

CHAPTER I

GENERAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Jones (1985:11-12), it is recognised that no one is immune to problems. Unfortunately, these problems are hardly ever convenient. Individuals do not have internal “switches” that enable them to turn off problems that originated at home as they walk through the corporate door to work. Likewise, problems that are generated at work are often “carried” home. Unattended problems usually become worse and adversely affect job performance. The prognosis for problem resolution is greatly enhanced through early identification and professional attention.

From the above quotation, it is clear that a problem needs to be addressed holistically because as mentioned, a problem in one sphere of one’s life affects all other spheres. Having said this, it is possible that problems that originated from work can have adverse effects on the employee’s relationship with other colleagues, friends and family members. It is also possible that a personal problem can have adverse effects on the job performance of the worker. The researcher believes that it is only by identifying such problems early and realising their negative effects on performance and productivity that it is important to implement an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) so as to attend to these problems quickly before performance and productivity deteriorate.

In conclusion, Langley (1999:48) indicates that the Employee Assistance Programme is a broad-brush approach acknowledging that at some time in life, crises could impact on performance and if employees are assisted in dealing with their situations, their functioning and quality of life can be improved. Hence Hollman in Terblanche (1988:24) says that an Employee Assistance Programme is a planned, systematic programme designed to provide professional assistance to employees experiencing alcohol, drug,

emotional and or personal crises (e.g. marital, family, financial and legal problems), which interfere with their job performance.

1.2 **MOTIVATION FOR THE CHOICE OF THE SUBJECT**

As a Social Worker for eleven (11) years at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital, and at some stage acting head of the Social Work Department, the researcher was expected to represent the Social Work Department at the hospital's Extended Management Meeting held every month. This acting role exposed the researcher to the problems faced by the managers of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital, such as unreported and general absenteeism, alcohol abuse, sick leave abuse, general lack of morale among employees, suicides, high employee turnover, especially among the nursing professionals, and the frustration that the managers have with a backlog of pending disciplinary and grievance cases, which the Department of Labour, Head Office, could not complete on time.

After reading an article on EAP from one of the social work journals, the researcher decided that this (EAP) might be a solution to the frustrations and problems of both Sterkfontein Managers and employees because "EAP is objective, non-judgemental and makes business sense. It has measurable benefits e.g. dealing with performance deficiencies, reduces absenteeism and systems abuse, time spent in disciplinary hearings, staff turnover, even the arrive alive statistics and fatalities" (Langley, 1999:48).

In conclusion, Davies (2000:3) indicates that EAP is a Staff Support System paid for by the employer, which helps employees to deal with their personal and work-related problems and challenges earlier and more effectively. As a result, it improves the productivity, performance and morale of the organisation. Hence, the researcher undertook this study to find out whether Sterkfontein employees need a structured support system so as to deal with their personal and work-related problems.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

The absence of a structured EAP for the employees of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital seems to manifest itself in problems not being addressed, such as high employee turnover, absenteeism, alcohol abuse and low morale. According to an annual report taken between 1/8/2000 – 30/4/2001 by the Sterkfontein Human Resources Department, the following statistics were provided on the following: absenteeism (12), alcoholism (10) poor work attendance (4), theft (2) and alleged assault (1). No statistics on employee turnover were available. Du Plessis (1988:23-25) indicates that it is estimated that troubled employees cost their employers 25% of their annual wage in lost production - reason alone to institute a programme.

The researcher therefore investigated the need for such an Employee Assistance Programme at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital.

1.4 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 Goal of the Study

To determine the need for an Employee Assistance Programme at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital

1.4.2 Objectives of the Study

- To describe the theoretical framework of an EAP as a service.
- To explore the employees' need for an EAP through an empirical study.
- To make recommendations for the possible design/introduction of an Employee Assistance Programme at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION FOR THE STUDY

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:37) indicate that problems are questions about relations among variables, and hypotheses are tentative, concrete and testable answers to such problems. Hence, the research question forming the object of this study is: Is there a need for an EAP at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital?

1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH

As a staff member for eleven (11) years at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital and the fact that no research had been done on the need for an EAP, the researcher has made use of a quantitative approach as the study phenomenon using numerical means. Mark (1996:210) points out that there is, in a quantitative approach, emphasis on counting, describing and using standard statistics, such as means and standard deviations. Furthermore, when we want to verify whether a cause produces an effect, we are likely to use quantitative methods.

Due to the nature of the research topic under investigation, which was geared towards the assessment of the employees' need for an EAP, the researcher has thus made use of a quantitative approach because she wanted to base her knowledge gained, as Grinnell (1997:74) puts it, on objective measurements of the real world, not on someone's opinion, beliefs or past experiences.

1.7 TYPE OF RESEARCH

For this study, the researcher utilised applied research. According to Bailey (1994:25), applied research is research with findings that can be applied to solve social problems of immediate concern. Judd, Smith and Kidder (1991:322) indicate that applied research may serve more broadly to define a social problem or explore alternative policies or programmes that might be implemented to solve some problems.

With applied research, the researcher will contribute information aimed at resolving an immediate social problem, which is needs assessment for an EAP at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:63), a research design is the planning of any scientific research from the first to the last step. In this sense, it is a

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programme to guide the researcher in collecting, analysing and interpreting observed facts. Mouton (2001:55) indicates that a research design is a plan or blueprint of how you intend conducting the research.

For this study, the researcher utilised an exploratory–descriptive design. According to Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:42), the purpose of exploratory research is to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person. The need for such a study could arise from a lack of basic information on a new area of interest.

According to Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:41), social anthropologists, for instance, are sometimes confronted with a situation where a culture, a certain group of people living in a remote area, is virtually unknown to the world. Thus, before being in a position to search for an explanation related to the mode of living of these people, or some characteristic, a certain amount of background information, namely a description of the “object of research”, must be gathered. In such a case, the type of research will be exploratory, which is a particular type of descriptive study.

Neuman (in Fouché 2002:109) indicates that descriptive research presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship, and focuses on the “how” and “why” questions. Fouché (2002:109) continues by saying that the researcher, therefore, begins with a well-defined subject and conducts research to describe it accurately, whereas in exploratory studies, the researcher aims to become conversant with basic facts and to create a general picture of conditions.

In conclusion, the researcher utilised an exploratory-descriptive design to identify the need for an EAP at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital, because little is known about EAP at Sterkfontein.

1.9 RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND STRATEGY

For this study, the researcher utilised a questionnaire to obtain data from the employees of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital. According to the New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:51), a questionnaire refers to a set of questions on a form, which is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project. De Vos and Fouché (1998:89) indicate that a questionnaire is an instrument with open and closed questions or statements to which a respondent must react.

The researcher compiled a questionnaire with open and closed-ended questions. According to Fouché (1998:160), the open question has advantages when a variable is relatively unexplored or unknown to the researcher. McMurtry (in Fouché 1998:160) notes that most questionnaires contain both open and closed questions. Fouché (1998:160) also indicates that the closed question is advantageous when a substantial amount of information about the subject exists and the response options are relatively well known.

In this study, the researcher hand delivered questionnaires to the respondents to enable the respondents to complete the questionnaire in their spare time without interference from the researcher. Bourque and Fielder (1995:2) indicate that a self-administered questionnaire is an instrument used to collect information from people who complete the instrument themselves.

1.10 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is defined in the New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:45) as the “process whereby the research design for a prospective survey is tested”. Strydom (2002:211) indicates that a pilot study can thus be regarded as a small-scale trial run of all the aspects planned for use in the main enquiry. Huysamen (1994:197) indicates that it is advisable to conduct a pilot study on a limited number of subjects from the same population as that for which the eventual project is intended.

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From what these authors say, the researcher's understanding was that a pilot study entailed the researcher trying out the proposed study on people who are not part of the sample, before the actual study commences. This helped the researcher to obtain some idea of the obstacles she might encounter in the actual study. For example, ambiguous or unclear questions that needed to be rectified before a proper study could be investigated. The pilot study provided the researcher with the "feel" of the study.

The following components were part of the pilot study:

1.10.1 Literature Study

Strydom (2002:211) is of the opinion that the prospective researcher can only hope to undertake meaningful research if he is fully up to date with existing knowledge on his prospective subject.

According to Mouton (2001:86-87), when you embark on your study, one of the first aims should be to find out what has been done in your field. You should start with a review of the existing scholarship or available body of knowledge to see how others have investigated the research problem in which you are interested. You want to learn from other scholars: how they have theorised and conceptualised issues, what they have found empirically, and what instrumentation they have used and to what effect.

For this study, the researcher enlisted the assistance of the Librarian at the University of Pretoria specialising on Academic Information Services to help with a search (through the computer and the Internet) on the relevant topic, which is Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The search provided a list of journals, books, theses and articles on EAP that are available in the Pretoria library, at RAU, at Wits and at Cape Town universities. With this list, the researcher traced books, journals as well as law, medical and health science sources on EAP. Other books, journals

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and articles on EAP were made available to the researcher through inter-library loans and the use of inter-varsity library services – more specifically RAU and Wits.

1.10.2 Consultation with Experts

The following experts have supported or shed some light on the subject of Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and thus helped the researcher to realise that such programmes were designed in the workplace specifically to assist employees who experience either work and/or personal problems:

- Professor L.S. Terblanche - of the University of Pretoria, Social Work Department, whose expertise on the subject of EAP dates back to 1980.
- The late Mrs S.C. Mamasela – also of the University of Pretoria, Social Work Department – who was a lecturer on EAP from 1997 to 2002.
- Mr A. Davies of the Independent Counselling and Advisory Services, who has inspired and shed more light on EAP through his contributions in the Star Newspaper (Workplace section).
- Dr B. Botha, a medical practitioner, who was the then Medical Superintendent at Sterkfontein Hospital, who had the idea that cases referred for disciplinary procedures should be referred to the heads of both the Social Work and Psychology departments first for intervention.

Information deduced from the above experts indicated the importance of EAP implementation at any workplace to help employees deal with problems that affect them socially, physically, psychologically and emotionally so that they can lead a healthy and improved quality of life both at work and at home, which will lead to a productive workforce.

1.10.3 Feasibility of the Study

Rubin and Babbie (1993: 101-102) indicate the following issues bearing on the feasibility of research, namely:

- **The fiscal costs**

Since Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital management gave permission for the study on needs assessment on EAP, the researcher did not encounter any problems regarding all the administrative costs, such as printing and copying expenses, computer costs for data processing and analysis, because all this equipment was accessible to the researcher in the hospital at an affordable cost as the researcher is a staff member of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital. There were no travelling, postage and personal costs as the research study was conducted at the researcher's place of employment. Therefore, everything was within the researcher's reach.

- **The scope of the study**

With the advent of Chief Executive Officers in public hospitals in 1999/2000 – the need for high productivity levels in State hospitals also developed and to achieve this, most hospital Chief Executive Officers introduced EAPs in their hospitals. Hence, the researcher – being a staff member of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital, did not encounter any problems in obtaining permission to conduct her study on needs assessment for an EAP at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital, as there was no such programme at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital. However, a letter of permission from Sterkfontein management was required for the research (See appendix I).

1.10.4 Pilot Test of the Measuring Instrument

Strydom (1998:179) maintains that a pilot study can be viewed as the “dress rehearsal” to the actual investigation. In this way, the researcher tries out the research instrument on a small number of people who have characteristics similar to the target group. For the pilot testing in this study,

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the questionnaire was administered to five (5) employees of Sterkfontein Hospital. These five employees did not form part of the sample of the research.

The preliminary study helped the researcher to check whether or not the questions asked supplied the information needed. In this instance, the respondents gave more than one response, despite the instruction given. The researcher modified the question concerned to accommodate more than one response and the instruction on the covering letter was also changed as a result thereof.

Some questions such as “Department for which you work” elicited inaccuracies and in clarifying the question, an example of the category of people falling within that department was provided.

Some inaccuracies were identified in the terminologies used, such as employee turnover and EAP. These terms were defined and a simple explanation was provided in brackets next to the difficult term.

It was also difficult to obtain the completed questionnaire back on time, that is after three days, because of the following: the people/person involved lost the questionnaire – had to get another one; they had to help in other wards – needed more time; they were off duty, or they were on night duty and were therefore not available during the day; some questionnaires were half completed and had to be discarded; the general assistants could only complete the questionnaire during lunch time and the researcher had to be available for interpretation; and others were available at work only on weekends.

The researcher also experienced some problems even in the main study. Despite the fact that the researcher tried everything possible to rectify

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some inaccuracies revealed in the pilot study, one respondent indicated an incorrect response under “Department for which you work” thus causing a slight change in the original number of respondents in some departments (see page 14 & Table 4).

In the end, it took the researcher three weeks to obtain all the completed questionnaires.

1.11 **DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION**

According to Grinnell and Williams (1990:118), a population can be defined as the totality of people or objects with which a study is concerned. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:85) indicate that the entire set of objects and events or group of people, which is the object of research about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics, is called the population.

For this study, the population included all the employees (525) of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital.

1.11.1 **Boundary of the Sample**

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:86) define a sample as a subset of the entire population, which is actually investigated by a researcher and whose characteristics will be generalised to the entire population.

A sample is the element of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study (Arkava & Lane, 1983:27).

The researcher’s understanding of a sample is a certain number of people taken from among the study population that will be used in the investigation as a representative of the entire study population. According to Grinnell (1985:146), a convention on sample size has been adopted: in most instances, a sample size of one tenth (1/10) the size of the population will provide reasonable control over sampling error. This proportion also

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applies in various categories of the population; one tenth of each category can be sampled.

In order for the researcher to obtain the number of the population so as to make a sample for this study, a computer printout of all the employees of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital was requested from the Personnel Department. The computer printout reflected a population of five hundred and twenty-five (525) employees of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital. In order to obtain a sample size for this study, one tenth of the total population of 525 employees of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital was deducted, which amounted to 53 respondents.

1.11.2 Sampling Methods

For this study, the researcher utilised probability sampling “in which each person in the population has the same known probability of being selected” (Strydom & Venter, 2002:203).

According to Fink (1995:9), probability sampling implies the use of random sampling, which eliminates subjectivity in choosing a sample, and it is a fair way of obtaining a sample. In order to select a representative sample of the population for this study, the researcher utilised a combination of interval/systematic sampling and stratified random sampling to complement each other in eradicating any bias that has the potential of occurring when applying interval/systematic sampling (Strydom & Venter, 2002:205).

Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:91) indicate that the principle of stratified random sampling is to divide a population into different groups, called strata, so that each element of the population belongs to one and only one stratum. Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:93) also indicate that stratified sampling by preserving proportions, even of very small samples, will allow for any small minority to be well represented.

To achieve representation and precision in this study, the researcher divided the total population of 525 Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital employees into five (5) strata according to their division/departments and attached the actual number of such employees in that particular division/department as reflected in the staff establishment document of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital to the appropriate strata.

The following different strata of the population were used: management - 25 in number – all levels of management; clinical staff – 45 e.g. doctors, social workers, psychologists and occupational therapists; administrative staff – 44; nurses – 253, including professional and auxiliary nurses; general workers – 158 – including cleaners and groundsmen. The union representatives were included in categories according to their respective rank and their inclusion in the sample of the study was ensured.

The researcher divided each employee in each respective category by one tenth or 10%, in order to know how many respondents from each category could be included in the sample, and added together all the figures derived from such a division to obtain a sample size of 53 respondents for the study. Grinnell and Williams (1990:127) indicate that a 10% sample should be sufficient to control sampling errors.

In conclusion, the sample of this study consisted of the following respondents: Management (3), Clinical Staff (5) Administration (5), Nurses (25) and General Workers (15).

1.12 **ETHICAL ISSUES**

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:102-103) indicate the following generally accepted ethical rights of participants, which a social scientist should respect:

- **Privacy or voluntary participation**

Participation in research must be voluntary and people can refuse to divulge information about themselves. This right to privacy demands that direct consent for participation be obtained.

For this study, the researcher made sure that when distributing the questionnaire, the target population was verbally informed in their own language that participation in the study was voluntary, even though this was clearly stated on the covering letter accompanying the questionnaire (See appendix 3). Creswell (1998:115) says that participants in the study should be informed of their right to withdraw voluntarily from the study at any time.

- **Informed consent**

For this study, the researcher received written consent from Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital and the participants in the study. The letter of permission is included in the appendices.

- **Harm to respondents**

In this study, the respondents were not exposed to any physical and/or emotional harm.

- **Confidentiality**

In this study, the respondents were assured of confidentiality. The researcher made sure that the information gathered was used only for the purpose of the study, which is needs assessment for an EAP, and not for personal use by anyone (i.e. individual supervisor or management) to get back at them (i.e. the employee/s).

- **Release or publication of the findings**

The results of the findings of the study were made known to Sterkfontein Management for them to approve or disapprove the recommendation for EAP introduction at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital. No identities of any participants were revealed, to ensure the right of the participants to confidentiality. Not only did the management know about the study findings, but the participants too, as Grinnell and Williams (1990:10) indicate that communication of the findings to those who participated in a study is even more delicate.

1.13 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts were defined for clarification purposes:

1.13.1 Employee Assistance Programme

The Employee Assistance Professional Association in the United States defines Employee Assistance Programme thus: “An Employee Assistance Programme is a work-site based program designed to assist in the identification of productivity problems associated with employees impaired by personal concerns including, but not limited to: health, marital, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, emotional, stress or other concerns which may adversely affect employee job performance. The specific core activities of EAP’s include: expert consultation and training to appropriate and timely problem assistance... and formation of linkages between workplace and community resources that provides such services” (Lee and Gray, 1994:216).

According to Myers (1984:4), Employee Assistance is a generic term denoting more or less structured programmes that utilise technical, administrative and professional human services and staff, on either a contractual or employment basis, to meet the needs of troubled employees.

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From the definition given by the above authors, it is clear that an Employee Assistance Programme is designed to benefit the employer, the employee and the entire organisation. It helps to identify the problems of individuals to help towards resolving such problems and in the process, the overall quality of life of the individual improves. This further shows that by having such a programme operating in the workplace, the productivity level will be enhanced and the worker morale and motivation will be boosted because as per the definition, problems are handled promptly and as a preventative measure, problematic areas are identified and resolved before escalating into a full-blown scale.

1.13.2 Troubled Employee

According to Bruce (1990:4), a problem employee is an employee whose behaviour in the workplace causes reduced productivity and lowered morale for the self, the co-workers, or the supervisor. Klarreich, Franscek and Moore (1985:1) defined troubled employees as those individuals whose personal problems (such as alcohol, drug addiction, marital difficulties and emotional distress) preoccupy them to an extent that in either their own or their supervisor's judgement their work is disrupted.

The researcher's interpretation of a troubled employee is an employee with emotional, social, financial or physical problems that have a negative effect on his/her job performance and who needs help in trying to obtain a solution to his/her problems.

1.14 CONTENTS OF RESEARCH REPORT

This research report is presented thus:

CHAPTER 1: General introduction and research methodology.

CHAPTER 2: This chapter focuses on a theoretical perspective concerning the topic of EAP, the troubled employee, a psychiatric hospital and working conditions.

CHAPTER 3: This chapter entails a description of the empirical findings as well as the analysis and interpretation of data by means of figures and tables.

CHAPTER 4: This chapter presents a summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations.

1.15 SUMMARY

Like other workplaces, Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital experiences problems related to absenteeism, high employee turnover, alcohol abuse and a general lack of morale among employees. This has prompted the researcher to undertake a study on needs assessment for an EAP at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital.

Due to the nature of the research topic under investigation, which is a needs assessment for an EAP, the researcher has used a quantitative approach because she wanted to base her knowledge gained on objective measurements of the real world, and not on someone's opinion, beliefs or experiences. Thus, applied research was used in this study as it is the scientific planning of induced change in a troublesome situation.

An exploratory-descriptive design was used in this study to identify the need for an EAP at Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital because little is known about EAP at this hospital. The research questionnaires were administered to 53 employees of Sterkfontein Psychiatric Hospital so as to gather information about the employees' attitudes, opinions and interest regarding EAP.

In the next chapter, the researcher will focus on a literature review of the concept of EAP.