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of
BOTSWANA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Coping and Subjective Well-being in University of Botswana employees

A Research Essay Submitted to the Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Education
(Counselling and Human Services)

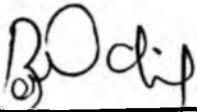**Bonkamile E. Odirile**

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June, 2008

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I, the undersigned researcher, certify herein that this research was carried out while a student at the University of Botswana between January 2006 and June 2008. I testify that it is a product of my work. It has not been submitted to nor published anywhere else and that any ideas or quotations from the work of other people are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices of the American Psychological Association (APA) style.

(Signature of the author)

APPROVAL

This research essay has been examined and approved as meeting the requirements for the partial fulfillment of Masters Degree in Education.

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DEDICATION

To you my loving husband Elliott, my daughters Dolly, Tankiso and Tuduetso, and to my grandchild Phumzile, this dissertation is dedicated to you. Let it contribute to your resilience as you go through the challenges of supporting one another, and more especially Tuduetso, the special gift in the family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACCRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

COPE – Coping Orientation to the Problems Experienced

SWB- Subjective Well-being

SWLS – Satisfaction With Life Scale

SWL – Satisfaction With Life

UB – University of Botswana

QoL – Quality of Life

QWL – Quality of Worklife

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Abstract

The study examined how age, experience, qualification, type of job and the section of employment influenced the use of coping strategies by University of Botswana (UB) employees. It further examined the coping strategies used by UB employees and how the strategies affected their well-being at the workplace. Sixty three participants from the two campuses in Gaborone were studied (N= 63; mean age 41.3). The participants completed the Coping Orientation to the Problems Experienced (COPE – English version) which measures different behaviors and cognitive activities one might engage in to cope with stress, and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) which comprised questions that measured cognitive judgement of Subjective Well-being (SWB). Senior staff status correlated with satisfaction of life, $r = -.25$: $p<0.01$. Lower qualification correlated negatively with avoidant strategy, $r = -.25$: $p < 0.01$ and positively with satisfaction of life, $r = .34$: $p <0.01$. Coping strategies are usually similar for people in the same qualification or employment status.

COPING AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA

EMPLOYEES

CHAPTER 1

Background of the Study

1.1   Introduction

The human capital of any organization is an asset rather than just a cost factor in the

work place. Provision of intrinsic motivation is considered the best way to motivate

employees in an organization (May, Lau & Johnson, 1999). The condition and nature of the

job has a way of influencing employees positively (Dessler, 2004). While executing their

duties in organizations, individuals experience varying levels of stress at one point. Their way

of coping can have an impact on their well-being. Research conducted by Du Toit (cited by

van der Walt, in press) in South Africa, suggest that using coping strategies can cushion the

negative effects of stressful situations. The extent to which findings from South Africa would

translate in the context of Botswana is unknown.

This study established the relationship between coping and subjective well-being in

employees of the University of Botswana. Coping is associated with quality of work-life in

that it affects employees' subjective well-being. There are various interpretations of what

constitutes quality of work life. For example, individual relative judgement of what

constitutes happiness, quality of life and well-being depends on their evaluations of what

gives them fulfillment (Diener, Suh & Oishi, 1997). Determinants of what individuals

perceive as quality of work life are bound to differ depending on their needs, wants and

priorities. This principle applies to employees at any work place. However, the specific

needs, wants and priorities that determine quality of life for employees at University of

Botswana (UB) are not known. Various aspects of work environment elicit unique responses

from different employees, depending on how they evaluate them, and respond to them.

People work because they want to earn a living, but for some, it is fulfilling certain needs.

My informal interactions with employees across UB, both academic and support, revealed that individuals have values that they uphold, which seem to impact on the way they feel at work. For example, many employees were unhappy with the fact that, it appeared that the UB as an employer does not seem to care about how employees get the results, but was primarily concerned about the results. De Jonge, Dormann, Jansen, Dollard, Landeweerd and Nijhuis (2001) argued that some problems may have their roots in the properties of the job itself, which could impact on the quality of work-life (QWL) and thus lead to low SWB.

1.2   Background of the Study

Coping strategies used to deal with stressful events have implications for employees' well-being at the workplace (Welbourne, Eggerth, Hartley, Andrew & Sanchez, 2007). For instance, Welbourne et al. (2007), examined, the relationships between workplace coping strategies and job satisfaction. A sample of 190 nurses completed the Brief COPE, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) and the Occupational Attributional Styles Questionnaire (OASQ). They observed a greater use of problem solving/cognitive restructuring coping styles and less use of avoidance coping styles to deal with workplace stress.

Sociologists view SWB as part of social behaviour (Veehoven, 2006). It can be defined as "... positive state of mind that involves the whole life experience" (Cummins, Mellor, Stokes & Lau (in press, p.2). Diener (1984) observed that, everyone would prefer to be well-adjusted and happy, but too often people experience so much stress that they are not as happy as they would like to be. Well-being may be defined as a subjective, positive, emotional state with general life satisfaction. A variety of factors are capable of affecting

individuals' SWB, and QWL is one of the factors, hence my interest in carrying out research on SWB in UB employees.

1.2.1 Needs, Values and Priorities

Workers have different values and priorities. For instance, some workers may decide to dissociate themselves from the stressful work life events; others may confront the events. In confronting challenge, some may use their emotions to deal positively with threatening events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The manner in which an individual responds to a stressful event is influenced by their interpretation and explanation of the events. Therefore, people choose a coping strategy they perceive to help them in handling a particular event (Welbourne et. al, 2007). Evaluation of events or situations by individuals may differ, yet the subjective feeling of well-being could be similar.

For organizations to maintain their competitiveness, it is imperative to support QWL in employees. In their study, May, Lau and Johnson (1999) confirmed a positive relationship between quality of work life and business performance. More often than not, positive performance is associated with positive well-being and good quality of work life (Welbourne et. al, 2007).

The important role played by employees in transforming an organization cannot be over-emphasised. Researchers have taken keen interest in studies on motivating employees to contribute their best ability and knowledge in work (May et.al., 1999). Executive Management of various institutions is often perceived as failing to provide good QWL, and with negative affects on employee's SWB.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This study explored the relationship between coping and SWB in UB employees. It examined the individual employees' experiences at work, and the mechanisms or strategies they use when faced with stressful situations at work. Employees at the UB face numerous challenges in an increasingly stressful and complex work life that blends multiple responsibilities, and the increasing pressure from management to be productive. Employees' individual differences in the use of coping strategies and the extent to which they contribute to their well-being were investigated.

The manner in which employees respond to work stress depends on their interpretation of the work events. For instance, Caverley (2005, p. 404) observed that "coping strategies are typically the thoughts and actions which individuals demonstrate when they are responding to discomfort, tension or strain as a result of a stressful work or life event." According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (1999), some of the aspects that generate stressful situations for employees are; task design, management style, personal relationships, work roles, career concerns and environmental conditions. These become stressful if they are not properly managed. The study examined how UB employees deal with daily stressful events at the work-place, and identified their coping strategies.

Coping strategies can be classified under three categories; problem solving/cognitive coping strategies, emotional –focused coping strategies, and avoidant coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem solving/cognitive coping strategies involve attempts to come up with a solution or way of alleviating the stressful situation, whereas emotional coping strategies focus on efforts to regulate the emotional consequences brought about by the stressful event or situation. Avoidant strategies are associated with efforts to distance

oneself from the stressful and threatening event, with a view to minimizing or coping with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

1.4   Research Questions

The study addressed the general research question whether there was a relationship between coping and SWB in UB employees. The specific research questions were:

1. How do UB employees respond to stressful or difficult situations or events at the workplace?

2. What coping strategies are used by UB employees?

3. What is the relationship between coping and SWB in UB employees?

1.5   Significance of the Study

Although research has been conducted on coping and SWB, not much has been written about those aspects in the Botswana context. Several studies have been conducted on SWB and other domains such as self-esteem, health, economic status and so on (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003, Diener, Suh & Oishi, 1997; Maluka, 2004). The findings of this study will make invaluable contributions towards the improvement of management style at UB. For example, knowledge of how stressful work events or situations impact on SWB in UB employees could assist in the review of policies and procedures. For instance, interventions on dealing with work stress could be considered for inclusion in UB employee induction programmes. One of the values of the UB is maintenance of "professional and ethical standards by upholding the highest professional and ethical behaviour and through openness, honesty, tolerance and respect for the individual' (Shaping our Future, 2004). The findings and recommendations made could facilitate nurturing human resources within

the University, and development of intervention programmes where necessary, to assist employees to make positive adjustments when they are faced with stressful events.

The findings of the study make a contribution to theory by establishing how workplace coping and SWB are operationalised in the African context. Furthermore, the study also determined the relevance of the standard measures of coping and SWB in the African context.

1.6 Limitations

The findings of the research cannot necessarily be generalized to all higher education institutions in Botswana due to the fact that UB is different in many qualities, from other institutions of higher education. For example, the UB, despite being a knowledge based institution, has more categories of employees than other similar institutions. Other institutions would probably have fewer categories, such as teaching and administrative staff only. The researcher is an employee of the UB and has a unique perspective of the population being studied. However, there could be possibilities of bias in her interpretation of the findings. The use of a survey approach is likely to yield different findings from those involving observational studies.

1.7 Delimitation

This study focuses on employees of the UB who are listed in the internal telephone directory. Certain categories of staff such as members of the Industrial class cadre, most of who do not appear in the directory are not part of the study. These are likely to have differing experiences.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1. **Subjective Well-Being (SWB).** It is defined as the people's evaluation of their lives, including their evaluation of their emotional reactions to events, their moods, and the judgement they make about life satisfaction, fulfilment and satisfaction with domains such as work (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003). This includes variables such as life satisfaction and marital satisfaction, and positive moods and emotions.

2. **Quality of work life (QWL).** The degree to which organisations create work situations that enhance employees' motivation, satisfaction and commitment that lead to high levels of organizational performance (Greenberg & Baron, 1993).

3. **Perception.** The process through which individuals select, organize, and interpret information brought to them by their senses in order to understand the world around them (Greenberg & Bacon, 1993).

4. **Employee.** A person who is employed (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English).

5. **Work.** A job or business One's place of vocational employment (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English).

6. **Strategy.** Plans and actions necessary for successful achievement of organizational goals (Moorhead & Griffin, 1998).

7. **Stress.** A person's adaptive response to a stimulus that places excessive psychological or physical demands on that person (Moorhead & Griffin, 1998).

1.9 Summary

This chapter outlined the background to the study and the research questions to be addressed. The purpose of the study was two fold: the first aim was to examine the coping strategies used by UB employees. The second aim was to establish the relationship between

coping strategies and UB employees' well-being. The study focused on individual

employees coping strategies. The findings were intended to make a contribution towards the

development of effective workplace intervention programmes to assist UB employees to

cope with stressful events at the workplace. Operational definitions of terms are provided

within the context of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the literature representing what is already known on the subject.

It covers the theoretical background on coping and coping strategies as well as subjective

well-being. The use of coping strategies at the work place has a bearing on the workers' well-

being. The manner in which workers interpret stressful events at work affects their subjective

well-being (Diener, 1984).

2.2   Theoretical Foundation

This research is based of the Transactional Model. For example, according to Lazarus,

people who are confronted with stressful events or situations, go through a series of stages in

an endeavour to deal with such events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

2.2.1   Primary Appraisal

This is the first stage at which the individual makes an assessment and evaluation of

the situation and determines whether the implications are positive, negative or neutral. At this

stage the individual appraises the interaction between stressor and their individual values and

beliefs surrounding the event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For instance, an employee at UB

would consider the extent to which the stressful event or situation interferes with their value

system. Literature presents the argument that if an individual is distressed by an external

thing, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to the individuals' estimate of it; and the

individual has the ability and power to change the situation (Aurelius cited in Kovacs, 2007).

2.2.2 Secondary Stage

The stage that follows involves an assessment of whether an individual has adequate coping strategies or abilities to handle the challenge. In cases where the strategies are adequate, a state of equilibrium is experienced. If the coping strategies are inadequate, stress could result. Stress could present itself as physiological or psychological illness (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The study sought to investigate coping strategies used by UB employees to deal with the workplace events that are perceived stressful.

2.3 Coping

An individual's subjective evaluation of situations is attributed to the degree to which they feel stressed. Lazarus (1990) suggested that stress is a condition that is subjectively experienced by respondents as they try to address the imbalance brought about by perceived stressful events. According to Kovacs (2007), the workplace is filled with stressful events, and individual performers have to devise a way of coping, and being productive. Successful use of coping strategies enhances productivity at the workplace, as well as improves health and well-being in daily living. Coping strategies refer to the mechanisms that individuals put in place or employ in order to master, tolerate, minimise or reduce stressful events. Coping comes as a response to a stressful experience. It is defined as an effort to disengage from goals that are considered unattainable, and where an individual creates conditions that allow them to move towards desired goals (Carver et.al., 1989).

2.3.1 Dimensions/Categories of Coping

Literature identifies various categories or dimensions of coping strategies employed by individuals. Although there are slight variations to the terminology used by researchers,

major coping strategies have been classified into, problem – solving strategies, emotion

focussed strategies, and avoidant coping strategies (Higgins & Endler, 1995; Lazarus, 1990;

Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The three categories are discussed.

2.3.1.1 Avoidant coping strategies

People who utilise this strategy tend to avoid threatening events, instead of

confronting them. According to literature (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Carver et. al., 1989;

Levin, Ilgen & Moos, 2007), this is short-term, and if the stressful situation continues, the

individual is likely to resort to unacceptable behaviour such as, drinking heavily or substance

abuse. UB employees who employ this strategy will be more likely to find ways to withdraw

from workplace events or problems, instead of finding solutions to them (Welbourne et.al.,

2006). Avoidant coping strategies share common features with denial strategies. Denial

strategies are characterised by an unwillingness to become involved in coping with certain

events or problems. Long-term use of denial as a coping strategy can have detrimental

consequences for health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

2.3.1.2 Problem–solving coping strategies

This type of coping strategy is used to change or alter the source of stressor. The

individual makes an attempt to confront the event or the source by for instance, making a

deliberate effort to change the behaviour of the person who is responsible for the threatening

event (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). "Workers who

attribute stressful workplace events to external, temporary, and specific causes (characteristic

of a positive style) should see stressful events as "fixable" and apply coping strategies that

are geared toward problem solving" (p.2).

2.3.1.3 Emotion-focused coping strategies

Emotion –focused coping aims at "reducing or managing the emotional distress that is associated with (or cued by) the situation" (Carver et.al., 1989, p.267). This evokes resilience and endurance on the part of the individual.

2.4 Coping at the workplace

There is no single way of coping with stress that has been established. The subjectivity of assessing individual situations contributes to this. Employees typically aim at reducing harmful environmental conditions, and maintaining a positive emotional equilibrium. At the workplace, coping is associated with resiliency in response to stressful work events and situations (Edwards, 1992; Lazarus, 1993)

2.4.1 Measures of Coping

Recent studies conducted on coping have used COPE (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) and Ways of Coping measure (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980) to measure coping. According to these researchers, the existing measures are considered to have been derived empirically as opposed to theoretically. However, the measures do serve the purpose in so far as measuring the coping strategies based on the potential coping responses.

2.5 Subjective Well-being

SWB is defined as the people's evaluation of their lives. This embraces what they consider as constituting life satisfaction. It also involves emotional feelings; i.e. moods and emotions, and perceived quality of life (QoL) in specific domains. Examples of domains associated with QoL are, social support, financial status, relationships, career paths and opportunity progression (Diener, et.al, 1997). SWB is the affective and cognitive evaluation we make about how happy and satisfied we are with our life. The fewer the negative

emotions compared to positive emotions, the higher the satisfaction is derived. In this case, individuals are considered to have a high SWB (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997).

Maslow (1943) encouraged recognition of creativity that leads to all forms of self-expression and self-understanding. Motivation is related to general goal-seeking. Accordingly, a person's goal-seeking behaviour can lead to higher QoL including their work life. For instance, an individuals' quest to meet psychological needs, safety needs, belonging needs, esteem needs and self –actualisation could influence SWB. Satisfaction of both intrinsic and extrinsic needs is essential for SWB. Workplace events influence dimensions of SWB. The specific ways in which workplace events influence aspects of SWB in UB employees is partly addressed by this study.

2.5.1 *Components of SWB*

Major components of SWB include the positive affect (includes happiness, ecstasy, joy, elation and contentment), and negative affect which includes among others stress, depression, anger and envy (Diener, et. al., 1997). Following from this argument, high SWB is associated with positive affect. Lay people often give SWB the same interpretation as happiness, although happy people still strive to boost their well-being (Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2007). As reflected in this study, employees at UB reported high SWB, but the negative actions taken by the same group, such as suicide, do not necessarily represent happiness.

2.6 *Gender, Coping Strategies and SWB*

Bishop (2006) explored gender and age differences in the adaptation and well-being of adults staying in Catholic monasteries. The study established greater coping behaviors and satisfaction, while men reported greater depression. Although gender differences are

reported, gender differences in SWB are usually small (Shmotkin, 1990). Pottinger,

McKenzie, Fredericks, DaCosta, Wynter, Everett and Walters (2006) also established that

both male and female used problem-solving strategies, and engaged in wishful thinking. The

study investigated gender differences in coping with infertility among couples. More women

reported heightened distress compared to their male counterparts ($p < 0.05$) because females

did not want to share, but instead took a lot of time blaming themselves, and trying to

establish what contribution they had towards their infertility. This as a result, puts them at a

higher risk of distress.

2.7   *Measures of SWB*

The established simple way of measuring SWB has been to ask individuals how

satisfied they are with their life in general. In responding, people tend to make judgement

based on how they feel at the time of questioning (Veenhoven, 2006), while others consider

other aspects of their life in general (Dienier, et. al., 2003). This reflects the subjective nature

of the responses. This argument is supported to a certain extent by the findings of my study,

where academic staff reported high SWL, which is an aspect of SWB, while at the same time

preferred to use avoidant coping strategies. The high SWL reported may not be associated

with the events that these employees elect to avoid, and as such, it would not be stated with

conviction that the instrument used may have generated responses based on aspects not

targeted by the researcher. Diener, et. al. (1997) acknowledged that cognitive and affective

components of SWB are interrelated, and researchers have only recently begun to appreciate

the relations between the various types of SWB.

2.8 *Summary*

Literature available indicate extensive work that has been carried out on subjective

well-being, and coping. The various components of the two aspects have been articulated.

However, it is evident, as Lau and May (1998) pointed out, that most of the studies that have

been conducted have a bias towards the employer. Concentration is mainly on enhancing

productivity without necessarily exploring what the employee has to go through to produce.

Coping strategies used by UB employees need to be studied with a view to establishing the

motivational considerations for well-being of employees. This study therefore, specifically

address coping at the workplace in order to ensure a balance between employer's

expectations and the employees' perception of their work environment.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and methods used in the study. It also

explains the sampling procedures, the population, data collection procedures, the

instruments and the data analysis procedures. The chapter describes the techniques used to

recruit participants, as well as the ethical considerations that were observed while

conducting the study.

3.2   Research Method

The study employed a survey method. According to Neuman (2007), the survey

method is relatively inexpensive, and provides a general capacity that allows for description

of the characteristics of a large population.

3.3 Participants and Study Setting

This study was conducted at the UB main and south campuses in Gaborone city. The

main reason was that the study was about UB employees, and therefore, had one population.

Both academic and support staff members were included in the study.

3.3.1 Sample Selection and Size

Purposive sampling was used in the first instance to identify employees who were

willing to participate in the study. I used the 2007/2008 UB Internal Telephone directory. The

researcher called employees per faculty (for academic staff), support divisions and

departments (for support staff); thus stratifying the sample into academic (54%) and support

(46%). This was done over a period of three days. All the 63 respondents who were called

and answered the phone agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent letter. This method was ideal in the sense that I could select a small sample from groups that were known to have critical information (Chilisa, 2005; Gay & Peter, 2003; Neuman, 2007). The profile of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of respondents (N=63)

Variable	Category	Frequencies (%)
Age of Respondents	20-35	20 (32%)
	36-45	19 (30%)
	46-58	24 (38%)
Gender of Respondents	Male	30 (48%)
	Female	33 (52%)
Years of Experience at UB	1-5	27 (43%)
	6-10	14 (22%)
	11-15	5 (8%)
	16-20	12 (19%)
	20-30	5 (8%)
Section of Employment	Academic	34 (54%)
	Support (Administrative)	29 (46%)
Job Title	Lecturer	27 (43%)
	Secretary	10 (16%)
	Manager	8 (13%)
	Senior Lecturer	7 (11%)
	Professor	1 (2%)

	Director (Support Section)	2 (3%)
	Administration Officers	8 (13%)
Academic Qualifications	PhD	11 (18%)
	Masters	33 (52%)
	Bachelors degree	4 (6%)
	Diploma	12 (19%)
	Certificate	3 (5%)

3.4 Instruments

The initial contact with potential respondents was through the telephone, followed by the delivery of a consent form to select and document the respondents' consent to participate in the study. Two measures were used by the researcher; Coping Orientation to the Problems Experienced (COPE) (van der Walt et.al, in press), and Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin (1985). In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .75 for the total N-COPE and .70 for the SWLS were observed. These correspond with the Cronbach's alphas reported by van der Walt et.al, (in press) in a study conducted in South Africa among a Setswana speaking population. The two instruments are described below.

3.4.1 Coping strategies

COPE inventory which measures different behaviors and cognitive activities one might engage in, in order to cope with stress, was used to collect data for the study. Past research (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; van der Walt et.al, in press), reported reliability of .74. Scores on the COPE have been shown to predict several relevant outcomes,

such as stress levels. For instance, the COPE is used to assess the various ways in which people respond to stress (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

N-COPE (van der Walt et.al, in Press) was adapted and used for data collection. The N-COPE comprised 26 questions. A four-point Likert-type design was used to elicit responses. The following phrases were used: 1 = *I usually don't do this at all*, 2 = *I usually do this a little bit*, 3 = *I usually do this a medium amount*, and 4 = *I usually do this a lot*. 5 items measuring satisfaction with life (SWLS) were used to measure subjective well-being (Appendix II). The N-COPE instrument comprised questions dealing with coping strategies. These included questions focusing on the problem solving strategies or things those individual employees do in order to solve the stressful events that they encounter; questions that focused on the support seeking strategies, that is, those that measured the extent to which employees rely on others or on external support in dealing with stress at the workplace. Other questions centred on avoidance and denial strategies. These included questions geared at collecting data that indicated the extent to which employees succeed in dealing with stress by avoiding the stressful events or denying the existence of the events. Participants were asked to rate each item on a 4-point scale (1: "I usually don't do this at all; 4: "I usually do this a lot") to indicate the degree to which they typically used each strategy to deal with workplace stress.

Section C comprised questions that measured the satisfaction of life. The items were based on an amalgam of a selection of items from S-COPE (Setswana version of N-COPE), and the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI). The instrument was developed and piloted among the Setswana speaking population in South Africa by van der Walt, Potgieter, Wissing and Temane (in press). The ACSI was considered relevant and appropriate since Batswana are a predominantly Setswana speaking population. An Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .74 was observed for the total N-COPE (van der Walt et.al, in Press).

3.4.2 Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, et.al 1985)

In order to measure the SWB, Satisfaction of Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, et.al 1985) was administered. The SWLS comprised questions that measured cognitive judgement of SWB. That is, the individual's personal judgement and evaluation. For example, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they identified with the following; *In most ways my life is close to my ideal; I am satisfied with my life; The conditions of my life are excellent; so far I have gotten the important things in my life and If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.* A Cronbach alpha reliability index of .87 has been observed for this instrument (Diener, et al., 1985). The SWLS was found to be reliable for use in a South African context (Maluka, 2004; Wissing *et al.,* 1999). Considering the cultural similarities that exist between South Africa and Botswana contexts, as well as the geographical proximity, the researcher adopted the instrument for use in this study. The following are aspects of coping: emotional support, instrumental support-seeking, and denial, and avoidance coping subscales. These items were grouped into four categories: Problem Solving and Cognitive Strategies; Avoidant Strategies; Support Seeking Strategies, and denial strategies. Section C was SWLS that consisted of items that measured SWB or satisfaction with life.

3.4.3 Demographic Data

Demographic variables such as age, gender, employees' department, number of years working at UB, educational qualifications and category of staff were collected. SWB was measured in relation to gender.

3.5 *Procedure*

Prior permission was sought from the UB management to conduct the research. The participants gave individual consent to participate in the study. All participants were made aware of their rights and responsibilities, both legal and moral. Respondents were given an option to decline participation, and those participating signed a consent form (Appendix I). Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from participation should they so decide. The study was clarified and explained to the subjects, so as to protect them against any risk. To ensure anonymity, the names of participants were not used in the study; instead, they were allocated numbers for ease of reference.

3.6 *Data Analysis*

SPSS version 15 was used to compute descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations, as well as reliability coefficients such as Cronbach alphas, and correlations between items. Regression analysis was used to predict UB employees' coping strategies and SWL personnel variables (e.g. age, seniority, qualifications).

3.7 *Summary*

This chapter described the research design and methods used in the empirical study. The sampling procedures, target population, data collection procedures, the instruments and the data analysis procedures were discussed.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1   Introduction

The results presented on this section focus on the key research questions which are:

(a) Establishing how UB employees respond to stressful or difficult situations or

events at the workplace;

(b) Establishing the coping strategies that are used by UB employees;

(c) Establishing the relationship between coping and SWB in UB employees.

Correlations between the coping variables (which are the criterion), with the

predictor/personnel variables were computed. The criterion variables comprised problem

solving/cognitive strategies; emotional support/support seeking strategies; and avoidant

strategies. SWB was an additional criterion variable. The predictor variables included age,

gender, number of years of experience, section to which the respondents were employed, job

title and academic qualification.

4. 2 Correlations among study variables

Table 2 shows the zero-order correlations among the study variables. Employees' years of

experience correlated with age, $r = .66$: $p < 0.01$. Qualification level correlated with age of

respondent, $r = .34$: $p<0.01$. Years of experience and qualification were correlated, $r = 28$: $p <0.01$.

Similarly, employees' job title and qualification correlated, $r = .78$: $p<0.01$. The section to which

respondents are employed correlated with the job title, $r = 89$: $p<0.01$. Staff employment status by

section correlated with satisfaction of life, $r = -.25$: $p<0.01$. Qualification correlated with avoidant

strategy, $r = -.25$: $p < 0.01$ and qualification correlated with satisfaction of life, $r = .34$: $p <0.01$. The

correlation among the predictor variables suggests caution in the interpretation of findings from the

one found from the multicolinearity of the predictor variables. With regard to the criterion variables, problem-solving strategy correlated with emotion–focussed strategy; r = .56: p<01.

Table 2. Zero-order Correlations among the Study Variables (N =63).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Predictor variables										
1.Employee' age	-									
2.Sex/Gender	-	-								
3.Experience	.66**	.13	-							
4.Section	-.06	-18	.03	-						
5.Job Title	-.15	-16	-04	.89**	-					
6.Qualification	.34**	-21	.28**	-.71	.78**	-				
Criterion Variables										
7.Problem-Solving	.10	-11	.21	.09	.09	.11	-			
8.Emotion-Focussed	.32	.08	.05	.07	.07	.06	.56*	-		
9.Avoidant	-.03	.03	-.13	.17	.18	-.25*	.07	.12	-	
10.Satisfaction with Life	.19	-01	.06	.-26	-.19	.34*	.14	.09	-.06	
Mean	41.28	-	8.62	-	-	3.59	2.81	2.68	1.74	2.96
SD	9.36	-	6.72	-	-	1.13	.47	.53	.57	71

Note. Section was in two levels: Academic staff vs Support (Administrative) staff. p< 0.01 p < 0.05

4.3 Coping strategies and UB Employees

Statistical significant correlations were observed between qualification and use of avoidant coping strategies, r =-.25, p < .05. Post-hoc using cross tabulation of frequencies revealed that, of the 28 respondents, 11 (17.5%) participants with a Masters degree used the avoidant coping strategies. Proportionally, fewer of the participants with Diploma represented 11.1%, PhD 7.9%, Certificate 4.8% and bachelors degree 3.2%, used the avoidant coping strategy (see Table 3).

Table 3. **Results of Post – Hoc Analysis of Avoidant Coping Strategy with Qualification**

	Avoidant Coping Strategy									
	1.00	1.20	1.40	1.60	1.80	2.00	2.20	2.40	2.60	3.60	Total
Qualification										
Certificate 1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	3
Diploma 2	0	1	2	2	1	2	0	3	1	0	12
Bachelors 3	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Masters 4	5	3	2	12	4	2	1	2	0	2	33
PhD 5	2	2	1	1	2	0	2	1	0	0	11
Total	8	7	5	16	7	5	4	6	3	2	63

Note. Certificate = 1; Diploma = 2; Bachelors = 3; Masters = 4; PhD = 5

Regression analysis in Table 4 revealed that use of problem solving strategy was higher among academic staff than support staff.

Table 4   **Regression Analysis for problem-solving strategy (N = 63)**

Model	SEM	β	T
Constant	84		3.81
Age of respondent	.04	.002	.016
Sex/Gender	.15	-.124	-.963
Section of Employment	.16	.338	1.817*
Qualification	.16	.379	1.910

Note. SEM = Standard error of measurement. *p <.05

4.4   Satisfaction With Life and UB Employees

A statistically significant correlation was observed between qualification of respondents and the SWL, r = .34. Of the 53 employees who responded to the questionnaire, 33 (52.4%) from the academic section reported a higher satisfaction with life as compared to 20 (31.8%) from the support or administrative section. Distribution of frequencies by qualification and satisfaction with life revealed that more Masters Degree holders (58.5%) had higher SWL as compared to PhDs (20.8%), Diploma holders (9.4%), bachelors degree holders (7.5%), and Certificate holders (3.8%). Employees with higher qualifications tended to have higher satisfaction with life (see Table 5).

Table 5. Results of Post – Hoc Analysis for SWL by Qualification

		Satisfaction with Life											
		1.00	1.80	2.00	2.40	2.60	2.80	3.00	3.20	3.40	3.60	3.80	4.00	Total
Qualification														
Certificate	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3
Diploma	2	2	3	2	0	0	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	12
Bachelors	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	4
Masters	4	0	1	1	4	2	0	2	9	5	0	3	6	33
PhD	5	0	0	0	3	1	0	1	4	1	1	0	0	11
Total		2	4	4	8	3	1	3	18	10	1	3	6	63

Note. Certificate = 1; Diploma = 2; Bachelors = 3; Masters = 4; PhD = 5

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction

This study established the relationship between coping and SWL (which is an aspect

of SWB) in UB employees. Specifically, it explored personnel variables (e.g. qualifications,

experiences, seniority), and the mechanisms or strategies employees use when faced with

stressful life situations and events at the work place. The criterion variables were problem

solving/cognitive strategies; emotional focused strategies, avoidant strategies, and satisfaction

with life. There was no statistically significant difference in the use of coping strategies by

academic and support/administrative staff. The only significant difference observed was in

the use of avoidant focused strategies. People with higher qualifications reported using

avoidant strategy compared to those with lower qualifications.

5.2   *Coping strategies and UB Employees*

Proportionally, more employees with a Masters degree reported using avoidant coping

strategies than did those with different qualifications. At the UB, all Lecturers hold a

minimum of a Masters degree. By virtue of their superior academic training, one would

expect the employees with higher qualifications to rationalize and find alternative solutions to

stressful events. The study however, presents the reverse. Avoidant coping strategies involve

responses that are aimed at avoiding either any acknowledgement of the existence of the

problem or making any attempts to deal with the problem (Carver et.al., 1999). The strategies

are more likely to be used by people with a preference to postpone or procrastinate in dealing

with issues rather than those who prefer a more direct, confrontational approach. It appears

that emotion-focussed or avoidant coping strategies are used when dealing with stressful

events (Kovacs, 2007). However, an individual may elect to "buy time" and try to find ways

of dealing with the event. In employees, use of avoidant coping strategies could be effective as a short-term measure that provides an individual the opportunity to temporarily avoid constant pressure emanating from stressful events (Carver, Scheier & Pozo, 1992; Suls & Fletcher, 1985). A deliberate decision to avoid events that would lower SWB may have been made by the academics. The fewer the negative emotions compared to positive emotions; the higher the satisfaction is derived. In this case, individuals are considered to have a high SWB (Diener, et. al, 1997). However, use of avoidant coping strategies could also lower the productivity of employees in that they probably would postpone challenging tasks or avoid challenging others to work to expectation.

Regression analysis revealed that the use of problem solving strategies was higher among academic staff than support staff. This contradiction is difficult to explain. However, several explanations are possible. For instance, the manner in which individuals interpret their situations may influence their choice of coping strategies. This argument fits in well with the one raised by Edwards (1992) who indicated that a coping strategy is considered effective if it frees the individual from psychological distress. The result could also be a measurement artifact. For example, academics and support staff may interpret avoidant coping style and problem solving style differently.

The nature of issues that support/administrative staff have to deal with, are substantially different from those handled by academic staff. Supervision is evidently tighter for support staff than for academics, and this could have a wash out effect in differences in coping strategies they elect to use. Situational or circumstantial factors may also have had the effect to enhance endorsement of avoidant coping strategies by academics. For instance, at the time the study was undertaken, academic staff members were involved with marking examinations, and as such, it is possible that the responses to the items in the questionnaires were biased. Recency effect could be attributed to the findings. In order to concentrate on the marking, academic staff members probably decided to deliberately avoid any events or situations that could trigger stress, and in responding to the items on

the questionnaire, went for items related to avoidant strategies. Future studies should examine differences in coping strategies within clusters of support/administrative staff to further investigate strategies of coping in support roles.

The use of problem solving strategy by academic staff members is congruent with what would normally be expected. People with higher academic qualifications, which in this case comprise largely academic staff members, are better placed to make attempts to solve problems than to avoid confronting them. It is probable that academic staff may have endorsed problem solving strategies more out of social desirability or the need to project themselves as competent and in control of their work experiences (Singer, Frankel & Glassman, 1983). Perceived control of one's environment has been positively correlated with SWB, while perceived lack of control over one's environment has been negatively correlated with SWB (Boschen, 1996). Future research on problem solving strategies which control for social desirability could provide a more robust explanation on this aspect.

5.3 Satisfaction with Life and UB Employees

This study established the relationship between coping and subjective well-being in employees of the University of Botswana. The study had two categories of staff comprising academic staff members and support or administrative staff. A higher satisfaction with life was reported among the academic staff, the group that surprisingly used the avoidant coping strategy. Academic staff members may not perceive use of avoidant coping strategy to influence their overall SWL. Their happiness may emanate more from involvements away from the workplace, and from their relatively higher salaries, as well as already acquired academic qualifications. UB academics unlike support/administrative staff have flexi hours which allow them to engage in research and consultancies which come with extra remuneration, and could explain the high SWL that was reported. Although support staff employees are not barred from carrying out research, the nature of

their duties and the restrictive office hours, make it impossible to engage in consultancies. Future studies that seek to analyse SWL while matching academic and support staff on income levels could help clarify this relationship.

Issues of individuals' general mental state, striving for fulfillment of desires and the interpretation of lives at the work place, need to be studied in relation to employees at the UB. The unique nature of the UB environment could have an impact on the choice of coping strategies. Despite report of higher satisfaction with life by academic staff, more academic employees committed or attempted suicide in the past two years than did those from among administrative staff. However, the sources of stress resulting in suicide in UB employees are not well understood. Work stress could be a variable. SWL can be considered an amalgam of cognition and affect that represents the general sense of well-being individuals have in relation to their lives Lau et. al., (1999), Diener, et. al., 2003 & Shmotkin, 1990). Policies at the UB tend to place emphasis on results and productivity more than on how employees achieve the results. Establishing possible stressors and how employees cope with stressful events could yield valuable information for policy formulation, and coming up with counseling interventions.

5.4 Limitations

In clustering the criterion variables or coping strategies into problem solving, emotion focussed and avoidant strategies, I used the rationale approach or suggestions drawn from previous research (van der Walt et.al., in press; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The use of empirical approach such as factor analysis could probably yield a different outcome. In this case, the findings would probably be different from what I have presented. The use of factor analysis in clustering of coping strategies could have indicated the overlaps between the strategies which were observed when using the rationale approach. Future research on coping could benefit from the use of factor analysis, as well as a combination of scales to measure the other aspects such as personality of the participants.

Although the study stratified UB employees into two major categories of academic and support staff, the researcher recognises that neither of the categories is homogeneous. Other categories such as seniority and gender within each stratum could yield different results. A future and more representative sample of each of these strata could present different findings.

5.5 Conclusion

On average, UB employees do not differ by personnel variables in their use of coping strategies at the workplace and also in SWL. Differences in the use of avoidant and problem solving strategies were the only exceptions, and these were differentiated by qualifications of employees. The findings of the study suggest a need to conduct intensive research to establish possible stress triggering events with a view to influencing positive affect among UB employees. Instruments more sensitive to differences in personnel variables could be more revealing. It is possible that employees do not genuinely express their feelings, and this could continue to affect their well-being and have negative effect on productivity.

5.6   Recommendations

In order for the UB Management to know the perceived stressful events or work situations, structures to facilitate employee work-life consultations should be set up. These could in the end work as support groups where people could share coping strategies that have worked for different individuals.

UB induction programmes should include interventions that empower employees to deal with workplace stress. The UB has centres and departments that could lead the activities, for instance, Careers and Counselling Centre and Wellness Centre. There is a need to encourage sharing of overwhelming situations so as to avoid taking drastic measures that have negative effects, such as, suicide.

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Appendices

Appendix I

15th April 2008

The Director

Human Resources Department

P/Bag 0022

Gaborone

Dear Sir

Request for permission to collect data from UB Employees

I am a final year M.Ed. (Counselling and Human Services) student at the University of Botswana student, I write to request for permission to administer a questionnaire for data collection purpose. The data is intended for use in a study on Coping and Subjective Well-being in University of Botswana employees.

To ensure anonymity, the names of respondents will not be required. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential and used for educational purpose only.

Sincerely yours.

Odirile, B.E. (Mrs.)
M.Ed. Final year student

Appendix II

Dear Employee

Request for your participation in a Study

You are kindly requested to complete the questionnaire for data collection purpose.

The data is intended for use in a study on Coping and Subjective well-being in

University of Botswana employees.

To ensure anonymity, your names will be required. The data collected would be

kept strictly confidential and used for educational purpose only. Please be informed

that you may elect to withdraw from the exercise if you so wish.

Thank you for your assistance.

Odirile, B.E. (Mrs.)
M Ed. Final year student

_____

I _____ willingly agree/disagree (*delete as*

appropriate) to participate in the exercise. I am aware of my right to privacy and

confidentiality as well as the fact that I may choose to withdraw at any time.

_____
Signature of participant   **Date**

Appendix III

<u>Section A:</u>   **Demographic details**

Instructions:

Please complete the section below from serial number 1, by providing the information

requested:

Participant Number *(For completion by researcher)*

1.   **Age:** _____Years

2.   **Gender:**   1 = Female   2 = Male

3.   **No of years as UB employee:**

4.   **Section (Academic/Support):**   1 = Academic 2 =Support

5.   **Job Title:** _____

6.   **Academic qualification:**

      1 = Certificate   2 = Diploma

      3 = Degree   4 = Masters   5 = PhD

Section B: Coping Strategies (N-COPE: van der Walt et.al, in Press)

Instructions:

We are interested in how people respond when they confront difficult or stressful events at the work-

place. There are lots of ways to try to deal with stress. This questionnaire asks you to indicate what

you generally do and feel when you experience stressful events at work. Obviously, different events

bring out somewhat different responses, but think about what you usually do when you are under a lot

of stress.

Please respond to each of the following items by indicating which of the response choices listed just below is most true FOR YOU is. Please try to respond to each item separately in your mind, and choose your answers thoughtfully. Please answer every item. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, so choose the most accurate answer for YOU—not what you think most people would say or do. Indicate what YOU usually do when YOU experience a stressful event.

1	=	I usually don't do this at all
2	=	I usually do this a little bit
3	=	I usually do this a medium amount
4	=	I usually do this a lot

	1	2	3	4
1. I try to come up with a strategy about what to do				
2. I refuse to believe it has happened.				
3. Get a group of co-workers or friends together to help with the problem.				
4. Share my feelings with a friend or work colleague.				
5. Seek advice about how to handle the situation from more experienced colleagues.				
6. I say to myself: "This is not real".				
7. Spend more time than usual doing group activities.				
8. Hope that things will get better with time.				
9. I become upset and let my feelings out.				
10. Attend a social event (dance, party, wedding, movie or				

community meeting) to reduce stress caused by the situation.				
11. Help others with their problems.				
12. I take direct action to deal with the problem.				
13. Seek emotional support from colleagues or friends.				
14. I accept that the event has happened and that it cannot be changed.				
15. I talk to someone who can do something helpful about the problem.				
16. I learn to live with it				
17. I reduce the amount of effort I am putting into solving the problem.				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
18. I feel much emotional distress (upset feelings), and find myself expressing those feelings a lot.				
19. I talk to someone to find out more about the situation.				
20. I act as though the event has not happened.				
21. I concentrate my efforts on doing something about the problem.				
22. I accept the reality of the fact that it happened.				
23. I get comfort and understanding from someone				
24. I become upset and very aware of my feelings.				
25. I try to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive				
26. I give up trying to deal with it				

Section C: Satisfaction with life (Diener, et. al 1985)

1	=	Strongly Disagree
2	=	Disagree
3	=	Strongly Agree
4	=	Agree

		1	2	3	4
1	In most ways my life is close to my ideal				
2	The conditions of my life are excellent				
3	I am satisfied with my life				
4	So far I have gotten the important things in my life				
5	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing				

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE