



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY  
OF A NAMIBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION**

by

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## **DECLARATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study sought to assess the effectiveness of Employee Assistance Programmes in reducing absenteeism at the Polytechnic of Namibia<sup>1</sup> in Windhoek. The study was motivated by the realisation of a lack of effective strategies or programmes that deal with employees' immediate and indirect circumstances, which have a negative influence on their job commitment or productivity. This was evidenced by the high absenteeism rate of 28% during the three-year period, 2014 to 2016. High absenteeism has a significant effect on the quality of education. Hence, this study was an interventionist study, conducted through a mixed methods philosophy. A descriptive case study approach was employed in which the Polytechnic of Namibia was the case study. The study explored the causes of high absenteeism, the relationship between job stress and absenteeism, the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism and assessed how an Employee Assistance Programmes can mitigate job stress, personal problems and absenteeism. Data was acquired from a 100 randomly selected respondents from five departments at the Polytechnic of Namibia and 10 purposively selected key respondents through a 100 self-administered questionnaires and 10 face-to-face interviews. It was found that high job stress, employees' personal problems and inequity in reward systems, the difficulties with relocation issues and employees' dissatisfaction were the major causes of absenteeism. Secondly, the study found that high job stress and low job satisfaction had a significant influence on absenteeism. Overall, the study found that the adoption and proper implementation of Employee Assistance Programmes in higher education institutions had the potential to increase employees' job satisfaction, commitment and retention, as well as reduce high absenteeism. Therefore, this study recommends the implementation of Employee Assistance Programmes in higher education institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Polytechnic of Namibia officially became the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) in 2015, stipulated by the NUST Act No. 7 of 2015 (Government gazette No. 5827) on 14 September 2015.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
BCEA	South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act
CAMS	Corporate Absenteeism Management Solutions
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
EAP	Employee assistance programme
EAPA	International Employee Assistance Professional Association
EASNA	Employee Assistance Society of North America
EOC	Employer of choice
EWP	Employee wellness programme
FNB	First National Bank
GAR	Gross absenteeism rate
HEI	Higher education institution
HHA	Health hazard appraisal
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HRM	Human resource management
NABCOA	Namibia Business Coalition on AIDA
Namport	Namibian Port Authority
NUST	Namibia University of Science and Technology (ex-NUST)
O&L	Olthaver & List
OAP	Occupational alcoholism programme
OCB	Organisational citizenship behaviour
OHS	Occupational health and safety
OPH	Organisational psychological hazard
PDP	Personal development plan
NUST	Polytechnic of Namibia (now NUST)
SME	Small and medium sized enterprise
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TB	Tuberculosis (TB).
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USB	Universal serial bus



## GLOSSARY

### Term

**Employee Assistance Programmes** are employer-sponsored benefit programmes, which are designed to improve productivity by helping employees to identify and resolve personal concerns as defined by Kleiman (2000).

**Absenteeism** is defined as an employee's failure to report for work when scheduled to do so. It is not regarded as absence from work, when it is by prior arrangement, approved annual leave and other lawful vacation (Bucknall & Wei, 2005:9).

**Absenteeism or absence rate** is described as the number of staff absent from a specific job, as a proportion of the total number of staff assigned to that job (Bucknall & Wei, 2005:9).

**Sick absence** is generally described as absence of an employee from work; it is attributed to sickness or injury (Kirch, 2008:2).

**Wellness** is defined as "the quality or state of being healthy in body and mind, especially as the result of deliberate effort" (Collins English Dictionary, 2009).

**Stress** is described as a negative concept that can have an impact on one's mental and physical wellbeing.

**Ethics** is a system of moral principles or rules of behaviour (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010a:500).

**Productivity** is the rate at which a worker, a company or a country produces goods and the amount produced, compared to how much time, work and money is needed to produce them (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010b:1170).

**Motivation** may be defined as a process of stimulating someone to adopt a desired course of action.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Educational quality is a topical issue over the years and the call for quality education is ongoing. It is well known that education institutions are established with the primary objectives of profitability, growth and the delivery of quality education. These three primary objectives are achieved through organisational fundamental inputs, which include the financial capital and human resources among others. Of the above-mentioned fundamental inputs, the latter is the most critical to this study because "the work behaviours of a human being as an employee in an organisation is a function of the perception of the content of the psychological contract entered with the organisation" (Nel, van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono & Werner, 2004:56). According to Nel *et al.* (2004), the psychological contract is achieved when employees integrate individual goals and expectations with organisational objectives and intended outcomes. Therefore, it is important to realise that human capital has an important effect on performance, competitiveness and general success of any education institution (Swanepoel *et al.*, 2008). The institutions should promote a culture and space which fosters employee commitment and motivation for the institution to realise organisational productivity and performance (Nel *et al.*, 2004). One way is through the Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) which are determined to consolidate the psychological contract for the development of employee motivation and commitment. Vinassa (2003, cited by Nel *et al.*, 2004:44) reports that worldwide the organisations that provide EAPs to their staff earned a return of between three and seven times the amount they invested through increased employee motivation, productivity, reduced absenteeism and accidents, as well as, staff turnover. It is against this notion that this study argues that the employee psychological contract is critically important in employee commitment and motivation and impacts on the institution's performance and productivity. This study argues that effective EAPs are critical in dealing with employees' work-related negativity that might manifest as absenteeism. There is a need to assess the effectiveness of EAPs as a strategy to reduce absenteeism with the intention to recommend guidelines for the development of an effective EAPs at the Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN), one of the Namibian higher education institutions.

#### **1.2 Background to the study**

A decade or two ago, concerns about quality education were not unique to Namibia but have been reported worldwide. The quality of education depends on the quality of the employees. In fact, delivery of quality education by educationists directly depends on the state of an

employee's psychological contract (Nel *et al.*, 2004). There is no doubt that an employee's psychological contract has a significant impact on job commitment and productivity. A psychological contract was described by Karagonlar, Eisenberger and Aselage (2016) as the trust between two parties in a reciprocal agreement in which some contracts must be accomplished, some contributions are needed and some liability must be accepted.

Nel *et al.* (2004) further explain a psychological contract as a condition or a state achieved when an employee combines employees' goals and expectations with its own. In addition, a psychological contract is further described by Rousseau (2000) as an individual's perceptions towards the agreement he or she enters into with an organisation. What is common in these definitions is the prejudice that the extent of contract fulfilment is no doubt the major reason for employee behaviours, which can be positive or negative. This observation was also argued by Sturges, Conway, Liefoghe & Guest (2005) when they found that when an employee's contract is fulfilled, there is a high likelihood that increased job performance will be achieved and when there is a violation of the psychological contract, the employee might engage in negative workplace behaviours.

The employee psychological contract concept was first applied in human resources management to describe the relationship between the organisation and employees and it merely related to aspects such as salaries (Kiazad, Seibert & Kraimer, 2014; Lee & Lin, 2014). The psychological contract is commonly described as the perception employees have on the implicit agreement they enter with their organisation which contains respective responsibilities between the two parties (Festing & Schäfer, 2014; Ng, Feldman & Butts, 2014). Of most importance to this study is the realisation that employees' psychological contracts have a significant influence on their behaviours at an HEI. One such behaviour of interest in this study is absenteeism. In essence, these behaviours are further argued to shape or have an influence on employee commitment, productivity or output, which may be in the form of products or service delivery (Swanepoel *et al.*, 2008). Concurring with the above argument on the employee's psychological contract and behaviours, Anggraeni, Dwiatmadja and Yuniawan (2017) report that employee commitment is also influenced by an organisation's commitment. Their study further revealed that employee's commitment to an organisation also depends on the employer's ability to understand organisational needs and expectations in regard to the opportunities available to advance their careers and work in a conducive environment. This aligns with the argument postulated by this study, that psychological contracts of employees significantly influence their behaviours at the workplace. However, I argue that an improvement in the company's commitment through the provisions of EAPs can enact the employees to meet the company's expectations (Rhoades *et al.*, 2001). In this case, the main deliverable

being quality education which can only be achieved by eradicating high employee absenteeism currently experienced in the institute.

Further global studies in the field show that employees' psychological contracts focus on employee development and influence employees' commitment (Flood *et al.*, 2001, Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002, Sturges *et al.*, 2005). The fulfilment on the aspects spelt in the job description has an impact on emotional attachment of the employee towards their organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Kiazad *et al.*, 2014; Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Hence, it is believed that psychological contracts create stability in the working environment and improve the relationship between an organisation and its employees (Sparrow & Cooper, 1998; Beardwell, Holden & Claydon, 2004; Karagonlar *et al.*, 2016).

A study was conducted on customer service employees, focusing on the impact of contract violation on trust and absenteeism (Deery, Iverson & Walsh, 2006). Deery *et al.* (2006) noted a correlation between increased absenteeism and contract violation as well as decreased trust towards the organisation. They further realised that employee contract violations had a significant influence on how the employees performed their duties. The mistrust resulted in poor employee performance. Lastly, fulfilment of the psychological contract of employees may translate into increased employee commitment and lower turnover.

Employees' negativity in education institutions is because of various conditions and most of the causes are contextual, multidimensional and complex in nature. Earlier scholars like Smewing and Cox (2008) point out that the demand for higher education has increased as technology has advanced over time. As such, that demand has been accompanied by new interventions in most higher education institutions in the form of new, diverse courses and subjects being offered. The role of the higher education institutions is viewed in knowledge and skills production terms. This shift is one reason many higher education institutions are finding it difficult to balance or effectively deal with the rapid changes and demands in the job market (Smewing & Cox, 2008). These challenging expectations have become an additional source of workplace problems, such as high expectations and demands on tertiary employees and shifts in organisational cultures (Bucknall & Wei, 2005).

The most common and challenging problems experienced by higher education institutions over the world is the issue of high absenteeism in the workplace (Smewing & Cox, 2008). Institutions of higher learning around the world face ongoing demands for better quality education and services, greater numbers of applicants, improved standards of accreditation in various courses, more advanced technologies, more campuses or centres, budget cuts by governments, higher standards of academic pools and competition. Bucknall and Wei

(2005:11) state that it is not easy for an organisation to carry out its functions in a smooth and efficient manner when there is high employee absenteeism.

The problem of high absenteeism is not unique to NUST. According to the NUST Leave Report (2016), sick leave days applications increased by 28% from 2014 to 2016, hence, high sick absenteeism is problematic. The sick leave days applications for 2016 shown in Table 1.1 gives an average of 2.87 applications per employee and 9.37 days applied per employee. This may indicate a sickly staff at NUST or staff at NUST has developed a culture where sick leave is considered as a benefit. However, sick leave as an evidence is just one of the main three types of absenteeism presented in this study but, there are many different examples which could have been used. These form of absenteeism which are also evident at NUST can be regarded as withdrawal behaviour (Nel *et al.*, 2004:548). Notably, the excessive sick leaves used as an example in this study do not always translate into high absenteeism and vice versa. In reference to table 1.1, it is evident that the non academics may have applied sick leave days in excess compared to the academic staff. Yet, in essence, the nature of the academic staff's job is different from that of the non-academic staff and in actual sense the academic staff may record the highest absenteeism estimates. This is because the academic staff are nomadic due to their flexible workload pattern, making it difficult to relate whether they are on duty or not. Thereby, also making it difficult to relate on their authorised and unexcused absence. Interestingly, the sick leave reports show that the academic staff under-utilise their sick leaves compared to non-academic staff who are always confined in/to certain workplaces. Therefore, excessive sick leaves as an example to high absenteeism doesn't apply to all the groups of employees at the institute but, may give an estimate or insight on the intensity of absenteeism within the institute.

**Table 1.1: NUST sick leave chart for non-academics (2014-2016)**

No.	Departments	Total staff	Sick leave applications and total days applied					
			2014		2015		2016	
			Applications	Days applied	Applications	Days applied	Applications	Days applied
1	Bursar	20	23	61	47	187	45	199
2	Printing	8	30	65	30	96	21	54
3	Library	20	93	282	84	208	98	250
4	Dean of Students	20	34	206	42	117	57	184
5	Registrar	20	37	83	43	133	44	108
6	Bureau of Computer Services	12	26	85	36	112	27	169
7	COLL	14	23	52	40	112	36	105
	Total	114	266	834	322	965	328	1069

Source: NUST Leave Report (2016:13)

**Table 1.2: : NUST sick leave chart for academics (2014-2016)**

No.	Department	Total staff	Applications	Days applied	Applications	Days applied	Applications	Days applied
			<b>2014</b>		<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>	
1	Faculty of Human Sciences	6	6	251	0	0	1	44
2	Faculty of Management Sciences	7	4	133	2	42	3	51
3	Faculty of Computing and Informatics	2	1	17	0	0	1	14
	Faculty of Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences	7	5	124	0	0	2	42
4	Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences	4	2	48	1	14	2	43
5	Faculty of Engineering	8	6	180	3	66	1	13
	<b>Total</b>	34	24	753	6	122	10	207

Source: NUST Leave Report (2016:14)

EAPs have been widely used for decades, assisting employees with various problems that negatively affect their productivity. According to the South African Public Service Commission (2006), EAPs were introduced to deal with employee-work problems, that had negative effects on work outcomes. Such employees' negative experiences or behaviours include employee conflict, mental and personal relationship problems, personnel development issues and diseases such as cancer and counselling needs in the workplace (South African Public Service

Commission, 2006:2). This could include increased absenteeism, changes in organisation structure, stress, excessive workload, addiction, marital problems, performance issues, conflict at work or at home, emotional distress, depression, social detachment and financial problems (South African Public Service Commission, 2006:2).

This study argues that institutions should create a norm and space which fosters employee motivation and commitment for the institution to realise organisational productivity and performance (Nel *et al.*, 2004). One way is through the EAPs, which are determined to consolidate the psychological contract for the development of employee motivation and commitment. Vinassa (2003, cited by Nel *et al.*, 2004:44) noted that globally organisations that provide EAPs to their staff earned a return of between three and seven times the amount they invested through increased employee motivation, productivity, reduced absenteeism and accidents, as well as staff turnover.

In support, Rhoades *et al.* (2001) realised that through EAPs organisations can satisfy the socio-emotional needs of employees, such as financial needs and the social emotional support, which encourages employees to perform their jobs effectively (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). Aubé *et al.* (2007) agree on the significant influence that organisational support has on the employees' commitment.

This study argues that the psychological contract is critically important for employee commitment and motivation and significantly influence institutional performance and productivity. Hence, this study argues that effective EAPs are critical in dealing with employees' work-related negativity that might manifest as absenteeism. There is a need to assess the effectiveness of EAPs as a strategy to reduce absenteeism with the intention to recommend guidelines for the development of an effective EAPs at NUST, one of the Namibian higher education institutions.

### 1.2.1 Establishment of NUST

The NUST has its origin back in 1980 when the Academy for Tertiary Education was established under Act No. 13 of 1980 and was the first institution of higher education in Namibia offering classes in teacher training and secretarial courses (Polytechnic of Namibia [PoN], 2014). The Academy for Tertiary Education was transformed into three components in 1985 under Act number 9 of 1985, consisting of a university component (the present University of Namibia), a Technikon and College for Out of School Training (PoN, 2013). Act No. 33 of 1994 merged the Technikon Namibia and the College for Out-of School Training (COST) to become the PoN (PoN, 2014). In 2015 the PoN later changed its name to the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST).



Currently, the NUST offers both undergraduate and postgraduate academic programmes. Since 2011, the NUST has experienced a transformation in its work processes and structure, including its Human Resources Department (HRD). These changes and shift in organisational structure were mainly aimed at accommodating the transformation in the needs and demands of quality education in the institution and improve service delivery. According to the 2014 Annual Report, the NUST embarked on a business review process which basically re-examined the management and institutional structures with the intention to improve its key operations (PoN, 2014). It is of concern to note the lack of EAPs to deal with the various problems and experiences which employees face. Currently, at NUST there is just a social worker attached to the Office of the Dean of Students and is responsible for all the students. Because of the lack of an appropriate and effective EAPs, the whole institution relies on the social worker for assistance of the employees experiencing personal problems related to substance abuse. However, this is not adequate and effective, considering that the social worker is also solely responsible for assisting students on welfare issues. Hence, many of the times the social worker is overwhelmed by work and is not trained to handle human resource issues of both administrative and academic staff. The social worker is trained to handle issues of drug abuse, meaning the programme is restricted to drug abuse and other minor related issues. Therefore, there is a need for an intervention at NUST and the adoption of appropriate and effective EAPs could be the solution to the current high absenteeism rate. There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing absenteeism at NUST and the intention to recommend effective EAPs plan.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

#### **1.3.1 Main problem**

The NUST lacks effective EAP and this is reflected by a high sick absenteeism rate of 28% experienced during the three-year period, 2014 to 2016 (See Table 1.1).

#### **1.3.2 Explanation of problem**

The NUST is a higher education institution that offers science and technology education from certificates and diplomas to the Degree level. NUST has 970 both academic and non-academic staff in the administrative and non-administrative departments. Critical to this study is the realisation that NUST lacks an effective EAP.

Sick absence is the main form of absenteeism at NUST, as evident from the NUST Leave Report (2016), which shows a 28% increment in sick leave days' applications by employees between the years 2014 to 2016. Table 1.1 shows an approximate 2.87 sick leave days' applications per employee in 2016 meaning that an average of 9.37 days applied per employee

per year. This may resemble a sickly staff at NUST or simply describe a new culture where sick leave is considered a benefit which should be utilised without fail or else may never be recovered (Nel *et al.*, 2004). Considering the identified main problem, the following sub-problems can be identified:

#### *1.3.2.1 Sub-problem 1*

Due to the lack of EAP at NUST as described above, there is a lack of effective strategy or programme that deals with the employees' immediate and indirect circumstances that have a negative influence on their job commitment or productivity. As a result, the employees suffer from depression, stress and other psychological, social, financial and physical constraints and these constraints prevent the employees from executing their duties effectively (Sharma, Singh & Kishor, 2013). Furthermore, as explained by Duvenhage (2017), such a workplace environment can hamper the employees' capabilities to effectively and efficiently execute their duties and has a direct impact on the Institution's competitiveness, profitability and overall reputation.

#### *1.3.2.2 Sub-problem 2*

Due to the main problem described above, high absenteeism in its three forms is experienced. However, high absenteeism has a negative effect on the delivering of quality education in the higher education institutions (Netshidzati, 2012). Because of the negative effects associated to high absenteeism on quality education delivery, tertiary education systems are likely to produce unready prospect employees. And these prospect employees would be assumed to have acquired appropriate skills and knowledge an entrusted with future strategic posts and tasks different sectors.

#### *1.3.2.3 Sub-problem 3*

Due to the main problem, a high level of personal problems is experienced such as marital concerns, family issues and substance abuse (Duvenhage, 2017). It is in line with the common perception that whatever happens at the workplace has a way into the home. As such, workplace problems of stress and anger is sometimes extended to the family at home. This has an effect on family stability and may sometimes end up in undesirable and compensatory behaviours such as drug or substance abuse among others (*ibid*, 2017).

### **1.4 Research questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

#### 1.4.1 Main research question

How can EAPs be utilised strategically to relieve high-absenteeism in a higher education institution?

##### 1.4.1.1 Sub-questions

- a) What are the causes of high absenteeism?
- b) Is there any relationship between job stress and absenteeism?
- c) Is there any relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism?
- d) How can EAPs help to reduce job stress, personal problems and absenteeism?

#### 1.4.2 Objectives of the study

##### 1.4.2.1 Main objective

To assess the effectiveness of EAPs as a strategy to reduce absenteeism at NUST.

##### 1.4.2.2 Sub-objective 1

To investigate the causes of high absenteeism.

##### 1.4.2.3 Sub-objective 2

To investigate the relationship between EAPs and job stress and absenteeism.

##### 1.4.2.4 Sub-objective 3

To assess the relationship between EAPs and job satisfaction.

##### 1.4.2.5 Sub-objective 4

To assess the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing job stress, personal problems and absenteeism.

### 1.5 Assumption of the study

The NUST lacks effective EAPs, hence high absenteeism.

### 1.6 Hypotheses

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between lack of EAPs and high level of absenteeism at NUST.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between lack of EAPs and high absenteeism at NUST.

### 1.7 Significance of the study

A study of this nature, which intends to intervene with effective EAPs shall not only be helpful in resolving the issues of absenteeism at NUST but may go far in addressing the issues of employee satisfaction, motivation and productivity in the higher education institutions. This

study will help in addressing critical issues on the quality of education in higher education institution in Namibia. This study will assist NUST's management to realise the importance of employee wellbeing using EAPs in mitigating challenges associated with employee absenteeism. In particular, this study's findings will benefit NUST since anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a lack of effective EAPs, resulting in the existing high levels of absenteeism and costs. Furthermore, the study findings will provide the NUST management with recommendations for the development of appropriate and effective EAPs to deal with employees' immediate issues that hinder employee productivity. Finally, this study is breaking new ground since few or no studies known to the researcher have dealt with the issues on the effectiveness of EAPs on reducing employee absenteeism. Therefore, it shall add to literature and shall become a referral study for future studies in the field of human resources management and EAPs.

### **1.8 Delimitation and scope of the study**

The study aimed to understand the potential of EAPs as a strategy to reduce absenteeism in a higher education institution, NUST, in Namibia. It was guided and restricted by the concept of EAPs and absenteeism at higher education institutions. This study sought to obtain NUST's absenteeism statistics for the three-year period from 2014 to 2016. Considering the large number of academic and non-academic staff at NUST, this study was restricted to the academic and non-academic staff of NUST located at the Windhoek main campus. The NUST is situated in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia and houses approximately 11 500 students and more than 300 academic and 670 non-academic staff (Tjivikua, 2019). Windhoek has a total population of 268 000 while, Namibia has a population estimated at 2.5 million. Namibia has an average temperatures of 24°C in summer and 15°C in winter. The highest rainfall month is February and annual rainfall is approximately 110mm.

### **1.9 Outline of the Study**

The study comprises eight chapters.

#### **Chapter 1**

This chapter introduces the whole study. It provides the background information to EAPs and employee absenteeism. This chapter argues that a lack of appropriate and effective EAPs can result in high employee absenteeism. Therefore, there is a need to assess existing EAPs and if non-existent, there is need to explore how an effective EAP can be integrated to reduce high employee-absenteeism at NUST. The problem statement and the research questions were also outlined in this section. The chapter outlines the specific research objectives and states the two hypotheses.

## **Chapter 2**

The second chapter reviewed literature and discusses the theoretical background of EAPs and absenteeism. Existing relevant studies are reviewed with the aim to clearly illustrate and argue the potential of effective EAPs in reducing absenteeism. The conceptual framework of EAPs and absenteeism are discussed in detail. The relationship between the two variables is critically reviewed, backed by empirical evidence from local studies and studies conducted abroad. This chapter opens up a new dimension on how EAPs are perceived and can be influential and effective in dealing with absenteeism in higher education institutions like the NUST.

## **Chapter 3**

The concept of absenteeism and EAPs are discussed in this chapter. The chapter defines and explains what constitutes absenteeism at the workplace. The chapter draws on the rich diverse understanding of absenteeism to relate how absenteeism impacts on organisational performance and productivity. Absenteeism as a universal problem is investigated, as well as how EAPs can be utilised to reduce absenteeism effectively in higher education institutions.

## **Chapter 4**

This chapter focused on literature review and the concept of EAP. The chapter discusses the importance and value of EAPs on related factors like job stress, retention, job satisfaction and wellbeing. Not just are EAPs effective in dealing with absenteeism, it is also beneficial in other aspects such as reduction in employee job stress, increase in job satisfaction, enhancing retention and improving the wellbeing of employees.

## **Chapter 5**

This chapter discusses a methodological section. The chapter described how data was acquired, analysed and interpreted to come up with meaning to the study. The mixed methods philosophy was described in this section and further describe the descriptive survey research design and the population involved is addressed. The random and purposive sampling techniques were employed to choose the respondents in the study. The chapter further discusses the questionnaire and document analysis used in data acquisition. The section further described how ethical issues were handled in the study.

## **Chapter 6**

The chapter summarises the results emanating from the research. Data are presented in two phases, firstly the quantitative results gathered from the questionnaires, followed by qualitative findings from the face-to-face interview data.

### **Chapter 7**

This chapter interprets the findings in relation to the four sub-research questions of the study.

### **Chapter 8**

Chapter Eight draws conclusions from the study and makes recommendations

#### **1.10 Summary**

This chapter introduced and offered the problem statement, the aim and the objectives of the study. The chapter argued that the lack of an effective EAPs influence high absenteeism at NUST. The significance of the study was illustrated and the delimitation and scope of the study was outlined. The layout and study structure concluded the chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews relevant literature on EAPs and employee-absenteeism. In this chapter, three theoretical frameworks on EAPs and absenteeism are explored and discussed in detail and the concept of EAPs is explained. The chapter further argues on how lack of EAPs may affect employees' absenteeism in the higher education institutions.

#### **2.2 Theoretical framework**

Bohlander and Snell (2013), described EAPs as the services provided by employers or externally contracted entities for the employees. It is important to acknowledge that there is no agreement to defining EAPs in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM). Therefore, the EAP's roles include the mentioned duties namely, confidentiality assessment, therapeutic services and employee counselling and their immediate family members who experience related problems.

EAPs were established in the USA in the early 1940s as an Occupational Alcoholism Programme (OAP) for employees, providing support and assistance to employees with alcoholic-related issues. The OAP's main focus was on prevention of alcohol abuse by blue-collar workers. The OAP was introduced to curb the negative effects associated with alcoholism and drug abuse.

In the 1970s, the OAP focused on the personal issues that impeded job performance and evolved into what is now known as the EAPs. The EAPs services grew immensely, helped employers address employees' diverse personal problems and proactively dealt with workplace challenges, which could have led to violence, physical/mental health issues and deteriorating worker morale (Daniels *et al.*, 2005). This study explored three theories of EAP to gain a full understanding of how the EAPs helps in dealing with employees' issues, including absenteeism at workplace. The theories are critically explored and discussed in the following sections.

##### **2.2.1 Theories of EAPs**

It is important to discuss some of the theories that are the foundations for employee wellness in organisations. These theories include the Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), the Theory of Needs (McClelland, 1960) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Maslow, 1943).

### 2.2.1.1 Social comparison theory

The Social Comparison Theory (SCT) was postulated by the social psychologist Festinger (1954). This theory is anchored on an understanding that, there is an individual drive that determines self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). In acknowledgement, Corcoran, Crusius and Mussweiler (2011:5) posit that the Social Comparison Theory states that individuals can evaluate the extent to which their self-perceptions relate to the perceived status of others. Once that self-evaluation is acknowledged, the individuals use their internal feedback to reduce uncertainty and validate behavioural choices (Corcoran *et al.*, 2011:5). In addition, Garrin (2014:111) points out that the Social Comparison Theory is associated with the social cognitive and social learning foundations that ascribe to conformity, self-affirmation and self-validation.

This theory is useful as it helps troubled employees to compare themselves and their problems with those of others (Garcia, Tor & Schiff, 2013). In this case, the theory suggests that employees can compare their strategies of solving the problems with those of their colleagues. It is further noted that if other employees engage in EAPs, then their behaviours must be rational, appropriate and valid. Additionally, Garrin (2014:111) noted that:

...if several people engage in the same type of behaviour (attend EAP) to attain a common goal (such as to become physically fit), then such behaviour is habituated and reciprocally reinforced through group membership.

For EAPs participants, the ability is to motivate others to engage in programming and has profound implications for self-efficacy perceptions.

### 2.2.1.2 Theory of needs

The Theory of Needs, commonly referred to as the Three Needs Theory, was propounded in 1960 by David McClelland, a psychologist. The theory assumes that regardless of demographic characteristics or the culture, there are three types of motivation that drive individuals and these are derived from life experiences and societal constructs. Royle and Hall (2012:21) state that the Theory of Needs is about the way individuals workers feel about their accountability and answerability to others. In agreement, Nelson and Quick (2013) posit that the Theory of Needs focuses on the needs, namely, achievement, affiliation and power, which is crucial in EAPs and workplace wellness.

#### 2.2.1.2.1 Achievement

According to Garrin (2014), the achievement stage is the initial stage in the Theory of Needs. Achievement can be attained through intrinsic motivation and invokes some components of the Self-determination Theory. Garrin (2014:112) further states that similarly to the achievement



component of the Theory of Needs, self-determination involves making choices and engaging in behaviours which lead to internal intrinsic motivation. In this case, the employees should achieve their goals themselves through EAPs and they become self-determinant, which leads to intrinsic motivation (Garrin, 2014:112). Therefore, the employees who engage in the EAPs can be motivated easily.

In other words, when employees feel and develop a sense of belonging it means they have acquired some sense of self-awareness and this helps them to have full control of their personal life and work-related aspects such as work-life balance. In addition, the employees' state of achievement can be a source of happiness and contentment leading to employee satisfaction. Therefore, it is important that employees be internally driven to take initiatives to achieve personal goals through EAPs.

#### 2.2.1.2.2 Affiliation

According to Garrin (2014), affiliation is one of the components of EAPs. He argues that employees should be affiliated with others to experience perceived acceptance by others. Employees who have a high degree of affiliation can easily join groups that are likely to help them with their problems.

#### 2.2.1.2.3 Power

Power is one of the aspects of social motivation. In this case, the assumption is that if the power employers have over employees is effectively and appropriately utilised it can enhance employee assistance and support in work-related issues (Garrin, 2014).

#### 2.2.1.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory

A crucial theory to note is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. Maslow's theory describes human needs as the drive behind the behaviours of employees (Amos, Ristow, Ristow & Pearse, 2008). This means employees can only be well motivated if they are satisfied and their basic needs are met. The general assumption of the theory is that the first need should be satisfied in order to satisfy the next. Notably, according to Garrin (2014:113):

The sedentary lifestyle, sleep irregularities and poor dietary choices that are often perpetuated by perceived time limitations might induce physiological distress in EAP participants and thus provide the impetus for behaviour change.

### 2.2.2 Definitions of EAPs

This section discusses the operational definitions of EAPs. From these definitions, one can understand the importance and necessity of having EAPs in organisations. With EAPs in place, an organisation can achieve competitive advantage. This means that competitors cannot

imitate the operations of that organisation. In addition, if the firm has a competitive advantage in an industry, human capital development is effectively achieved. It is important to provide definitions of EAPs to eliminate confusion that may arise with regard to EAPs.

The International Employee Assistance Professional Association (EAPA) is the world's biggest forum and most renowned for professionally assisting employees. The EAPA provides two definitions of EAPs - a general and a specific definition. These are outlined below.

According to EAPA (2010:6), in general the EAPs are:

A set of professional services specifically designed to improve and/or maintain the productivity and healthy functioning of the workplace and to address a work organisation's particular business needs through the application of specialized knowledge and expertise about human behaviour and mental health.

According to EAPA (2010:6), in specific the EAPs are:

Workplace programme designed to assist: (1) work organisations in addressing productivity issues and (2) help employees in identifying and resolving personal concerns, including health, marital, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, emotional, stress, or other personal issues that may affect job performance.

The above definitions address the two issues of organisational productivity and employee wellness. Therefore, it is not wrong that EAPA definition of EAPs is more concerned with employee productivity and wellness. The management of any organisation should be aware of numerous EAP models and approaches that can be utilised to help troubled employees. Organisations can offer EAPs internally or the organisation can refer the employees to qualified wellness specialists for problem diagnosis and planned resolutions.

Another definition of EAPs comes from Bohlander and Snell (2013:466), who define it as:

EAPs are services provided by employers or externally contracted entities for employees to help them cope with a wide variety of problems that may interfere with the way they perform their jobs. The problems might include organisational, individual, family-related and societal problems.

The definition provided by Bohlander and Snell (2013) has something in common with the EAPA (2010:6) definition, that is a focus on the wellbeing of employees and organisational productivity. Hegar (2012) further defines an EAPs as confidential and professional help offered to troubled employees at the workplace. To add, Newton, Hayday and Barkworth (2005:1) define an EAP as "a worksite focused programme set in place to assist in the identification and resolution of employee concerns, which may affect performance."

Another prominent employee assistance service provider is the Employee Assistance Society of North America (EASNA). EASNA is an association that promotes best practices, research, education and advocacy in behavioural health and wellness in Canada, the USA and Mexico. They describe an EAPs as a service provided to the workers or created to help workers to shake off their personal and work related problems so as to remain effective in their jobs (EASNA, 2013). EASNA (2013) further posits that EAPs professionals are human behaviour/psychological experts who are trained to provide strategic analysis, guidance and consultation throughout the organisation to the principles of human behaviour to achieve organisational-performance, culture and business success.

According to Bernardin and Russell (2013:546), EAPs are mostly utilised and well known in the US:

...where over 10,000 organisations with formal EAPS treat job stress, alcoholism and other forms of drug abuse, marital and emotional difficulties and financial problems annually...

Based on the above definitions, EAPs can be explained as a proactive preventative programme that addresses personal-issues that can negatively affect the organisation's performance. This study further explores EAPs in detail, which are discussed below.

### **2.3 The historical origin of EAPs**

As explained previously, it is important to know the origin of EAPs to determine its usefulness in this study. Originally, EAPs were designed to deal with two problematic areas, namely alcohol and drug abuse (Rue & Byars, 2010) in the USA during the 1940s. The South African Public Service Commission (2006:10), posit that, the main reason for the adoption and implementation of the EAPs in the USA was to deal with employee related challenges. Additionally, these programmes were aimed at improving employees' health and increase organisational stability and profitability (South African Public Service Commission, 2006:10). Mrkvicka (2016), survey in the USA noted that, 80% of the participants concurred that the EAPs helps in managing mental health issues.

As early as 1917, large companies such as Macy's introduced special programmes that served the single purpose of assisting employees with personal problems. These early programmes were started by a group of recovering alcoholics who were trained to identify and assist employees who were trying to deal with alcohol-related problems. To add, the NYS Work-life Services (2012) explain that in New York in 1940 there was a need for programmes that assisted with alcoholism because employees often drank on the job and alcohol abuse was rampant (White & Sharar, 2006; Sandys, 2015). Growth and recognition of Alcoholic

Anonymous groups became apparent when employers raised concerns about in the 1940s. These programmes mainly dealt with alcohol-related problems at the workplace and over time evolved to address other problems, which affect employees and organisational productivity (Sandys, 2015:1).

Richard and Emener (2009:6) report that the pioneers of early EAPs were Dr. George H Gehrman and Dr. John L Norris, who developed some of the first in-house programmes for the likes of DuNUS of de Nemours & Company and Eastman Kodak Corporation. These EAPs consisted of both internal formal and external informal programmes. In the 1970s, EAPs gained momentum and started to include other problems that interfered with employees' ability to do their work productively. This included violence in the home, divorce, depression and financial problems (Rue & Byars, 2010:241). By the 1970s, EAPs were broadened to help workers with a wider range of problems of the mind, emotions and finance, related to alcoholism (NYS Work-life Services, 2012).

## **2.4 Aspects of EAPs**

The various aspects of EAPs offer a deeper understanding of the diverse definitions of EAP discussed earlier, to further justify the importance and significance of the EAP concept. According to the South African Public Service Commission (2006), EAPs are confidential, professional and offer employee benefits, as well as dealing with individual or company related issues or concerns.

It is important to highlight that nowadays organisations operate in a highly competitive environment hence, they need to keep their employees mentally and physically healthy. Therefore, this supports and sets in motion the study's argument that an appropriate and effective EAPs enhances employee behavioural change, which reduces high absenteeism. It is critical to understand that when talking of behavioural change and employee wellbeing, it means cognitive, affective and psychomotor behaviour. In this case, the cognitive behaviour is about the knowledge of the employees. Connerley and Wu (2016) define cognitive as individual abilities and characteristics. While, non-cognitive deals with individual cognitive skills, that includes the knowledge, experiences, skill and interests (Connerley & Wu, 2016).

Steven, Whitmeyer, Mogk and Pyle (2009) posit that affective behaviour refers to the emotion, mood, attitude and feelings. They are valuable in themselves and have an influence on outcomes, for example, attitudes and emotions can influence the learning ability of an individual and thus can positively or negatively hamper knowledge and skills attainment. Psychomotor behaviours deal with the movement of body parts of the employees and implies that an employee's body should function effectively to achieve organisational outcomes. This

includes the physical and mental health of the employee. Therefore, psychomotor behaviour is concerned with the performance of voluntary movement and perceptual motor activities.

Ideally, an EAP helps to improve the health of employees. According to Hewitt (2012:3), an organisation that has a high number of employees who suffer from chronic health conditions is likely to experience consequences such as high health care costs, reduction in productivity, reduction in employee engagement and reduction in business profitability. Therefore, organisations such as higher education institutions can adopt and implement EAPs for increased employee wellbeing and organisational productivity. Another great area of benefit from implementing EAPs is on the safety and health of employees in the organisation. It is vital for companies and organisations to promote safety and health by adopting and implementing EAPs (Patel, Goetzal, Kolbe-Alexander & Nossel, 2013). Out of the 108 companies registered for health promotion initiatives in South Africa, an average absenteeism rate of 5.3 days was observed annually (Patel *et al.*, 2013). If this average is converted into monetary terms, it means hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Rands lost annually because of the high incidence of absenteeism. Therefore, organisations could benefit from implementing EAPs. Such benefits may include reduced absenteeism, an improved industrial relations, increased employee-performance and productivity, low health care costs, few work-related accidents and achieve employees' mental health and wellness and resulting in increased employee job satisfaction (Sieberhagen *et al.*, 2011).

## **2.5 Key elements of EAPs**

This section deals with the necessary awareness of key elements by organisation development practitioners, consultants and others responsible for the implementation of EAPs. On occasion EAPs fail to yield satisfactory results because implementers ignore some of the key elements that could be used as guidelines when assisting troubled employees (Rue & Byars, 2010:242). It's important to enseege and understand these elements. Rue and Byars (2010:242) and Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield (2011:454) identified the essential elements of an EAP as follow:

**Table 2.1: Elements of EAPs**

Element	Significance
Management backing	Without this at the highest level, key ingredients and overall effect are seriously limited
Labour union (if a union is present)	The EAPs cannot be meaningful if it is not backed by the employees labour union
Confidentiality	Anonymity and trust are crucial if employees are to use an EAP
Easy access	For maximum use and benefit
Normal disciplinary procedures	No employee should receive lenient or harsh treatment due to participation in EAPs. Some programmes allow the suspension of discipline as an incentive to enter the programme. Even in such cases, the employee's work must improve and the problem eventually is resolved.
Supervisor training	Supervisors must be trained to educate employees requiring understanding and support during the assistance process.
Voluntary participation	Supervisors can strongly urge employees to participate and even give termination as the alternative, but the employee must seek help voluntarily for any chance of success.
Union steward training (if a union is present)	A critical variable is employees' contact with the union steward or representative
Insurance involvement	Occasionally, assistance alternatives are costly and insurance support is a must
Breadth of service componets	Availability of assistance for a wide variety of problems
Professional leadership	A skilled professional with expertise in helping, who must have credibility in the eyes of the employees
Follow-up and evaluation	To measure program effectiveness and overall improvement
Separate location	The programme should be located away from the workplace to help ensure privacy.

Rue and Byars (2010:242) and Grobler *et al.* (2011:454)

The table above sheds light on some of the common key elements that help to ensure that EAPs interventions are successful from the beginning to the end. They also help the

employees to have an interest in participating in the programmes to be productive and for their jobs to be satisfactory.

The main principle underlying EAPs is the identification of employees who have problems. These problems might be personal or work-related. Nothing operates in a vacuum. Before any organisation decides to introduce EAPs, it should understand the crucial elements of the EAPs. With this in mind, an EAPs will yield quality results that can contribute significantly to the organisational culture and mission.

## **2.6 Components of EAP**

There are additional important components of EAPs that are worth mentioning in this study to build a foundation for the programme's importance. Bohlander and Snell (2013), Jacobson and Sacco (2012:468) and Newton *et al.* (2005) outline the following components as necessary in an EAP.

### **2.6.1 Provision of education**

Education is about the provision of systematic instruction to employees with regard to their wellbeing as human beings. Through EAPs, the employees can learn and gain knowledge so that they can be enlightened in the issues regarding workplace health and safety. Education is the key to success; it opens people's minds to everything happening around them, both in personal lives and workplaces (Newton *et al.*, 2005). For example, high absentee rates in an organisation due to lifestyle illnesses might provide education on nutrition and healthy eating, as well as exercise and fitness options.

### **2.6.2 Provision of diagnosis**

Diagnosis is about managers identifying the cause of absenteeism, low productivity and poor performance that the organisation is facing and to address them through EAPs. This helps the EAPs interventions to work effectively and yield quality results for the benefit of the employees and the organisation (Bohlander & Snell, 2013).

### **2.6.3 Counselling**

Counselling is part of EAPs, usually involving the use of external professional counsellors to provide counselling to employees with personal problems that include marital concerns, family issues and substance abuse. Counselling involves a discussion of both parties on an emotional problem for the purpose of eliminating or reducing the problem (Hegar, 2012). Similarly, Nair and Xavier (2012) define counselling as the provision of support and help to employees to address related problems and factors that might adversely affect their performance at the

workplace. Nair and Xavier (2012:73) found that 93.7% of the employees participating in their study stated that counselling is crucial in assisting employees to solve their work problems as well as those that they encountered in their personal lives. Therefore, counselling should always be incorporated in EAPs in all the organisations.

When counselling is initiated, the counsellor can use two techniques, namely directive and non-directive (Rue & Byars, 2010:236). With directive counselling, the counsellor takes the initiative and asks the employee pointed questions about a problem. When the counsellor feels that they are well-knowledgeable of the root cause to the problem, they suggest various steps (including EAPs) that the employee might take to overcome the problem. In non-directive counselling, the employee assumes most of the initiatives and the counsellor primarily listens. The employee is encouraged to discuss what he or she thinks is causing the problem and to develop solutions to it.

#### 2.6.4 Confidential screening and assessment

Confidentiality is a very important element of successful EAPs. The programme should ensure confidentiality for the employees to put trust in them and participate fully.

#### 2.6.5 Identification of employees

The employees are identified based on the problems they encounter. This implies that the managers or professional counsellors determine the employees who have problems in order to offer them required support to increase their productivity. Identification of the type and cause of the issues the employees are faced with is crucial in resolving problems. This helps to provide relevant assistance and support required for the employees (Rue & Byars, 2010).

### 2.7 Dimensions of EAPs

Sieberhagen *et al.* (2011) established that EAPs comprise 14 dimensions. Their study investigated the types and foci on employee wellness to describe perceived success of EAPs in South Africa. The dimensions of the EAPs help counsellors and the management to be aware of their employees' health and how best they can be helped to work effectively. The dimensions are as follows, health, organisational wellness, occupational health and safety (OHS), personal wellness, work wellness, self-development, employee benefits, legal requirements, performance, recognition of benefits, employee service and responsibility among others. Lastly, wellness management and holistic dimension which basically, refers to the perception that wellness efforts need to be holistic, integrated and have a wide focus. It is imperative that organisations take note of a broad view of employees' wellness needs.



Bernardin and Russell (2013:537) provide a brief understanding of the fundamental objectives of an EAPs. This explanation is crucial to the management, supervisors and labour unions in understanding EAPs interventions and processes to assist employees. EAPs provide specific programmes that help employees with personal problems. They are seen by human resource departments as a remedial resource to intervene with violent employees (Bernardin & Russell, 2013:537; Solon & Kratz, 2016:32). Additionally, they highlight that training and educational programmes should always include techniques to reduce stress and provide drug abuse awareness. Efforts should be made by employers to provide educational materials to their employees and families.

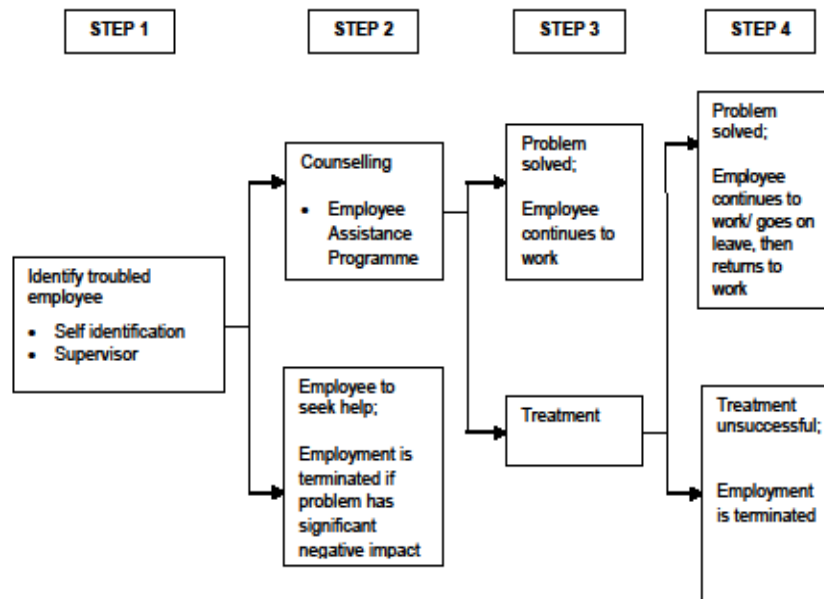
These materials should contain information on handling harassment, domestic abuse, substance abuse and other emotional problems and health and safety (Bernardin & Russell, 2013). If there are hazards in an organisation, the outcomes will not be satisfactory. One should note that an increase in job stress is inevitably accompanied by many problems. Grobler *et al.*, (2011: 446) note that an increase in job stress results in poor company productivity, high employee-absenteeism and high labour turnover and in some cases, alcohol and drug abuse as a coping mechanism. EAPs can be useful instruments in reducing burnout and stress. Management should not ignore the problems of burnout and stress.

## **2.8 Steps of EAPs**

It is important to understand the steps to be followed in implementing successful EAPs. For any programme to be successful there should be guidelines and procedures explicitly outlined for the responsible people to follow in spearheading the EAPs. Several authors added that, “EAPs should provide education, confidential screening and assessment, short-term counselling and referral with follow-ups” (Noe *et al.*, 2010:468; Jacobson & Sacco, 2012:3).

It is critical for the management to observe and single out the troubled employees who require EAP interventions (Jacobson & Sacco, 2012). This will determine the type of intervention suitable for the troubled employee. Some of the early symptoms that can be detected is high absenteeism (Daniels *et al.*, 2005:43), unexcused absences, injuries and legal troubles among others (EASNA, 2009:17; Grobler *et al.*, 2011:454).

After the detection of the symptoms in a troubled employee, supervisors and counsellors should initiate further steps and procedures in helping the employee, which will increase the company's profits by lowering absenteeism, reducing employee turnover and medical claims (EASNA, 2009; Sandys, 2015:2). Grobler *et al.* (2011:455) propose the following steps for successful EAPs (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1: Steps for successful EAPs**

(Adapted from Grobler *et al.*, 2011:455)

Figure 2.1 above shows the steps to be followed for successful EAPs and to gain a competitive advantage. In essence, the above steps review two way system in which EAPs could be successful. One way is via the supervisor's identification of a troubled employee and the other one is through employee self identification. These steps enact the organisation to seek appropriate solution to the employee's needs. However, judging on the outcome a decision to stay or leave is reached in both steps (Grobler *et al.*, 2011:455). Therefore, the above laid steps are a must know, for EAPs professionals who intend to implement EAPs in their organisations. These steps help to reduce costs and yield satisfactory results for the employee and the organisation (Jacobson & Sacco, 2012:4). In addition, when it comes to problem solving the EAPs is seen as a proactive remedial support system and reduces disciplinary action taken against troubled employees (Sandys, 2015). In this case, disciplinary steps taken against employees usually entail the issuing of verbal warnings. However, if an employee does not want to participate in EAPs, immediate termination of employment is not the solution but, the employer must follow multi-step disciplinary procedures that give the employee an opportunity to change.

## **2.9 Strategic values of EAPs**

Rothermel, Slavitt and Finch (2008) report that EAPs which are aligned to the organisation's core values and vision improves the company's operations, employee satisfaction and the company's image. EAPs are seen as a corporate social responsibility towards employees. Well-run EAPs provides a positive return on investment. Leon (2012:24) categorises the values of EAPs into three groups, namely benefit cost value, performance value and organisational value. These three categories of EAPs values are discussed below.

### **2.9.1 Performance value**

The first category is workplace performance value. There is a cost savings related to effective EAPs. They can reduce costs by preventing and intervening in employee challenges thereby reducing high absenteeism.

### **2.9.2 Benefit cost value**

The second category is the cost value benefit. The organisation make savings on health care related issues and reduce claims from work-related injuries or accidents due to negligence or stress (Leon, 2012:25).

### **2.9.3 Organisational value**

The third category is organisational value, that includes positive organisational culture, positive working environment and improved employee job satisfaction and commitment (Leon, 2012: 25). Additionally, EAPs are value added benefit to the organisation since organisations that show loyalty toward their employees receive the same back from employees. The overall intention of EAPs are to address employees' problems, to return to normal, productive functioning on the job for the organisations to be competitive and become more profitable (Bernardin & Russell, 2013:546). Additionally, Grobler *et al.* (2011:454) posit that the immediate intention of the EAPs is to enhance the organisation's profitability through low employee-absenteeism, high employee retention and safe working environment. Besides the above goals, the purpose of EAPs is to increase return through energetic and healthy employees. Sieberhagen *et al.* (2011) found that, the introduction of EAPs reduced the high incidence of sick leave, high absenteeism rates, means of social responsibility and the organisations became the employer of choice.

## **2.10 Other strategic values**

There are other strategic values that are worth being mentioned. These include recruitment, job satisfaction, employer of choice, reduction in employee turnover, competitive advantage,

return on investment and cost-effective programmes. These strategic values are discussed in detail below.

### 2.10.1 Recruitment

Strategic recruitment is what an organisation should consider when filling a vacant position (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2010:210). The organisation should recruit the candidate with the best abilities and knowledge (Pilbeam & Corbridge, 2002). However, selective candidates will only be interested if they are convinced that the employer cares about their employees and provides the necessary benefits and assistance. EAPs should be used as the competitive advantage component for recruitment. Bernardin and Russell (2013) opine that the recruitment process should be incorporated into human resource planning and selection.

### 2.10.2 Job satisfaction

Employees are happy in their jobs if they are treated respectfully and job satisfaction leads to an increase in productivity. Aziri (2011) outlines some definitions of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is the degree to which a worker is satisfied by the job remuneration and intrinsic motivation. In this case, job satisfaction refers to employees' perceptions about their work. Where positive attitudes reflected in the employees are likely to indicate job satisfaction while, unfavourable actions like absenteeism is likely to indicate job dissatisfaction. In essence, job satisfaction is a complex component of HRM that faces many managers and supervisors in managing their workers (Aziri, 2011).

### 2.10.3 Employer of choice

One key principle of the Employer Of Choice (EOC) is to care for the people and balance work-life factors. Balodis (2013:5) states that work-life balance is an essential component of being an EOC. Employees want to work in organisations where they are valued as human beings and such organisations will attract competent employees. An EOC is an organisation that is attractive to qualified employees. If the organisation becomes an EOC, there will be less job stress, greater opportunity for investors and increased customer satisfaction (student-centred satisfaction).

Furthermore, being an EOC means being able to attract potential employees and convince the existing workforce to continue to work with (Balodis, 2013:3). In addition, an EOC is an employer that creates a working environment and attitude that lures and maintain top and talented workers. The environment of an EOC favours the wellbeing of employees and customers (Balodis, 2013:3).

#### 2.10.4 Reduction in employee turnover

Noe *et al.* (2010) describe employee turnover as the rate of losing workers because of various reasons that include poor working conditions, job-stress and lack of career development. The assumption is that if the employees' wellness is attained and guaranteed, employees may be retained for longer periods. High employee turnover is a very expensive process for any organisation (Rue & Byars, 2010). For example, it would cost approximately US\$18,000 (R251,640) to replace an employee whose annual salary is US\$54,000 (R754,920). The costs of replacing an employee can be either direct or indirect (Rue & Byars, 2010:379).

It is up to employers and their management to ensure that employee turnover is minimal. EAP is one of the initiatives that can be utilised to minimise turnover costs. Rue and Byars (2010:380) identify the following strategies to keep turnover low:

- a) Built a good relationship with all the workers so that they can feel important and be treated with respect. Managers and supervisors should make employees feel important.
- b) Praise the workers all the time, since they can never get tired of praise on every job done well. Managers should also recognise and praise the outstanding workers.
- c) There is also a need to pay attention to workers' feedback. Workers usually communicate their needs and job-related concerns when they feel that their supervisors and managers are genuinely interested.
- d) Maintain a good working mood and environment to make the employees feel being a part of big things happening in the organisation. Managers should ensure that employees laugh with them.

Continually selecting and strengthening the EAP team can provide the necessary experience. There is a need to constantly upgrade and train the experts to develop and encourage employees to identify training desires and needs.

#### 2.10.5 Competitive advantage

The above-stated advantages of an EOC makes that organisation difficult to emulate. This means that other service providers will try to benchmark their practices. However, they will encounter difficulties to replicate the business operations of this particular organisation. The organisation will be able to keep its competent employees that have the required abilities, are knowledgeable, have good attitudes and are skilled in the work they do. Other crucial aspects associated with competitive advantage in the provision of EAP include increasing access to services and utilisation, offering a dynamic service that goes beyond phone calls, increasing revenue with a superior service and reduced overheads from traditional expenses and

attracting and retaining clientele that might have previously been beyond reach (Noe *et al.*, 2010:466).

#### 2.10.6 Return on investment

With the use of EAPs, organisations achieve their returns on investment. This includes the low employee-absenteeism, wellbeing of employees, reduced workplace related accidents and high employee retention. Employees are mentally, emotionally and physically healthy (EASNA, 2009). Furthermore, the EAPs focuses on aspects such as workplace violence, substance abuse and crisis management, thereby promoting employees' wellbeing in a confidential and professional manner. The programme is conducted in privacy to encourage full participation, which can be an advantage on its own (EASNA, 2009).

#### 2.10.7 Cost-effective programmes

An EAP help employees to get back on their feet and become more productive, stay longer in the organisation, and be more innovative and creative, thereby practising organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). According to Zhang (2011), OCB is about the positive and constructive actions that employees take on their own to benefit their co-workers and the company at large. Even though organisations spend millions of dollars on EAPs, Rue and Byars (2010) found the EAPs to be cost effective by improving the morale and health of employees. Morale, allegiance and perception boost are some of the important benefits of EAPs for employees in an organisation. When morale is lost, employee productivity is compromised. EAPs help to minimise the costs related to absenteeism and reduced productivity. EAPs boost energy in employees and help organisations to meet the demands and extend their services to customers (Zhang, 2011).

EAPs help to boost productivity and create positive work environments, which attracts competent and skilled employees. EAPs creates workplaces free of conflict, where employees are likely to work towards organisational vision and goals (Rue & Byars, 2010). EAPs reduce employee turnover; employees do not want to remain in an organisation where uncertainty exists but prefer an environment that encourages personal and organisational development (Rue & Byars, 2010). Employees want their efforts in the workplace to be recognised. Employees expect a balance in life and wish for their family members to be taken care of when a problem arise. A caring organisation would provide a lactation facility for new mothers on the working premises or give them an hour off work during the week to breastfeed their newborn for the first three months after maternity leave has lapsed (Zhang, 2011).

EAPs reduce overall health care costs caused by high stress and substance abuse, which could cause accidents in the workplace. EAPs also provide incentive-based programmes, which are competitive and significantly profitable to corporates (Bernardin & Russell, 2013:526). Even a small incentive can improve employees' behaviours and attitudes. For instance, if there is a decrease in absenteeism for six months, employees will be rewarded for satisfactory attendance (Bernardin & Russell, 2013).

## **2.11 EAP models**

There are various EAP models of which the most popular are the in-house model, out-of-house model, consortium model and affiliate model. These EAP models are discussed in detail below.

### **2.11.1 In-house model**

The in-house model is a type of EAP that provides diagnoses and treatment services in an institution. In this type of model, the employer maintains a full-service facility and employs EAP practitioners on a full-time basis (Byars & Rue, 1994:510; Dessler, 1997 cited in Rajin, 2012:21). Furthermore, the employee assistance staff are organised into a unit of the organisation where the superiors are accountable for supervising the workers in their respective units, develop EAP policies and frameworks as well as the procedures followed in implementing the respective policies. In-house model EAPs are located inside the organisation but sometimes the offices could be located off the worksite.

Rajin (2012:21) indicates that there is consensus that in-house EAPs are financially cheaper. This is because internal control measures can be easily implemented or utilised and at the same time identification of employees in need is easy. Generally, in this model the employer and management have their own programmes to help employees in the organisation.

### **2.11.2 Out-of-house model**

The model employs outside consultants and counsellors to capacitate the employees to deal with workplace and personal lives' challenges. In this case, the employers engage and enter into contractual agreements with external employee assistance service providers (Dessler 1997, cited in Rajin, 2012:21). In most instances employers can negotiate and engage private contractors to provide the services. As explained by Masi (1992, cited in Rajin, 2012:21), this model improves accountability, reduces legal liability and it's easy to start-up and to implement.

### 2.11.3 Consortium model

The model operates on partnership basis where, individual institutes bring together resources to implement EAPs (Dessler, 1997, cited in Rajin, 2012:22). This model is more applicable to smaller institutions where the maximum number of employees could be 100.

The consortium model has several advantages, including the fact that smaller institutions benefit from collective employee assistance, which makes it affordable to smaller institutes (Blair, 1985, cited in Rajin, 2012:22). Various small establishments can come together to share resources to achieve EAP goals for their businesses.

### 2.11.4 Affiliate model

The affiliation model is one of the external models and is commonly grounded in the Contract model. According to Masi (2000:407) an affiliate or subcontractor model is a form of variation in the contract model. In essence, the organisation subcontract the local professionals to deal with internal organisational issues. This model is much reaching since it is flexible and allows for service delivery to geographical spread of clients.

## **2.12 The following should be considered when designing EAPs**

For any EAP to be successfully utilised in an organisation the following guidelines should be considered as explained by (Rakepa, 2012:95). It is important to know these principles to effectively design EAPs that could help to reduce employee absenteeism. EAPs cannot be effective if it does not have principles or guidelines in place. According to EAPA (2010:6), any organisation that intends to have EAPs in place and to work effectively should have guidelines so as to increase profitability and improve productivity. The guidelines that should be adhered to at all times are programme design, management and administration, confidentiality and regulatory impact on protective rights, employee assistance programme direct services, drug free, workplace, substance abuse professional services, strategic partnerships and evaluation.

## **2.13 Disadvantages of EAPs**

Sharar, Pompe and Attridge (2013) note that although EAPs might yield satisfactory results, they also have both internal and external shortfalls. Internal disadvantages include the following:

- Too closely identified with a particular department, group or individual;
- Confidentiality of employee problems can be difficult to protect;
- Can be expensive due to salary, administrative support and logistical costs;
- Only large organisations can justify full-time staff;



- Less diversity in clinical staff;
- Possibility of staff 'burnout' with one-person EAP;
- The practitioner can be more subjective in assessments; and
- The practitioner's neutral position in the organisation can be compromised.

The external disadvantages include the following:

- Counselling is usually not provided in person at organisation worksites;
- Some employees and supervisors may be reluctant to deal with 'outsiders' for help;
- Lack of knowledge about the organisation and its unique corporate culture;
- Communication problems can occur between the EAP service centre and the organisation;
- Less 'ownership' of the EAP by the organisation;
- External model can be profit-oriented and may not always serve the best interests of the organisation or client; and
- May offer less accessibility for appointments.

#### **2.14 EAPs providers in Namibia**

Employee wellness in Namibia is becoming visible in terms of implementation. Organisations in the country have started to recognise the importance of employee wellbeing. This section reviews the wellness programmes used in organisations in Namibia to improve employees' total physical and mental health and to boost employee morale and productivity in the workplace. Available literature on wellness providers in Namibia revealed that there are organisations that provide these programmes. Examples of some of the organisations that offer EAPs are the Namibia Business Coalition on AIDS (NABCOA), the Namibian Port Authority (Namport), First National Bank (FNB) and Telecom Namibia. They have developed and implemented health promotion policies which underscore the importance of wellbeing.

The NABCOA has developed programmes to improve health outcomes in the private sector (Altshuler, Berry, Mcnich & Nayeem 2014). NABCOA aims to be the "lead agency with the responsibility of mobilising the private sector community and coordinating the private sector efforts in the national response to HIV/AIDS and impacts in Namibia" (PWC, 2013, cited in Altshuler *et al.*, 2014:4). In addition, Altshuler *et al.* (2014) "assessing the workplace wellness needs for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)" found that the most frequently cited health issues included HIV/AIDS, flu, stress, depression and high blood pressure.

Furthermore, Altshuler *et al.* (2014) argue that when asked what services employees would want at their workplace, the desired services include:

- General testing (such as blood pressure, glucose and BMI tests);
- Education about the disease, HIV testing, medical aid;
- TB screening and treatment, care and support; and
- Safety equipment; and
- Testing for Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STIs).

It was further found that health testing came before HIV, TB and STI testing, implying that employees may have realised that general health issues are more problematic in their workplace than infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis (TB). According to Telecom Namibia (2004:5), EAPs provide professional services to address psychosocial issues among employees, including stress, chronic diseases, poor working relationships resulting in conflicts, mediation, harassment, career development issues, alcohol and substance abuse and relationship and family issues. Similarly, the programmes offer services in addressing problems related to financial concerns, HIV/AIDS, grief and bereavement, health and lifestyle, trauma and critical incidents, coping with organisational change and threatening and destructive behaviours. Namport offers health care facilities to all qualifying workers and has a clinic managed by an occupational nurse (Namport, 2013). Furthermore, Namport has constructed a wellness centre to support workers in attaining a positive work-life balance (Namport, 2013).

The EAP services provided by Namport, NABCOA and Telecom Namibia in the form of wellness services support the argument made by Nel *et al.* (2001, as cited by September, 2010) that organisations can promote wellness by including the workers' wellness into its strategy and mission statement. Secondly, by engaging with other employee role players like the labour unions among others, it encourages stronger synergies. Thirdly, by establishing policies that promote workers' health and value their wellbeing like the non-smoking policy among others.

The Olthaver & List (O&L) group of companies is another example of an organisation that provides a comprehensive employee wellness programme. Their main purpose is to improve and maintain the workers wellbeing. Their wellness programme is also meant to create and restore high-performance, healthy and happy organisation where employees are always motivated and satisfied. Among others, their programme gives professional help to the workers in respect to their emotional, social and physical as well as to refer the identified workers. Secondly, to care and be of support to all the workers in their individual or work-related issues. Lastly, to train and give preventative strategies, that may improve individual functioning through awareness to the organisational wellness programme.

Diverse wellness activities are offered to employees, which include the O&L Vitality Programme, executive wellness programme, awareness sessions on wellness at operating companies, wellness screening, voluntary counselling and testing among others (Mathis & Jackson, 2002, as cited by September, 2010). The overall aim of EAPs is for organisations to be proactive rather than being reactive. The aim of the wellness programme is to promote good health in workers (Mathis & Jackson, 2002, cited in September, 2010). The wellness programme promotes self-directed lifestyle changes (September, 2010).

In conclusion, although the issue of absenteeism with regard to EAPs was not apparent, a majority of Fortune 500 companies offer EAPs that provide services to deliver different health and productivity services to improve organisational performance and assist individuals and their dependents affected by these adverse changes (Rothermel *et al.*, 2008). EAPs are significant in the competitive market where organisations are competing for the most valuable asset (employees). However, of pertinent interest to this study is the realisation that little has been done in the field of higher education institutions yet statistics reveal high rates of absenteeism in such institutions. This is the reason for evaluating the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing absenteeism in higher education institutions such as NUST.

## **2.15 Chapter summary**

This chapter provided a critical analysis of EAPs around the world. It covered theoretical and empirical studies. The chapter critically discussed the history of EAPs since their introduction into organisations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, where the major focus was on alcohol-related issues up to the present. The chapter dealt with the diversity in defining EAPs, explaining the theoretical frameworks in which EAPs are grounded, as well as the models implemented. This chapter argued the importance and appropriateness of EAPs in enhancing employee wellness and the ability to reduce various forms of employee absenteeism. This chapter laid the basis for a critical understanding that is necessary for Chapter 3, where further analysis and discussion on the concept of absenteeism and EAPs are articulated.

## CHAPTER 3

### ABSENTEEISM AND EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES (EAPS)

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the association between employee absenteeism and EAP initiatives. A strong claim is made for the potential that EAPs has as an intervention strategy to reduce the frequency and occurrence of high absenteeism. A review on absenteeism and EAPs literature both in the Namibian context and abroad were done in this chapter.

#### 3.2 Definitions of absenteeism

There is no agreement among scholars on conceptualising and defining absenteeism. Absenteeism is subjective, contextually driven and in essence, can be described as a social construct. Absenteeism impedes business productivity and reduces employee and organisational performance (Singh, Chetty & Karodia 2016). The traditional definition of absenteeism as stated by Lokke, Eskildsen and Jensen (2007), mean physical unrepresent at a given time and location when supposed to be there. Nel *et al.* (2004) views absenteeism in two ways, namely absenteeism as the non-attendance of an employee and secondly, as withdrawal from an undesirable work environment. The former relates more to non-attendance and is the one widely used (Australasian Faculty of Occupational Medicine, 1999:1). In support of the above, Cascio and Boudreau (2010:52) described absenteeism as the “failure to report for work as scheduled, regardless of the reason”, while to Jackson (2003:1) it means:

...an unplanned, unjustifiable and disruptive incident, which is further characterized by a lack of physical presence of the employee at work, such as scheduled, extended breaks, late coming or leaving his/her workstation.

Lastly, Tiwari, Sharma, Zodpey and Khandare (2014:9) define it as the “absence of workers from their regular work without prior permission.”

However, there are some scholars who describe absenteeism as the withdrawal behaviour by workers in an attempt to be away from uncondusive working environment, as postulated by Nel *et al.* (2004). In support of the above sentiments, Booyens (2008:355) views absenteeism as the withdrawal by employees from unsatisfactory work conditions. Carmeli (2005) regards absenteeism as worker’s form of withdrawal behaviour from work. According to Greenberg and Baron (2003:156), withdrawal can be seen in two forms, namely as absenteeism and/or voluntary turnover.

Importantly, scholars concur that absenteeism occurs when workers are not present at work, at the time they should be working. Numerous authors agree that absenteeism is a fraction of

missed workdays or hours without proper permission (Martocchio & Jimeno, 2003:230; Davey, *et al.*, 2009:313). Therefore, the understanding of absenteeism in terms of the frequency and duration of missed hours or days out from work also accommodates the issues of extended breaks, late-coming or employees leaving their workstations, which is also perceived as problematic in the conceptualising of absenteeism (Johnson *et al.*, 2003). Aitchison (1994:10) provides a more refined definition of absenteeism, stating that absenteeism is the intentional or consistent absence from work.

The South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 (BCEA), do not include approval absence like annual, sick and maternity leave, as well as illnesses related situations as absenteeism. The exclusion of the above from absenteeism unlocks the two major categories of absenteeism in HRM literature. The categorisation of absenteeism is two dominant groupings, namely voluntary (illegitimate or unexcused) absenteeism, or inevitable (legitimate or excused) absenteeism. The latter inclusive of those forms of absenteeism mentioned above as exclusions in the BCEA. In his definition of absenteeism, Nielsen (2008:35) divides absenteeism into involuntary absence and voluntary absence. The former is approved absence like ill health or funeral attendance, while later is unapproved sickness and shirking due to personal reasons and the employee has a full control of the situation or act (Nielsen, 2008).

According to the survey reports by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development [CIPD] (2009:5), historically, public sector institutions in Africa have always had serious problems with high absenteeism amongst employees. The survey showed that the public sector institutions recorded the highest absence rate at an average of 9.7 days per employee per year, which represents 3.3% of working time. Globally, studies reveal that absenteeism is a problematic phenomenon for public sectors, especially in the education sector and many days are lost annually. For example, Canada recorded 2.85%, the USA 4.8% and Israel 6-9% (Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2005:210). McLean (2005:1) reports the education and health sector services to have the highest absenteeism rates of all sectors.

### **3.3 Types of absenteeism**

Nielsen (2008:1330) categorises absenteeism as involuntary and voluntary absenteeism, whereby involuntary absence is beyond the employee's immediate control and voluntary absence is under the direct control of the employee. Nel *et al.* (2004:549) categorises absenteeism into three distinctive types, namely sick absence, authorised absence and unauthorised absence. A further categorisation of absenteeism is unplanned and planned absenteeism. The different types of absenteeism are discussed below.

### 3.3.1 Sick absence

According to the provision of Section 151.2 of the Namibian Labour Act No.11 of 2007, sick absence is regarded as absence from duty because of illness, employees are not permitted to be absent from work for a period of more than 48 hours consecutively, if this is the case, any period over 48 hours must be medically certified. Therefore, absence from work due to a reported illness, regardless of genuinity of the illness is sick absence (Moshokwa, 2016).

### 3.3.2 Authorised absenteeism

Moshokwa (2016) defines authorised absenteeism as accepted and known employee absentism for other reasons other than illness. Authorised absenteeism is further described by Singh *et al.* (2016) as formalised absences for instance, as annual and paternity leave. Therefore, an authorised absenteeism can be planned or unplanned.

### 3.3.3 Unauthorised absenteeism

According to Moshokwa (2016), unauthorised absence is employee absence from work without proper communication or permission from the management. Casio (cited by Rosenblatt & Shiron, 2005:209) considers unexcused absence to be “any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason.” Singh *et al.* (2016) further define unauthorised absenteeism as employee absence without permission or explanation and the absence is unacceptable. Unauthorised absenteeism can be planned or unplanned.

## 3.4 Measurement of absenteeism

A number of methods can be used to calculate and measure employee absenteeism. According to Grobler *et al.* (2006:124), the most popular and frequently used measurement in absenteeism is the total time lost measurement. This formula indicates the percentage of available time that is lost owing to absenteeism. The formula for the measurement is shown in Figure 3.1 below.

<b>Total time lost</b>	<b>=</b>	$\frac{\text{Days lost to absenteeism for a period}}{\text{Average number of employees X Total days in period}} \times 100$
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**Figure 3.1: Total time lost formula**

(Nel *et al.*, 2004:583)

As shown in Figure 3.1 above, the total time lost in an organisation can be calculated by dividing the number of days lost to absenteeism by the average number of employees and the total days in period multiplied by 100.

Furthermore, a calculation of the average period of absence can be calculated using the CIPD (2006:6) formula. The formula can be used to calculate the absence of an individual employee during a period (for example, monthly or annually). The formula is shown in Figure 3.2.

<p><b>Individual frequency = <math>\frac{\text{Number of workers having one or more spells of absence}}{\text{Number of workers}} \times 100</math></b></p>
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**Figure 3.2: Individual frequency**

(CIPD, 2006:6)

As shown in Figure 3.2 above, absenteeism can be measured in terms of individual frequency percentage, that is the number of workers having one or more spells of absence divided by the number of the workers and multiplied by 100.

Lastly, the Gross Absenteeism Rate (GAR) can be measured using the statistics provided over the years. According to Moshokwa (2016), GAR is the measurement of absenteeism over a long period. In this case, absenteeism is caused by sick leave, the number of sick days that are utilised are recorded in the leave log book. The Department of Labour in the USA use a formula as explained below. The absenteeism rate is the ratio of days absconded within a given period of time and it is calculated as shown below:

**Absenteeism rate = Number of lost working days owing to absence/(Number of employees) x (Number of workdays) x 100.**

However, it is critical to understand that the GAR is measured on an annual basis but does not provide any information about the reason for the absenteeism. According to Nel *et al.* (2006:582), a GAR of 3% is the international norm and therefore considered to be an acceptable level of absenteeism. These calculations were used in the measuring and describing the absenteeism rates of NUST (presented in Table 1.1: NUST Sick leave chart 2014-2016: p. 5 and Table 1.2 in page 6).

### 3.5 Causes of absenteeism

Scholars in the field of HRM concur that organisational factors are the main causes of workplace absenteeism. Such organisational factors include job dissatisfaction, work-related stress, lack of employee motivation, organisational culture and leadership, the working conditions or environmental and personal factors such as psychological wellness, illness and demographic characteristics (Sharma, Singh & Kishor, 2013:05; Joseph, 2015:76). Furthermore, Booyens (2008) outlines additional causes of absenteeism as low job satisfaction, tension or conflict at work, low self-esteem or lack of confidence, heavy family responsibilities (being a single or widowed parent) and chronic illnesses. In addition, Kocakulah *et al.* (2009) categorise the causes of high employee absenteeism as job-related or non-job-related problems, which may include lack of supervisory support, long commuting distances, monotonous or repetitive job tasks, insufficient job autonomy, burnout, stress, substance abuse (alcohol or drug) and negative organisational culture. HRM literature shows that employees are absent from the workplace for various reasons, including personal reasons and an unsatisfactory working environment (Levin, 1999:2; Grobler *et al.*, 2006:124; Tylczak, 2002:1). Therefore, the root causes of absenteeism might be in the organisational management styles which may have promoted poor supervision, unfair treatment and poor leadership (Dunn & Wilkinson, 2002:235; McHugh, 2002:48; Sheikha & Younis, 2006:67). "Sickness absence is, however, a complex phenomenon combining physical, psychological and social aspects and therefore there is some room for flexibility between the decisions to attend or to be absent" (Joensuu & Lindström, 2003:5). A critical discussion of the factors follows below.

#### 3.5.1 Job dissatisfaction

Employees are regarded as instrumental in the success and achievement of organisational goals. Employee satisfaction has direct or indirect influence on organisational success. Motivation plays a key role in the behaviour and performance of employees in an organisation and this has a direct influence on the success or failure of the organisation. There are various factors that affect the levels of employee job satisfaction, hence job satisfaction is individualistic in nature and varies from employee to employee (Dunn & Wilkinson, 2002).

Regarding job satisfaction, Cohen and Golan (2007:427) note that factors such as increased pressure, increased workload and frustration from staff shortages lead to depressed employee morale and low job satisfaction. The authors urge managers to promote employee job satisfaction amongst the employees since, no job satisfaction is known to lower organisational productivity. Plimmer (as cited by Yende, 2008:15) further reports that absenteeism rate that is over 5% is reflective of employee dissatisfaction, poor labour relations and poor



management leadership styles. Bydowell (2000:15) contends that “in reality, many organisations run absenteeism rates as high as 12% without even realising it”.

It is important to point out that it is not universally perceived and accepted that job dissatisfaction causes absenteeism. In support of this statement, Goldberg and Waldman (2000) revealed an insignificant correlation between job satisfaction and employee absenteeism. They argue that it is the responsibility of the management or leaders to motivate and ensure that the employees are satisfied. This thinking makes sense to a certain extent and it can be argued that there is a fine line between motivation and satisfaction, although the two in some human resource discourses are used interchangeably or are described interdependently. This debate aligns with Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory, in which he argues that extrinsic factors (hygiene factors) affect more the workers’ attitudes towards work. However, Herzberg further suggests that although the hygiene factors promote workers’ job satisfaction, they don’t necessarily enhance increased motivation (Herzberg, cited by Singh *et al.*, 2016:107).

Netshidzati (2012) argues that intrinsic factors motivates employees and ensures job satisfaction. Furthermore, when workers are satisfied at work they are likely to always be at work compared to unsatisfied workers. In support, Friday and Friday (2003) posit that workers which are highly motivated are likely to be satisfied, deliver better quality services and report low rates of absenteeism. The argument in the above discussion clearly shifts the cause of employee absenteeism to low employee motivation. Nel *et al.* (2004:549) strengthen this argument claiming that when performance is linked to absenteeism the levels of motivation are held responsible. They argue that inappropriate and ineffectively managed organisations can easily lead to low workforce motivation. This might lead to employees’ unacceptable behaviours such as absenteeism. They further explain that when employed, the employees come with their own expectations and failure to satisfy the expectations by the employer can result in the workers being dissatisfied and absenteeism is likely to increase (Nel *et al.*, 2004:549). This discussion helps to illustrate how employee motivation is essential and how lack thereof it may cause high absenteeism amongst employees.

### 3.5.2 Work-related stress

Stress in a workplace is arguably a major cause of employee-absenteeism. Erkutlu and Chafra (2006:287) define stress as the depressed state of mind. By nature stress is inevitable and cannot be avoided. Conti *et al.* (2006) assert that stress is an issue of concern because it can cause employee absenteeism thereby affecting the organisation’s performance. Swanger (2002) posits that companies are becoming aware that a conducive working environment

brings forth better organisational performance and may improve employee retention and reduce health-care costs.

Subbulaxmi (2002) reports that stress maybe caused by personal or work-related factors, like work-overload, irregular working hours, boredom and lack of autonomy, conflict and unrealistic objectives. He further notes that these factors are interdependent and can cause high employee-absenteeism. Stress can impact on the employee's work-performance, resulting in poor production and high incidences of employee absence (Netshidzati, 2012). To add, Conner and Douglas (2005) highlight the demands relating to the changes and transformation in technologies, the impacts of company downsizing or retrenchment and the level of job security as some of the sources of workplace stress and these have a significant influence on the employees' behaviours. De Klerk and Mostert (2010) report that changes in the workplace come with unforeseen demands like increased working hours and the increased pressure to remain competitive and deliver the demands of customers. However, a small amount of stress can be productive and encourages creative among the employees (Nel *et al.*, 2004). Although this argument is not widely accepted and suffers salient objection, it is important to acknowledge the purpose of optimal stress and appreciate how much damage can be caused by high stress levels on employees and its ultimate influence on absenteeism.

It is of interest to note that over the years, stress related to work is a determinant to low employee morale in most organisations. In addition, a close link has been established between work-related stress, low employee morale and high incidences of absenteeism. There are several work-related circumstances that cause low employee morale at the workplace and this has a significant influence of absenteeism (Rosenblatt & Shirom 2005). They identify factors such as high workload, poor supervision and lack of personal development as some circumstances that cause low morale among employees. Netshidzati (2012) defines morale as the spirit or a feeling. Poor morale affects employees' satisfaction and may influence unwanted behaviours such as high employee absenteeism.

Low employee morale affects the performance of the organisation. In agreement, Makawatsakul and Kleiner (2003) further argue that, poor morale is destructive and has a direct effect on employee-dissatisfaction, low organisation's productivity and high levels of absenteeism. Gill and Smith (2007) identify work overload and poor management as some of the reasons for low employee morale. They argue that the former may leave employees feeling undervalued, resulting in dampening of morale and this may lead to excessive absenteeism as a compensatory behaviour. McHugh (2001) points out the issue of power relations within the organisation as a potential cause of low employee morale and ultimately the high absenteeism rates in workplaces. They specifically identified decision-making power, training

and career development opportunities as better practices that may lead to high employee retention and low employee absents. A lack in the two is considered influential in the lowering employees' levels of morale and increase absenteeism.

### 3.5.3 Organisational culture and leadership

Organisational culture and poor leadership have been suggested as factors which contribute to high employee absenteeism. Organisational culture may be understood as a social phenomenon that influences workers to meld into a culture of commitment that has the potential to minimise absenteeism, thereby increasing performance.

As mentioned earlier, there is a nested connection in the causes of employee absenteeism and it is very wrong to assume that these factors are independent and are not inter-connected. Kefela (2010) reports that organisational culture is part of the leadership style in an organisation. He argues that the two are inseparable and the former is an important aspect to achieve the organisations vision and goals. Hence, leadership promotes and safeguard values and norms in the company (Sharma & Sharma, 2010). Applying this understanding to the area of interest would strengthen this study's argument that when the staff members have a healthy relationship with superiors and receive EAP support, they become satisfied and will be more likely to have a better attendance at work, thereby lowering the number of absences at work.

In addition, Netshidzati (2012) reports that a company's working culture and the leadership style are equally responsible in shaping absenteeism in an organisation. He argues that some companies have relaxed policies, where sick leave becomes a benefit. He blames high rates of employee absenteeism on a company's working culture that lacks focus and as a result, unnecessary absenteeism is experienced within the organisation.

However, Sheikha and Younis (2006) blame high absenteeism rates on poor leadership skills, among other aspects of organisational culture. Poor leadership skills in an organisation negatively affect the employees' functioning, organisational performance and results in absenteeism (Sheikha & Younis, 2006:83). They maintain that poor leadership styles and management skills are likely to promote a better culture and may fail to effectively mitigate absenteeism. In support of the above observations, Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005:218) report that high tolerance of absenteeism within an organisation causes the general misconception that it is acceptable and once employees regard absenteeism as a 'benefit' and their right, this results in high employee-absences.

### 3.5.4 Working environment/conditions

Working conditions are inevitably linked to employee absenteeism. Working conditions or environment is closely linked to employee satisfaction, organisational culture and work-related stress, as discussed earlier. However, it is important to discuss this factor not in isolation but in relation to previously highlighted factors. Cronje (1995) argues that this is the role and sole responsibility of employers to ensure satisfactory working environment to its employees. In his study in Gauteng Province of South Africa, Chauke (2007:27) reported that there are numerous factors that affects workers' health and satisfaction. These including numbers of hours an employee work day, medical aid benefits as well as the availability of a conducive and productive working environment.

Further issues raised in HRM literature on working conditions as a reason to high absenteeism and this includes working long night shifts and failure to get sufficient sleep (Gerber, 2001; Basner *et al.*, 2008).

### 3.5.5 Personal factors

As discussed earlier, absenteeism does not happen in isolation but there is an interplay between the factors. Personal factors arguably have a significant influence on high rates of employee absenteeism. Some of these personal factors are discussed in detail below.

#### 3.5.5.1 Illness

Genuine illness is another factor that leads to high employee absence. Illness can be costly considering that it adds on to the numbers of employee-absenteeism also the accompanying financial costs of paying unproductive employees (Lokke *et al.*, 2007). In this case, sick leave is perceived as rest period offered to the employees for them to recover from the illness hence sick leave increases employee-absenteeism. Sick leave can negatively impact the organisation, especially when only few employees report for duty and worse still, the more technically gifted and irreplaceable employees fail to report for duty because of sickness. Hence, the company suffers a loss in production and incurs costs in hiring relief employees to balance the labour force.

Josias (2005) posits that the most effective way to mitigate illnesses at work and absenteeism by providing a conducive working environment. Paul (2008) agrees that to deal with illness-related absenteeism there is need for organisational policies and rules regarding sick leave. Absence should require a medical certificate, to eliminate unnecessary absenteeism. Hence, there is the likelihood of sick leave abuse which may be costly to the organisation. Failure to manage absenteeism effectively is likely to affect the company's performance, thereby

affecting the delivery of service and retention of clients. Applying this understanding to this study, a strong argument can be made that an effective and efficient EAP programme may reduce the existing high absenteeism rate at NUST.

A very serious illness considered causal to high absenteeism is HIV/AIDS. Werner (2005) reports that in South Africa the AIDS pandemic pose big social challenge and cause businesses failure. Employees affected by HIV/AIDS often face both individual and work challenges. Since these employees affected by HIV/AIDS are on medication, it means they need more time off for medication or treatment. Netshidzati (2012) also notes that sometimes uninfected employees become primary caregivers to the sick ones and may need more leave days to care for the infected relatives or go to the funerals of workmates or their loved ones who passed on because of HIV and in return this means more absence time from work.

#### *3.3.5.2 Level of education*

Education level, is another personal factor linked to high absenteeism. Langenhoff (2011), noted that workers with tertiary or secondary level education, have low absent rate. Educated workers are involved and satisfied by their roles compared to less educated employees who mostly occupy menial job positions (Cristofoli, Turrini and Valotti, 2011). In support of this notion, Silman (2011) observes that employees qualified with a degree tend to earn more which in turn makes them more motivated, ambitious and self-confident comparing to their lesser-qualified associates. Hence, well educated employees are believed to absent less compared to their less educated associates

However, education qualifications are not universally influential on absenteeism. A study by Lam, Zhang and Baum (2001) on employee job satisfaction in hotels in Hong Kong found contrasting experiences. Employees with a higher education dissatisfy easily because they expect high incentives, salaries and recognition (Netshidzati, 2012:35) hence, they may engage in unproductive behaviours like absenteeism if their expectations are not met. Academic qualifications are an important consideration in this study in determining its effect on absenteeism at the NUST.

#### *3.5.5.3 Age*

Age is another demographic characteristic known to have an influence on absenteeism. Age relates to absenteeism (Cohen & Golan, 2007). Younger employees are believed to take short sick leaves comparing to the elderly employees (Lau, Au & Ho, 2003). Lau *et al.* attribute this finding to the positions occupied by elderly employees at work, their better work ethics and commitment they have towards their companies compared to the younger or novice employees. Hence, they are likely to be absent less and they take authorised time off.

Depending on the circumstances, some may take maternity leave for three months. The absenteeism period of the older employees tends to be longer than that of young employees. This could be because young workers still have high expectations in life and have duties to fulfil at home and resultantly they may be more often absent from work, comparing to elderly employees who in some cases might be approaching retirement age and would have achieved most of their life targets and wishes (Lau *et al.*, 2003).

In contrast, Lambert *et al.* (2005) reported that elderly workers often absent due to their ill health. They acknowledge that despite the fact that elderly employees have higher commitment and association to their organisations their advanced age comes with unexpected illness. In fact, their body starts to reflect some signs of fatigue and old age ailments like high blood pressure, lung diseases and heart diseases. As a result, the elderly are likely to absent more frequent compared to the younger and energetic groups.

Guariguata *et al.* (2012) report that health-related factors associated with absenteeism across various sectors in Namibia include alcohol, cholesterol, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, anaemia and high blood glucose. Guariguata *et al.* (2012) argue that most ailments that cause high absenteeism in workplaces are related to age. Age as a biographic factor is of significant importance in this study, which focuses on high absenteeism among the employees at NUST.

#### 3.5.5.4 Tenure

Another important biographic factor which is highly influential on absenteeism is tenure, also described as the period of stay at a workplace. According to Sheikha and Younis (2006), period in service contributes to high absenteeism. Josias (2005) note that, the longer period of service the higher the chances for high commitment and less absenteeism, since employee loyalty strengthens over time.

In contrast, Barmby, Ercolani and Treble (2002) found out that, employees with a long-tenure may absent more because they have false jobs security, thinking their jobs are secured. Barmby *et al.*'s conclusion is realistic, considering the false sense of security that long tenure gives. Employees with long service feel comfortable and secure in their jobs and shielded from dismissal or retrenchment. These employees are more likely to be absent than new employees are. Interestingly, Lambert *et al.* (2005) add that this absence may result from boredom, emotional problems and burnout. This point is very relevant to Namibian institutions of higher education, where most employees have a tenure of more than 20 years. Hence, employees who stayed longer at work have high absenteeism compared to short-tenure employees.

### 3.5.6 Substance abuse

Another cause of high absenteeism in the workplaces is substance abuse. Earlier scholars like Fisher (1994) posit that excessive intake of alcohol is a major factor to absenteeism. In support, Osilla *et al.* (2010) report that excessive alcohol and drug use can lead to high employee absenteeism, with high cost implications to the organisation and a negative effect to the organisation's productivity as well.

## 3.6 Consequences of high absenteeism

Workplace policies or guidelines are important in determining what constitutes an acceptable absence. Although absenteeism is mostly viewed negatively, studies show that a normal level of absence is good. An absenteeism rate that is higher than 5% indicates unhappiness amongst employees. Some absence from time to time may relieve work-generated tensions and increase motivation to work harder. However, absenteeism is more detrimental than the perceived positivism. Onikoyi, et al. (2015), noted that absenteeism affects the organisation's outcomes, achieavables especially on quality service delivery and promptness in achieving customer expectations. They further found that, effective human resource management styles can reduce absenteeism and improve the company's productivity, efficiency in service delivery, organisational effectiveness and lastly, may increase the company's profitability and the overall performance of the organisation. Therefore, absenteeism affects the organisation's performance (Tiwari *et al.*, 2014; Onikoyi *et al.*, 2015).

Absenteeism has a detrimental effect on production. It causes work to fall behind schedule and can become a cost concern for the organisation. In the United Kingdom (UK) for instance, on average absenteeism costs organisations approximately £32 billion annually.

Previous researchers such as Hays et al. (1995) and Ulleberg and Rundmo (1997, cited by Spetch, Howland & Lowman, 2011:111) blamed high absenteeism to psychological distress. EAPs are expected to ease psychological distress in employees and therefore improve workplace results.

A major impact of absenteeism is the costs related to staff replacements to handle the excessive workloads and pressures at work. A survey conducted by Kocakulah *et al.* (2009) found that the USA employers lose approximately \$789 per employee per year in direct costs associated with absenteeism, while employers in the UK experience similar costs of around \$694 per employee per year. These costs exclude the cost of lost productivity, extra overtime and hiring of temporary employees. In South African an approximate 4.5%-18% of the workers absent every day. The country loses an approximate R200 per employee on an average salary

of R5,000 per month and a further R600 is considered as added indirect costs related to replacement of employees and lost productivity (Robbins *et al.*, 2009:18).

In addition, Grobler *et al.* (2006) note that on average absenteeism costs South Africa an approximate R12 billion per year. They further attributed these high costs of absenteeism to abuse of sick leave by employees, which abuses are caused by employees' social problems, work-related problems and possibly work conflict in an organisation. The estimated R12 billion per year lost in South Africa through absenteeism was also highlighted by Robbins *et al.* (2009:512). Naidoo (2005:10) reports that the security companies in South African have lost approximate R23 million annually due to absenteeism. Furthermore, a study conducted on absenteeism by the Corporate Absenteeism Management Solutions (CAMS, 2007:1) also identifies absenteeism as a major challenge that has caused billions of Rands losses to the South African economy annually. Chauke (2007) argues that these estimates, indicates that absenteeism is a major challenge in the workplace. Phillips (2012) states that employee absence causes problems for organisations in terms of re-arranging schedules and finding substitutes for work to be completed. Ultimately, this leads to incurring additional costs as argued and discussed earlier on.

According to Maclean (2008), costs associated with absenteeism in an organisation fall within the two main categories of direct and indirect costs. Maclean opines that absenteeism places an extra cost burden on an organisation and cause business failure. Absenteeism is responsible for financial losses through sick leaves, the money paid to people on sick leaves, low production during sick leaves and the reduced service provision because of expertise and human resources shortages. While, the indirect costs may include the disruptions caused when employees are absent, the time spend by management teams revising work schedules, costs incurred in the monitoring and administering the leave policy, disturbances due to workers' turnover and sometimes the costs in the training of replacement workers. In addition, some resentment and lowered morale may also be experienced when some employees are absent and in some cases this may result in workers' turnover (Lambert *et al.*, 2005:166).

Munro (2007) reports that absenteeism can prevent employees from effectively and efficiently performing their duties. Consequently, this can result poor delivery of services, dissatisfactions in customer and poor financial turnover to the company. As mentioned earlier, the present employees may work extra hard to fill the void left by absentees and this could have negative repercussions on the overall productivity and capabilities of the remaining employees. Productivity is further lost when remaining employees undergo training of the temporal workforce (Chauke, 2007). Resultantly, the remaining employees work extra hours to fill in for the absentees, in a way the morale of the staff could be destroyed and delivery of services



may be jeopardised. In some cases clients are dissatisfied because of the services and can even cancel their contracts, which undoubtedly affects the organisation.

### **3.7 Strategies to reduce absenteeism**

The effectiveness of any organisation also lies in its mandate to mitigate absenteeism. Many organisations use a variety of ways to manage absenteeism in the workplace such as attendance rewards, paid time-off programmes, unused leave buyback policies, illness verification and disciplinary action (Mathis, Jackson, Valentine, Meglich, 2015). However, the most important strategy in the reduction of absenteeism is the effective and appropriate use of the EAP. This study argues that the appropriate and effective engagement and utilisation of EAPs in higher education institutions is likely to reduce the current high absenteeism rates. This strategy is worth exploring to discover how it can be useful in reducing the high absenteeism reported in higher education institutions across the globe and particularly in Namibia (Moshokwa, 2016). The EAPs are discussed in detail below.

#### **3.7.1 Employee assistance programmes (EAPs)**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the EAPs are service provided by employers or externally contracted entities to assist employees, helping them to mitigate various challenges that may affect performance of the workers (Bohlander & Snell 2013). EAPs are workplace programme designed to assist 1) work organisations in addressing productivity issues and 2) employees in identifying and resolving personal concerns such as health, marital, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, emotional, stress, or other personal issues that may negatively affect job performance (Bohlander & Snell, 2013:23). The introduction of EAPs in institutions is not only intended to benefit employees, but is also a tool that allows employers to attract, retain and motivate employees to achieve higher efficiency and productivity. Organisations that have adopted EAPs have reported benefits from improved health, lower recruitment costs and reduced absenteeism (Sharar, Pompe & Lennox, 2012).

EAPs can yield positive results in reducing absenteeism if the programme is effectively and appropriately implemented.

Jacobson and Sacco (2012) report that the strength of EAPs lies in its ability to foster employee engagement through education and counselling and this on its own has a high probability of reducing absenteeism. They are supported by Luthans (2008), who indicates that USA organisations which have adopted and implemented the EAPs managed to lower employee absenteeism, lessen the health care costs and reduce discipline related issues at the workplace.

According to Nel *et al.* (2006:318), EAPs are unique interventions that provides various opportunities to establish individuals' and work-related employee issues. EAPs addresses the challenges affecting the employees' wellbeing and affect their work performance. Grobler *et al.* (2006:398) note that approximately 10% of a workforce in any organisation are troubled at any given time. Moshokwa (2016) maintains that EAPs are valuable, as the organisation will have a physically and emotionally stronger workforce, because whenever work or personal problems arise that need professional attention, the facilities will be available and accessible to all employees within the workplace.

According to EASNA (2013), EAP professionals are human behaviour/psychological experts who are trained to provide strategic analysis, guidance and consultation throughout the organisation on principles of human behaviour to enhance organisational performance, culture and business success. The EAPs are well known in the USA and Bernardin and Russell (2013:546) report:

In the USA there are over 10,000 organisations with formal EAPS treating job stress, alcoholism and other forms of drug abuse, marital and emotional difficulties and financial problems.

EAPs use professionals to address employees' personal and work-related problems, thereby benefiting the employee (South African Public Service Commission, 2006:10). Sieberhagen *et al.* (2011) report that the aspects of EAPs, namely identification, assessment, monitoring, referral, counselling and follow-up activities are beneficial to employees who are troubled by their personal and work-related circumstances. According to Connerley and Wu (2016), further benefits of EAPs are the ability to enhance employee wellbeing through cognitive, affective and psychomotor behaviour assessments. Cognitive wellbeing is about the knowledge, skills, abilities and other individual characteristics in an employee, while affective behaviour relates to outcomes such as emotion, moods, attitudes and feelings (Steven *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, with appropriate and effective EAPs, an organisation can tap into the cognitive and affective spaces of employee and bring out their best performance and reduce absenteeism. Hence, EAPs are valuable since they strongly influence cognitive outcomes such as attitudes and emotions, as well as the learning ability of an employee, which positively or negatively hampers knowledge and skills attainment.

### 3.7.2 Other way to reduce absenteeism at the workplace

There are strategies other than the EAPs that can be useful in reducing absenteeism. Efforts should be made to establish cordial relations between employees. Job rotation is one way to reduce the frustrations of employees and to make their jobs more interesting, thereby reducing

absenteeism. Job rotation enriches employees by moving them from one job to another in the same department to broaden their knowledge and skills (Connerley & Wu, 2016).

It is good for companies to put in places policies and attendance strategies that deals with absenteeism. Counsellors should be appointed for employees that are late for work frequently to understand and eradicate the reasons for latecoming (Connerley & Wu, 2016). The counsellors should work in a professional and confidential manner to help employees. Moreover, the management of an organisation must promote a working environment that upholds ethics to decrease absenteeism and resignations (Sieberhagen *et al.*, 2011). The ethical climate of an organisation is about respect by the managers for employees.

### **3.8 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the concept of absenteeism and the importance and potential of EAPs in the workplace. The literature reviewed agrees that absenteeism is a cost to an organisation. Despite many factors that can cause high absenteeism, a programme that deals with the cognitive, affective and psychological aspects of individuals can be effective in reducing high absenteeism. The reviewed literature indicates that although absenteeism is inevitable, it is important that managers and supervisors understand the causes of absenteeism and be more proactive in investigating contributing factors to high sick leave and absenteeism. Lastly, this chapter argues that effective EAPs can be adopted and integrated to manage high absenteeism in an organisation.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES AND OTHER RELATED FACTORS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses EAPs and other work-related factors such as job stress, retention, job-satisfaction and wellness programmes. These factors are related to the EAPs and relates to one another as well.

#### **4.2 Job stress**

Rue and Byars (2010) define stress as the mind and body reflex in response to work conditions. In the workplace, employees struggle to find a balance between work life and personal life and this leads to stress, which affects their ability to do their job effectively. Job stress is strongly linked to employee absenteeism and low productivity and is costly to an organisation. Understanding the concept of job stress is critical in this study, which focuses on the effect of EAPs on absenteeism in institutions of higher learning. Job stress is a well known cause of job dissatisfaction and has been reported as closely linked to unwanted employee behaviours such as absenteeism. Hence, there is a need to discuss and clearly understand the concept of job stress. Knowledge of job stress can be helpful in determining appropriate and effective EAPs that can improve employee well being in tertiary learning institutions such as NUST.

##### **4.2.1 Causes of job stress**

Rue and Byars (2010) opine that the increased blurring or merging of work and home life because of today's technology can result in additional stress on managers and supervisors. Bernardin and Russell (2013) describe job-stress as a condition whereby job-related factors change the employees' psychological and/or physiological situation affecting the person's normal functioning. According to Bernardin and Russell stress is problem faced by workers in today's economy.

Bohlander and Snell (2013:517) mentioned four factors that influence employees' stress, namely, high work demands, high effort that can be expressed as using high mental or physical energy over very long working hours, low control over the job done and low reward in both performance feedback and job recognition.

Bernardin and Russell (2013:542) and Grobler *et al.* (2011:447) summarise the causes of stress as follows:

- Intra-organisational entails the actual environment where employees execute their expected tasks and this include the lighting, levels of noise, the temperatures that workers are exposed to as well as the vibration levels and quality of the air;
- Personal: that includes the unrealistic expectations of self; low time management; poor organisation skills; poor confidence; under- or overestimating abilities, power hungry, poor managerial skills, inability to set limits, for example by saying 'no', financial concerns, role conflict and role ambiguity;
- Interpersonal: obligation to fulfil others' expectations; high expectations on work perfection, lack of authority at work, dealing with aggressive or manipulative people, lack of respect for others, being taken for granted and low decision-making power. Some of these factors lead to alcohol and drug abuse;
- Group level: lack of cohesiveness, intragroup conflict, status incongruence and group dissatisfaction;
- Organisational: inadequate communication systems, extreme managerial styles, lack of experienced staff, poor communication of the organisational values and goals, lack of appreciation of individuality within the organisation, inadequate staffing levels for the job in hand, lack of positive and/or critical feedback to employees and lack of team and organisational identities; and
- Extra-organisational: family relations, economic problems, race and class and residential.

For instance, psychosocial stressors cause anxiety and depressive illness, suicide and family disruption (Bhui, Dinos, Stansfield & White, 2012:1). Therefore, these stressors should be resolved at individual and organisational levels. Drawing from the above discussion on some of the causes of stress, it is the main reason why this study argues that appropriate and effective EAPs are necessary to reduce some of the stress that leads to absenteeism at workplace.

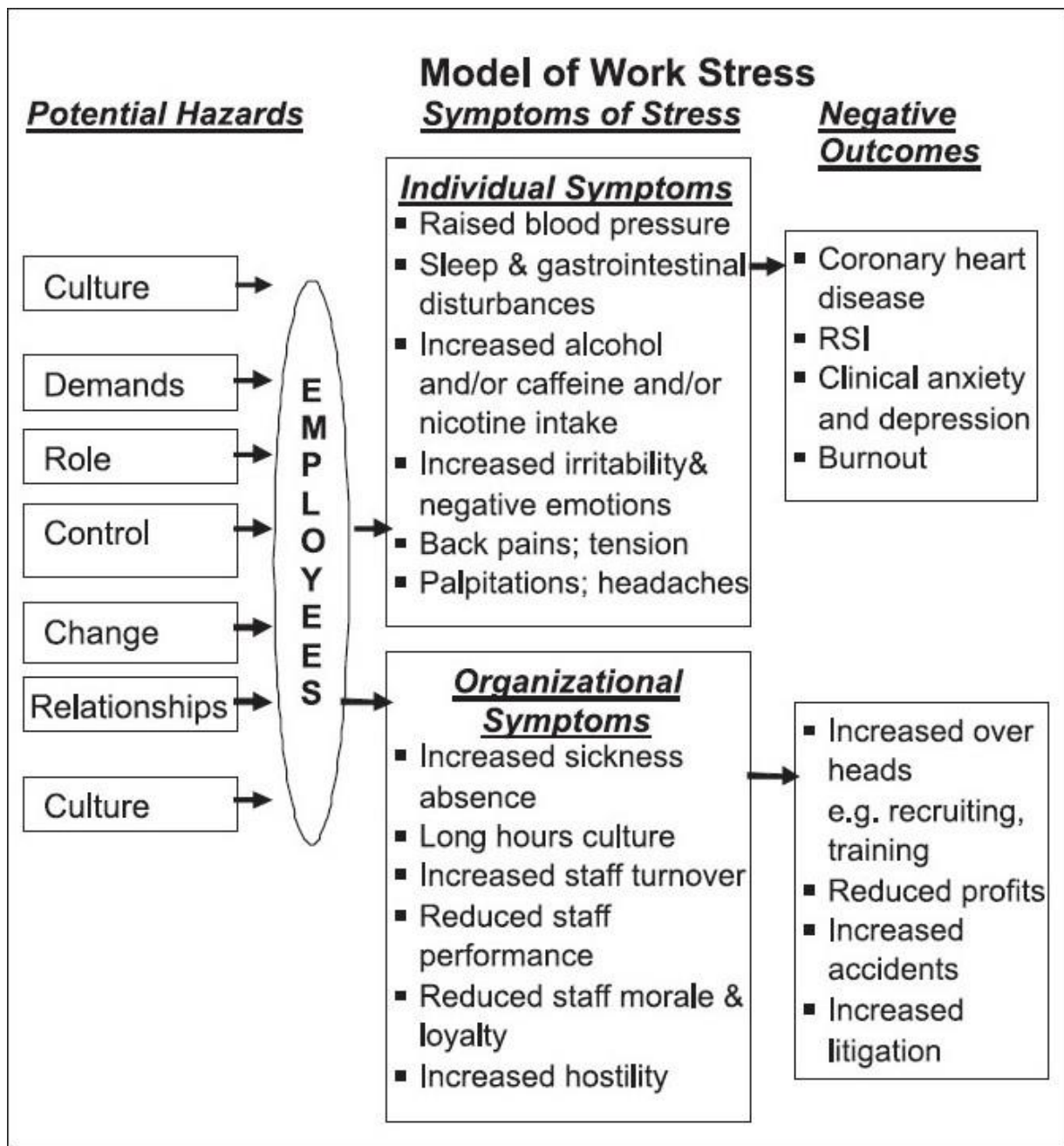
Another important aspect to note is the organisational psychological hazard (OPH) which is known to have a great influence on job stress and job dissatisfaction. Houdmont, Kerr and Randall (2012:183) define OPH as:

...those aspects of work design and the organisation and management of work and their social and organisational contexts, which have the potential for causing psychological, social or physical harm.

It is therefore important to realise that the introduction of EAPs is crucial in this regard. OPH deals with aspects that cause psychological, social and physical harm to the employees (Houdmont *et al.*, 2012). Houdmont *et al.* (2012:15) further report a positive significant correlation between OPH and stress-causing factors. This shows that OPH could be a stress

factor and have an effect on absenteeism since stress is a big factor to absenteeism in workplaces.

Another cause of stress is psychiatric illness, which is strongly linked to high absenteeism (Henderson *et al.*, 2011). There is no doubt that one remedy for psychiatric illness at a workplace are effective EAPs intervention. Henderson *et al.* (2011) argue that the world is changing and employees might experience psychiatric disorders which lead to low productivity through increased absenteeism. They further point out that the psychiatric disorder is mostly likely to occur in academic staff, sales staff and managers in government organisations (such as at universities) where there is extreme pressure on the brain. However, these disorders can be easily dealt with through appropriate and effective stress management programmes, especially on issues relating to individual distress (Henderson *et al.*, 2011). Other immediate remedies to prevent and/or reduce psychiatric disorders include regular exercise and maintaining body weight. However, psychiatric illness might have a permanent effect on employees and this could be costly to the organisation. The cost might include lifetime salary payment to a person's family and some percentage of the medical care services, as well as high absenteeism-related costs.



**Figure 4.1: Model of organisational stress**

(Bernardin & Russell, 2013:542)

The above figure depicts a model of job stress, its causes and outcomes. One should critically look at the outcomes of job stress because they can affect the organisation. The following section discusses what needs to be done.

#### 4.2.2 Controlling job stress

The causes and outcomes of stress are illustrated in Figure 4.1 above. It is important to identify strategies for controlling and managing stress in the workplace. Grobler *et al.* (2011:446-449)

identify the following strategies for stress control, which could be utilised at both an organisational and personal level.

### **Organisational strategies**

- Preventive management: Managers identify potential stressors and take mitigative measures to reduce or eliminate them. Surveys and employee group interviews are important tools to achieve this.
- Maintaining a productive culture: There is a need to develop and adhere to a mission statement which promotes a positive working environment and that increases employees' job satisfaction at the workplace. Hence, there is a need to adopt and implement programmes that can actually create and maintain a positive culture as a significant aspect of a stress-reduction strategy.
- Management by objectives: commonly referred to as performance appraisal techniques, that identifies the employees' goals, clarify the roles and responsibilities and strengthens the communication in the organisation. This technique can reduce employees' stress by eliminating the uncertainties in critical aspects of employees' jobs.
- Controlling the physical environment: this suggests creating a conducive physical environment so as to reduce stress and this can be achieved through several strategies. One strategy will be to reduce the noise and improve temperature controls in the physical environment. A second strategy will be to improve safety by providing employees with protective equipment.
- Employee fitness facilities: Brought in as a component of EAPs and it includes the provision of physical fitness facilities so as to improve the employees' health and morale thereby reducing employee boredom and stress. In Namibia, there are various fitness facilities (gyms) such as Virgin Active, Nucleus, Exclusive Health Wellness and others subscribed to for employees by their medical aids.

### **Personal strategies**

- Meditation: The most common meditation form is Transcendental Meditation (TM). In using TM, the participant silently utters a mantra, a word or sound on which to concentrate to enter a state of mental or physical relaxation. It was found that meditation can reduce anxiety and improve work performance and job satisfaction.
- Exercise: Employees should always keep their bodies fit. Exercise is one of the least expensive and potentially most effective stress reduction strategies. This includes jogging, racket sports, fitness classes, cycling and swimming. It is noted that a sound physical fitness programme can improve mental health and physical well-being of employees.



- Removing the causes of stress: Causes of stress can sometimes be easily recognised. These include a confrontational supervisor, difficult support staff and no possibility for advancement. What is important here is to remove or lessen the cause.
- Becoming a mentor: When one has mastered one's own job, helping a junior person to learn the job and the organisation's culture can reduce excessive stress.
- Seeking counselling: Stress is one of the common psychological problems. Counsellors and industrial psychologists can offer helpful insights and stress-reduction techniques such as hypnosis, which alleviate problems. Counselling is one of the less expensive techniques compared to an employee quitting a job.
- Extended leave: Taking extended leave, such as an extended vacation, sabbatical or personal leave could be an adventure to resolve stress-causing problems. Upon returning to work, the employee might find some of the problems have resolved themselves and that others do not cause the same high levels of stress as they did before.

The benefits to be attained from EAPs include an increase in productivity, which show financial turnover to the organisation's investment (Bross, Kelton & Cronin, 1999:3). Bross *et al.* further note that managers work extra up to an approximate nine hours to deal with a troubled employees, by providing close monitoring, addressing internal co-worker conflicts, mending mistakes and mitigating the lag in production. In a way, when workers feel they are supported, they tend to commit and stay longer in the organisation. Another benefit of EAPs is on job stress, it reduces most of the expenses related to the recruiting, training and lost productions in cases of absenteeism and worker turnover. Similarly, reduced disability claims show that employers care for their employees.

### **4.3 EAPs and job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction, as defined above, is crucial in any organisation. EAPs are a tool that can be used to achieve job satisfaction. It is important for an organisation to ensure that employees are satisfied in their jobs so that they do not leave the organisation. Generally, if employees are satisfied with their jobs, it means their wellbeing is being taken care of by the organisation.

If EAPs are incorporated into the work design it helps to improve job satisfaction. In support of this notion, Grobler *et al.* (2006) posit that employees in Japan are ardent supporters of quality work life, which designs work around teams and a strong company culture. The result is not only higher productivity but lower absenteeism and turnover. The Japanese example is worth emulating as it fosters a good relationship between employees in the organisation that

positively influences high productivity. This is the main goal of all organisations operating in today's turbulent and competitive environment.

#### **4.4 EAPs and personal problems**

People are different and they experience different problems at home or in the workplace. Therefore, EAPs are required to mitigate these problems to ensure a healthy and productive work environment and yield a competitive advantage in an organisation. This notion was supported by Swanepoel *et al.* (2008:559) who state that EAPs are an intervention provided to employees with professional and personal challenges. Personal problems may include marital concerns, family issues and substance abuse (Duvenhage, 2017). These problems lead to a lack of concentration at the workplace. Therefore, professional treatment usually includes counselling which is of vital importance in this regard. It is noted that counselling is an effective tool in managing the impacts of employees' stress in the workplace.

Furthermore, employees that experience personal and social problems are usually stressed and may not perform effectively at work. EAPs are professional could be contracted to train managers on how to recognise employees' troubles before their performance is affect. This is very helpful in balancing employees' work and family issues (Fully Effective Employees, 2012). Similarly, if employees realise that they are valued and given a free, confidential resource to address their personal troubles, they are likely to feel important and appreciated and resultantly, they may become loyal to the employer (Fully Effective Employees, 2012).

Additionally, the South African Public Service asserts that EAPs were meant to address various problems that are experienced by public servants, which had negative effects on their productivity. These problems include "substance abuse or dependency, adaptation problems, employee conflict, mental and personal relationship problems, personnel development and diseases such as cancer and counselling needs", in the workplace (South African Public Service Commission, 2006). This implies that if employees experience personal problems the solution lies in EAPs for them to recover.

#### **4.5 Retention and EAPs**

Retention is about keeping competent employees for a long time to achieve a competitive advantage. One of the incentives that organisations could use to attract and retain competent employees is to have EAPs interventions in place.

#### 4.5.1 Retention strategies

Each organisation should have retention strategies to retain competent employees. Losing employees to rival organisations is very costly and could lead to a reduction in market share. It is important that retention strategies are thoughtful and comprehensive. For example, Shikongo (2010) proposes crucial retention strategies that might help organisations to create conducive working conditions and environments.

#### 4.5.2 Improvement in human resources development

According to Shikongo (2010), another retention strategy is in improving the human resource department to enable the department to identify problems of employees and capacitate their developmental needs. This helps the organisation to promote employees' individual development and ensures the organisation achieves its goals, thereby increasing employees' intentions to stay with the organisation as well as reducing negative behaviours such as absenteeism.

#### 4.5.3 Company branding

Another retention strategy is company branding (Shikongo, 2010). Shikongo argues the need for a positive corporate image since talented employees do not want to be associated with a company with a negative corporate image. Talented employees are likely to be attracted to organisations with a positive public image because employees are judged by their employers or organisational image. Therefore, a positive corporate culture and image are critical in branding. This will increase employee motivation, maintain employee retention and reduce employee absenteeism (Shikongo, 2010:23). Furthermore, a good corporate culture and image are closely associated with improved company market share and employee retention.

#### 4.5.4 Employee motivation

According to Shikongo (2010), both intrinsic and extrinsic factors can motivate employees thereby, lessening employee absenteeism. The author notes that the complex part is that there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to motivation. Employees are motivated differently by different things or circumstances in a workplace and biographic characteristics such as age, upbringing, personal circumstances and career goals affects the levels of employee motivation. For instance, a good salary can be motivate a graduate to start a new life, while, job security may motivate a middle aged person, whilst the opportunity to after retirement medical aid access can motivate a person to approaching retirement age. Shikongo further argues for the need to investigate each group's motivation so as to establish motivation

strategies that fit the unique workforce and increases the employees' retention and reduce high levels of employee absenteeism.

#### 4.5.5 Establishment of an employee wellness programme

Shikongo (2010) identifies employee wellness programmes (EWP) as another important strategy to deal with employee retention and other negative behaviours such as absenteeism. Further, she describes EWP as a care intervention programme for important employees of the organisation. Healthy workforce in a company pose a competitive advantage because the workers tend to be productive compared to otherwise. Therefore, there is a need to be educate the employees on the dangers of unhealthy lifestyles and encourage them to have a healthy life so as to realise their full physical and mental potential. This can lower medical and absenteeism related costs. For example, availing of fitness facilities manned by qualified trainers on the company's premises can be a fruitful initiative. All the employees should be encouraged to have access to the fitness facilities so as to promote a healthy living and also be used to attract and retain talented employees. Ultimately, this would help to retain employees, attract new talented employees and reduce negative behaviours such as absenteeism.

#### 4.5.6 Development of remuneration reward systems and benefits

According to Shikongo (2010), remuneration is another factor that influences employee retention. Quality staff are attracted and retained with competitive salaries in the labour market. There should be proper and regular market research to determine the remuneration incentives in the labour market and adjust accordingly. In addition, there is also a need for fair evaluation of individual or team performance and link performance to rewards. This will reward those who work hard but also encourage poor performers to improve so they too may be rewarded. Considering the fact that employees are always at different stages of life, their needs are also different hence, it is important to include age when deciding the benefit packages to offer to the employees. Employees should have a choice, rather than impose a 'one size fits all package'. Reward systems boost employee confidence, foster willingness to remain with one company and minimise unwanted behaviours such as absenteeism.

#### 4.5.7 Leadership style

According to Shikongo (2010), another retention strategy is organisational leadership style. The preferred leadership style is democratic, that encourages workers to have a say in the decision-making process and develop participatory work plans, setting goals and utilises employee reflections to improve the organisation. Staff feedback foster employee ownership and commitment to the organisation, thereby lessening incidences of employee absenteeism.

#### 4.5.8 Work-life balance

Shikongo (2010) suggests work-life balance as another strategy that can be utilised to maintain employee retention and reduce employee absenteeism. She argues that organisations should implement a work-life balance programme since employees are moving towards gender equality in the workplace and this would fulfil the objectives of the Namibian Affirmative Action (Act 29 of 1998). Therefore, a company must put interventions to help employees to maintain a balance between their work and private life. For instance, the introduction of flexible working hours, provision of primary life support like childcare centres and breastfeeding time off. These initiatives create a working environment that encourages employees to stay and avoids unwanted behaviours such as absenteeism.

#### 4.6 Wellness programmes

Wellness programmes can be incorporated in EAPs. Wellness is defined as a free lifestyle aimed at adopting and achieving individual's good health (Bernardin & Russell, 2013:548). From this definition, it can be assumed that maintaining good health is part of the EAP. Grobler *et al.* (2011) outline the most common wellness activities offered to employers regarding employees' problems include cessation of smoking, health-risk appraisals, back care, stress management, exercise/physical fitness, on-the-job accident prevention, nutrition education, blood pressure checks and weight control.

According to Grobler *et al.* (2011), wellness activities can only be realised if certain components are recognised:

- i) The first is that there should be awareness. The health hazard appraisal (HHA) provides individual and family education and knowledge on potential premature death or disease.
- ii) Employees must be educated. The HHA counsellor outlines various on-site fitness activities and programmes that are aimed at changing the employee's behaviour.
- iii) Offers financial incentives to the employees when they manage to achieve and maintain personal goals.
- iv) The programmes should be held on-site, which can prove convenient for employees, especially those who rely on public transportation.
- v) There should be a variety of programmes on offer and employees should be given a chance to participate in the range of programmes offered. The programmes should be provided through self-action of the employees.
- vi) The programmes should be made available and accessible to employees and be included as a medical benefit.

- vii) Finally, there should be follow-ups for example, reminder mails with critical information like blood pressure screenings and mammograms.

#### **4.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter addressed work-related issues and their association with EAPs. The main focus was on the causes of job stress and the strategies to mitigate them. Furthermore, other factors which were discussed were retention, wellness programmes, job satisfaction and personal problems.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter is a research design and methodology section. It presents a narrative on how data was acquired, analysed, interpreted and discussed. The details of the mixed methods approach that is the qualitative and quantitative research philosophies are also revealed. In this chapter the study population, random and purposive sampling, the questionnaire were also discussed and the chapter concludes by discussing the ethics observed in this study.

#### **5.2 Research philosophy**

The research methodology chosen and applied to this study is explained in detail in this section. According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:2), research methodology "...considers and explains the logic behind research methods and techniques." There are three broad research methodologies, namely quantitative, qualitative and mixed research methodology and these are referred to as the research philosophy. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000) describe research philosophy as a broad view or perspective of knowing a phenomenon. In this study, a mixed research approach was used which entailed the use of both qualitative and quantitative research philosophies. These philosophies are apparently underpinned by an interpretivist research paradigm which is later described as an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with "making meaning and interpretations in real life cases to understand the phenomenon" (Bush, 2003:122). The interpretive approach was ideal for this study, it allowed for indepth understanding of the phenomenon. It acknowledges that society's experiences are real and must not be taken for granted and through interactions and listening to what they have to say, the researchers can understand the people's experiences (Bush, 2003:122). Hence, through the interpretivist research paradigm the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing absenteeism at the workplace can be determined.

According to Trochim (2006) qualitative research approach relies on the word descriptions of the phenomenon. Qualitative approach produced the data, used to describe how the causes of high absenteeism, the relationship between job stress, job satisfaction and absenteeism, as well as the better practices in EAPs towards absenteeism reduction in institutions of higher learning. McPhil (2006) posit that in qualitative approach social process are important and the general description on how society interpret and assign meanings to their social-world is equally important.

The quantitative philosophy measures variables in a quantitative way (Mertens, 2005). The approach deals with statistical data gathering and providing the numerical explanations to the phenomenon. In this study it focuses on measuring how effective are the EAPs in reducing absenteeism.

In addition, the quantitative research philosophy involves collecting and analysing statistical data to completely understand the research problem (Creswell, 2002). The quantitative research philosophy employs empirical methods and statements (Cohen, 1980). An empirical statement describes the case in the real world and not what ought to be the case. Typically, empirical statements are expressed in numerical terms. Empirical statements sought to assess the extent to which a specific programme achieves its intended standards or norms.

The interpretivist paradigm was used because it proposes making meaning and interpreting real life cases (Bush, 2003:122) to understand the phenomenon. Secondly, it allowed for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and assumed that society's real life experiences must be seriously considered and through interactions we should be able to understand their experiences (Bush, 2003:122). In other words, the researcher had to make interpretations and relate the meaning to the effectiveness of the EAPs as a strategy to reduce absenteeism at the workplace.

A quantitative research philosophy enabled the researcher to use statistical descriptions to create frequency tables describing and explaining the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing absenteeism. This gave an opportunity to clearly represent the statistical data for comparative purposes. The interpretivist approach allowed learning, participation and involvement of the researcher in the study process (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The mixed research philosophy was deemed ideal for this study because it managed to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods to bring forth a better understanding of the employee-absenteeism experienced at NUST and how the EAPs can be effective in reducing employee-absenteeism.

### **5.3 Research design**

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) define research design as the method of gathering, categorising, recording and comparison of the information gathered to understand the logic, sequence and meaning. It involves all issues pertaining to the management and execution of the study process, ranging from investigation of the problems through to reporting and publication of results (Bryman, 2001). Lacobucci and Churcill (2010) describe the research design as a blueprint that is followed to complete the study. A research design entails all the processes to acquire data on how the EAPs can be effective in reducing the high absenteeism rates at NUST.



In this study, a descriptive survey design was employed to acquire data from the NUST. A descriptive survey design is concerned with gaining a more in-depth understanding about the characteristics within a given field of study (Burns & Grove, 2013). Hence, the descriptive design was used to assess the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing absenteeism at the NUST.

A descriptive survey design involves the collecting of data from various audiences to describe a phenomenon. A descriptive survey was selected because it can incorporate sampling as argued by Chiromo (2006), that sampling is the lynchpin of a descriptive survey. Therefore, in this study the design allowed for easy, wisely and effectively management of time. Furthermore, it was appropriate because it can incorporate both the qualitative and quantitative instruments such as questionnaires and interviews. To add on, the design was reflexive and allowed the researcher to learn from the respondents' thoughts (Borg & Gall, 2000). Hence, it gave an opportunity to judge responses prior to conclusions.

In addition, the design enabled acquisition of data from a wide spectrum of respondents through a questionnaire, identification of variables and hypothetical constructs. The descriptions offered by the design can be used for theory or model testing. It is against this background that a descriptive survey design was chosen.

#### **5.4 Study population**

According to Polit and Beck (2012), a population entails all the cases in which the researcher is interested. Mureith (2010) describes population as the collective entities that share similar characteristics. According to Chiromo (2006:26) a "study population is the complete individual units, objects or events that are studied." In the current study, the population was derived from the context of the problem that was examined. Polit and Beck (2012) further distinguish study population into two distinctive groups, namely the accessible and the target population. In essence, the accessible population is the particular population which can be reached by the researcher while, the target population entails the entire group of individuals that are within the sampling framework (Grove *et al.*, 2013). In this study, the population was the 670 administrative staff and over 300 academic staff at NUST, including non-management employees, supervisors, HoDs and directors from all five departments and six faculties of the NUST.

#### **5.5 Sampling frame**

Sampling frame comprises of the particular members of the target population that completed the questionnaires and were interviewed. The researcher was interested in the academic and non-academic staff members at the NUST because these respondents have first-hand

information on absenteeism and its impact on quality of education. To add on, these are the employees who are affected most and likely to be absent. These are the very employees who occupy administrative positions and have the responsibility of caring for other employees, hence they have a responsibility to adopt, implement and monitor the EAPs. Yin (2004) describes them as data-rich respondents. The frame comprises all the employees in the administrative departments at NUST as described in section 5.4 above. In essence, the Cochran (1963) sampling frame was used to come up with the study sample. Since, this study population was large (970) the study implied Cochran (1963:75) Equation 1 to produce a representative sample for proportions.

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

In essence, Cochran (1963) formula suggests the following:  $n_0$  - is the sample size,

$Z$  - is the abscissa of the normal curve that cuts off an area  $\alpha$  at the tails ( $1 - \alpha$  equals the desired confidence level, e.g., 95%),

$E$  - is the desired level of precision,

$p$  - is the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population and

$q$  is  $1-p$ .

while, the value for  $Z$  is found in statistical tables which contain the area under the normal curve.

Henceforth, the Cochran sample frame was used to categorise this study's sample frame. The Cochran Sample frame is shown in table 5.1:

**Table 5.1: Cochran's (1963) Sampling frame categories**

Size of Population	Sample Size (n) for Precision (e) of:			
	±3%	±5%	±7%	±10%
500	a	222	145	83
600	a	240	152	86
700	a	255	158	88
800	a	267	163	89
900	a	277	166	90
1,000	a	286	169	91
2,000	714	333	185	95
3,000	811	353	191	97
4,000	870	364	194	98
5,000	909	370	196	98
6,000	938	375	197	98
7,000	959	378	198	99
8,000	976	381	199	99
9,000	989	383	200	99
10,000	1,000	385	200	99
15,000	1,034	390	201	99
20,000	1,053	392	204	100
25,000	1,064	394	204	100
50,000	1,087	397	204	100
100,000	1,099	398	204	100
>100,000	1,111	400	204	100

**a = Assumption of normal population is poor (Yamane, 1967). The entire population should be sampled.**

Source: Adapted from Israel (1992: 3)

Applying the understanding drawn from Cochran's (1963) the sample frame categories it can then be argued that, the desired sample size of 110 employees is reliable, justifiable and representative at ±10% precision level and at 95% confidence level. Considering that this study's population is 970 inclusive of the academic and non academic employees then, a sample of 110 is justified and reliable since it exceed the recommended sample of 90. The sample frame and the process of selection for this study is further discussed in section 5.6.

## 5.6 Sample and sampling technique

According to Frankel and Wallen (2006) it is from the study population where the researchers choose a sample from which they would gather data and make references on information. A sample is therefore defined as the subset or a smaller group of respondents chosen from the whole population in the study (Chiromo, 2006). In essence, the sample is chosen from the entire study population and is used as an estimate or representative measurement of the entire population within the required limits. Creswell (2002) describes a sample as a sub-group of the entire target population that the researcher intends to gather data from and generalise to the whole population. In this study, the sample was 110 individuals, the 100 who completed the questionnaire and 10 who were interviewed.

The study employed two sampling techniques in the selection of the respondents, namely probability and non-probability techniques. Struwig and Stead (2001) explain that in probability sampling the whole population has an equal chance to be included in the sample. Types of probability sampling techniques include random, stratified, cluster, systematic random and multi-stage area random sampling. For the purpose of this study the simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 respondents from the entire complement of non-academic and academic staff members at NUST. Wiid and Diggins (2013) describe random sampling as a probability selection where every unit has a positive chance of being chosen.

Furthermore, the study utilised a non-probability technique in selecting the 10 key respondents. Grove *et al.* (2013) note that in a non-probability sampling not all units in the population have equal opportunities of being chosen into the sample. The non-probability sampling techniques tend to increase the likelihood of choosing unrepresentative samples of own population. However, since qualitative research is conducted to gain insight and discover meaning about a particular experience or situation, non-probability sampling is ideal it allows a researcher to target knowledgeable respondents who offer valuable and meaningful information. Non-probability sampling techniques include network (snowballing), purposive, judgemental, convenience and theoretical sampling.

In this study, the purposive sampling was employed to have a deeper understanding from the particular sample and not to generalise the findings. Purposive sampling is described by Repper and Carter (2011) as a convenient or purposeful choosing of respondents from a wider population and Yin (2004:106) referred these respondents as 'data rich' respondents. The researcher used her understanding, knowledge and judgement to choose the respondents.

The purposive sampling method was used because it enabled the selection of resourceful respondents who were knowledgeable in the area of study, thereby minimising irrelevant data

(Yin, 2004; Mertens, 2005). Furthermore, it allowed for collection of very informative data from the respondents. Lastly, purposive sampling was ideal and economical since only the researcher was involved in the selection process. Although the method is known to have limitations in the form of bias and subjectivity, the researcher deemed it the most appropriate method. The criteria for respondent selection were observed closely and the researcher was only concerned with an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing absenteeism.

## **5.7 Data collection instruments**

There are several data collecting procedures and they depend on study purpose and aim. In this study, the two data collection instruments used to collect data were a questionnaire and interviews. These methods are ideal for collecting qualitative and quantitative data (Grove *et al.*, 2013). A structured questionnaire and face-to-face interviews were used as the primary instruments to assess the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing absenteeism at NUST. These two methods are discussed and explained in detail below.

### **5.7.1 Questionnaire**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described questionnaire as statements or questions that measure respondent's attitude and opinions on certain phenomenon. One hundred (100) semi-structured questionnaires were used to acquire data from randomly selected participants from five departments within NUST (see Appendix D). According to Patton (2002), a semi-structured questionnaire encompasses both open-ended questions on which the respondents answer openly and closed questions with a list of answers from which the respondent is expected to choose from. This instrument reduced the volumes of irrelevant data and assessing relationships of the variables.

The questionnaire was pilot tested for reliability and validity on six employees from the HR department before being self-administered to the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two broad sections, namely the demographic section which acquired relevant biographical information and the last section, which acquired data on the three problem areas and addressed the four objectives of the study. The questionnaire was designed based on the theoretical framework discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

The questionnaire comprised 28 questions that were divided into three sections as follows:

**Section A:** consisted of 09 questions on general demographics.

**Section B:** consisted of 25 questions which sought to answer EAPs questions.

**Section C:** consisted of seven questions on jobs, organisational and external factors.

**Section D:** consisted of seven questions on the effectiveness of EAPs as a strategy in reducing absenteeism.

By using a semi-structured questionnaire, the researcher was able to organise the questions and receive responses in a systematic, logical and coherent way and because the questionnaire was flexible, it helped the researcher to acquire data from diverse respondents. The questionnaire helped in achieving a high response rate, considering that they were self-administered to the respondents. Self-administration of a questionnaire enables smooth data acquisition and for clarity, whenever respondents are not sure of the question, they can ask the researcher for assistance; a questionnaire is impersonal. (Walliman, 2011).

The questionnaire was selected because of its easiness to design and use to acquire data from a wide population. A questionnaire helped to uphold issues of participant anonymity and privacy. A questionnaire increased the chances of acquiring authentic information from the sample. In addition, Haralambos and Holborn (2004) opine that a questionnaire is effective, can be distributed to the rightful sample and has the potential to yield exact results. In this study, a pilot test was done to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

#### 5.7.2 Interview

In addition to the use of questionnaires, the researcher collected data through interviews. There are three main types of Interviews, namely unstructured, semi-structured and structured (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). This study used the semi-structured interview to acquire data from 10 interviewees. Interviews are “interactions between the participant and the qualitative researcher that produce data as words” (Grove *et al.*, 2013:271). Frey and Oishi (1995) define semi-structured interview as a face-to-face interaction with an interviewee who responds to the questions asked. In this study, a face-to-face interview guide was developed (see Appendix E) and was used to acquire data from the 10 purposively selected key respondents namely, the supervisors, HoDs and directors. Ruane (2016:291) describes an interview guide as:

...a list of exact questions (and response options) to be presented (in order and verbatim) in the interview, a list of the authorized probes and follow ups for any open-ended questions.

In this study, after the ethical clearance and consent procedures were completed, the researcher made appointments with the 10 interviewees. The schedules were flexible and the interviews were convened at convenient places and at convenient times. If the keyrespondent was busy or unprepared, the researcher postponed the interview. The interviews lasted between 10 to 25 minutes and were audiotaped, with permission from the participant to ensure

an accurate account of the interview, which could be replayed for analytic purposes. In the interview process, anonymity was assured and maintained as well as during the interview recording. The interviews were conducted over three weeks (one interview per day), this gave the researcher an opportunity to pre-analyse and do necessary changes before the next interview. The researcher also took notes during the interviews. The interview guides had a respective numbering for anonymity but also source indexing purposes.

## **5.8 Data collection procedures**

Data was collected in phases, in the first phase preparations and a pilot study was conducted. Six employees from the HR department, were asked to analyse and answer the questions. A critically review of the questionnaire was convened so as to simplify it, making it easier for the respondents to complete. The adjusted questionnaire was designed and employed to acquire data (see Appendix D). Each questionnaire contained a covering letter, which outlined the research to the respondents (see Appendix B). A peer review was used to measure consistency, relevance, trustworthiness, clarity and reliability of the questionnaire.

The researcher sought permission to do the study and involve the academic and non-academic staff members at NUST. The process involved obtaining permission from the NUST Human Resources Office (see Appendix A). During this initial visit, the researcher negotiated consent from the interviewees who were purposefully chosen. The researcher personally met with the respondents and explained the study purpose, objectives, data collection plan and procedure. Each interviewee was given a copy of the interview guide for them to familiarise themselves with the questions and be aware of the ground expected to be covered in the study. The researcher then gave the interviewees the informed consent form (see Appendix C) together with the introductory letter from the University

This was followed by a visit to NUST, to sample the respondents, as described in section 5.6 and to acquire the respondents' consent to participate. After random selection of the 100 respondents, the objectives and data acquisition procedures were explained to the respondents. The respondents' rights were explained to them, including the right to withhold information and to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished. Respondents' names were withdrawn and their confidentiality was promised. A consent form together with the Registrar's approval and the introductory letter from the University were used to negotiate consent with the study's respondents. All the targeted 100 respondents in this study agreed and signed the consent letter and returned it to the researcher (Appendix C).

In the second visit 100 questionnaires were self-distributed to the respondents who were randomly chosen for this study. The researcher collected and labelled and coded all the

completed questionnaires with individual anonymous codes. The questionnaires were kept in a safe place to which only the researcher had access. A preliminary data analysis was conducted prior to the interview phase.

During this second phase the 10 face-to-face interviews were conducted. The researcher organised a quiet environment for the interviews and arranged a suitable appointment date and time with the interviewees. At the pre-arranged time, the researcher travelled to the appointment venue and conducted the interview, which entailed asking questions and the interviewee answering and engaging in a conversation. An audio recorder was used to capture the entire interview, which was later transcribed. The researcher also took notes during the interviews. If the interviewee was unavailable, the researcher rescheduled the interview for another time suitable to the interviewee. This happened on two occasions with one particular participant. All the interview schedules were coded for anonymity and confidentiality purposes. The interview audio records were labelled, saved in anonymous folders and stored in soft copy format and locked with a personalised code for security purposes.

## **5.9 Pilot test**

A pilot test of the instrument were done with six staff members from the HR department. This was done to ensure that the questioning was clear, logical, coherent, reliable and valid for achieving the desired results. The outcomes were satisfactory as positive comments were given and necessary adjustments were made to the questionnaire.

## **5.10 Data management and analysis plan**

Jackson (2009) reports that data analysis entails the process of uncovering the trends and patterns in the data sets while interpretation sought to give an explanation to the discovered patterns and trends. In this study, data management involved the capture and storage of all data collected. Data was source indexed and interview transcriptions were labelled. Data were stored in multiple sources. A backup was done using USBs for safety and security reasons. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v23.0 was used to analyse data generated through the 100 questionnaires and a thematic analysis on 10 interviews. These data analysis procedures are described below.

### **5.10.1 Statistical analysis procedure**

SPSS was used to organise and analyse data generated from the questionnaires. Themes and categories were converted to the format required by the SPSS template. Data was entered manually into the SPSS template, covering every question and the responses. Descriptive referential statistics and one-sample t-test was conducted to test the hypotheses of the study



and quantify the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing absenteeism at the workplace. Frequency tables and thick data description were used to present data.

#### 5.10.2 Thematic analysis procedure

The qualitative data were analysed by means of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a “process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge” (Grove *et al.*, 2013:279). Data generated from the 10 interviews were analysed through thematic means. Direct quotations and thick description of the findings and insights was done.

### 5.11 Ethical considerations

Walliman (2011:245) opines that:

Social research and other forms of research that study people and their relationships with each other and with the world need to be particularly sensitive about issues of ethical behaviour.

Goddard and Melville (2001) inform that collecting data from respondents (people) raises ethical concerns. This includes taking care to avoid harming people, having due regard for their privacy, respecting them as individuals and not subjecting them to unnecessary research. As argued by Welman *et al.*, (2005:201), the researcher took note of the following ethics.

#### **Informed consent**

The respondents were fully informed of the purpose of the study before acquiring their permission to involvement and participation.

#### **Right to privacy**

Respondents had the freedom to maintain privacy of information and decided which information is shared or reserved.

#### **Protection from harm**

The researcher promised and gave the respondents an assurance that no physical and emotional harm shall happen to them during and after the study.

#### **Involvement of the researcher**

Participants were treated as individual human beings and not as objects or subjects. Hence the researcher showed respect for individuals and for the group throughout the study.

## **5.12 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the methodological descions took in this study. The chapter gave a trail on data acquisition process. It explained how data shall be presented in subsequent chapters that follows.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the results of this study. These results were collected from 100 questionnaires that were self-administered and the 10 face-to-face interviews. The data was presented in two phases, firstly, the quantitative results gathered from the questionnaires and secondly, qualitative findings from the face-to-face interviews.

#### **6.2 Results from the quantitative section of the study**

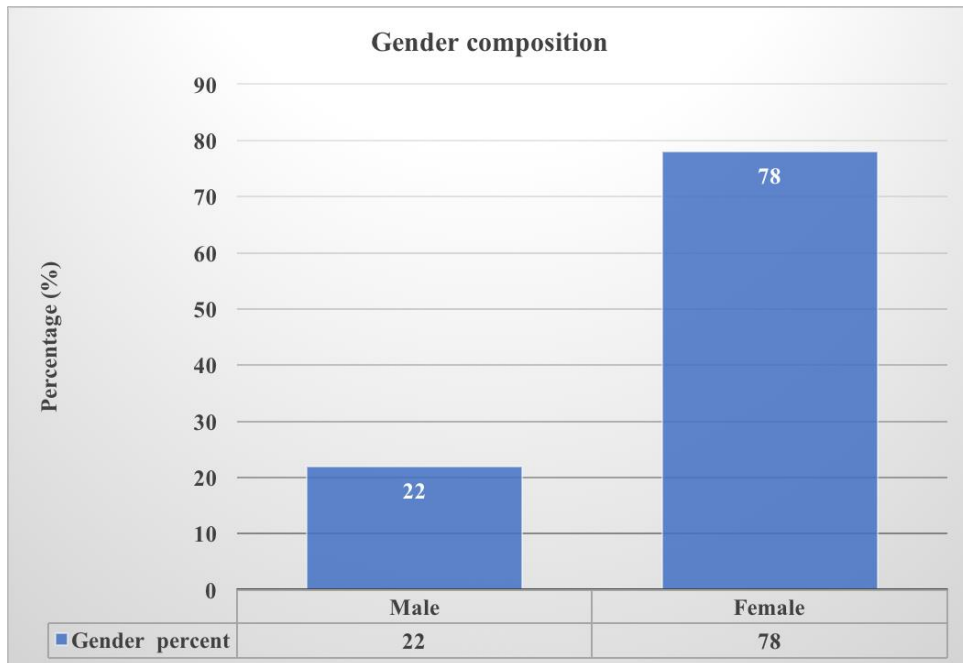
The findings on the demographic characteristics of the 100 respondents is presented and discussed below.

##### **6.2.1 Demographic characteristics**

The demographic characteristics of the 100 respondents are presented below.

##### **6.2.1.1 Gender**

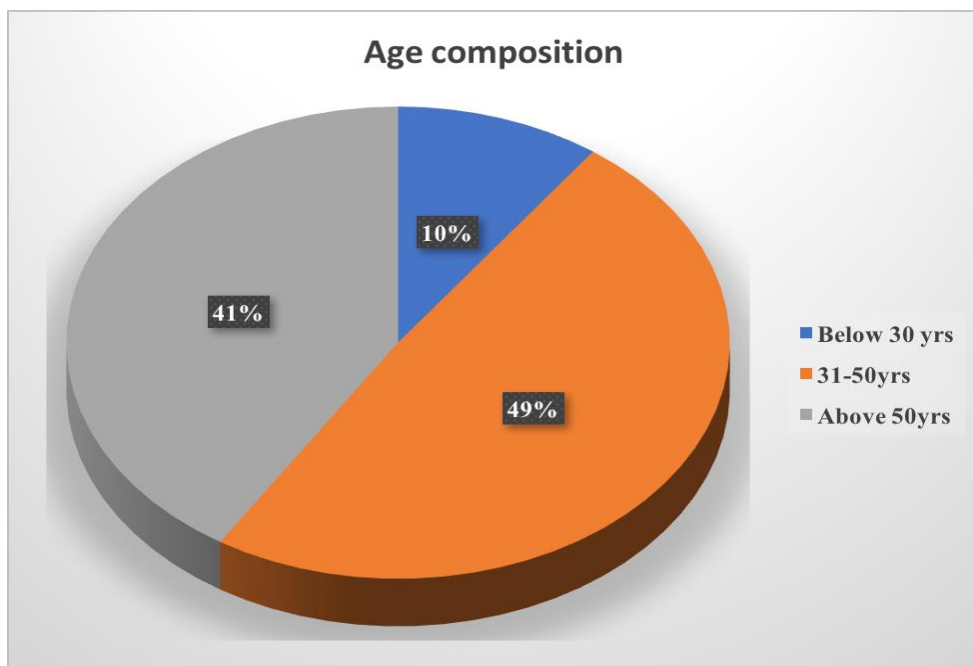
Figure 6.1 shows the respondents' gender composition. The results reveal that the majority of respondents were female (78%), while males constituted only 22% of the population. This difference in gender composition is not unique but aligns with the patriarchal ideology which limited women to secretarial, office clerks and teaching professions, whilst physical jobs were associated with men. However, gender is a factor to consider because job satisfaction, job stress levels and absenteeism differ by gender as well (Cohen & Golan, 2007). Hence, gender in this study is an important variable to consider.



**Figure 6.1: Gender characteristics**

*6.2.1.2 Age composition*

The study sought age composition of the respondents and results are shown in Figure 6.2 below.

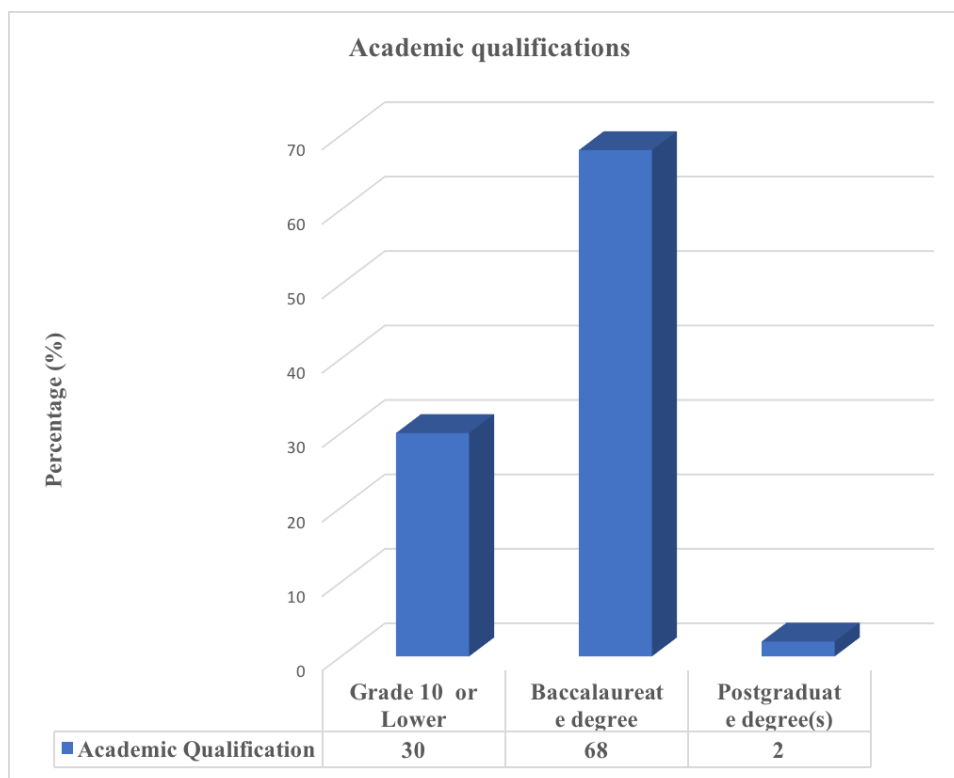


**Figure 6.2: Age composition.**

Figure 6.2 shows that the majority of the respondents (49%) were between the ages of 31-50 years, 41% were over 50 years and the remaining 10% were below 30 years of age. In this case, age relates to absenteeism, as noted by Cohen and Golan (2007). They found that age is the most studied demographic characteristic that affects absenteeism. Lau *et al.* (2003) report that most results in the field revealed that novices took short sick leave days when compared to elderly workers. They further argue that older employees hold more responsible positions, hence they were respectful and committed making them always at work. In contrast, Lambert *et al.* (2005) concludes that elderly employees are likely to absent more due to health issues. This inconsistency piqued the researcher's curiosity on how age can be influential in this study where the majority of respondents were below the age of 50 years. Therefore, age is a critical variable to be considered in this study.

### 6.2.1.3 Academic qualifications

The study investigated the respondents' academic qualifications and the results are presented in Figure 6.3 below.



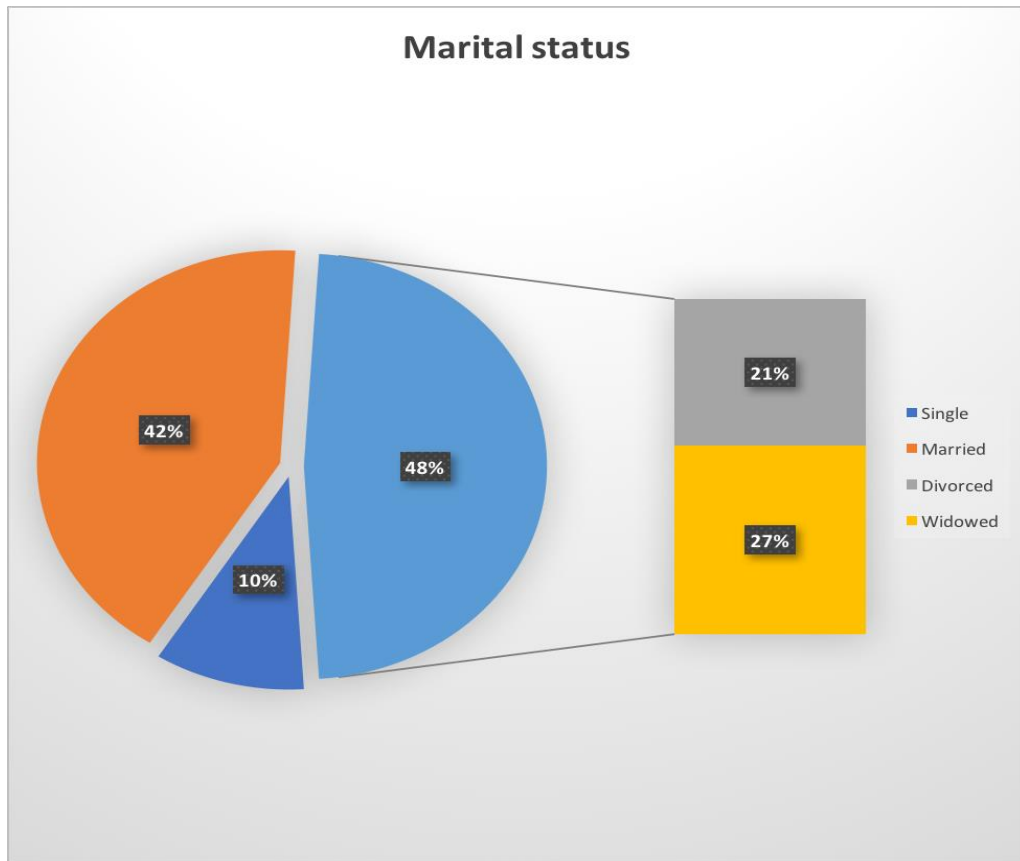
**Figure 6.3: Academic qualifications**

Figure 6.3 shows that respondents in this study were well educated. The majority of respondents (68%) have a Baccalaureate degree, 2% have a postgraduate qualification and 30% have attained grade 10 or lower. This shows that the study population is well educated and makes sense considering that the target population in this study were supervisors, HoDs and other high profile officers who have knowledge of the absenteeism at NUST.

Academic qualification affects absenteeism as reported by Langenhoff (2011) that educated workers absent less compared to those of low education. Cristofoli *et al.* (2011) further attribute this to satisfaction whereby, educated workers are easily satisfied and are involved more compared to the low educated employees who sometimes occupy menial jobs. In support of the latter, Silman (2011) observed that a degree of employees earned more in salary and this shapes those individuals into more ambitious, motivated and self-confident persons than their associates with no degree. Hence, the most educated employees are likely to retain their work and have a lower absenteeism rate than less educated. Therefore, education level has an influence in this study.

#### *6.2.1.4 Marital status*

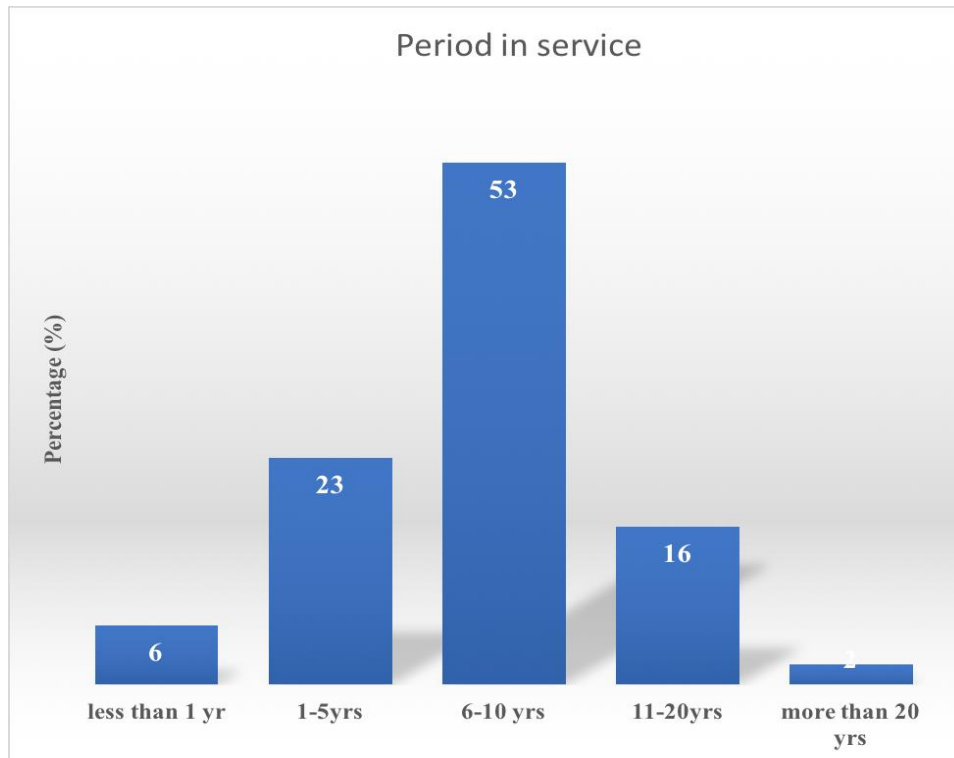
Figure 6.4 reveals that the majority of the respondents (42%) were married, while 10% were single and 48% were either divorced (21%) or widowed (27%). It is well known that marital status has a significant effect on employee-absenteeism. Osilla *et al.* (2010) report that the above-described population, comprising divorcees and widows/widowers, are manifestations of high personal and family-related problems. They further posit that these two categories are associated with alcoholism and absenteeism problems at work, which has a negative cost and productivity impact on an organisation.



**Figure 6.4: Marital status**

#### 6.2.1.5 Period in service

The study sought to determine the respondents' period of service at NUST. Figure 6.5 shows the results.



**Figure 6.5: Period in service at Polytechnic of Namibia**

The results presented in Figure 6.5 show that 53% had been in service for 6 to 10 years, seconded by those who have worked at NUST for 1 to 5 years (23%), 16% who have been in service for 11 to 20 years and 6% who have worked for less than a year. Lastly, those employees who have served the longest period that is more that 20 years were very few just 2%. This shows diverse accumulated experience amongst the respondents. The results define the study population as knowledgeable respondents who have in some instances been absent from the workplace legally or illegally. Sheikha and Younis (2006) term the period of stay at a workplace as tenure. They further argue that long tenure at an organisation contributes to employee-absenteeism. Josias (2005) reports that a longer tenure in service can influence less absenteeism, because employees' loyalty strengthens over time. In contrast, Barmby *et al.* (2002) conclude that longer tenure influences high absenteeism rates, because it creates a false sense of job security. Employees feel comfortable because of long tenure and tend to disregard the possibility of dismissal and retrenchment. Hence, period in service is one of the critical factors to be considered in this study.

#### *6.2.1.6 Positions held at Polytechnic of Namibia*

Figure 6.6 shows that the majority of the respondents (70%) in this study held supervisory positions, while 28% held middle level management positions and only 2% of the respondents held top-level management positions. This result confirms that the targeted population were in the management ranks. These respondents are described by Yin (2004) as data-rich



respondents. Employees' positions are crucial in this study and as argued earlier, tenure is partly responsible for absenteeism.

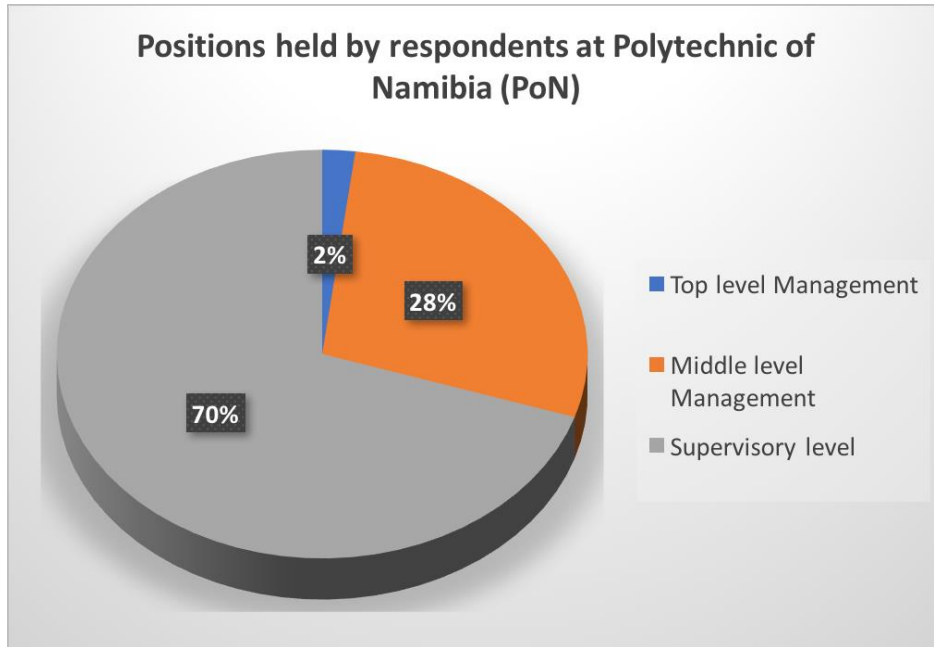


Figure 6.6: Positions held by respondents at NUST

### 6.2.2 The causes of high absenteeism in institutions of higher learning

The study investigated the frequency of absenteeism within the workplace. The results are depicted in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Frequency and occurrence of absenteeism at the workplace

How many times have you been absent from work in 2015?				
Occurrence	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
1-3 occasions	10	10.0	10.0	12.0
4-6 occasions	43	43.0	43.0	55.0
More than 7 occasions	45	45.0	45.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The results revealed in Table 6.1 above show high occurrences of absenteeism among the employees. The majority (45%) of the respondents reported to have been absent from the workplace on more than seven occasions and a further 43% of the respondents reported to have been absent between 4 and 6 occasions in 2015. The results support the general perception that there are high absenteeism rates in higher education institutions in Africa and abroad. As highlighted by Smewing and Cox (2008), the most common and challenging problem experienced by higher education institutions across the world is high absenteeism in the workplace. Bucknall and Wei (2005:11) argue that:

...yet, it is not easy for an organisation to carry out its functions in a smooth and efficient manner, especially when workers absent.

It is well-known that NUST has a high absenteeism rate, as shown above and this is among other reasons, motivated this study.

It is important to investigate the reasons to the high absenteeism in higher education institutions to gain a broader understanding of the concept of absenteeism if any meaningful interventions are to be adopted and implemented. Hence, the study went on to investigate the reasons of high absenteeism at NUST and the results are presented in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 and Table 6.3 below summarise the causes of high absenteeism at NUST.

**Table 6.2: Showing one-sample statistics on the causes of high absenteeism at NUST**

<b>One-Sample Statistics</b>				
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>
High job stress cause high absenteeism at NUST	100	1.63	.812	.081
Employees personal problems, including family responsibilities are responsible for high absenteeism at NUST	100	1.93	.946	.095
Lack of equity in rewards has caused high absenteeism at NUST	100	1.68	.649	.065
Difficulties with relocation issues are also significantly related to absenteeism at NUST	100	2.29	.902	.090

**Table 6.3: Showing one-sample test on the causes of high absenteeism at NUST**

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
High job stress cause high absenteeism at NUST	20.069	99	.000	1.630	1.47	1.79
Employees personal problems including family responsibilities are responsible for the high absenteeism at NUST	20.412	99	.000	1.930	1.74	2.12
Lack of equity in rewards has caused high absenteeism at NUST	25.867	99	.000	1.680	1.55	1.81
Difficulties with relocation issues are also significantly related to absenteeism at NUST	25.381	99	.000	2.290	2.11	2.47

The study results reveal the following:

#### *6.2.2.1 High job stress*

The results presented in Table 6.2 show that high job stress causes high absenteeism at the workplace (Mean 1.63; Std 0.812). Since the numerical measurement of the respondents' perceptions were above the average 0.5 and very close to 1, it therefore indicates a strong relationship between the respondents' views on how high job stress is related to high absenteeism. The results further revealed a strong agreement at 95% confidence that high job stress has a strong positive significance (Sig. 0.000) on high absenteeism. A strong positive significance show that the overwhelming majority strongly agreed that high job stress causes high absenteeism at NUST.

This shows that job stress contributes significantly to high absenteeism. This finding is not unique and was also reported by Smewing and Cox (2008) who point out that the demand for higher education has increased as technology has advanced over time and this has been the source of stress to many employees. Several authors report that a psychological contract is significantly influential to employee-commitment (Lemire & Rouillard, 2005; Sturges *et al.*, 2005). They argue that lack of fulfilment in the psychological contract of employment may translate into high job stress, which might manifest in low employee job commitment, high absenteeism and high turnover. In addition, Subbulaxmi (2002) found that both personal and work-related factors that may result in high absenteeism. Hence, job stress is a cause to the high absenteeism.

#### *6.2.2.2 Employees' personal problems including family responsibilities*

From Table 6.2 it is evident that employees' personal problems, including family duties, are a factor to high employee-absenteeism (Mean 1.93 and Std .946). Since the numerical measurement of the respondents' perceptions was above the average 0.5 and very close to 1, showing a very strong positive agreement to the fact that personal problems, including family responsibilities, has a significant link to high absenteeism. In support, the results in Table 6.3 show a high positive significance (t=20.412 and p-value Sig. 0.000). Considering that the significance level is below 0.05, shows a very strong association in respondents' views regarding the effect of personal problems on high absenteeism.

The finding shows that employees' personal problems have a direct influence on high absenteeism at the workplace. This finding is not unique and has also been reported by Lokke *et al.* (2007) who identified illness as one example of personal problems that is not only very costly to the organisation but also increases the rate of absenteeism. In this case, an employee has the right to official sick leave to recover from illness but this increases the absenteeism rate. Another common problem to deal with is substance abuse, which was reported by Osilla *et al.* (2010), arguing that alcoholism can lead to high employee absenteeism which has high cost implications and negatively affect the productivity of the organisation. When personal problems and family-related responsibilities impact on work there is a problem. For instance, when alcoholism causes absenteeism then it becomes a problem both to the individual and organisation's productivity.

#### *6.2.2.3 Lack of equity in rewards*

The results presented in Table 6.2 show that lack of equity in reward systems can be a cause of high absenteeism (Mean 1.93 and a Std 0.946). Considering that the numerical measurement of the respondents' perceptions was above the average 0.5, showing an

agreement that lack of perceived equity in reward systems causes high absenteeism. The study results shown in Table 6.3 show that inequity in reward systems is linked to absenteeism. The results show a  $t=25.867$  and a  $p$ -value Sig.  $.000$ . Considering that the level of significance is below  $0.05$ , it indicates that inequity in reward systems is a significant cause of absenteeism at a workplace. This finding is not unique and was also reported by Lam *et al.* (2001) on employee job satisfaction in hotels in Hong Kong, where they found that highly educated employees had a high job dissatisfaction, because of their higher expectations and inequities in salaries, incentives and recognition. Netshidzati (2012) reports that the dissatisfaction due to inequities in the reward systems causes employees to engage in negative behaviour such as absenteeism because they feel their expectations are not met.

#### *6.2.2.4 Difficulties with relocation issues*

The results presented in Table 6.2 show that difficulties with relocation issues is a cause to high absenteeism at workplace (Mean  $2.29$  and Std  $.902$ ). Noting that the numerical measurement of the respondents' perceptions were above the average  $0.5$  and very close to  $1$ , showing that the majority of the respondents agreed that difficulties in relocation have a significant effect on high absenteeism at NUST. The results in Table 6.3 further reveal a strong positive significance  $t=25.381$  and  $p$ -value Sig.  $0.000$ . Since the significance level is below  $0.05$ , it indicates a strong association in the respondents' views on the effect of relocation difficulties on absenteeism. This reveals that employees find it difficult to relocate to other campuses or coming from their home towns to work and be based in Windhoek. Because of the relocation issues, employees still reside in their home towns and travel to work, hence they could experience logistics challenges resulting in absence or getting to work late, or having to leave work early to travel home. This finding is unique in literature and can be viewed as a new finding, although anecdotal evidence suggests it is a very common cause of absenteeism.

#### *6.2.2.5 Relationship between job stress and absenteeism*

The study assessed the relationship between job stress and absenteeism at the workplace. A regression analysis was done to assess the linearity in the respondents' perceptions on job stress and absenteeism. The respondents were given four expressions, which they had to choose for or against the perception. The study findings reveal the following in Tables 6.4 and 6.5.

**Table 6.4: The model summary of job stress and absenteeism**

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.471 <sup>a</sup>	.222		.189	.375

**Table 6.5: ANOVA table on job stress and absenteeism**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.808	4	.952	6.773	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	13.352	95	.141		
	Total	17.160	99			

**Table 6.6: Coefficients on job stress and absenteeism**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.341	.486		.701	.485
	I feel under-utilised in my job, that's why I am sometimes purposefully absent	-.095	.059	-.179	-1.629	.107
	The amount of work expected of me is unreasonable, that's why I am always stressed and absent from work	-.088	.113	-.078	-.779	.438
	The morale is low, that's why employees are always absent	.458	.098	.727	4.668	.000
	I was provided with training to effectively do my job so I am happy to do my job	.290	.093	.542	3.130	.002
a. Dependent Variable: gender						

Regression was conducted using SPSS on job stress and absenteeism to measure the degree of association between job stress attributes and absenteeism. These measurements were conducted to see the degree to which job stress affects employee absenteeism. The results obtained are shown in Tables 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6. Table 6.4 show a regression value of R .471<sup>a</sup> while Table 6.5 shows a Mean Square 0.952 and a p-value Sig. 0.000<sup>b</sup>. Since the R-value is only just 0.5, this shows a weak association between gender, job stress and absenteeism. Because the mean square in Table 6.5 is 0.952 and considering that the significance level 0.000 is below 0.05, this shows a strong relationship between job stress and absenteeism. The results presented above show that gender had an insignificant effect on job stress and absenteeism since women dominated the sample population, as seen in Table 6.6.

### 6.2.3 Under-utilisation

When the respondents were asked if feeling under-utilised at the workplace has anything to do with their absence from work, the finding in Table 6.6 shows a  $B = -0.095$  and a  $p$ -value  $\text{Sig.} = 0.107$ . Considering that Beta is negative and above 0.05, it shows a negative relationship between the feeling of being under-utilised and absenteeism. Furthermore, considering the significance value 0.107 obtained, which is above 0.05, it denotes an insignificant relationship between feeling under-utilised and the rate of absenteeism at NUST. This is in contrast to literature and prior studies where employee motivation was reported a key factor in the behaviour and performance of employees in an organisation. This has also been reported to have a direct influence on the success or failure of the organisation. Chen (2008:107) found job satisfaction influenced employees' attitude towards their jobs and the organisation in which they work. Cohen and Golan (2007:427) note that job-satisfaction is caused by numerous factors like high workloads, poor staffing and lack of recognition in the workplace. They also report that these factors lead to low employee morale, job dissatisfaction and unwanted behaviours such as absenteeism and may hinder organisational productivity. Some employees are not worried about being under-utilised but in some instances this can lead to employee dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the feeling of being under-utilised could cause employees to think that they are unrecognised at the workplace, fuelling further dissatisfaction. However, Plimmer (as cited by Yende, 2008:15) found that an absenteeism rate over 5% shows dissatisfaction, poor employee-employer relations and poor management skills.

### 6.2.4 Job expectations

The results presented in Table 6.6 show that when the respondents were asked for their opinion and perception of workload as a potential job stressor and its repercussion on absenteeism, the findings returned a negative response. The findings revealed a negative Beta  $-0.078$  and a  $p$ -value  $\text{Sig.} = 0.438$ . The negative Beta  $-0.078$  is also above the 0.05 which is an indication that workload was not a major cause of absenteeism. Furthermore, the significance value of 0.438, shown in Table 6.6, is above 0.05, which indicates an insignificant relationship between workload and high absenteeism. In other words, the results show an insignificant relationship between the amount of work expected to be done and absenteeism. Furthermore, literature suggests that high work demands and employer expectations can cause employee burnout from exhaustion, long working hours unrealistic targets and this often causes manifests in negative behaviour such as absenteeism, especially when remuneration is poor (Netshidzati, 2012). Furthermore, Subbulaxmi (2002) reports that unrealistic objectives are likely to cause negative behaviours in employees. In this case, work expectations are likely to cause high absenteeism although this claim does not support this study's findings.



### 6.2.5 *Employee morale*

The study investigated the influence of employee morale on absenteeism. In this case, employee morale was perceived as one of the indicators of job stress. When the respondents were asked about their perceptions of the morale at their workplace and its likely effect on the rate of absenteeism, the study found a very significant relationship between employee morale and absenteeism. The results show Beta 0.727 and a p-value Sig. 0.000, which indicates a strong link between low employee morale and absenteeism. Because the Beta is close to 1 and the significance level is below 0.05, this shows a significant relationship between employee morale and absenteeism and that low employee morale has a strong influence on absenteeism. This finding is not unique but shares a common understanding with previous authors in that an unhappy, dissatisfied employee is likely to engage in unwanted behaviours like abuse of leave days, sick leave and absenteeism. Netshidzati (2012) defines morale as the spirit of a person or group and as such, low employee morale is likely to have a negative impact on employee satisfaction and may manifest in unwanted behaviours such as high absenteeism. Makawatsakul and Kleiner (2003) posit that low employee morale can be destructive in the organisation and has a direct influence on employee dissatisfaction, poor productivity and high incidence of absenteeism.

In support of the above finding, Sheikha and Younis (2006) blame high absenteeism rates on poor leadership skills, among other aspects of organisational culture. They also found that poor leadership skills in an organisation negatively affect employee morale, functioning and performance of the organisational and can result in absenteeism (Sheikha & Younis, 2006:83). They report that poor leadership and management skills can create a dysfunctional organisational culture that fails to manage incidents of absenteeism effectively. Hence, employee morale can be a strong predictor and determinant of absenteeism at a workplace.

### 6.2.6 *Job training opportunities*

The respondents were asked if the provision of training opportunities helps them to execute their duties effectively and minimises unnecessary absenteeism and the findings reveal a very strong significant relationship between training opportunities and absenteeism. The study found a Beta .542 and p-value Sig. 0.002, which means that the provision of training has a significant influence on employee absenteeism. Beta 0.542 is slightly above 0.5, which indicates that a small majority of the respondents believed that training opportunities have an effect on absenteeism. The significance value of 0.002, which is below 0.05, shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents agreed, meaning that there was a strong significant relationship between provision of training opportunities and absenteeism. This finding is not unique but is in support of good organisational cultures and work environments where

employees are valued and feel cared for through various programmes, including training courses and on-the-job training facilities. In support, Netshidzati (2012) argues that motivation factors also referred to as intrinsic factors have an influence on high absenteeism rates and vice-versa. Therefore, job training is one motivation strategy and as shown in the findings, lack of job training opportunities causes low morale and high absenteeism.

#### 6.2.7 Relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism

The relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism was investigated. The study employed the one t-test to measure the significance of various job satisfaction variables on absenteeism. The findings are presented in Table 6.7 and Table 6.8.

**Table 6.7: Relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism**

<b>One-Sample Statistics</b>				
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>
I am provided with training to effectively do my job so I am happy to do my job	100	3.41	.780	.078
My job presents me with the opportunity to learn and develop my skills so I am satisfied and motivated to come to work	100	3.02	.550	.055
I have the necessary tools and resources I need to do my job well so I am always happy to come to work	100	3.20	.725	.072
My supervisor actively listens to my suggestions or ideas	100	2.23	.423	.042
My supervisor enables me to perform at my best	100	2.65	.479	.048
My supervisor promotes an atmosphere of teamwork	100	3.32	.469	.047
I understand what my supervisor expects of me regarding my job performance	100	3.02	.619	.062
My job performance is evaluated on a regular basis	100	3.09	.288	.029
My supervisor provides me with actionable suggestions on how to improve my work	100	2.83	.378	.038
When I have a question or concern on work issues, my supervisor is able to address them effectively	100	3.45	.642	.064
Overall, my supervisor does a good job	100	3.18	.657	.066
My supervisor actively listens to my suggestions or ideas	100	3.05	.411	.041
My supervisor enables me to perform at my best	100	3.00	.000 <sup>a</sup>	.000
My supervisor promotes an atmosphere of teamwork	100	2.75	.435	.044

**Table 6.8: One-sample test findings on the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism**

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
					Lower	Upper
I am provided with training to effectively do my job so I am happy to do my job and won't abscond from work	43.733	99	.000	3.410	3.26	3.56
My job presents me with the opportunity to learn and develop my skills hence, I am satisfied and motivated to come to work all the times	54.898	99	.000	3.020	2.91	3.13
I have the necessary tools and resources I need to do my job well so I am always happy to come to work	44.154	99	.000	3.200	3.06	3.34
My supervisor actively listens to my suggestions or ideas	52.725	99	.000	2.230	2.15	2.31
My supervisor enables me to perform at my best	55.281	99	.000	2.650	2.55	2.75
My supervisor promotes an atmosphere of teamwork	70.815	99	.000	3.320	3.23	3.41
I understand what my supervisor expects of me regarding my job performance	48.771	99	.000	3.020	2.90	3.14
My job performance is evaluated on a regular basis	107.432	99	.000	3.090	3.03	3.15
My supervisor provides me with actionable suggestions on how to improve my work	74.962	99	.000	2.830	2.76	2.90
When I have a question or concern on work issues, my supervisor is able to address them effectively	53.774	99	.000	3.450	3.32	3.58
Overall, my supervisor does a good job	48.387	99	.000	3.180	3.05	3.31
My supervisor actively listens to my suggestions or ideas	74.150	99	.000	3.050	2.97	3.13

### *6.2.7.1 Training opportunities and absenteeism*

The study investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism. In this case, training opportunities was used as a variable of job satisfaction, the key assumption is that employees presented with training opportunities are likely to be satisfied. Respondents were asked about job satisfaction derived from training opportunities and absenteeism. The results in Table 6.7 and Table 6.8 reveal a Mean value of 3.41 and a Std 0.780, in response to the statement "I am provided with training to effectively do my job so I am happy to do my job and will not abscond from work." Since the numerical measurement of the respondents' perceptions was 0.78, which is greater than 0.5, this means that the majority of respondents agreed that provision of training makes them effective and prevents them from absconding from work. The results in Table 6.8 further reveal a t-value 43.733 and a p-value Sig. 0.000 on the same perception. The t-value shows a disassociation with the null hypothesis and together with a significance value of well below 0.05, showing a strong agreement amongst the respondents, that the provision of training opportunities makes them effective and less absent from work. In addition, the respondents were presented with the statement "My job presents me with the opportunity to learn and develop my skills, hence I am satisfied and motivated to come to work all the times." The findings presented in Table 6.7 show a Mean value 3.02 and a Std 0.550. A high mean value and a numerical measurement of the respondents' perceptions that is slightly above 0.5 means few respondents in the study concurred that provision of learning and skill developing opportunities to workers improves their satisfaction and reduce high absenteeism. The findings presented in Table 6.8 show a t-value 54.898 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. Since the significance level is below 0.05, shows a strong concurrency that training opportunities reduce high absenteeism.

Generally, the findings presented in the Tables 6.7 and 6.8 reveal a high positive significance of training opportunities as a source of job satisfaction and a reduction in absenteeism. The findings show that training opportunities equip employees with skills to effectively execute their jobs, make employees feel satisfied and motivated to reduce unnecessary absenteeism. Secondly, the findings show that training opportunities give space to learn and grow employees' skills and subject knowledge, thereby motivating employees to be present at work and reducing the high rate of absenteeism.

The study findings are not new in HRM, they are supported by Chen (2008:107) who notes that job satisfaction is an attitude the workers develop towards their work and company. Hence, job satisfaction is individualistic in nature and affects the behaviours of individual employees in different ways. Applying this understanding from the work of Chen (2008), it is true to say if

employees feel satisfied and enjoy doing their work, they are unlikely to engage in unwanted behaviours like absenteeism. This strengthens the idea that job satisfaction positively affect absenteeism.

#### *6.2.7.2 Resource materials*

The study investigated the influence of resources material on absenteeism. The common thinking has been that as employee satisfaction is derived from diverse entities (Chen, 2008:107), regardless of the source of satisfaction, this has an influence on their behaviours, including absenteeism. The study posed the statement to the respondents, “I have the necessary tools and resources I need to do my job well so I am always happy to come to work” and the respondents were asked to score it. The findings presented in Table 6.7 reveal a high Mean value 3.20 and a Std 0.725 which shows that availability of resource materials affects absenteeism. The findings in Table 6.8 show a t-value 44.154 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. A t-value above 0 shows disassociation with the null hypothesis, while a significance value below 0.05 shows a strong relationship between availability of company resource materials and absenteeism. This shows that appropriate tools and resources to execute work, is likely to keep the workers always satisfied and encourages them to come to work.

As previously argued, employee satisfaction translate to job satisfaction and ultimately low absenteeism and this study finding shows a very strong positive significance Sig. 0.000. In this case, a p-value below 0.05 means a strong positive significance, which indicates that resource availability and job satisfaction influence absenteeism. The findings reveal an association between job satisfaction and low absenteeism. This finding is not new but was supported by Cohen and Golan (2007:427) who note that “job dissatisfaction has a significant influence on high rates of employee absenteeism and negatively influences organisational productivity.” In addition, Netshidzati (2012) reports on extrinsic job stress as a result of a lack of materials or tools to execute work. He continues that this could influence employees' output and result in low productivity and high rates of absenteeism. Conner and Douglas (2005) highlight that the changes in technologies are also sources of workplace stress and affects absenteeism. Therefore, this study finding is in line with contemporary arguments on employee satisfaction and absenteeism.

#### *6.2.7.3 Supervision*

Supervision is a major determinant of employee satisfaction. Supervision has a relationship with leadership skills and is enshrined in organisational culture. Hence, in this study respondents were given a chance to rate in relation to supervision, job satisfaction and absenteeism. The respondents were asked to score the following statement, “My supervisor

actively listens to my suggestions or ideas." Table 6.7 shows a Mean 2.23 and a Std .423. In this case, a slight low mean and lower numerical measure on the respondents' perceptions below the optimum average line 0.5 show a disassociation in the respondents' perceptions. Furthermore, the findings in Table 6.8 on the same perception have a t-value 52.725 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. In this case, a high t-value shows a strong disassociation with the null hypothesis. The strong significance that is below 0.05, as shown above, further indicates very strong agreement among the majority of the respondents that good communication skills of supervisors motivate and satisfy employees, ultimately reducing absenteeism. The findings show a strong positive significance between supervisor communication attributes and job satisfaction and low absenteeism.

Secondly, the respondents were asked to score the statement, "My supervisor enables me to perform at my best." The results presented in Table 6.7 show a Mean 2.65 and a Std. 0.479, which shows a slight low mean and the numerical measurement of the respondents' perceptions was below the optimum average line 0.5. This indicates a disassociation in the respondents' perceptions. Furthermore, results presented in Table 6.8 show a t-value 55.281 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. The results reveal a high t-value, which shows a strong disassociation with the null hypothesis. The strong significance that is below 0.05, as shown above, further indicates very strong agreement on the fact that supervisors help workers to perform to their level best at work. This makes sense considering that most of these respondents were supervisors. The findings further show that good supervision enhance employee satisfaction and reduce absenteeism. The findings reveal an association between supervisor motivation, satisfaction and low absenteeism.

Thirdly, the respondents were asked to score the statement, "My supervisor promotes an atmosphere of teamwork." The results presented in Table 6.7 show a Mean 3.32 and a Std 0.469. However, a high mean and a slight low numerical measure on the respondents' perceptions that is on the optimum line 0.5, reveals that respondents agreed that supervisors promote teamwork in the workplace. The findings presented in Table 6.8 show a t-value 70.815 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. In this case, a very high t-value shows a strong disassociation with the null hypothesis. The strong significance that is below 0.05, as shown above, further indicates a very strong agreement among the greater majority of the respondents, meaning strong agreement among the respondents in that a supervisor promotes an atmosphere of team work. Furthermore, the findings show a strong positive significance of supervisor influence on employee satisfaction and reduction in absenteeism.

Fourthly, respondents' opinions on the following notion, "I understand what my supervisor expects of me regarding my job performance" revealed a high Mean 3.02 and a Std 0.619 as

presented in Table 6.7. The high mean and a numerical measurement on the respondents' perceptions that was slightly above 0.5, shows that employees understood what was expected of them by their supervisors. In addition, the results on Table 6.8 reveals a t-value 48.771 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. A t-value above 0 shows a disassociation with the null hypothesis and the high significance level that is below 0.05 shows a strong significant association among the vast majority of the respondents. This means the overwhelming majority of the respondents understand what is expected of them by their supervisors. This shows a strong association within the respondents on clear expectations by supervisors as a motivation towards employee job satisfaction and reduced absenteeism. This shows that clear expectations on employee performance enhances employee satisfaction and ultimately reduces the high rate of absenteeism.

Respondents' views on the following statement, "My supervisor provides me with actionable suggestions on how to improve my work" show a Mean 2.83 and a Std 0.378 as shown in Table 6.7. A slightly low mean and a slightly low numerical measure on the respondents' perceptions that is below 0.5, shows that a significant majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement that supervisors provide actionable suggestions to improve work. Furthermore, the findings show a very strong positive significance of supervisor conduct and employee satisfaction and low absenteeism. The study found that supervisors who mentor their subordinates to achieve improved output, are likely to enhance employee job satisfaction and reduce unwanted behaviours like absenteeism.

Adding on supervision, the respondents' scores on the following statement, "When I have a question or concern on work issues, my supervisor is able to address it effectively" yielded a Mean 3.45 and a Std 0.642 as reflected in Table 6.7. In this case, a high mean and a numerical measure on the respondents' perceptions higher than 0.5 shows an agreement that supervisors addressed workers' questions and concerns effectively. Table 6.8 shows a t-value 53.774 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. A t-value higher than 0 and a strong significance below 0.05 shows very strong agreement among the larger majority of the respondents on the ability of supervisors to address work-related questions, concerns or challenges. This indicates satisfaction with supervisors' supervision conduct. Again, as mentioned and discussed earlier on, this makes sense since +70% of the respondents were supervisors themselves and some held even more senior positions. This means they were reflecting on own practises. The results show a very strong positive significance of employee satisfaction driven by supervision conduct and low absenteeism. The study found that the ability of the supervisors to amicably resolve work-related questions and employee concerns had a significant influence on employee satisfaction and low employee absenteeism.



The respondents' rating on the following statement, "Overall, my supervisor does a good job" yielded a Mean 3.18 and a Std 0.657 as shown in Table 6.7. A high mean and a numerical measure on the respondents' perceptions slightly above 0.5 show a relative relationship between good supervision and reduced absenteeism. The findings presented in Table 6.8 further shows a t-value 48.387 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. A t-value beyond 0 shows a strong disassociation with the null hypothesis, while a significance level below 0.05 shows a very strong significant relationship between good supervision and low absenteeism. These findings show that overall, the supervisors are doing a good job and this has an effect on reducing absenteeism. When supervisors are praised it indicates a healthy working environment where employees are satisfied and acknowledge the efforts from management in growing their careers and enhancing work productivity. Hence, this shows high employee satisfaction which is related to low absenteeism. This is in line with Friday and Friday (2003) who found that highly motivated workers are usually satisfied, deliver high quality work and reduced rates of absenteeism.

The issue of supervision is also addressed by Kocakulah *et al.* (2009), who categorise the causes of high employee absenteeism as job-related or non-job-related problems. They mention that lack of supervisory support, monotonous or repetitive job tasks, insufficient job autonomy and negative organisational culture are likely to cause employee dissatisfaction and increased employee absence. The study findings show high praise from employees on supervisory support, which can also relate to high employee satisfaction and low employee absenteeism. Sharma and Sharma (2010) report that leadership style is a critical organisational cultural aspect that relies on the capabilities of the superior to motivate workers to achieve objectives and efficiency. They further argue that leadership plays a critical part in the establishment and maintainance of specific values and norms in a company. Sharma and Sharma's (2010) arguments were noted and it can be claimed that the leadership of this study was reported to be determined, responsive, caring and encouraging of teamwork and good work ethics. This therefore relates well to Netshidzati (2012) who also claims that organisational culture and leadership style are equally responsible in shaping and pursuing absenteeism in an organisation. Netshidzati further argues that a strong company's values and norms allow for high financial performance, employee satisfaction and the achievement of organisational goals.

#### 6.2.8 The potential of EAPs in reducing job stress, personal problems and absenteeism

The study investigated the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing employee job stress, personal problems and absenteeism. However, because EAPs does not exist at NUST, this study

focused on the potential of EAPs in reducing employee job stress, personal problems and absenteeism. The study findings are presented below:

#### 6.2.8.1 Knowledge and perceptions on EAPs

The study assessed the respondents' knowledge and perceptions of EAPs. The respondents were asked, "Do you know what an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is?" The findings are presented in Table 6.9 below.

**Table 6.9: Respondents' knowledge of Employee Assistance Programme (EAPs)**

<b>Do you know what an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is?</b>					
	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Yes	8	8.0	8.0	8.0
	No	92	92.0	92.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.9 above depicts the respondents' knowledge of EAPs. The findings show that 92% of the respondents were unaware what EAPs are, while only a mere 8% had knowledge of EAPs. This result shows that employees are ignorant of the EAPs and that EAPs are not implemented at NUST and employees derive no benefits from such programmes.

#### 6.2.8.2 Respondents' awareness in the ethical binding of EAPs

The study investigated the respondents' awareness in the type and ethical cores or binding of the EAPs. The respondents were asked, "Are you aware that EAPs services are anonymous and confidential?" The findings are presented in Table 6.10 below.

**Table 6.10: Respondents' responses on the ethical binding of EAPs**

<b>Are you aware that EAP services are anonymous and confidential?</b>					
	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Yes	39	39.0	39.0	39.0
	No	61	61.0	61.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The results presented in Table 6.10 show a high rate of unawareness among the respondents on the nature and ethical bindings of the EAPs. When they were asked if they were aware that the EAP services are bound by and based on ethical conditions of anonymity and confidentiality, 61% were unaware and only 39% indicated that they are aware. This shows ignorance on the nature of EAPs, which further confirms that such a programme is not already established at NUST to assist the employees. It is concerning to note that most of the respondents held managerial/influential positions in the administration of NUST but were not aware of EAPs. This therefore requires urgent intervention, which is one of the study aims.

### 6.2.8.3 Exposure to personal or work-related problems

The study investigated if employees were faced by individual or work-related issues, as it is the main purpose of EAPs to deal with such experiences at the workplace. The respondents were asked, "As an employee, do you experience personal or work-related problems?". Table 6.11 shows the study findings.

**Table 6.11: Personal or work-related problems**

<b>As an employee, do you experience personal or work-related problems?</b>					
	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Yes	61	61.0	61.0	100.0
	No	39	39.0	39.0	39.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The results presented in Table 6.11 above show high incidents of personal and work-related problems among the employees. It is evident that 61% of the workers experienced personal and work-related problems. This presents a critical situation that requires urgent attention. The finding confirms the study's anecdotal observations that most workers experience individual and work-related issues and this has a negative impact on the employee and may manifest in high absenteeism. This is in line with the study's argument that there is a need to adopt and implement EAPs to address employees' personal and work-related problems. Bohlander and Snell (2013) support this finding, noting that EAPs are services provided by employers or externally contracted entities to assist employees to cope with numerous challenges that may affect their workplace productivity. In further support, Daniels *et al.* (2005) observe that EAPs help employers significantly to address employees' personal and workplace problems, which could have led to violence, physical/mental health issues and deteriorating worker morale.

Considering the lack of readily available EAPs at NUST it is therefore, critical to have an effective and appropriate EAPs, as argued by this study. This stance is shared by Hewitt (2012), who reports that an organisation that has a high number of employees who suffer from chronic health conditions is likely to experience the consequences of high health care costs, reduction in productivity, reduction in employee engagement and reduction in business profitability. Therefore, organisations such as higher education institutions should adopt and implement EAPs for increased employee wellbeing and organisational productivity. Patel *et al.* (2013) point out a further benefit of implementing EAPs as the health and safety aspect of employees and argue that it is essential for organisations to promote health and safety by implementing EAPs.

This study investigated the forms of individual and work-related challenges the respondents are experiencing. The respondents were asked, “If Yes to the above question, what kind of problems have you experienced?” Table 6.12 below show the results.

**Table 6.12: Types of personal and work-related problems experienced**

<b>If Yes to the question above, what kind of problems have you experienced?</b>		
<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Burnout	38	38.0
Stress	41	41.0
Lack of motivation,	16	16.0
Poor remunerations,	45	45.0
Low self esteem, low morale,	31	31.0
Illness, poor health,	31	31.0
Bankruptcy, lack of financial support,	25	25.0
Marriage, family responsibilities ,	32	32.0
Job dissatisfaction, unsatisfied,	16	16.0

Table 6.12 above shows the various challenges that employees experience in the work place. The results shows that 45% of the respondents reported poor remuneration as the main

problem they face, 41% identified stress and 38% of the respondents' experienced burnout. A further 32% of the respondents mentioned marriage and family responsibilities and 31% highlighted low self-esteem, low morale, illness or poor health. The findings identify a wide spectrum of problems, ranging from personal to work-related problems, yet the earlier findings show that there is no EAPs in place to help the employees. As argued earlier, it is critically important to implement an appropriate and effective EAPs to help employees faced with such issues. Sieberhagen *et al.* (2011) suggest that organisations that adopt and effectively implement EAPs could benefit immensely by reducing absenteeism, improving employees' performance and productivity among others.

**6.2.8.4 Negative effects of personal and work-related problems on job performance and family life**

In the previous section, the study investigated the negative effects that personal and work-related problems have on the job performance and family issues of the employees. The respondents were asked, "Do you personally feel that any of the problems indicated above negatively affect your job performance and/or family life?" The results are presented in Table 6.13.

**Table 6.13: The effects of personal and work-related problems on job performance and family-life**

<b>Do you personally feel that any of the indicated above, negatively affect your job performance and or family life?</b>					
	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

The results in Table 6.13 above reveal that 100% of the respondents agreed that the current individual and work-related challenges they experience negatively affect their job performance and family life. To gain deeper insight, respondents were asked, "If yes, in what ways?" The findings are presented in Table 6.14 below.

**Table 6.14: Ways in which the personal and work-related problems affect the employees' job performance and family life**

If Yes, in what ways?		
Responses	Frequency	Percent
Absent, boycott work	45	45.0
Dissatisfaction	51	51.0
Lack of commitment, low motivation, low morale, low esteem, low work confidence	69	69.0
Stress	23	23.0

The results presented in Table 6.14 show various ways in which individual and work related challenges experienced by employees affect their job performance and family life. The majority of respondents (69%) highlighted effects such as lack of commitment, low motivation, low morale, low esteem and low work confidence. This finding is not unique and is in line with Kefela (2010) who reports that these effects are nested and interconnected. The above mentioned effects directly affects the workers' satisfaction at work. The majority of respondents (51%) identified dissatisfaction as an effect. Cohen and Golan (2007) highlight effects such as low morale and motivation of the workers and further discuss how these effects can lead to job dissatisfaction, hinder organisational productivity and increase absenteeism at work.

A further 45% of respondents reported that they are absent or boycott work due to personal and work-related problems, while 23% identified work-related stress. This finding is not new and is confirmed by Conti *et al.* (2006), who argue that work-related issues is a concern because it can cause absenteeism and hinders an organisation's performance. Subbulaxmi (2003) further notes that these factors are interdependent since they can affect each other and together they can lead to high absenteeism at the workplace. In addition, workers have a tendency to carry these stresses from home or family into the workplace. Therefore, work boycott or absenteeism is a common action or retaliation that also affects the workers' performance, commitment and job-satisfaction.

#### 6.2.9 Effectiveness of EAPs as strategy in reducing absenteeism

The study investigated the effectiveness of EAPs as a strategy in reducing absenteeism in higher education institutions. The study questioned how the respondents perceived the EAPs at NUST and the findings revealed the following.

### 6.2.9.1 Satisfaction of the EAPs at NUST

For a better understanding of the effectiveness of the EAPs at NUST, respondents were asked to rate their views on the following statement, “The EAPs at NUST are satisfactory in assisting with personal or work-related problems.” Table 6.15 below shows the results.

**Table 6.15: The satisfaction of EAPs in assisting employees at NUST**

<b>The EAPs at NUST are satisfactory in assisting with personal or work-related problems</b>					
	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	DA	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 6.15 above shows that all the respondents (100%) disagreed that the EAPs at NUST are satisfactory in assisting the workers with challenges. The results further revealed the following, as presented in Table 6.16.

**Table 6.16: Provision of additional services by EAPs**

<b>The EAPs at NUST provides additional services to satisfy the employees</b>					
	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	DA	80	80.0	80.0	80.0
	SD	20	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.16 above reveals that the overwhelming majority (80%) disagreed, while 20% strongly disagreed that the EAPs at NUST provide additional services to satisfy employee needs. Overall, the results shows that all disagreed with the proposition that current EAPs provide additional services to the employees. The results further reveal the following, as shown in Table 6.17 below.

**Table 6.17: The existence of EAPs at NUST**

<b>Currently, there are no EAPs at NUST</b>					
<b>Valid</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
	SA	63	63.0	63.0	63.0
	AG	37	37.0	37.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.17 above reveals that the majority (62%) strongly agreed, while 37% further agreed that currently there are no EAPs at NUST. This finding is valid because there are no EAPs currently implemented at NUST and supports the study’s argument on the need for adoption of an appropriate and effective EAPs.

The study then investigated the potential benefits of EAPs at NUST.

*6.2.9.2 Potential of EAPs on reduction on employee absenteeism*

The study investigated the potential of EAPs to reduce employee absenteeism. The results are presented in Table 6.18 below.

**Table 6.18: Potential of EAPs on motivation and satisfaction on employees**

<b>Introduction of an EAP would motivate and satisfy the employees</b>					
<b>Valid</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
	SA	61	61.0	61.0	61.0
	AG	39	39.0	39.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.18 above reveals that a significant majority (61%) strongly agreed and a further 39% agreed that the introduction of an EAP would motivate and satisfy the employees. This result concur with Rothermel *et al.* (2008) who affirm that EAPs promotes the business operations, creates new employee experience and perceptions of the company. Furthermore, McCann *et*



al. (2010:7) report that EAPs encourage productivity, lessen absence among the workers and reduce the costs related to health care claims.

#### 6.2.9.3 Potential of EAPs in increasing employee job satisfaction

The study assessed the potential of EAPs in increasing employee job satisfaction and Table 6.19 shows the findings.

**Table 6.19: Potential of EAPs in increasing employee job satisfaction**

<b>EAPs would increase the employees job satisfaction</b>					
<b>Frequency</b>		<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>	
Valid	SA	38	38.0	38.0	38.0
	AG	62	62.0	62.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.19 above shows responses to the proposition that EAPs would increase employee job satisfaction if they are adopted and fully implemented at NUST. The findings reveal that a significant majority (62%) agreed and a further 38% strongly agreed. All the respondents (100%) agreed that EAPs increase employee satisfaction. It follows that a satisfied, stress-free employee is easily satisfied at work hence, less absent from work.

#### 6.2.9.4 Potential in employee retention

The study assessed the potential of EAPs in enhancing employee retention, as well as the ability to attract new motivated and talented employees. Table 6.20 show the results.

**Table 6.20: The potential of EAPs in enhancing employee retention**

<b>EAPs are likely to retain, maintain and attract new motivated and talented employees</b>					
Valid	Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	SA	81	81.0	81.0	81.0
	AG	19	19.0	19.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.20 above shows that 81%, strongly agree and a further 19% agree that EAPs have the potential to enhance employee retention at NUST. This is in support to Leon (2012) findings, who also note that a further benefit of EAPs lies in organisational value. He claims that EAPs enhance positive organisational culture. Grobler *et al.* (2011) report that the primary goal of EAPs is to enhance an organisation's profitability through reduction of absenteeism, turnover, tardiness, accidents and medical claims. Grobler *et al.* further posit that above all, the main reason of EAPs are to increase retention of energetic and healthy employees. Similarly, Sieberhagen *et al.* (2011) state that, among other benefits, the introduction of EAPs reduced the high incidence of sick leave, high absenteeism rates, reduced employee turnover and increased employee retention.

#### 6.2.10 Testing and interpretation of the hypothesis

The study conducted a T-test on the study's hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between lack of EAPs and high level of absenteeism in Namibia.

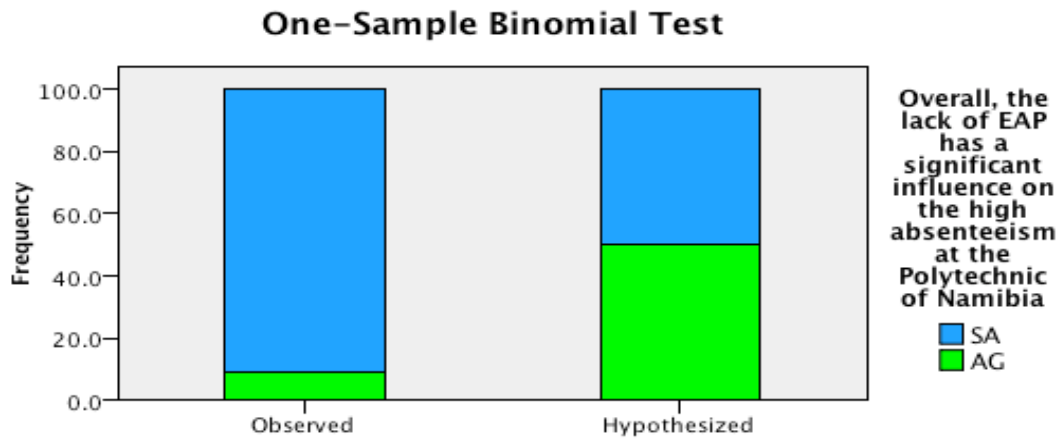
**Table 6.21: One-sample statistics on hypothesis 1**

<b>One-Sample Statistics</b>				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall, the lack of EAPs has a significant influence on the high absenteeism at the NUST	100	1.09	.288	.029

**Table 6.22: One-sample test results**

<b>One-Sample Test</b>						
	<b>Test Value = 5</b>					
	<b>T</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</b>	
					<b>Lower</b>	<b>Upper</b>
Overall, the lack of EAPs has a significant influence on the high absenteeism at the NUST	-135.942	99	.000	-3.910	-3.97	-3.85

The results presented in Table 6.21 reveal a Mean =1.09 and a Std .288. A very low mean and standard deviation below the optimum 0.5 shows a high significant relationship between lack of EAPs and high absenteeism. Furthermore, the findings presented in Table 6.22 show a t-value -135.942 and a p-value Sig. 0.000. In this case, a negative t-value shows a positive association with the null hypothesis and the strong significance level below 0.05 reveals strong agreement between the respondents on the influence of EAPs on absenteeism. The above result reveals a very strong positive significance between lack of EAPs at NUST and high absenteeism. This shows that the lack of EAPs at NUST has an influence on the high absenteeism currently experienced. A non-parametric hypothetical testing was further conducted and the results reveal the following.



<b>Total N</b>	100
<b>Test Statistic</b>	91.000
<b>Standard Error</b>	5.000
<b>Standardized Test Statistic</b>	8.100
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.000

Figure 6.7: One sample binomial test

Table 6.23: Hypotheses testing results

### Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The categories defined by Overall, the lack of EAP has a significant influence on the high absenteeism at the Polytechnic of Namibia = SA and AG occur with probabilities 0.5 and 0.5.	One-Sample Binomial Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Based on the findings presented, the study therefore rejects the null hypothesis.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is an insignificant relationship between lack of EAPs and high level of absenteeism at NUST in Namibia.

### 6.3 Findings from the qualitative section of the study

This section presents the results generated from the 10 face-to-face interviews, as described and discussed in the previous chapter. Presentation of the demographic characteristics of the interviewees is followed by the presentation of the data, followed by a discussion. Overarching themes and major categories were used. A thematic analysis was applied in this study. Lastly, all of the main ideas emanating from the data are presented.

**Table 6.24: Demographic information for respondents in qualitative research**

Interviewee	Gender	Length of service	Qualifications	Citizenship
	Male	+20 year	National Diploma: Personnel Management BCom: Industrial Psychology National Diploma: Office Management Technology	Namibian
	Female	+20 years	BCom Hons degree	Namibian
	Female	15-20 years	BCom Human Resource Management Postgraduate Diploma in Labour Law Currently studying BTech Human Resource Development	Namibian
	Female	5-10 years	BTech: Human Resource Management National Diploma: Human Resource Management	Nigerian
	Male	11-15 years	MCom Industrial Psychology	Zimbabwean
	Female	5-10 years	BTech: Human Resource Development	Namibian
	Female	11-15 years	BCom: Industrial Psychology National Diploma: Office Management Technology	Namibian
	Female	Less than 5 years	National Diploma: Human Resource Management	Namibian
	Female	Less than 5 years	National Diploma: Office Management Technology	Namibian
	Male	11-15 years	BCom: Industrial Psychology	Namibian

The findings presented above show that the study was conducted with mostly females (70%) and well-educated respondents with degrees ranging from BCom to BTech with minimum qualifications of National Diplomas. The respondents have also served the NUST for quite a long period. The majority served for more than five years and only 20% served for less than five years.

### 6.3.1 The causes of high absenteeism

The study assessed the reasons behind the high levels of absenteeism from the 10 key respondents who were the interviewees in this study. Data obtained from the interviews did not reveal an explanation for the causes of absenteeism but rather agreed that NUST is currently experiencing high absenteeism. The interviewees were asked the following question, "Are you aware that there are high rates of absenteeism at NUST?"

The findings are evident that most of the interviewees in this study agreed that there is high absenteeism. However, Participant 6 added more clarity when she claimed that:

... of course absenteeism is common and has always been there, but honestly speaking I have served this organisation for more than 15 years now, since I started in year 2000 but beginning 2015 onwards the rate has been escalating. You will find 60% of the employees in my department exhausting their official sick leave days annually and even exceed beyond explainable reasons. I honestly think something is wrong and if we get deeper to the base of this inquiry we can have all the answers...

There was no doubt that Participant 6 had done her homework well and shared the same views and arguments of this study.

The study investigated the actual causes of the high absenteeism to have a better grasp of the phenomenon and to strengthen the argument of the study. The interviewees were further asked the following question, "What could be the causes of these high rates of absenteeism?"

The most common reasons given were the following:

- Alcoholism
- Drugs addiction
- Marital problem
- Burn-out and stress
- Workload
- Family problems
- Poor communication skills
- Weak organisational culture

Notably, Participant 2 gave a lengthy explanation, She explained:

...there are various causes for the current high absenteeism at NUST. But, these can be categorised into two broad factors, namely personal and work-related problems.

Participant 2 elaborated as follows:

...personal problems are individualistic in nature meaning that these are the problems that affect an individual and the problems could be internal, meaning in own life or could be social issues including the family problems and these are normally carried to the workplace.

On the same note, Participant 10 added value to the matter under discussion by stating that:

...personal problems don't necessarily mean bad habits like alcoholism but some are natural stages in life which people are neither in control of like death of a spouse or close family members and could be a divorce, the pain and grief stays with you and its natural in fact you need proper counselling to get over them. Some are even happy moments like marriage, wedding, birth of a new child for the newly wedded families or even maternity and paternity leaves. All these add up to absenteeism and have the same effect on organisational output and productivity. Hence, personal problems should be clearly defined and seen to which extent does it fall to intentional or non-intentional absenteeism...

Participant 2 explained the work-related problems as:

...the work or employment induced problems. These could job stress, ill health because of poor occupational, safety and health practices and an employee may be drawn out for as long as 6 month sick leave and some could be work accidents and they may take time to heal and in the meantime the company has to feel the pinch.

In addition, Participant 7 stated that:

Work-related problems also include poor communication practices at work which may lead into conflicts, hatred and even fighting and these acts creates an unconducive environment for a good working environment or teamwork. In some instances, these work-related problems are linked to poor supervision where in most cases the supervisors are mostly held culprits of failing to manipulate management styles and skills to draw out the maximum from an employee. Instead, they may cause unnecessary tensions, hatred and employees may end up dissatisfied.

The issue of employee dissatisfaction as the major cause of absenteeism was discussed and explained by Participant 5 as follows:

...you know the issue I am talking about is rather serious than it sounds. This is the little sour grape story, a small thing at a workplace can turn everyone off and creates an everlasting dissatisfaction among the employees and this feeling is the most difficult to do away with. Once an employee feels has been ill-treated or improperly handled let's say when he/she complains they are likely to be dissatisfied and the feeling of fighting back it's in our genes and that's when you see an employee deliberately coming late to work or coming from break or lunch and the time being lost is production time and will never be recovered and instead it is the organisation that suffers the loss.

In general, the reasons explained above are not unique in human resource literature but as argued earlier in the quantitative data section, the understanding raised here is in line with

scholars in the field of HRM who concur that absenteeism in the workplace is mainly influenced by work-related factors like dissatisfaction, work-related stress, working environment, psychological or mental wellness, illness, demographic characteristics (Sharma *et al.*, 2013; Joseph, 2015:76). The findings concur with Booyens (2008) who adds that additional causes of absenteeism are low job satisfaction, tension or conflict at work, low self-esteem or confidence, heavy family responsibilities (being single or widowed parent) and chronic illnesses.

As stated earlier by Participant 2, Kocakulah *et al.* (2009) categorise the causes of high employee absenteeism as job-related or non-job-related problems, which may include lack of supervisory support, long commuting distances, monotonous or repetitive job tasks, insufficient job autonomy, burnout, stress, substance abuse (alcohol or drug) and negative organisational culture. Furthermore, the results are in agreement with HRM literature that shows that workers absent from the workplace for numerous reasons, which includes, personal reasons and unsatisfactory working environment (Levin, 1999:2; Tylczak, 2002:1; Grobler *et al.*, 2006:124).

### 6.3.2 The relationship between job stress and absenteeism

The study went on to investigate the key respondents' understanding and perceptions on the relationship between job stress and absenteeism. The 10 key respondents agreed that job stress has a significant influence on absenteeism. Participant 4 stated:

...it is true indeed that job stress has a significant influence on absenteeism. There is interconnectedness between job stress, job commitment, job satisfaction and absenteeism. To put it straight it's very rare for a person to absent because of stress but it is understandable that job stress cause lack of employee job satisfaction and in most instances this therefore, leads to low job commitment and high absenteeism.

This understanding of job stress is supported by Erkutlu and Chafra's (2006:287) definition of stress as the state that occurs when employees feel that the demands imposed exceed their ability to function and that job stress is inevitable and unavoidable. Conti *et al.* (2006) further note that job stress can have varying effects on individuals and it may cause absenteeism and hinder an organisation's performance. In essence, the data generated from the quantitative and qualitative phases agree that job stress is a major cause of absenteeism.

### 6.3.3 The relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism

The study assessed the key respondents' perceptions and understanding of job satisfaction and absenteeism. The findings reveal that most of the interviewees did not question this proposition but were very aggressive in their explanations. The interviewees offered meaningful contributions to this statement. Participant 3 posits that:



...you know what, to tell the truth there is nothing to discuss here this common knowledge readily accepted anywhere that ill-treat your employees, never show them respect and frustrate them and see what happens you start to see a drop in their job commitment absents are always knocking at your door complains and excuses every time...

Participant 7 further explained that:

...you know why it is such, satisfaction is the key at a workplace. If you want to achieve the best out of your employees motivate them, make them feel they are an important piece of puzzle in your organisation or business and make them feel they are taken care of and everything will flow, job commitment, satisfaction and even productivity increases and absenteeism obvious decreases.

To add, Participant 1 explained that high absenteeism resulted from a dissatisfactory working environment, stating that:

...you know what, when you are working for a company or organisation where you feel you are not important you work to fulfil the job card and once you are done you must just get paid nothing more. In addition, in such environment you have to utilise all the available resources to maximum including the sick leave. Remember some jobs are monotonous, very predetermined no room for innovations hence, you burnout and feel that you need some rest and once such happen you even facilitate fake sick leaves and absenteeism increases.

The above-mentioned reasons are not unique but confirm the results of the quantitative instruments and further concur with HRM literature. As highlighted by the Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene theory, a lack of extrinsic factors also referred to as hygiene factors affect the employees' attitudes. Herzberg further argues that although hygiene factors improves workers' satisfaction, they don't increase motivation (Herzberg, cited by Singh *et al.*, 2016:107). In support, Friday and Friday (2003) posit that motivated workers are easily satisfied, deliver high quality services and report lower rates of absenteeism.

#### 6.3.4 The potential of EAPs in reducing job stress, personal problems and absenteeism

The study explored the potential value of EAPs in reducing job stress, personal problems and absenteeism. All 10 key respondents stated that in the case of NUST, there is no such thing or initiative that helps employees in dealing with their job stresses, personal problems or absenteeism. Participant 9 stated:

...ever since my 20+ years of service in this organisation I haven't met that initiative let alone any assistance by the organisation towards an individual's personal problems. All we know is we stay like a family when a staff member in your department experience personal problem for instance death of a close loved one we contribute towards that cause not of any assistance that I know that comes from the organisation...

In this case, building from Participant 9's observations, the participants can only talk about the potential of the EAPs at NUST.

In essence, the key respondents were asked the following questions, "Do you understand the concept of EAPs?" and "Can you explain how it works or its purpose?" The majority of the respondents (90%) were unable to respond, which clearly showed that they had never heard of the EAP concept. Only one (10%) of the respondents, Participant 10, had some idea and stated that:

...I have heard of this programme by a friend when we went to one of the workshops here in Windhoek. All I can say these are initiatives implemented by the employers to assist their employees to get rid of their personal problems which includes bad habits like alcoholism, betting as well as family issues like divorces and bankruptcy that have a tendency of being carried to the workplace thereby, affecting the employees' performance. This is all I can say as far as the EAPs are concerned, one more thing is they could be internally implemented or the organisation can hire independent or private companies to run the programme for them.

Participant 10 clearly explained the purpose and objective of EAPs. Because it is clear from the findings that EAPs are non-existent at NUST, this study then explored the potential of implementing EAPs at NUST, as argued before.

To discover whether EAP has a role to play at NUST, the following question was asked, "Do you think EAPs as strategy, can reduce employees' personal or work-related problems and reduce the high absenteeism currently booming at NUST?" After a thorough discussion on what EAPs are, the respondents started to contribute positively to the discussion. It was noted that all the interviewees agreed that EAPs as a strategy could reduce employees' personal or work-related problems and thereby reduce high absenteeism. Participant 1 stated that:

...to be specific, EAPs can therefore be helpful in dealing with personal problems the employees are experiencing. It is very sad to learn that due to lack of assistance, even the general counselling procedures many employees at this organisation have turned into alcoholism which instead cause more addiction problems and they live in the shadow of high bankruptcy and have huge credit and loan burdens. These experiences are not ideal for a productive workforce.

Participant 7 added:

... because of these personal challenges like alcoholism some employees just come to log in but in actual sense they are absent and are not even committed at all, so I am of the thinking that if there are such programmes that deals with such personal and some work-related issues then most employees would love to get the assistance and start living normal lives again and commit themselves to work thereby, reducing the high absenteeism rate we discussed earlier on...

Participant 10 further iterated that:

...like I said before I was introduced to this concept I found it much interesting and helpful especially when it comes to employee motivation and satisfaction but what I am not so sure is how long it will take to start realise the benefits like low absenteeism to the organisation. Remember most of these factors we discussed about earlier on like job stress, employee satisfaction, motivation, commitment they all play a critical role to absenteeism yet they are more attitudinal in nature, they are more of psychological than physical and it may take time for employees to realise the change in organisational culture and appreciate the change and behave likewise...

This interesting observation poses a great challenge to the progress and effectiveness of the EAPs. Theoretically, they are formulated and hypothesised on a firm base of employee satisfaction but could have also missed the psychological effect of change. However, all the respondents in this study appreciated the initiative and said they would love to see it adopted and implemented at NUST. They also said they hoped to see an abrupt reduction in job stress, personal and work-related problems, as well as the high absenteeism that is currently burdening NUST. Lastly, they wish to realise high quality learning processes at NUST.

#### **6.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented, analysed, interpreted and discussed the findings generated from the 100 questionnaires and 10 face-to-face interviews. The demographic status of the 100 respondents and 10 key respondents was reported. A thematic presentation of the results and insights from the 10 interviews was given. This chapter answered the four specific research questions.

This chapter provided the evidence from which conclusions are drawn and recommendations made, as presented in Chapter 7 that follows.

## CHAPTER 7

### INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

#### 7.1 Introduction

Results drawn from the 100 respondents and 10 key respondents in the study were discussed. In essence, it interprets the findings in line to the study's four sub-research questions. The aim of this chapter was to address the main research question set out in Chapter 1.

#### ***Main research question***

How can an EAP be used to strategically relieve the high level of absenteeism in a higher education institution?

#### ***Sub-questions***

- a) What are the causes of high absenteeism?
- b) Is there any relationship between job stress and absenteeism?
- c) Is there any relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism?
- d) How can EAPs help to reduce job stress, personal problems and absenteeism?

#### 7.2 The causes of high absenteeism in answering sub-question a)

The results show high occurrence and frequency of absenteeism among the employees. Overall, the majority of the respondents (97%) report that they at some time have been absent from the workplace on more than four occasions in 2015. The results align with the general assumption that there is high absenteeism among higher education institutions in Africa and abroad. As highlighted by Smewing and Cox (2008), the most common and challenging problems experienced by higher education institutions globally is the issue of high absenteeism in the workplace.

The following question, "What are the causes of high absenteeism?" was answered by the respondents in this study. The study conducted a one-sample test to determine causes that had a significant association with high absenteeism. The results showed five major causes of high absenteeism, which are discussed below.

##### 7.2.1 High job stress

The quantitative results revealed a Mean of 1.63 and a standard deviation of 0.812, which shows that indeed high job stress is a major causes to the high absenteeism at workplace. The results further revealed a strong significance at 95% confidence that high job stress has a

strong positive significance (p-value of .000) on high absenteeism. This shows that job stress contributes significantly to the high absenteeism being experienced. The qualitative findings can be categorised into two namely, personal and work-related factors. Participant 2 explained work-related problems as:

...the work or employment induced problems. These could be job stress...

Relating high job stress to high absenteeism is not unique and has been reported frequently in HRM literature. For instance, Smewing and Cox (2008) identify increased technology in higher education systems as the main source of job stress among employees. Several authors report that the psychological contract significantly influences employee commitment (Lemire & Rouillard, 2005; Sturges *et al.*, 2005). They argue that a lack of fulfilment of the psychological contract of employment might translate into high job stress, which in turn might manifest in low employee job commitment, high absenteeism and high turnover. In this study, job stress emerged a major cause to high absenteeism.

#### 7.2.2 Employees' personal problems including family responsibilities

The quantitative results show that employees' personal problems, including family responsibilities, is a major cause of high absenteeism. The results revealed a Mean of 1.93 and Standard Deviation of 0.946, which shows a high relational factor between employees' personal problems and high absenteeism. The results further revealed a positive significance of  $t=20.412$  and a p-value of .000. This means that employees' personal problems have a positive significant influence on high absenteeism at the workplace. This was also reported by Lokke *et al.* (2007), who identify illness as one example of personal problems that is not only very costly to the organisation but also increases the rate of absenteeism.

Osilla *et al.* (2010) identifies the problem of substance abuse as one example of personal challenge that is difficult to contain and has a strong effect on absenteeism. In support of this finding, qualitative data in this study also raised concerns on the same factor. For example, Participant 7 pointed out that:

...work-related problems include alcoholism...and this in most cases lead to absenteeism and many other poor employee productivity issues.

Osilla *et al.* (2010) further indicate that alcoholism is further associated with several costs and affects the organisation's performance, lastly, it can lead to high employee absenteeism. It is therefore understood that when personal problems and family-related responsibilities affect own work, it becomes a problem. For example, when alcoholism causes absenteeism, then it

becomes a problem for both the individual and the organisation's productivity. In this study, personal problems were also responsible for high absenteeism at the workplace.

### 7.2.3 Lack of equity in rewards

The quantitative results show that lack of equity in reward systems was one of the causes of high absenteeism. The results revealed a Mean of 1.93 and a Standard Deviation of 0.946, which shows a strong agreement that inequitable rewards causes high absenteeism in the workplace. The findings further revealed a t-value of 25.867 and a p-value of 0.000, which is an indication that indeed, inequity in reward systems has a strong influence on absenteeism at the workplace. This finding concurs with Lam *et al.* (2001) study in Hong Kong hotels, which revealed that highly educated employees experienced high job dissatisfaction, because of the high salaries expectations and the inequities that existed in incentives and recognition. Netshidzati (2012) further notes that because of the inequities in the reward systems employees become dissatisfied and engage in negative behaviours like absenteeism. In this study, a lack of equity in the reward system was found to influence the high absenteeism rate at NUST.

### 7.2.4 Difficulties with relocation issues

The quantitative results show that difficulties with relocation is a causes to high absenteeism. The results found a Mean of 2.29 and a Standard Deviation of 0.902,. The results further revealed a strong positive significance of t-value of 25.381 and a p-value of 0.000. This reveals high difficulties the workers are faced with in relocating to other campuses or coming from their home towns to work at the main campus in Windhoek. Because of the relocation issues employees still reside in their home towns and travel to work, hence there could be logistics issues. This could cause employees to be absent or late for work, or having to leave early so that they can travel home. This finding is not found reported in literature and could be viewed as a new finding, although anecdotal evidence suggests it as a common cause of absenteeism.

### 7.2.5 Employee dissatisfaction

The qualitative findings show that employee dissatisfaction is another major cause to high absenteeism. Participant 5 explained that:

...a small thing at a workplace can turn everyone off and creates an everlasting dissatisfaction among the employees and this feeling is the most difficult to do away with... when you see an employee deliberately coming late to work or coming from break or lunch and the time being lost is production time and will never be recovered and instead it is the organisation that suffers the loss.

The interconnectedness of factors was realised and employee dissatisfaction was reported to be the most influential cause of absenteeism.

Overall, the findings align with scholars in the field of HRM, who agree that absenteeism in the workplace is mainly influenced by work-related factors like poor working environment, psychological or mental wellness, illness and demographic characteristics (Sharma *et al.*, 2013;105; Joseph, 2015:76). The findings are in line with Booyens (2008) who outlines additional causes of absenteeism as low job satisfaction, tension or conflict at work, low self-esteem or confidence, heavy family responsibilities (being single or widowed parent) and chronic illnesses. Lastly, Kocakulah *et al.* (2009) report that causes of high absenteeism to are job-related or non-job-related problems, including lack of supervisory support, long commuting distances, monotonous or repetitive job tasks, insufficient job autonomy, burnout, stress, substance abuse (alcohol or drugs)and negative organisational culture.

### **7.3 Job stress and absenteeism in answering sub-question b)**

The respondents were asked, “Is there any relationship between job stress and absenteeism?” The study performed a regression to discover the relationship between job stress and high absenteeism. A regression model summary of job stress and absenteeism showed R 0.471<sup>a</sup> with a Mean Square of 0.952 and a p-value of 0.000<sup>b</sup>. This means that job stress has a significant effect on absenteeism. The results further revealed the following.

#### **7.3.1 Employee morale**

The quantitative results show a Beta of 0.727 and a p-value of 0.000 between low morale and high absenteeism. This shows a strong significant effect of low employee morale on absenteeism. This therefore indicates that low employee morale has a strong influence on employee high absenteeism. This finding shares the same line of thought that an unhappy, dissatisfied employee is likely to engage in unwanted behaviours, like abuse of leave days, sick leaves and absenteeism. Netshidzati (2012) further posits that low morale affects workers’ satisfaction and can cause retaliation behaviours like high absenteeism from work. Makawatsakul and Kleiner (2003) also fnote that low morale can affect workers’ dissatisfaction, leads to company’s poor productionand high absenteeism among the employees. Sheikha and Younis (2006:83) blame high absenteeism rates on poor leadership skills. They argue that inappropriate leadership skills can destroy the morale of the workers thereby reducing the company’s performance. Hence, employee morale was found to have a strong influence on absenteeism at the workplace.

### 7.3.2 Job training opportunities

The quantitative results indicate a Beta of 0.542 and a p-value of 0.002, which means that the provision of training affects employee absenteeism. In this case, lack of training opportunities is assumed to cause high employee absenteeism and vice versa. Therefore, job-training opportunities is also one motivation strategy and as shown in this finding, lack of job training opportunities is inevitably a cause of low morale and associated with high employee absenteeism.

### 7.3.3 Employee dissatisfaction

The qualitative findings indicate that job stress is linked to employee dissatisfaction. Participant 4 stated:

...it is true indeed that job stress has a significant influence on absenteeism. There is interconnectedness between job stress, job commitment, job satisfaction and absenteeism. To put it straight, it's very rare for a person to absent because of stress but it is understandable that job stress cause lack of employee job satisfaction and in most instances this therefore leads to low job commitment and high absenteeism.

This understanding of job stress is shared by Conti *et al.* (2006) who note that job stress can affect individuals in various ways, may cause employee absenteeism and hinder performance of the organisation. The data generated from both the quantitative and qualitative sections agree that employee job-stress causes high absenteeism in the workplaces.

## 7.4 Job satisfaction and absenteeism in answering sub-question c)

The respondents were asked, "Is there any relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism?" The quantitative results show the following.

### 7.4.1 Training opportunities

The results revealed a t-value of 43.733 and a p-value of 0.000, which show that employees who have training opportunities are likely to be satisfied and to execute their jobs effectively. The findings further showed a t-value 54.898 and a p-value of 0.000 on enhanced learning opportunities and skills development. This shows that employees afforded training opportunities are likely to professionally grow and develop skills, that promotes their job satisfaction. The study findings reveal a high positive significance of training opportunities as a source of job satisfaction and a reduction in absenteeism. Employees who are given training opportunities improve their skills and execute their jobs effectively, making the employees happy and motivated, thereby reducing unnecessary absenteeism.



Secondly, the results show that training opportunities give space to learn and improve the employees' skills and subject matter knowledge, thereby motivating the employees to always be at work and reducing the high rates of absenteeism. This is confirmed by Chen (2008:107) who notes that job satisfaction is individualistic in nature and differently affects the behaviours of employees. In applying the understanding of Chen (2008) to this study, it is true to say if employees feel happy and enjoy their work, then they are less likely to engage in unwanted behaviours like absenteeism. This confirms that workers' satisfaction affects rate of absenteeism.

#### 7.4.2 Resource materials

The quantitative results revealed a Mean value of 3.20 and a Standard Deviation of 0.725, with a t-value of 44.154 and a p-value of 0.000 on the availability of the necessary tools and resources and absenteeism. This shows a very strong positive significance on availability of resources and absenteeism. In essence, when employees are given all the resources and materials to use they are likely to be motivated, increase their job satisfaction and be less absent from work. Cohen and Golan (2007:427) confirm that job satisfaction lowers employee absenteeism in a work place and negatively affects the organisation's productivity.

#### 7.4.3 Supervision

The quantitative results show that supervision is a strong determinant of employee satisfaction and absenteeism. The results revealed a Mean of 2.23 and a Standard Deviation of 0.423, with a t-value of 52.725 and a p-value of 0.000 on the effect of good communication skills by supervisors on employee satisfaction and reduced absenteeism. The study found that good communication skills of supervisors motivates and satisfies the employees, ultimately reducing absenteeism. The results show a strong positive significance between supervisor communication skills and job satisfaction and low absenteeism.

Furthermore, the study findings show a Mean of 2.65 and a Standard Deviation of 0.479 with a t-value of 55.281 and a p-value of 0.000 on supervision motivation and employee satisfaction and reduced absenteeism. This shows that supervision plays a very significant role in motivating employees, enhancing employee satisfaction and in lessening employee absenteeism. The study found a very strong significant relationship between supervision motivation, employee satisfaction and low absenteeism.

The results show a Mean of 3.02 and a Standard Deviation of 0.619 as well as a t-value of 48.771 and a p-value of 0.000 on the perceived clear expectations by supervisors and employee job satisfaction and reduced absenteeism. The study found a very strong positive

significance on the perceived clear supervisors' expectations and employee job satisfaction as well as reduced absenteeism. The findings show that if expectations of supervisors regarding employee performance are made clear to employees, this motivates and satisfies them and thereby reducing the high rates of absenteeism.

The study realised a Mean of 2.83, a Standard Deviation of 3.78, a t-value of 74.962, as well as a p-value of 0.000 on the effect of supervisors' conduct and employee satisfaction and reduced absenteeism. There is a strong positive significance between supervisors' conduct, employee satisfaction and low absenteeism. The findings show that supervisors who are helpful in mentoring their subordinates towards improved employee output are likely to enhance employee job satisfaction and reduce unwanted behaviours like absenteeism.

Overall, the results revealed a Mean of 3.18 and a Standard Deviation of 0.657 as well as a t-value of 48.387 and a p-value of 0.000, showing the confidence and satisfaction the employees have regarding their supervisors. When supervisors are praised it makes for a good working environment where employees are happy and acknowledge the efforts of management towards the success of their careers and work productivity. This shows high employee satisfaction is associated with low absenteeism. This agrees to Friday and Friday (2003), who report that motivated employees are easily satisfied, deliver quality and absent less.

## **7.5 The role of EAP in reducing job stress, personal problems and absenteeism, in answering sub-question d)**

### **7.5.1 The effect of EAP on reduced job stress, personal problems and absenteeism**

The respondents were asked, "How can EAPs help to reduce job stress, personal problems and absenteeism?" The findings revealed that there were no EAPs implemented at NUST, hence, the study assessed the potential of EAPs in relation to reduction in job stress, personal problems and reducing absenteeism. The study found the following.

### **7.5.2 Potential of EAPs on reduction on employee absenteeism**

All (100%) the respondents concurred that the introduction of EAPs would motivate and satisfy the employees and ultimately reduce absenteeism. This is agreement with Rothermel *et al.* (2008), who affirm that EAPs improves the operations of the business, increase the employee experiences and company image.

### **7.5.3 Potential of EAPs in increasing employee job satisfaction**

All (100%) the respondents concurred that EAPs increase employee satisfaction. The finding concurs with the common understanding that a happy, stress-free employee is easily satisfied

and less absent. Aziri (2011) describes job satisfaction as the degree to which workers are happy with the remunerations they get. Intrinsic motivation is about improving the employees perceptions and the way they feel about their work and creating a positive and favourable perception thereby increasing their job satisfaction.

#### 7.5.4 Potential in employee retention

All the respondents agreed that EAPs are likely to increase employee retention at NUST. Leon (2012) notes that a further benefit of EAPs is in organisational value, in which EAPs enhance positive organisational culture that can enhance workers' morale and retain better and motivated workers.

### 7.6 Practical answers to the main research question

The findings deduced from this study show that the implementation of EAPs in institutions of higher learning could strategically reduce the high level of absenteeism through the following.

#### 7.6.1 Motivation and satisfaction of employees

The results shows that 61% strongly concurred that the introduction of EAPs would motivate and satisfy the employees. This is in agreement to Rothermel *et al.* (2008) who affirms that EAPs improves business operations, employee experiences and company image. EAPs encourages the employees to be more productive, less absent and reduces health care claims and costs (McCann *et al.*, 2010:7).

#### 7.6.2 Increased employee job satisfaction

The findings show that the implementation of EAPs can increase employee job satisfaction and strategically reduce the high absenteeism level. The majority 62% agreed and a further 38% strongly agreed, that the introduction of EAPs is likely to reduce high absenteeism. This confirms the understanding that a satisfied, stress-free workers are less absent. Aziri (2011) explains job satisfaction as the magnitude to which employees appreciates the rewards their company gives them, particularly in terms of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation includes employees' perceptions and feelings towards their work.

#### 7.6.3 Increased employee retention

The results indicate that 81% strongly agreed and a further 19% agreed that the implementation of the EAPs in higher education institutions is likely to increase employee retention. Leon (2012) notes that a further benefit of EAPs is in organisational value, in which EAPs enhance positive organisational culture that can boost employees' morale, job commitment and job satisfaction as well as retain gifted employees. Grobler *et al.* (2011)

reports that the main goal of EAPs is to enhance the organisation's profitability through reduction of absenteeism. He further argues that above all, the main purpose of EAPs is to increase retention of energetic and health employees. Sieberhagen *et al.* (2011) report that the introduction of EAPs reduced the high incidence of sick leave, high absenteeism rates, reduced employee turnover and increased employee retention.

## **7.7 Chapter summary**

The chapter interpret and discusses results in line with the four objectives of this study. It also answered the main research question and the sub-questions. In summary, the study found that high job stress, employees' personal problems, including family responsibilities, employee dissatisfaction, difficulties with relocation and lack of equity in rewards cause high absenteeism in the institutions of higher learning in Namibia.

The study further found interconnectedness between job stress and absenteeism. The findings revealed that low employee morale and lack of training opportunities is likely to cause high absenteeism. In addition, a relationship between high job stress, low job commitment and low job satisfaction was established and is believed to be significantly related to high absenteeism. Overall, the study found a positive significant relationship between employees' low job satisfaction and high employee absenteeism. Factors that had a significant effect on high employee absenteeism include availability of training opportunities. Employees presented with training opportunities were reported to be satisfied and unlikely to engage in any form of absenteeism. In addition, lack of resources at the workplace was likely to affect employee job satisfaction and could cause high absenteeism. Lastly, supervision qualities, including good communication skills, outlining clear expectations to employees and general good conduct towards the employees could significantly motivate and satisfy employees, thereby reducing high absenteeism.

Despite the fact that there are no EAPs implemented at NUST the study found that the adoption and implementation of EAPs could strategically help in reducing the high absenteeism level by reducing employee job stress, assisting with personal problems and by motivating and satisfying the employees. EAPs were reported to increase employee job satisfaction and there is a common understanding that a happy, stress-free employee is likely to be satisfied and less absent from work. Furthermore, EAPs are likely to increase employee retention through a positive organisational culture that could improve morale, job commitment and satisfaction as well as attract gifted employees.

The following chapter, Chapter 8, draws conclusions to the study and makes recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter draws conclusions from the data gathered relevant to the four research questions. In conclusion, recommendations are made to promote the adoption and effective implementation of EAPs at NUST.

#### **8.2 Conclusions**

The main aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of the EAPs as a strategy to reduce absenteeism at NUST.

The study was guided by the following specific research objectives:

- a) To investigate the relationship between EAPs and job stress and absenteeism;
- b) To assess the relationship between EAPs and job satisfaction;
- c) To assess the effectiveness of EAPs in reducing job stress, personal problems and absenteeism.

Based on the findings presented, the following conclusions are drawn.

##### **8.2.1 Causes of high absenteeism**

Depicting from the findings revealed on job stress, this study concludes that high job stress is a major contributor to the high absenteeism rate at NUST. Based on the findings on the role employees' personal problems play in absenteeism, the study also concluded that employees' personal problems contributes to the high absenteeism. The study further concluded that inequity in reward systems has a strong influence on absenteeism at the workplace. It was found that difficulties with relocation cause absenteeism. Based on the insight drawn from the qualitative data, the study concluded that there is an interconnectedness of factors but employee dissatisfaction continue to be the most contributing factor to absenteeism.

##### **8.2.2 Relationship between job stress and absenteeism**

The study further concluded that low employee morale had a significant contribution to employee job stress, which in turn led to high absenteeism. It was further concluded that lack of job training opportunities contributed significantly to employee job stress and had an influence on the high absenteeism rate. Findings from the qualitative data show that employee dissatisfaction leads to low job commitment and high absenteeism. Overall, the study concluded that high job stress has a significance on high employee absenteeism.

### 8.2.3 Relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism

To add on, the study concluded that employees who have training opportunities are likely to be satisfied and less absent. Furthermore, the study concluded that availability of resources and materials at the workplace enhance employee job satisfaction and lessen employee absenteeism. Good supervision significantly improves employee satisfaction and reduces absenteeism. Good supervision includes supervisory communication skills of a high standard, motivation by supervisors, clear expectations from supervisors and the conduct of daily managerial functions by supervisors.

### 8.2.4 Effect of EAPs on reducing job stress, personal problems and absenteeism

The study concluded that the introduction of an EAP would motivate and satisfy the employees. EAPs will increase employee satisfaction and are likely to increase employee retention at NUST. The study concluded that there was a very strong positive significance between lack of EAPs at NUST and high absenteeism.

Therefore, the study rejects the null hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between lack of EAPs and high level of absenteeism at NUST.

## 8.3 Recommendations

A number of recommendations are suggested for the implementation of effective EAPs in NUST. Recommendations are based on locally collected and evaluated data, as well as suggestions derived from the literature review.

The recommendations include:

- i) A suggested EAP for NUST: There is a need to develop written EAPs policies and a full NUST plan.
- ii) There is a need to list specific items the EAPs committee must include in the EAPs.
- iii) There is also a need to highlight and give assurance on confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents in the EAPs. This is meant to protect the respondents, increase honesty, responsiveness and commitment from the respondents involved to reduce high absenteeism.
- iv) Supervisors and union stewards need formal training on EAPs in order to raise an awareness, understanding and confidence when implementing an EAP.
- v) A plan is needed on how to inform and educate the workforce about the EAP. This should explain the origins and justify the need and opportunities in implementing the EAP.

- vi) There is a need for a clear outline on how the NUST academic and non-academic staff members and other external organisations interact, affiliate or collaborate with the EAPs' service providers.
- vii) The formal inclusion of non-unionised groups and the role they will play in the EAP must be clearly outlined.
- viii) There is a need to formalise discussions on the human resources management within the EAP.
- ix) There is a need to strengthen counselling services through:
  - x) Reinstate awareness on EAPs information to new employees during induction and orientation.
  - xi) Raise awareness to educators who may have stress issues.
  - xii) The workplace website should be updated and include awareness information on EAPs counselling services and confidentiality clause on e-posters and flyers. Creating a post of a counsellor would help to equip the EAP department with the relevant personal to handle the EAPs issues. This will make the implementation of EAPs not only a success but also easy.
  - xiii) Union representatives need to be engaged in the EAPs promotion. This will help to raise the union representatives' awareness on the EAP and its benefits including lowering high absenteeism rates.
  - xiv) There is a need to involve the HR managers in developing a wellness strategy within the institutions' ability. This is believed to aid to employee satisfaction thereby reducing the high absenteeism rate at NUST

#### **8.4 Further recommendations**

The study further recommends the following:

- There is a need to improve the general upkeep of employees to increase the reduction of job stress and increase job satisfaction. Such initiatives include competitive remuneration and proper health and housing programmes for employees, among others.
- Future studies should focus on evaluating EAPs in local cases in Namibia, if any and learn from them for an effective replication process.

#### **8.5 Limitations of the study**

The following challenges can be seen as limitations that may affect the success of this study.

Since this study was conducted in a case study manner, it was difficult to generalise the findings to other cases. As argued by Yin (2004), the case study used in this study prime

particularisation than generalisation. Hence, it is of great importance to replicate the same project in other higher education institutions to improve issues of high absenteeism.

Time resources were a challenge to the completion of this study, since the researcher was a part-time student. This means the researcher had to carefully plan and utilise free time to complete the study.

Financial resources were also a challenge in the completion of this study, since the study was not fully funded. Hence, the researcher had to use cost-effective financial methods to acquire data, such as self-administered questionnaires.

## **8.6 Contributions of the study**

The following are successes and contributions this study has done to the specific field.

- a) This study addresses the issues of employee satisfaction, motivation and outcome in the higher education institutions.
- b) This study contributes to addressing critical issues on the quality of education in higher education institutions in Namibia.
- c) Universities may learn and realise the importance of employee wellbeing through the use of EAPs in mitigating challenges associated with employee absenteeism in their institutions.
- d) This study provided recommendations for the development of appropriate and effective EAPs to deal with employees' issues that hinder their productivity.
- e) Lastly, this study has added to literature and shall become a point of reference for future studies in human resources management and EAPs.

## **8.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter concluded on the main research objective as well as the three sub-objectives. The study concluded that high job stress, employees' personal problems, inequity in reward systems, difficulties with relocation issues and employees' dissatisfaction with these aspects in the workplace are the major contributing causes to the high absenteeism. The chapter further concluded that low employee morale, lack of job training opportunities and employee dissatisfaction with these aspects in the workplace contribute significantly to employee job stress, which eventually led to high absenteeism. In addition, the chapter concluded that factors such as training opportunities, availability of resources and materials at the workplace and good supervisory skills such as good communication, motivation, clear expectations and supervisors' conduct towards the employees are likely to satisfy employees and lessen absenteeism.



The chapter concluded that the introduction of EAPs would motivate and satisfy the employees and is likely to increase employee retention and lessen absenteeism. The chapter made recommendations, among which is the need to implement the EAP at NUST. This should be done with the intention to ensure that the EAP meets employees and employers' future requirements, recognises the fiscal realities, as well as developing the work environment. In addition, the chapter highlighted the need to improve on the general wellbeing of employees to increase the reduction of job stress and increase job satisfaction. Such best practice initiatives include competitive remuneration and proper health and housing programmes for employees, among others.

In the end the chapter has outlined the main limit of the case study approach adopted and has also highlighted the major benefits this study has brought in, including adding to literature and being a possible referral point to future studies on HRM.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA



## POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

OFFICE OF THE VICE-RECTOR: ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE

Private Bag 13388 • 13 Storch Street • Windhoek, NAMIBIA  
Tel: (+264-61) 207-9111/2255 • Fax: (+264-61) 207-2442 • E-mail: hr@polytechnic.edu.na

### HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

17 April 2012

Cape Peninsula University of Technology  
Faculty of Business  
Department of Human Resources Management  
P.O. Box 652  
Cape Town

#### LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear Sir/Madam

I have read the information presented in the letter about a study to be conducted by Ms. Nelao-Mekondjo Kamati, student at the Faculty of Business, at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

I had the opportunity to ask questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I required. I am aware and satisfied that the intention of this research is for academic purposes.

I am also aware that the researcher will do field study visits for the purposes of conducting interviews and administering questionnaires to employees of the Polytechnic of Namibia, in order to obtain their views, and that the respondents will remain anonymous.

I took note that the researcher is interested to interview senior staff members for the purposes of getting more insight on her study. I was assured that respondents will have the option to withdraw or choose not to respond to certain questions at any time during the interviews.

This letter, therefore, serves to confirm my consent to go ahead to require clearance at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology to proceed with her study on "Establishing the need for Employee Assistance Programmes in Higher Education Institutions" with special reference to the Polytechnic of Namibia.

With full knowledge of the above, I hereby give my consent to the researcher to conduct research within the study area and get written approvals from all the relevant parties involved.

Sincerely,

Mrs Riëtte Duvenhage  
Director: Human Resources





## APPENDIX B: COVERING LETTER FOR QUESTIONNAIRE



### RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondent,

#### **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF A NAMIBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION.**

I hereby request permission to conduct a study at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). I am pursuing a Master's degree in Human Resources Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town, South Africa.

Responses to questions will be used for academic purposes only and respondents are guaranteed anonymity as no identification is required. The aim of the study is to assess whether there is a need for an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), as well as determining the need and impact of such a programme as a mitigating strategy for reducing the problem of the high absenteeism rate and for the mitigation of socio-economic factors affecting the productivity of employees at NUST.

The information obtained from the respondents will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The outcomes of the study will be made available to the management of NUST.

EAPs: an acronym for **Employee assistance programmes**. It is defined as programmes designed to help employees overcome personal crises or problems such as alcoholism, job burnout or family problems, amongst others (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2011:453)<sup>2</sup>.

As you have been identified as a subject participant in this study, kindly complete this questionnaire and indicate your answers by placing an X in the appropriate box. It will be appreciated if you could provide further explanations for your choice of response in the spaces provided.

***Completion can be done manually or electronically and can be e-mailed to the address provided and or it can be collected from you by the researcher.***

**NB: PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS**

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<sup>2</sup> Grobler, P.A., Warnich, S., Carrell, M.R., Elbert, N.F. & Hatfield, R.D. 2011. *Human resource management in South Africa*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Andover, UK: Cengage Learning.

## APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER



### CONSENT FORM

Dear respondent,

You are kindly requested to participate in a study the aim of which is to determine the need and impact of an employee assistance programme (EAP) as a strategy for reducing of the problem of high absenteeism and for the mitigation of socio-economic factors affecting the productivity of employees at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST).

#### **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF A NAMIBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION.**

#### **PROCEDURES (Kindly indicate your preference)**

I prefer to complete a questionnaire and return it to the researcher via the following:

Hand-delivered hard copy	
E-mail	X

I prefer a conversation between the researcher and I, which will be recorded to enable the researcher to recall the information gathered. An interview session will be scheduled at my convenience.

Interview session	X
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**BENEFITS:** I understand that there are no financial gains for me in participating in this study. However, the results of the study may help the researcher to gain an understanding of how employees feel about the lack of an EAP at the NUST and what the experiences and needs are regarding these services.

**RESNUSTUDENT'S RIGHTS:** I understand my rights as a respondent and voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I understand what the study is about and how and why it is being done. I understand that I may withdraw from participating in the study at any time.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** All information obtained from the respondents will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

**CONCERNS:** If you have any questions or concerns prior to participation or at any time during the study. You can contact the researcher at +264 612072080 or +264 813912140, or e-mail at [nelres21@gmail.com](mailto:nelres21@gmail.com) or [nkamati@nust.na](mailto:nkamati@nust.na)

## APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE

### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

*Please tick the appropriate box throughout the questionnaire*

**1. Gender**

Male  Female

**2. Age**

Below 20 years  20-30 years  31-50 years   
Above 50 years

**3. Academic qualifications**

Grade 10 or lower  Grade 12 (Matric)  Diploma   
Baccalaureate degree(s)   
Postgraduate degree(s)

Other specify.....

**4. Marital status**

Single  Married  Divorced  Widowed

**5. Period of services at NUST**

Less than a year  1-5 years  6-10 years  11-20 years   
More than 20 years

**6. Position held at work**

Top level management

Middle level management

Supervisory level

Non-managerial

**7. Type of employment**

Permanent

Contract (one year or more)

**8. Number of dependents**

None

1-5

6-10

More than 10

**9. Nationality**

Namibian

Non-Namibian

**SECTION B: CAUSES OF EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM**

**10. How many times have you been absent from work due to illness in 2015?**

Never  1 to 3 occasions  4 to 6 occasions  More than 7 occasions

**11. Kindly indicate factors that you think contribute to high absenteeism, in terms of your sick leave at NUST**

	SA	AG	DA	SD
11.1 High job stress cause high absenteeism at NUST				
11.2 Employees' personal problems including family responsibilities are responsible for the high absenteeism at NUST.				
11.3 Lack of equity in rewards has caused high absenteeism at NUST				
11.4 Difficulties with relocation issues are also significantly related to absenteeism at NUST				
11.5 Difficulties with social work relations are partly to blame for the high absenteeism at NUST				

**12. Please answer the following perceptions on job stress and absenteeism.**

	SA	AG	DA	SD
12.1 I feel underutilised in my job that's why I sometimes purposefully absent				
12.2 The amount of work expected of me is reasonable that's why I am always stressed and absent from work				
12.3 The morale in my department is low that's why employees are always absent				
12.4 The superiors in my department have poor communication skills				

**13. Please honestly answer the questions on job satisfaction and absenteeism.**

	SA	AG	DA	SD
13.1 I am provided with training to effectively do my job so I am happy to do my job and won't abscond from work.				
13.2 My job presents me with the opportunity to learn and develop my skills hence, I am satisfied and motivated to come to work all the times				
13.3 I have the necessary tools and resources I need to do my job well so I am always happy to come to work				
13.4 Overall, my supervisor does a good job				
13.5 My supervisor actively listens to my suggestions or ideas				
13.6 My Supervisor enables me to perform at my best				
13.7 My supervisor promotes an atmosphere of teamwork				
13.8 I understand what my supervisor expects of me regarding my job performance				
13.9 My job performance is evaluated on a regular basis				
13.10 My supervisor provides me with actionable suggestions on how to improve my work				
13.11 When I have a question or concern on work issues, my supervisor is able to address them effectively				
13.12 Overall, my supervisor does a good job				
13.13 My supervisor actively listens to my suggestions or ideas				
13.14 My Supervisor enables me to perform at my best				
13.15 My supervisor promotes an atmosphere of teamwork				

**SECTION C: GENERAL QUESTIONS ON AN EAP**

14. Do you know what an EAP is? Yes  No

**15. Are you aware that EAP services are anonymous and confidential?**

Yes  No

**16. As an employee, do you experience personal or work-related problems?**

Yes  No

**17. If yes, what kind of problems have you experienced?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**18. Do you personally feel that any of the problems indicated above, negatively affect your job performance and or family-life?**

Yes  No

**19. If yes, in what ways?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**20. Please indicate who provides you with assistance.**

Supervisor/ manager  Social worker  Employee Relations Officer

Pastor  Family member/friend  Colleague

**SECTION D: EFFECTIVENESS OF EAP AS A STRATEGY IN REDUCING ABSENTEEISM**

KEY: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (AG), Disagree (DA), Strongly Disagree (SD)

**21. Please tick the appropriate box.**

	SA	AG	DA	SD
21.1 The EAPs at NUST are satisfactory in assisting with personal or work-related problems				

21.2	The EAPs at NUST provides additional services to satisfy the employees				
21.3	Currently, there are no EAPs at NUST				
21.4	Introduction of an EAP would motivate and satisfy the employees				
21.5	The EAPs would increase the employees' job satisfaction				
21.6	The EAPs are likely to retain, maintain and attract new motivated and talented employees				
21.7	The EAPs are likely to encourage, raise employees' job commitment and lessen employees' absenteeism				

**Thank you for your time**



## **APPENDIX E: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE**



### **In-depth Interview Guide**

The researcher is pursuing her Master's degree in Human Resources Management and the topic of the study is "Employee Assistance Programmes in Higher Education: A case study of a Namibian higher education institution".

The aim of the study is to assess the effectiveness of Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), as well as to determining the potential in such programme in dealing and mitigating employee dissatisfaction, stress and high absenteeism at NUST. As you have been identified as a subject participant in this study you are kindly requested to partake in the study as an interviewee. Your kind, honest and timely response is highly appreciated.

### **Interview Guide**

Are you aware that there are high rates of absenteeism at NUST?

What could be the causes of these high rates of absenteeism?

From your own experiences do you think job stress is one of the main cause of high absenteeism? If yes, how does it influence absenteeism?

From your own perception do you think there is any relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism?

Do you understand the concept of Employee Assistance Programme EAPs, Can you explain how it works or its purposes?

Do you think EAP as a strategy can reduce employees' personal or work-related and reduce the high absenteeism currently booming at NUST?

Are there any other strategies you feel can help in reducing the high absenteeism rate at NUST.

**Thank you for your time and information.**

## APPENDIX F: STATISTICS REPORT

R & R Consultancy  
Environment and Education Solutions  
19110/11  
Mbizo, Kwekwe  
Zimbabwe

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15 June 2019

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Namibia

### **Ref: Statistics Report.**

I do hereby, confirm that the statics results presented in Miss. N. Kamati study: EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF A NAMIBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION were genuinely generated from the SPSS 23.0 V and meet the research standards. A redo of the same statistical procedure on the SPSS *sav* (SPSS data file) send to us produces the similar results to those presented in the document, meaning the procedure was valid and reliable. The choice of statistical methods were compatible and relevant to the data generated and the research sub-questions intended to be answered. I therefore, strongly recommend the results as valid, trustworthy and reliable and meet the research standards.

Yours

Mr. R. Mukwambo

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## **APPENDIX G: LETTER FROM GRAMMARIAN**

22 Krag Street  
Napier  
7270  
Overberg  
Western Cape

1st July 2019

### **LANGUAGE AND TECHNICAL EDITOR**

Cheryl M. Thomson

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#### **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF A NAMIBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION**

**Supervisor: Dr A A (Braam) Rust**

This is to confirm that I, Cheryl Thomson, executed the language and technical editing of the above-titled Master's dissertation of **NELAO-MEKONDJO MUADINA KAMATI**, student number 212103261, at the CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, in preparation for submission of this dissertation for assessment.

Yours faithfully



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