

**ANALYSIS OF MANAGEMENT OF EMPLOYEE
ABSENTEEISM AT MMABATHO COLLEGE OF NURSING**

NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY



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Analysis of the Management of employee absenteeism at Mmabatho College of Nursing.

A mini dissertation

by

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I hereby declare that:

Analysis of the management of employee absenteeism at Mmabatho College of Nursing is my own work and submitted as partial fulfillment of the Masters degree in business administration. I have not submitted it in part or as a whole to any other university. All sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete reference

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Signature

.....

Date

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study was to investigate the causes of absenteeism in the public service focusing at Mmabatho College of Nursing (MMACON) a training institution for nurses as one of the public sector institutions. According to MMACON (2002:3) statistics in 2002 almost one in five workers were absent over one week of work as a result of illness. The college statistics reveal that one third of these employees, or 6% of all workers, missed in excess of two weeks away from work. In addition to the reduced quality of life experienced by these employees, absenteeism impacts the productivity of the college.

The focus of the study is based on the following; to explore causes of absenteeism, to establish the effects of absenteeism, to identify measures to control absenteeism and to make recommendations for an efficient management of the problems.

Questionnaire was designed for staff to complete. Data was then coded and computerized. Analysis of data was reported by means of frequencies and percentages Chi-square method was used. The results were processed and outlined the causes, the effects, control of absenteeism and recommendations.

In general the main cause of absenteeism at MMACON is due to family problems. Days mostly affected are Fridays. The department mostly affected by high absenteeism rate is catering department. Support staff category is the one affected mostly. Employees are frustrated by the rate of absenteeism. Employees are absent for more than three days per week. Recommendations are as follows; to improve communication within the group and with supervisors, to encourage employees to participate in decision making in the area of their expertise, to encourage problem solving in a team environment, to provide training and development opportunities, to provide feedback about performance and to deal positively with employee concerns.

KEY WORDS

- Absenteeism
- Tardiness
- Management.
- Innocent absenteeism
- Subculture.
- Public sector.
- Values.
- Roles
- Stress
- Organisational structure

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Orientation to the study

1.1 Introduction

Absenteeism occurs when an employee fails to report for work as scheduled when she /he either is sick or having problems. Absenteeism is the biggest operational challenge facing the Public sector. The problem of absenteeism has been discussed in management forum at Mmabatho College of Nursing and it calls for an urgent attention.

The main aim of the study was to investigate the causes of absenteeism in the public service focusing on Mmabatho College of Nursing (MMACON), which is a training institution for nurses as one of the public sector institutions. According to MMACON (2002:3) statistics almost one in five workers missed over one week of work as a result of illness. The college statistics reveal that one third of these employees, or 6% of all workers, missed in access of two weeks away from work. In addition to the reduced quality of life experienced by these employees, absenteeism impacts the productivity of the college.

Temporary employees used are about 75%, leading to reduced productivity. Indeed, employers view higher productivity and lower absenteeism as two of the key benefits of health promotion programme at work (MMACON, 2002:4). Most of the employees report absenteeism of a short duration, 25% of employees missed up to two days off work, 24% reported three to five days, 13% lost six to ten days and the remaining 9% were away from work for over two weeks. This report is alarming and it is the cause for concern for management of the college. Statistics of the college obtained in 2002 shows a higher overall rate of absenteeism and the absences are generally of short duration; that is, at most five days (MMACON, 2002:5). Absenteeism is higher among women than among

men (78% versus 63%) at MMACON. When more than ten days off work are considered, however, men and women show comparable absenteeism, a finding common on the statistics.

The likelihood of missing more than ten days from work increases as the number of sources of concern increases, with those concerned with all illness aspects being twice as likely as those unconcerned with any illness to report time off (11% versus 6%) (MMACON, 2002:5). The more diverse the sources of home-related stress, the more likely the employees are to be absent for more than ten workdays. This reflects in the statistics of the college quarterly reports on attendance patterns.

The human resource report of the college shows that most of the employees were referred to the employee-assisted programme (EAP) for counseling and support. EAP is a programme designed by the government to support staff in need of help (MMACON, 2002:6). Absenteeism is one of the most widespread obstacles to productivity, profitability and competitiveness. Absenteeism causes overtime, late deliveries, dissatisfaction amongst customers and a decline in morale amongst workers expected to cover for absent colleagues. The indirect cost of absenteeism often exceeds the direct cost (McFarland, Skipton and Morris, 1998:190).

Absenteeism is regarded as a huge, but largely neglected problem for employees. Absence from work occurs for legitimate reasons, serious illnesses, death and family emergencies, but they also occur for aches and pains, sleepless nights and hangovers. Work related problems include amongst others stress and burnout from added responsibilities and tight schedules as employers try to do more with fewer workers. Public sector workers are absent more than those in private sector (Flood, 2004:2).

1.2. Problem statement.

Absenteeism at MMACON is a problem. This study therefore sought to investigate the causes of absenteeism at MMACON and to make recommendations for efficient management of the problem.

1.3. Objectives of the study.

1.3.1 Primary objective.

The study was undertaken to investigate the causes of absenteeism in a public sector institution.

1.3.2. Secondary objectives.

- To explore causes of absenteeism at MMACON.
- To establish the effects of absenteeism at MMACON.
- To identify measures to control absenteeism at MMACON.
- To make recommendations for an efficient management of the problems.

1.4 Importance of the study

The importance of this study is to establish the causes of absenteeism and suggest ways of controlling the rate thereof at MMACON. The study is also important because it has the potential to provide explanations for causes of absenteeism at MMACON. To some extent, the study will contribute to knowledge about causes of absenteeism amongst all level of workers and enhance the understanding of this behavior. The recommendations of the study can also assist in the implementation of effective measures in managing the problem.

Furthermore, the findings of the study can help broaden the understanding of organizational functioning by highlighting the causes of absenteeism that have not yet been investigated and are not clarified at MMAACON. The study can also help management at MMAACON to better forecast, plan and compensate for employee wellness issues such as absenteeism. The study can lead to lower absenteeism rate at MMAACON, which ultimately helps efficiency and effectiveness at the college.

1.5. Definition of concepts

- Absenteeism

Failure to report for work as scheduled (Van Der Westhuisen, 1999:21).

- Tardiness

A form of absenteeism in that the employee reports late to work and or is absent on duty, that is loitering around and being non- productive (van Der Westhuizen, 1999:23).

- Management.

The process of using an organisation's resources to effectively achieve the organisational goals by planning, organizing, leading and controlling (Cronje and Smith, 1999:3).

- Innocent absenteeism.

This type of absenteeism occurs when an employee fails to report on duty due to reasons above the employee's control (Gillies, 1998:13).

- Culpable absenteeism.

This type of absenteeism occurs when employees are absent from work without authorization for reasons that are within their control (Gillies, 1998:16).

- Excessive absenteeism.

This type of absenteeism occurs when an employee is absent from work most of the time. It can include both innocent and culpable or it may be deliberate without any reasons (Gillies, 1998:16).

- Corporate Culture.

It is the way a community interacts in the given situations and it is also a collection of values, beliefs and also behaviour shared by workers in the work place (Flood, 2004:3).

- Subculture.

The behaviour found within the broader culture (Flood, 2002:123).

- Public sector.

It is the government institutions which include three spheres of governance; national, provincial and local government (Cronje and Smith, 1999:13).

- Values.

Worker's assumptions about what ideas are worth pursuing (Cronje and Smith, 1999:98).

- Roles

Duties, activities and tasks that an individual carries out at the workplace (Cronje and Smith, 1999:77).

- Stress

The situation when people face important opportunities or threats they are uncertain can be handled. (Cronje and Smith, 1999:77).

- Organisational structure

Formal system of tasks and reporting relationships showing how workers use an organisational resources (Cronje and Smith, 2004:132).

CHAPTER TWO

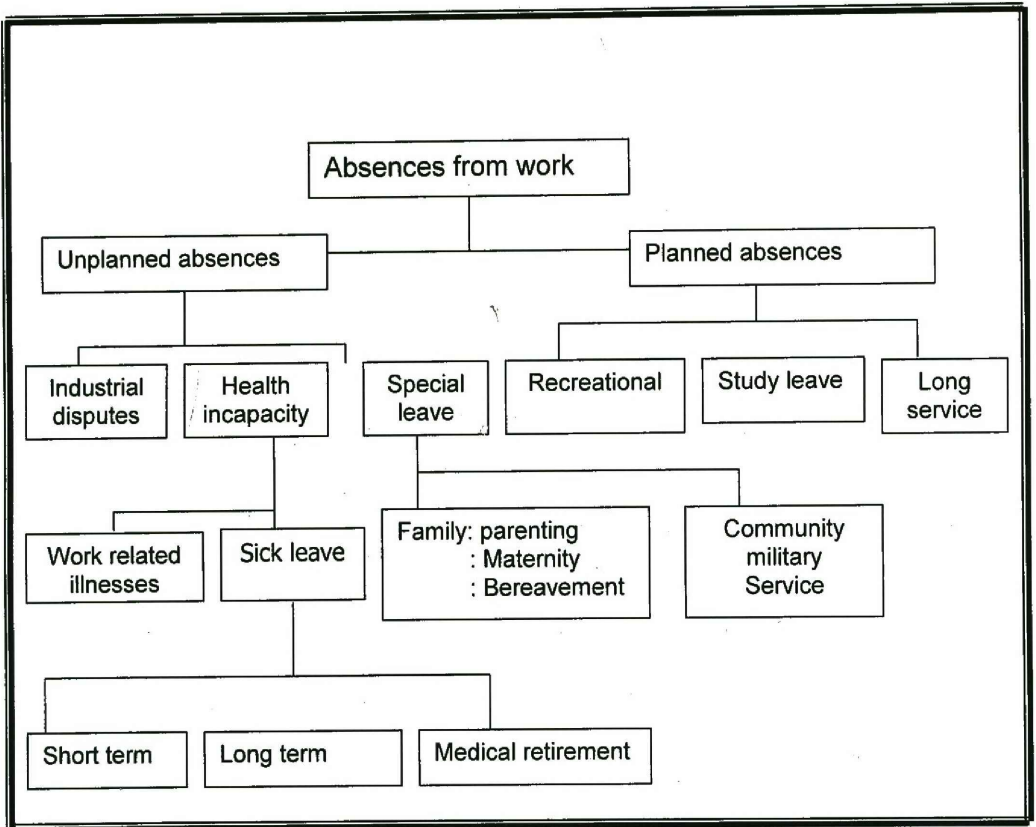
2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature reviewed for this study with a focus on absenteeism in the work place and management. The literature reviewed was aimed at investigating the causes of absenteeism in the public service focusing on Mmabatho College of Nursing as one of the public sector institutions with a view to making recommendations for effective and efficient management of the problem.

2.2 Causes of absenteeism

The following discussion focuses on the causes of absenteeism with a focus on theories that describe the subtle interplay between diseases, disability, social, personal and workplace factors. Attention is placed on the following; individual factors; organisational workplace factors; social and societal influences and associated workplace climate factors. Leave categories are also taken into consideration in the discussion since they have an impact on patterns of absenteeism. The following leave categories describe relationship between different leaves as depicted in Figure 2.1.



SOURCE: Poole (1994:13) Leave patterns and absenteeism

According to Wooden (1999:13) many individual factors that appear linked to absenteeism are past absence history, education, personality and the abuse of drugs and alcohol. The largest single component of sickness absenteeism is associated with genuine incapacity attributed to illness and injury; however, health status is only a minor contributor. Health status was not found to influence absenteeism significantly. Poole (1994:13) argues for this notion emphasizing that sick leave use has non –medical determinants.

Addae (2002:20) states that females are often more absent than their male counterparts. Female absenteeism is tolerated by organisations to a greater extent than absenteeism of their male counterparts. It is asserted that the constraints that affect female absenteeism mainly stem from completing no-work responsibilities that have traditionally been performed by females. Since these responsibilities tend to have a social impact, organisations have generally accepted female absenteeism (Addae, 2002:23).

Van Den Heuvel and Wood (1999:4) argue that women are more likely to take one to ten days off work in a year, but this difference occurs even without any source of stress in the physical, social, or home environments, suggesting that absenteeism among women is due to other factors such as illness of their children. Van Den Heuven (1993:3) states that the "absence behavior of women is more sensitive to factors internal to the workplace such as stressful life events, while the absence behaviour in men is more responsive to factors internal to the workplace, such as job satisfaction (Shehadel and Shain, 1999:1). Mc Farland, et al (1998; 183) on the other hand state that drawing an institutional theory can assist the organisations to legitimize their existence. (Shehadel and Shain, 1999:1). Mc Farland, et al (1998:183) argued that legitimization of female absenteeism or legitimization of absenteeism in general is socially construed.

According to Gillies (1999:816) innocent absenteeism occurs when employees are absent for reasons beyond their control, like sickness, and injury. Innocent absenteeism is not culpable which means that it is blameless. Culpable absenteeism refers to instances when employees are absent without authorization for reasons, which are within their control. Furthermore, (Gillies, 1999:98) state that an employee who is on sick leave even though he/she is not sick and if it can be proven that the employee was not sick is guilty of culpable absenteeism.

The social role theory encompasses occupational stresses as consequences of playing various roles in the organization, (Van Der Westhuisen 1999:27). The main contributors to absenteeism are uncertainty and fluidity of circumstances at work. Smoking is a known risk factor for diseases such as heart diseases or lung cancer, which typically show up later in life. From this knowledge, a positive relationship between smoking and absenteeism might be expected.

Smokers report high levels of absenteeism than non- smokers, and by far, most absenteeism due to smoking occurs among women aged 15-25 and 35-44. In addition, the impact of smoking on many health problems, namely heart diseases, emphysema, and lung cancer, may not manifest itself until later stage. (Shehade and Shain, 1999:6). The presence of chronic conditions is often poorly predictive of attendance behavior. Many workers with chronic diseases show little impairment in their conditions. Wooden (1999: 11) argues that there appears to be a significant relationship between lifestyle and behavioral factors such as smoking and excessive alcohol intake. Alcohol abuse has an adverse association with workplace attendance either as a consequence of abuse or as an inappropriate coping mechanism to intrinsic and extrinsic stressors. Workers with a diagnosis of alcohol dependence were found by Wooden, (1992:11) to have a six-fold increase in absence frequency and seven times the days lost when non-work absences of more than five days were assessed.

Tomey (1999:20) states that feeling in control of one's health is having an influence over things that happen at work, as well as having someone to count on for help. All reduce the impact of workplace stressors and enhance health perceptions. Addae (2002:8) also argues that personal resources play a similar role in mediating workplace and home stressors to help reduce absenteeism. Korttraba (2003:10) on the other hand states that the relationships among employees has been reported as one of the contributing factors of stress over things that happened to them at work. These employees are more likely to report no absenteeism in the previous year and are less likely to report absences totaling six or more days.

Socioeconomic factors tend to be related to morbidity and mortality, even when individual and environmental conditions are taken into account. The relationship found between absenteeism and education and between absenteeism and professional group in the needs assessment are consistent with this as indicated by Adam (1999:2). Shepard (1999:2) states that people with a higher education level are less likely to report absence totaling more than ten days. On the other hand, they are more absent than employees with less than secondary education by having taken one to five days away from work. Compared with employees in sales, services, or trade jobs, managers are more likely to report short-term absences one to five days as a result of ill health (Leigh, 1999:3).

According to Kaiserman (1999:4) few adults over the age of 60 report stress arising from difficult interpersonal relations. Older workers are nevertheless more likely than their younger counterparts to miss work when they experience difficult interpersonal relations. Absenteeism is also directly related to every stressor of home life and employees free from home related stresses are less likely than others to miss days from work as a result. Employees reporting the following home-related stresses are more likely than others to be absent seven or more days: high-risk behavior, financial worries, death or illness in the family and work place relationships. Conversely, employees who do not indicate home-related stress are more likely to report zero work-loss days (Waches, 1999:4). In contrast, while employees with a support network report better health, they report more or less the same absenteeism pattern as employees without a support network (Evans and Stoddart, 1996:6).

Gillies, (1999:123) states that absenteeism occurs according to week pattern with the highest rates of absence on Mondays and lowest rate on Fridays. Absenteeism is lower in small work groups than in large work group. It is also higher among early shift workers than late shift worker's employees with high absenteeism rates tending towards high accident rates. In addition Gillies, (1999:123) states that employees who live far from the work place tend to have higher rate of absenteeism.

2.2.2 Organisational and workplace factors.

Organisational factors describe the effect of workplace absence culture, group norms and the influence of physical and social work environment. Allen (1999:15) argues that the intrinsic nature of the work including repetitive tasks, monotony, and routinisation, danger and role ambiguity can influence absenteeism. The author states that persons who work in dangerous jobs report between 1.4 and 1.6 days more absence per year than those in safe work. A positive association between workloads and absenteeism has also been observed.

Employee absenteeism, unplanned and missed time from work, has negative implications on an organisation (Korttraba, 2003:14). Employee absenteeism is not always under the control of employees, that is, workplace stress is increasingly causing employees to become ill thereby missing time at work (Tomey, 1999:116).

According to Korttraba (2003:9) absenteeism in the workplace is the most common problem faced by managers. Korttraba (2003:9) further states that the social role theory provides a theoretical framework for conceptualizing how absenteeism affects an organisation's effectiveness. According to this theory, each employee holds various roles at work and he or she performs an array of tasks in those roles, which are largely dictated by the organisational culture or sub-culture or his or her workplace. Interactions between degree of control and autonomy worker skills and workload are suggested as being influential in psychological models of attendance. In support of the aforementioned notion, Allen (1999:17) argues that workplace autonomy, control, the latitude permitting dependent decision making, participatory versus centralised workplace hierarchies, can influence absenteeism.

The term 'role' is operationalised as assets of expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position by the incumbent and by the role renderers within and beyond an organization's boundaries (Korttraba, 2003:9). It is postulated that legitimacy of any behavior, in this case absenteeism, is embedded in the social contexts within which the behavior is enacted, (Addae, 2002:3). Furthermore differences in social contexts such as economics and culture within the workplace will therefore influence an employee's perception of absence legitimacy. This is consistent with the notion that the social context of an organisation engenders unique absence that sustains and reinforces the dynamics of absenteeism, (Addae, 2002:9). On the other hand (Addae, 2002:9) further states that job satisfaction is a key variable in psychological models of worker absence through which other factors exert an indirect effect. Self-perception at a workplace is also an important factor.

Gillies (1999:318) suggests that the absence behaviour of women is more sensitive to pressure external to the workplace, while that of their male counterparts is more responsive to factors internal to the workplace. According to Flood (2004:1) public sector workers are absent more than those in the private sector. Some factors that contribute to a high rate of absenteeism is management styles that are too autocratic. Furthermore poor working conditions, poor relationships with supervisors, stress, burn out from added responsibilities and tight schedules are contributory factors to absenteeism. Employees who are either somewhat or very concerned with unpleasant working conditions or safety issues at work are less likely to report a perfect record of attendance compared with unconcerned employees. For unpleasant conditions, the highest difference in absenteeism between concerned and unconcerned employees shows up primarily in reports of employees missing three to five days of work (Iveson, et al 1998:3).

Flood (2004:4), Gillies (1999:816) and Addae (2002:22) argue that large companies have more absenteeism than small companies. Iveson, et al (1998:3) state that improvement in attendance can be achieved by making absence management an integral part of company policy, creating attendance culture. The shift should be away from absence control to enlighten attendance management strategies, which aim to provide work environment.

The majority of employees are concerned with the physical environment at work and this is related to their perception of their health. When each aspect of their physical work environment is considered independently, an association is found between absenteeism and two of these aspects: unpleasant working conditions and safety issues, (Adam 1999:3). Stressors in the physical environment at work yield a stronger relationship with absenteeism. The number of sick days reported increases as the number of environmental aspects causing concern increases. Markham and Mc Kee (2000:16) noted that an increased absenteeism occurs with increased working hours and overtime. Shift workers have an inconsistent relationship with attendance even though good evidence exists for an increased association with adverse health effects. Decreased absenteeism has been associated with flexible working hours and converse with inflexible hours.

The relationship between absenteeism and concern with the physical environment parallels that between health and the physical environment. The greater the degree of concern with the physical environment at work, the greater the likelihood that employees rate their health lower on the scale. Similarly, a greater degree of concern with the physical environment is linked to a greater likelihood that the employee will be absent from work for six or more days, (Van Den Heuven, 1999:3).

2.2.3 Social and societal factors

Social factors also influence leave taking by reinforcing community norms of non-caring. This is also in relation to the culture of illness acceptance (Mathieu and Kohler 1998:16). Boubarnais, Vinet, Meyer, Goldberg (1992:15) in Sergeant (2000:18) cite the effects of market economic recession as one of the factors that influences absenteeism behaviors. Family issues and their relationships to work obligations have also influence on absenteeism patterns.

Sagie (1998:3) argues that the majority of employees are stressed by various problems, employees who report more problems that are sources of stress are more likely to be absent from work than others. Aspects of the social environment at work are contributory factors of absenteeism. These factors can result in employee absenteeism of up to six or more days. Conversely, employees who do not indicate stress from the following are more likely to report a perfect record of attendance: interpersonal relations, job demand, job control, management practices and job change (Kaiserman, 1999:4).

2.2.4 Associated workplace climate factors

Bourbonais, et al (1999:16), discuss on the associated workplace climate factors emphasizing on the following; turnover productivity and stress claims. Bourbonais, et al (1999:16) argues that there is a link between absenteeism, turnover and retention. Supporting the notion, Taylor (1996:17) explains role stresses as one of the organizational factors that can cause absenteeism. Stress, a tension state resulting from factors that tend to alter an existing state of equilibrium, is a concept that has received great deal of attention from researchers throughout the past several decades. Stress is a fundamental of the work environment, and it appears to have adverse affects on both employees as well as organizations as a whole (Dobrevva-Martinova, et al. 2002:897).

The links between absenteeism and retention (turnover) are strong. Price (1999:17) in Tauton, Krampitz and Woods (2002:17) states the patens of leave, reflecting the interaction between intent to stay with job mobility, workplace factors, career and personal development opportunities, affects absenteeism rates. Workplace climate factors share some causal factors that can be linked to management practices and the physical work practices. Whilst such relationships are strong, each of these are separate constructs and can vary independently in causation and outcome. Jenkins, Mitra and Gupta (1992:77) view absenteeism as a withdrawal response from perceived or actual adverse working environments. This may however represent the reaction at one end of a continuum, which can affect work performance, concentration, safety and participation. Jenkins, et al (1992:77) concluded by suggesting that there are key indicators to be followed, which are workers' compensation rates; absenteeism rates; rate of client aggression; rates of disciplinary procedure; rates of system breakdown; staff turnover; rates of grievance reporting and measures of job satisfaction. Some of these factors are more specific for the public sector work environment.

Dalton and Mesch (1999:35) argues that physical aspects of the work environment may also influence absence rates. Hazards such as noise, heat, poor indoor air quality, biohazards and chemical agents should be assessed. The presence of uncontrolled hazards in the workplace has a potential to give rise to direct compensate absence and indirect workplace absenteeism.

2.3 The effects of absenteeism at workplace

Absence from work has wide ranging repercussions on the workplace, workers, the operation of industry and the provision of goods and services to clients. The effects of absenteeism were investigated exploring the following areas; cost, hidden cost, productivity and benefits.

Absenteeism is one of the most widespread obstacles to productivity, profitability and competitiveness. It causes overtime, late deliveries, dissatisfaction amongst customers and a decline in morale, amongst workers expected to cover for absent colleagues. The indirect cost of absenteeism often exceeds the direct cost (McFarland, et al 1998:190).

Brook and Price (2002:1) analysed the unscheduled absence survey and found out that the direct money lost to unscheduled absenteeism on per employee basis has reached a record high of an average of R9000.00 per annum. This costs small companies as much as R6000.00 a year, whilst largest employers lose up to R3, 6 million. In addition to the description of the effect of absenteeism by Brook and Price (2002:1), Burke (1993:9) discovered that the average amount organisations spend for unscheduled absenteeism on an annual basis accounts for approximately 2.3 percent of their pay roll expenditure up from 1.7 percent. Toomingas (1998:9) states that management has to make changes to the normal operations. This may mean working staff longer and harder, allowing work to built up or deferred, eliminating certain services, hiring temporary replacement, or permanently maintaining an extra work- force to cover absenteeism.

Wooden (1992:10) argues that the effects of absenteeism are most pronounced when work tasks are interdependent. Wooden (1992:10) states that indeed with many complexes, specialized and technological processes, operations cannot proceed without a full complement of staff. Chadwick, Nicholson and Brown (1999:11) also support the above-mentioned notion by stating that operations may not be able to continue without the required resources and or materials.

Burke (1993:7) describes the consequences of workplace non-attendance as hidden increased cost. The non attendance include lower morale of employee; increased workloads; frustrated managers and supervisors; loss of productivity; non achievement of objectives; reduced provision of services; decreased product quality; increased training costs and loss of key skills and personnel; increased supervisory and administrative costs; adverse public perception and confidence

and adverse effects on consumers. Dalton and Mesch (1999:35) also notes that hidden costs such as additional supervisory time, extra staff, overtime, employment of temporary staff, administration, training, effects of reduced service provision and loss of business are frequently under estimated. Hidden costs may be higher then double the cost of wages.

In contrast Bertera (1999:33) states that being away from work for "legitimate" reasons can be beneficial to the workplace and the individual. Award provisions serve a function in providing workers with the right not to attend work when physical or psychological capacity is diminished. This reduces the risk of injury not only to themselves but also possibly to others and allows a productive workforce to operate. Employees who fail to take time off appropriately may represent a health and safety hazard. Therefore taking of sick leave may act as a safety valve mitigating personal, external and workplace factors.

Bross, Kelton and Cronin (1999:13) maintain the same view point that workers may utilize sporadic sick leave for workplace conditions, particularly "cumulative trauma disorders" or workplace stress. In a survey of the Commonwealth government workers, 49% of interviewed staff reported that they experienced an episode of illness or injury that had some association (in their view) with work. Only one of the staff had lodged a claim, while the majority dealing with such problems through accessing sick pay if leave was required. There are also legitimate reasons for employees' absence, which is unrelated to personal illness. This may include emergency childcare for well children; care of sick children; care for adult relatives; or the performance of important personal business.

According to Hockings, Grain and Gordon (1994:161) there are potential benefits of work absence such as legitimate exemption from work; reduces injury risk; maximises rate of recovery; reduce transmission of infectious diseases; maintains productive workforce; maintains workplace safety; safety values and the ability to deal with pressing non-workplace commitments. Bross, et al (1999:13) also believe that absence from work could benefit an organisation.

2.4. Control mechanism

An article in the Sunday Times (Business News) dated 14th September 2004 states that "South Africa has one of the most important and progressive policies in terms of spelling out what attempts must be made to address a situation of recurring sick leave before an employee can be dismissed". It is also apparent that many local employees tend to abuse the sick leave system because of this progressive policy. Fitzpatrick and Huczynski (2000:19) suggested that careful assessment and analysis of absence problems is essential for effective solutions. This involves characterisation of the absence problem before designing and implementing strategies suited to the organisation and identification of the causes before designing and implementing strategies suited to the organisation. Fitzpatrick and Huczynski (2000:19) suggest that solutions can be chosen from a range of solutions such as individual, work and organisational focused strategies.

Van Der Westhuisen (1999:27) states that institutions seek to legitimise absenteeism by attempting to create congruence between social values associated with their activities and norms of acceptable behaviour in the larger social system. Gillies (1999:16) furthermore argues that absence from work was initially conceptualised as a managerial problem that can be resolved by management intervention. As a result, it was considered that the boundaries of the relevant factors that induce the behavior or help to resolve it lay within the organisation

Gillies (1999:16) state that it is important to construct a job person fit to conceptualise and modify workplace attendance and absence behaviour. The emphasise was also on factors that can modify supervisor's skills on issues that affect attendance such as productivity, safety and injury on duty. Based on the argument in the preceding discussion, absence-monitoring systems are fundamental to identify problems, developing solutions and monitoring the success of absence control strategies. Computer based absence reporting system can provide data so that rates can be measured on ongoing basis as an important indicator of overall human resource performance. This can provide feedback on the success of intervention strategies.

Moss (1992:23) states that employee-wellness programmes can be one mechanism that can minimise absenteeism rates. These programmes have an intuitive attractiveness given the substantial contribution of factors such as smoking, alcohol and drug use and effects that lifestyle and infectious agents have on work absence. Sloan (1998:25) argues that programme implementation should be an important role of supervisors, furthermore supervises practices that will lead to more open strategies in workplace development such as feedback giving, participatory problem solving open expression of opinion should be emphasized. Sloan (1998:25) believes that the supervisory role may result in reducing ambiguity, role conflict, stress and increased job satisfaction, with a consequent reduction in absenteeism.

Taylor (1999:29), Warner (1992:199) and Buon (1992:59) stress the necessity of involving workers in forming shared objectives. The role of supervisors is also emphasised as the most important strategy. A further strategy should include the involvement of employees so as to make them feel accepted, acknowledged and recognized. Buon (1992:59) states the importance of follow-up, contact and communication in assessment of absenteeism. They argue that it should be a non-confrontational inquiry. A step-by-step programme that includes counseling investigations and discipline is recommended.

Burke (1993:7) on the other hand argues that the supervisory role should be seen as a main strategy to address absenteeism but also the environmental factors should be addressed. The areas to focus on are such as shift work-existing, downsizing problems, relocation, rapid change and technological changes. According to the author the workplace change can have dramatic effects on employees participatory and influencing their motivation to attend work. In particular downsizing and restructuring associated with consequent uncertainty and the risk of retrenchment have the capacity to adversely affect attendance. Burke (1993:9) recommends that change management strategies should involve informative approaches as this can have an impact on performance, turnover and absenteeism.

In addition Seamonds (1993:821) states that enterprise bargaining at the workplace may involve issues that relate to work practice systems and even management of absenteeism policies. Agreements entered into should include shift hours or rotations, relocations, retrenchment package consultation and training, flexible working arrangements. Flexibility on working arrangement can include working at home. Dalton and Mesh (1990:35) support the notion by stating that the introduction of flexible working hours requires a high level of organisation planning and support. However Burke (1993:8) supports the abovementioned notion strategy.

Many managers may be familiar with the taking of sick leave when annual leave or other forms of leave are denied. Poor planning, consideration of staffing requirements and leave requisitions can result in destructive leave taking patterns. Short recreational or discretionary leave ranging from one to four days together with forward manpower planning are useful considerations (Kossek and Nichol 1992:485).

Childcare facilities on employee attendance are very effective. There is evidence to support the effectiveness of childcare provision in reducing turnover and improving recruitment. In contrast Blau (1993:30) suggests that absence may

occur not so much as a response to a lack of childcare but rather because of the sickness of a child, in which case such facilities are unlikely to have much effect. Low cost and cost effective opportunities exist for the provision of services, including service co-location adjacent to industry with government schemes. After hours school care and care during holidays may fill an important gap, noting that absence rates appear elevated during school holidays.

The Volvo report in the study by Royal Australasian Physicians (1999:31) describes a number of improvements in the work environment including innovative job design, mechanization, elimination of repetitive jobs and heavy lifting, job rotation and teamwork. These allowed more social communications and other measures, which increased the freedom and responsibility of workers resulting in a 50% decrease in absenteeism without diminishing productivity and profitability.

Pearson (1992:90) states that quality circles and autonomous workgroups represent an adoption of a new set of work arrangements involving workers in a more active and participatory role. Improvements in productivity, job satisfaction, absenteeism and other work-related variables have occurred. The development of affirmative job attitudes where employees identify their interests with those of the firm is seen as an important consequence. Involvement with increased job scope and responsibility requires training and skill development to achieve an optimal job person fit and can be seen as one of the components for work motivation including rewards, communication, shared goals and participation.

Quality management has been debated as one of the management strategy that can reduce absenteeism in the workplace. The principles of quality management have the potential to significantly impact on employee management. Quality concepts can be directly applied to the problem of absenteeism within an organisation. With employee participation in decision-making, processes can lead to the analysis of the causes of absence and improved systems can be developed Klaas (1999:31).

CHAPTER THREE

The theoretical framework and the hypothesis of the study.

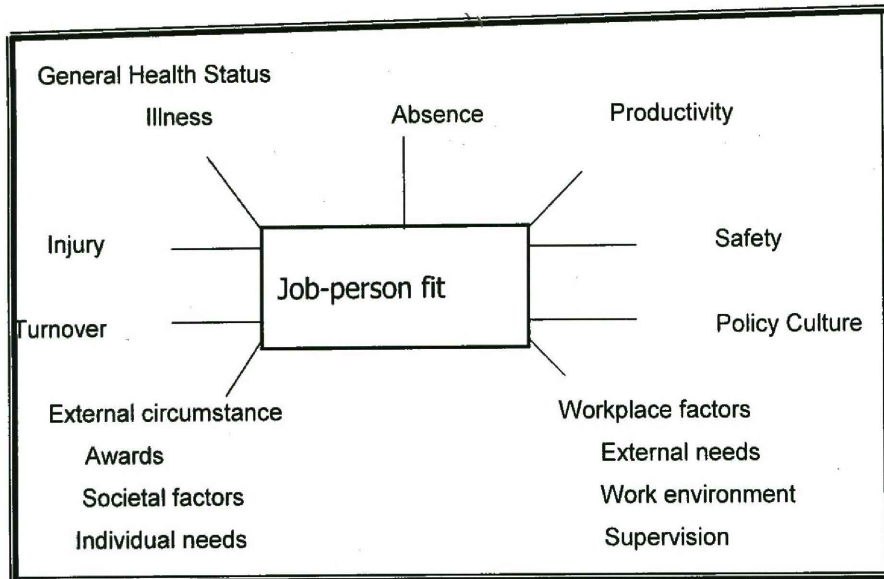
3.1 Introduction

A theoretical framework expresses and explains some of the perceptions regarding certain phenomenon. Theories provide a framework from a combination of personal experiences, research findings and abstract thought processes. They also provide a framework for examining the phenomenon of interest of the study. A theoretical framework is a general, abstract explanation of the interrelationships of concepts. The theoretical field of this study in this regard was based on the social role and interacting system theory as supported by Polit and Hungler (1998:191), Steers and Rhodes, Dawkins and Kenyon in Korttraba (2003:9).

Social role theory provides a framework for conceptualising how work stress affects an individual's well being and organisational effectiveness (Korttraba 2003:9) According to this theory, each employee holds various roles at work and he or she performs different tasks in those roles which are largely dictated by organisational culture and subcultures or work group Korttraba, (2003:9).

Social theory encompasses workplace problems, stressors and further explains stress as a consequence of playing various roles within an organisation. Dobрева-Martinova in Korttraba (2003:11) defines role stress as a perception indicated by ambiguity, conflict and more work as characterized by both factors from the environment and from the individual. Brook and Price (1999:12), Todd et al (1996:123) define role ambiguity as a lack of predictability of outcome of response to one's behavior and as a lack of the existence of clarity of behavioral

requirements. When an employee is faced with a situation of role conflict, ambiguity, or overload, expectations become difficult to meet. (Korttraba 2003:10), Hackett (1990:248), Hackett and Guion (1995:355) and Rhodes and Steers (1990:86). The environmental factors include socio-cultural, political, economical and cultural behaviors. Polit and Hungler (1998:191) Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationship between external and internal factors of absenteeism.



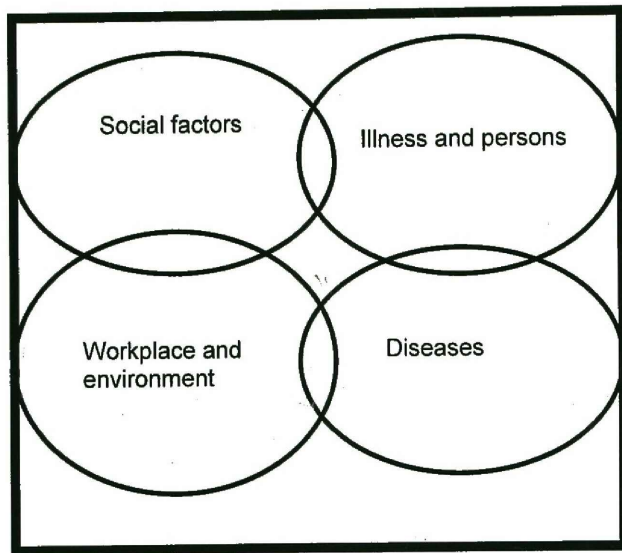
SOURCE: Robinsons (2002:78) Interaction between external (workplace) factors and internal (individual) factors model.

The emphasis of the theory is on how environmental factors can influence an individual and affect attendance patterns. Robinsons (2002:78) describes the external factors as the following; organisational justice, centered by job- person fit awards; societal factors; individual factors internal factors, general health status; illness and injury. Furthermore, Robinsons (2000:79) cites organisational factors such as culture, job-person fit, rewards and awards, workplace policies,

health and safety, as some of the fundamental factors that can affect absenteeism. Individual problems from the external factors can also affect absenteeism and one of the examples cited is the relationship between supervisor and an employee. Productivity is seen as the area that will suffer as a result of high absenteeism rates. Job satisfaction is poor in relation to job- person fit. It is predicted that there will be job satisfaction amongst employees who are well placed at a workplace.

The social theory seeks to address areas that affect the individual and can have either negative or positive influences. King, in Polit and Hungler (1998:198) refers to the interaction between internal factors in an individual that can affect absence patterns. Polit and Hungler (1998:198) cite general health status of an individual; illness and stress as fundamental factors that can influence absence from work. These internal factors also have a direct negative impact on the workplace but there is also a direct relation between safety matters and wellness programmes at the workplace that can assist in minimising individual problems.

Brook and Price (1999:12) describe absenteeism as the interplay between general determinants namely illness and personal, disease, workplace environment and social factors. This notion is in support of the in system interacting theory. The factors are described in figure 3.2.



SOURCE: Brook and Price (1999:12) Theoretical framework social role theory and absenteeism

Brook and Price (1999:12) state that the illustration describes the subtle interplay between disease, disability, social, personal and workplace factors, which cannot be readily dichotomised. Since none of these factors is univocal, the theory also highlights the importance of work and non-work factors in absenteeism. Brook and Price (1999:12) demonstrate that the factors in addition to illness and direct incapacity, account for a proportion of workplace absenteeism. This leaves open the opportunity for management intervention to encourage and facilitate attendance by factors that may fall into their control. However it down plays the role of illness and disease and ignores the possible contribution that interventions at this level may make.

It describes the rationale for social and psychological causes of absenteeism, multidimensional constructs and simple important determinants. Rhodes and Steers (1990:86) describe employee attendance as conceptualized largely by function of two variables namely, the ability to attend and the motivation to attend. According to Rhodes and Steers (1990:86) the theory seeks to emphasise workplace determinants such as job situational variables like routinisation, job stress, job satisfaction, work involvement, leadership and co-worker support. The melding of joint influences of job satisfaction and pressures to attend results in attendance or absence. The theory also attempts to analyse the psychosocial factors in an individual and differentiate between voluntary and involuntary absences and the causes thereof.

Hackewtt (1990:248) defines absences as being under workers control, being typically short term, casual and illegitimate. According to Hackett and Guion (1995:355) the decision to attend work is based upon motivational factors to attend. Involuntary attendances are typically beyond the control of workers and tend to be of a longer term, are thought to result more often from illness or family responsibilities, may be based on the workers ability to attend. These constructs are distinctly, differentially and significantly related to subsets of organisational, personal and attitudinal variables. Being older, having longer organisational employment record, organisational commitment and higher job level are possible factors. Hackett and Guion, (1995:356) findings of the study states that the relationship between job satisfaction and employee absence is weak but between job satisfaction and absence frequency was consistently evident.

Lack of strength may in part contribute to the effect of unavoidable absence where motivation may not be a factor, external factors which attract absence from the workplace, the influence of organisational policies and workgroup norms. Increased relationship strength reduces absence relationships. This implies that shorter absences are more likely to occur in association with relative job dissatisfaction. It can therefore be hypothesised that external factors rather

than workplace factors can influence patterns of attendance. The theory describes voluntary absence propensity as a function of a behavioral tendency akin to absence proneness, relative work dissatisfaction competing with attractiveness of other settings, molded by social culture and norms, and influenced by past individual adaptations (Dawkins and Kenyon 1999:41).

The social theory emphasises issues of socio-economy as one factor that can influence labour absence. The traditionalist economic perspective sees the need to work competing with other alternatives as commodities within the same market. Much weight on either side of a balanced scale with a potential advantage for the workers preferred hours. The employee sees long working hours as an opportunity of taking paid sick leave. It can be concluded that an employee who works for longer hours has likely to be absent than those working for shorter hours, (Dawkins and Kenyon 1999:41). Economists have primarily focused on the effects of incentives, unionization, wages, sick pay provisions and availability, employment climate and the demographic traits. The theory emphasizes the flattening of organizational structures and the establishment of discretionary power as potential solutions.

The socio-economic factor is more predictive that flexible hours, workplace and understanding employers can increase attendance. The effects of changing norms and the presence of external factors sees the effects of trade offs between income and leisure and the influence of award provisions, task oriented work groups and the provision of opportunities for employees to have a say in the workplace (Fulmer, Gibbs, Goldsmith in Korttraba 2003:3).

The theory also describes personal perception on incapacity and personal motive as two factors that can also play an important role in attendance tendencies. The theory suggests that external constraints, including a perception of the need to be absent rather than the problems that relate to organisation may be more important (Dawkins and Kenyon 1999:41). The theory also emphasises

the role of illness, diseases and age. The rate of absence due to ill health can increase the workload on other employees and thus decreases productivity. It can be hypothesised that if most employees are absent from work productivity will be affected and that there will be a loss in profit, business, increased overtime and additional labour, (Dawkins and Kenyon 1999:41).

Rahim, et al and Zohar in Korttraba (2003:11) argue that the implication of difficulty to meet expectations results in poor performance. Furthermore, negative reactions from co-workers are likely, as tasks and responsibilities often interlock within the workplace. Therefore when one employee does not meet his or her expectations, overall progress of the team is inhibited. The theory emphasises team efforts and the effects of one-member failures in a team. Rahim et al in Korttraba (2000:13) argue that slow progress on the part of one team member often puts stress on others. The effects of slow team members affect productivity and cause conflicts. The more individuals are cooperative and show genuine concern for the other party, the more likely that the situation will result in positive individual and organisational outcomes. Less cooperative styles of handling conflict will result an escalation of conflict and stress (Rahim et al in Korttraba 2000:13).

Kaplan–Leiserson, Rahim et al and Zohar in Korttraba (2003:10) conclude that stress is commonly perceived as negative consequences of change and ambiguity. However, both negative and positive outcomes can be observed. It is predicted that positive outcomes of stress include increased creativity and innovation as well as quality of decision-making. The theory further states situations that induce minimal to slightly moderate degrees of tension in an employee often resulting in positive stress because the employee's reaction may effectively address the change Dawkin in kottraba. When an employee acknowledges the stress and focuses on using the most effective means of handling the situation. More often this employee experiences positive effects of stress.

When ambiguity and change are more moderate, employees often experience negative results of stress. Negative results of stress have important organizational implications, as the combination of uncertainty and change often creates tension within employees. Stress can ultimately affect the perception, judgment and interpersonal relationships of employees in the workplace (Marks and Mavis Zohar in Korttraba 2003:12) states that employees who feel overwhelmed by their workload or unmet expectations are likely to perceive unfairness and poor interpersonal relationships as well as lowered mood state.

Rowe (2000:215) states that a decline in mental functioning as a result of role stress has been associated with the concept of "burn-out syndrome". Burnout syndrome is defined as a state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur amongst individuals who do people-work of some kind. This process of emotional exhaustion and overload is the corner stone of the burn out and it contributes to poor work attendance (Swanson, et al 1998: 134).

3.2. Hypothesis of the study

Hypothesis is the formal statement of the expected relationship between two or more variables. Hypotheses translate the research problem and purpose into a clear explanation or prediction of the expected outcome of the study. The statement of a hypothesis implies theory testing and is derived from a proposition. In this study the hypotheses was based on the theory explained in the preceding discussion namely the, interacting system theory Polit and Hungler (1998:191), psychological theory (Steers and Rhodes 1990:40), economical theory of labour absence Dawkins and Kenyon (1999:41) and social role theory Korttraba (2003:9). The environmental factors include socio -cultural, political, economical and cultural behaviors (Polit and Hungler 1998:191).

General health status of an individual, illness and stress were cited as fundamental factors that can influence absence from work. These internal factors also have a direct negative impact on the workplace. There is a direct relation between safety matters, wellness programs at workplace, which can assist in minimising the individual problems

CHAPTER FOUR

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology used in this study and describe in detail the population and the instrument utilised for the collection of data. The discussion also focuses on the steps that were taken to ensure validity and reliability of the study.

The main aim of the study was to investigate the causes of absenteeism in the public service focusing on the Mmabatho College of Nursing (MMACON), which is a training institution for training nurses as one of the public sector institutions and to make recommendations for efficient and effective management of the problem.

Any method which produces meaningful results and is compatible with the Assumptions of a theoretical system is a good method Bloom, (1999:78), Best and Kahn (1989:123). In the empirical investigation of this study the researcher collected data by means of questionnaire (see Appendix) supplemented by unstructured interviews because it is not all phenomenon are accessible to the researcher from questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed using information collected from reading articles related to the study and with the assistance of my supervisor.

4.2 Research design

Devos (1999:451) refers to a research design as the structural framework within which the study is implemented. In this study, the research was quantitative, descriptive and explorative in nature as described by Polit and Hungler, (1999:462). The researcher was able to examine the cause and effect relationship, to remain objective and not influencing the study. The researcher was able to examine participants in order to make generalizations about the cause of absenteeism.

The descriptive research provides an accurate portrayal or account of characteristics of a particular individual, situation or group. The study was a means of discovering new meaning, describing how it exists, determining the frequency because the researcher want to gain new insight into the problem of absenteeism and discover new ideas or increased knowledge on the causes and management of absenteeism in the workplace.

The choice of a research design constitutes an important aspect of research because it is appropriate at this state to define the concept of the research design. Kerlinger (1996:564) defines a research design as a plan or structure of research, the purpose of which is to answer the research questions in an objective, valid, accurate and economic manner, and to control variance. Mouton and Marais (1998:124) defines a research design as an exposition or blue print of a research project. This implies that the research project is structured beforehand to give a clear plan regarding how to gather, organise and analyse data for investigation in such a way that validity is maximised.

4.2.1 Population and Sampling

The term population refers to the entire number of units under study (Treece and Treece 1999:215). The population in this study comprised of staff at the Mmabatho College of Nursing. The total number of staff was 86 eighty-six and random sample of 75 was drawn from three different category of staff at the college 25 staff members were selected from each category of staff members. The categories at MMA CON are nurse educators, support staff and administration staff.

4.3 Data collection

Devos (1999:60) refers to data collection as the process of collection information to be used during the study. Data was collected by means of a survey at Mmabatho College of Nursing in the Northwest Province.

- **Questionnaire as data collection tool**

There are many possible ways of gathering information directly from participants if such information cannot be obtained from observation. These various methods have advantages and disadvantages. Questionnaires and interviews are vital and the most commonly used instruments to collect data in survey research. Both instruments utilise the question-asking approach and are used to obtain information concerning facts, beliefs, feelings and intentions. In a structured interview the questions are pre-determined. The basic aim of the interview is to get information from the interviewee. The questions may be put in a specific sequence and the responses are recorded as precise questions, relevant to the subject asked, in order to establish the full knowledge about the subject or topic Mc Beath, (1999:12). Structured interviews are more scientific in nature than the unstructured.

- **The questionnaire techniques.**

Questionnaire should be asked in such a way that the respondents because free and willing to divulge the require information it should create a feeling of importance on the part of the respondents. Sensitive items should be left to the end of the questionnaire. This is avoiding arousing hostility in the respondent early in the questionnaire. Sensitive issues should be introduced after warning up a respondent with items related to sensitive issues. A well-constructed questionnaire is more likely to elicit good response. A questionnaire should therefore reflect quality and be as brief as possible to require a minimum of the respondent's time. However, constructing a good questionnaire is not an easy task. The researcher opted to use the questionnaire method because she had limited time and resources to complete the research.

- **Development of the questionnaire items.**

In this study the researcher developed the questionnaire by formulating questions from the themes in the literature review. The questions were thoroughly examined to ensure that they measure what they were supposed to measure. The researcher designed questions that focused directly on the topic under [ensured that questions focused directly on the topic under] research. The long and complex sentences were avoided in order to make questions readily explicit and clear to respond to leading questions were avoided in order to maintain a high level of validity of the instrument. The wording of the questionnaires was brief and to the point. The primary aim of adhering to the above-prescribed procedure was to ensure that the Questionnaire was reliable and valid.

- **The Format and the content of the questionnaire.**

The questionnaire consisted of four sections (See Annexure A), Section A consisted of a profile of the respondents. This section was utilized to make the respondents feel at ease and it was also important to determine the age and qualifications of the respondents. It includes the age category, gender and qualifications of the respondents. Section B consisted of eleven questions, some constructed on four to six point scale basis on Likert method. The questions focused on the causes of absenteeism and were constructed in such a manner that all respondents should have the same question and responses options. This was done to avoid vague responses. The respond method was uniformed to ensure that the respondents did not become impatient as a result different responding methods. Section C had four questions. The questions focused on the effects of absenteeism. The questions allowed the respondents the freedom and fair chance of expressing their views about the topic under research. Section D had four questions, which focused on control mechanisms of absenteeism. A procedure of request and appreciation was also attached.

- **Pre-testing the questionnaire.**

A pilot study is small-scale preliminary investigation designed to acquaint a researcher with problems that need attention and offers the researcher an opportunity to pre-test the instrument. The purpose of the pilot study is to trail and detect the problems that must be solved before the major study (Legotlo 1996:28). In order to determine any ambiguity and problems in this study, the questionnaire was presented using sample of five (n=5) nurse educators and support staff (n=5). They were asked to complete the questionnaire and to indicate whether they understood all the questions as well as to comment on points that might need clarification. Amendments were effected to avoid irrelevance and invalidity.

- **Administrative procedures**

A total of 75 copies of the questionnaire were distributed. Some were personally distributed to respondents while the coordinator distributed others. The researcher contacted the respondents explaining the purpose of the research to them. The copies of the questionnaires were numbered and a record was kept in order to determine the responses received as well as the non-responses.

4.4 Data Analysis

- **Statistical Techniques**

The collected data was forwarded to the North West University, Department of Statistics for data caption, analyses and testing of hypothesis.

- **Statistical Test Method**

The method deemed very suitable by the research was the Chi-Square Test method. The method was preferred over other available methods because the analyzed data was more descriptive than numeric. This method is described by Parasuman (1991:221) as a nonparametric test for determining whether there is a statistically significant relationship between two categorical variables that have been cross tabulated.

4.5 Limitation of the study

The biggest limitation of the study was the small number of respondents since there was resistance to participate at the beginning. The nurse educators did not want to participate until the researcher held the meeting with them. Out of 75 only 28 respondents returned the questionnaires which accounts to only 37% responses.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher reports on the results of the investigation conducted to determine the causes, effects and management of absenteeism at (Mmabatho College of nursing) MMACON.

5.2 Statistical analysis

The data analyzed hereunder reflect the responses received. Of 75 distributed questionnaires 28 were received back and 47 questionnaires were recorded non-response. In percentage terms 38.8% of questionnaires were received back and 61.2% were not.

5.3 Biographical and demographical data

The data were presented in tables to reflect the biographical and demographical characteristics of the respondents.

5.3.1. Age

The respondents were asked to indicate their age for the purpose of ice breaking.

Table 5.1 Age distribution.

AGE (IN YEARS)	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
25 - 35	n=6	21.4
36 - 40	n=2	7.1
41 - 45	n=9	32.1
46 - 50	n=4	14.3
51 - 55	n=3	10.7
56 and over	n=4	14.3
Total	N=28	100.0

The information in Table 5.1 shows that (n=9) 32.1% of the respondents were between 41-45 years and a small proportion of (n=2) 7.1 % were older than 36 years.

5.3.2. Gender

Gender differentials contributed to the inequality that is prevailing in the workforce today. It is a general assumption that a woman's place is in the kitchen; hence men were considered to be the most suitable ones to be working. Figure 5.1 displays the results.

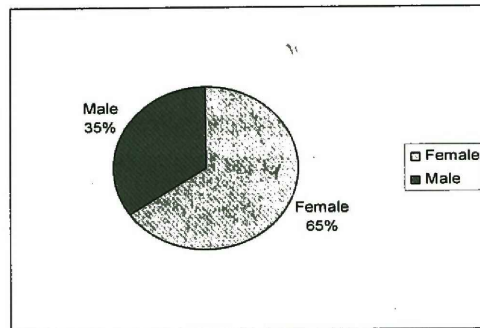


FIGURE 5.1 Gender distributions

The data in figure 5.1 indicates that 65% of the respondents were female workers while 34% were male.

5.3.2 Chi- square relationship between gender and absenteeism

The relationship between gender and absenteeism was checked to clear the assumptions that there is a higher rate of absenteeism by females than males. Table 5.2 displays the results.

TABLE 5.2 Chi –square relationship between gender and absenteeism

GENDER	FOR HOW LONG ARE YOU ABSENT FROM WORK		TOTAL
	1 DAY	1 DAY	
Female	7	7	14
Male	3	6	9
Total	10	13	23

As indicated in Table 5.2 the Chi – square statistics reflect 0.62, and the P va is 0.43 therefore there is no relationship between gender and absenteeism, si the P value is grater than 5 % level of significance.

5.3.3 Marital Status

The respondents were asked to indicate their marital status. Figure 5.2 dep the results.

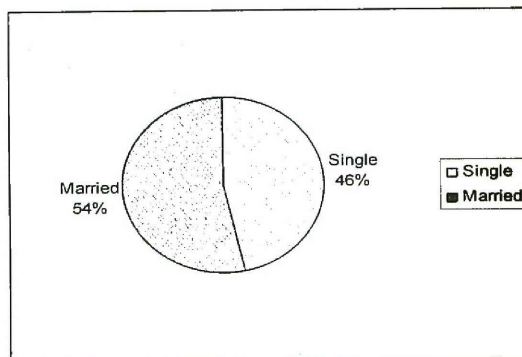


FIGURE 5.2 Marital status distribution

The data reflected in Figure 5.2 show that 54% of staff was married and 46% are single.

5.3.2 Chi- square relationship between marital status and absenteeism

The relationship between marital status and absenteeism was tested to clear the assumptions that there is a higher rate of absenteeism amongst single parent than their counterparts married parents. The results are illustrated in Table 5.3.

TABLE 5.3 Chi-square relationship between marital status and absenteeism

FOR HOW LONG ARE YOU ABSENT FROM WORK			
GENDER	1 DAY	MORE THAN 1 DAY	TOTAL
Single	6	6	12
Married	6	7	13
Total	12	13	25

It is evident from Table 5.3 that Chi- square is 0.04 while P value is 0.84. Since the P value is greater than 5% level of significance therefore there is no relationship between status and absenteeism.

5.3.4 Position at work

The respondents were requested to indicate their position at work. Figure 5.3 depicts the report.

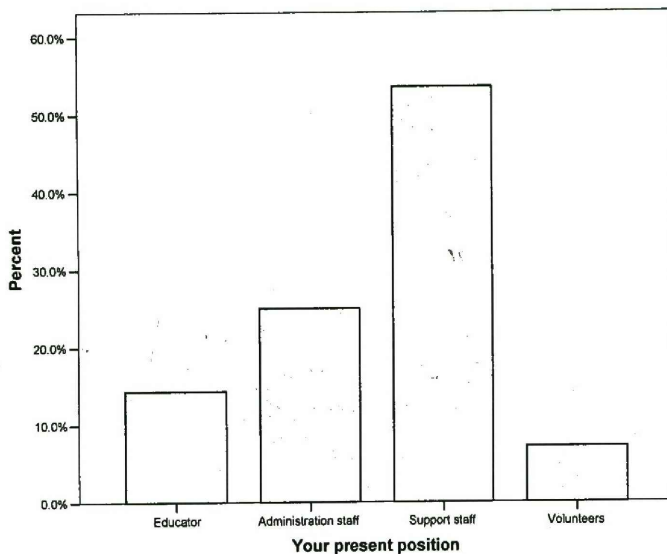


FIGURE 5.3 Positions at work distribution

Figure 5.4 depicts that 53% of respondents were support staff and 14.3% were nurse educators, while 23% were administrative staff and only 9% were volunteers.

5.3.5 Chi-square relationship between position at work and absenteeism

The relationship between position at work and absenteeism was tested. The results are as indicated in Table 5.4.

TABLE 5.4 Chi-square relationship between position at work and absenteeism

	1 DAY	MORE THAN 1 DAY	TOTAL
Support staff	7	7	14
Other	5	6	11
Total	12	13	25

Table 5.4 depicts that Chi- square is 0.051 P- value is 0.82. Since the P- value is greater than 5% level of significance there is no relationship between position at work and absenteeism.

5.3.6 Qualifications of employees

Respondents were requested to indicate their qualifications. Tables 5.5 illustrate the qualifications of respondents.

TABLE 5.5 Qualifications of employees

Qualifications	Frequency	Percent
Honours	n=2	7.1
Degree	n=4	14.3
Diploma	n=4	14.3
None of the above	n=18	64.3
Total	N=28	100.0

Table 5.5 depicts that 14.3% of the respondents had diploma, 14.3% had degree and 7.3% had honours degree while 64% had no qualifications.

5.3.7 Days of absenteeism per week.

The respondents were asked to indicate the number of days per week they were absent from work. The question was asked to determine the average absenteeism rate per week. The information provided helped the researcher to find out whether the assumption that employees are more than seven days absent from work would be justified (MMACON statistics 2002).

TABLE 5.6 Distribution of absenteeism in days per week

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	7 days	1	3.6	4.0	4.0
	5 days	5	17.9	20.0	24.0
	Not more than 3 days	7	25.0	28.0	52.0
	1 day	12	42.9	48.0	100.0
	Total	25	89.3	100.0	
Missing	System	3	10.7		
Total		28	100.0		

The data in table 5.3 shows that 42,9% respondents stated that they were absent for only one day per week and 28 % were absent for not more than three days, 17.9% are absent for five days. Only 3.6% were absent for more than seven days. The report is contrary to the findings of the MMACON statistics (2002), which state that most of the employees are absent for more than five days and above.

5.3.8 Reasons of high rate of absenteeism

A question was included in the questionnaire to determine the reasons for being absent from work. The information was meant to assist the researcher to determine the causes of absenteeism at the work place. It was assumed that health status of employees was just a minor contributory factor to absenteeism (Wooden1999: 13).

TABLE 5.7 Reasons for high rate of absenteeism

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sickness	9	32.1	33.3	33.3
	Stress	1	3.6	3.7	37.0
	Family problems	14	50.0	51.9	88.9
	Financial problems	3	10.7	11.1	100.0
	Total	27	96.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	3.6		
Total		28	100.0		

As indicated in Table 5.7 the highest percentage (51.9%) of the respondents indicated that they were absent from work due to family problems while 32.1% was absent due to sickness, and 10.7% due to financial problems. It is interesting to observe that only 3.2% of the respondent indicated that they were absent due to stress related conditions.

5.3.9 Days of the week that have more incidents of absenteeism.

A question was asked as to which days of the week were more affected by absenteeism. The aim was to determine as to which weekdays had more incidents of absenteeism. It was assumed that Mondays was the day that most of the employees were absent.

TABLE 5.8. Distribution of weekdays that have more incidents of absenteeism.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Monday	2	7.1	11.1	11.1
	Tuesday	3	10.7	16.7	27.8
	Wednesday	2	7.1	11.1	38.9
	Friday	6	21.4	33.3	72.2
	Saturday	1	3.6	5.6	77.8
	Sunday	4	14.3	22.2	100.0
	Total	18	64.3	100.0	
Missing	System	10	35.7		
Total		28	100.0		

According to table 5.8 Fridays are the most affected days with the highest percentage of absenteeism totaling to 33% followed by Sundays with 22.2% and Tuesdays with 16.7%. Mondays and Wednesday are both 11.1%.

5.3.10 Relationship between employees and their supervisors

A question was included in the questionnaire to assess the relationship that exists between employees and their supervisors in the workplace. The information was meant to assist to verify the assumption by Rhodes and Steers (1990:86) that poor relationship between employee and supervisor contribute to high rate of absenteeism.

TABLE 5.9 Relationships between employee and supervisors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Good	13	46.4	46.4	46.4
Excellent	6	21.4	21.4	67.9
Poor	9	32.1	32.1	100.0
Total	28	100.0	100.0	

In table 5.9 is evident that the respondents indicated that they had good relationships with their supervisors, while 21.4% had excellent relationships. However 32.1% indicated that there relationship is poor.

5.3.11 Supportive role of the supervisors.

The respondents were asked whether they received any support from their supervisors. The question was included to ascertain whether there was any relationship between absenteeism and lack of support from the supervisors on work- related issues, individual issues and other organisational issues.

TABLE 5.10 Supportive roles of supervisors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	19	67.9	67.9	67.9
No	9	32.1	32.1	100.0
Total	28	100.0	100.0	

Table 5.10 shows that 67.9 % of respondents agree that the supervisors on duty support them. However 32.1% indicated that their supervisors did not support them.

The respondents were requested to suggest ways in which they expected their supervisors to support them in case they were not supported. An ample space was provided for the respondents to list problems that they experienced. The responses were as follows;

- Regular meetings to be held between employees and supervisors ;
- Favouritism to be stopped;
- They should be treated as unique individuals;
- Supervisors should address them when there were problems
- There should be regular appraisals
- Supervisors to organise training, seminars and workshops,

TABLE 5.11.Suggestions on nature of support

NATURE OF SUPPORT	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Regular meetings to be held	n = 6	33.3%
Stop favouritism	n = 3	16.7%
Training, seminar workshops	n = 10	35.7%
Treat them as unique individual	n = 6	33.3%
Regular appraisals and rewards	n = 10	35.7%

The data in table 5.11 show that six respondents (33.3 %) stated that they had requested regular meetings with the supervisors. Three respondents (16.7%) indicated that they have asked for favouritism to be stopped, while ten respondents (35.7%) stated that they needed to have staff development programmes and six of the respondents (33.3%) needed to be treated like

unique individuals. Ten of the respondents (35.7%) requested for regular appraisals and fair rewards. The call to stop favouritism is however of less interests as only three (16.7%) of the respondents stated that. However it is important to note the findings for correction in future.

5.3.11 Chi-square relationship between lack of support and absenteeism

The relationship between lack of support and absenteeism were tested. The outcome is indicated in Table 5.12

TABLE 5.12 Chi-square relationship between lack of support and absenteeism

		FOR HOW LONG ARE YOU ABSENT FROM WORK	
IS YOUR SUPERVISOR SUPPORTIVE TO YOU?	1 DAY	MORE THAN 1 DAY	TOTAL
Yes	8	10	18
No	5	2	7
Total	13	12	25

Table 5.12 indicate that the Chi square – statistics is 1.47 P- value is 0.23 It is therefore evident that if the P- value is greater than 5% level of significance, it means that there is no significance relationship between lack of support and absenteeism.

5.3.12 Placement at workplace and job –person fit.

Position and job fit was singled out as one of the factors that contribute to high rates of absenteeism. This question was asked so as to gather information, which would assist the researcher to establish facts on the assumption that, if employees were not correctly placed there would be problems of absenteeism.

TABLE 5.13 Placements at workplace and Job –Person Fit.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	22	78.6	84.6	84.6
	No	4	14.3	15.4	100.0
	Total	26	92.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	7.1		
Total		28	100.0		

Table 5.13 reflects the reaction of the respondents regarding job – person fit. It is evident that 84.6% of the respondents are satisfied only 15.4% of the respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied.

5.3.12 Problems experienced at work

A question was asked regarding the problems that employee are experienced at the workplace, the question was asked with the aim of gathering information that would assist the researcher to reach conclusions regarding problems that could contribute to the high rate of absenteeism.

TABLE 5.14 Problems experienced by employees

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	23	82.1	88.5	88.5
	No	3	10.7	11.5	100.0
	Total	26	92.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	7.1		
Total		28	100.0		

The data in table 5.14 show that twenty-three respondents (88.5 %) stated that they had work related problems while three respondents indicated that they had no problems. The findings are alarming as only (11.5%) respondents reported that they did not have work related problems.

Ample space was provided for the respondents to list the problems that they experienced. Table 5.14 reflects the problems listed by the respondents.

TABLE 5.15 Problems of employees

PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Transport and financial problems	N = 6	33.3%
Favouritism	N = 3	16.7%
No training, seminars, workshops	N = 10	35.7%
No recognition.	N = 10	33.3%
Unfair remuneration		
Overloaded with work	N = 10	35.7%

As indicated in table 5.15 the majority that is ten respondents (35.7%) indicated that staff development, recognition, unfair remuneration and work overload are the main problems at the workplace. Six respondents (33.3%) indicated that they experienced financial and transport problems, while three respondents (16.7%) state that there is favoritism by supervisors.

5.3.13 The effects of absenteeism on fellow employees

The researcher included a question in the questionnaire that would help her to determine the effects of absenteeism on fellow employees. The question was asked to verify the assumptions that employees who are on duty might be affected by absenteeism and end up being absent themselves.

TABLE 5.16 Distribution of the outcome of effects of absenteeism on fellow Employees.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non-productive	4	14.3	15.4	15.4
	Work overtime (unplanned)	4	14.3	15.4	30.8
	Frustrated	3	10.7	11.5	42.3
	Overworked	15	53.6	57.7	100.0
	Total	26	92.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	7.1		
Total		28	100.0		

It is evident as seen in Table 5.16 that fifteen of the respondents (57.7%) reported that they were overloaded with work when fellow employees were absent. Four respondents (15.4%) reported that production was affected and that they worked unplanned overtime while three respondents (10.7 %) reported that they were frustrated and stressed when fellow employees were absent and that it had an impact on their performance.

5.3.14. The effects of absenteeism on customer relations

Customer relations were identified as one of the areas that is affected by the high rate of absenteeism. This question was asked to gather information, in order to assist the researcher to establish facts on the assumption that absenteeism of employee affects customer relations.

TABLE 5.17 Distribution of customer's relations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Angry	3	10.7	12.5	12.5
	Complain	14	50.0	58.3	70.8
	Disgruntled	3	10.7	12.5	83.3
	Report incidents to management	4	14.3	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	85.7	100.0	
Missing	System	4	14.3		
Total		28	100.0		

The data in Table 5.17 indicates that fourteen of the respondents (58.3%) reported that customers complained if deadlines were not met due to the absence of one team member. Three of the respondents (12.5%) remarked that customers expressed anger and dissatisfaction, while four (16.7%) of respondents affirm that incidents are reported to management.

5.3.15 Areas that are affect mostly by absenteeism

The respondents were asked as to which areas are affected mostly by absenteeism patterns at the workplace. The question was included to assist the researcher to gather information that will identify areas, which need more attention.

TABLE 5.18 Distribution of areas affected mostly by absenteeism patterns

		FREQUENCY	PERCENT	VALID PERCENT	CUMULATIVE PERCENT
Valid	Catering	11	39.3	45.8	45.8
	Maintenance	2	7.1	8.3	54.2
	Administration staff and HR	9	32.1	37.5	91.7
	Procurement	2	7.1	8.3	100.0
	Total	24	85.7	100.0	
Missing	System	4	14.3		
Total		28	100.0		

The data presented in Table 5,18 show that catering is the highest area with 45.8% of absenteeism, followed by administration and human resources with 37.5% procurement, and maintenance at 8.3%.

5.3.16 Control measures of absenteeism

The respondents were asked to suggest control measures of absenteeism to assist managers. The responses were listed as indicated in Table 5.14.

Table 5.19 Suggestions for control measures of absenteeism

CONTROL MEASURES	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Counseling	n = 17	32.0%
Warning, verbal, written and final	n = 8	16.7%
Investigate the causes	n = 11	42.3%
Refer to EAP for support	n = 6	23.1%
Discipline fairly and dismiss	n = 1	3.6%

Table 5.19 indicates that eleven respondents (42,3%) argue that there is a need to investigate causes of absenteeism. It is evident seventeen respondents (32.0%) support counseling of employees while six of the respondents (3.6%) suggested that employees should be referred to EAP for support. Although majority (32.0%) of the respondents proposed support to employees who absent themselves from work, is surprising to note that only one respondent indicated that employees should be disciplined following a fair disciplinary procedure.

CHAPTER SIX

Major findings, discussions, conclusions and recommendation of the study

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the major findings, discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

6. 2 Findings.

The major findings of the study are discussed under the following headings;

- Demographical, personal and academic which are the Bio- data,
- The causes of absenteeism at Mmabatho College of Nursing.
- The effects of absenteeism at Mmabatho College of Nursing.
- Control of absenteeism at Mmabatho College of Nursing.
- Recommendations

6.3 Demographical, personal and academic data.

The majority of respondents were female the age of the respondents' ranges from 25 to 56years of age. The majority of respondents who participated in the study were married. The highest percentage of the respondents had no qualification.

6.3.1 Gender

The study provides concrete evidence that there is no relationship between gender and absenteeism. For instance the findings are in contrary with the findings of Korttraba et al (2003:11), according to Korttraba et al (2003:11 females are more absent from work than their counterparts male employees. It is

interesting to note that MMAACON (2002:11) statistics also indicate that there is higher rate of absenteeism by female employees than their male counterparts. However the researcher also found out that there are more females at the work place than males. This is an indication that management should arrange a special package to support them.

6.3.2. Marital status

It was statistical proven in this study that there is no relationship between absenteeism and marital status. The assumption that there is a higher rate of absenteeism by single employees than their married counterparts is not supported by the findings of this study. In contrary to the study findings it was noted by Gillies (1999:319) that single employees are more absent from work due to family responsibilities. The study revealed that the finding of the study by Korttraba et al (2003:11) is also in contrary. Social responsibilities were cited as the cause of absenteeism in single parenting.

6.3.3 Position at work

The findings reflected that most the respondents are support staff. The researcher found out that majority nurse educators category did not participate in the study; this might be the reason why the percentage is low. It is however important to note that findings suggest that there is no relationship between position at work and absenteeism. Adam (1999:2) and Shephard (1999: 22) commented that people with a higher education level are less likely to report absence totaling more than ten days; this finding is not in support of Adam (1999:2) and Shephard (1999: 22).

6.3.4 Causes and rate of absenteeism

This study provides concrete evidence that there are several causes of absenteeism at MMAACON. The findings revealed that the main cause of absenteeism is family problems. Wooden (1999:13) and Poole states that health status is a minor contributory factor of absenteeism. The findings of this study affirm the abovementioned notion. Robinsons (2002:78) Brook and Price (1999:15) and Rhodes and Steers (1990:86) describes the interplay between external factors and absenteeism. The emphasis is supporting the fact that illness is not always the cause for absenteeism. Financial problems were also cited as one of the causes of absenteeism. This was also noted by Dawkins and Kenyon (1999:41) that the demand for more incentives, wages and performance bonus may influence work attendance. The findings of the study revealed that Fridays are the most affected days. It is evident that employees with alcohol and drugs abuse problems will be absent during weekends. The notion is supported by Gillies (1999:158) stating that employees with substance abuse are absent from work during the weekends.

6.3.4.1 Relationship between employees and their supervisors

The majority rates interpersonal relationships to be good implying that both subordinates and supervisors are working together as a team. It is however interesting to observe that only one respondent has reported that the relationship is poor it is not of significance importance at this time. It however it is interesting to note that there is good relationship between the two as this denotes proper communication in the institution. However the findings of the study revealed that there is no significant relationship between lack of support and absenteeism. The findings is not in line with Rhodes and Steers (1990:86) assumption that poor relationship between employees and supervisors contribute to high rate of absenteeism.

6.3 The effects of absenteeism on fellow employee

The majority of the respondents agreed that production was slowed down also that those on duty were overloaded when fellow employees were absent from work. Unplanned overtime was reported to be resulting in serious problems for those who reported for duty. The findings also revealed that respondents reported that they were frustrated and stressed when fellow employees were absent and that it had an impact on their performance. It can therefore be concluded that both the institution and employees are negatively affected by absenteeism. The findings affirm the report of Rahim et al in Korttraba (2002:230), which states that one team member's absence can affect productivity of other team members.

6.4 Control mechanisms

Suggestions made by respondents to control absenteeism included counseling, discipline and referral to Employee Assistant Programme (EAP).

6.5.1 Counseling

The finding revealed that the majority of the respondents suggested that counseling was the most effective way of addressing absenteeism problems. This response implies that the employees view counseling as the first step of absenteeism management. It can thus be concluded that there is commitment from employees to assist in dealing with the problem of absenteeism.

6.5.2 Disciplinary measures

It is evident that the findings revealed that the process of counseling should be followed by verbal warning, written warning and final warning as these aid in the enhancement of active participation of both affected employees and their supervisors. The suggestion implies an understanding of process of discipline in controlling absenteeism. The findings reflected on issues of procedural and substantive fairness in disciplinary measures as indicated by the resolutions. Further the findings revealed that an investigation of the causes of absenteeism is crucial to finalize the process of fair and procedural discipline. Dismissal could be instituted, as the last step. However the findings emphasised that dismissal should be done in a procedural and fair manner. There is consensus among the respondents that it highly crucial to discipline employees who absent themselves regularly and in a progressive manner. It was statistical proven that referral of employees to Employee Assistant Programme (EAP) for support and to attend wellness programme available in the department was strongly recommended. The findings denote that the respondents were calling upon management to support employee to cope with all work related problems and including family problems.

6.6. Recommendations

The following recommendation is based on the results and conclusions of the study.

6.6.1. The role of supervisors

The role of supervisors and managers to manage employee absence within their group .The managers should take interest in the health of employees, monitoring absence within the group and taking appropriate action where absence problems are evident.

6.6.2 Monitoring employee absence

Supervisors should monitor individual and group absence rates the Human Resource information system has the capability of producing detailed information on employee absence. Quarterly reports tracking absence rates should be available to each manager along with confidential report highlighting individuals with frequent absence .The managers should analyses this reports and attendance records periodically and deal with issues promptly. Planned absence such as annual leave, long service leave and study leave should be managed to ensure minimum disruption to work schedules while allowing the benefits from relaxation, recreation, personal development and meeting family responsibilities to be optimized by employees.

Changes within the work place designed to promote trust and break down barriers between employees and management will help to foster commitment to the organization and contribute to reductions in absence rate. Interventions where unplanned absence problems exist help employees to overcome health problems, improve the work environment where work factors contribute to absence, and develop strategies through communication, involvement and personal development to enhance commitment. Managers should attend to individual's problems and advise accordingly. Managers and supervisors must earn the confidence of employee by showing concern for their needs. This can be achieved by asking questions, listening to answers and helping to solve problems raised. Managers should also move from the traditional role of control and director to more open and trusting role of coach, communicator teacher facilitator and enabler. Employee counseling is imperative and it should be followed by referral to EAP where applicable.

6.6.3 Employee morale

The respondents included lack of staff development, lack of recognition for work done, favouritism, unfair remuneration, work overload, financial and transport problems. Employee morale in particular has a marked effect on attendance at work. Some areas where improvement can be achieved are;

- Improving communication within the group and with supervisors and managers;
- Encouraging employees to participate in decision making and in the area of their expertise;
- Encouraging problem solving in a team environment;
- Providing training and development opportunities;
- Providing feedback about performance
- Dealing positively with employee concerns.

6.7 Conclusion

In general the main cause of absenteeism at MMA CON is due to family problems and the most affected days are Fridays. The department mostly affected by the high absenteeism is the catering department. The most affected staff category is the support staff. Employees are frustrated by the rate of absenteeism. Some of the employees are absent for more than three days per week. Management at strategic level must implement strategies as recommended.

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ANNEXURE A

QUESTIONNAIRE

TITLE: MANAGEMENT OF CAUSES OF EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM AT MMACON

PARTICIPANTS: EDUCATORS, ADMINISTRATORS, SUPPORT
STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

SECTION A

RESPONDENT NUMBER

OFFICE USE

1. DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA

1.1. Your age

25-35years	1
36-40 years	2
40-46years	3
46-50years	4
50-56years	5
56-60years	6

1.2. Gender

Female	1
Male	2

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1.3 Marital Status

Single	1
Married	2

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1.4 Your present position

Educator	1
Administration staff	2
Support staff	3
Volunteers	4

1.5 Qualifications

PHD	1
Masters	2
Honors	3
Degree	4
Diploma	5
Non of the above	6

1.6. Others (specify)

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SECTION B

2. CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM –INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

2.1 How often are you absent from work ?

Always	1
Often	2
Occasionally	3
When having problems	4
Once a month	5
Every time when sick	6

2.2 What makes you to be absent from work?

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2.3 For how long are you absent from work?

More than a week	1
7 days	2
5 days	3
3days	4
Not more than 3 days	5
1 day	6

2.4 State your reasons for being absent

Sickness	1
Tired and bored	2
Stress	3
Family problems	4
Financial problems	5
Alcohol problems	6

2.5 Others (specify)

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2.6 Which days has more incidents of absenteeism

Monday	1
Tuesday	2
Wednesday	3
Thursday	4
Friday	5
Saturday	6
Sunday	7

3. ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

- 3 1. What is the relationship between you and your supervisor?

Good	1
Excellent	2
Poor	3

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3.2 Is your supervisor supportive to you?

Yes	1
No	2

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3.3 If not suggest ways of support

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3.4. Do you experience any problems at work place?

Yes	1
No	2

3.5. State the problems that you experience at work

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SECTION C

4. EFFECTS OF ABSEENTISM

4.1 What are your experiences when your colleague is absent from work?

Non productive	1
Work overtime (unplanned)	2
Frustrated	3
Overworked	4

4.2. How does customers react when your colleague is absent from work

Angry	1
Complains	2
Disgruntled	3
Report incidents to management	4

Category	U.S. should take action (%)	U.S. should not take action (%)
18-29	~85	~15
30-49	~80	~20
50-69	~75	~25
70+	~65	~35
High School	~70	~30
College	~80	~20
Graduate	~85	~15

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SECTION D

5. CONTROL MEASURES

5.1. Which methods of discipline can be used to control absenteeism

Counseling	1
Verbal warning	2
Written warnings	3
Final warning and lastly dismissal	4

5.2. Indicate the role of supervisor regarding Subordinates support

Counseling	1
Investigate the causes	2
Refer for EAP	3
Support at all times	4

5.3 Suggest methods that can improve workplace

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5. 4 State steps that management can take to control absenteeism

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