The Impact of Stress and Burnout on Employees’ Performance at Botswana Power Corporation

Authors: Pule K. Jankome, M. Mangoriant Ms. Guillermina Ritacco

Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA)

Corresponding Author:
Ms. Guillermina Ritacco
Research HOD - MANCOSA

ABSTRACT
Purpose: Although many studies have considered the impact of stress and burnout in many contexts, little research has been done in Botswana. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the impact of stress and burnout on employees’ performance.
Design/methodology/approach: Data was collected from 93 employees of the electricity utilities company (BPC) using anonymously structured questionnaires.
Findings: Loss of profit at BPC may be related directly to the stress that is perceived by employees. The impact of stress on employees is negative, resulting in loss of productivity and subsequent loss of profit by the organization.
Practical Implications: Stressed and “burnt out” employees are not able to produce results optimally because of the behavioural, cognitive and physiological challenges they have to deal with. When employees do leave since the intention to leave is high, the replacement costs as well as the burdened workload on the remaining staff are insurmountable. Organisations are called to monitor stress and burnout levels of employees in utilities’ and introduce structures and plans to reduce or eradicate the negative impacts of stress and burnout.
Originality/value: This study has value for all levels of management, wellness departments, employment counselors and the employees themselves.
Keywords: Impact ; Stress ; Burnout ; Employees’ Performance ; Botswana Power Corporation

1. Introduction
Jobs stress and burnout have been widely discussed issues since the concepts hit the business and health circles. The damning impact of the duo on human wellbeing is still a phenomenon worth the attention of the working industry, from the shop floor to top management. Stress and burnout are found to have negative and undesirable physiological and mental effects on the victims.

This study aims to create findings on the impact of stress and burnout on employee performance at Botswana Power Corporation (BPC), a monopolistic parastatal tasked with the provision of electrical energy to all types of consumers in Botswana. It explores the extent to which job stress and burnout impacts on the performance and overall productivity at BPC. Botswana Power Corporation is a parastatal organisation that was formed by an Act of Parliament in the Republic of Botswana in 1970 under the Botswana Power Corporation Act CAP 74:01. The mandate since then has been to generate, transmit, distribute and supply electrical power to anyone who has a desire to have electricity. Since then BPC has been running as a monopolistic organisation without any form of competition within the country. The Corporation is directed by its own mission, vision and values.

Since it has been said that the only constant in this world is change, BPC has not been an exception to continuous improvements that have been bringing change in the organisation. A project called Bokamoso was introduced in 2006, with the aim of rescuing the corporation from
a chronic ‘internal bleeding’ where the corporation was making financial losses for at least three (3) consecutive years. At this rate strategies had to change and the Corporation had to do more with less. Consequently staff had to be redeployed into other departments, retrained and where found very lacking, retrenched. Shortly afterwards, even before feedback was given to the surviving staff, many other projects followed through costing the Corporation more costs to institute. Go Direla, CFL Exchange Campaign, the Smart Meter & Hot Water Load Control project and the SAP ERP configuration are a few of these projects. The ultimate goal was that at the end of the day BPC would have lower operating costs as this was where the problem seemed to be; fixed staff costs. The strategic direction therefore, was the financial turnaround focused on budget and lean expenditures across departments.

Whist all calculations have been done and measures put in place to propel BPC to profitability in a period of five years, it seems this target has not been achieved. The last financial year, 2011/2012, amidst a lot of optimism from executive management, still saw the Corporation in the red owing to losses in the millions of Pula region. It is to be seen through this study whether the most important asset in any organisation, the human capital, has not been left behind in this extravaganza of change. More importantly to check whether the staff has not been stressed and burnt out in the process. The impacts or effects of these variables on employee performance will also be investigated.

After the adverse effects of HIV and Aids scourge in the country, BPC arose to the challenge and formed a Wellness Unit under the Human Resources wing. Whereas the unit has been in existence for the past five (5) years, it has not undertaken any significant study on the welfare of the employees except in very isolated cases where employees go out to seek assistance. Even then most of these cases have not been investigated back to stress and burnout as the primary source of ill-health (Carr, Kelley, Keaton & Albrecht, 2011:32).

The purpose of the study is therefore to investigate the effects of job stress and burnout on employee performance in order to ascertain the shortcomings so that recommendations may be made to management to ensure that employees perform more efficiently and resultant low performance is minimised or eradicated.

1.1 Aims and objectives
This research seeks to unearth the perceptions that the employees at BPC have, regarding the absence or presence of stress and burnout and whether they feel it affects them negatively or positively. It is very important to establish the problems that cause economic decline in the organisation since it affects, in the long run, the economic stability of the country as a whole. Having noted that, the aim of the study is to establish if employees at BPC perceive their jobs as stressful and the consequence of the stressful conditions. It will investigate whether stress and burnout negatively affect employee performance as alluded to by existing literature (Grout, 1994:29; Carr et al., 2011:32; Drafke & Kossen, 2002:409). From the findings, recommendations can be made to management to put measures in place to educate employees about stress and burnout and stay afloat of the problems they might cause.

Objectives of the Study
1. To investigate whether stress and burnout are an issue in performance of employees at BPC.
2. To establish whether stress and burnout negatively affect performance of employees at BPC.
3. To assess the impact of stress and burnout on employee performance.
4. To make recommendations on how the negative effects of stress and burnout may be reduced or eliminated.
2. Literature review

Stress and burnout have become one of the reasons that the workplace of recent times has suffered demise, with a lot of unhealthy people and a loss of many of the employer’s work-days and hours of productivity (Aswathappa, 2009:499). It has become common-place to hear workers decrying ‘this job is stressing me’ whether or not they understand the real meaning of stress. Researchers and practitioners have, since the emergence of the important concept in the 1970s been inspired to study it and try to figure out ways of how to cope with it, prevent it or combat it (Schaufeli et al., 2008:204). No matter the reasons for stress, most authors concur that stress is the most discreet killer of all at the workplace (Sargent, 2007:11).

Many writers have gone to great lengths to differentiate between stress and the natural feelings of emotion that people go through as a biological cycle stimulated by different events. Literature shows evidence that burnout negatively impacts task performance (Aswathappa, 2009). It is possible that stress and burnout exert significant effects on the employees’ performance, and thus, for those employees with the same job environment, different levels of stress and burnout may be observed depending on the moderators applied to the stressors (Aswathappa, 2009:498).

Theory suggests that the effects of chronic job stressors on the individual lead to burnout (Aswathappa, 2009:508, Gill et al, 2006:471, Schaufeli et al., 2008:204). Burnout as a state of physical, emotional and physical exhaustion as well as cynicism to one’s work is found to lead to lower levels of performance by employees. The low levels of performance by employees will translate to reduced profitability of the organization at large. Whilst there are varied reasons for any profitable organisation to start making perpetual financial losses, it is worth investigating whether possibility of an ailing human capital at BPC does not contribute to the same. There is, prior to this research, no known study that was conducted to establish the impact of stress and burnout on the overall profitability of the organisation.

2.1 Stress

Stress is the word given to the destructive nature of tension experienced by individuals facing extraordinary demands, constraints or opportunities (Aswathappa, 2009:507). Most authors (Brades& Das 2006:238, Drafke&Kossen 2002:409, Aswathappa, 2009:507, Rao 2005:644) concur that there are two faces of stress, namely eustress and distress.

Eustress is said to be the constructive stress, which is necessary to motivate an individual to perform better (Aswathappa, 2009:507). On the other hand, distress is the destructive stress which is not good for both the individual and the organisation (Drafke&Kossen, 2002:409). Examples of eustress include the tension that causes individuals to work hard before examinations, pay attention in class, complete projects and assignment on time. Distress entails excessive stress that may lead to overload and break down of a person’s physical and mental systems (Aswathappa, 2009:497). Drafke and Kossen(2002:409) have argued that the complete absence of stress, known as sensory deprivation, leads to death.

So in essence a certain amount of stress is unavoidable, but excessive stress may be fatal to the point of causing life-threatening illnesses such as heart diseases, stroke, high blood pressure, migraines, stomach ulcers and other undesirable discomforts (Drafke&Kossen, 2002:424; Sargent, 2007:11).
The personality of an individual has been found to play a huge influence on their reactions to stressors. Personality types A and B have been found to react differently to the same stressor. Past experience as well as technical expertise, also affect the way the individual reacts to stressors. Stress is caused by stressors. Stressors originate at the individual, group, organisational and extra-organisational levels (Aswathappa, 2009:498). The relationships between stress, stressors and the behavioural outcome have been modelled by authors to highlight the connection among them. The figure below illustrates this.

Figure 2.1 A model of Occupational Stress

Source: Adapted from Kreitner & Kinicki (2007:530).

As the figure 2.1 illustrates, stressors lead to stress, with a host of consequences (Aswathappa, 2009:498). It can be seen that there are certain variables that moderate the outcome of the stressor-stress relationship. These stressors are manifested at different levels of the employee’s life. So according to the figure above these are individual, groups, organisational and extra-organisational levels. The stressors under each level are listed separately for clarity. Management at Botswana Power Corporation must understand these attributes that tend to
subject the workforce to distress in order to offer them relevant assistance that is appropriately customised to alleviate the problem.

The current work environment has been labelled as one of the greatest causes of stress and burnout by many writers. Many of these authors mentioned the following as the most common sources of stress and eventually burnout: quantitative and qualitative demands, work pace control, participation, work shift, and work roles (Drafke & Kossen, 2002:410). Working extended hours because of excessive work demands in limited time constitute what is referred to as quantitative demands (Drafke & Kossen, 2002:411; Kaufman, 2005:171; Carr, Kelly, Keaton and Albrecht, 2011:32; Rao, 2005:644).

Qualitative demands include insufficient authority to make decisions, lack of autonomy which leads to a feeling of lack of control, performance anxiety caused by a promotion. Casual observation has put Botswana Power Corporation on the list of victims in regard to the former two i.e. insufficient authority and lack of autonomy. This has duly given rise to a lot of bureaucratic delays in the organisation’s operations. Drafke and Kossen (2002:411) observed that because of the negative behavioural effects of stress such as lack of interest and carelessness, accidents and injuries on the job may result.

Role ambiguity, conflicting values, uncertainty, rapid change, threats and frustration are also mentioned as sources of stress in the work place. Whichever way these sources of stress are viewed, authors have concluded that the impacts of stress on employees and the organisation at large cannot be positive or desirable. Although this is yet to be determined in the study, literature points to the observation that if stress is increased, employee productivity will go down (Rao, 2005:653, Aswathappa, 2009:496).

Too much stress can be harmful in both the short and long term. Short term signs of stress include tiredness, irritability, sleeplessness, anxiety and frustration (Kaufman, 2005:171). In the long term, there may be a greater likelihood of stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, migraine, asthma, skin conditions, heart diseases and strokes (Sargent, 2007:12; Grout, 1994:29). The effects of persistent stress may catapult to further undesirable conditions associated with the digestive tract and the glands (sluggishness, dullness, indigestion, pains, gastric ulcers, colic irritation, constipation and disturbed digestion leading to nutritional deficiencies) and the neuro-hormonal reproductive system, that is, trouble with menstruation, spermatogenesis and sexual difficulties among others (Renaud, 2003:157). Job stress is often an indirect cause of other ills such as occupational sickness and injury, clinical depression, suicide and fatal heart disease (Alder, 2005:146). For employees, these effects are a cause for concern as they translate eventually into lost production hours for the employer and economic loss for the country.

2.2 Burnout

Authors have submitted that stress has both mental and physical effects on individuals (Gill et al. 2006:471; Rothmann, Steyn & Mostert, 2004:55), whilst others have gone further to demarcate that stress can have either biological or adaptation reaction (Renaud, 2003:160). In a case where the stress has been prolonged on an employee, it plays a vital role in giving rise to a condition known as burnout (Rothmann et al. 2004:55; Rao, 2005:660; Whitaker, 1996:61; Buick & Thomas, 2001:304).

Writers have in the past endeavoured to unearth the phenomena surrounding job stress and burn-out. Gill et al. (2006:471) defined burnout as a syndrome or state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion as well as cynicism to one’s work in response to chronic stressors. When
an individual is burnt out they are likely to resort to excessive drinking, smoking and overeating thus making themselves susceptible to coronary heart disease, an illness that is responsible for more than a quarter (27%) of men between the ages of 35 and 44 (Grout, 1994:29). Burnout is painful and leaves a terrible void in the individual and so many victims turn to alcohol, drugs, gambling and sex to find relief (Benson, 2005:176).

Burnout, according to Maslach and colleagues; (Maslach, 1993; Maslach, 1996; Maslach, 2001), refers to a psychological syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and lack of personal accomplishment. It is a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind characterised by an array of physical, psychological and attitudinal symptoms, primarily exhaustion: Schaufeli&Enzmann (1998), as quoted by Rothman et al., (2004:55). The multidimensional nature of burnout prompted these researchers to design the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) which has since been adopted by other researchers and practitioners to measure the levels of burnout among employees. It is said that the popularity of the MBI saw it being preferred in 93 percent of the journals and dissertations by the end of the 1990s. This is so because burnout has become a phenomenon of notable global significance (Maslach et al., 2009).

Although burnout was predominantly identified within the human services at the outset, researchers and practitioners began to recognise burnout outside the human services (Maslach&Leiter, 2008) including in managers themselves (Buick & Thomas 2001:305). The term burnout was coined by Freudenberger (1974) after he fell victim to burnout twice, which increased his credibility in spreading the message of the phenomenon (Schaufeli et al., 2009:205). Since then, burnout has become such a huge field that professionals make a living treating burnout victims worldwide and in Europe it is an official medical diagnosis that paves way for affected employees to access compensation claims and treatment programs (Schaufeli et al., 2009:205).

2.3 Performance
It is important to understand the concept of performance before we can try to measure it or manage it. In order to establish whether this performance is affected by stress, we have to know exactly what it is we are observing on the employees. Performance has many and various definitions, as a widely research topic. The purpose of this study is not to investigate deeper into the dimensions and variables of performance but merely to understand for our cause, the basic concept. It is known that performance can either be good or bad. This is true on an individual and organisational basis. On an individual level, performance can be the record of a person’s accomplishments (Armstrong & Baron, 2006:15). On an organisational front, performance would encompass all and sundry from the input (behaviour) of the employees to the output (result) (Armstrong & Baron 2006:16), as well as the efficiency of the systems and processes employed to execute the tasks.

The Oxford Compact Thesaurus defines performance as “the continual performance of a single task: the carrying out, execution, discharge, accomplishment, completion, fulfilment, dispatch, implementation” (Oxford Compact Thesaurus, 1997:374). The performance or non-performance of this single task has a bearing on the overall profitability of the organisation. This single task is the simplest form of the strategic decisions made by the executive for a defined end to give the organisation a competitive advantage over others. It is thus important to establish whether at BPC the execution of this single task has not been affected by stress and burnout. This follows the decline in financial profits at the country’s only electricity utility for more than five years.
2.4 Stress vs. Burnout
One may wonder if therefore there is any significant difference between job stress and burnout. Clearly stress is due to the perception of the individual and the reaction to stressors, as it all starts in the mind (Renaud, 2003:161). Whereas stress may have short-term and long-term effects on the employee, care should be taken not to allow it to persist. When stress is perpetual it escalates to a level that is fatal to the individual, in some instances causing irreversible harm and even death (Alder, 2005:146). On the other hand, it is argued that burnout is an end stage (Schaufeli et al., 2009:214) in which where there used to be fire we can now only see the char and debris with no heat or flame. The table below seeks to clarify the effects of both stress and burnout respectively on an individual.

Figure 2.2 Stress Vs. Burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Burnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The person feels fatigued</td>
<td>The individual encounters chronic exhaustion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person is anxious</td>
<td>The individual is hypertensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person is dissatisfied with his/her job</td>
<td>The individual is bored and cynical about the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person’s job commitment has dropped off</td>
<td>The individual’s job commitment is virtually nil; he/she is mentally detached from the organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person feels moody</td>
<td>The individual feels impatient, irritable and unwilling to talk to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person feels guilty</td>
<td>The individual encounters mental depression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person is having difficulty in concentrating; he/she tends forget things</td>
<td>The individual does not seem to know where he/she is; forgetfulness is becoming more frequent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person undergoes physiological changes such as increased blood pressure and heartbeat</td>
<td>The individual begins to voice psychosomatic complaints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Aswathappa (2006:502)

2.5 Management of stress and burnout
Stress reduction strategies may be categorised as individual and organisational strategies. Authors have stated that there are many coping strategies that individuals can employ in order to reduce the adverse effect of stress in their lives. These include muscle relaxation, biofeedback, Meditation, cognitive restructuring and time management (Aswathappa, 2009:496). This is besides the fact that Aswathappa (2009:505) argues that no single technique is suitable for everyone to manage and reduce stress. Author purports that a combination of lifestyle change of diet, exercise and relaxation will allow individuals to manage stress in their lives.

Jeff Grout (1994:30) in his golden rules for effective stress management, advises individuals to enjoy a healthy lifestyle by eating balanced diets, cut down on smoking and drinking but exercise regularly to maintain a sensible weight. He proposes regular health checks and taking a break on holiday entitlement.
Organisational strategies that may be used to eliminate stress often include; improvements in the physical work environment, job redesign to eliminate stressors, changes in the workload, deadlines and structural reorganisation among others (Aswathappa, 2009:505). Programmes of stress management targeted at perceptions and past experience of stress and outcomes of stress include team building and behaviour modifications. Workshops on time management and burnout would also go a long way in averting these harmful outcomes. Employees can also be trained in relaxation techniques and be enrolled in physical fitness programmes (Aswathappa, 2006:506). Employees should avoid handling too many complex tasks at a time, avoid taking work home and try delegating or reorganising their workload (Drafke&Kossen, 2002:425).

Many authors have discovered that there are many other kinds of therapies for relaxation that the individuals can use to induce relaxation and reduce stress as well (Author, 200x 149; Jeff Grout, 1994:29; Carr et al. 2011:32; Drafke&Kossen, 2002:409). It is still a challenge though to find a time and place where there is not even a possibility of mild stress. Indeed, it appears that for as long as we remain on the lifecycle in which man must live comfortably and provide for his offspring and closer community, stress can never be completely annihilated. These discovered therapies remain but to try and make the effects of stress and burnout a bit bearable and the effects less fatal.

The negative physical and psychological effects of stress and burnout have been clearly indicated in the research literature. In addition, within the work context, stress and burnout have been linked to reduced staff performance and high absentee rates which in turn have negative effects on the overall performance of organisations (Aswathappa, 2009:507; Maslach et al., 2009). It is within this context of literature that the present study was initiated.

3. Research design & methodology
3.1 Research design
The research strategy that was adopted for this quantitative research was the use of a structured questionnaire. A descriptive approach was therefore preferred.

3.2 Target population
BPC has a workforce of 1770 employees, who are scattered strategically across the country (Botswana) in almost all urban towns and large villages. Due to geographic access challenges, the target population comprised of employees working at the Head Office in Gaborone, the capital city.

3.3 Sampling
For reasons of time and cost, it was not possible to interview all the employees at BPC and so it was important to have a sample that represented widely all the employees at BPC. The 100 participants from the five sections: ICTS, Rural, Customer Services, Call Centre and Marketing were chosen to represent the population, by selecting a quota deliberately from the population. Non-probability sampling was therefore preferred.

A convenience, quota sample was developed by selecting five (5) out of the 23 different sections in the organisation and further selecting 20 participants per section.

3.4 The research instrument
Data was collected by the use of a structured questionnaire consisting of twenty (20) questions. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, one containing demographic questions, the
other section containing questions related to stress, burnout and performance. The questions were based on the theoretical debates found in the literature.

3.5 Data analysis
Data were captured into Microsoft Office Excel 2007 spread-sheet to prepare it for analysis. Analysis of data was done using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) version 9.2. Since convenience quota sampling was used to select respondents, frequency analysis was used in analysing the data.

4. Analysis of data and statement of findings

4.1 Response rate
Out of the 100 questionnaires that were distributed, 93 were successfully completed and collected. This makes a response rate of 93 percent.

4.2 Demographics
This section of the chapter highlights the demographic composition of the respondents in terms of age, gender, length of service, qualification and department.

4.2.1 Age
Figure 4.1 below shows the groups of ages for the respondents, which range from less than 20 to 60 years.

![Age Distribution Chart]

Only 5% of respondents were less than 20 years. This category was made by temporary staff and graduates who were seconded at BPC as part of their Internship programme. Most of the respondents were from the 20-29 and 30-39 age categories, having 46% and 32% respectively. The 40-49 years category was the third largest with 11% and the 50-59 age-groups consisted only 7%. This distribution is not surprising as BPC Management made a strategic move to cut off some employees in order to lower operational costs related to manpower salaries. A voluntary exit package was offered to employees who wanted to part ways with BPC at the early retirement age of 45 years. As such most employees who applied and succeeded were released, while others were unsuccessful though they indicated they too wanted to leave. The Corporation felt not all competent staff could leave as business had to go on.
4.2.2 Gender
The graph on Gender simply dissects the respondents into the male and female groups.

![Figure 4.2 Gender](image)

The results shown in Figure 4.2 indicate that a greater percentage of respondents are male, at 72%. The remaining 28% is the portion of females. This finding can conveniently be related to BPC at large because of its engineering background. A case in point is the Rural Unit which has only 5 females out of the 20 respondents.

4.3.3 Qualification Level
The chart in Figure 4.3 shows the statistics of the respondents in terms of their highest educational qualifications.

![Figure 4.3 Educational Qualification](image)

A total 29% of respondents were educated up to Certificate level. The National Craft Certificate is the most popular at BPC, though a little fraction possesses Business-related certificates. Diploma holders are the highest within the respondents. Quite a substantial percentage of respondents also possess a degree qualification.
4.4.4 Respondent by Department
The targeted respondents, as discussed earlier were from five different departments from various business units. The chart below, Figure 4.4 shows this distribution of respondents according to their departments.

Figure 4.4 Respondents by Department

![Bar Chart showing respondents by department](chart)

It was planned that 20% of respondents would be picked from each of the five departments. However, only 15% of respondents successfully filled in the questionnaires from Network Services & Supplies. This is the unit that houses mostly engineers, technicians and artisans. The nature of their job is that they would be out in the field daily, for the better part of the day. It is also the unit in which staff work shifts and are constantly on standby. Achieving 15% response rate out of the anticipated 20% is satisfactory for the study. All other sections made up an equal share of 21.25% each.

4.4.5 Years of service at BPC
This questionnaire test item separated the respondents by the length of employment at BPC, with groups ranging from 0 to more than 15 years. Figure 4.5 presents this spread.

Figure 4.5 Length of Service

![Bar Chart showing length of service](chart)

Nearly half of respondents (48%) had been working at BPC for a period ranging from 1 to 5 years, making it the majority group. 17% had been working for more than 5 years up to 10
years. 14% were still new at the job, being a year or less according to the figure, Figure 4.5 above. In total 24% of respondents had been working for more than 10 years at BPC.

### 4.5 Indications of stress and burnout on respondents

**B1. I feel stressed at my workplace**
The response to this item would establish what portion of the respondents felt stressed at the workplace.

![Figure 4.6 Feeling stressed at the workplace](image)

According to the results presented on the graph above, 48% respondents agreed that they were stressed at the workplace and less than 5% strongly felt they were not stressed at the workplace. 24% of respondents strongly agreed that they were stressed. This indicated that a majority of the respondents, 73%, felt stressed at the workplace.

This condition is quite undesirable seeing that more than half of the workforce is suffering from job stress. The impact of this condition is such that productivity will be hampered. The presence of stress means that the employees may succumb to behavioural, cognitive or physiological effects (Kreitner&Kinicki, 2007:530). All these are detrimental to good performance as they render the employees sick and susceptible to counter-productive tendencies. These include absenteeism in the minor symptoms to forgetfulness, coronary heart disease and burnout in the worst.

**B2. The source of stress for me is the job environment**
Respondents had to mention to what extent their job environment at BPC caused them stress.
Figure 4.7 Job environment is the source of stress

A majority, 63% of respondents felt that the source of their stress was the job environment. 9% of them were not certain while the remainder, 28% indicated that the job environment was not a source of stress for them.

There are a lot of things that can constitute stress for employees at the workplace (Rao, 2005:644). The employees who show that the job is their source of stress actually indicate that they are better off away from the workplace. Such employees develop a condition of cynicism, with proven negative impact on employee productivity. Cynical employees distance themselves from their work and show signs of boredom and disinterest in what they do (Gill et al., 2006:471).

B3. The stress is due to unfulfilled social needs

Asked whether their stress was due to unfulfilled social needs, the response from participants was as depicted in the graph Figure 4.8 below.

Figure 4.8 Stress due to unfulfilled social needs
According to Figure 4.8 above 48% of respondents linked their stress to their unfulfilled social needs and 16% strongly agreed that the statement is true. 34% of respondents however felt that unfulfilled social needs did not cause stress for them.

In this age when people all want a better life, a life of sophistication and comfort, it goes without saying that over-achieving is on the minds of employees (Drafke & Kossen, 2002:419). Employees that feel they need to build huge houses and drive expensive vehicles are prone to stress and burnout. This is so because they are forced to work harder than normal and seldom have time to rest. Such employees develop high emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and low feelings of personal accomplishment (Whitaker, 1996:61), which are all dimensions of burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2004:92).

**B4. I know the typical symptoms of stress and burnout**

This item sought to find out whether the respondents actually knew the typical signs of stress and burnout. Their responses are indicated in the chart, Figure 4.9 below.

![Figure 4.9 Typical signs of stress and burnout are known](image)

Figure 4.9 indicates that 43% of respondents could not say whether or not they knew the typical symptoms of stress and burnout, with the remainder consisting of 26% who disagreed and 31% who agreed with the statement.

It emerged that there had never been any effort by management to educate employees about the issue of stress and burnout. Organisational development professionals who are well-versed in the operations of a high traffic environment as the one at BPC must have arisen to the occasion and made ways to sensitise employees on issues pertaining to the phenomena known as job stress and burnout. In this era of uncertainties, all grounds must be covered in trying to investigate why BPC has not been doing well for the past five years.

**B5. I have been aware of my stressful situation for a long time**

Respondents had to indicate whether they have been aware of their stressful situation for a long period of time. Figure 4.10 below illustrates the outcome.
It is clear from this graph that whereas a number of respondents, 44%, have been aware of their stressful situation for a long time, even more respondents were ignorant of their situation in regard to stress, 56%.

The results above almost make a balance between respondents who have had a stress for a long time and those who say they have not had it for a long time. This question could enquire for two answers which contradict each other. It seemed to have an ambiguous edge to it. In the first instance, the people who disagreed might have meant that they have never experienced any stress. On the other hand, they might be indicating that though they have stress, it had not been present for a long time as the question suggested.

**B6. There is nothing I can do to eradicate the job stress**

This survey question was to establish the extent to which respondents felt they could fight off job stress and Figure 4.11 indicates the results.

The results showed that a total 63% of respondents could do nothing to mitigate their job stress in contrast to the 33% who felt they had the capacity to change their stressful conditions.
Prolonged stress is a strong determinant of burnout (Weisberg, 1994:4; Whitaker, 1996:61). If respondents cannot do anything about the stress, especially in terms of eradicating it, it is clear that they are either victims of burnout or they are heading there. Burnout, unlike the arguments on stress, does not possess any “good” side. Once it gets in, the results can only be disastrous to the employee with accompanying low productivity and lost profits for the organisation (Alder, 2005:146).

B7. I think my performance deteriorated since I started feeling stressed

On whether stress deteriorated their performance, the figure below captured the feelings of the respondents.

Figure 4.12 Stress deteriorated my performance

![Figure 4.12 Stress deteriorated my performance](image)

Whilst 20% of respondents were unsure, the majority of respondents, 72%, were convinced that since they started feeling stressed, their performance began to plummet. Only 8% felt that their performance did not deteriorate because of stress.

This outcome is consistent with existing literature about stress and performance. Most respondents felt that since stress got into their lives, their performance had taken a nose-dive (Carr et al., 2011:32).

A few however seemed to be thriving under stressful conditions. This outcome is equally consistent with literature that supports the theory that some kind of stress, eustress, is inevitable to perform the task at hand (Aswathappa, 2009:507).

B8. There have been too many changes at the workplace

Asked whether there had been a lot of changes at the workplace, the respondents indicated their observations as captured in Figure 4.13.
Figure 4.13 There have been many changes at the workplace

Seventy one percent of respondents indicated that there have been too many changes at the workplace. 14% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed with the question. 93% of the respondents were neutral.

Many changes were effected at BPC since 2006. In 2006, management at BPC made a strategic decision to re-structure the whole organisation. Bokamoso, as the project was named sought to position the organisation so that it would be able to handle the looming competition. The Ministry of Minerals, Energy and Water Resources (MMEWR) had just professed its intention to engage an office of the Regulator. This move was succeeding the decision by Cabinet to amend the Electricity Supply Act and involve more players in the generation of electricity in the country. Initially BPC had been the sole monopoly; generating, transmitting and distributing electrical energy to all parts of the country from the coal-fired power station in Morupule.

Shortly afterwards, in 2009, another strategic decision had to be made since the organisation continued to make losses. This time SAP was engaged to see to the implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning system in a bid to re-engineer the business process of the organisation. This engagement brought with it lots of changes as most databases from across the organisation had to be consolidated and centralised. While a lot of training was on-going for super-users, those left in the offices had to make double effort to cover the work left by the trainees.

In 2010, as more efforts were being made to turn around the financial position of the organisation and make it more profitable, management decided to go lean on manpower. The Early Exit Programme was launched, eventually affording BPC to part ways with close to 200 loyal employees who qualified for the exit package. In 2011, a huge expansion project ensued at Morupule (Morupule B) power station. The plan?To increase the mega-watt output of the generating station by 600 mega-watts within two years. In the meantime, plans to moth-ball the operational generation units (Morupule A) were under discussion. True to their words, management announced a “care and maintenance” stance on the Morupule A employees. Retrenchment and re-shuffling again became imminent. While others have argued that these changes are a bit too rapid, management has stood that it may be a minor inconvenience but the results will be admired by all. Literature has suggested that for change to be successful, the three steps of unfreezing, changing and refreezing must be undertaken (Brisson-Banks, 2010:244). Overall this would
involve helping employees to overcome bad habits and embrace better ones, both physically and psychologically (Self & Schraeder, 2009:171).

**B9. Management does not seem concerned about staff welfare**

In response to whether management is concerned with the concerns and welfare of staff, respondent’s perceptions were as follows:

*Figure 4.14 Management does not seem concerned about staff welfare*

Most respondents in the study did not feel that management was concerned about their welfare. An insignificant proportion though, totalling 5%, felt that management was concerned about their welfare. Management support is crucial for a healthy workforce. Employees who feel management is not making enough effort to recognise the input that they make at the workplace, may become disgruntled. Research has shown that employees who perceive a positive management support on their welfare are less likely to be affected by stress and burnout (Hamwi, Rutherford & Boles, 2011:4; Leiter & Maslach, 2004:99).

**B10. When people leave they do not get replaced**

In response to replacement of leaving staff by the employer, the respondents answered as shown in the figure below.

*Figure 4.15 Leaving staff do not get replaced*

According to the chart above, 94% of respondents opined that when members of staff leave, they did not get replaced. This was against a total 6% who disagreed and felt that the leaving members of staff were replaced.
The study has pointed out that members of staff who leave do not get replaced. This means the remaining employees have to face huge workloads under limited time. Reduced manpower has a negative bearing on the existing staff. Unmanageable workloads could mean that a job of lower quality is done in the interest of time. More mistakes are bound to happen and even accidents may occur where people are under time pressures to perform (Rao, 2005:644; Masia&Pienaar, 2011:2).

**B11. There is often little or no communication about decisions to change**

The item was to test whether staff felt that change decisions that affect their work were communicated or not.

According to Figure 4.16, more than 90% of respondents observed that there is often little or no communication about decisions to change. Only 2% of respondents disagreed with the statement.

These results point to management that makes strategies but is failing to engage employees on proper change management practices. If more employees feel they get no communication from management about changes to their work environment, resistance to change is possible (Self and Schraeder, 2009:168). This is so because the employees cannot feel they own the decision to change. The situation only serves to bring uncertainty on the employees. Another dangerous thing is that the employees may take heed of the grapevine making rounds ever so often around the workplace. Eventually they make decisions based on what they heard informally and this might hurt their careers (Self and Schraeder, 2009). Uncertainty has a way of bringing stress since the employee has apprehension and gets no clear communication about his/her future in the organisation.

**B12. When changes are made, staffs are always consulted**

The figure below, Figure 4.17, shows the response when the respondents were asked if they were consulted prior to change.
Ninety seven percent of the respondents believed that they were not always consulted when changes were made. Therefore this implies limited or no consultation on the part of the employer. 2% of respondents agreed that they were always consulted when changes were made.

Consultation is important during the period when change is being initiated. If this communication between management and the employees does not happen, the resultant is stress on the employees. But even management is not immune when the employees are stressed. Stressed employees who become cynical about the job will display behaviours that are counter-productive and this has a potential to be a stressor to management (Rothman et al., 2005:56).

**B13. Change decisions are made at executive level and imposed on me**

Responding to whether they had an input on change decisions made by the executive, the respondents answered as per the Figure 4.18, below.
Figure 4.18 indicates that 20% of respondents did not agree that change decisions were made at executive level and imposed on them. 5% were neutral while 75% agreed that decisions that affect their jobs were made at executive level and imposed on them.

Employees who are not given authority and autonomy over the way they go about their work as suggested by the findings on the figure above, are likely to be victims of stress (Drafke & Kossen, 2002:411). Executives must always consult the employees regarding looming changes that are bound to change their working conditions. This would serve to improve the employees’ perceived capacity to influence decisions that affect their work (Leiter & Maslach, 2004:96) and make them less prone to stress and burnout (Hamwi et al., 2011:5).

B14. I am happy about the remuneration for good performance

Are staff members happy about the remuneration for good performance? The respondents answered this question as shown in Figure 4.19 below.

Less than 10% of respondents indicated that they were happy about the remuneration for good performance. The rest, totalling 90%, said they were not happy. Indeed 66% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

BPC currently does not have a Rewards & Recognition system that seeks to motivate high achievers to do more. The absence of this system propels talented employees to come and go. Masia and Pienaar (2011:3) posited that job satisfaction has a negative relationship with work stress. In other words, unsatisfied employees are prone to stress. Employees who come and find that there is a mismatch between their expectations and the job environment are bound to become stressed. Indeed most authors cited by Leiter and Maslach in one of their writing on burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2004:97) had shown in various studies that insufficient reward increases people’s susceptibility to burnout.

B15. If I got an alternate job offer I would leave BPC

In response to the question on their intention to leave BPC, the respondents expressed their feelings as shown in Figure 4.20.
Figure 4.20 I have intentions to leave BPC

![Graph showing respondents with intentions to leave constituted 84% of the total number of respondents. 7.5% were unsure and 8.5% in total said they would not leave if they found an alternate job offer.]

Intention to leave has been found to be propagated by stress. When more than 80% of employees want to leave the job, the availability of profound stress and burnout is suspected. Organisational commitment in such cases (Maisa&Pienaar, 2011:3) has waned and the individual no longer affectively identifies with the organisation.

**B16. I have often considered resigning from work**

The item sought to find out what portion of respondents had often considered leaving their employment at BPC and what had never thought of it. Figure 4.21 illustrates their responses as a bar chart.

Figure 4.21 I have often considered resigning from BPC

![Graph showing respondents had at one point in time considered resigning from BPC. When the employee finds that the workplace is a source of stress for him or her, the inclination is to work around the stress-causing situations to try and eradicate the stress. However, if the stress cannot successfully be reduced or eradicated, the compounding problems force the employee to]

It came out clear from the study that most respondents had at one point in time considered resigning from BPC. When the employee finds that the workplace is a source of stress for him or her, the inclination is to work around the stress-causing situations to try and eradicate the stress. However, if the stress cannot successfully be reduced or eradicated, the compounding problems force the employee to
exit, as the last resort. Depersonalisation often happens due to causes such as work stress, excess work overload and the nature of job responsibilities (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2010:300). Many respondents have shown that they have stress and that they can do nothing to eradicate their job stress. That being the case, the only sane alternative is to leave the employer. This action contributes directly to high levels of turnover, along which come lower levels of productivity. These lower levels of productivity arise where recruitment, training and adaptation of the new employee are (Hamwi et al., 2011:9).

**B17. BPC must introduce Employee Assistance Programmes**

How did the respondents feel about the introduction of EAPs by the employer? The respondents answered as demonstrated in the Figure 4.22 below.

![Figure 4.22 The employer must introduce EAPs](image)

Whereas 19% of respondents were neutral, the rest (81%) of the respondents wanted BPC to introduce Employee Assistance Programmes. The chart on Figure 4.22 above indicates that.

Employees understand that management can help them with schemes that are directed at assisting them to learn about stress and burnout, including information on how to reduce the effects in their lives. Wellness programmes, role clarity, supportive climate, and clear career paths (Rao, 2005:667) are ways the organisation can assist employees to cope with stressors at work. These programmes can insure that management plays a part in the welfare of employees, such as health and fitness. They allow management to provide incentives that can motivate the employees to better their lives; such may include the building of a staff gym or subsidies towards purchasing of bicycles, as examples.

**B18. I know colleagues who are under serious job stress**

When the respondents were asked if they knew any of their colleagues was suffering from serious job stress, the responses were as shown in Figure 4.23.
Figure 4.23 illustrates that a majority of respondents, 48%, knew a colleague who was under serious job stress. The remainder was made up of 27% who were neutral and 25% who did not agree.

It is often the case that people who are under stress and burnout do not realise it themselves. Sometimes it takes a colleague who knows the signs to identify the symptoms on another and alert him or her. The majority of respondents agreed that they knew colleagues who were under serious job stress. So this tells that either the victims are ignorant of their predicament or they totally do not have any existing strategies to alleviate them from the troubles.

**B19. I need to be educated more about job-stress and burnout**

The respondents were asked if they felt they should be educated more about job stress and burnout and they responded as depicted in the bar chart, Figure 4.24 below.

The figure above, Figure 4.24, shows that more than 3 quarters of respondents (77%) needed to be enlightened more about job-stress and burnout. Only 11% felt they did not need to be educated more about the same.
It is clear from the study that management must organise workshops and team building sessions (Rao, 2005:667) at which issues relating to staff health and general welfare are discussed. The majority of respondents suggested exactly that.

B20. I have a stress relief strategy to keep myself from the negative effects of stress

How many respondents had existing stress relief strategies in place? Figure 4.25 shows the results on availability of stress relief strategy.

Figure 4.25 I have a strategy for relieving stress

More than half, 55% of the respondents indicated that they did not have any stress relief strategy. Twenty-two percent were neutral and 23% agreed that they did have some strategy to fight job stress and burnout.

The absence of stress relief strategies such as relaxation, exercising and eating right means that the victims will succumb to burnout, which has been found to have dire effects to the individual’s performance propelling them to lower levels of productivity (Drafke & Kossen, 2002:425; Grout, 1994:30; Aswathappa, 2009:505).

4.6 Conclusion

The data that were collected in Chapter 3 were presented in this chapter by way of graphical charts. The discussions proceeded immediately after the findings were presented. Both findings from the literature and the primary research point to condition of stress among the respondents. Observation that most do not have any mechanisms or strategies in place to fight off work stress subjects the researcher to conclude that burnout; the resultant of prolonged stress, is also present in the respondents.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Investigating whether stress and burnout are an issue in performance of employees at BPC

It came out from the study that 73% of the respondents felt that they were stressed at the workplace and this figure could be higher since 11% of respondents could not say whether or not they felt stressed BPC. Most of the respondents pointed out that the job environment was
the source of stress for them. Others felt that their stress was due to unfulfilled social needs. These unfulfilled social needs have the potential to make employees that the employer must provide more in terms of benefits for the work they put in for the organisation. If that does not happen then the effect of disgruntled employees would only convert to lower levels of performance.

According to the response to questionnaire item 4, a majority of respondents did not know the typical signs of stress and burnout, a clear contrast to item 1 on the questionnaire in which a majority showed that they felt stressed at the workplace. This indicates that people often say they are stressed when they do not actually know what stress is. Someone must clearly know the typical signs of stress before concluding that they are stressed. It might be true that people resolve to call anything that has negative emotions stress. Anger, sadness, frustration and apprehension for example, should not be referred to as ‘stress’, though people usually say they are stressed when they have these feelings.

Nearly half of the respondents indicated that they had been aware of their stressful situation for a long time. The rest disagreed and hence the significance of this study in establishing whether stress was an issue in employee performance at BPC. Individuals who feel there is nothing they can do to eradicate their stress signifying what great a number of people will eventually succumb to burnout. Prolonged stress as has been observed, paves the way for burnout.

5.2 Establishing whether stress and burnout negatively affect performance of employees at BPC

The primary study showed that in the majority, the performance of employees started deteriorating since they started feeling stressed. Stressed employees with their physiological and mental ill-health, are susceptible to a high rate of absenteeism. These lost employer’s hours therefore can only translate to a decline in the levels of productivity for the employee and subsequently for the whole corporation.

Respondents were concerned that had been too many changes at the workplace. Along with the uncertainties concerning change come the possibilities of stress. This is especially true for the employees at BPC whose majority show that change decisions are not involving the employees. Respondents showed that there is little or no consultation by management when decisions which affect their work are made.

Respondents brought to light that they did not perceive a positive support from BPC management, a situation that is likely to culminate into stress for the employees.

The majority of respondents felt management was not concerned about their welfare. They further observed that as employees leave they do not get replaced. This shortage in manpower means that fewer people are doing the job that was initially planned for more, thereby making the survivors walk many times harder on the workload. Such excessive workloads leave the survivors vulnerable to stress and burnout.

5.3 Assessing the impact of stress and burnout on employee performance

The study has shown that most respondents admit that they do have stress and though they could not know whether they are under serious burnout conditions, most said they did not have any strategies for combating stress. It is known that prolonged stress leads to burnout eventually. It emerged also that the most respondents felt since they felt stressed, their
performance went down. This outcome is consistent with extant literature relating to the topic on stress and burnout.

The stress related items, as shown by the study, drive the respondents to seek alternate employment opportunities somewhere else. This was shown by the high rate of intention to leave BPC. Intention to leave is a key result of employees feeling that the job environment is causing them stress that they can do without. They therefore feel they do not have power to change the status quo and so exit seems to be the only wise option.

5.4 Recommendations
The following recommendations are given:

- Employee Assistance Programmes have positive effects on employee wellbeing and from the results, would be well received within this context.
- Showing concern for employee wellness by management is important and developing support structures becomes a must.
- Communication and consultation when it comes to change is important. Developing communication and consultation channels is recommended to this end.
- Employee recognition and reward systems are required as well as ensuring job fit for employees.
- Workload distribution is important especially in the context of burnout. Reviewing recruitment strategies is a must as well as managing staff turnover so as not have overloaded employees.

5.5 Conclusion
This study was important because it highlighted the status of the employees at BPC in regard to stress and burnout. It gave an insight into the impact of stress and burnout on the performance of employees. The respondents indicated that stress and burnout are an issue at BPC when they responded to the items on the questionnaire. That being the case, both employees and management must be concerned.

Stress and burnout were found to have a negative correlation with performance based on the weaknesses to which these antecedents subject the human body. Behavioural, cognitive and physiological impacts of stress and burnout on the individual present a state at which the employee cannot perform at optimum levels. This is to say that the impact of stress and burnout are negative and a threat to productivity.

The introduction of EAPs, it was learnt, can help improve the motivation level of employees, get them physically active and usher them into a stress-free lifestyle.

Management must put up thoughtful plans in which employees will be trained about stress and burnout and encourage them to openly discuss their stress-causing problems with others. While management assists the employees to eradicate their own stress, the potential benefit is that the employees’ levels of performance will rise and eventually make the organisation more productive.

Future research, however, must cover a wider population such that the results of this study may be replicated to the whole corporation. Furthermore, other burnout measurements on employees should be administered. This includes the renowned Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to further cement the findings from this study.
Bibliography


