

Work Related Stress and Coping Methods: The Case of Employees in the Motor Vehicle Spares Industry in Harare

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ABSTRACT: *This study focused on work related stress and coping methods in the motor vehicle spares industry in Harare. Objectives of the study were to examine the sources of occupational stress being experienced by employees to establish the strategies used by employees to cope with stress, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the stress coping methods adopted. The study was significant as a tool for use in decision making in various industries and hopefully assist in enhancing stress management. The research used the qualitative approach and it was a multi-case study. The population consisted of the employees at the company. The research found out that job stress results from various interactions of the worker and the environment whilst performing their duties. In addition, it was held that the organisational factors such as organisational culture, resources in the organisation, management style, and conflict among departments also caused stress. The research recommended the need for effective human resource management and implementation of occupational health policies by the responsible government institutions, the establishment of social safety nets that takes care of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs), and that employees should embark on income generating projects in order to supplement their employees' incomes.*

Keywords: *occupational stress, coping methods, management styles, organisational culture*

I. INTRODUCTION

This research focused on the assessment of the forms and causes of occupational stress as well as the coping mechanisms. A multi-case study of two companies in the motor vehicle spares sector in Harare was conducted. All individuals who have been exposed to work situations have experienced stressful working conditions one way or the other. Stressful situations are experienced by the working population especially in Zimbabwe, where the majority of the employees are earning salaries below the poverty datum line. More so, most employees are experiencing unfair labour practice as their contracts of employment can be terminated if their company is no longer able to pay them.

1.2 Background to the Study

Most firms the world over are losing potential revenue as a result of occupational stress. There are a myriad of causes of occupational stress, which include the dynamism of the work environment, which is always putting more pressure on employees. Nevertheless, reduction of stress seems to require adequate research and improvement of the organisational climate. According to Kompier (2010), a number of approaches can be used to prevent and manage stress. However, participatory approaches are usually effective. Effective stress management requires the input of all the affected stakeholders. All organisational members should play an active role in stress management. Additionally, the process of stress management should be 'stepwise' meaning that a number of phases need to be followed when managing stress. According to Kompier (2010) there are five steps in the 'stepwise' process. These are preparation, problem analysis, evaluation of choices (alternatives), implementation (taking action), and evaluation. Consequently, in the context of companies, occupational stress is the same as job or work stress. The terms can be in use interchangeably and have the same meanings (Larson, 2009). It is also worth noting that stress has two main dimensions, which are physiological and psychological. Physiological stress manifests itself through body pain and the symptoms include headache, migraine, abdominal pain, backache, chest pains, fatigue, and sleep disorders. A person with physiological stress can also have eating, drinking, and smoking problems (Critchley et al, 2010). On the other hand, psychological stress has to do with one's reactions, which include anxiety, depression, burnout, hostility and frustration. It is common for an employee with psychological stress to shout at others and become angry for no reason. If a marketing or sales employee has psychological stress, he or she would not be able to give a good impression to clients. Therefore, an organisation can lose customers because of occupational stress. One of the reasons why companies are losing customers and facing stiff competition is work stress. Occupational stress is a challenge because, the world over, economies have gone through a recession period recently. The global economic recession, that reached a peak between the years 2008 and 2012, resulted in companies adopting retrenchment strategies and turnaround strategies to cope and be sustainable. In the European Union (EU) Greece was mostly affected by economic

recession and is still to 'move out of the woods'. According to Hall (2013) these developments have affected employees more, as companies have resorted to retrenchments and layoffs. Millions of workers have lost their jobs as many organisations have been declared insolvent and bankrupt. Those who survive retrenchments are faced with increased workload and making the working conditions difficult to manage. In addition, millions of workers have been shifted to unfamiliar tasks, requiring new sets of skills. Working hours have also been increased, job rotation and job enlargement exercises has resulted in workers facing new bosses (Gardell and Tey, 2012). Since the working population is increasingly getting pathetic salaries they have resorted to searching for part-time contracts in some organisations compromising their time with family. This shows that internationally employees are being faced with increased tension and uncertainty. The negative effects of losing a job are numerous as they range from marital strain, depression, physical illness, anxiety and even sometimes suicide (Lokk, 2012). With particular reference to Zimbabwe, the economic situation has been extremely unique. The hyperinflation period 2000 to 2008 left Zimbabwe on its knees. The adoption of the multi-currency at the end of 2008, eroded companies' savings and cash. The erosion of savings and shortage of credit lines resulted in a liquidity crisis. Organisations' cash flows are 'tight' and employee salaries are not paid in time. According to the Zimtrade Report (2013), most organisations in Zimbabwe, in general, and in the motor spares sector, in particular, are making losses and are forced to lay-off staff. These companies have also adopted increased working hours for their employees so as to make use of very few employees to cut costs (Zimtrade Report, 2013). The supporting industries and buyers are also experiencing these negative economic situations. Companies are also made to pay high utility bills at a time they are operating below their full capacity. As a result, employees are the ones who suffer because the salaries, which are already low, are not being paid in time. Therefore, stress becomes the order of the day. Moreover, restructuring, job enlargements, scrapping of allowances and poor working conditions have become a common practice at work. These efforts are being done to protect the viability of companies. This has negatively affected family relationships. Thus, it has become difficulty for employees to come up with sound decisions. Retrenchment exercises have been are the major triggers of occupational stress. Employees always have fear as they are no longer secure. In some instances, labour disputes that are seen through industrial action and legal battles are witnessed time and again. In the light of the foregoing background, the companies in the motor spares industry are unique and warrant investigation. Most researchers like Cox (2009), Heany (2008) and Lokk (2012) conducted studies in stable economies and the organisations they studied were large. However, Zimbabwe's economy is highly unstable and the companies in the motor spares industry are largely small and medium sized (SMEs). The SMEs are dominating Zimbabwe's economic landscape. Also, this research is a multi-case study, which is a different approach because other researchers mentioned conducted descriptive surveys.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

If these organisations do not take into consideration stress management at work it will compromise service delivery and productivity resulting in increased losses (Lokk, 2012). Thus the present study sought to explore how employees in the motor industry were coping with stressors at work. Employees in the motor spares industry have been reporting of sleepless nights, headache, high blood pressure, heart disease, depression, short temper and difficulties in concentrating and these are symptoms of stress.

1.4 Research Questions

The researcher sought answers to the following questions;

- What are the sources of occupational stress being experienced by employees in the motor spares industry?
- What are the strategies being used by employees to cope with stress?
- How effective are the stress coping methods being adopted?

1.5 Importance to Practice

The findings from the research may be used in decision making in various industries and hopefully assist in enhancing stress management. It may be able to give alternative options in solving problems related to stress as well as enlighten the human resources policy makers in various organisations on how to manage stress. If organisations fail to manage occupational stress, they are likely to suffer losses. More research is important because the nature of the workplace is changing rapidly and in the context of the new information economy, globalisation, and the introduction of new technologies, emerging risks for workers include increased pace of work, longer hours, more emotion work, greater cognitive demands, exposure to violence, increased monitoring, and job insecurity. At the same time greater participation and dialogue between key stakeholders in the way new work practices evolve, holds great promise for not only preventing work stress and promoting health and well-being, but at the same time contributing to job satisfaction, productivity, work meaning, social cohesiveness and competitiveness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Bandura (2009), Coetzee and Schreuder (2009) presented that there are various theories that have been developed to explain the existence of stress at work and how employees cope with it. Theories on stress are underpinned on their definition of stress, which is undesirable condition, circumstance, task, or other factors that impinge upon the individual (Cox, 2009). This implies that there are various theoretical models from various theorists depending on their definitions of stress. De Bruin and Taylor (2006) mentioned that there is a growing consensus that stress at work is where an employee feels that he/she cannot cope with the demand of the work. Contemporary theorists on stress at work do not focus much on how the individual respond to external or internal events (Burke, 2008). The theorists focus mainly on psychological processes such as perception, cognition and emotions (Burke, 2008). The theorists focus on how employees respond to stressful conditions. Thus, the models of stress and stress management approaches depend on how stress itself is defined. Gardel, et al (2013), Hall (2013) and Havran et al (2013) all presented differing views on the structural model of stress. The structural model of stress emphasizes on the variables involved in stress, and the outcome of such stressful conditions. Hall (2013) highlights that there are causes and outcomes of stress, which differentiate one individual from the other. Gardel, et al (2013) further mentioned that there are structured ways of dealing with stress at institutional and individual level. Havran et al (2013) stated that there are structured ways of dealing with stress. Thus, employees and management in the motor spares industry may need to understand stress at both the organisational and individual level. Organisational factors such as organisational culture, resources in the organisation, management style, conflict among departments, strategies and how they are implemented have an influence on stress in an organisation (Gardel, et al 2013). Individual factors include employee experience, individual work demands, individual work relationships and feelings of job security (Lokk 2012). These factors leading to stress are discussed within the context of theories by Person–Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit Theory), process model of stress, Job Demand Control (JDC), Effort-Reward Imbalance Model (ERI model) and the Transactional model.

2.2 Process Model of Stress

Lokk (2012) and Rollinson (2005) stated that the Process Model of stress reveals the processes that one goes through in the occurrence and management of stress. Rollinson (2005) mentioned that stress is a sequential process from one individual to the other. In support, Lokk (2012) further propounded that stress emanates from sources leading to the outcomes. Thus, this theory implies that employee stress follows a process. Sources of stress can be from the workplace or external. The organisation may have control or may be the reason behind stress at work. In some instances, it could be factors external to the organisation for example political issues, economic issues, social and family issues. The primary states that there are primary stressors that lead to secondary role strains, leading to secondary intra – psychic strains and ultimately outcomes such as impact on physical health. Background and context in the form of culture, socio-economic status, family network and personal history have an influence on internal stress coping methods.

Person – Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit Theory): Most theories on stress came from the University of Michigan findings through their P-E Fit Theory (Burke 2008, Elkin and Rosch 2012). Burke (2008) cited that the P-E Fit Theory states that stress occurs in the absence of fit between individual’s capabilities and the work demands. This covers the resources available, skills possessed and abilities against the demands of the work (Elkin and Rosch 2012). The theory also emphasis on the perception of the individual to work situations. The interaction between the perception and the work situation also influences the outcome. The lack of fit can be in three forms, work demands being greater than employee capability, the individual continuously failing to meet the work demands and the combinations of the two situations where employee’s needs are not being met, and the employee’s capabilities are overstretched (Burke, 2008). This is due partly to the fact that person–environment fit encompasses a number of subsets, such as person–supervisor fit and person–job fit, which are conceptually distinct from one another (Edwards and Shipp, 2007). Nevertheless, it is generally assumed that the person–environment fit leads to positive outcomes, such as satisfaction, performance, and overall well-being (Ostroff and Schulte, 2007). Burke (2008) mentioned that the P-E Fit Theory has four domains which are person-organization fit, person-job fit, person-group fit and person–person fit. Person organisation fit is where the organisation and an individual will be both benefiting from the work relationship (Burke, 2008). Person-job fit refers to the capability between a person’s characteristics and those of a specific job (Edwards and Shipp, 2007). Thus, there is need to match employee critical success factors of an employee with that of the job demands. Person-group fit is the fit between the individual and other groups (thus its departments and divisions) at work. Person –Person fit is another dimension of looking at person–environment fit. It relates to individual’s culture preferences and those preferences of others (Ostroff and Schulte, 2007). Edwards and Shipp (2007) argued that P-E Fit Theory encompasses a variety of subsets which include person – supervisor fit. Burke (2008) supported

saying that the differences in personality of the supervisor and subordinate alone can be a cause of stress at work. The understanding of this theory is that work demands should also be matched with outcomes. With increasing rate on retrenchments in the motor spares industry, employees spared are found having to perform many tasks with less or no pay. These situations are strongly discussed by the P-E Fit Theory. If there is no fit, then automatically the imbalances may become the cause of stress.

Job Demand Theory (JDC): JDC theory which states that employees are stressed at work when the job demands exceed employee capability (Rollinson, 2005). Job strain becomes a function of psychological job environment and job control. Psychological job demands cover issues such as workload, perceived capability to handle the job, time pressure and role conflict. Further, modifications of the theory also incorporate emotional demands of the job and interpersonal conflict dimensions. Job control has various facets which include existence of authority to make decisions and skills discretion (Elkin and Rosch 2012). The JDC model states that employees pressed with high job demands with limited authority and capability to make decisions will be stressed (Elkin and Rosch 2012). This will result in employees being stressed with their work. They also tend to lose confidence in their job leading to job dissatisfaction (Bandura 2009). The model mainly focused on psychological aspects at work but has since incorporated other social aspects such as social support which include existence of supportive informal groups and general workplace support (Coetzee and Schreuder 2009). The social support reduces the impact of job demands.

Effort Reward Imbalance (ERI) Model of Stress: The ERI model states that individuals at work are stressed when the rewards of their effort are not commensurate to their efforts (Coetzee and Schreuder 2009). The theory states that effort at work is part of the psychological contract where an individual has certain levels of expectations from his/her effort. The individual then stresses reciprocity where effort spent at work is rewarded accordingly in the form of salaries, wages, praise, recognition among other financial and non-financial rewards (Bandura 2009). The effort-reward imbalance model proposes that if there is no reciprocity of effort, stress occurs. In short, if the employee's expectations are not met, in relation to the job input, occupational stress is the end result. The model of effort-reward imbalance claims that failed reciprocity in terms of high efforts spent and low rewards received in turn is likely to elicit recurrent negative emotions and sustained stress responses in exposed people. Conversely, positive emotions evoked by appropriate social rewards promote well-being, health and survival. The ERI model states that imbalance between effort and reward causes stress. Issues to do with work contracts being poorly defined and existence of high cost / low gain at work. Employees may accept this imbalance for strategic reasons. This could be improving future work prospects by anticipatory investments. Coetzee and Schreuder (2009) argued that there are basically three conditions that cause stress due to effort reward imbalance and these are poorly defined work contract, employee having limited employment opportunities and perceived improvement in work conditions.

Transactional Model: The Transactional model states that stress is mainly caused by the interaction between the individual and the environment (Coetzee and Schreuder 2009). Stress is as a result of a dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment. Rollinson, (2005) presented that the Transactional Model of stress and coping is a framework for evaluating the process of coping with stressful events. Stressful experiences are construed as person-environment transactions. These transactions depend on the impact of the external stressor. When a person is faced with a stressor, a person evaluates the potential threat (Lokk, 2012). The thrust of this model is on the cognitive senses against perceived work demands on the worker (Rollinson, 2005). That is, stress occurs when perceived ability does not match job demands and the surrounding environment. However, what stresses one individual varies from person to person. This is influenced by attitudes, time, gender, age, experience and differing perceptions (Lokk, 2012). Thus the work environment can be a stressor to an employee. The cognitive work demands and capabilities are influenced by various factors which include personality, situational demands, one's ability to cope, previous experiences and current state of stress already being experienced. The model broadens the causes of stress as emanating from behavioural, psychological and social aspects. The theories discussed show that work-related stress can be conferred from various facets of the life, environmental conditions, psychological state, social state and behavioural state of an individual. Further, the principle of equity or fairness contributes to stress. If employees feel that they are being underpaid compared to their effort they will be stressed. The common understanding of these theories is that individuals are different and they respond to stress differently. Further, stressful conditions and job demands and capability vary from one person to the other. These models present that all employees are exposed to stressful conditions, however, there are certain levels of stress which leads to dissatisfaction. Further, conditions and latitude of an individual to respond and manage stress differ from one environment to the other.

2.3 Sources of Occupational Stress

Stress is the body's physiological response to the stressor. Strain is the body's long-term effect of stress. Lork (2012) defined occupational stress as stress involving work. Occupational stress can also be called work related stress. Thus, occupational stress is stress that people experience at work. It is not possible to eliminate stress at work as they are factors that are not controllable by employees and organizations themselves. Havran, Tery and Dewrt (2013) stated that the sources of stress on an individual vary from person to person. Factors such as personal characteristics, lifestyle, previous life events, attitudes, level of education, gender and work variables among others influence the effect of stress on individuals (Havran, et al 2013). Thus, factors leading to stress can be at individual level. Stress also can be viewed as how people at work relate to work demands and work pressures against their skills and abilities (Rollinson, 2005). If work demands and pressures are greater than the individual's capability, an employee will be stressed. This will challenge them to cope which may be difficult (Heany, 2008). Thus, failure of employees to cope with stress is a key contributor to stress itself. Most common sources of occupational stress are work overload, unpaid overtime, hostile working environment, downsizing among others. Stressors are those events or set of conditions that causes a stress response (Rollinson, 2005). These studies by Havran, et al (2013) and Rollinson, (2005) reviewed that stressful conditions may also be external to the firms. Situations facing the Zimbabwean motor spares industry may be related to the above literature. This is due to the existence of unpaid overtime, downsizing and work overload. However, the economic situations faced by countries where these studies were carried out is quite different. The major issues affecting Zimbabwean companies emanate from the business environment which is characterized of low levels of liquidity such as the circulation of money in the economy. Issues to do with security of employee occupation also cause employee stress (Gardell, et al, 2012). Retrenchments, implementation of turnaround strategies, layoffs and job sharing activities to cope with negative economic environment stress employees (Heany, 2008). Interrelationships at work have an impact on stress (De Bruin and Taylor, 2006). Good working relationships in informal groups help to reduce and solve stressful conditions. However, hostile working relationships trigger stress levels (Heany, 2008). Evidence of harassment, discrimination, biased opinions, hearsay and other derogatory remarks trigger stress in individuals (De Bruin and Taylor 2006). Individuals vary in terms of how they are affected by issues to do with working relationships and family at work. Today's working environment has become more interactive, such that leaders are expected to encourage good working environment, where there is an open door policy and fairness in access to information (De Bruin and Taylor 2006). The overall management style will be then to promote solidarity and the desire to achieve one common goal (Heany, 2008). Thus, managers may be encouraged to implement collaborative planning and equally dispersed responsibilities (Heany, 2008). This would entail having dedicated personnel and sufficient resources. Managers should also take time to mentor and coach subordinates so that they understand their roles (Cox, 2009). If employees understand what is expected from them they will enjoy job autonomy and job satisfaction. Thus, lack of job autonomy can trigger stress at work (De Bruin and Taylor 2006). This is because employees will not have the latitude to make decisions about their jobs. Employees may be stressed by lack of adequate incentives (Cox, 2009). Generally individuals are economic animals who are motivated by money. Absence of sufficient or competitive remuneration triggers stress (Coetzee and Schreuder, 2009). This is because employees will be finding it difficult to pay for basics such as food, health services, education and clothing. Under such scenario, employees may seek other part-time jobs to augment salaries (Cox, 2009). This may in-turn compromise family relationships. Bandura (2009) argued that negative work-home interface can be a cause of stress. If an employee is exposed to stressful family conditions it will be difficult for the employee to perform. As employees come from home to their work relationships it does not mean that they forget all their stressful family relationships (Cox, 2009). Individuals are social animals, who reside in societies, community and family. Thus, family pressures and family conflicts may result in occupational stress. Lack of resources at corporate level, business level, departmental level and at individual level impacts negatively on occupational stress (Cox, 2009). It will be difficult for individuals to perform effectively if resources are limited. Lack of resources may increase work demands and expectations which an employee may face difficulties in coping (Bandura, 2009). The end result will be high stress levels which may transfer to distress.

2.4 The Effect of Occupational Stress

The human body responds to psychological, emotional, physical and behavioural stressors (Hall, 2013). The human body will then form a chemical response to a threat of increased work demand and pressure releasing adrenalin (Gardell, Yu and Tey, 2012). Once the threat is over the body will restore its natural state (Hall, 2013). Thus, the impact of stress to an employee affects all the facets of the human body mechanisms. Thus, excessive forms of stress are less desired as they bring anxiety and low morale amongst employees. Occupational stress can affect an employee's, physical, mental, and social health. For instance, a stressed employee can have difficulties in concentrating at work. According to Hall (2013), stressed employees are prone to accidents, and usually produce poor quality outputs. The demands of the job, when they are excessive and

requiring an employee to put extra ordinary effort and ability, can lead to stress (Gardell, et al, 2012). If workers are overburdened by workloads and challenging work they become stressed (Hall, 2013). This could result in employees becoming anxious resulting in heart palpitations. It also results in high blood pressure, insomnia, chronic headaches among other effects (Gardell, et al, 2012). Hence, excessive forms of stress affect the emotional, behavioural and cognitive state of employees. In addition, the effect of occupational stress is influenced by a number of factors (Heany, 2008). The factors include unique nature of the job, position in the firm, interpersonal skills of an individual and organisational working environment (Gardell, et al, 2012). All these factors among others influence how individuals at work are exposed to stress. Stressful conditions need to be managed. Job demands and job environmental factors have an influence on stress levels of employees.

2.5 Stress Coping Methods by Employees

Gardell and Tey (2012) mentioned that since workplace stress is unavoidable employees should learn how to cope with stress. Better ways of coping with stress need to be invented. Stress at workplace is on the increase during this economic crisis and so are the coping strategies. If employees can manage stress it will be easier for them to perform job activities. If employees manage their stress it will be easier for those working around them to be effective. Emotions need to be controlled as they are contagious.

Making Resources Available: Availability of resources can enable employees to perform their activities easier. Resources can help meet the demands faced at work (Cox, 2009). Fairness in the distribution of organisational resources is required. Other resources such as time need to be attended to. Time management is critical in helping to meet targets (Gardell and Tey, 2012). Personal financial wellness of the employee has an effect on stress at work.

Good Working Environment: Good working environment and social support is critical in ensuring that employees cope with stress (Gardell and Tey, 2012). Organisations need to support informal groups and interaction at work. Leaders in social groups help in the management of stress in organisations (Cox, 2009). It has been noted that sometimes work setting itself creates physical stress because of noise, lack of privacy, poor lighting, poor ventilation, poor temperature control or inadequate sanitary facilities. Issues such as crisis centred management, management styles and availability of work place materials may be stressors. Managers should pay particular attention to training and development, health and safe environment so that employees are not exposed to stress of work demands.

Defence Mechanisms: Gardell and Tey, (2012) mentioned that individuals deal with stress differently. Some adopt defence mechanisms where they will not be interested in understanding the underlying causes of stress and how to deal with it. Cox (2009) mentioned that there are various productive ways of coping with stress, because stress is perceived. However, usually coping with stress results in an employee coping with negative feelings/anxiety. This will be as a result of stressful situations (Heavy, 2008). Thus, employees may decide to partake and accept the occurrence of stressful realities. defence mechanisms describe behaviours or thought patterns used to reduce stress and anxiety. The term 'defence mechanism' is loosely referred to as 'coping strategy'. In responding to stress, some people consider denial thus rejection or blocking of an event. Bandura (2006) argued that coping with stress may be temporary, as stress usually recurs. For example, subordinate working with a manager who always passes negative comments may learn to live with it. Some may cope with stress through avoiding stressful conditions. Cox (2009) presented five categories of coping with stress:

Preventative coping: This is where an employee avoids stressful working conditions and choose to do the right thing at first (Coetzee and Schreuder, 2009). Thus, the employee will be cautious of stress and avoid situations that may lead to stress. However, it may often be difficult for employees to always prevent stress. This is because there are other third party conditions which the employee may not have control over (Cox, 2009). Preventive coping takes into consideration anticipated stressful conditions and events. An employee anticipating stressful conditions may decide to prevent stress in advance.

Anticipatory coping: When an employee anticipates future causes of stress and its nature may decide to avoid it and be prepared to deal with it (Lokk, 2012). Previous experience of stressful conditions may alert employees on the potential causes of stress (Coetzee and Schreuder, 2009). If that is understood, the employee will be able to avoid stressful conditions. Anticipatory is stress you experience concerning the future. It relates to thinking about what one does if the company closes or if the job is lost. The stress can be focused on one particular event, such as upcoming presentation that one will give. However, anticipatory stress can also be vague and undefined, such as an overall sense of dread about the future, or a worry that something will go wrong. Under these situations there is need to visualise the situation going right thus according to the plan. Meditation is another

important tool that can be used to develop focus and the ability to concentrate on what will happen. Anticipatory stress can result in lack of confidence. This is usually accompanied by the fear of failure. Thus, making contingency plans and analysing possible outcomes enables preparedness and confidence. Fear of failure will be diminished.

Dynamic coping: This is an ongoing way of coping with stress where an individual always finds better ways of coping with stress (Coetzee and Schreuder, 2009). Cox (2009) argued that employees need to understand the changing conditions surrounding their work activities so as for them to manage their surroundings and work conditions. If that is understood employees will manage their work situations.

Reactive coping: Some individuals deal with stress after it has occurred (Coetzee and Schreuder, 2009). Because stressful conditions are unpredictable and are not always determined by the employee means that employees need to be reactive (Cox, 2009).

Residual coping: After stress has happened some individuals may in the long run decide on the best way to deal with stress (Cox, 2009). Due to experiences of stress an employee will cope with it. This situation calls for employees who can understand their roles and stressful conditions (Coetzee and Schreuder, 2009). Apart from these there are many other ways of dealing with stress. The best stress coping methods is influenced by the number of factors (Cox, 2009). The factors include one's history in coping with stress, personal characteristics, social coping resources and organisational climate (Cox, 2009). Cox, (2009) presented that individuals who are affluent, healthy, capable and optimistic are seen as resourceful and thus, are less vulnerable toward the stress of life. It is of most importance to be competent to handle a stressful situation. But actual competence is not a sufficient prerequisite. If the individual underestimates his potential for action, no adaptive strategies will be developed (Gardell and Tey, 2012). Therefore, perceived competence is crucial. This has been labelled 'perceived self-efficacy' or 'optimistic self-beliefs' by Bandura (2009).

2.6 Implication of the Reviewed Literature

The models of stress presented highlighted the differing dynamics of stress. The theories highlighted that stress takes differing forms and is influenced by various factors. There are environmental conditions, reward conditions, psychological state, social state and behavioural state of an individual. The common understanding of these theories is that individuals are different and they respond to stress differently. Further, stressful conditions and job demands and capability vary from one person to the other. These models presented that all employees are exposed to stressful conditions, however, employees react differently.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are number of research philosophies. However, there are two main approaches that dominate literature, which are positivism (quantitative) and phenomenology (qualitative). Positivism has roots in the natural sciences. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012), positivism assumes that acceptable knowledge is based on facts. Subjective or value judgements have no place in research. This research did not use the positivist ideology because the subject of occupational stress is highly subjective. On the other hand, phenomenology acknowledges the subjective nature of knowledge. It argues that people differ and there is a need for researcher to use their values in order to come up with practical solutions to problems (Simon, 2011). This research uses the subjective approach. The reason is that occupational stress is individual experience and people differ. Furthermore, the subjective approach was used because people can react to stress in different ways. There may be no one best way of managing stress, therefore, it was prudent for the researcher to use the qualitative approach.

3.1 Research Strategy

Research strategy is the approach that was in use when the research collected the data. There are two main approaches or strategies in research, which are deductive and inductive (Saunders et al., 2012). Deductive strategy has roots in the natural sciences and uses quantitative data. The strategy also uses systematic data collection procedures and is associated with large sample sizes. The researcher did not use the inductive logic because the occupational stress is subjective. The inductive logic is qualitative and places less emphasis on procedures when collecting data. The sample is relatively small and focus is on the 'quality' of the data. This study used the inductive approach because it allowed for flexibility and generation of detailed information.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is the overall plan for obtaining answers to the research questions and testing the research hypothesis (Saunders et al., 2012). Kothari (2004) notes that a research design provides a framework for collection and analysis of data and subsequently indicates which research methods are appropriate. Kato (2002) define research design as all the issues involved in the planning and execution of a research project from identifying the problem through to reporting and publishing the results. In this study, the research design used

was a multi-case study. The case study allowed the research to conduct a detailed analysis. A case study is a detailed analysis of a single unit or few entities. A case study focuses on a specific company or selected companies and does not focus on many institutions.

3.3 Population

Population consists of all units, or the universe- people or things possessing the attributes or characteristics in which the researcher is interested (Yin, 2003). The population size for the study was 255. All the employees irrespective of level of management were considered. Work stress affects all employees in the organisation irrespective of level of management.

3.4 Sampling Technique

A sample, in simple terms, is a subset of the population (Saunders et al., 2012). Kothari (2004) defines a sample as a set of elements selected in some way from a population. It is virtually impossible to collect data from the wholesome target population due to the financial and time resources the exercise would require. For this reason sampling is utilised in which a small and manageable proportion of the population is interviewed for the purposes of this study and is assumed to be a representation of the target population. The sampling procedures in this study were non-probability sampling techniques which are not based on probability theory but on obtaining sample subjects on the basis of opportunity, researcher's judgment and referrals. Purposive sampling was utilised because it involves the deliberate selection of 10 key informants who possess particular information about the working conditions in the organisations under the study. Purposive sampling is a technique in which the investigator selects participants because of their characteristics good informants/participants are those who know the information required, are willing to reflect on the phenomena of interest, have the time and willing to participate (Saunders et al., 2012). With reference to the above, key informants in this study included human resource and administrative employees. The researcher also selected 20 employees from a further company (10 from each company), who were selected using convenience sampling. Focus group discussions were conducted with these employees. The researcher visited the companies and interviewed the first 10 employees she came across. In this regard the researcher was in control of the sample composition by employing convenience sampling. The accessibility and proximity of respondents make convenience sampling relatively fast and inexpensive thus suitable for researcher in this study.

3.5 Research Instruments

Research instruments are basically the tools that are employed to collect data. Data for this research was collected using key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

Key Informant Interviews: Key informant interviews are used as a tool to explore related issues and problems associated with a given topic, a key informant interview involves talking to people who know the area or certain aspects of the problem (Saunders et al., 2012). In this study there were 10 key informants. The key informant technique is an ethnographic research method in which the key informants because of their personal skills, position within society are able to provide information and a deeper insight into what is going on around them. Key informant interviews also allowed the researcher to collect quality data in a short period of time in comparison to the time that in depth interviews can require. The interview schedule was prepared in line with the research objectives. The researcher broke down the research questions into sub-questions, which were then adopted as the interview questions.

Focus Group Discussions: Focus group discussions are a small, temporary community formed for the purpose of collaborative enterprise of discovery (Kato, 2002). There were 20 participants and two focus group discussions were held. In this study, the use of focus group discussions allowed the researcher to gain the research domain quickly from the respondents. By using focus group discussions, the researcher was provided with unique insights of the employees' understanding of occupational stress and the strategies being employed. This process generated rich answers from the respondents. The researcher was also allowed to probe further as responses from respondents were presented to her the discussion progresses. Kato (2002) noted that focus group discussions make use of open ended questions and this allows respondents to reveal what is on their mind as opposed to what the interviewer suspects is on their mind. In light of the above statement, the use of focus group discussions for this study provided the insights and understandings of the employees themselves and not the researcher's opinion on the subject matter.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Validity is about the truthfulness of the research findings (Saunders et al., 2012). The researcher ensured validity through using knowledgeable participants and making sure that the sample was representative. The use of

quality control measures, like review of the data collection process by the supervisor, helped to enhance validity. Reliability is the extent to which the research results can be obtained if a similar study is conducted (Saunders et al., 2012). The study was qualitative and subjective, therefore, reliability is difficult to establish. The research dealt with human behaviour, which is difficult to predict.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection was initiated by the compilation of the key informant interview guide and the focus group discussion guide. The data collection procedure began by the researcher visiting the organisations to obtain approval letters and to make appointments. Focus group discussions were conducted with 20 participants. The discussion session lasted approximately between one and one and a half hour. The researcher had to lay down a few ground rules for the discussion session to ensure order and progress such as being the chairperson and to view opinion on issue under discussion. After the focus group discussions, the key informants were interviewed. Only 10 key informant interviews had to be done. The first step in the interviews was to identify and introduce oneself to these key informants. The key informant interview were intended to last for not more than an hour as these people were busy individuals.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are standards are qualities that researchers should meet. They denote what a researcher can and cannot do during data collection. It is important for a researcher to respect the ethical principles because it enhances the validity and the reliability of the research results. Some of the ethical principles that the researcher respected include informed consent. Under informed consent, the organisations were told about the study and written consent was given. The participants were not forced to take part and they were given the freedom to withdraw. Additionally, the privacy of the respondents was protected and no names were divulged.

3.9 Data Presentation and Analysis Procedures

The research conducted was more qualitative in nature and, therefore, quantitative data analysis was difficult due to the use of open ended questions. Open ended questions produce a multi varied and multi diverse response(s) from interviewees. O'Leary (2004) says that for qualitative data thematic analysis is suitable. This involves an analysis of words, concepts, literary devices and or non-verbal cues. Findings from the research of similar nature were, therefore, grouped together and detailed discussions were made for each group. There was use of research objectives to guide on the grouping of the findings, with the objectives becoming the sub-headings.

3.10 Research Limitations

The researcher faced two major limitations during data collection process. Firstly, the participants were not readily available because of work commitments. To overcome the limitation, appointments were made in advance and the interviews were conducted when the participants had confirmed availability. Furthermore, focus group discussions were conducted after work, when most participants were free. The second limitation was that participants, especially management, were reluctant to provide some detailed information about stress management in their companies because of confidentiality. Nevertheless, the researcher gave assurance that the study was an academic exercise and the data collected was going to be safeguarded and not divulged to parties who are not involved in this research.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The researcher obtained a good response from participants. The sample size was 30 (10 key informants and 20 focus group discussion participants). Responses were received from eight key informants and 17 employees participated in the two focus group discussions (nine in the first meeting and eight in the second meeting). Therefore, from a sample target of 30 individuals, there were 25 participants implying that a response rate of 83% was obtained. The response rate was acceptable because it was well above the minimum acceptable response rate of 67% recommended by Saunders et al., (2012). The eight key informants comprised six males and three females. Additionally, there was gender imbalance again in the focus group discussions, with 13 out of the 17 people who attended the two meetings being male. Therefore, the findings of the study seem to suggest that the motor spares industry in Harare is a male dominated sector. The researcher also solicited data about the age of the participants. It was found out that only five out of the 25 participants were below the age of 25 years. Therefore, most of the respondents were seen as mature people and provided reliable data. Furthermore, the research showed that there is high labour turnover in the motor spares industry in Harare. The reason is that 14 participants (56%) have been in the industry for less than two years. These findings tend to indicate that the level of occupational stress is very high and some of the employee could be leaving for 'greener pastures'.

Additionally, it could be an indicator that some of the employees have a high level of unethical conduct and were constantly being relieved of their duties. It might also point to the fact that there is ineffective human resources management in the motor spares industry in Harare.

4.2 Sources of Occupational Stress in the Motor Spares Industry

The participants were not able to provide the classification on the forms of stress they experience. However, it was established that some of the signs of these stress include headache, being emotional, absenteeism, and unethical conduct. One focus group participants said, "I am sure my best friend at work is sometimes affected by stress because he can just get emotional without reason. One day he actually beat me for just joking with him". Additionally, one key informant interviewee said, "my subordinates usually make mistakes, which I believe are as a result of stress. The accidents that usually happen are a result of stress. Sometimes you can see someone talking to him/herself or one can no hear you when you give an instruction. The cases of domestic violence that are on the increase could be also partly blamed on occupational stress". Consequently, while the participants, given that they do not have adequate knowledge about occupational stress and its forms, the researcher categorised the types of stress experienced into three. The study showed that the employees in the motor spares industry usually experience acute stress, episodic stress, and chronic stress. Acute stress was found to be the widely experienced one. The reason is that it is cause by the daily job demands and the pressures that every employee encounter. Examples of excessive acute stress are vomiting, tension headaches, and anger. Findings from the key informant interviews showed that the signs are common among employees in the motor vehicle sector are;

- Emotional distress, such as anger, anxiety, irritability, and acute periods of depression
- Physical problems, such as headache, pain, stomach upset, dizziness, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, hypertension and bowel disorders.

Moreover, episodic stress refers to acute stress that is always recurring. This type of stress is usually seen in people who make self-inflicted, unrealistic or unreasonable demands which get all clamoured up and bring too much stress in their attempt to accomplish these goals. Episodic stress is not like chronic stress, though, because this type of stress ceases from time to time yet not as frequently as acute stress does. Chronic stress is brought about by long term exposure to stressors. These include unhappy marriage, traumatic experiences, unwanted career or job, stress of poverty, chronic illnesses, relationship conflicts, political problems, and dysfunctional families.

4.3 Sources of Stress in the Motor Spares Industry

The study showed occupational stress is mainly due the interaction between the employee and the environment. In addition, location, gender, status, and personal characteristics cause stress. There were different views on the importance of worker characteristics versus working conditions as the primary cause of job stress. The differing viewpoints suggest different ways to prevent stress at work. Differences in individual characteristics such as personality and coping skills can be very important in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress. In other words, what is stressful for one person may not be a problem for someone else. This viewpoint underlies prevention strategies that focus on workers and ways to help them cope with demanding job conditions. In general, participants said that occupational stress is caused by a mismatch between perceived effort and perceived reward, and/or a sense of low control in a job with high demands. Low social support at work and job insecurity can also increase occupational stress. In addition, it was held that the organisational factors such as organisational culture, resources in the organisation, management style, and conflict among departments were causing stress. This finding is in line with Gardelet al.,(2013), who stated that individual factors include employee experience, individual work demands, individual work relationships and feelings of job security. Working conditions were also to blame for stress. Although the importance of individual differences cannot be ignored, the findings of the research suggest that certain working conditions are stressful to most people. Such evidence argues for a greater emphasis on working conditions as the key source of job stress, and for job redesign as a primary prevention strategy. The research also showed that the interrelationships at work have an impact on stress. It was held that the good working relationships in informal groups help to reduce and solve stressful conditions. These findings agree with Heany (2008), who stated that hostile working relationships trigger stress levels. Evidence of harassment, discrimination, biased opinions, hearsay and other derogatory remarks trigger stress in individuals. Additionally, the research revealed that workload is another cause of stress. One participant said, "I work from Monday to Saturday (8am to 6pm) and this is too much for me". The findings agree with Burke (2008) who argued that handling workload pose stress to employees. Bandura (2009) added to the debate and argued that there are three aspects of workload, which are quantitative workload (more work than one can handle), qualitative workload (difficult work), and under load (having work that fails to use a worker's skills and abilities). Some participants said that workload has been

linked to a number of strains, including anxiety, physiological reactions such as fatigue, backache, headache, and gastrointestinal problems.

4.4 Major Causes of Stress in the Motor Spares Industry

Low expertise on the part of employees: It was stated that most employees did not receive formal job training. Most of them were just employees as ‘counter sales persons’ but do not have marketing qualifications. The findings of this study are in line with the Job Demand Theory which states that employees are stressed at work when the job demands exceed employee capability (Rollinson, 2005). Job strain becomes a function of psychological job environment and job control. Psychological job demands cover issues such as workload, perceived capability to handle the job, time pressure and role conflict.

Loss making institutions: Just like other companies in Zimbabwe, which are facing high operating costs coupled with dwindling revenues, motor spares companies are facing challenges. There are limited financial resources in the companies. The findings are in line with Cox (2008) who stated that the lack of resources at corporate level, business level, departmental level, and at individual level impacts negatively on occupational stress.

Low motivation: The study showed that employees are receiving lower salaries as compared to the cost of living. The poverty datum line in Zimbabwe is above \$500.00 while most employees are earning less than \$300.00. These findings agree with Cox (2009) who argued that employees may be stressed by lack of adequate incentives.

Leadership: The research showed that the institutions under the study are managed by the owners, who are mainly interested in profits. Therefore, the leadership styles seem to be ineffective. Leaders are responsible for the performance of institutions and their actions are important in the management of occupational stress. There are conflicting interests between the employees and the leaders in the motor spares industry in Harare.

Job demands: There are higher job demands so that the companies make profit and this causes stress. The employees pressed with high job demands with limited authority and capability to make decisions will be stressed (Elkin and Rosch 2012).

Harsh economic environment: The economic environment in Zimbabwe is very harsh. The ‘evils’ of this world are seriously affecting the country and they include, poverty, hunger and diseases. The situation is worsened by extended family members and orphans and vulnerable children.

High cost of living (high rentals and utility bills and transport challenges): The study showed that housing is a major cause of stress to Harare residents. The rentals are very high. The situation is worsened by the high electricity and water bills. There is also the absence of affordable urban transport system and this puts a burden on employees.

Loan Sharks: All respondents said that they are not able to access loans from financial institutions in times of need. Low salaries being earned make them ineligible for loans from formal financial institutions. Therefore, in times of need they opt for ‘loan sharks’ who rip them off. The ‘loan sharks’ are informal money lenders who charge people high interests rates.

4.5 Strategies used for Coping with Occupational Stress

Participants said that workplace stress is unavoidable and employees should learn how to cope with stress. Better ways of coping with stress need to be invented. Stress at workplace is on the increase during this economic crisis and so are the coping strategies. Other employees’ spouses are into cross border trading and vending as a way of supplementing income. One interviewee said, “The years 2007 and 2008 taught us that you should not rely on salary”. Additionally, it was stated that the employees’ families go to the rural areas during summer to do some agricultural activities. One participant said, “This post-harvest period is better because I am not worrying about mealie-meal and bread. I harvested half tonne of maize and 500kg of sweet potatoes and they are sustaining me during this time”. The companies under study are also making efforts to ensure that work resources like safety equipment and clothing are available. Availability of resources can enable employees to perform their activities easier. There also attempts to create a good working environment. Good working environment and social support is critical in ensuring that employees cope with stress (Gardell and Tey, 2012). Organisations need to support informal groups and interaction at work. Leaders in social groups help in the management of stress in organisations (Cox, 2009). It was also held that individuals vary in terms of how they are affected by issues to do with working relationships and family at work. Some managers have also realised that today’s working environment have become more interactive. The leaders, therefore, are encouraging good working environment, where there is an open door policy and fairness in access to information. These findings agree with Heany (2008) who argued that the overall management style is essential in stress management and will be then to promote solidarity and the desire to achieve one common goal.

4.6 Ideal Stress Coping Methods for the Motor Spares Industry

4.6.1 Individual Level

Income Generating Projects by Employees: One manager said, "I encourage my employees not to rely on salary alone but to start projects".

Rotational Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCA): Employees could manage stress through group saving and circulating their savings. When one has a turn to receive the money, he or she can buy household assets or start a project.

Advancement of Education: Employees need to advance their education so that they can assume higher positions.

Organisational Level

Possible recommendations for ensuring that the adopted stress coping mechanisms do not result in unethical behaviour include;

Direct and Indirect remuneration: The companies should make an effort to give fair remuneration to the employees. It should be remembered that money is the most important motivator.

Employee empowerment is essential. The managers should give employees the freedom to do their work without undue interference. Training of employees is essential. Training would help employees to gain job knowledge so that they effectively perform their tasks. This view is supported by De Bruin and Taylor (2006) mentioned that there is a growing consensus that stress at work is where an employee feels that he/she cannot cope with the demand of the work.

Effective Leadership: The managers should also take time to mentor and coach subordinates so that they understand their roles (Cox, 2009). Additionally, it is important to note that a mixture of individual and organisational stress management approaches is more useful. Both the employees and the organisation should be committed towards reducing work related stress. Changing the organisation can also help to prevent job stress. The following adjustments are necessary:

- Ensuring that the workload is in line with workers' capabilities and resources.
- Designing jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills.
- Clearly defining the workers' roles and responsibilities.
- To reduce workplace stress, managers may monitor the workload given out to the employees. Also while they are being trained they should let employees understand and be notified of stress awareness.
- Giving the workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs.
- Improving communication and reducing uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects.
- Providing opportunities for social interaction among workers.
- Establishing work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job.
- Combating workplace discrimination (based on race, gender, national origin, religion or language).
- Bringing in an objective outsider such as a consultant to suggest a fresh approach to persistent problems.
- Introducing a participative leadership style to involve as many subordinates as possible to resolve stress-producing problems.
- Encouraging work-life balance through family-friendly benefits and policies
- Telecommuting is another way organisations can help reduce stress for their workers. Employees defined telecommuting as "an alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks elsewhere that are normally done in a primary or central workplace, for at least some portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to interact with others inside and outside the organisation." One reason that telecommuting gets such high marks is that it allows employees more control over how they do their work. Telecommuters reported more job satisfaction and less desire to find a new job. Employees that worked from home also had less stress, improved work/life balance and higher performance rating by their managers.

4.6.2 National Level

Social safety nets and poverty eradication: There is a need for effective implementation of policies aimed at poverty alleviation. It is essential to note that the Millennium Development Goal Number 1 (to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) was not achieved and countries are moving towards the sustainable development goals. For developing countries like Zimbabwe, adequate funding is essential so that the sustainable development goals (SDGs) are attained. The other national level initiatives include employment creation and housing provision. However, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation ZIM-ASSET target to deliver about 500 000 housing units nationally by year 2018, is inadequate. The housing backlog for Harare alone is more than 500 000. Therefore, more efforts are required to ensure that national developmental goals are met. The leaders need to show commitment through fighting corruption and encouraging followers to discharge their duties diligently.

V. CONCLUSION

The overall objective of the study was to establish how employees in the motor spares industry were coping with occupational stressors. Ultimately, stress coping mechanisms were recommended to employees. The findings from the research may be used in decision making in various industries and hopefully assist in enhancing stress management. This study edifies existing literature and concludes for each research objective as follows.

5.1 Recommendations

Effective Human Resource Management: Just like machines are serviced and maintained for better performance, human resources should also be maintained, as they are the most valuable assets. It is important for companies to put in place safety and health systems with a view to reduce accidents and diseases at workplaces. Workplace wellness programmes need to be put in place to manage issues that causes injuries, such as stress, bad nutrition and ignorance. Other important safety issues like wearing protective clothing, faults making equipment unsafe to use, electric damages on plugs and cables, leaks and noises should also be addressed. Surfaces which are uneven or slippery may cause accidents, net mentioning obstructions like doors and corridors. It is important for companies to put in place safety and health safety systems with a view to reduce accidents and diseases at workplaces. Workplace wellness programmes need to be put in place to manage issues that causes injuries, such as stress, bad nutrition and ignorance. Other important safety issues like wearing protective clothing, faults making equipment unsafe to use, electric damages on plugs and cables, leaks and noises should also be addressed. Surfaces which are uneven or slippery may cause accidents, net mentioning obstructions like doors and corridors. Effective human resources management entails training and motivation, employee empowerment.

Effective Policy Implementation: There is a need to ensure the effective implementation of occupational health policies by the responsible government institutions. Zimbabwe has ratified several international protocols on occupational health and safety. These include the Prevention of Major Industrial Convention of 1993 and the Occupational Safety and Health Convention of 1981, which are require effective execution.

National Social Safety Nets: Establishment of social safety nets that takes care of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) is essential. These social safety nets would help reduce occupational stress in that the working class can largely focus on their families only without being burdened by extended families.

Income Generating Projects by Employees: Employees should embark on income generating projects in order to supplement their employees.

Rotational Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCA): There is a need for the employees to form savings clubs and rotate their income.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Study

This study focused on two motor spares companies in Harare. With adequate financial resources, a national study could yield more results.

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