

**EMPLOYEE PERCEPTION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
OCCUPATIONALSTRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES AT
THE SAFARICOM CALL CENTRE**

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been submitted for examination to any other University.

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The research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University Supervisor.

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DEDICATION

This Management project is dedicated to my late Mum Margaret, my Dad John and my whole family for their inspiration and support.

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ABSTRACT

Occupational stress is manifested in the physiological and emotional responses that occur when employees are unable to cope with the work life imbalances. Work challenges can have positive or negative impact on employee health and safety and flexible work schedules have the potential of improving employee satisfaction and reducing stress. Call centre work has a high level of monitoring, with unpredictable traffic peak of calls. This significantly increases the risk of suffering from stress. Work related stress when well managed can increase productivity of employees and the entire organization. it is also important to realize that the costs of stress can be extremely high hence the need to manage it effectively. This study intended to establish the employee perception of the effectiveness of occupational stress management programmes at the Safaricom Limited call centre. This was a descriptive survey design study. The population was 1459 staff from whom a sample size of 200 employees was selected using stratified sampling design. Primary data was collected using semi structured questionnaires which were self-administered. The results from the data analysis indicated that occupational stress in the call centre can be effectively managed in various ways. These included allocating employees their preferred shifts, salary increments, fairness in doing the quality assessments and transparency when dealing with promotions. Respondents provided their opinions based on their feelings and this was a major limitation to the study as they would be biased in their answers. It recommended that over time a related study would be carried out to assess the effectiveness of occupational stress management programmes at Safaricom Limited or in related telecommunication industry to. The study concludes that occupational stress management programmes were very significant in motivating the employees and identifying employee needs. Safaricom management highly valued occupational stress management and worked towards its effective management. occupational stress management was mostly done through coaching and training on emotional management, implementation of work schedules that help improve work life balance and establishment of policies that assist to motivate the employees.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Health of employees is very essential for productivity of any business venture. An organization that has a healthy workforce has an advantage of having an improved output. According to the constitution of the International Labor Organization, workers should always be protected from diseases, sickness and injuries that may arise from their employment. According to the report given by the World Health Organization, 2 million people succumb to work related accidents and diseases every year. An estimated 160 million workers suffer from work related illnesses every year. 270 million people suffer from non-fatal and fatal work related accidents in every year. This suffering is incalculable because the effects spread over to the other dependants of the employees. The International Labor Organization estimates that 4 % of the annual GDP of the world is lost as a result of occupational accidents and diseases (Vilkman, 2004).

Employers have legal and moral obligation to provide a healthy and safe work environment. When employees have been protected against safety and health hazards at their work place, there is a ripple effect towards their dependants. Employees are breadwinners and caregivers of their families. If their health concerns are neglected, it affects not only the productivity of an organization, but also the wellbeing of their entire families. Psychological and social issues can affect health of employees. These include bullying, sexual harassment, mobbing, burnout, verbal abuse, work related stress, exposure to unhealthy elements like tobacco and uncontrolled alcohol. Employees in the service sector may also face work related health problems. However, the problems are

different from those experienced in the manufacturing and the primary goods sector. Problems more prevalent in the service sector include obesity, overwork and stress (Peiró, & Tetrick, 2011).

1.1.1 Concept of Perception

In psychology, perception is looked at as the way in which the mind deduces an event, an occurrence, an object, a system or a behavior. Perception could be very much different from reality. People perceive things differently, according to a number of factors. Emotional state, experience and motivational states are some of the factors that influence perception. Two individuals observing the same phenomenon will have different perceptions of the same, depending on the factors. In different emotional and motivational states, the two individuals will perceive the same phenomenon from different angles. Perception is an essential aspect of human behavior. People are either optimistic or pessimistic, depending on how they perceive things. Individuals who perceive situations positively are more likely to solve a problem efficiently than those who look at situations in a pessimistic way. A positive perception of affairs is important for any leadership qualities and for a good work environment in an organization (Mauno et al, 2005).

Janssen (2005) did studies that related perception of employees and innovativeness of their behavior. The author argued that the way employees' perceived assertiveness of their supervisors had a direct implication on their innovativeness at work. This study showed that in workplaces where supervisors were perceived as being supportive of

employee innovation, the employees were encouraged to be innovative at work. Workplaces where employees perceived the management as not being supportive of innovation had little motivation for employees to engage in innovation activities. From this study, it is clear that perception of employees at any workplace about the human resource management activities is very important. Given that perception by employees about human resource practices can affect productivity, perception management is an essential part of an organization. If the top management understands employee perception, it is easy to shape up decisions that will help create positive perception from all the workers.

1.1.2 Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is the mental, emotional or physical strain that an employee suffers because of his work. Occupational stress has been found to affect productivity of employees who have been affected. Occupational stress is noted as one of the most common occupational health safety issue in the most places of work. Whenever there are constant demands on workers to meet unrealistic and stringent targets, there is a possibility that they can develop occupational stress. As well, when the employees are literally wired to their working desks, they can suffer fatigue and stress related problems. Some work environment needs a high level of monitoring. This significantly increases the risk of suffering from stress (Singh & Pandey, 2005). Management of occupational stress among employees is an issue that depends on various factors. Even though management team is charged with putting in place structures that are geared towards assisting its staff to cope with stress, perception among the staff is also an important

factor. Employees perceive sources of stressors and management of the same through different lens. Efforts put in place to deal with management may not bear fruits if the employees have a negative perception towards them. It is important for the management team to understand the perception of employees about how occupational stresses are managed (Gillespie et al, 2001).

Occupational stress is manifested through physiological and emotional responses that are occasioned when an employee is not able to cope with the lopsided nature of work-life balance. Occupational stress is resulted when the demands by work conditions an individual is undertaking are higher than the ability of the individual to meet them. These conditions have the ability to put a strain on an employee's physical and mental state. A number of factors influence stress at work. They include less motivation, harassment by management and customers, little chances of promotion and career growth, long working hours, heavy than normal workload and other ergonomics factors at work (James, 2007). Ouma et al (2011) set out to prove this by studying the causes of occupational stress in the United States Air force workers. The researchers studied 426 officers, enlisted operators, and found out what caused the stress among the subjects. The results showed that the active duty operators were more likely to suffer from exhaustion and burnout. This was linked to emotional exhaustion and cynicism. This is only but one of the causes of occupational stresses in companies. Management of an organization should rely on studies of similar nature to understand the sources of stress among its employees. This is one of the best ways of understanding how to manage occupational stress.

1.1.3 Management of Occupational Stress

Management of occupational stress is essential for the human resource management practices in any organization. The first step in managing of occupational stress in any workplace is to understand the sources of the stressors, their magnitude and their effects on individual employees. In the event that the management understands these factors, it is easy to come up with programs and practices that help in managing the occupational stress faced by employees. When managing occupational stress, it is essential to focus on individual employees because the response to stressors is different (John &Graham, 2005). Environment that occasions stress in workplace is sometimes inevitable. The management of any organization should be on the frontline in helping employees manage occupational stress. Avey et al (2009) support this point by stating that occupational stress is a source of concern to human resource managers in organizations. Development of a positive organizational behavior is looked at as one of the ways of tackling this problem. The authors suggest that psychological capital investment is important in tackling the occupational stress. Hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism are some of the strategies that management can use in order to leverage and develop the psychological capital of employees to cope with occupational stress.

Williams & Cooper (1998) contributed to the debate about occupational stress management by opining that development of a pressure management indicator was an important step towards dealing with stressed employees. The authors postulated use of a pressure management indicator that could be developed from an occupational stress indicator. Pressure management indicator can be used in management of stress at work

places. The outcome scale of this indicator measure organizational satisfaction, resilience, worry, anxiety-depression, physical symptoms, exhaustion and organizational security. The stressor scales measured covered pressure that came from relationships, career development, home demands, decision latitude, life work balance, home demands, personal responsibility and managerial responsibilities. From the mentioned scales, it is easier for management to know where to focus when dealing with occupational stress management. Richardson & Rothstein (2008) clearly brought out the importance of occupational stress management in their research done on 2847 participants. The researchers did 36 experimental studies. The analyses done based on the studies showed that the type of intervention in managing occupational stress had a moderating role in the stress. The occupational stress management intervention programs that were studied included; relaxation intervention, cognitive-behavioral intervention, organizational intervention and multimodal intervention. The cognitive-behavioral intervention created the largest effect in tempering occupational stress among employees. Organizational interventions were the scarcest forms of management. Relaxation was the most used in many organizations.

Gardner et al (2005) look at occupational stress management from a different angle. The authors state that modification of techniques associated with cognitive therapy could do well in managing occupational stress. The authors emphasized on the importance of stress management training towards the management of occupational stresses among employees. Cognitive therapy techniques and behavioral coping skills are important in dealing with occupational stress management. In a study done by the researchers, it was

found that cognitive therapy was effective in managing of occupational stress among employees. Mann (2004) stated that workers who are involved in the people-work environment should be taught how to deal with emotional management. Emotion management is one of the causes of stress in such work conditions and employees should be helped how to deal with the dissonance created due to the emotional management. Employees should be taught emotional management as a vital skill towards managing occupational stress. Guidance and counseling sessions should be used in helping employees acquire more skills in emotional management.

Effectiveness of management of occupational stress is the measure of how well the intervention programs cure and or prevent the negative effects of job related stress (Van der Hek & Plomp, 1997). When measuring the effectiveness of intervention programs, individuals, groups or the whole organization can be examined. Intervention programs in management of occupational stress can be said to work well only if they have been effective. An understanding of how intervention programs work well is important for any organization. This helps in selecting the best program that can help employees to recover from occupational stress effects. There should be congruence between the effectiveness of intervention programs and the selection of the programs to put to use. Intervention programs range from primary, secondary, tertiary and context specific. The programs have different effectiveness (DeFrank & Cooper, 1987).

1.1.4 Safaricom Call Centre

Call centre and customer service agents are such employees who can be exposed to health risks in their daily engagement with their duties. The employees at call centers and customer service shops use different media to communicate to the customers. This includes the website of the company where they communicate directly using emails, headphones where they engage customers in audio communication, social media and short message services where customers send their queries via text messages and they get a response. In customer service centers, employees encounter customers in a direct contact. They talk directly to customers and give feedback. In customer service centers, employees are charged with giving real time solutions to customers. In the line of offering services, employees are bound to suffer from occupational stresses (Levy, 2006). Mimura & Griffiths (2003) discuss various strategies used in managing occupational stress in the call centre working environment which should be driven by the management. In making a real commitment to stress reduction, they cite that an organization needs to have in place among other plans, changes that increase employee autonomy and control as well, increase skill levels of employees and improve physical working conditions. This will help in reducing unhealthy job stressors and create a workplace in which employees have a sense of control, connectedness, where they are working at a reasonable pace, where they are challenged and motivated and where they have a sense of support and security.

Safaricom is the leading mobile telecommunication network in Kenya. The company has over 1459 Call center staff supporting over 17 million prepaid and post paid subscribers

who call for solutions to problems affecting their phone use. In a given day, over 60,000 of these customers attempt to reach the call centre for assistance on various issues. Safaricom has three contact centers. They are located in Mlolongo, Thika and Westlands. The Safaricom Call Centre has latest technology in telephony and in data system tools. In the call centre, the employees can effectively handle 80 000 contacts via all the customer service lines. Access through the customer service lines is tolling free (Option Magazine, 2009). Customer service at Safaricom Call Centre is offered through calling line 191, 234, 100, 300,400 and 200. These lines deal with directory, M-Pesa, pre-pay, M-pesa agents, data and post-pay customers respectively. This is the interface between Safaricom Limited and its customers. All the call centers have a sitting capacity of 1499 employees at a go. The call centre management is done from a central point, places of working notwithstanding. Through the Call Centre, customer problems are solved and the company gets a feedback about its products and services. The customers offer suggestions on how the company can improve its services.

At the Call Centre, prepaid and postpaid queries, M-Pesa service issues, directory services and data problems are solved (Option Magazine, 2009). Tactical operations at the call centre are done through groups and teams. Teams at the call center are formed without regard to where an employee reports to work. A team manager could be leading a team that has employees drawn from Thika, Westlands and Mlolongo. This is possible because the monitoring systems in the call centre are centralized. The call centre agents deal with calls that come through line 100, line 200, line 191, line 234 and line 400. Support staff is made up of 50 employees who deal with support roles at the call centre.

The call centre has quality analysis team. The quality analysts are 150. They help in evaluating the monthly performance of employees. The team leaders make the last group of tactical team at the call centre. There are 49 call centre team leaders. They work on rotational basis between the three call centers (Macharia, 2012). Work at the contact centre is done on a shift basis. Employees work for 5 days in a week, each day comprising of 8 hours. The employees are allowed a 1 hour break. They spend a total of 9 hours at the workplace. Employees use pooled transport system. The company buses pick them from designated points while going to work and drop them at their homes for those who leave at night. Those who leave work during daylight are dropped at designated points (Oruta, 2012).

1.2 Research Problem

Perception of events and outcomes is the way in which the mind deduces an event, an occurrence, an object, a system or a behavior. Effectiveness of a process is the ability to achieve the desired results. Management of occupational stress among employees is a process that is also looked at differently by employees, depending on their perceptions. Different interventions are used to manage occupational stress among employees. Employees perceive the effectiveness of such intervention programs differently. Barnett & Kellermanns (2006) while looking at cases of non-family employees in a family business investigated the issue of perception about justice by the non-family employees. In the analysis, the researchers investigated perception of justice by non-family employees in a family business. The study sampled 310 non-family employees from Germany and German-speaking Switzerland. In the findings, the researcher found out

that employees who had a sense of psychological ownership had bigger contribution to the work output. The research concluded that employee perception of owning the business was useful in motivating them to work hard and be productive.

Call Centre work at Safaricom Limited is designed in a way that the center is the single customer contact point. The contact is via phone calls, short message service and email. The customer service employees in the call center can develop work related stress. This is caused by several factors including rude, impatient, angry and over demanding customers, the work ergonomics work life imbalances. Safaricom management has come up with efforts to help employees manage with issues resulting from call centre occupational stress. These include training on emotional management, implementation of work schedules that help improve work life balance and establishment of policies that assist to motivate the employees (Macharia, 2012).

Kelliher & Anderson (2008) did a study in the United Kingdom of Britain about employee perception about flexible work practices and its effect on quality of work output. The aim of the research was to explore how experiences in flexible working have influenced the perception of employees towards the job quality. The research found that there was a strong and positive correlation between flexible working and the perception of employees about quality of job. The research also found out that employees perceived the flexible work practices as being costly because it offered little long-term opportunity for progress at work. This study managed to bring out the aspect of employee perception in relation to human resource practices of flextime and flex-place. A study by Gennard, G & Graham

,J(2005) did an assessment of basic physical stressors such as work stations, computer keyboards, chairs work surfaces and desks as well as the environment layout should always be carefully and frequently scrutinized to reduce stress at work and concluded that as a basic need there should always be safety and employee health skills trainings as well as wellness sessions in the workplace to check on recurring discomforts and provide solutions to them . A number of studies have been done on effectiveness of Occupational stress management programmes .Wainaina (2011) carried out a study in Capital FM with an aim of establishing the relationship between interventions meant to improve employee wellness and employee job satisfaction. The researcher looked at programs established by the management with an aim of reducing effects of occupational stress. The findings of the study established that the wellness programs at Capital Group Limited were perceived by employees to be relevant and important. Participation by employees in these programs was high and they had contributed to total wellbeing of the organization. With a positive perception of the programs, the organization was found to have reduced employee absenteeism, increased their morale and improved productivity. This study focused on wellness programs that went beyond managing occupational stress.

None of these studies focussed on a call centre environment. The results of the research were therefore not enough to provide answers to the objective of this research. This research sought to find how employees perceive the effectiveness of occupational stress management at the call centre in Safaricom Limited. The research sought to answer the question: how do Safaricom call centre employees perceive the effectiveness of occupational stress management in the call centre?

1.3 Research Objective

To establish employee perception of the effectiveness of occupational stress management at Safaricom Limited Call Centre.

1.4 Value of the Study

The results to be found in this study will be useful to telecommunication companies, banks and other sectors that operate call centers and call centres. The results will be used in putting in place strategies that will help increase the quality of work output in the call centers as well as improving the ways used in managing stress in the centers.

Safaricom Limited will be the main beneficiary of this study. The data collected will reflect the true situation on the ground and findings will come up with ways of improving how they deal with occupational stress in the call centre. Strategies that improve how employees perceive occupational stress management practices will be useful in improving commitment to the organization.

The research findings will be useful for further research. Researchers who wish to do more studies about occupational stress management practices will use the information to do literature review for future studies with reference to Safaricom Limited which has recorded success over the years in its performance.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on occupational stress and occupational stress management.

2.2 Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is a mental or physical negative disposition suffered by an employee, which results from nature of the work done and its environment. Whenever an employee cannot meet the demands of work, occupational stress is likely to occur. Occupational stress disorders include but are not limited to anxiety, depression, fatigue, aggression, substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, memory problems and attention deficit disorder (Osipow & Spokane, 1998). A stress free working environment is inevitable hence the need to manage occupational stressors for productivity of any organization to be improved.

These conditions are counterproductive to good performance of any organization. High rate of absenteeism is a manifestation of occupational stress among employees. When this condition is not well managed, truancy, malingering and hypothermia become prevalent. As well, those who make it to work realize low rates of productivity. In some work environment, employees may suffer injuries due to low concentration while working. Stress, when unchecked, can lead to serious health conditions like cardiovascular problems (Jex, 1998).

2.3 Causes of Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is related to sources. These sources are known as stressors. Stressors lead the body to have a physiological reaction that can strain the mental and physical faculties of an employee. Human resource experts have documented a wide array of sources of stress. They include extensive working hours, lack of autonomy, bullying by management, difficult relationships between the management and workers, isolation, negative workload and lack of motivation. All these causes can be treated like stressors (Ziegelstein, 2007). Due to the the nature of call centre work ,the employees have a big problem maintaining the work life balance due to the stress factors mentioned that come with the work.

The stressors that afflict employees at workplace transcend the tactical conditions imposed by work requirements. Investors may be a source of trouble to employees if they impose unrealistic expectations on management. Management cascades such expectations to the employees. Whenever employees lack trade unions and professional bodies to champion their rights, the problem of occupational stress can be higher. Rivalry between companies and other forces of competition can cause an organization to create conditions that can lead to occupational stress to employees (Beehr, 1995). Stress is mostly caused by the intensive nature of work at the call centre. There are constant demands on the call centre agents to meet unrealistic and stringent targets. As well, the employees are literally wired to their working desks. This contributes to the high level of stress. Call centre work has a high level of monitoring, with unpredictable traffic peak of calls. This significantly increases the risk of suffering from stress (Singh & Pandey, 2005).

Environment that occasions stress in workplace is sometimes inevitable. The management of any organization should be on the frontline in helping employees manage occupational stress. Avey et al (2009) support this point by stating that occupational stress is a source of concern to human resource managers in organizations. Development of a positive organizational behavior is looked at as one of the ways of tackling this problem. The authors suggest that psychological capital investment is important in tackling the occupational stress.

2.4 Occupational Stress Management Programmes

Occupational stress management is an important element in human resource management practices. It is clear that employees with stressed minds cannot be as productive as employees who have a healthy mind. For any organization to maintain its financial health therefore, it should have a work force with a healthy mind. An organization should come up with proper intervention strategies or programmes that can help it to manage occupational stress and mitigate its effects on the workers on the productivity. The style of work organization, corporate culture, managerial style and work life arrangements are some of the factors that management can look at while planning intervention measures for stress management (Leong et al, 1996). An organization can use many programs and interventions to manage occupational stress in an organization. Implementation of the programs can focus on an individual, a group, organization of work or the organization. Programs used to manage occupational stress can differ in terms of scope, applicability,

cost and effectiveness. Programs are primarily made up of interventions that are meant to manage the effects of stress among employees.

Cognitive behavioral therapy is such an intervention that is used by management to deal with occupational stress at work. This psychotherapeutic approach targets dysfunctional emotions, cognitive processes and maladaptive behaviors. When using this intervention, a number of goal-oriented and systematic procedures are used. While using this intervention, it is assumed that certain behavior and emotions cannot be controlled via rational thoughts. Whenever therapists are dealing with employees who have depression, stress and anxiety, a blend of cognitive and behavioral therapy is put to use. Cognitive behavioral therapy can be applied to employees through group educational courses and by helping and encouraging them to read self-help materials (Wright et al, 2006).

Relaxation is another intervention that management can use to deal with cases of occupational stress among employees. Relaxation intervention is a process, a method, activity or procedure that can help an employee to relax and attain calmness state. This also helps to reduce levels of anxiety, anger and stress. When relaxation technique is employed, it helps to reduce muscle tension, slow breathing rate and lower blood pressure. Yoga classes, gymnasiums and other sport facilities can help employees to relax and reduce effects of anxiety (Ziegelstein, 2007). Multimodal intervention therapy can also be used to manage occupational stress among employees. This intervention is based on the theory that human beings are biological beings that sense, imagine, interact and feel. This approach uses different intervention modalities to address individual stress

management needs of employees. This intervention focuses on seven dimensions of personalities. The personalities are behavior, cognition, biology, imagery, sensation, affect and interpersonal relationships (Van der Klink et al, 2001).

Occupational stress in places of work is prevalent and management comes up with different ways of dealing with the problem. While coming up with ways of managing stress, management of an organization have two options; they can either help employees to change the situation that causes the stress or change the way employees react to the situation that causes the stress. While coming up with strategies to change the stress-causing situation, the management can help employees either to alter the stressor or to avoid the stressor. In the second strategy, management can help employees either to accept the stressor or to adapt to the stressor. These are summed in four As of avoid, accept, adapt or alter the stressor. The success of these strategies may depend on the way the employees perceive them. Stress management program effectiveness can be a perception problem (Quick et al, 1992).

2.5 Effectiveness of Occupational Stress Management Programmes

Management of occupational stress at workplaces can only be important if it gives effective results. Even though it is agreed that some work situations must breed incidences of occupational stress, it is important that the stress be managed in an effective way. Studies have indicated that some human resource management practices in given firms do not put emphasis on the issue of occupational stress. Other firms emphasize on proper management of occupational stress among their employees. Even though the firms

have occupational stress management practices in place, their effectiveness differs. As well as the difference in actual effectiveness of the occupational stress management, the perceived effectiveness is also different among different employees (Gilardi et al, 2008). Work published by Cooper & Cartwright (1994) contributed to the debate about occupational stress management and its effectiveness. The researchers looked at occupational stress management effectiveness in terms of costs and benefits. In the study, the researchers stated that teams that had robust management systems of occupational stress had good effects. The effects listed included a healthy workforce that improved on productivity of the company. The financial health and profitability of organizations that managed occupational stress of their employees in a proper way was found to be positive.

That the effectiveness of occupational stress management practices varies with firms is an observation that was also reported by Van der Hek & Plomp (1997) in their review of such programs. The authors did the study with an aim of giving an overview of a variety of programs dealing with occupational stress management, their scope, their applicability and evidence of their effectiveness. In the results, the authors stated that programs differed from firm to firm, in terms of costs, the working group and their duration. The studies found out that the effectiveness of such programs was not uniform across all the firms. While some firms had recorded considerable success, other firms performed dismally despite of the efforts put in place. These findings point out to the previously mentioned argument that emphasis on occupational stress management programs alone cannot help reduce occupational stress. Emphasis is supposed to be put on the effectiveness of such programs.

Occupational stress management interventions can assume different shapes. These include promotion of physical fitness, cognitive restructuring, stress inoculation, meditation and assertiveness training. The effectiveness and practicality of these interventions differs according to how they have been applied. Bellarosa & Chen (1997) published a study that looked at the practicality and effectiveness of such interventions. In the study, it was found that relaxation was the most practical intervention while stress inoculation and meditation were the least practical. In terms of effectiveness, physical fitness was on top of the list of all studied interventions. Meditation and assertiveness training were ranked as the lowest in terms of effectiveness. From the studies, it can be inferred that during setting up of occupational stress management programs, the types of intervention selected determine the effectiveness. Israel et al (1996) presented a conceptual model of occupational stress, safety, and health. The authors incorporated multiple factors from diverse disciplines and then examined specific implications of each model for the development of prevention interventions. The types of interventions studied were primary, secondary, tertiary and content specific interventions. The interventions were studied in four case studies with an aim of understanding the effectiveness of occupational stress management programs. In the findings, the authors stated that the types of stressors being dealt with determine the effectiveness of intervention programs put in place to manage the occupational stress. The authors also ascertained that the role the top management played in the intervention programs affects the effectiveness of the occupational stress management.

Mimura & Griffiths (2003) analyzed effectiveness of the approaches used to workplace stress management for nurses. In the analysis, the researchers looked at seven randomized control trials and three prospective cohort studies. The programs used were identified and their effectiveness reviewed. The researchers found it difficult to understand the most effective approach among the ones that were studied. The report could not therefore give a specific answer as to which one was the best method to adopt to solve occupational stress among the nurses. From these studies, a new factor comes in the efforts to evaluate effectiveness of occupational stress management approaches in workplaces. It is clear from the studies that it could be difficult to ascertain to a certain degree of accuracy the most effective intervention programs in management of occupational stress.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology that will be used to carry out the study. It describes the research design, population of the study and sampling techniques. It also describes the data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Design

This study used a Descriptive Survey design. It is used to obtain information that concerns status of phenomena with respect to variables (Charles, 1998). The design was appropriate for this study because it helped the research to do an in-depth analysis of occupational stress management and perception of employees about its effectiveness.

3.3 Population

The study targeted a population of 1459 call centre employees who work as customer care agents in various capacities (Option Magazine, 2013). This included the Call centre staff from the three Safaricom call Centers.

3.4 Sampling Method

The research sampled of 200 employees. The sample was selected basing on the number of employees who report for shift every hour. The employees can only be talked to when they are leaving or coming to work. The study used stratified random sampling method.

The researcher stratified the call centre customer care agents into different groups. The groups comprised of quality analysts, the support staff, the prepaid and M-Pesa agents, the postpaid agents and the directory agents. Simple random sampling was done to identify the subjects of study.

3.5 Data Collection

This study used primary data, which was obtained through a semi structured questionnaires (see Appendix 2) and was administered to the selected respondents using the drop and pick later method. The Questionnaire was divided into Three Sections; Section A comprised respondents demographic profile, Section B contained questions on the respondents general understanding of occupational stress and Section C contained questions on respondents perception towards stress management programmes at the Safaricom Call centre.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. SPSS, a statistical Package tool, was used to analyze the data. Analysis involved a qualitative and quantitative approach. This involved use of measures of central tendency and statistical dispersion. Arithmetic mean, mode, median, standard deviation, inter-quartile range and range was used in presenting the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter covers data analysis, findings and discussions of the research. Data was collected from call centre employees who work in the three Safaricom call centers. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics tools. The analysis and study findings were then summarized into percentages and frequencies. These were subsequently presented in tables, and charts.

4.2 Response rate

The study targeted a total of 200 Safaricom Call centre agents. Out the 200 questionnaires distributed, 106 were completed and returned representing a response rate of 53 % which was considered satisfactory for subsequent analysis.

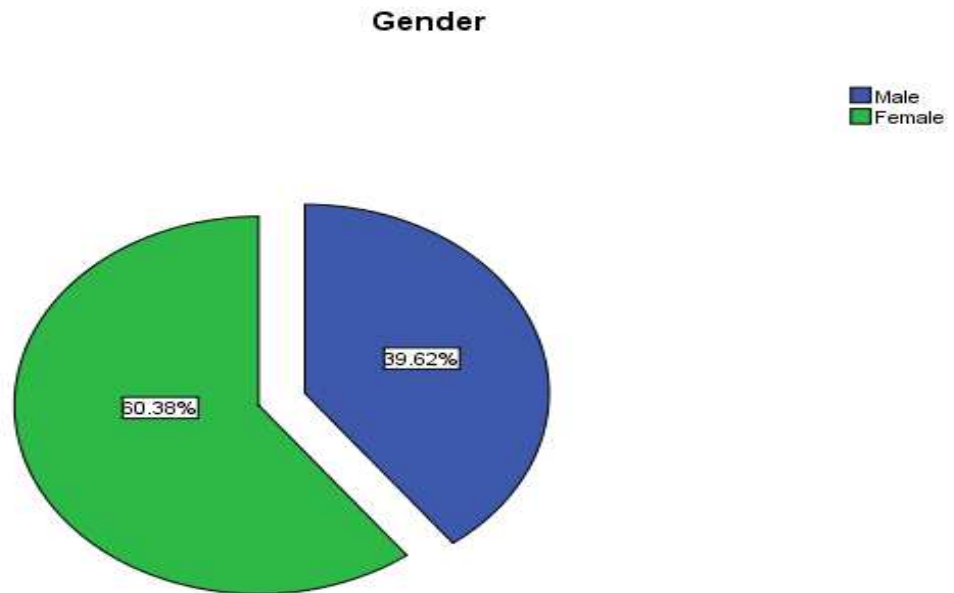
4.3 Demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics were important to the study as they helped the researcher to understand the nature of employees they were dealing with in terms of their work-life arrangements.

4.3.1 Gender of the respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their gender. The employees' gender represents both male and female employees.

Chart 4.3.1 Gender of the respondents



From the research findings, it was established that 60.38 % were female while 39.62 % were male as shown in chart 4.3.1 below. In the study both genders were represented and the results of the study were not be skewed towards any gender.

4.3.2 Age of the respondents

The study sought to establish the age of the respondents.

Table 4.3.2 Age of the respondents

| Age | Percentage |
|----------------|------------|
| 18-20 years | 3.8 |
| 21-30 years | 47.2 |
| 31-40 years | 30.2 |
| 41-50 years | 15.1 |
| Above 50 years | 3.8 |
| Total | 100.0 |

From the research findings, it was established that 47.2 % were between 21 to 30 years. 3.8 % were either between 18-20 years or above 50 years as shown in table 4.3.2 below. In the study, all ages were represented and hence the results of the study were not skewed to any age.

4.3.3 Level of Education

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of education. This was important since it helped to the researcher to understand whether the respondents understood the concepts of the study.

Graph 4.3.3 Level of Education

| Level of education | Percentage |
|--------------------|------------|
| Diploma | 11.32 |
| Bachelors Degree | 66.04 |
| Masters | 18.87 |
| PHD | 3.77 |
| Total | 100 |

From the study as indicated on Table 4.3.3 , it was established that 11.32 percent had diploma level of education level while 66.04 percent had university level of education ,18.87 percent had Masters level and 3.77 had PHD level of education. as shown in Table 4.3.3 below. This showed that majority of the call centre employees had university education level and above and they therefore understood the concept of occupational stress.

4.4.0 Employee perception of the effectiveness of occupational stress management programmes

The study sought to establish the employee perception of the occupational stress management programmes at the Safaricom Call Centres. The employees perception of the stress management programmes in use helped to gauge the effectiveness of those programmes. Hence, to meet this objective, the study used the Likert type of scale in collecting and analyzing the data. The study sought the respondents' level of agreement with given statements, their responses were recorded on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being

assigned to strongly disagree to indicate a complete disagreement while 5 was assigned to strongly agree, to indicate a high level agreement with the statements given on occupational stress management programmes. Since the scale ranged from 1 to 5; the following allocation keys were developed Strongly disagree ≤ 1.5 ; 1.51 \leq Disagree ≤ 2.5 ; 2.51 \leq Neutral ≤ 3.5 ; 3.51 \leq Agree ≤ 4.5 and 4.51 \leq Strongly agree: ≤ 5

Table 4.4.0 Employee perception of the effectiveness of occupational stress management programmes

| Employee Perception | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|-------------|-----------------------|
| Management gives enough support to the occupational stress management programmes | 4.47 | .520 |
| Support to the occupational stress management programmes given by management is better when compared to other telecommunication companies | 4.41 | .659 |
| Employees support the occupational stress management programmes at work | 4.40 | .596 |
| Employee support helped to improve implementation of occupational stress management programmes at work | 4.38 | .560 |
| Affected employees have benefitted enough from such care | 4.31 | .575 |
| There enough care for the affected employees at work | 4.30 | .841 |
| The cost of implementing occupational stress management programmes is lesser than the cost of dealing with absenteeism among employees affected by Occupational Stress | 4.29 | .768 |
| There is enough peer support for the affected employees | 4.25 | .851 |
| Occupational stress management programmes at Safaricom are more cost effective as compared to other telecommunication companies | 4.25 | .744 |
| The management encourages formation of such peer support systems | 4.21 | .713 |

From the research findings as shown on Table 4.4.0, the majority of the respondents agreed that the management gives enough support to the occupational stress management programmes by a mean score of 4.47 and they also agreed that the support given to the occupational stress management programmes by the Safaricom management is better compared to other telecommunication companies by a mean score of 4.41. The respondents also agreed that the employees support the occupational stress management programmes at work and that employees support helped to improve the implementation of occupational stress management programmes at work with a mean score of 4.40 and 4.38 respectively. The study also established that majority of the respondents agreed that the affected employees benefitted from the care provided by the occupational stress management programmes by a mean score of 4.31. Most of the respondents agreed that the employees affected by occupational stress received enough care from the occupational stress management programmes as indicated by a mean score of 4.30. Most of the respondents agreed that the cost of implementation of occupational stress management programmes was found to be lesser than that of dealing with absenteeism by a mean score of 4.29. The respondents also agreed that there is enough peer support for the affected employees and that the occupational stress management programmes were more cost effective in Safaricom Limited compared to other Telecommunications companies by mean scores of 4.25 respectively. Most of the respondents agreed that the management encourages formation of peer support systems by a mean of 4.21. From this analysis it can be concluded that the Safaricom Call centre employees are satisfied with the Occupational stress management programmes offered and this implies the programmes are effective in managing occupational stress in the organization.

4.4.1 Management Commitment to Occupational Stress management programmes

The study sought to establish whether the management was committed to occupational stress management programmes at the Safaricom Call Centres. The management commitment is significant in determining the perception of employees towards the occupational stress management programmes in use.

Table 4.4.1 Management Commitment to Occupational Stress management programmes

| Management commitment | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| Management has comprehensive guiding policies used in occupational stress management programmes | 4.39 | .579 |
| Facilities such as the gym have been effective in occupational stress management programmes | 4.39 | .489 |
| Management ensures the policies are adhered to by all the employees in the organization | 4.38 | .487 |
| Occupational stress management programme policies conform to the general guidelines given by the labour laws of the country | 4.35 | .535 |
| These units been given enough mandate to carry out their duties that concern occupational stress management programmes | 4.34 | .567 |
| Management has come up with clearly defined units that deal with managing of occupational stress management programmes | 4.29 | .534 |

| | | |
|--|------|------|
| Management procured enough facilities used in occupational stress management programmes | 4.28 | .613 |
| Safaricom management gives enough training to the units that deal with occupational stress management programmes | 4.27 | .684 |
| Resource deployment in occupational stress management programmes is a top priority to the management | 4.25 | .769 |
| Management has deployed enough financial resources in occupational stress management programmes | 4.16 | .906 |

From the research findings as shown on Table 4.4.1, the majority of the respondents agreed that the management had comprehensive guiding policies being used in occupational stress management programmes and that facilities such as the gym have been effective in managing occupational stress by a mean scores of 4.39. The respondents also agreed that the management ensured that the occupational stress management policies are adhered to by all the employees in the organization by a mean of 4.38. The respondents agreed by a mean score of 4.35 that Safaricom Occupational stress Management programmes conform to the current labor laws. Most of the respondents agreed that there are clearly defined units that handle occupational stress and they are given enough mandate to handle occupational stress by the management by a mean of 4.29 and 4.34 respectively. Most of the respondents agreed that Safaricom has procured enough facilities such as the gym too handle occupational stress by a mean of 4.28 and that enough training to manage occupational stress is given to the units handling occupational stress at a mean of 4.27 hence showing that these units were able to handle the employees affected by occupational stress. Many of the respondents also

agreed that it's a top management priority to deploy enough resources for the occupational stress management programmes by a mean of 4.25 and they also agreed that the management has deployed enough financial resources by a low mean of 4.16 .From this analysis it can be concluded that the Safaricom Call centre Management is committed to providing effective occupational stress management programmes which the employees are satisfied with and these programmes are able to effectively manage work related stress.

4.5.0 Discussions

The research findings indicate that the study wasn't skewed towards any gender or age and that majority of the respondents clearly understood the concept of occupational stress. Both male and female employees of all ages are affected by occupational stress hence the need to involve them all in the study. This is in line with Leong ea al (1996) that cites that employees with stressed minds cannot be as productive as those with healthy minds and that organizations should come up with intervention strategies or programmes that can help it to manage occupational stress and manage its side effects.

The study findings also indicate that the Safaricom Call centre employees are satisfied with the Occupational stress management programmes offered such as peer support programs and the physical facilities like the gym and other games. This is in agreement with Cooper and Cartwright (1994) who indicates that occupational stress management programmes can only be termed as effective if it gives effective results. Avey et al (2009) cites that occupational stress is a concern for many human resource managers and this

applies to Safaricom Call centre .As seen on the research findings the Safaricom call centre management supports units which handle occupational stress and are given full mandate of handling it.

The Safaricom Management is committed to promoting and supporting Occupational Stress management programmes which are well supported by the employees. This is line with Leong et al (1996) who opines that an organization can use many programs and interventions to manage occupational stress .These can focus on individual groups or entire organization. Interventions such as relaxation using such facilities as the gym and trainings have been applied by Safaricom Limited. In agreement with Macharia 2012) Safaricom Limited had come up with efforts to help employees to manage issues arising from call centre occupational stress. The call centre management, as the study findings indicate encourages formation of peer support groups to help the staff affected by occupational stress. This is in line with Wright et al (2006) who says that group educational or support programmes are very important in managing Occupational stress.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter present a summary of the findings of the study, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

5.2 Summary of the findings

The objective of this study was to establish how Safaricom call centre employees perceived the effectiveness of occupational stress management programmes and it was not skewed to the individual employees' age or gender. It established that the employees understood the concept of occupational stress. From the Study findings most call centre employees agreed that Occupational stress management programmes were effective. This can be attributed to the management's commitment to occupational stress management programmes that were in use.

5.3 Conclusions

From the study findings it can be concluded that most of the call centre employees agreed that occupational stress management programmes were effective. This can be attributed to the management's commitment to occupational stress management programmes. Most respondents agreed that management was committed to the occupational management programmes and this was seen through the existence of comprehensive policies guiding occupational stress management programmes. Among the stress management programmes in use at the Safaricom call centre include physical facilities such gym facilities ,games such as pool and tennis, a day care facility for the young parents,

trainings, flexible working arrangements(shift schedules), coaching and peer support .These programmes have been able to effectively manage occupational stress due to their diversity hence leading to more productive employees .Despite their benefits to the organization, these occupational stress management programmes assume that occupational stress is always triggered at the work place which is not necessarily the case and hence may not fully address the employee stress needs that are not job triggered. Also due to the nature of the job employee time is limited in engaging in the provided programmes as well as maintain a healthy work life balance.

5.4 Recommendations

This study recommended that Safaricom management should come up with strategies of enhancing effectiveness of their occupational stress management programmes e.g. surveys to identify the weaknesses of the programmes to help improve the programmes in use..The Management should also deploy enough financial resources in occupational stress management programmes. Additionally apart from the Safaricom management using this research to come up with strategies to help them increase the quality of work output in the call center, banks and other business entities that operate call centers and customer service centers can use these findings as reference material in pursuit of strategies to help them increase the quality of work output in the call center by managing occupational stress effectively.

5.5 Limitations of the study

This study was successfully undertaken but not without a few limitations. One such limitation was that some of the respondents were not available for the interview. The time period covered by the study and the resources available to the researcher were also limited.

5.6 Suggestions for further research

Arising from the study, the following directions for future research in Human Resource Management were recommended: First, this study focused on a specific company which was Safaricom Limited call centre. Therefore, generalisations could not adequately be extended to the other telecommunication companies as they have varying employee issues. Based on this fact among others, it is therefore recommended that a study covering call centre employees of all telecommunication companies be done to compare the perceptions. Similar surveys to this can also be replicated in a few years to come to assess if the employee perception of the effectiveness of occupational stress management at Safaricom Limited Call Centre are the same as the company continues to grow.

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