An evaluation of the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction: an empirical study of non-profit organisation in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction of employees in a non-profit organisation in South Africa. A descriptive and quantitative research approach was employed with a structured closed-ended questionnaire. A purposive sampling method was employed to select a sample of 230 full-time and contract employees in the Non-Profit Organisation in South Africa. A Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (MJSQ) and the Eliot Stress Questionnaire (ESQ) were distributed to collect data. The research findings on job satisfaction reveal that most employees were generally satisfied with their jobs. Statistical analysis results on occupational stress showed that employees are generally neither stressed nor non-stressed, (the neutral point). The findings of this research reveal that when occupational stress is reduced employee satisfaction is improved. NPOs must communicate and clarify expectations, and ensure that employees fully understand the nature of their business and the funding implications.

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Introduction

Worldwide today, government functions effectively with the involvement of Non-Profit Organisations (NPO) to provide services to the communities. NPOs are dedicated to improving health of people with a special focus on HIV and AIDS. These NPOs strengthens and supports the public healthcare system by providing technical assistance, capacity building, clinical expertise and facilitating health technology expansion. Some of these NPOs depended on foreign government and organisations for funding. They are adversely affected by policy, priority shifts and availability of funding from this countries and own government. NPOs are responsible for numerous community and developmental problems, awareness and prevention, child-headed households, environmental protection, poverty alleviation, violence and victim aid (Holtzhausen, 2013). Government has accepted that it will not be able to deal with these problems as indicated above effectively on its own (Holtzhausen, 2013). The government realised the fact that health inequality exists for low and middle-income earners in different countries due to poor performance of the health systems and obstacles to care as experienced by poor and vulnerable communities (Nxumalo, Goudge, & Thomas, 2013).

The challenge of NPO is funding, as this NPOs relies on donations to provide services to the poor (Rippon & Moodley, 2012). According to Furneaux and Ryan (2014), NPOs are the most providers of services in many fields such as health, education, arts, sport and community development, and mainly depend on government funding and donations. Many NPOs struggle to survive due to lack of funding (Furneaux & Ryan, 2014). Without funding NPOs find it difficult to exist (Holtzhausen, 2013), a lack of long-term financing challenges translates into employment insecurity, increased workloads, lack of promotion, lower salaries and no rewards for employees and volunteers dedicated to providing service (McIsaac, Park, & Toupin, 2013).

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With all these cited problems above, NPO has to fulfill its mandate with employees making difference in other people’s lives, with lots of pressure (Baines, Cunningham, Campey, & Shields, 2014). Due to these bottlenecks, countless employees are retrenched, which add more work demands to remain employees with abnormal job functions (Becker, Beukes, Botha & Vorster, 2004). Lack of resources and high demands in an organization related to occupational stress among employees with job insecurity (Baines, Cunningham, Campey & Shields, 2014). Occupational stress has significant economic implications for organizations (Kelloway, Teed & Kelly, 2008).

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

The literature review were consulted on the two research variables, occupational stress and job satisfaction. Maxwell, (2012) described occupation stress as result of a process that links the environmental stimulus to job strain, which is the individual’s response to the stimulus and the antecedent of stress. The study used Cartwright and Cooper (2002) An Organisational Stress Screening Tool (ASSET) model, with eight factors that lead to occupational stress such as work relationships, work-life balance, overload, job insecurity, control, resources and communication, rewards and job aspects. This model was supported by Rothmann and Viljoen (2009) as well as Sharm (2015) who added other occupational stress factors such as interpersonal relations, growth and development prospects including job authority supported the factors in the study. Sharma’s research findings are supported by (ASSET) model, which also identified work-related factor such as working condition, which is occupational stressors. Generally, stressors put pressure on an employee until such stress develops on employees (Newstrom & Davis, 2002). ASSET model is accepted models to assess and explain the factors of occupational stress.

The support that colleagues provide to each other even in difficult times in their jobs creates positive working relationships (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009). According to Hitt, Miller and Colella (2006), employees cope better with stressors at work when they have support from others. This support extended by the support employees received from the family, which made it possible for employees to balance the responsibilities and responsibilities at home.

*Work life balance* caused by imbalance demands of an occupation with family and personal life (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009). The contemporary family could take on any variety of forms namely, single parent, two-earner families, families with ageing parents in need of care or non-traditional family units (Landy & Conte, 2007). Hochschild and Machung (2012) reports that it may be more difficult for women to balance work than the traditional male role of scheduled maintenance around the house and garden that they are able to do at their leisure on a routine basis.

Jacob (2012) confirmed that employees experience occupational stress and *work overload* due to their family roles that they still need to carry out. Work overload results in uncertainty for an employee whose ability to complete job tasks is inadequate (Spector & Jex 1998). The major contributor to occupational stress is work overload (Anwar, Sidin & Javed, 2017). The physical demands related to the environment and individual effort are some of the factors contributing to this uncertain relationship between work overload and occupational stress (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2000). Warr (2012) mention that the fear associated with the prospect of losing a job is one of the biggest sources of stress in employees.

*Job insecurity* has found to be a common work stressor by other researchers, meaning that job insecurity is a type of stress mainly related to doubts about the continuation of employment (Warr, 2012). Control refers to the amount of authority an individual has in making decisions regarding the way work is organised and performed. Diener and Chan (2011), state that individuals who perceive that they can control their environment are likely to suffer from occupational stress than those who do not. The inability to exercise control in the workplace contributes to negative psychological states especially if there is career dissatisfaction (Hakanen and Schaufeli, 2012).

Employees need adequate resources (training, equipment) and effective communication in order to perform their jobs effectively. According to Nielsen and Randall (2013), open communication in organisations can decrease levels of stress experienced by employees, but organisational communication will only be effective if it provides accurate information, thereby increasing the predictability of the working environment. According to Charara (2012), poor communication was found to be the third highest rated stressor in the British Industrial Society report. In a study undertaken by Kinman and Court (2010) it was found that resources and communication caused the highest levels of occupational stress for educators.

Chandra (2012) found that levels of stress experienced by employees related to monetary rewards (pay and benefits). Shirom, Westman, and Melamed (1999) as well as Kumar, Bajwa and Priya (2016) broadened this view by explaining that there is also a link between levels of stress and performance pay. Van Zyl and Buitendach (2004) highlighted a list of job stressors, which includes salary, lack of decision-making, role overload and retrenchments. A study conducted by Viljoen and Rothmann (2009) on educators confirmed that list of stressors includes, positive work impact, autonomy, salaries, promotion, job security, lack of support services and working hours which all forms part of intrinsic factors. Employees manage and control these working conditions with available resources. Lack of employees’ capabilities to deal with *job related demands* become stress when employees are required to expend considerable effort, in order to meet these demands (Opie, Dollard, Lenthall, Wakerman, Dunn, Knight & MacLeod, 2010).
The study by Sempane, Rieger, and Roodt (2002) as well as Buitendach and Rothmann (2009) states that job satisfaction has to do with an individual’s perceptions and evaluation of his or her job. This perception is due to personal experience of employees on different aspects of work, activities and related outcomes of the construct. Spector (2008) views job satisfaction as a general attitude that an employee has towards various aspects of their job. Spector (2008) also proposed that job satisfaction has linked to an employee’s individual needs. According to Spector (2008) a person’s individual needs may include challenging work, equitable rewards, a supportive work environment and positive relationships with colleagues. An individual with a high level of job satisfaction generally holds positive attitudes towards their job while an individual with a low level of job satisfaction holds negative attitudes towards their job (Robbins, Judge, Odendaal & Roodt, 2009; Rababah, 2019). It is influenced by personal perceptions, where individuals can decide whether they are satisfied with their jobs or not (Chen, Lee, Weng, & Chen, 2010). The level of job satisfaction depends on the person’s perception about what he/she actually wants from the job and their expectation (Chen, Lee, Weng, & Chen, 2010).

Job satisfaction has divided into intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic job satisfaction is how people feel about the outcome of the job (Spector, 1997). It refers to achievement, recognition; work itself and responsibility (Sharma & Jyoti, 2009). Extrinsic job satisfaction described as how people feel about aspects of the work situation that are external to the job (Spector, 1997). According to Sharma and Jyoti, (2009) extrinsic job satisfaction includes factors such as company policy, administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. Research shows that intrinsic factor is a more effective factor of human behaviour than extrinsic factor (Robbins et al., 2009, Sibisi, 2012). According to Phillips and Connell (2003), job satisfaction comprises of five factors, which are satisfaction with the work itself, salary, opportunity for promotion, supervision, and relationship with colleagues. Hochschild and Machung (2012) supported the above statement and Jacob (2012) added several factors, which influence job satisfaction such as, work group and working conditions. The above findings are supported by Herzberg theory, which included recognition and need for achievement, responsibility, advancement and growth.

**Relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction**

According to Setati (2014) negative relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction exists. Which means that high levels of occupational stress in employees will lead to lower job satisfaction and vice versa. Cicei (2012) indicates that higher job satisfaction fundamentally has a significant negative relationship with occupational stress. Sibisi (2012) has confirmed that nurses at a public hospital in Durban, had high levels of occupational stress associated with low levels of job satisfaction. Liyana and Mansor (2009) indicated that there are eight job satisfaction factors that are negatively associated with occupational stress, which are pay, nature of work, supervisors, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, communication and promotions.

Factors affecting occupational stress and job satisfaction are comparable therefore it can be established that any effort to promote satisfaction by categorizing the factors influencing job satisfaction will decrease occupational stress levels also (Liyana & Mansor, 2009). In another research conducted among military personnel the association between occupational stress and job satisfaction were established (Cicei, 2012; Sanchez, Bray, Vincus & Bann, 2004). Moreover, previous literature consistently reported an inverse relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction among various populations (Alfes, Shantz, & Ritz, 2018; Zimmermann, Rösler, Möller & Köller, 2018; Lambert, Minor, Wells & Hogan, 2016; Khamisa, Peltzer, Ilic & Oldenburg, 2016).

The study seeks to determine the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction in the NPO seeing that there are challenges in the NPO in South Africa as stipulated above. There is a sense of decline in employment stability particularly in NPO that relies heavily on funding; this is experienced as a result of fiscal pressure of governments (McIsaac et al, 2013). This reality shapes employment in NPO, and contributes to lower salaries, limited access to benefits and pensions. NPO operate under a continuous threat of funding cut, placing their on-going operation on a difficult situation (Shields, 2014). According to Shields (2014), among the job insecurity challenges are lack of resources, which also affect work overload and non-competitive salaries in NPO’s. Shields (2014), proposed that this situation has meant increased job instability.

Under funding and a lack of long-term funding which translates into job insecurity increases workloads, lack of promotion ladders, lower salaries and poor benefits. This situation is compound by strictness measures where government funding to the NPO’s has been further restrained and low wages eroded further which leads to NPOs failing to keep up with inflation because of funding (Baines, Cunningham, Campey & Shields, 2014). Many NPO’s employees finds their jobs satisfying, even under difficult situations where funding is cut, there is job satisfaction that is keeping employees working hard (Baines, Cunningham, Campey & Shields, 2014). On the other hand, the frustration about job insecurity, work overload and absence of rewards because of funding constraints has an impact on employees’ job satisfaction and occupational stress (Baines, Cunningham, Campey & Shields, 2014). This study determined the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction of employees and determine the factors of occupational stress and job satisfaction among employees in a Non-Profit Organisation.

**Research and Methodology**

The quantitative research design was selected as guided by the positivist social sciences approach to determine the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction of employees at NPO. Cross-sectional research design used to assess relationships among occupational stress and job satisfaction. A data was collected from a convenience sample of 148 permanents, fixed term and temporary employees from a total population of 260 using Minnesota Job Satisfaction and Eliot Stress Questionnaires (Weiss, Dawis,
England & Lofquist, 1967) The questionnaire was used to give employees the opportunity to indicate how they feel about their present work overall. An Eliot Stress Questionnaire (ESQ) by Eliot (1994) was used to measure occupational stress. Organizations usually use Eliot stress questionnaire to determine the occupational stress levels of employees within a specific work environment or in multiple environments within the same organization. For reliability and validity these questionnaires have been tested successfully. The statistical software SPSS version 24 was used to analyze the generated data. The descriptive and inferential statistics in the quantitative empirical methods was used to analyze and interpret the data statistically.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of factors affecting occupational stress

About 30% of the employees regularly experience the effects of occupational stress and 52% of employees sometimes experience the effects of occupational stress. Seven (7%) of the employees have never experienced the effects of occupational stress. The researcher used 2 questions to meet this objective: “Which of the following brings about maximum stress in the work environment?” and “Which of the following activities do you do to cut down on the negative stress?” The responses allowed respondents to choose more than one response. SPSS multiple response menu was used to analyse the frequency of responses rather than frequency of respondents on a certain response. Crosstabs were used to analyse the responses against different categories.

This finding shows that most of the occupational stressors arise from too much work which is inadequately compensated for by the organisation. Bland (1999) confirmed this finding that stressors like too much work, appeared to be standard with employees in the workplace. Sometimes occupational stress can be caused by the work that an employee has. It can be overload work or too little work. When employees have too much work to do, which in this study it is the case, they often put extra hours or even take work home in some cases which can lead to occupational stress. Workload can be stressful when it is too demanding, hence it was discovered in this study that 30% of employees regularly experienced occupational stress while 52% of employees experienced occupational stress sometimes.

This has been supported by Wales (2003) that as the workload becomes more demanding, intense and tight deadline approaching, some employees work well and find such stressful situations motivating. Given the differences in individual’s ability, stress can lead in a career change or could result in a new and better change within the organisation. New ideas, more creativity, and competitiveness can be generated from occupational stress hence it was discovered that 7% of the employees never experience occupational stress.

It was also discovered that low salaries are one of the stressors indicated in this study. When employees put efforts in their work, they expect to be rewarded accordingly. Therefore, in the absence of their expectations, they tend to be dissatisfied which then lead to Occupational stress.

In spite of the occurrence of occupational stress, it is important to also note that 61% employees have not suffered from occupational stress related chronic illnesses. Only 5% of the employees have suffered from occupational stress chronic related illnesses and 24% sometimes suffered from occupational stress related chronic illnesses. The fact that around 29% of employees sometimes and have suffered from occupational stress related chronic illnesses means that there is need for some programmes to actively reduce and ultimately manage occupational stress on employee so that it does not lead to illnesses, diseases, ill-health and infirmity.

The study concluded that indeed chronic illness is associated with occupational stress. Maslach & Schaufeli (2017) supported the above finding and that most of the early concern with occupational stress was directed to physiological symptoms. This was
researched and validated by specialist in the health and medical sciences. This research led to the conclusion that occupational stress could create changes in metabolism, increase heart and breathing rates, increased blood pressure, headaches and induce heart attacks.

**Key findings on the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction**

The study finds that certain occupational stress variables are directly correlated with certain job satisfaction variables. The simplified correlation of these variables as shown in Table 13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job satisfaction variable</th>
<th>Correlation value</th>
<th>Occupational stress variable</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The chance to be ‘somebody’ in the community</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>Frequency of bringing work back home?</td>
<td>There is a weak although statistically significant direct relationship between the two variables at 0.05% level of significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way my job provides for steady employment</td>
<td>0.239</td>
<td>Having ever suffered from chronic depression due to high level of work related stress?</td>
<td>There is a weak although statistically significant direct relationship between the two variables at 0.1% level of significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way company policies are put into practice</td>
<td>0.197</td>
<td>How often do you feel the effects of occupational burnout?</td>
<td>There is a weak although statistically significant direct relationship between the two variables at 0.1% level of significance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study finds that there are some occupational stress variables that have an inverse relationship as presented in Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational stress variable</th>
<th>Correlation value</th>
<th>Occupational stress variable</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do you feel the effects of occupational burnout?</td>
<td>-0.272</td>
<td>How often do you bring work back home?</td>
<td>There is an inverse, weak but statistically significant relationship between the two variables at 0.1 level of significance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction of employees in a NPO in the Gauteng province.

**Objective one: To determine the factors of occupational stress and job satisfaction among employees.**

Analysis results on occupational stress show that the employees are generally neither stressed nor non-stressed, median = 3.00 (the neutral point). Further scrutiny revealed that management, females, permanent employees, white and honours categories of employees have higher stress levels than associated categories by demographic strata. Jacob (2012) also found that educational qualifications have effect on the levels of stress experienced and that non-graduates do not experience high levels of stress than graduates, which are found to be experiencing occupational stress because of pressure of work. He concluded that the expectations, awareness and the aspirations of the educated classes being more, the graduates and post graduates experience high level of stress. According to Shane (2010) there are two sources of occupational stress that arise from the job content and job context that are generally acknowledged. The source of job content refers to characteristics of employee’s work characteristics, such as working overtime.

The source of job context refers to characteristics of the organization and behaviors of the people in them that may produce stress, such as inadequate support from supervisors and lack of chance of promotion. However, this study categorized eight factors of occupational stress. The main three occupational stressors are associated with work overload (29%), low salaries (26%) and no rewards in the human resources management system (25%). The study also showed that employees have developed personal mechanisms to deal with occupational stress. The activities that employees as imperative in reducing on the job negative stress include keeping self-motivating (48%) trying to look for alternate solutions (34%).

Analysis results on job satisfaction show that most employees, were generally more satisfied with their jobs than dissatisfied as the median score for satisfaction=3.62 above the neutral zone of 3. It was also discovered that females were more satisfied than their male counter-parts. Jacob (2012) has also reported similar findings. The results also showed that the women are found to have high levels of job satisfaction. Fixed term contract employees more satisfied than temporary and permanent employees. Additionally, employees with Honours degrees as their highest qualification were more satisfied than those with matric, diplomas, degrees and masters whilst employees whose ethnic origin is colored were more satisfied than black Africans, white, and Indian colleagues.
Employees at management levels were more satisfied with their jobs than technical and support-type employees. The most satisfying factors were being able to be kept busy at all times (44%) of respondents the way their job provides for steady employment (45%). The most causes of dissatisfaction came out as working conditions (13%), lack of freedom to use own judgement (13%) and lack of chances of advancement on the job (13%).

Objective two: To determine the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction of employees

Having presented and explained correlations between job satisfaction and occupational stress, the study findings point out that occupational stress and job satisfaction are somehow significantly related. From the correlation matrix in the appendix, a measure of the relationship between job satisfaction variables and stress variables is analysed and at 5% level of significance. There was a statistically significant correlation between levels of stress caused by “taking work back home” and levels of satisfaction derived from “the chance to be someone in the community” (0.243) weak but positive association (p=0.015) < 0.05. At 5% level of significance, there is also a statistically significant relationship between levels of stress caused by “having suffering from chronic depression due to high level of work related stress” and levels of satisfaction derived from “The way my job provides for steady employment” (0.239), (p=0.018).

The predictive value of occupational stress on job satisfaction is supported by research conducted by Ouellette, Frazier, Shernoff, Cappella, Mehta, Maríñez-Lora & Atkins (2018) who have found that high levels of occupational stress are a significant predictor of low levels of job satisfaction. Significant correlations between variables measuring the same dimension like job satisfaction signifies multi-collinearity which means they are highly correlated and one can be used as a proxy of another without loss of generality. This is evidenced at 5% level of significance where there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between frequency of stress caused by “feeling the effects of occupational burnout “and levels of satisfaction derived from “The way company policies are put into practice” (0.197), (p=0.05). This implies that the more frequent there is stress caused by occupational burnout, the less the levels of satisfaction from the way the company policies are put into practice.

Conclusion

Improving working conditions, creating advancement opportunities within the organization and letting the employees to use their judgement when faced with decision-making scenarios also contribute to job satisfaction. NPO employees are committed in helping other people and find their jobs psychologically satisfying (Renard & Snelgar, 2019). They choose to work for NPO for reasons such as flexible working place where they are highly involved in decision-making processes which gives employees the opportunity to be recognised and to improve their competences, knowledge and job satisfaction (Sacchetti & Tortia 2018). If employees have work overload, low income and no reward system in place, there are high chances of job related stress. Contracting services of a motivational speaker may be a good idea for employers as this study shows that keeping oneself self-motivated is one of the main remedies to work-related stress. It serves as a warning to employers that as one of the second best remedies to reduce stress, trying to find alternative solutions or “other jobs” was chosen as an option out of stress by employees.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Liyana and Mansor (2009)


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