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**The Impact of Personal and Work Resources on Work
Stress of Staff Members during the Covid-19 Pandemic,
Khomas Region**

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Sharon Chitambu

Department of Psychology and Social Work

University of Namibia,

Namibia

Email: nysbasharon96@gmail.com



Wesley R. Pieters

Department of Psychology and Social Work

University of Namibia,

Namibia

Email: wpieters@unam.na

Abstract

High job demands, limited resources, work role conflict, uncertainty, organisational transformation, increase in student intake and diversity of the student population amplify the work stress that staff members at the University of Namibia (UNAM) are required to withstand. Work stress results in disengagement of employees, negative job attitudes, poor service delivery, poor health and well-being, burnout and eventually turnover. Emotional intelligence enhances employees' coping ability and increases resilience, stress responsiveness as well as improve organisational commitment, work engagement and higher levels of health and well-being. This study collected data from UNAM staff members in the Khomas region on emotional intelligence (self-awareness; social skills), job demands-resources (growth; advancement) and work stress (lack of autonomy, workload, job insecurity) during the Covid-

19 pandemic in 2020. Self-awareness and social skills reported a negative relationship with work stress; growth and advancement reported a positive relationship with work stress. It is recommended that emotional intelligence training, team-building activities and social skills training be prioritised; additional social and administrative support could be provided to allow senior employees to cope better with work stress; the salaries and benefits should be re-evaluated against national and international standards but also to ensure internal and external fairness/equity.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Job Demands-Resources (JD-R), Work Stress, Covid-19, UNAM*

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is regarded as one of the most significant disruptions to society in the world of work and the education systems around the world (Gervasius, 2020; Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021). It was also noted that, apart from highlighting the cracks and challenges within Namibia's education system, Covid-19 has exacerbated the challenges faced by learners, students, teachers, administrators and lecturers (Gervasius, 2020).

Due to globalisation, a lot of occupations have become more challenging (demands) and require more resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Most of these jobs require employees to be emotionally intelligent to manage job demands (Anand & Monika, 2017). Dating back to 1992, the University of Namibia (UNAM) has made significant progress in offering different courses to students and has increased both in size as well as the administrative load (Kirby-Harris, 2003). Over the years, the Namibian tertiary education system has equally undergone complex changes, affecting educators in various ways (Kirby-Harris, 2003). It is necessary for tertiary institutions and organisations to remain relevant and to develop continuously but at the same time, it is vital to facilitate these changes and developments with the needed resources.

The Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) states that employees need resources in order to be effective at their jobs (Brasfield, Lancaster, & Xu, 2019; Gorsy, Goyat, & Anand, 2015). The current study aims to explore emotional intelligence as one of the resources employees can benefit from. Emotional intelligence is the ability to control, understand and utilise one's feelings, emotions and those of others to guide decision-making (Gujral, 2013). Being emotionally intelligent helps employees in an organisation to meet their job demands (Gorsy et al., 2015; Newton,

Teo, Pick, Ho, & Thomas, 2014). The environment must be suitable to enable educators to be able to construct or at times cultivate resources (emotional intelligence) to manage their job demands (Griva & Joekees, 2003). It was found that there is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and work stress (Aiello & Tesi, 2017).

Increased job demands, stress, financial problems and emotional disturbances emerge as a result of changes in educational institutions (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008). Despite these changes and their effects on occupations and organisations, employees are required to manage the stress by incorporating not only high levels of intelligence quotient (IQ) but emotional quotient (EI/EQ) as well (Gorsy et al., 2015). Life stress or improper work-life balance also affects work stress positively (Goswami, 2013). When faced with stress both at work and at home or when employees cannot balance work and their day-to-day life, employees tend to steer clear of their problems by being absent from work or leaving the job entirely (Goswami, 2013).

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence and job demands-resources on work stress of UNAM employees at the main campus in Windhoek (Khomas region), Namibia, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Problem statement

Unreasonable job demands together with limited job resources are the new actuality and setup in Namibian education institutions (Silume, 2013). Work stress is one of the challenges that employees struggle with, especially in jobs that require emotional labour (Prieto, Sona, Martinez, & Schaufeli, 2008). Work stress is common among employees at universities because they work with different types of people daily (Gorsy et al., 2015; Yamani, Shahabi, & Haghani, 2014). Kumar and Rooprai (2009) observed that some sources of work stress may include work overload, abnormal working hours, high job demands, unhealthy interpersonal relationships with authorities or fellow employees, tight deadlines, high targets, low job satisfaction, the type of work and at times poor leadership.

UNAM has been facing problems with its employees and this could be a result of work stress (New Era, 2016). In 2019, UNAM dismissed eight employees due to factors like absenteeism, theft and breach of trust (New Era, 2019). These aspects may result from employees having more demands than resources. These include issues like late payments of

salaries and strikes in 2018 for a 6% increase are other stressors for employees at UNAM (NBC, 2018). Changes in the increase of student numbers at UNAM overwhelm the staff and change is one of the aspects that trigger stress in organisations (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008). In 2004 there were 6 000 students and by 2016 there were over 23 000 students from different countries around the world (New Era, 2016). The university has not been able to keep up with these changes as it can be noticed that some staff have little personal space (very small offices) and limited resources. If not resolved, these issues may result in more stressed employees affecting job performance. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and Ministry of Higher Education, in an effort to reduce the further spread of Covid-19 in Namibia, announced the implementation of e-learning for all learners and students in 2020 during the nationwide lockdown. E-learning has the potential to provide access to education for students in remote areas and allow teaching and learning to continue during challenging times (such as the Covid-19 pandemic). Apart from the challenges explained earlier, 32% of students indicated that they do not have access to laptops or data, hindering access to online learning (Gervasius, 2020). Some classes at the University of Namibia made use of blended learning (face-to-face and online teaching). However, not all lecturers are familiar with the different platforms available. Considering that learners and students are making use of e-learning and that many employees were working from home, the network experienced unusually high internet traffic on the different platforms (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021). The high user traffic resulted in challenges experienced with accessibility on these platforms by students (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021). Students also noted that ease of navigation on these platforms was challenging. For many students, navigating on the platforms is novel and the same challenges could be experienced by lecturing staff. Kaisara and Bwalya (2021) reported challenges related to access to internet as other challenges experienced by students. Students, administrative and academic staff needed to make alternative arrangements to acquire access to internet to facilitate teaching, learning and work. Students also reported other challenges related to e-learning such as feelings of isolation and an uncondusive home environment (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2021). Student attrition is higher for e-learning students than students making use of face-to-face teaching and learning. These challenges are not limited to students but can be worsened by the experience, understanding and access of administrative and academic staff. Role ambiguity is another antecedent of work stress (Mustafa et al.,

2015). It is when individuals are not sure of their roles at work and are confused, resulting in more stress.

There are worldwide transformations within the work industries and the use of emotional intelligence (Rohini & Nithya, 2018). Issues of globalisation and improving technology have also contributed to more job demands while employees have little resources to work with (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Chhabra and Mohanty (2013) added that integrating EI does not only have a positive effect on work stress but also reduces the negative results caused by work stress. Griva and Joeke (2003) argue that a university is a stressful workplace, dealing with students' and co-workers' negative attitudes, poor working conditions, technology and extensive job demands.

The main/overarching objective of the study is to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence and job demands-resources on work stress. The specific objectives are to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence on work stress; to investigate the impact of job demands-resources on work stress.

Literature Review

Job demands-resources and emotional intelligence

Organisations have emphasised much on the need to maintain employee well-being, manage stress levels as well as maintaining high job performance for better outcomes (Mohamed & Nagy, 2017). Emotional intelligence has proved to be an important resource that helps mitigate work stress and its negative impact on job performance in demanding occupations (Jang & George, 2011).

Having emotional intelligence helps employees to develop their interpersonal skills (Ramesar, Koortzen, & Oosthuizen, 2008), resulting in a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and job demands which has been reported over the years in various occupations (Aiello & Tesi, 2017). Higher levels of emotional intelligence allow employees to further develop job resources to work in stressful working environments and mitigate the impact of constant demands.

Job demands-resources and work stress

The JD-R model has been utilised for research for about two decades (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreimer, & Schaufeli, 2001). It was influenced

by work stress theories and came about as an alternative to work stress models as most models took little consideration of resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). The theory states that there are job demands which tend to be risk factors and job resources which are protective factors to employees (De Carlo, Girardi, Falco, Dal Coroso, & Di Sipio, 2019). The more the job resources, the better the management of job demands (Bakker et al., 2014). The more employees rely on emotional intelligence, the better their performance (Anand & Monika, 2017). Job resources, in this case emotional intelligence, serve as a buffer for the impact that job demands have on employees and the stress associated with it (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

When workers encounter high levels of emotional labour and demands, there is a need to mitigate stress levels (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). High levels of job demands and low levels of job resources result in work stress (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005).

Studies have shown that the JD-R model assists in mitigating work stress (Almendra, 2010). There are many resources that can be at the disposal of employees for better management of work demands or work stress (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). The job resources must be commensurate with the job demands (Bakker et al., 2014). Job demands increase work stress while job resources decrease work stress (Kim & Wang, 2018). If the resources in an organisation are limited, employees are overwhelmed with the job demands; hence, a decrease is noticed in their well-being (Rothmannm Mostert, & Strydom, 2006). It is known that job demands deteriorate employee well-being while job resources help to mitigate these impacts (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011).

Emotional intelligence and work stress

Emotional intelligence is effective at moderating work stress; it must be at the centre of organisational administration as it is very crucial for performance, successful leadership and interpersonal relationships (Naqvi, Khan, Kant, & Khan, 2013). Emotional intelligence is explained as having the ability to express, understand and manage one's emotions (Hoffman, 2010). Bradberry and Greaves (2009) define emotional intelligence as one's ability in recognising and understanding emotions of themselves or others for better interpersonal relationships. Emotional intelligence is the ability to control, understand and use one's feelings and emotions and those of others for better decision-making (Gujral, 2013).

For an organisation to achieve its goals, employees must be able to understand their emotions as well as the emotions of others to facilitate effective decision-making.

In stressful situations employees are prone to breakdowns and emotional intelligence is an important resource for managing stress (Kumar & Rooprai, 2009). Emotional intelligence plays an important role in organisations (Bibi, Karim, & Din, 2013) and reduces physical and psychological stress (Ismail, Suh-Suh, Ajis, & Dollah, 2009). For problem solving at work, workplace stress management as well as employee well-being and the use of emotional intelligence should be seriously considered (Haricharan, 2015).

Emotional intelligence has a negative impact on occupational stress (meaning emotional intelligence reduces occupational stress) and once employees master occupational stress, there is an increase in employees' commitment to their jobs (Johar & Shah, 2014). High levels of emotional intelligence are related to remarkably high levels of healthy stress responsiveness (Mikolajczak, Roy, Luminet, Fillèe, & de Timary, 2007). In spite of the growing scholarly interest in emotional intelligence and work stress, there exists a lack of research on these aspects in the tertiary education institutions in Namibia.

Working is one of the main causes of stress in today's society. It was emphasised that work stress is a divergence from an employee's usual functioning due to physical and psychological influences (Yamani et al., 2014). Also known as job stress or occupational stress (Shukia & Srivastava, 2016), work stress is triggered when the abilities of employees do not go hand in hand with the resources and requirements of the occupation, resulting in physical and emotional responses to the situation. The same levels of work stress affect employees irrespective of their sex (Shukia & Srivastava, 2016). Research has it that employees should maintain normal levels of stress so as to function well in their respective occupations (Kalyoncu, Guney, Arslan, Guney, & Ayranci, 2012). Stress can be beneficial at moderate levels with the needed resources since this facilitates innovation, resilience, development and perceived competence.

Work stress is common in various occupations (Schaufeli, 2017). It is important to monitor employee well-being to minimise job stress to maintain their physical and mental well-being (Schaufeli, 2017). Work stress is defined as job demands that exhaust job resources leading to unfavourable outcomes (Gujral, 2013). Any kind of occupation that is associated with or deals with people is stressful (George, Louw, &

Badenhorst, 2008). Excess job demands can lead to work stress which in turn results in burnout (Werner, 2016). Stress tends to affect job satisfaction in a negative way when the job demands outstrip job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). This may lead to negative effects on the employees if not managed (Newton et al., 2014). Evidently, job stress often leads to poor performance, work accidents and sometimes sickness (Schaufeli, 2017). Thus, coping mechanisms for stress are vital for the well-being of employees. This is where emotional intelligence and the JD-R come in as essential resources to mitigate the impact of job stress (Mohamed & Nagy, 2017).

In line with the JD-R model, higher emotional intelligence has a positive impact on the negative effects of work stress like burnout (Karatepe, 2011; Newton et al., 2014). If job demands do not match the job resources it may cause shear and emotional disengagement (Karatepe, 2011). Job resources lower strain and intensity of job stress (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). The JD-R model and emotional intelligence help employees to have a positive attitude towards the work stressors (Mohamed & Nagy, 2017).

Methodology

Research design

Research design is an outline of the path a study wishes to take (Burns & Groove, 2005) or the plan for carrying out a study. This study made use of quantitative research which is based on numerically measuring the quantity of something (Sukamolson, 2007). A survey was used for this study where a series of questions was asked, as contained in the questionnaire, which was distributed to the desired sample.

Population

A population implies the people or other living and non-living items which a study uses (Mason, 2002). The population comprised all the employees at the University of Namibia's main campus in the Khomas region. The population included the academic and administration employees at the University of Namibia, comprising of 2 395 people as per the 2018 UNAM report. The authors were unable to get the total number of staff in the Khomas region, main campus.

Sample

A sample is the specific group of people from whom data will be collected. It is a group of individuals stemming from a larger population for the purpose of obtaining data or information on the whole population (Leedy, 2010). The sample of this study included $n=150$ participants. Out of the eight faculties at the main campus and administration departments, a convenient sample was drawn. The study took place in 2020 before the new transformation took place. All participants available and willing were asked to complete the questionnaire.

Research instruments

Research instruments are used for easier data collection (Yin, 2014). The following self-report questionnaire was used. The biographical questionnaire was developed by the researchers and requested information on participants' sex, age, work experience, marital status, number of children, qualifications and work role. An adapted version of the *Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire* (EIQ) developed by Goleman (2009) and a self-report questionnaire, measuring emotional intelligence, was used in this study. The instrument focuses on five dimensions, namely self-awareness, self-regulation/management, social skills, motivation and empathy. This study only focused on self-awareness ("I realise immediately when I lose my temper") and social skills ("I am an excellent listener"). The questionnaire makes use of a Likert-scale response format with responses ranging from 1 (does not apply), 3 (applies half of the time) to 5 (always applies). Ingo, Fernandes, Ndove and Pieters (in press) found acceptable reliability standards for self-awareness (0.69) and social skills (0.80). The *Job Demands-Resources Scale* (JD-RS) was developed by Jackson and Rothmann (Jackson & Rothmann, 2005). The scale measures workload, growth opportunities, organisational support, advancement opportunities and job insecurity. This study focused on measuring growth opportunities ("Does your job offer you opportunities for personal growth and development?") and advancement opportunities ("Does your job give you the opportunity to be promoted?") (Rothmann et al., 2006). The questionnaire makes use of a four-point response scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). Pieters and Van Heerden (2018) reported acceptable levels of reliability for growth opportunities/resources (0.74) and advancement opportunities (0.87). To

assess work stress, the researchers used sections/dimensions from different instruments and specifically focused on role ambiguity, autonomy (lack thereof), workload and job insecurity. To assess job insecurity (“Do you need to be more secure that you will still be working in one year’s time?”) and workload/overload (“Do you work under time pressure?”) the *Job Demands-Resources Scale* was utilised (Jackson & Rothmann, 2005). The questionnaire makes use of a four-point response scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). To assess role ambiguity (“I know what my responsibilities are.”), the section was used from an instrument developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). To assess autonomy (“In my job, I feel forced to do things I do not want to do.”) the *Work Related Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Questionnaire* by Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte and Lens (2008) was used. This section of the questionnaire made use of a Likert-scale response format with responses ranging from 1 (does not apply/totally disagree), 3 (applies half of the time/agree sometimes) to 5 (always applies/totally agree). Pieters and Van Heerden (2018) reported acceptable Cronbach’s alpha for job insecurity (0.80) and workload (0.77). Nunez and Frezatti (2015) reported acceptable reliability levels for role ambiguity (0.84).

The data was calculated assessing means, standard deviation, reliability and correlation with SPSS.

The following ethical principles were upheld: Participants were given understandable information on the nature of the research so that they can decide to willingly participate or withdraw without any negative consequences. For anonymity purposes, no names were used. Privacy and confidentiality were observed and no information will be shared with unauthorised people. Questionnaires will be stored in the researchers’ office for security purposes for about five years. Ethical clearance was obtained from UNAM (see attached document).

RESULTS

Biographical details

Table 1 below shows the respective percentage frequencies of the sample that participated in the study. A total of 49.3% (n=71) were males and 50.7% (n=73) females. The biggest group per age category was 36-40 years (n=23, 16%), most of the employees having worked at the institution for 3-4 years (n=26, 18%), a total of n=34 participants (23.6%) obtained MA degrees, most of the

sampld group does not have children (n=41, 28.5%), the majority of participants are single (n=59, 41%), and a total of n=79 (54.9%) work as academic staff. The rest of the biographical details are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Biographical Details of the Sample (n=144)

Category:	Item:	Frequency:	Percentage:	
SEX:	Male:	71	49.3	
	Female:	73	50.7	
AGE:	Below 24:	12	8.3	
	24-28	22	15.3	
	29-31	21	14.6	
	32-35	16	11.1	
	36-40	23	16.0	
	41-45	19	13.2	
	46-50	14	9.7	
	51 and older	17	11.8	
TENURE:	Less than 1 year	13	9.0	
	1-2	25	17.4	
	3-4	26	18.1	
	5-6	16	11.1	
	7-8	18	12.5	
	9-11	17	11.8	
	12-15	14	9.7	
	16 and more	15	10.4	
QUALIFICATIONS:	Grade 12	7	4.9	
	Certificate	4	2.8	
	Diploma	15	10.4	
	Degree	23	16.0	
	Honours Degree	29	20.1	
	Master's Degree	34	23.6	
NUMBER OF DEPENDENTS (children):	PHD	32	22.2	
	None	41	28.5	
	1-2	38	26.4	
	3-4	34	23.6	
	5-6	19	13.2	
	7-9	3	2.1	
	10 and more	9	6.3	
	MARITAL STATUS:	Single	59	41.0
		Married	57	39.6
		Divorced	13	9.0
Widowed		13	9.0	
Missing responses		2	1.4	
WORK ROLE	Admin	65	45.1	
	Academic	79	54.9	
TOTAL:		144	100.0	

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

As reported in Table 2, self-awareness (emotional intelligence) reported a mean of 30.28, SD of 5.69 and alpha of 0.77. Social skills (emotional intelligence) reported a mean of 36.16, SD of 6.09 and alpha of 0.72. Growth opportunities (JD-R) reported a mean of 14.97 and advancement opportunities (JD-R) a mean of 13.56. Standard deviation scores were reported for growth opportunities (3.19) and advancement opportunities (3.96). Alpha levels were recorded for growth opportunities (0.78) and advancement opportunities (0.87). A lack of autonomy (work stress) reported a mean of 7.25, SD of 1.93 and alpha of 0.68. Workload (work stress) reported a mean of 22.97, SD of 4.21 and alpha of 0.79. Job insecurity (work stress) reported a mean of 7.94, SD of 3.07 and alpha of 0.91. Work stress (combined) reported a mean of 43.42, SD of 6.63 and alpha of 0.71.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation Coefficient

	M	SD	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. EQ_SelfA	30.28	5.69	.77	-							
2. EQ_SSkills	36.16	6.09	.72	.62++	-						
3. JDR_Growth	14.97	3.19	.78	.18*	.19*	-					
4. JDR_Adv	13.56	3.96	.87	.13*	.18*	.61++	-				
5. WS_LAut	7.25	1.93	.68	.22*	.13*	.51++	.49++	-			
6. WS_WLoad	22.97	4.21	.79	-.21*	-.28*	.22*	.15*	.00	-		
7. WS_JIns	7.94	3.07	.91	-.16*	-.10*	-.10*	-.07*	-.15*	.15*	-	
8. WS_COM	43.42	6.63	.71	-.19*	-.26*	.21*	.19*	.19*	.78++	.60++	-

* Statistically significant: $p \leq 0,05$

+ Practically significant correlation (medium effect): $0,30 \leq r \leq 0,49$

++ Practically significant correlation (large effect): $r \geq 0,50$

Self-awareness (emotional intelligence) reported a positive relationship with autonomy (work stress) ($r = 0.22, p < 0.05$; small effect); a negative relationship with workload (work stress) ($r = -0.21, p < 0.05$; small effect); a negative relationship with job insecurity (work stress) ($r = -0.16, p < 0.05$; small effect); and a negative relationship with work stress (combined) ($r = -0.19, p < 0.05$; small effect).

Social skills (emotional intelligence) reported a negative relationship with workload (work stress) ($r = -0.28, p < 0.05$; small effect); a negative

relationship with job insecurity (work stress) ($r = -0.10, p < 0.05$; small effect); and a negative relationship with work stress (combined) ($r = -0.26, p < 0.05$; small effect).

Growth opportunities (Job demands-resources) reported a positive relationship with autonomy (work stress) ($r = 0.51, p < 0.05$; large effect); a positive relationship with workload (work stress) ($r = 0.22, p < 0.05$; small effect); a negative relationship with job insecurity (work stress) ($r = -0.10, p < 0.05$; small effect); and a negative relationship with work stress (combined) ($r = -0.21, p < 0.05$; small effect).

Advancement opportunities (Job demands-resources) reported a positive relationship with autonomy (work stress) ($r = 0.49, p < 0.05$; medium effect); a positive relationship with workload (work stress) ($r = 0.15, p < 0.05$; small effect); a negative relationship with job insecurity (work stress) ($r = -0.07, p < 0.05$; small effect); and a positive relationship with work stress (combined) ($r = 0.19, p < 0.05$; small effect).

Discussion of Results

This study highlights the need for organisations to improve stress management of employees, make resources available to mitigate stress and to maintain a balance between the job demands and resources. When organisations are able to manage the well-being of employees, these employees are likely to perform better (Mohamed & Nagy, 2017). This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence, JD-R and work stress of employees at UNAM.

Self-awareness and social skills (emotional intelligence) reported a positive relationship with autonomy (lack of autonomy, work stress). A lack of autonomy in this study is related to being told what to do and not feeling comfortable to be yourself at work. Knowing who you are as a person and trying to foster good relationships with colleagues contradict being unable to be yourself or being unable to influence work decisions at the organisation.

This study found a negative relationship between self-awareness, social skills (emotional intelligence) and workload (work stress). A negative relationship was also reported by Aiello and Tesi (2017). Employees that have a higher level of self-awareness are likely to know what their skills, abilities and limitations are, and are thus less likely to experience stress from work duties that exceed their skills or abilities. Social skills and the ability to foster healthy relationships at work can be

regarded as a resource for employees, thus reducing workload and/or stress. Having healthy relationships with colleagues ensures that these colleagues are open to assist, guide and support other employees when they need help. Social support (job resources) acts as a resource and buffer against workload/stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Self-awareness and social skills (emotional intelligence) reported a negative relationship with job insecurity in this study. Employees with higher levels of self-awareness are less likely to be concerned about the contribution that they are making at work or where they will be able to find another job in future if needed. Knowing what skills and abilities employees have makes it likely that these employees become more assured of their role and contributions at work. Pieters et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between relatedness and affective commitment. Having the skills to foster healthy relationships ensures that employees are likely to work in different work settings since they are able to work well with different kinds of employees. Social skills can also be regarded as a resource adding to the employability of employees and retention at work. Johar and Shah (2014) also found that emotional intelligence reduces work stress and increases organisational commitment of employees.

This study found a negative relationship between self-awareness, social skills (emotional intelligence) and work stress (combined). Similar findings were reported in other studies across different industries (Ismail et al., 2009; Johar & Shah, 2014; Kumar & Rooprai, 2009; Naqvi et al., 2013). Self-awareness and social skills are resources that mitigate the impact of work stress. When employees are aware of their emotions, skills, abilities and limitations, they are more likely to manage stress and challenging circumstances at work better. Similar to self-awareness, social skills help employees develop resources through the relationships with colleagues thus reducing work stress. The relationships with colleagues can help to ensure that employees would be willing to assist each other with work tasks, guide and support each other and, in that process, develop more job resources to reduce the impact of work stress. Job resources, in this case self-awareness and social skills (emotional intelligence), reduce the impact of work demands/work stress (Kim & Wang, 2018). Job resources are also found to enhance the well-being of employees (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011).

Growth opportunities and advancement opportunities are regarded as job resources since it helps employees to complete work duties, stimulate growth and development (Rothmann et al., 2006). Pieters and

Hasheela (2018) found that job resources reduce burnout and enhance work engagement. Pieters and Van Heerden (2018) found that job resources reduced exhaustion experienced by employees. Contrary to the findings in literature, this study found that growth opportunities and advancement opportunities reported a positive relationship with autonomy (lack of autonomy), workload and work stress (combined). Growth opportunities and advancement opportunities should facilitate better opportunities and positional power to make decisions (autonomy) and access to better resources to reduce workload. It can be argued that in order to utilise all skills and abilities at work, the tasks may be more challenging than usual thus adding to positive stress levels. However, in this study, the items related to work stress (combined) are negative items. A similar argument could be used for the relationship between advancement opportunities and work stress (combined). When employees are offered opportunities to develop themselves or be promoted, it may increase their levels of work stress. Further investigation may be required after the Covid-19 pandemic, but it can also be hypothesised that for the sampled employees in this study, growth is not facilitated/supported with the needed resources or benefits/outcomes thus being perceived as a stressor. Perhaps employees experience limited resources and that trying to cope with their current tasks is challenging enough that growth and advancement are not seen as opportunities but rather stressors. Pieters (2019) found that psychological meaningfulness enhanced organisational commitment and reduced turnover intention. Psychological meaningfulness is when employees regard their work to be important to others but also when they regard the exchange of the labour to be fair/equitable. The same argument can be made about advancement opportunities – to be developed and promoted. Employees might perceive the challenges related to working in senior positions within the institution as more than the benefits or outcomes obtained from occupying these positions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Working in academia can be stressful considering the impact of globalisation, diversity, the need for change in order to remain relevant and competitive, attending to the needs of society and industry, and the increase in student intake numbers. Apart from these challenges, the Covid-19 pandemic has added to and amplified the existing challenges in education around the world and specifically in Namibia.

A positive relationship was found between self-awareness, social skills (emotional intelligence) and autonomy (work stress). This study also found a negative relationship between self-awareness, social skills (emotional intelligence) and workload, job insecurity and work stress (combined). Growth opportunities and advancement opportunities (JDR) reported a positive relationship with autonomy (lack of autonomy), workload and work stress (combined). Growth opportunities and advancement opportunities (JDR) reported a negative relationship with job insecurity.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that employees be sent for Emotional Intelligence training to enhance their levels of self-awareness and social skills. Emotional intelligence does not only enhance job resources like growth and advancement opportunities, but also reduces work stress experienced by employees. Enhancing job resources and reducing work stress are beneficial under “normal” circumstances and even life-saving during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also recommended that UNAM management finds ways like self-evaluation (performance management) and reflective tasks (peer review, self-assessment of skills, abilities, work projects, research or teaching work) to enhance self-awareness of employees. It can also be beneficial to have performance meetings with supervisors regularly to obtain feedback but also for employees to evaluate and assess their own skills, abilities and limitations in a safe and supportive environment.

Social skills of employees can be enhanced by team-building exercises. These may include but are not limited to social gatherings, birthday celebrations, recognition and awards ceremonies, fundraising events or community engagement activities. The more opportunities employees have to engage and socialise with others, the more they are able to re-evaluate unhealthy social interactions and develop healthy interactions with others. People work with each other for many hours. However, this does not guarantee that they know each other or what is going on in each other’s lives. Being more aware and in tune with the occurrences within the lives of employees would also make employees more sensitive to and tactful when dealing with each other.

In order to ensure a balance between job demands and job resources, it is vital that UNAM management regularly assesses work duties, job descriptions and the job resources available. The Covid-19 pandemic has had many negative consequences, but it has also enhanced our levels of resilience, hardiness and coping ability with stress. Job resources like self-awareness and social skills (emotional intelligence) reduce work stress for

employees in this study but other resources like growth opportunities and advancement opportunities increase job stress. Further investigation may be required to confirm if the positive relationship between growth opportunities and advancement opportunities with work stress are as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic or if these perceptions are related to a lack of resources, support and an imbalance between work expectations and outcomes/benefits. Having opportunities to grow, develop, advance or be promoted does broaden employees' experiences and build on their abilities/skills. However, if these opportunities lack the needed resources and support or the requirements outweigh the benefits, it is likely to cause stress for these employees.

It is also recommended that UNAM management assesses the working environment and workplace policies to ensure that the policies are not suffocating innovation, growth and development for staff and the institution. Having many policies and practices within an organisation that take away decision-making and exclude employees from the procedures and processes are likely to frustrate employees instead of enhancing their levels of well-being. If these policies and procedures are sound, it would be beneficial to also educate employees about these policies and the rationale behind these organisational practices.

Considering that the sampled employees indicated that growth opportunities and advancement opportunities increase work stress, it is suggested that the salaries and benefits of employees be re-evaluated to ensure internal and external equity. Employees need to be able to sustain themselves and their loved ones from the salaries and benefits they get from the organisation. When employees regard the exchange of labour as unfair, they are likely to experience lower levels of organisational commitment, job satisfaction, work engagement and higher levels of turnover intention, workplace deviant behaviour, work stress and turnover intention.

Considering that this study found different results from literature regarding the relationship between growth opportunities, advancement opportunities and autonomy (lack of autonomy), workload and work stress (combined), it is suggested to do a follow-up study after the Covid-19 pandemic. It may also be beneficial to conduct a qualitative study to gather further understandings about the findings of this study. It is also recommended that the study be extended in future to all employees at the University of Namibia.

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