

CHAPTER 7

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Corporate employees experience stress in the workplace because of reasons such as interpersonal relationships, organisational processes and work-home balance. They are expected to perform because there are deadlines that they have to meet, high management expectations and job insecurity. Often, they earn excellent salaries but they are expected to perform in accordance and even give more than their money's worth to justify their positions and their salaries.

Apart from the stress that corporate employees experience in the workplace, they also experience pressure in other areas of their lives outside the workplace. They have different roles that they have to fulfil and each one of these roles has their own demands.

All of these aspects add to the stress that is experienced by corporate employees. With ongoing stress, corporate employees start to feel out of balance with themselves and their environment. They experience a loss of control and they need to explore ways of regaining their equilibrium and thus their sense of being in control of their lives. If corporate employees do not take steps to manage their stress levels it could be to the detriment of their health and their work performance and it may even lead to burnout.

7.2 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

7.2.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was stated as follows:

To use play therapy mediums in a stress management programme to enable corporate employees to become aware of, and to manage their stress levels.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the findings that were gained from the pre and post-test indicate that this aim was achieved. The pre-test indicated that the stress levels of the corporate employees were very high. The stress management programme was presented to the corporate employees and play therapy mediums were used successfully throughout the programme. Thereafter, a post-test was done and it indicated that there was a positive change in the stress levels of the employees. The empirical results indicate a significant difference between the pre and the post-test findings.

7.2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- To conduct a literature study regarding stress management, play therapy mediums and corporate employees.
- To design a stress management programme using play therapy mediums to facilitate greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects

of stress on their daily functioning, their health and job performance.

- To implement a stress management programme that will enable employees to manage their stress levels more effectively.
- To evaluate a stress management programme for corporate employees.
- To formulate conclusions and recommendations which will be based on the empirical findings obtained from the study.

As discussed in Chapter 1, in order to achieve these objectives, the researcher essentially made use of quantitative research during this study, but for the sake of a more comprehensive research study, some aspects of qualitative research were incorporated.

With regard to the quantitative approach, the respondents completed questionnaires before and after they had undergone the stress management programme. The questionnaires gave an indication of the stress levels that the respondents were experiencing before the stress management programme, and what the effect of the stress management programme was on the respondents' stress levels. These results were analysed statistically to ascertain what the impact of the stress management programme was on each individual. The respondents were also asked to complete a checklist at the commencement of the stress management programme which they used for the compilation of their own stress management programmes. The checklists were not submitted to the researcher, but they remained the property of the respondents. In this regard a quantitative approach was followed.

Qualitative data was also gathered throughout the research. The researcher made use of a semi-structured interview schedule to have individual interviews with each of the respondents who took part in the study. This enabled the researcher to become

aware of their knowledge regarding stress and expectations regarding the stress management programme. Furthermore, the respondents were observed throughout the training and some conclusions were drawn with regard to the effect of the training on the respondents.

The objectives of the study were achieved as follows:

- An extensive literature study regarding stress management, play therapy mediums and corporate employees was done before commencement and during the course of the research study.
- A stress management programme with the use of play therapy was developed to facilitate greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects of stress on their daily functioning, their health and job performance.
- A stress management programme enabling employees to manage their stress levels more effectively was implemented.
- A stress management programme for corporate employees was evaluated by means of a pre and post-test as well as a separate evaluation that was completed by the corporate employees regarding the use of the play therapy mediums in a stress management programme.
- Conclusions and recommendations based on the empirical findings obtained from the study were formulated.

7.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question was formulated as follows:

Will the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees, have a positive effect on their stress levels?

The research question can be answered as follows: Play therapy mediums can be used in stress management programmes with corporate employees to improve their stress levels. The pre and post test scores as discussed in Chapter 6, indicated that the stress levels of the corporate employees improved after exposure to a stress management programme wherein play therapy mediums were used.

7.4 HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were compiled, guided by the expectations regarding the outcome of the research study:

After participation in the stress management programme the corporate employees:

- Will be aware of what stress is.
- Will become aware of the effect of stress on their lives.
- Will become aware of what causes stress in their lives.
- Will be able to use the play therapy mediums as a stress release.
- Will be able to make use of the stress management techniques to alleviate stress in their lives.

- Will be able to take responsibility for their lifestyle.
- Will be able to make choices regarding their future reactions to stressors in their lives.
- Will be able to compile a, personal stress management programme.
- The organisation will benefit from more productive and motivated employees.

From the quantitative research results, it was concluded that the hypotheses could be proven to be true as follows:

After participation in the stress management programme the corporate employees:

- Were more aware of what the meaning of stress is, because of the information that was presented to them during the course. Each of the employees was involved in a play therapy activity where they had to draw and discuss the definition of stress.
- Became aware of the effect of stress on their lives, because of the information that was presented to them during the course. Each of the employees was involved in a play therapy activity where they had to do a body outline drawing and discuss the effect of stress on themselves, physically, emotionally and psychologically.
- Became aware of the causes of stress in their lives through a checklist that they completed during the stress management programme.
- Were able to use the play therapy mediums as a stress release. The employees applied this during the stress management training.
- Were able to make use of the stress management techniques to alleviate stress in their lives. The employees applied this in the compilation of a personal stress management programme after completion of the stress management training. The post-test indicated an increase in the use of relaxation techniques, to manage their stress levels.

- Were able to take responsibility for their lifestyles. Most of the employees indicated that they needed to make lifestyle changes. They compiled a personal stress management programme, in order to address certain aspects in their lives that have an effect on their stress levels. They had the responsibility to make some lifestyle changes.
- Were able to make choices regarding their future reactions to stressors in their lives. Some of the employees approached their manager to discuss the impact of stress on their personal lives.
- Were able to compile their personal stress management programme. Each employee compiled a personal stress management programme which they applied for a period of three weeks. The post-test, after the stress management programme, indicated that the stress levels of the employees decreased.
- The organisation will benefit from more productive and motivated employees. This has not been proven from the quantitative research yet as one of the recommendations from this study is that further post- test should be performed in order to measure the longer term impact of the stress management programme on the employees as well as on the organisation. The literature study indicated that organisations benefit from more productive and motivated employees when their stress levels decrease.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter focuses on the conclusions and recommendations that can be made from the results that were obtained from the research that was done with corporate employees. Conclusions were derived from both the literature and empirical findings and were grouped as follows:

- The Gestalt Theory as theoretical framework for stress management with corporate employees.
- The effect of a stress management programme on the stress levels of corporate employees.
- The use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme with corporate employees.

7.5.1 Conclusions with regard to the use of the Gestalt Theory as theoretical framework in a stress management programme.

The Gestalt Theory can be used effectively as a theoretical framework for a stress management programme with corporate employees.

The concepts of the Gestalt Theory can be brought into relation with the effect that stress has on an individual. This conclusion is confirmed by Congress (1995:1121) when he states that the Gestalt Theory is holistic and can form the theoretical framework for work with any type of individual.

From the literature, the researcher derived the following concepts regarding the application of the Gestalt Theory in a stress management programme within the corporate environment. These concepts were discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

- **Awareness**

As discussed in paragraph 2.4.1, one of the main objectives of a stress management programme is to create awareness with regard to the cause of stress, the effect of stress and ways in which stress can be managed. The

Gestalt Theory focuses on awareness as part of the process of bringing the person in contact with him/herself and thereby the person can take responsibility for his/her life.

Furthermore, Robinson (1991:4) states that the basic goals of Gestalt are:

... for the clients to gain awareness of what they are experiencing and doing, and by becoming aware to take responsibility for what they are feeling, thinking and doing.

The Gestalt Theory underlines awareness and can, therefore, be used effectively as a theoretical framework in a stress management programme with the corporate employee. The researcher experienced this concept as a fundamental part of the programme. As the awareness increased, the employees took more responsibility for their stress levels.

- **Homeostasis**

This concept was discussed in detail in paragraph 2.4.3. The person who is experiencing stress on an ongoing basis often feels that he/she is out of balance.

The person's Gestalt is intact when he/she is able to balance the different parts that form the Gestalt – the parts that form part of the foreground as well as the parts that form part of the background. Corporate employees often experience stress because they cannot balance all the aspects of their lives and, therefore, do not reach homeostasis.

Therefore, using the Gestalt Theory as a theoretical framework for the stress management programme enables the employee to identify and address factors that cause an imbalance in their Gestalt, which leads to stress.

- **Wholeness**

Wholeness, as discussed in paragraph 2.4.2, is emphasised in the Gestalt Theory. There is no distinction between the mind and body or the thoughts and actions of people. They do not refer to feelings as separate from themselves – it is an integral part of them and should be viewed as such (Congress, 1995:1119).

Through the stress management programme and with the Gestalt Theory as theoretical background, the corporate employees realised that their emotions and their bodily reactions related to one another and, therefore, if they felt sad they may experience physical symptoms, for example headaches and stomach discomfort. The Gestalt Theory as theoretical framework for the stress management programme enables the employees to realise that all the parts of their person, work together as a whole. Their emotions have an effect on the physical person and this can have an effect on their psychological functioning.

- **Unfinished business**

The term “unfinished business” was discussed in detail in paragraph 2.4.4. People who have unfinished business cannot give their full attention to a specific situation because they have unfulfilled needs, unspoken needs or

unfinished situations that colour their perceptions (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:111).

The corporate employees realise that if they have concerns at home, it could affect their ability to perform as expected of them. Unfinished business will always have an effect on their homeostasis. The employees feel out of balance and the unfinished experiences are projected into the workplace. This affects the stress levels of the employee negatively.

- **Responsibility**

As discussed in paragraph 2.5.8, corporate employees need to take responsibility for their lives and their stress levels. They need to take responsibility for their choices and make lifestyle changes to ensure positive stress in their lives. This concept from the Gestalt was emphasised during the stress management programme by allowing each employee to reflect on the causes of stress in their lives and how they need to make changes that will address these stressors. Therefore, they have to take the responsibility for the changes that need to be made. This concept enabled the social worker to explain to the corporate employees why it is important to take responsibility and to regain control over their lives.

Perls (1969) in Thompson and Rudolph (1992:113) refers to the aim of Gestalt therapy as follows:

... to help people help themselves to grow up – to mature, take charge of their lives, and become responsible for themselves.

The stress management programme ensures that the above is accomplished as each of the corporate employees compile a stress management programme. This enables them to take responsibility for the stress that they are experiencing as well as for the fact that they can make positive changes in their lives.

- **The use of sensory activities promotes awareness and helps the corporate employees to gain balance.**

Sensory awareness is one of the activities that can be used with corporate employees during the stress management programme. The employees become aware of how they can make contact with themselves and how sensory awareness can help them manage their stress levels more effectively. Oaklander (1988:128) supports this view by emphasising the use of sensory activities when she states that sensory contact promotes awareness and helps people to gain homeostasis. Once homeostasis is achieved, the employee feels more in control and his/her stress levels react more positively.

- **Projection**

Through the stress management programme the corporate employees realised that by projecting blame onto others, they are relinquishing control and giving everything and everybody else the control over their lives and their circumstances. According to the Gestalt Theory, an individual can stop projecting and regain the control over his/her own life. This concept was discussed in detail in paragraph 2.5.3.

Glass in Corsini (1984:60) indicates that someone who projects cannot take responsibility for his/her life:

Instead of denying, blaming, projecting and displacing responsibility for one's own experience, the individual is encouraged to accept thoughts, feelings and actions as part of the self. Attributing responsibility to scapegoats – parents, childhood traumas, spouse and the like – leaves the individual powerless and dependant.

The stress management programme gives the corporate employees the opportunity to stop projecting and to take responsibility for their lives. Their stressors were identified and they had to make a decision as to what they can do to address those stressors.

- **Polarities**

Polarities are a part of every aspect of every person's life (see paragraph 2.5.9). Once the corporate employees realised that there are positive and negative aspects to every situation and circumstance they started to realise that they should embrace the positive aspects and accept the negative aspects as part of their lives. With regard to this, Greenberg, *et al.* (1995:40) suggested the following:

...strength and weakness, kindness and cruelty, selflessness and selfishness integrate into a balanced capacity to act adaptively.

Polarities, as emphasised by the Gestalt Theory, is addressed in the stress

management programme. The employees had to compile a stress management programme for themselves that included positive and negative aspects. In this stress management programme the employees were asked to identify five aspects in their lives that have a depressing effect on them (stressors) as well as five strengths in their lives that have a positive effect on their functioning. They had to set goals for the positive as well as the negative aspects in their lives and therefore they could realise that all situations have positive and negative aspects and each person should work towards improving the negative aspects and take action to strengthen the positive aspects (which also form part of the individual's support system).

With regard to all the above mentioned concepts, the Gestalt Theory can be utilised effectively as part of the theoretical framework to implement a stress management programme with corporate employees.

7.5.2 Conclusions with regard to the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees.

The evaluation of the play therapy mediums (as shown in Figure 6.10) indicates that the mediums can be used effectively in a stress management programme with corporate employees.

From the researcher's observations during the presentation of the stress management programme, the following conclusions regarding the reaction of the corporate employees to the use of play therapy mediums were made:

- **The play therapy mediums create an atmosphere of fun in which the stress management programme can be presented.**

The play therapy mediums were experienced by the corporate employees as **fun**. These are unique mediums that the corporate employees have never worked with before as the mediums have never been included in a training programme that they attended, before. The activities gave the employees the opportunity to laugh and while they were playing, they had the opportunity to de-stress as well.

- **Awareness regarding stress and the effect thereof on the corporate employee is facilitated by the use of play therapy mediums.**

The play therapy mediums were effective in creating **awareness of the stressors and the effects thereof on the employees, in the here and now**. When the employees did the drawings of “stress” they had the opportunity to show what they knew about stress and their knowledge was broadened in the process. This was effective in bringing the employees in contact with their feelings, in the here and now.

- **When using the play therapy mediums the corporate employees have an opportunity to make contact with and to ventilate their emotions.**

With the awareness came the opportunity for the corporate employees to make contact with their emotions and to **discuss these emotions** in front of the rest of the group.

- **All the corporate employees who took part in this research study participated in the activities with the play therapy mediums.**

The play therapy mediums were experienced positively by all the members of the corporate team. The team consisted of males and females, junior staff, senior staff and managers from different race and gender groups. All the members of the **team participated** in the activities and there was no distinction between gender and race as to the effective use of the play therapy mediums. This is a definite indication that the play therapy mediums can be used effectively within a multi-cultural environment. Furthermore, the team members were all corporate employees and as play therapy mediums are traditionally used when working with children and not with adults, these adults, within a formal corporate environment, could relate to the activities and have fun whilst doing so.

- **Drawings can be used effectively as part of a stress management programme with corporate employees.**

The following additional conclusions can be made with regard to the use of drawings in a stress management programme:

- **Drawings serve as a metaphor into which the corporate employees project their own feelings and experiences.**

The corporate employees were asked to make three drawings. The employees projected what they thought stress was and the effects thereof, into the drawings.

- **Drawing is a fun activity**

The corporate employees are not familiar with the use of creative mediums such as crayons. They laughed at their own creations and also laughed with each other. They had fun whilst projecting their ideas and feelings onto paper.

- **Drawings ensure involvement from the participants**

All the corporate employees took part in this activity. Different people react differently to the instruction, but they all participated and, therefore, nobody in the group felt excluded.

- **Personal awareness is created with the use of drawings**

Through their drawings the corporate employees could identify the stressors in their lives and how it affects them. Furthermore, they could make contact with unfinished business in their lives while drawing their dreams. They could also draw how they would have liked their dreams to end.

- **The use of relaxation techniques in a stress management programme helped the corporate employees to relax and, therefore, lower their stress levels.**

The following additional conclusions can be made regarding the use of

relaxation techniques in a stress management programme:

- **The use of music in a stress management programme is effective in helping the employees to relax.**

Music was used before and during each training session. The corporate employees remarked that they enjoyed the music in the background before they started with the programme. It made their bodies feel as if they were not at work. If the music was not used during the activities, one of the corporate employees would ask if the music could be turned on.

- ***Muscle relaxation techniques can be used by the corporate employees during and after the stress management programme to lower their stress levels.***

The researcher observed that the corporate employees seemed more focused on the training after a muscle relaxation activity. With the repetition of the activity they were able to memorise the steps and make it part of their own stress management programme.

- **Breathing exercises create awareness of how the stress affects their bodies.**

Whilst participating in the relaxation exercises the corporate employees were made aware of the effect on stress on their breathing – was the breathing shallow and/or fast and how it affects the body when the breathing becomes too fast. The corporate employees were encouraged

to take deep breaths when they felt stressed. This is one of the activities that formed part of their daily stress management programme.

- **Imagery and visualisation can be incorporated into relaxation exercises, to improve the stress levels of the corporate employees.**

Visualisation formed part of some of the relaxation activities. The corporate employees could visualise how to address a stressor successfully in their lives and through this technique, gain confidence in their abilities to address the stressor. The visualisation also gave the corporate employees the opportunity to create a safe place where they could return to when they experience stress.

- **The use of clay in a stress management programme with corporate employees facilitates awareness of emotions and gives the opportunity to ventilate emotions.**

The following additional conclusions can be made regarding the use of clay in a stress management programme:

- **Clay helps the corporate employees to relax**

The use of the clay medium contributed to the fact that the participants felt relaxed because they ventilated anger and pent up feelings.

- **The clay offers a sensory experience.**

The participants showed explicit reaction to the experience of the clay on

their hands. Some enjoyed the touch of the clay on their hands and others wanted to wash their hands as soon as possible after handling the clay.

- **The clay brings people into contact with their feelings.**

When the corporate employees were discussing their stressors with the rest of the group, they were very quiet and subdued. Some of the group members showed their emotions overtly.

- **Anger can be ventilated through the clay.**

The corporate employees had the opportunity to destroy their stressors in any way that they liked. Some of them crushed their stressors, others threw them and others ripped their stressors apart.

- **It is an appealing activity for adults to take part in.**

The corporate employees enjoyed the activity. The fact that there was no aesthetic value in their creation had the effect of more relaxed individuals who did not hesitate to participate.

- **The clay can be used as an activity in a group.**

The researcher observed that the corporate employees felt more comfortable with the fact that everyone in the group was participating in the activity, rather than them having to do it on their own. All the participants were involved in the activity, therefore no one felt left out and

the confidence of the corporate employees grew as they saw the other participants sharing.

- **The use of dream work in a stress management programme helps the corporate employees to deal with unfinished business that causes stress in their lives.**

Dream work is an effective way of completing unfinished business. With dream work the corporate employees became aware of stressful factors in their lives that they would not have identified as stressors. This activity increased the awareness and promoted homeostasis in the lives of the corporate employees.

- **The use of the sand tray empowers corporate employees to regain control of their lives.**

The sand tray was used during the pilot phase of this study and the researcher came to the following conclusions regarding the use of the sand tray in a stress management programme with corporate employees:

- **The sand creates a tactile experience.**

Working with the sand enhances the sensory experience of the corporate employee and therefore facilitates greater awareness in the employee.

- **The sand tray allows the corporate employee to take control of his/her life.**

The employees have the opportunity to play out their stressors in the sand and to create a scene where they regain control of their lives.

- **Through the use of the sand tray employees are empowered to take control of their lives by facing their fears.**

Whilst using the sand tray the employees are empowered to take control over their lives. They find alternative solutions for problems and feel less overwhelmed.

- **The employees have the opportunity to ventilate their anger when working in the sand tray.**

The employees are encouraged to get involved in the sand scene and to do what ever they like with the stressful situation. This gives them the opportunity to ventilate their feelings and, therefore, to feel more relaxed.

7.5.3 Conclusions with regard to the effect of a stress management programme on the stress levels of corporate employees.

A stress management programme can have a positive effect on the stress levels of corporate employees. This is indicated in Figure 6.3 where the post-test that was completed by the corporate employees indicated an improvement in the stress levels

of the employees after they completed the stress management programme.

From the literature, as well as the empirical findings, the researcher derived the following conclusions regarding the effect of a stress management programme on the stress levels of corporate employees:

- **The employees became aware that the long working hours have a negative impact on their stress levels.**

Corporate employees who work long hours are more susceptible to the effects of stress:

Individuals under 45 years of age who worked more than 48 hours a week had twice the risk of death from coronary heart disease as did similar individuals working a maximum of 40 hours a week (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997:15).

These individuals are at risk of stress related illnesses but the organisation is also affected in a negative way as employees can become less productive and less efficient:

It is now commonly recognised that working beyond 40-50 hours a week results in time spent that is increasingly unproductive (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997:15).

The corporate employees who participated in this study work approximately 50-55 hours a week. Therefore, they form part of the high risk group in terms of the

effects of stress on their lives. Unfortunately the high performing corporate employee has to live up to the expectations in the working environment. Employees often find themselves in the situation where they have to work longer hours to meet the deadlines that have been set. This becomes stressful and the employee's health and efficiency can be affected by the long working hours.

- **The corporate employees took responsibility for managing their career development.**

One of the aspects that cause stress in the lives of corporate employees is the uncertainties that surround their career development expectations. The corporate employees may feel uncertain about their job security or about future prospects within their working environment. These aspects can lead to stress if they are not clarified with the employee's manager. Cartwright & Cooper (1997:19) explains it as follows:

A host of issues can act as stressors throughout one's working life. Lack of job security, fear of job loss, obsolescence, or retirement, and numerous performance appraisals – all can create pressure and strain.

Career development was one of the stressors in the lives of the corporate employees who took part in this study. The outcome of the study revealed that some of the employees discussed their job design and career with their manager after the first session of the stress management programme and that it had a positive effect on their stress levels.

- **The use of social support is an effective way of lowering stress levels.**

One of the most effective strategies to manage stress is to make use of the support systems in a person's life. In this study, as well as in a study by Cartwright and Cooper (1992), many of the respondents made use of their family and friends as a strategy to cope with the stress that they were experiencing at work. Brehm (1998:89) supports this view by explaining social support as follows:

Most people need human contact in times of stress. We turn to people for help in solving problems, and we turn to them for comfort.

The stress management programme emphasised that each person should value his/her support system. This support system also plays a role in helping the corporate employee with the tasks and roles that he/she has to perform around the house. If family and friends do support, it takes part of the load off these employees and they can experience less stress. The corporate employees indicated on the post-test that most of them had a discussion with their families with regard to chores that had to be performed at home. This contributed to a decrease in their stress levels.

- **A lack of communication creates stress in the life of the corporate employee.**

Communication is a theme that is relevant to many aspects that can result in lower stress levels in the lives of the corporate employees. It relates to

communication with family and friends regarding the support that is needed, it is related to discussions with a manager regarding career development; it is related to the sharing of feelings and the handling of conflicts and confrontations in the workplace. Cohen, *et al.*, (2001:223) describe the role of communication by stating the following:

In any relationship people must communicate, which is always subject to distortion and misunderstandings.

Effective communication was discussed as part of the stress management programme. All the respondents mentioned that communication and especially communicating their feelings is not a natural process for them. This causes misunderstandings between themselves and their colleagues, families, and friends. These misunderstandings contribute to an increase in their stress levels.

The stress management programme created awareness regarding the effects of communication on their stress levels. The questions which related to communication indicated an improvement in the post-test that was completed after the stress management programme mainly because they communicated with their manager, colleagues, family and friends, regarding the stressors in their lives and the support that they need.

- **Effective time management alleviates the effect of stress in the lives of corporate employees.**

If corporate employees experience difficulty in managing time effectively, it

causes stress in their lives. Time management is important because they have large workloads, deadlines to meet and they work long hours. This leads to the fact that they spend less and less time at home with family and friends – who should form the basis of the employees' support system. Cartwright & Cooper (1997:109) has the following opinion regarding time:

Time, like money, is a limited resource that can be used to good or bad effect. However, although it is possible to make more money, unfortunately you can't knit more time – there can be only 24 hours in a day. The inability to manage time effectively is often a major source of stress.

Greater awareness with regard to stress management techniques such as time management and the implementation thereof, has a positive effect on the stress levels of corporate employees. The post-test scores indicated more effective time management and this contributed to lower stress levels after the stress management programme was presented.

- **Balanced diet, exercise and rest improve the stress levels of the corporate employee.**

The above mentioned implicates that corporate employees must make lifestyle changes to ensure improved stress management in their lives. Daft (1997:773) explains the importance of exercise by saying the following:

Moderate exercise three to five times a week is a great stress reliever. If you find an exercise you really love, you are more likely to keep doing it.

The corporate employee must make more time to exercise and to rest. A change to a more nutritious diet will improve the immune system of the corporate employees and, therefore, they will be more able to withstand the negative effects of stress more effectively.

The empirical findings indicate that the corporate employees who started to rest and exercise more and who were prepared to make positive changes in their diets, experienced lower stress levels after the stress management training. This is one of the areas in which the corporate employees had to take responsibility for their lifestyles and make some changes.

- **A stress management programme can have a positive effect on the stress levels of corporate employees.**

This conclusion can be made from the empirical findings of this study. The pre-test indicated high stress levels but after the stress management programme was implemented, all but one of the corporate employees indicated lower stress levels. If fun activities such as play therapy mediums are included, it contributes to the de-stressing of individuals.

- **The employees became aware that processes within the corporate environment can have a negative impact on their stress levels**

The researcher observed that the following aspects have an effect on the stress levels of the corporate employees:

- **Job satisfaction makes the hard work and the long hours worthwhile.**

The corporate employees mentioned that if you enjoy your job, it does not matter that you work long hours and that there is a lot of stress involved. During the stress management training it was mentioned that all jobs have positive and negative aspects (polarities) and that each employee has to decide for him/herself whether it is worth doing the job.

- **Decision making**

During the stress management training, it became obvious that decision making is stressful to the corporate employees. The fact that they work in a team where everyone needs to be considered in decision-making complicates the process and often makes the process longer.

- **Communication**

A lack of communication causes misunderstandings between the members of the corporate team. This has the effect that deadlines can be missed and conflict can occur between the team members. This may also lead to stress within the corporate environment.

- **Organisational culture can be stressful to corporate employees.**

The organisational culture of this group of employees is to work and perform to their full potential to ensure that they meet deadlines and live up to the million rand contracts that they are working on. By discussing the organisational culture with the corporate employees, they became aware of the fact that this aspect of functioning as a team could have an effect on

their stress levels and they have to build positive aspects into their lives to counteract the negative effects.

- **Organisational change causes stress in the lives of corporate employees.**

The corporate employees' work in a changing environment within the organisation but they also function within an environment where change in the organisation and change in technology is something they have to cope with on a regular basis. Daft (1997: 770) states the following regarding change in the lives in employees:

There are many sources of stress for managers, especially when companies are changing and everyone seems to want more from less.

While the training was taking place there was a takeover by another bank and this caused uncertainty with regard to their job security. Many of the corporate employees are contract workers and they did not have any idea how they would fit into the "new" company.

7.5.4 Stress Management Model

The following model is a summation of the use of a stress management programme on the stress levels of employees. The conclusions that can be made from this model are as follows:

- With the use of play therapy mediums awareness is created regarding stress and the effects thereof on employees.

- As soon as awareness is created with corporate employees, they take responsibility for their functioning and are prepared to make lifestyle changes.
- Through these changes the employees regain control of their lives and, therefore, regain their homeostasis.
- The stress management programme lowers the stress levels of corporate employees.



Figure 7.1 Stress Management Model

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.6.1 Theoretical Framework

- It is recommended that the Gestalt theoretical framework be implemented when presenting the stress management programme as it can serve as a guideline to the social worker when presenting the programme and it can facilitate greater awareness, homeostasis and the taking of personal responsibility.

7.6.2 Presentation of Stress Management Programmes

- A stress audit should be done with the corporate employees of an organisation to ascertain what their stress levels are and whether a stress management programme should be one of the measures implemented to lower the stress levels.
- The success of the stress management programme depends on the fact that all the participants compile their own goals whereby they plan to make lifestyle changes and, therefore, take responsibility for their own stress management.
- The group of employees participating in the stress management programme should not exceed 15 participants and should not consist of less than 8 participants. This will ensure that each participant receives individual attention and that there are enough people to create a group dynamic which will allow for all the participants to learn from each other.

- A follow-up study should be done with the participating employees to ascertain the long term effect of the presented programme on their stress levels.
- The organisation can make use of employee assistance programmes to address stress within their organisation on a pro-active and re-active level.
- Further research should be done with regard to the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme within the corporate environment.

7.6.3 Play Therapy Mediums

The researcher recommends that play therapy mediums are included in a stress management programme with corporate employees because it facilitates greater awareness and, therefore brings the participants in contact with themselves. The play therapy mediums should be included in each part of the stress management programme and a variety of mediums should be used to ensure that the participants do not get bored.

7.6.3.1 Reasons for the use of play therapy mediums:

- The social worker should create a fun atmosphere with the use of music and aids such as balloons.
- The social worker should allow for emotional ventilations from the participants and he/she should not become uncomfortable when such emotions are shown.

7.6.3.2 Recommendations when implementing the play therapy mediums:

- The social worker must ensure participation from every member by asking questions and being involved in the play therapy activity.
- When working with adults it is important to make sure that they understand the instructions with regard to drawings. This is not a natural activity for them and if the instructions for the activity are not clear enough, they may lose interest.
- When the body drawings are done the social worker must ensure that there is enough white board paper available for the participants to be able to lie down on the paper and make an outline of the body.
- Make sure that there are enough crayons and drawing materials for all the participants.
- When working with clay it is important for the social worker to ensure that there is big white board paper for the participants to do the activities on.
- The social worker should warn the participants that working with clay can bring some suppressed emotions to the fore and that it is a natural occurrence.
- The participants can be asked to wear comfortable clothing so that they feel free to take part in the activities.
- With regard to the sensory activities the participants should be warned that they must be aware of allergic reactions that can be caused by objects such as

oranges or food colouring before they take part in the activities. Some participants may be tactile sensitive and need to be informed before hand what the activity entails, what is going to be done and what the experience may be like. The participants should also have the social worker's permission to stop with the activity if it causes any physical discomfort for them.

- When working with play therapy mediums, it is always important to bring the employees back to reality before they leave the training session. The researcher recommends that the facilitator reminds them of the fact that it is allowable to "kill" someone when using a play therapy medium but it is never acceptable behaviour in real life.

7.6.4 General Recommendations

- Social workers should be used on a greater scale within the corporate environment to do stress management programmes with corporate employees.
- Training with regard to the use of play therapy mediums with adults should be included in the curriculum for social workers so that it is a skill that they can implement within the corporate environment.
- The training in the Employee Assistance Programmes at university levels should include a short course on the use of play therapy mediums with adults in the corporate environment.
- Training with regard to the use of play therapy mediums with corporate employees should be implemented in the form of a short course at all the

Universities in South Africa.

- The stress management programme would be even more effective if the corporate employees could be moved out of their working environment, perhaps into a more natural setting, where the atmosphere is relaxing for the corporate employees.
- If the stress management programme is presented at the offices of the corporate employees, an arrangement should be made before that they should not be called out for urgent work, whilst the presentation of the stress management programme is being conducted. This may break the continuity of the training and the employees who leave the sessions may not receive all the information.
- Further research should be done with regard to the enduring effects of the stress management programme. The same post-test could be implemented after three to six months to ascertain whether the positive effects of the stress management programme had lasting effects in the lives of the employees.