative	
Other	

SECTION 2 - SOURCES OF STRESS AT WORK

A number of stressors in the workplace potentially contribute to stress levels experienced.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5. My work environment is comfortable and safe.					
6. I determine my own work schedule.					
7. My colleagues are supportive.					
8. I cope well with my job.					
9. My boss uses my ideas.					
10. I have control over my job.					
11. I have a balanced work and family life.					
12. I report to one person only.					
13. There is variety in my job.					

SECTION 3 - CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

Stress influences people on a physical, psychological, cognitive and behavioural level.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
14. I often have stiff neck or back muscles.					
15. I am suffering from high blood pressure.					
16. I frequently get headaches.					
17. I frequently experience unusual tiredness.					
18. I do not enjoy the type of work that I do currently.					
19. My colleagues often irritate me.					
20. I take sick leave at least once every month.					
21. I can not handle the pressure my boss puts on me.					
22. I have been involved in more than one accident at work this year.					
23. I smoke daily.					
24. I take on average two alcoholic drinks per day.					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
25. I often forget important details.					
26. I often feel that I could have made a better decision.					
27. I do just what is expected of me, nothing less, nothing more.					
28. I feel that I have to drag myself to come to work in the morning.					
29. I can never wait for the weekend or my next holiday.					
30. I often see my job as a burden.					
31. I often loose my temper with other people.					

SECTION 4-STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND COPING ABILITY

Several strategies can be employed to help control responses to stressful situations.

Job aspects	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
32. I tell my supervisor which tasks I prefer to be involved in.					
33. I ask if I'm not sure what is expected of me.					
34. I consider my own abilities before I choose to get involved with a project/task.					
35. I remind myself that I am not responsible for keeping those around me happy all the time.					
36. I focus on the positive aspects of change.					
37. I recognise that I make a positive contribution in my group.					
38. I manage my time well.					
39. I never take work home.					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
40. I arrive early at work to have time to myself before I have to start with a task.					
41. I get at least 20 minutes exercise three times a week.					
42. I use medicine to help me sleep.					
43. I get a lot of support from my family and friends.					
44. I make sure I get feedback on my performance.					
45. I negotiate with my manager when I feel targets are set too high.					
46. I maintain a good working relationship with my supervisor.					
47. I make sure my ideas are considered in the workplace.					
48. My manager is interested in my wellbeing.					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
49. My manager keeps me informed of the company's future plans/goals.					
50. Management provides enough opportunities for training to help me do my job better.					
51. I have attended a training course on stress.					
52. I would like to attend a course on stress. 53. My organisation promotes wellness.					
54. I do make use of our sisters' rooms when I am stressed.					
55. My organisation facilitates rehabilitation for substance abuse.					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
56. My organisation does offer help in the following areas: • Financial management					
• HIV/AIDS support					
• Post traumatic stress debriefing					
• Drug addiction					