

CHAPTER 1

WORK STRESS

1.1 Introduction

Stress has become an important term in everyday language, meaningful to most individuals found in industrial societies (Wainwright & Calnan, 2002: v). It not only describes a range of “pains and aches” or as Cartwright and Cooper (1997:1) put it ‘a vague yet often sense of disquiet’, but a legitimate concern of our modern way of life. For both lay people and researchers work stress is indicative of the ‘natural’ limit of human endurance and resilience (Wainwright & Calnan, 2002: v) and is part of life, unavoidable, good and bad, constructive and destructive (Jacobs, in Van Zyl, 2002: 26).

Stress costs corporations all over the world large sums of money and on an individual level it affects the physical and psychological well being of the employee. Luthans (2002:395) quotes the president of the American Institute of Stress at the New York Medical College on the cost of stress in the U.S. workplace as saying ‘(It)...is estimated between \$200 and \$300 billion annually, as assessed by absenteeism, employee turnover, direct medical costs, workers’ compensation and other legal costs, diminished productivity, accidents, etc., and is spread throughout the corporation, from the mailroom to the executive suite’. Schell (1997: 4) mentions the International Labour Office in Geneva that cites that ‘excessive, pathological job stress can be viewed as the end-of-the-century affliction from which no country or job stratum is spared’. It is estimated that in South Africa R500 million is lost annually through absenteeism and loss of productivity as a result of stress (“Executive stress”, 1991).

All employment generates stress and strain to some degree (Koeske & Kirk, 1993: 319) and people tend to associate stress with something bad (Luthans, 2002: 395). A certain amount of stress is not automatically bad for the individual working in an organization and can enhance job performance (Luthans, 2002: 411). Stress experienced as a result of job-related stressful events, such as getting a new supervisor or being involuntarily transferred, often resulted in individuals obtaining more information about their job resulting in new and better ways of doing their work (Weiss, Ilgen, & Sharbaugh, 1982: 64). Individuals working in jobs such as in sales, journalism, or television and who are under time pressures often benefit from mild levels of stress. Other occupations, in which the individual has a high level of contact with clients such as teaching, law, policing, and medicine do not benefit from mild levels of stress and often suffer from burnout (Forshaw, 2002: 75; Luthans, 2002: 412; Van der Ploeg, Dorresteijn, & Kleber, 2003: 158).

1.2 Occupational health psychology

The field of stress falls under the spectre of health psychology. Health psychology, a relatively new branch of psychology, specifically focuses on issues of human health and illness (Forshaw, 2002: 1). Tetrick and Quick (in Quick & Tetrick, 2002: 4) state that health as defined by the World Health Organization in 1946 is not just the absence of disease but a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and in 1986 it added that health be viewed as 'resource for everyday life, not the object of living'. Health is seen as 'a positive concept including social and personal resources as well as physical capabilities' (Nutbeam in Quick & Tetrick, 2002: 4). Forshaw (2002: 1) loosely defines health psychology as 'the study of how thoughts, feelings, and behaviours stem from, interact with, or cause, physical or mental efficiency, efficacy, comfort and wellbeing'.

Occupational health psychology involves the application of both public health and health psychology to occupational settings (Quick *et al*, 1997: 15). Tetrick and Quick (in Quick & Tetrick, 2002: 4) state that '(T) the purpose of occupational health psychology is to develop, maintain, and promote the health of employees directly and the health of their families'. It achieves this goal by incorporating the preventive and therapeutic interventions developed to create safe and healthy working environments.

To appreciate the challenges facing occupational health psychology the nature of stress and the most relevant causes occurring in the workplace will be examined.

1.3 The nature of stress

Individuals usually think of stress as a negative event with negative consequences. This negative stress is called distress. However there is also a positive form of stress, called eustress where the Greek 'eu' means good (Birkenbihl, 1989: 12). Examples of eustress include, for example, a promotion, gaining recognition and getting married (Moorhead & Griffin, 1989: 195).

1.3.1 Definition of stress and work stress

Stress is derived from the Latin word *stringere*, meaning to draw tight, and was used in the 17th century to describe hardships or affliction (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997: 3). Numerous definitions of stress and job stress can be found in the literature. Moorhead and Griffin (1989: 193) define stress "as a person's adaptive response to a stimulus that places excessive psychological or physical demands on that person". Luthans (2002: 396) defines work stress as "an adaptive response to an external situation that results in physical, psychological, and behavioral deviations for organizational participants". Both definitions imply that individuals respond in different ways when subjected to certain stressors. A stressor is any stimulus, which the

individual perceives as a threat (Cotton, 1990: 28). The individual must perceive the stressor to be excessive for stress to result, whether it is physical, psychological or psychosocial. Physical stressors include such conditions as environmental pollutants, environmental pressures such as extreme changes in temperature, electric shock, prolonged exercise, injuries and other trauma to the body, and exposure to disease. Psychological stressors refer to those threats that are attributed to the individual's internal reactivity, such as thoughts, feelings, and concerns about these threats. Psychosocial stressors are those that result from interpersonal interactions, such as with colleagues at work or from social isolation.

Luthans (2002: 396) also points out what stress is not:

- Stress is not simply anxiety. Anxiety operates solely in the emotional and psychological sphere, whereas stress operates in both the aforementioned spheres, and also in the physiological sphere. Stress may be accompanied by anxiety, but the one should not be equated with the other.
- Stress is not simply nervous tension. Nervous tension, like anxiety, may result from stress, but they are not the same. Some individuals may keep their stress "bottled up" and therefore not display any nervous tension.
- Stress is not necessarily something damaging, bad, or to be avoided. Eustress is not damaging or bad and is something individuals should seek out rather than avoid. Everyone will experience stress. The important issue is how the individual is able to handle stress. Distress, however, should be prevented or effectively controlled.

Before stress can be discussed any further, the term burnout needs to be clarified as it is often used alternatively with the term stress.

1.3.2 Burnout

The first writings on burnout were by Freudenberger (in Maslach *et al*, 2001: 399) and Maslach (in Maslach *et al*, 2001: 399) a year later. Burnout is seen as a psychological syndrome that occurs in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach *et al*, 2001: 400) and is commonly associated with human service occupations (Schaufeli, 2003: 4). Three factors are associated with burnout, which are emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. Exhaustion represents the basic individual stress dimension of burnout. It describes feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources. Depersonalisation (or cynicism) refers to the interpersonal dimension of burnout, and may be described as a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to various aspects of the job (Maslach *et al*, 2001: 402). Individuals begin to lose interest in things around them (Forshaw, 2002: 75). They often start lacking sympathy for people in their

environment and can be described as being emotionally flat. The third component of reduced efficacy or accomplishment represents the self-evaluation dimension of burnout (Maslach *et al*, 2001: 402). It refers to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement and productivity at work.

Densten (2001: 842) found in his re-evaluation of these three factors that emotional exhaustion had two distinct aspects, i.e., psychological and somatic strain. Psychological strain referred to items such as 'really a strain' or 'too much stress' where as somatic strain referred to items such as 'emotionally drained', 'used up' or 'fatigued'. Personal accomplishment was found to also consist of two components, one referring to 'self' and the other to 'other'. A decline in personal accomplishment (self) may relate more to a lack of job competency, where as personal accomplishment (others) may relate to the views and expectations of others.

Luthans (2002: 398) quotes John Izzo, a former HR professional who describes burnout as "losing a sense of the basic purpose and fulfilment of your work." Luthans (2002: 412) concludes 'that performance of many tasks is in fact strongly affected by stress' and that 'performance usually drops off sharply when stress rises to high levels'. There are many causes of stress affecting the individual in the workplace.

1.4 Major causes of stress

In the 1990's major restructuring of work started to take place (Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001: 490). Organizations in countries that were hit by recession had to downsize and restructure in an effort to survive. In the United States of America 2.7 million jobs were lost between March 2001 and August 2003 (Heylin, 2004: 28). As a result an increase in subcontracting and outsourcing has taken place in order to remain competitive on the global market. A rise in short-term contracts, new patterns of working, such as teleworking, self-regulated work and teamwork, an increase in the use of computerized technology, and the development of a more flexible workforce has taken place (Cox, Griffiths, & Rial-Gonzalez in Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001: 490). An increase in the numbers of females in the workforce, as well as dual-earner couples, and an increase in part-time work has also occurred in some countries. Over the past 40 years in the United States of America Heylin (2004: 28) states "the percentage of those on payrolls who are women has risen inexorably from 37% to almost 49% today". As a result of these changes research on occupational research and employee wellbeing has focused on four major causes of stress in organizations, i.e., job insecurity, work hours, control at work, and managerial style (Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001: 490).

1.4.1 Job insecurity

The trend, where organizations are restructuring and downsizing, has led to an increase in the level of perceived job insecurity (Kivimäki, Vahtera, Pentti & Ferrie, 2000: 972). Not only blue-collar occupations are affected, but also professional and graduate jobs are being affected (Smithson & Lewis, 2000: 681). In the past the workers that were laid off were mostly young, male, blue-collar workers (Greenglass & Burke, 2001: 1). Today higher paid, white-collar workers, often at their peak of their careers, are losing their jobs. Burchell *et al* in Sparks, Faragher, and Cooper, 2001: 491) found that the youngest and the oldest employees of an organization experienced high levels of job insecurity.

Job insecurity has been identified as a form of work-related stressor, which is potentially detrimental to the individual's psychological wellbeing, job attitudes and behaviours (Klandermans, Van Vuuren, & Jacobson in Lim, 1996: 172). Employees generally experience high levels of anxiety when their jobs are insecure, which arises from the lack of certainty regarding when layoffs or curtailment of job features will occur, and when it occurs who will be affected (Jacobson in Lim, 1996: 173). Inherent in job insecurity is the experience of ambiguity that makes this phenomenon highly stressful for the individual. Research has shown that perceived job insecurity is bad for employee wellbeing and can impact on organizations through increased absence from work due to sickness (Kivimäki *et al*, 1997: 870). Other effects include lowered morale and motivation (Worral & Cooper, in Sparks, Faragher, and Cooper, 2001: 490), diminished support of organizational goals, less effort to produce quality work, and were more actively looking for alternative employment (King, 2000: 88).

1.4.2 Work hours

In many organizations changes due to restructuring and downsizing have resulted in an increase in the number of working hours (Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001: 493). Long working hours required by certain jobs effect employee wellbeing. Shift work has been found to be a common stressor that affects blood temperature, metabolic rate, blood sugar levels, mental efficiency, and work motivation (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997: 15). Extended shifts are also associated with deaths due to coronary heart disease (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997: 15).

Rosa (1995: 54) found that workers working shifts suffered from excess fatigue, sleepiness, and significant loss of sleep. Actual incidents of falling asleep were found to occur more often during night shifts (Åkerstedt, in Sallinen *et al*, 1998: 240). The second half of the night shift is a time of increased risk because the nadir of alertness is reached during this period. Over a long period severe sleep disturbances may develop resulting in the development of chronic fatigue, anxiety, nervousness, and depression (Costa *et al* in Smith, Folkard, & Fuller, 2002: 166). Furthermore shift workers are have been found to be prone to poor lifestyle habits, such as heavy smoking,

inadequate diet, and lack of exercise (Marayuma *et al*, in Sutherland & Cooper, 2000: 72). Flexible working hours have been found to have both advantages and disadvantages (Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001: 494). Some of the advantages include lower stress levels, increased job enrichment, morale and autonomy, reduced absenteeism and tardiness, and improved job satisfaction and productivity. Disadvantages include increase costs, problems with scheduling and work co-ordination, difficulties in supervising all employees due to differing work hours, and changes in the organizational culture.

1.4.3 Control at work

The concept of perceived control or autonomy has been extensively researched over the years (Sparks, Faragher, Cooper, 2001: 498). It is essentially a cognitive phenomenon and refers to the level that individuals perceive they are in control of their lives including their work (Luthans, 2002: 275). Ganster and Fusilier (in Sparks, Faragher, Cooper, 2001: 498) define perceived control as the amount of control that individuals believe they have over their environment, whether direct or indirect, to make it less threatening or more rewarding.

Within the work environment perceived control refers to the extent to which employees are free to decide how to accomplish a task or to reach set goals (Theorell, 2002: 204). Employees who perceive themselves' as in control are more intrinsically motivated and willing to accept responsibility for the consequences of their work (Hackman & Oldham, in Sparks, Faragher, Cooper, 2001: 498). Much of the research on control at work was in terms of task, decision, physical and resource control (Hurrell & McLaney in Troup & Dewe, 2002: 338) and more recently in terms of timing control and method control (Wall, Jackson, & Mullarkey in Troup & Dewe, 2002: 338) as well as task, resource and organizational control (Carayon & Zijlstra in Troup & Dewe, 2002: 338). Research on distinguishing 'being in control' and 'the desire for control' has also been done (Burger in Troup & Dewe, 2002: 338). Mergers and acquisitions are particularly stressful because they are viewed as a crucial event over which the employee has no control and is psychologically not prepared for (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997: 33). Employees tend to fear the worst and are very pessimistic from when the merger or acquisition is announced until actual changes have taken place.

1.4.4 Managerial style

Managers are prone to high levels of work stress (Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001: 501). They are involved in decision-making and the implementation of these decisions. When large important changes occur within the organization such as a merger, they are often blamed for these changes (Campbell-Jamison, Worrall, & Cooper, 2001: 46). Employees in a study of a power company that was being privatised felt let down by the organization and they felt that the trust that had existed between them and management had been destroyed. They blamed the

organization although in actual fact it was outside the control of management. The survivors' felt highly "stressed" due to feeling overworked, under pressure, hurt by the organization, bitter and aggressive towards management.

Increased managerial pressure may impact on employee wellbeing (Sparks, Faragher, Cooper, 2001: 501). Due to their superior position in the organization, managers and supervisors, whether intentionally or unintentionally, may cause stress for their subordinates. Different managers have different management styles, which may affect their subordinates. Managers who were viewed as having an inconsiderate management style contributed to the employee's self-reports of increased job pressure (Buck, in Sparks, Faragher, Cooper, 2001: 501). A bullying management style was found to play an important role when managers were under pressure (Hoël & Cooper, in Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001: 501). They found in their survey of over 5 000 employees, that managers were the perpetrators for nearly 75 % of employees who reported being victims of bullying affecting their wellbeing.

When events in the workplace are perceived as stressful and are seen as taxing the capabilities of the individual it may have dire consequences for the individual.

1.5 Consequences of stress

Some individuals are unable to cope with these stressful situations, and for the organization this could result in high staff turnover, absenteeism, and decreased motivation. Individuals may respond in different ways to the perceived stressors, which may be exhibited on a physical, psychological, or behavioural level.

1.5.1 Physical consequences

On a physical level research has shown that physical health has been linked to stress (Forshaw, 2002: 60, Luthans, 2002: 412). Luthans (2002: 412) summarizes the physical health concerns that have been associated with stress and they include the following:

- Problems of the immune system, resulting in a lowered ability to fight off illness and infection.
- Problems of the cardiovascular system of which blood pressure and heart disease are the most common.
- Problems of the musculoskeletal system, such as tension and headaches.
- Problems of the gastrointestinal system, such as diarrhoea and constipation.

These physical ailments have a serious effect on the wellbeing of the individual and they impact on the organization (Luthans, 2002: 412; Cartwright & Cooper, 1997: 2, 8). In the U.K. the

British Heart Foundation Coronary Prevention Group has calculated that 180 000 people die each year from coronary heart disease, and that this disease accounts for 70 million lost working days to industry and commerce (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997: 10). However, not all heart disease can be linked directly to stress (Luthans, 2002: 412). Environmental conditions and the individual's general state of health, heredity factors, and medical history are known to contribute to heart disease.

1.5.2 Psychological problems

Considerable research has shown that stress impacts on physical health especially within a medical context. However, not as much attention has been given to the impact of stress on mental health (Luthans, 2002: 413). Psychological problems resulting from stress may be as important as they may impact on the day-to-day job performance of the employee.

Psychological problems that are associated with stress include feelings of helplessness, mood changes, anger, depression, anxiety, nervousness, irritability, tension, and boredom (Dormann & Zapf, 2002: 34; Moorhead & Griffin, 1989: 204; Luthans, 2002: 413; Schell, 1997: 140). Individuals reacted to the impact of stress by exhibiting aggressive acts, such as sabotage, interpersonal aggression, hostility, and complaints (Chen & Spector, 1992: 181). Job insecurity, which is associated with organizational downsizing, also elicits reactions of anxiety, insecurity, stress, and anger (Greenglas & Burke, 2001: 3). These psychological problems associated with stress impact on job performance (McGrath in Luthans, 2002: 413), decision-making, and job satisfaction (Greenglas & Burke, 2001: 3) amongst others.

1.5.3 Behavioural problems

Behavioural problems that are associated with stress include undereating or overeating, fatigue, increased smoking and drinking, and drug abuse (Luthans, 2002: 414; Hogh, Borg, & Mikkelsen, 2003: 190). Moorhead and Griffin (1989: 204) add accident proneness, and violence to the list. Cotton (1990: 45) likens the behavioural symptoms that individual's exhibit with the expectations of the fight or flight response. The stressed individual may display a pattern of either aggressive behaviour or of avoidance. The aggressive individual may strike out, or be argumentative, stubborn, or confrontational. The individual who is prone to avoidance behaviour may become passive, avoiding stressful situations, whether minor or important, to the extent of becoming immobilized.

Alcohol consumption is often a way of dealing with stress leading to absenteeism and job turnover (Luthans, 2002: 414). Chen and Spector (1992: 182) found that the most significant reaction to work stressors was the intention to quit. Staying away from work or quitting one's work due to stress is a flight response to the situation, which may be a far healthier response

than a fight reaction, in which an individual stays on in the stressful environment and becomes angry and/or aggressive.

1.6 Stress in South Africa

A large number of changes have occurred in South Africa which in turn has affected the workplace in one or another way. Political changes and affirmative action (Beeld, 22 August 1997), downsizing or rightsizing of organizations (Freight & Trading Weekly, 11 June 1999), retrenchments (Drum, February 1996) and restructuring (Marais & Schepers, 1996: 1) have all taken place over the last decade.

Peters (Saturday Star, Dec 23, 2000) reports that bullying, work overload, and staff cuts are among factors that have contributed to making stress one of the greatest health hazards in the workplace. She refers to the South Africa Federation of Mental Health (Saturday Star, Dec 23, 2000) as stating “that the majority of adults spend between 50 and 80% of their waking hours at work, and 68% of all workers will experience workplace problems severe enough to prevent them from coping with their day-to-day duties”. A loss of about 200-million working days each year worldwide was attributed to employees with depression. The World Health Organization believes that “stress and depression are on the top of the list of mental health problems and that job stress is a worldwide epidemic, and stress-related disorders are becoming the most prevalent reason for worker disability” (Peters, Saturday Star, Dec 23 2000).

Research shows that approximately 30%–40% of South Africans suffer from high levels of stress (Van Zyl in Van Zyl, 1998: 22) and particularly South African managers are known to suffer from high levels of stress (Van Zyl in Spangenberg & Orpen-Lyall, 2000: 6). Sullivan (in Van Zyl & Pietersen, 1999: 74) noted that in South Africa the effects of the world recession are compounded by an unstable and rapidly changing social and political climate. The impact of stress is thought to affect all levels of society, whether at individual or national level (Van Zyl & Pietersen, 1999: 74).

Van Zyl (2002: 26) summarises a number of statistics and probable symptoms of stress, which he believes are indicative of the high stress experienced among South Africans:

- South Africa’s divorce rate is one of the three highest in the world.
- The incidence of coronary diseases is among the five highest in the world.
- Until recently the suicide rate among the Indian community was the highest in the world.
- There are too many people in jail.
- The number of motor accidents is among the highest in the world.
- The use of drugs was among the highest in world, especially in the Western Cape.

Within the work situation Van Zyl (2002: 26) referring to Jacobs (in Van Zyl, 2002: 28) as well as Levert, Lucas and Ortlepp (in Van Zyl, 2002: 28) gives the following warning signs of high levels of stress:

- Frequent illness
- Persistent fatigue
- Irritability
- Nail-biting
- Lack of concentration
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Poor interrelationships.

In the light of this information it becomes clear that South African workers experience high levels of work stress as well as concomitant reactions and symptoms of stress. It appears that many South African public and private companies do not realize the effect specifically chronic stress may have on their employees (Van Zyl, 2002: 27) and it appears that very little is done by the employers to develop their employees' ability to deal effectively with their stress.

1.7 Conclusion

Stress has become a major issue of our time affecting the individual and the organization in which the individual is employed. A study among 15 800 workers from 15 member states of the European Union found that after back pain (33%), stress (28%) and fatigue (23%) ranked second and third, respectively of the most frequently reported occupational health problems (Paoli in Schaufeli, 2003: 1, Sutherland & Cooper, 2000: 23). It is predicted that that the amount of stress experienced is likely to get worse (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997: 2). Increasing cross-national mergers, increasing international competition and joint ventures between organizations across national boundaries will result in reorganizations, relocations of personnel, redesign of jobs, and reallocations of roles and responsibilities. Change will be accompanied by job insecurities, corporate culture clashes and significantly different managerial styles, all of which will lead to massive organizational change and inevitable stress. Trade agreements, the influence of larger economic systems, for example the European Union, will result in organizations that will impose rules and regulations in terms of labour laws, health and safety at work, methods of production, distribution, and remuneration, which will inhibit individual control and autonomy (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997: 3). It is predicted that the ever-increasing workload with a decreasing workforce in a climate of rapid change and with control over the means of production increasingly being taken over by free-trade institutions and their bureaucracies, corporate stress is here to stay.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

2.1 Introduction

Stress in the workplace is a worldwide phenomenon affecting the employee at all levels. In South Africa circumstances are continually changing with political changes, affirmative action, downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, retrenchments, lay-offs, new technology amongst others, impacting on the individual in the workplace for example in the form of job insecurity. Other sources of stress brought into the organizational context are issues such as personal and financial problems. Stressors inherent in an organization, such as task demands, role demands, physical demands and interpersonal demands, continually affect the employee.

Prior to this doctoral study the researcher having worked in industry and the public service, personally observed the effect of job insecurity as a result downsizing, and affirmative action on fellow employees. They spoke about their fear of possibly being retrenched or having to take on a job that did not ensure the income that they were used to. In some cases they had to reapply for their posts, which created a lot of uncertainty. Some did retain their old posts, others were retrenched, and a few found alternative posts within the organization. For some that found alternative posts in the organization it meant relocating to other parts of the country: the change impacted on all of their family members. A few did not wait for the company to make a decision and instead found alternative jobs outside the organization, even immigrating or starting to work for themselves. In one of the organizations a number of staff remained in their jobs at all costs to ensure an income. Some used to complain of stagnation and one particular individual reacted negatively by developing migraine headaches. The general negativity affected their interactions with colleagues, and their productivity dropped accordingly. Some individuals would come to work late and they used to leave early, something they did not do prior to the restructuring of the organization. Other possible causes of stress that the author experienced or witnessed were long working hours on the pilot plant resulting in fatigue and loss of concentration, working towards deadlines, and staying within the confines of the budget.

2.2 Research problem

In the light of the introductory remarks above, the questions that arose in the mind of the researcher was “Which major stressors were impacting on these individuals?” “Were they to be found within or outside the organization?” “How did they react to these stressful situations?” Based on these

questions the underlying research problem could be divided into two major areas, namely causes and consequences of stress in the workplace.

2.2.1 Causes of stress

Possible causes of work-related stress amongst employees, specifically senior management, middle management, and specialist staff (specialists in their field), working in organizations are related to extraorganizational stressors as well as stressors inherent in the organization. Extraorganizational stressors refer to factors such as affirmative action, downsizing, retrenchments, restructuring, technological changes, and job sharing. Other factors include personal and financial problems. Stressors inherent in the organization, refers to factors such as the functioning of the organization, task characteristics, physical working conditions, equipment, career matters and social issues. Van Zyl (in Van Zyl, 2002: 26) found in an investigation in South Africa that 34.7% of Coloureds, 38.1% of Whites and Asians, and 35% of Black South Africans experienced high levels of stress. An investigation into the sources of job satisfaction and work stress amongst middle management in South Africa found that the main sources of work stress were work demands and expectations, working conditions, subordinates, interpersonal relationships, person responsibility, and working hours (Strydom & Meyer, 2002: 19).

The current economic situation in the country, new legislation, for example the Employment Equity Act, affirmative action and the quota system are all placing increasing demands on South Africans, both inside and outside of the work situation leading to high levels of stress (Van Zyl, 2002: 26). For some these changes have lead to the fear of retrenchment and lower income. The main concern that was reported to a suicide prevention centre in the past was relationship problems. However this has changed to issues related to the lack of money, for example losing one's home or car by repossession (Van Zyl, 1997: 138). High levels of stress are carried over to the non-work environment such as to other people the individual interacts with, for example the spouse and children (Kruger in Van Zyl, 2002: 26). Stress experienced outside the work environment can again impact on the work situation.

The problem of stress and the related health problems impact on the direct and indirect costs of the organization. One way of addressing this problem is to report research findings reflecting the present situation affecting the employees in the workplace. The findings may then be used to make organizations aware of the problem and allow for the development of an effective stress management strategy.

2.2.2 Consequences of stress

Individuals in the workplace may respond in different ways to both the extraorganizational and inherent stressors in the organization. This may manifest itself on a physical, psychological, and/or behavioural level. On a physical level it could manifest for example as hypertension, on a psychological level as anger, depression, anxiety and worry, and/ or on a behavioural level smoking and drinking, sleeplessness, overeating or undernourishment, and aggression. Van Zyl (1993: 37) found that a group of black South African high-level employees reported that they experienced passivity, uncertainty, and loneliness when subjected to high levels of stress. Research conducted with a group of lower level black and white employees involved in manual tasks showed that these black employees were inclined to lack self-confidence, to be dependant on others, to be passive, to feel uncertain, to be dissatisfied, frustrated, and to feel helpless (Van Zyl, 1996: 129). The white counterparts on the other hand, had higher scores on overload and tended to worry much more. However, it is not always easy to detect the symptoms of high levels of stress, as employees tend to hide these to protect their reputations and to appear as if nothing is happening (McGarvey in Van Zyl, 2002: 28).

However not everybody is unable to cope with stressful situations, some individuals seem to thrive under stress. A number of factors moderate the impact that various sources of stress have on the individual. These factors include job experience, social support, locus of control, learned helplessness, and problem solving ability amongst others. Spangenberg and Orpen (2000: 8) investigated the relationship between stress and coping strategies and found that an avoidant coping strategy probably contributed to an increase in stress levels amongst a group of managers. No other literature reporting on coping with stress in the workplace in the South African context with respect to management could be found.

In the light of this it is important to investigate not only the causes of stress but also the consequences of stress. Van Zyl (2002: 30) echo's this sentiment and states that 'a system of stress measurement and management – at all levels – is not a luxury in South Africa, or something "nice" to do for humanistic reasons. It is a matter of physical, psychological, economic, and social survival. Stress measurement in particular, can help to address the real problems in a preventative manner.'

2.3 Aim of the study

The study aims to determine the level and causes of stress that subjects experience in the workplace. These may both be extraorganizational and those inherent in the organization.

Furthermore the stressors and demands that contribute to the individual's experience of stress are expected to impact the individual both on a psychological, physiological, and behavioural level. A further aim of the study is to focus on specific psychological and behavioural consequences the experience of stress may lead to. At a psychological level the aim is to measure the levels of anxiety, depression, and worry. At a behavioural level the aim of the research will be to ascertain the extent of workplace aggression. However these consequences are dependant on the ability inability of the employee to deal with the demand and stressors inside and outside the workplace. Thus the third aim of the research is to determine how effective or ineffective the subjects cope with the demands or stressors they have to deal with in terms of social problem solving.

Very little research is available on the consequences of work stress with respect to anxiety and depression in South Africa. No research could be found within the South African context on the impact stress has on aggression in the workplace, worry, and on social problem solving as a way of coping with stress.

As circumstances in South Africa are continually changing it is believed that is essential to not only to determine the causes but also to continue studying the impact stress has on the wellbeing of the individual in the workplace. Management is prone to excessively high levels of stress due to overloading because they are regularly promoted to position levels, which their American and European counterparts only reach at a later stage (Van Zyl, 1997: 138). A further aim therefore was to focus on senior management, middle management, and on specialist staff where specialist staff refers to specialists in their specific work areas.

2.4 Research objectives

The objective of the research is to determine the individual's experience of stress in terms of normal, high, or very high. The causes of the stress as experienced by the employees, whether within or outside the organisation, will also be determined. Outside the organisation this includes factors such as the political, and social changes that have and are continuing to take place in South Africa, as well as technological changes, personal and financial problems. Within the organisation these include organisational functioning, task characteristics, physical working conditions and job equipment, career opportunities, social matters, and remuneration, fringe benefits and personnel policy of the organisation. To achieve this, the Experience of Work and Life Circumstances Questionnaire will be used. With regard to the impact of stress in terms of the specific psychological consequences, specifically depression, anxiety and worry, and behavioural consequences, specifically aggression as it manifests itself in the workplace the Aggression in the

Workplace Questionnaire, the IPAT Anxiety Inventory, the Beck Depression Inventory and the Penn State Worry Questionnaire will be employed. The extent to which and individual is able to cope effectively or for that matter ineffectively with experienced stress, will be assessed by employing the Social Problem Solving Inventory-Revised.

The aim was to determine the causes of stress arising outside and originating within the work situation, the impact that these stressors had on the individual's experience of stress, the individual consequences in terms of workplace aggression, worry, anxiety and depression as well as the ability of the individual to cope with the situation through social problem solving (Figure 2.1).

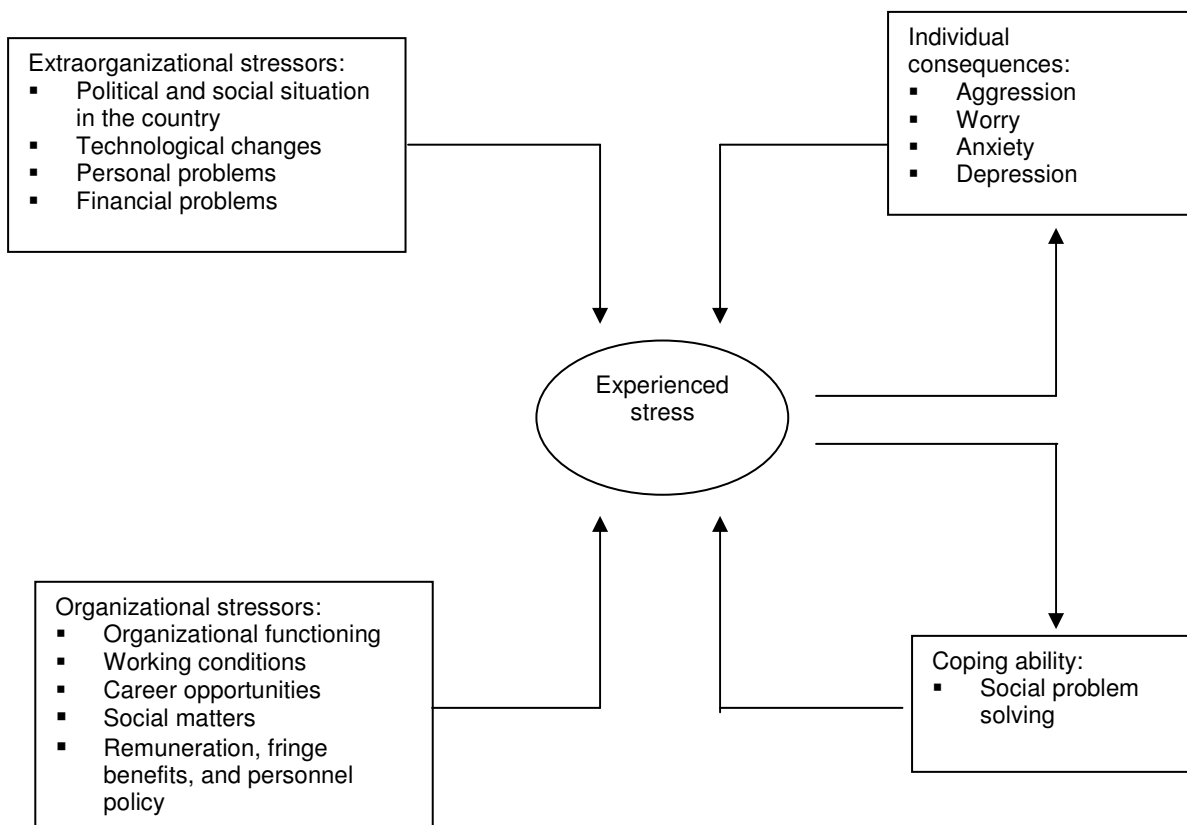


Figure 2.1: Causes and consequences of workplace stress