

**STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE: THE PHENOMENON, SOME KEY CORRELATES
AND PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACHES**

by

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**This thesis is dedicated to my son Ruric Colm
who amazes me every day with his joy and love of life**

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands but seeking with new eyes.

Marcel Proust

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SUMMARY

Stress in the workplace: the phenomenon, some key correlates and problem solving approaches

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In this study the researcher set out to determine the levels and the causes of workplace stress, as well as the consequences of stress in terms of witnessed and experienced aggression in the workplace, anxiety, depression, and worry for a sample of 205 subjects. To achieve this, the following tests were used: 1) Experience of Work and Life Circumstances Questionnaire, 2) the Aggression in the Workplace Questionnaire, 3) the IPAT Anxiety Scale, 4) the Beck Depression Inventory, and 5) the Penn State Worry Questionnaire. The subjects' ability to cope with experienced stressors in relation to social problem solving was examined with the Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised. The raw data were analysed by means of the usual descriptive statistics. In addition, inferential statistics including *z*-tests, *t*-tests, analysis of variance and post-hoc analyses (Scheffé) were conducted for the following groups: total group, gender, marital status, age, organizational type, qualification and position level.

Results indicate that most of the subjects in the sample experienced normal levels of stress, indicating that the participants generally experienced their circumstances within or outside the workplace as satisfactory. Generally, the results also indicated that their expectations regarding their work situation were met. With reference to the consequences of stress, the total sample reported low levels of witnessing and experiencing workplace aggression, normal levels of anxiety, low levels of depression and worry. Good overall social problem solving suggests the ability to cope with demands and stressors within and outside the workplace. Generally, Pearson correlations indicated significant relationships between a) *levels of stress* as experienced by subjects and b) witnessed and experienced *workplace aggression*, c) *anxiety*, d) *depression*, e) *worry* and f) *social problem solving*.

That most of the subjects in this sample were able to deal effectively with the demands and stressors placed on them, from within and outside the workplace suggests the ability to use effective problem-focused coping involving social problem solving which for most participants, was due to a positive problem orientation and effective rational problem solving skills. These findings may be useful as part of a stress management programme to help employees deal with stress proactively by becoming more effective problem-solvers. In terms of a salutogenic paradigm, and consistent with recent developments in positive psychology, the findings indicate that more attention should be paid to possible reasons why some employees appear to cope with stress more effectively than others.

Key terms: stress, workplace, wellbeing, workplace aggression, anxiety, depression, worry, problem-focused coping, social problem solving; quantitative analysis

OPSOMMING

Druktespanning in die werkplek: die fenomeen, enkele kernkorrelate en benaderings tot probleemoplossing

deur

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In hierdie studie poog die navorser om die vlakke en oorsake van stres in die werkplek, sowel as die gevolge daarvan in terme van waargenome en beleefde aggressie in die werkplek, angs, depressie en kommer vir 'n steekproef van 205 deelnemers vas te stel. Vir hierdie doel is die volgende vraelyste gebruik: 1) Ervaring van Werk- en Lewensomstandighede-vraelys, 2) Aggressie in die Werkplek-vraelys, 3) IPAT Angsskaal, 4) Beck Depressie-inventaris, en 5) Penn State Kommervraelys. Die deelnemers se vermoë om stres te hanteer soos weerspieël in hulle sosiale probleemoplossingvaardighede is ondersoek met die Sosiale probleemoplossingsinventaris-Hersien. Die onverwerkte data is ontleed deur gebruik te maak van beskrywende statistiek asook inferensiële statistieke soos *z*-toetse, *t*-toetse, variansieontleding en post-hoc analyses (Scheffé) vir die volgende groepe: totale groep, geslag, huwelikstatus, ouderdom, tipe organisasie, kwalifikasie- en posvlak.

Resultate toon dat die meeste deelnemers normale stresvlakke ervaar wat aandui dat respondente hulle omstandighede binne en buite die werkomgewing as bevredigend beleef. Oor die algemeen toon die resultate ook dat deelnemers voel dat daar aan hulle verwagtinge betreffende die werksituasie voldoen word. Met betrekking tot die gevolge van stres, rapporteer die totale groep lae vlakke van waargenome en beleefde aggressie in die werkplek, asook normale angsvlakke, en lae vlakke van depressie en kommer. Deelnemers se goeie algemene sosiale probleemoplossing suggereer hul vermoë om stressors binne en buite die werkplek toereikend te hanteer. Pearsonkorrelasies toon oor die algemeen aan dat statisties beduidende verbande bestaan tussen deelnemers se beleefde a) *stresvlakke* en b) *waargenome en beleefde agressie in die werkplek*, c) *ang*s, d) *depressie*, e) *kommer* en f) *sosiale probleemoplossing*.

Dat meeste van die deelnemers in hierdie steekproef die vermoë het om eise en stressors binne en buite die werkplek effektief te hanteer suggereer die effektiewe gebruik van probleemgesentreerde hantering wat sosiale probleemoplossing insluit wat vir die meeste deelnemers geassosieer was met 'n positiewe probleemoriëntasie and effektiewe rasonale probleemoplossingvaardighede. Die bevindings van hierdie studie kan nuttig wees as deel van 'n stresshanteringsprogram wat werknemers help om meer proaktief in hulle hantering van stres te wees deur meer effektiewe probleemoplossing. Vanuit 'n salutogeniese paradigma en in ooreenstemming met resente verwickelinge in positiewe sielkunde, suggereer die bevindings ook dat meer aandag geskenk moet word aan redes waarom sommige werknemers stres meer effektief as ander hanteer.

Sleuteltermes: Stres, werkplek, algemene welstand, gedrag, werkplekaggressie, angs, depressie, bekommernis, probleemgefokusde handhawing, sosiale probleemoplossing, kwantitatiewe analise

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