

CHAPTER 1

THE POSITIONING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION, HUMAN MOVEMENT STUDIES AND STRESS: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is necessary to position the concepts of physical activity, human movement studies and stress in their proper perspective. It is also imperative to provide perspective on the Department of Correctional Services. As an adolescent concerns about physical health are grounded in the present and youth have definite perceptions of what is meant by physical education. These perceptions are often based on personal experiences (eg. Physical education - taught at schools) and not on empirical studies. Many have pleasant memories, recollections and experiences associated with physical education and its many facets, which form an important subset of human movement studies.

As one grows older concerns about physical health extend to the future where issues such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer become increasingly important (Williams, 1985). Interestingly the issue of stress and its effect on wellbeing is appearing more often both in literature - and in conversations that focus on enhancing the quality of life both in the present and in the future. Simple changes in current life-style may help to reduce stress and enhance quality of life in the future (Williams, 1985). Fitness and wellness are two key "buzz" words of the 1990's and have invariably extended into the new millennium. Health promotion practices focus increasingly on five major areas, physical fitness and exercise, nutrition, control of stress, smoking and health, and misuse of alcohol and drugs. Business and industry are developing wellness programmes for

their employees and legislation now focuses on an area such as smoking (Williams, 1985).

1.2 PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education is entrenched within the philosophy of education which in itself and has been defined in various ways (Jordaan, 1992). Education has been defined as the optimisation of appropriate qualities within an individual with the objective of drawing this individual into adulthood (Yagoe, 1991). A child at birth is considered to be "incomplete" regarding the dimensions of mind, body and soul. Education both formally and informally attempts to guide, inform and mould the child. Physical education is a component of this "moulding" process and perhaps has its origins in schools, (a partner in educating the "incomplete child").

For education to take place the domains of psychomotor, physical, affective and cognitive orders have to be addressed. The Physical Education content of the curriculums in schools attempts to address the dimensions of body, mind and soul. These dimensions are directly or indirectly implicated in this study when studying references relating to education in a broad sense and physical education in a definitive sense. (Gabbard, Louw, 1991; Gallahue, 1993). This argument then places Physical Education within the domain of Human Movement Studies.

1.3 HUMAN MOVEMENT STUDIES

Physical education although entrenched in education has evolved over time. It has also been recognised as an academic discipline in most countries around the world. Physical education has a unique character and contributes to the development of an individual from birth to adulthood. This process of development takes place on a personal level

and is physical, spiritual, and social. Arising from this rationale is the reason for the change in the academic character of physical education. This lead to a broadening of the scope of physical education enticing many other disciplines to be associated with it.

In South Africa the metamorphosis from physical education to human movement studies was accelerated during the 1970's when finances were made available for sports research (Van Wyk, 1992). This notion of change of names is still a matter of debate in many countries. Human movement studies have been accepted through common consent by academic departments in South Africa and are known by various other names across the world (Greendorfer, 1987; Renson, 1990; Van Wyk, 1992). Human movement studies as a generic discipline is also associated with the following concepts, education, training, lifestyle, rehabilitation, recreation, exercise and beauty of movement (Renson, 1990).

1.4 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE

It is necessary to differentiate between physical activity and exercise. Physical activity refers to movement caused by muscular contractions resulting in an expenditure of energy of many of the usual activities of daily life. Exercise is considered to be an aspect of physical activity linked to the development and maintenance of specific components of fitness. Exercise is one of the major elements in health promotion. Physical inactivity is perhaps one of the most significant, readily modifiable personal factors contributing to poor health status and to stress (Williams, 1990).

1.5 RECREATION

Recreation and the outdoors make an enormous contribution to the quality of our lives, our sense of community and our economy (Flanagan, 1978). This is not a surprising statement since those associated with recreation and the outdoors have accepted as gospel the therapeutic importance of recreation to the quality of life of those who engage in such pursuits. The importance of recreation has been taken into account in the planning and marketing of residential environments today implying that participation enriches the quality of life of community residents (Hunt et al, 1983).

1.6 THE NATURE OF STRESS

We in South Africa and the rest of the world live in an era of unparalleled change. In the workplace; with specific reference to the Department of Correctional Services; employee's face increasing demands - upheaval caused by demilitarizing, severance packages, affirmative action and pressure on newly appointed managers. Our changing economy, movement towards increased technological advances, and the changing demographics of the work force all increase the rate of stress-related disorders. Stress appears to be increasing as a result of the pressures, changes and demands of modern life (Byers, 1987). Every person experiences stress but many believe that they cannot do much to counteract its negative effects. Stress has become a major barrier to personal health and has been linked directly to almost every common disease (Scott and Jaffe, 1991).

Hans Selye (Selye, 1974) coined the term "stress" referring to the "wear and tear" of the body's response to the pressures, changes and challenges of life. Both positive and negative events trigger the stress response. The body mobilises to meet a crisis, threat or challenge. The

thrill of a challenge or the cold shiver when confronted by a snake is a form of stress response where the body adapts its energy to meet a challenge, or crisis or threat.

Selye (1974) referred to positive stress as "eustress" which promotes and sustains high performance allowing individuals to meet special challenges. Negative stress or poorly managed stress can be dysfunctional by weakening a person's ability to resist. Over time the individual experiences physical and psychological breakdown resulting from his/her inability to cope. (Scott and Jaffe, 1991).

Life is filled with stress, which can be short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic). Acute stress is the reaction to an immediate threat, commonly known as the "fight or flight" response (House, 1982). The threat can be any situation that is experienced, even subconsciously or falsely, as a danger. Common stressors include noise, crowding, isolation, hunger, danger and infection. Imagining a threat or remembering a dangerous event can also evoke a stress response. Frequently, however, modern life poses ongoing stressful situations that are not short-lived such as work or personal situations and against which the urge to act – to fight or to flee – must be suppressed. Psychological pressures such as relationship problems, loneliness, continual deadlines, or financial worries may be unrelenting and lead to chronic stress (Busser, 1990). Stressors are external or internal e.g. pressures, demands, challenges and changes that affect an individual. These can be acute or chronic, once off events or events that are ongoing.

Persons vary in their perceptions of stress and stressors. When an individual feels he/she cannot cope, the situation becomes a threat. Anxious and insecure people may perceive all events as threats while others may perceive the same events as a challenge. If an event is seen

as a threat it may affect the person even at a later stage. Coping responses are built into the body and are activated by stressors. A stressor like being asked to prepare to speak in public activates a stress response. When the individual meets the challenge the body drops to the normal level. If the stressor is excessive the body becomes weakened leading to exhaustion and eventually physical breakdown.

A stressful situation can be dealt with, managed or even avoided. These responses depend on the nature of the stressor and can be either positive or negative leading to an effective or ineffective outcome. An individual can either take care of a situation or become ineffective or dysfunctional. Physical and emotional symptoms result from an ineffective coping strategy. These symptoms can also be behavioural and can contribute to alcohol and drug abuse. The work context is a primary contributor to dysfunctional stress.

The following list of the effects of chronic stress has been drawn from the works of several stress and health researchers (Selye 1974; Cox 1980; Moss 1981; Everly and Feldman, 1985; Harris and Dewey, 1984; Sauter, Murphy and Harrell, 1990; Temoshok and Dreher, 1992).

- a) Health effects: asthma, chest and back pains, coronary heart disease, diarrhea, faintness and dizziness, headaches and migraine, psychosomatic disorders, diabetes, skin rash, ulcers and weakness.
- b) Subjective effects: anxiety, aggression, apathy, boredom, depression, fatigue, frustration, guilt, irritability and bad temper, moodiness, low self-esteem, threat and tension, nervousness, loneliness, nightmares, insomnia, neuroses, inability to make decisions and concentrate, forgetfulness, hypersensitivity to criticism, loss of sexual interest, and mental blocks.

c) Behavioural effects: accidents, drug taking, emotional outbursts, excessive eating or loss of appetite, drinking and smoking, excitability, impulsive behaviour, impaired speech, nervous laughter, restlessness, and trembling.

d) Organizational effects: absenteeism, poor work relations, low productivity, accidents, turnover, poor organizational climate, low morale, antagonism at work, and job dissatisfaction.

1.7 DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

1.7.1 Some Basic Premises

In this chapter physical education, human movement studies and stress have been placed in perspective. However it is necessary to provide some perspective on the Department of Correctional Services within which this study is being conducted. Presently 32 000 personnel are employed at 215 prisons and at Head Office (Pretoria). The transformation of the Public Service has been a National priority and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) has had to make several changes to be in tandem with this priority. Several events have occurred since which have led to uncertainty, stress and low morale.

1.7.1.1 Demilitarization

The DCS has been a military organisation since its inception. A very formal and organised rank structure existed with specific protocols. All personnel wore uniforms and could be easily identified. "Orders" or "commands" were obeyed without question.

In April 1996 the organisation demilitarised. All personnel, who had been accustomed to a disciplined rank structure, suddenly found themselves without rank and in some areas out of uniform. This has led to several problems including a breakdown in discipline. The rigid military system, a system that most of the employees were accustomed to was removed without preparing employees for the change. Most new managers who had come up through the ranks were accustomed to giving and receiving “orders”. Participative management was an entirely new concept and managers did not receive much mentoring or induction in this respect.

1.7.1.2 Severance Packages

In keeping with the transformation of the Public Service the DCS offered several members severance packages. Although some welcomed this, the majority was uncertain. Valuable expertise was lost once severance packages were approved, and those leaving the Department could not mentor the new managers. New managers were placed in a hostile environment and had to learn by trial and error. Those occupying the vacant posts presently are also under stress as this is a new experience. Several have been promoted and may lack the necessary experience to cope with their new jobs.

1.7.1.3 Affirmative Action and Employment Equity

With the transformation of the Public Service came, the principle of 70/30. The DCS adopted a principle that by the year 2000-70% of the workforce would be black and 30% would be white. Initially this caused a great deal of dissatisfaction, as there were several misconceptions about the breakdown of the 70%. Minority groups such as Indians and Coloureds initially felt dissatisfied and believed that they were not included in the 70%. This has led to dissatisfaction and low morale.

1.7.1.4 Physical working conditions

Conditions within prisons are deteriorating because of overcrowding. At the end of June 2000 there were 172 000 prisoners in custody. Several prisons were filled to 150% their capacity. This caused several problems for the staff. They are constantly under threat and as a result are under stress. Both verbal and physical abuse of personnel by prisoners is on the increase.

1.7.2 Stress Related Problems At Certain Prisons.

A Committee was established in 1995 to investigate labour related problems at Johannesburg, Pollsmoor and Victor Verster Areas of Command. A report was submitted to the Minister of Correctional Services and the following is an interpretation of the report.

1.7.2.1 Stress Audit: Johannesburg Prison

The report refers to the prison environment, which is very stressful due to numerous factors that have been previously documented in other reports. These factors include the very nature of the people whom the members have worked with in the prison environment and the understaffing within the Department of Correctional Services. Johannesburg prison according to the report is no exception in this regard. The recreation and sporting facilities at the Johannesburg Prison were not utilised to assist the members in managing stress. The report emphasised that the department needed to give this particular aspect serious consideration and that the DCS should look into a variety of recreation facilities and not be limited to what was previously perceived as White sporting codes. The department should conduct a thorough psychological study of the stress environment in which members work and be advised by experts on

assistance that may be afforded to members to cope better. A number of members had currently applied for or were on stress leave. There had also been a sudden increase in the number of people who had applied for stress leave. The report stated that whilst the committee accepted that the conditions within a prison were stressful, the committee felt that there was a need for the department to investigate the authenticity of the various applications and the extent of leave, which has been, taken by some members. There was a perception within the prison services that there were members who were taking this as an “easy way out” to try and avoid working within the department. The report committee felt that the taking of "stress leave" would be increasingly abused unless urgent steps were taken to verify each case.

1.7.2.2 Stress/sick leave: Pollsmoor

At Pollsmoor management identified senior members and others who were off on sick/stress leave. It was stated that many of the senior management who resigned after the investigation ordered by the Deputy Commissioner had subsequently applied for voluntary retrenchment packages, which had been granted to most of them. The report stated that of the six senior managers who were on sick leave, five had been off for a considerable period of time. Management regarded it as significant that those senior managers that were on sick leave were white and that the reasons given were stress and major depression. No links or reasons were given for the stress and doctors' certificates were simply produced. The report stated that of the ordinary members, who were on sick leave, many were off for normal reasons but there were those who were also booked off citing stress and depression as reasons. In certain sections of the prison, management believed that a pattern could be established whereby one particular member came back from sick leave and another member would immediately go off apparently due to stress and/or

depression. Whilst there is a normal medical board that considers the whole issue, management felt that the process took a long time and was inappropriate in the circumstances. Management felt that many of the members who were taking stress leave were taking leave and using this as an escape from the effects of affirmative action policies and transformation in the department.

The absence of members off on sick leave had a very demotivating and stressful effect on other members in that the members remaining were required to perform the additional work that the member who was on sick leave would have done. In addition, if members perceive that the system was being abused by persons who were not really sick or under stress, it may be demotivating and in the long term may encourage other members themselves to abuse the system.

1.7.2.3 Stress/sick leave: Victor Verster

The report stated that the number of members who were away on sick leave was disturbing the morale of members who were working. There were certainly grounds for suspicion at the Victor Verster Prison that certain of the senior management who were supposed to be off on stress leave were in fact gainfully employing themselves in the private sector whilst enjoying the salaries paid by the department. It was the committee's view that a more speedy system of assessing the veracity of the sick leave/stress leave claims should be developed as the present system was cumbersome and facilitated abuse. The committee believed that the taking of sick/stress leave was spreading and that the figures indicate that more and more members were resorting to this "easy way out". Whilst it was clear that there were many underlying reasons as to why this was taking place, the department could not allow this situation to continue

especially where there already was a shortage of staff and each member was required to perform as effectively as possible.

1.7.2.4 Stress Management

The report indicated that the department should consider setting up a stress management unit under a qualified psychiatrist or psychologist as had been established within the South African Police Services subject to what may emerge in a stress psychological analysis referred to above.

1.7.2.5 Stress leave

As in other prisons, a concern was expressed about the number of people who have applied for or are on sick leave ("stress leave"). It seems there has been an increase in the number of people who go on stress leave. There was a perception even at Pollsmoor Prison that there are members who are taking this as an easy way out to try and avoid working within the Department. The taking of "stress leave" will in the view of the Committee be increasingly abused unless urgent steps are taken to verify each case. In making this recommendation the Committee is also mindful of the fact that the conditions within a prison are stressful and there might be genuine cases of people who need to go on leave due to stress.

1.7.3 Stress Audit

A stress audit was conducted at Victor Verster Prison by the sport subdirector in February 1997. Thirteen percent of the personnel were subjected to a questionnaire. Four measuring instruments were used to compile the questionnaire that was filled in by the personnel. The measuring instruments focussed on level of stress, the Holmes Rahe Stress scale with regard to events, the Service delivery scale of Maslach

(1981, 1986) and the Diversity Awareness Continuum of Gard en Swartz and Le Roux (1993).

A summary of the findings included:

- ✿ High stress levels
- ✿ Irritability
- ✿ Insomnia
- ✿ Headaches
- ✿ Depression
- ✿ Suicide as a solution had been contemplated
- ✿ Low self-esteem and morale
- ✿ Withdrawal symptoms

1.8 CONCLUSION

In studying stress the issue is not how to prevent stress (a task, which could be deemed impossible), but how to create a balance of positive and negative experiences that produces optimal mood and well-being.

This leads the author to view Human Movement Studies in general and Physical activity and recreation in particular as a central part of life, much like sleeping. It is likely that increasing one's physical activity and levels of recreation above a particular level will increase health or activate the body's defenses against stress. It is also more likely that not engaging in physical activity and recreation is stressful enough (Ulrich and Simons, 1986). Work can be, and especially in the Department of Correctional Services, is stressful. Physical activity and recreation can serve as a balance to work by providing restorative refractory periods in which the pressures of work are less salient.

1.9 OBJECTIVES OF THESIS

The purpose of this study is to determine the causes and levels of stress among the Heads of Prisons in the Department of Correctional Services.

The major research questions that will be addressed in this study are:

- ❖ What are the stress levels of employees in the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa?
- ❖ What are the stressors, both from within as well as outside the work situation, that are perceived as stressful?
- ❖ What percentage of the employees in the Correctional Services in South Africa experience high levels of stress?
- ❖ Is there an association or relationship between the employee's biographic/demographic characteristics and their experience of stress, i.e. causes and levels of stress?
- ❖ Are there differences between the average stress scores of different groups in the sample?

This thesis will not attempt to determine the relationship between reduced stress levels through sport and recreation (as sufficient research already exists) but will review this research in relation to the above as well as in relation to the Department of Correctional Services' sport policy.