

## Perceived stress amongst employees at a clothing manufacturing company in Bindura Urban, Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out if employees of the manufacturing company experience perceived stress. A descriptive research design was employed and stratified random sampling method to evaluate the stress levels of 35 employees at a clothing manufacturing company. A standardized self-questionnaire validated for the assessment of stress (Perceived Stress Scale) was used to collect data. The study highlighted a high level of stress among individuals: 28.6% of them were suffering from stress and 57.1 where suffering from moderate stress, 14.3% level was attributed to those with a low stress. Results showed that females are more susceptible to high level stress than males. A statistically significant association was observed between stress and gender. The findings indicated that self-controlling seeking social support, positive reappraisal and accepting responsibility are some of the top recommended positive ways for employees' stress. The major recommendation to the company is to adopt the stress management model developed from the six domains of wellness.

**Keywords:** Perceived stress; Employees; Workplace; Wellness;

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## 1. Introduction

Stress at the workplace is now considered to be a growing global problem due to factors like globalization and technological processes which have transformed the world of work, introducing new forms of work organization, working relations and employment patterns hence contributing to the increase of work related stress and its associated disorders (ILO, 2016). According to the World Health Organization (2019), workplace stress is unavoidable because of the contemporary work environments and it cited job design, work content and work context as the major drivers of workplace stress.

The WorkCover Advisory Service of Australia on the other hand cited lack of support at work due to bad management practices, possible trauma experience, and change in management, role conflict and physical work environment as causes of high stress levels at the workplace. Occupational stress impacts negatively on production as workers who are severely stressed are more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, and less productive at work. Work related stress has become a major occupational risk. According to WHO global Burden of Disease Survey depression and anxiety disorders together with stress related mental conditions, will be highly predominant and will be second to Ischemic heart disease in terms of disabilities by the year 2020 (Murray and Lopez, 2012).

The WorkCover Advisory Service, of Australia cited workplace stress as the most common compensated illness in Australia, the first being musculoskeletal disorders. A staggering amount of more than \$133.9 million was paid in benefits to workers who had made claims related to stress during the 2004-2005 tax year in Australia (WorkCover Advisory Services). In research conducted in India of the textile industry about occupational stress, it was noted that liability insurance premiums by employees had noted a substantial increase in civil claims due to stress induced injury which was seen to increase (Sangeetha, 2017). According to statistics from the American Psychological Association, a startling 60% of Americans say work is the main source of stress in their lives (APA, 2019). Occupational stress is one of the burdens of most companies worldwide hence importance to study perceived stress on employees in order to come up with stress management models at the workplace.

Research across the globe indicates workplace stress as a burden in most companies. A study conducted in Bangalore revealed that 5.9% of the workers were under severe psychological distress and another study conducted in Kolkata reported that 20.1% of workers were suffering from insomnia which is work related (Lillpet, 2017).

The 4<sup>th</sup> European Working Conditions survey of 2007 revealed an estimated 40 million people in the EU were affected by work related stress (ILO 2016). According to the European risk observatory report published in 2009, work related stress represented in Europe between 50% and 60% of all lost working days and the study also found that an average 22% of the European workforce was under stress. Stress was most prevalent in the Education and health sectors as well as agriculture, hunting forestry and fishing (28.5%).

The report on Psychosocial risk in Europe: Prevalence and strategies for prevention (2014) stated that 25% of workers experience work related stress for all or most of their working time and a similar proportion reported that work affected their health negatively. In the same study

nearly 80% of managers expressed concern about work related stress and nearly one in five considered violence and harassment to be of major concern. The 6<sup>th</sup> European Conditions Survey (2015) confirmed that intensive work is quite prevalent: 36% of workers in the EU work all of the time or almost all the time under pressure to meet deadlines. Stress has also been a topical issue in America, according to the First Central American Survey on working condition and Health (2014), more than one in ten respondents reported having felt constantly under stress or strain. In Argentina the First National Survey on Employment, Work Conditions, Labor, Environment and Health (2009) showed that 27% of workers reported mental overload considering their work as excessive.

Africa has not been spared by this psychological hazard at the workplace. The South African Stress and Health Study (2016) revealed very high stress levels among the working class. Work related stress and lack of job satisfaction were associated with most stress related illness (hypertension, heart disease and asthma). South Africa is estimated to be losing over ZAR3 billion due to workplace distress (Industrial Psychology Consultant 2015). Study in Nigeria by Izuchi and Onukwufor (2017) showed that workload, insufficient facilities were the drivers of high stress levels among employees.

Economic growth in Zimbabwe has slowed down sharply since 2012 which has negative effects to the industry sector impacting on the mental health of the workers. According to the Distress and Other Mental Health Problem in Zimbabwe Working Population Survey of 2015, four in ten working Zimbabweans experience symptoms of stress representing 43% of the working population. The study estimated that companies are losing over USD107 million in a year in wages and productivity through mental health and stress related absence from work. Results of the survey also indicated that 27.3% of the working population had depression symptoms, 18.3% anxiety symptoms, 33.4% experience somatization. Manufacturing sector in which the company under study falls had the highest prevalence of depression symptoms (27.4%), followed by financial sector (26.2%).

In terms of the distress symptoms, the financial sector was leading with (29.8%) followed by manufacturing sector, (26.2%). Female workers were more depressed (34.2%) against 21.5% of their male counterparts. In a study by Masuku and Muchemwa (2015) on occupational stress, the most common stressor among employees at Solusi University Zimbabwe was the increased workloads and the need to deliver within targets. A study by Makoni and Mutanana (2016) on the effective management of Occupational Stress as perceived by workers at manufacturing Company in Zimbabwe recommended consistent psychological counselling of employees as they are predisposed to high stress levels.

It is against such a background that the study investigated the stress levels of employees in order to come up with a stress management model.

### **1.1. Aim of Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study is to find out if employees of the manufacturing company experience perceived stress.

## **1.2.Objectives**

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. To find out if there are employees experiencing stress
2. To explore stress levels of employees.
3. To explore gender deference on stress levels of employees.
4. To recommend positive feasible coping strategies.

## **1.3.Hypothesis**

*Ho:* There is no significant difference in the stress levels of the employees.

## **2. Method**

This research took a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design. Creswell (2012) defined a research design as a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings. The researcher opted for a descriptive research design as it is ideal to test the research objectives.

### **2.1. Population and Sampling**

The population for this study consisted of 300 employees of the manufacturing company. A total of 35 participants took part in the study and were selected through stratified random sampling. The researcher focused on 35 employees as these were considered representative enough. The 35 selected employees cover three main stratified groups for the study, that is, management, tailor and non- tailors. The non- tailors group was comprised of drivers, clerks, general hands and security guards.

The researcher employed stratified random sampling to identify respondents for administering questionnaires. The company's population was first divided into three strata's who share similar characteristics. This method is used when there are reasonable expectations that the measurement of interest will vary between the diverse sub-groups. The sample was then attained by obtaining samples from each stratum. About 10% of each stratum was considered in the sample size. The probability of an individual being selected in stratified sampling varies in relation to known characteristics, such as education, gender and category of job with the purpose of ensuring that all sub-groups of the population that may be of significance to the study are sufficiently represented.

### **2.2.Justification**

With respect to sample size, Kline (2005) recommended that assurance could be considered on the premise of the proportion of cases to free parameters (10:1 or, stunningly better, 20:1). Bentler and Chou (1987) likewise recommended that the example to-parameters proportion for basic condition demonstrating ought to be in the vicinity of 5:1 and 10:1. Since the rate in this examination was 10:1, which is well inside the rule, there is no potential issue with respect to the quantity of members.

### 2.3. Data Collection Tools

In order to gather information needed to solve a certain problem under investigation data collection instruments are used. Tools used to gather required information needed to solve a problem under scrutiny is called research instruments Ranjit (2014) indicate that the instruments used for research are just devices for obtaining information relevant to a research project. The research tool used for this study was a questionnaire (Perceived Stress Scale). A questionnaire is a written set of questions that was used to collect information and make inferences on the subject matter under scrutiny (Doyle 2003). The researcher made use of a structured questionnaire; Grimm (2010) says that a structured questionnaire creates low level of involvement of the person (researcher) who is administering the questionnaire and high level of involvement of the person (participant) who is answering the questionnaire. The questionnaire had the Likert-type scale questions and the responses are easier to put into statistical form. Due to the busy nature of work pertaining to the employees, the researcher felt that a questioner would be the most suitable tool to use as it was less time consuming and one can easily answer it in the shortest possible time.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

In analyzing and categorizing quantitative data from the structured questionnaires, which were administered to employees of a clothing manufacturing Company. Quantitative data from questionnaires in this research was analyzed using descriptive from the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0. The SPSS was used for a clear presentation and analysis of the levels of employee stress and gender differences on stress level and the positive coping mechanisms to help with stress as well as looking at the demographics. Descriptive statistics assist in describing data for better understanding of the responses given from the questionnaire and help to derive conclusions from the sample data. The researcher chose SPSS as a tool for analyzing of data as it has simpler instructions and draws tables and graphs which are important in the analyzing of the data of the research.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Figure 1. Stress Level

|       |          | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Low      | 5         | 14.3    | 14.3          | 14.3               |
|       | Moderate | 20        | 57.1    | 57.1          | 71.4               |
|       | High     | 10        | 28.6    | 28.6          | 100.0              |
|       | Total    | 35        | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Figure 1 shows diverse levels of stress which employee's exhibit at a clothing manufacturing company in Bindura. A small group constituted low-level work related stress with a representation of

five employees (14.3%). A large number of employees represented employees experiencing moderate stress (57.1%). Ten employees exhibited high levels of stress, which amounts to 28.6%. The results of the stressors amongst employees, indicated that the stressors were mostly due to job demands and conflicts within the organization. Luthans (2002) indicated that, when there are squabbles amongst employees, it could lead to high levels of stress. Performing job roles is very important to employees, specifically at the lower levels of the organization. If the employee cannot be part of the group due to task design or job role, conflicts can be experienced as highly stressful. In addition, Luthen (2005) suggests that high concentration and overworking the memory can actually lead to stress.

The current study’s results are in line with the findings of Masuku and Muchemwa (2015) in their research of occupational stress amongst employees at Solusi University in Zimbabwe that found out that the most common stressor was the increased workloads, the need to deliver within targets/deadlines timely and long working hours.

The findings of the study also agree with the interactional theories where there is mention of effort- reward imbalance theory of Johannes Siegrist's and person environment fit theory by the Michigan school. In the study it can be noted that most respondents were uncertain if they were satisfied with their job and some were actually not satisfied. The tenants of this theory connects to the findings on the current study in that the main stressors found to be commonly visible amongst employees were related to individuals, environment and the job itself. Not being satisfied with ones job as a result of misfit between person and environment and as effort reward imbalance.

The findings of this study are inclined to the cognitive behavioral theory which depicts that individuals have the capability for happiness and dissatisfaction this emanate from rational and irrational thinking respectively (Ellis, 2004), hence stress is a result of irrational thinking.

The findings of the current study are in agreement with one of the findings of a study in Nigeria done by Izuchi and Onukwufor (2017) that showed that workload, insufficient facilities, and overpopulation of students jointly significantly relate to the employee’s job stress.

Figure 2. Stress Level\* Gender Cross Tabulation

| Count        |          | Gender |        |       |
|--------------|----------|--------|--------|-------|
|              |          | male   | Female | Total |
| stress level | Low      | 4      | 1      | 5     |
|              | Moderate | 10     | 10     | 20    |
|              | High     | 4      | 6      | 10    |
| Total        |          | 18     | 17     | 35    |

Figure 2 illustrates the gender distribution of stress levels of employees. Four males showed low-level stress whilst one female showed low-level stress. On moderate, there is an equilibrium within gender and lastly females show high-level stress, which is six against four male employees. Results yielded that females are more susceptible to stress than males one reason being marital roles which supports what Moore (2001) says that married people are more prone to stress as they will be really trying to have a work and home balance. Results of the current study are in line with prior studies to note a research which was done in Kazakhstan by Yekaterina Munko (2017), the study illustrates that stress levels are high in females than it is in males.

### **Positive stress coping mechanisms and stress management initiatives for employees**

The findings indicated that self-controlling, seeking social support, positive reappraisal and accepting responsibility are some of the top recommended positive ways for employee's stress. Seeking of social support as a coping mechanism is supported by Thomas and Lankau (2009) who in their research found out that work place social support minimized emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, occupational stress amongst employees can be dealt with, through confronted coping and distancing oneself. This implies that employees should have solutions not avoidance to address their personal issues and adapting to their surrounding environment. Henceforth, in agreement with this, interactional theories can be said to be putting emphasis on the interaction of the environment and the certain individual responses to the foundation of stress as the source in which positive stress-coping mechanisms can be drawn. The effort reward imbalance theory can help support the positive reappraisal of lecturers as a way to cope with stress as it helps the individual balance their efforts and rewards.

## **4. Conclusion**

The sample comprised 35 participants representing the three different tiers at the workplace. The research was quantitative. The results revealed that stress at the workplace was real and there was a need for intervention to reduce, introduce coping skills and prevent stress thereby improving the workers mental wellbeing. Managing worker's stress levels in a positive manner tends to positively improve productivity and improve performance. Moral at work is improved and workers and employer tend to enjoy a better understanding and relate to each other better. The research indicated that females were more susceptible to stress than their male counterparts.

Included in the research is the stress model designed for the company by the researchers. The model addresses the domains that contribute to mental wellbeing for an individual. Therapies are included in the model. The research also found that there is need for more research as to why females in this sample were more susceptible to stress than their male counterparts and also to explore the drivers of stress at the workplace. The major recommendation is for the company to adopt the suggested stress management model that is based on the six domains of wellness.

## **5. Recommendations**

- i. Adoption of different strategies, which reduces occupational stress, such as the adoption of a participative leadership style at the work place. The approach involves other sub-groups as



possible to resolve stress-producing problems. Such delegation of their work should reduce a lot of their stress.

- ii. Enhancement of individual coping skills such as talking to someone, exercise, taking up a hobby
- iii. The study recommends that there should be clear definitions of workers' roles and responsibilities for employees.
- iv. Wellness programs such as celebration of wellness days at the workplace that involves mental health awareness and advocacy so as to address stigma and the cultural aspect of mental health.

### **5.1. Stress Management Model**

The model was adopted from the six dimensions of wellness domains developed by Dr Hettler which can contribute to cope, reduce and prevent stress. The research recommends that the company adopt the stress management model that covers the six domains of wellness which are:

#### **5.1.1. Physical**

Physical wellness has been linked to reduction in stress levels. Researchers have also found out that people who exercise regularly react with milder physical stress responses before, during and after exposure to stressors (Paul and Walton, 2004)

The company can initiate a fitness club that meets twice a week to keep physically fit. The physical wellness ensures less chances of developing stress and non-communicable diseases like Hypertension hence the psychological benefits of enhancing self-esteem and self-control.

#### **5.1.2. Social**

This domain emphasize on interdependence between others and nature. People need people and as they interact they share fears, frustrations contributing to the wellbeing of mind and body.

The organization can start social clubs that involve a pool of sporting disciplines where employees and family members can meet and interact during sporting activities.

Wellness retreats for team building and work on people skills such as communication skills including nonverbal communication interpretation.

#### **5.1.3. Intellectual**

This dimension recognize ones creative, stimulating mental activities.

An internal wellness magazine can be initiated where employees contribute write ups quarterly on wellness issues.

Building resilience programs being the most important aspect of life when dealing with life challenges are incorporated in the model.



#### **5.1.4. Spiritual**

The spiritual dimension recognizes one's search for meaning and purpose in human existence.

Quarterly wellness days can be initiated where the spiritual component can be incorporated.

#### **5.1.5. Emotional**

Qualities of emotional wellness include optimism, trust, self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-control, satisfy relationships.

The organization can initiate team building sessions away from the work environment where motivational speakers with psychology background are invited for psychological sessions.

Screening of mental wellness by administering using tools such as Perceived Stress Scale conducted and other tests, hence an intervention is done. Suitable psychotherapies for the detected disorders will be applied. Enhancement of emotional intelligence programs for both employers and employees to be conducted.

#### **5.1.6. Environmental**

Environmental hazards like noise are linked to high stress levels at the workplace.

It is important that the organizations voluntarily subscribe to environmental standards like ISO 14001 NOSA standards that requires noise levels to be measured at the workplace and remedial actions are taken to protect the employees.

### **6. Future Research**

Future research should explore the drivers of occupational stress at the company and also why women are more susceptible to stress than man.

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