

## ORGANISATIONAL STRESS AND EMPLOYEES' INTENTION TO QUIT AMONGST ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE, EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

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### ABSTRACT

*This research study investigated the effect of organisational stress and the employees' intention to quit among administrative personnel at the University of Fort Hare. The main objectives of this study were determining the effects of organisational stress on employees' intention to quit, and providing results that would lead to a deeper understanding of the nature and extent of the relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit. A survey method was adopted for this study. A questionnaire comprising of three sections: biographical information, ERI questionnaire for stress, turnover intention scale, was administered to non-academic support personnel of the University of Fort Hare in all three campuses namely Alice, Bhisho, and East London. Simple random sampling was used to select the participants. The literature reviewed displayed a great need for managers to understand organisational stress and its causes, and how to manage and cope with stress so as to avoid losing employees, especially highly competent employees. The study yielded results that show that there is a relationship between organisational stress and employees' intention to quit.*

**Keywords:** *Intention To Quit, Organisational Stress, Workplace, Higher Learning, Ill-health.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Work has become an integral part of our existence as human beings. Once we start working, the possibility is that we will spend almost all the remaining years of our lives at work. The workforce and workplace are increasingly a critical part of an organisation's ability to deliver on its goals (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, & Younger, 2008). However, certain factors within the organisation often interfere with the workers' abilities to assist the organisation achieve its goals.

These factors could relate to stress, job engagement, and others. According to Ramesar, Koortzen, and Oosthuizen (2009), throughout the world, three forces define our time. These are globalization, the information revolution, and the speed of change. Organisations have to survive in an environment characterized by increased competition, ongoing developments in organisations, a relentless drive for greater cost-effectiveness, tightly controlled budgets and increased competitiveness in the workplace. These challenges to and changes to organisations can result in, among others, retrenchments, downsizing, multitasking and restructuring. Some of the problems associated with

these changes are amongst others, increased stress. Increased stress can lead to the loss of competent employees.

This research study looks at the relationship among organisational stress and intention to quit. It seeks to establish whether organisational stress plays any role on employees' intention to quit or not to quit when they are stressed. This relationship is investigated among the administrative employees at the University of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

The main objectives of this study are:

- Determining the effects of organisational stress on employees' intention to quit.
- To provide results that may lead to a deeper understanding of the nature and extent of the relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit.

### 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Higher education institutions worldwide are developing a disturbing imbalance with their environments. This is due to the fact that higher education institutions face an overload of demands but are somewhat under-equipped

with response mechanisms or strategies (Rothman & Barkhuizen, 2008). This overload of demands with minimal response mechanisms often leads to high levels of stress among the employees of the institutions, often leading to employees leaving the institution or showing signs of wanting to leave the institution.

Mostert, Rothmann, Mostert, and Nell (2008) raised a concern that organisational stress is often viewed as a problem of the individual, however, it should be viewed as a serious problem for the institution as a whole. It has also been revealed that two-thirds of sick leave in organisations may be attributed to organisational stress and that high levels of organisational stress may lead to mental and physical ill health, job dissatisfaction, stress-related injuries, turnover and intention to quit (Mostert et al, 2008).

Taking into account these very important but detrimental issues to organisations' wellbeing, it has become increasingly important that response mechanisms to stress be investigated. The study seeks to investigate the extent to which organisational stress can influence the degree of intention to quit among the administrative personnel suffering from or experiencing organisational stress, at the University of Fort Hare.

### 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As previously mentioned, even though stress is often viewed as a problem of the individual, it actually is a serious problem for the institution as a whole. According to Greenberg (2011), stress is an unavoidable fact of organisational life today, and stress takes its toll on both the organisation and the individual. Organisational stress poses a serious threat to institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Mostert et al. (2008) affirms this by pointing out the fact that South African institutions of higher learning have recently been subjected to a series of mergers: restructuring is reported to cause uncertainty, anxiety, loss of motivation, lower morale, and higher level of accidents and work errors. One could argue that these factors or consequences mentioned are all driven by stress.

This study seeks to shed more light on organisational stress and its possible sources, to investigate whether organisational stress has an impact or plays a role on employees' intention to quit.

### 4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theories related to stress, intention to quit, and job engagement

#### 4.1. Stress Theories

A number of theories related to stress have been developed by many researchers over the years. These theories provide comprehensive frameworks and help us gain a better understanding of stress. Oosthuizen and Van Lill (2008, p.64) explain that these stress-related theories have a common characteristic in that they all explain stress as "a dynamic process operating between an individual and his/her environment". For this study, three theories of stress have been approached and these theories are discussed in detail in the sections that follow.

##### 4.1.1. Selye's theory – General Adaptive Syndrome (GAS)

One of the theories relevant to this study is the General Adaptation Syndrome, or GAS. The General Adaptive Syndrome is a phrase used to portray the body's short-term and long-term reactions to stress. This theory was developed by Hans Selye, who carried out some research on stress from the early 1930's until his death in 1982 (Rice, 2012). The general adaptation syndrome discusses a three-stage reaction to stress.

The first stage or phase of the GAS is called the alarm reaction. This is the stage where immediate response or reaction to a stressor is experienced. During this phase, a person displays a "fight or flight" response, which braces the body for physical activity. At this stage, however, this immediate response can compromise the effectiveness of the individual's immune system, driving the individual to illness or making them prone to illnesses (Rice, 2012).

The second stage or phase of GAS is called the stage of resistance but may also be called the stage of adaption. If the stress is still continuing during this phase/stage, the body tends to adapt to the stressor to which it is exposed. Some changes might have to be effected, at many levels, to ensure that the effect of the stressor is reduced. A good example of how to reduce the effects of the stressor would be assuming that the stressor is perhaps starvation or malnutrition due to anorexia and as a result the person is weak and does not desire any physical activity, maximising the absorption of nutrients from food might be necessary to ensure that the person rebuilds some energy so that they can be active again (Rice 2012).

The third and final stage of the GAS theory is called the stage of exhaustion. This stage follows from the previous when the body's resistance to the stressor begins to decrease slowly, or at times just collapsing rapidly. This could be due to the fact that the body's immune system is completely failing. People who have been experiencing high levels of stress over long periods and eventually reach this stage without any proper stress management intervention often face undesirable and awful consequences. For example, a person with a very stressful job who experiences these high levels of stress over extended periods of time, might, if no intervention is done; suffer from high blood pressure and eventually, heart attack (Rice, 2012).

#### 4.1.2. The transactional model of stress

According to the transactional model, stress arises from the estimation that some particular environmental demands are about to wear out individual resources and energy, and therefore threatening that individual's well-being (Gatchel & Schultz, 2012). This model is based on a number of arguments or debates about the nature of stress. These first of these arguments interrogates whether stress is a result or product of the relationship between the environment and the individual. The second argues that the power and authority of this transaction depends on the process of the appraisal which binds the person and the environment. The third discusses the appraisal through which the focus of what people think and do in a stressful encounter depends, and categorise the appraisal into primary and secondary appraisals. The primary appraisal happens when the person acknowledges that there is something at stake and secondary appraisal is when the individual's focus turns to what can be done about it. The last one discusses the appraisal as the process that offers a causal bridge to the distinct emotions that best define the nature of stress (Dewe, O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2012).

#### 4.1.3. Person – Environment Fit Model

Person-environment fit model relates to how a person fits into a workplace environment. It discusses the factors affecting how a person relates to his/her work environment. This can be through motivation, ability, or several other factors (Caplan & Harrison, 1993). Gatchel and Schultz (2012) point out that the person-environment fit model has been in existence for a very long time and that a couple of other approaches to well-being and stress have been derived from this model. They further believe that the interaction between the individual and his/her environment is the key to understanding the individual's cognitive, emotional, and

behavioural reactions. They have also stressed the fact that for humans to function effectively, a perfect fit between the individual and his/her environment is needed.

The person-environment fit model can also relate to how a person fits in with the demands of a job or supplies presented by a job. Incorrect person-environment fit can lead to serious conflicts in any business environment. Stress and lack of productivity can result from a problem in the way a person fits into their work environment (Edwards, 1992). Gatchel and Schultz (2012, p.28), also affirm this by explaining that the "fit" concept of this theory is portrayed as "having two components: (a) the degree of match, congruence, or correspondence between the demands people confront at work and their abilities to meet those demands, referred to as demands-ability fit; and (b) the match, congruence or correspondence between the person's needs (including physical and psycho-social needs) and the resources available to him/her. The latter is referred to as needs-supplies fit." Furthermore, the assumption is that should there be a lack of fit between the needs and resources, the stress levels and the overall well-being of the individual will be affected. On the other hand, the demands-ability fit is important in terms of the individual's well-being.

Person-environment fit model relates strongly to organisational stress because if a person does not fit into their work environment, they are likely to be stressed. If an employee does not have the same motives as his/her workplace colleagues then stress can occur (Edwards, 1992). This theory implies that person-environment misfit can result in stress, which over a long period of time, can result in burnout (Edwards, 1992).

Coetzee and Rothmann (2005, p.48) raised a concern that "stress is the second most frequently reported condition of individuals who disclosed a work-related illness". This model therefore helps institutions or organisations understand stress better and also provide lessons for organisations in relation to stress management actions and occupational health and well-being improvement (Gatchel & Schultz, 2012).

In conclusion, the person-environment fit model stresses the facts that there should be a match between what people want and what they actually receive, and that there should be a match between their abilities and the demands that are placed on them by the organisation. A lack or mis-fit causes strain and reduces the individual's sense of psychological well-being (Gatchel & Schultz, 2012).

## 4.2. Intention To Quit (ITQ) Theories

### 4.2.1. The Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover (Greenberg, 2011)

Intention to quit is also termed turnover intention (Shields & Ward, 2001). One of the models that tend to shed more light on the nature of turnover and reasons leading to turnover intention are the Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover. This model explains the cognitive processes through which people make decisions about quitting or staying in their organisations.

The model explains that a decision to leave one's organisation is a huge one, and people often consider a number of factors before making such a big decision. According to this model, the employee's decision to quit or not to quit depends on two key factors – shock to the system and decision frames. Shock to the system can relate to an event that gets the employee's attention and gets the employee to start thinking about their jobs, for example, a merger with another organisation. Decision frames relate to a set of rules and images on how to interpret something that has happened, for example, things that the employee believes in and as a result, might have an obvious response to a situation based on what has happened in the past (Greenberg, 2011).

The Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover depicts four possible decision paths that may result from the two factors mention above. The first decision path happens when a shock to the system, that matches an existing decision frame, occurs. For example, the organisation loses a huge account - if the employee's experience is that when big accounts are lost then jobs are lost, he/she might decide to quit before actually being laid off by the organisation. The second decision path happens when a shock to the system occurs but fails to match a decision frame, and there is no specific job alternative. An example in this case would be if the employee's organisation is taken over by another – this is a shock to the employee; however it is very difficult to make a decision whether to stay or not to stay, especially because there is no alternative job to take on.

The uncertainty and fear might force the employee to leave even if they don't have another job to fall back on, but it will be a very difficult decision to make. The third decision path happens when a shock to the system occurs and it fails to match a decision frame, but there is a specific job alternative this time. An example once again is that the employee's organisation is taken over by another – as much as this is a shock to the employee, quitting or leaving the organisation might be made

easier by the fact that there is another job to fall back on. Decision path 4 happens when there is no shock to the system and therefore no decision time frame is considered. In this case, the employee leaves the organisation only if other conditions suggest that leaving is a good idea, for example, getting married to a rich spouse who can easily and willingly provide for the employee and people in his/her life (Greenberg, 2011).

Figure 1 below is a summary of the Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover, the figure shows all these decision paths in a less complex manner:

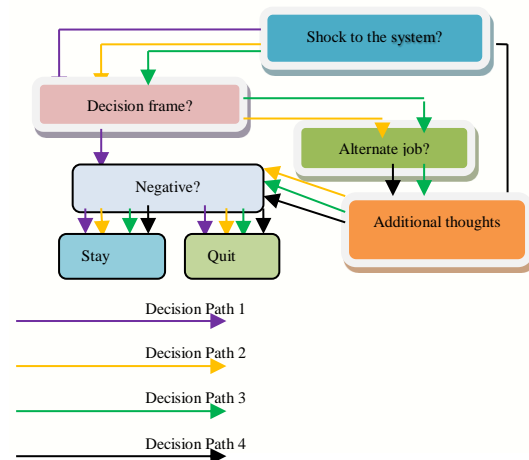


Figure 1: Voluntary turnover: the unfolding model (Greenberg, 2011)

It is upon the aforementioned background that the study draws the following hypothesis;

$H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit.

$H_1$ : There is a significant relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit.

The study is convinced that organizational stress and intention to quit have a significant relationship. The following section will review literature that has focused on these variables, organizational stress and intention to quit.

## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 5.1. Organizational Stress

Simply explained, organisational stress is the response that workers may experience when faced with work demands and pressures that are beyond or not matched to their knowledge, skills, and abilities, often

challenging their ability to cope (Leka, Griffiths & Cox, 1999). According to Greenberg and Baron (2008), stress can be defined as the pattern of emotional states and psychological reactions occurring in response to demands from within or outside the organisation. These demands, known as stressors (or awful situations that create extreme demands on an individual), lead to stress reactions when they are cognitively appraised as being threatening, and beyond one's control. Oosthuizen & Van Lill (2008, p64) define stress as "the reaction or response to excessive psychological and physical demands". It is important to note that organisational stress is restricted to the work environment, is caused by work-related aspects and has consequences for the work context (Viljoen and Rothmann, 2009).

In institutions of higher learning, stress is reported to be prevalent due to the overload of demands and under supply of response mechanisms (Rothman & Barkhuizen, 2008). Rothman (2003) has raised a concern about one perspective of stress at work, and this is the fact that it could cause illness. Organisational stress interferes with happiness at work, therefore stress levels need be reduced in order for organisations to have happy and productive workers (Rothmann et al., 2011). Stress is an awful situation which in most cases employees find intolerable, and each case or situation involves external events which are beyond the control of the individual (Greenberg, 2011). Due to stress, administrators at universities have been reported to be a misfit, and often have poor coping ability, and most of the time they consider changing jobs (Blix & Lee, 1991). In a study conducted at a university in Arizona, academic administrators also reported some feelings of unhappiness in their jobs (Khairuddin & Makhbul, 2011). Khairuddin and Makhbul (2011) further assert that stress generally occurs when the individual is unable to respond adequately or efficiently to the stimuli of his/her environment or when it is only achieved by affecting the organism's health. Organisational stress is, then, the imbalance between the individual's hopes and the reality of his or her working conditions or, in other words, the perceived difference between the professional demands and the individual's ability to carry them out. All the factors mentioned above could lead to stress.

#### 5.1.1. Types of stress

According to Greenberg and Baron (2008), there is good stress as well as bad stress. Good stress is called eustress and the bad and harmful stress is called distress. Eustress is the good stress, and it occurs when stress is converted to positive energy and becomes motivating. Eustress can be identified as a desirable outcome of

stress. Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Harfield (2011) define eustress as positive stress that accompanies achievement and exhilaration. They further explain that eustress assists those in managerial and demanding positions meet the challenges of their jobs. Greenberg and Baron (2008) argue that even though there is good stress, it is important to bear in mind that when we refer to stress on the job, we are referring to negative sources of stress. Grobler et al., (2011) refer to distress as the emotions we feel as we begin to sense a loss of our feelings of security and adequacy. Someone going through distress will feel helpless, desperate and disappointed. All these negative feelings turn stress into distress. It is exactly for this reason that work, organisational, or occupational stress is a concern to workers and managers, and therefore needs to be managed very well (Greenberg & Baron 2008).

#### 5.1.2. Causes of stress at work

Organisational stress occurs when the equilibrium amongst the cognitive, emotional, and environment system is disturbed by independent or external factors (Rothmann, 2008; Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009; Grobler et al., 2011). Conditions that often lead to stress are called stressors – also defined as any demands, either physical or psychological in nature, encountered during the course of living (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009; Greenberg, 2011). Researchers have found it useful to distinguish stressors in three categories, according to how long-lasting they are. Acute stressors bring sudden change and often threaten the employee's physical and psychological well-being, and often force employees to make undesirable alterations. Episodic stressors are results of experiencing several acute stressors within a short space of time. The episodic stressors are the ones that are most commonly encountered in organisations. Chronic stressors, as the term implies, are constant and have a long effect on the body, mind, and spirit (Greenberg, 2011).

As much as stress generally is caused by personal factors such as problems with family members and financial constraints, stress at work is caused by many different factors which are beyond the individual's control (Greenberg, 2011). A model developed by Cartwright and Cooper (2002) identified eight sources of organisational stress which could be referred to as stressors. Stressors often have to combine to cause to exert pressure on an employee; however, even a single stressor can lead to a considerable amount of stress. These stressors are work-relationships, work overload,

job insecurity or fear of losing one's job, lack of control over one's circumstances, limited resources, poor or no communication at all, work-life balance, and remuneration benefits.

In agreement to Cartwright and Cooper (2002), Rothmann (2003) also points out a critical area related to stress as being the employment relationships. These days, the workplace demands more of the employees than it previously did. The type of work and the volume of work that people have drastically changed. Also, some employees have little or no choice or control at all over what they can and cannot do; as a result, these employees end up working longer hours and undesirable overtime.

Work-life balance has also been identified as another factor that often leads to stress or simply a stressor (Deery & Jago, 2008; Cartwright & Cooper, 2002). Kar and Misra (2013) describe work-life balance as the formal and informal practices that enable workers to easily manage the conflicting worlds of work and family. According to Potgieter and Barnard (2010), work and family are the two most important spheres in the life of a working person. A research paper by Lourel, Ford, Gamassou, Gueguen and Hartmann (2008) discusses the importance of work-life balance and how the imbalance between work life and home life is related to the perceived organisational stress. The paper explains that work-life balance is very crucial and suggested that organisations should adapt a workplace culture that is supportive of work-family balance. This culture should be adapted as an effort to decrease employee stress and increase employees' commitment to the organisation. An important fact to note is that a couple of studies conducted on organisational stress have yielded results pointing out job insecurity as the most significant source of stress, followed closely by work relationships and work overload (Khairuddin & Makhbul, 2011).

### 5.1.3. Symptoms of stress

The most observable symptom of stress at work is physical illness. According to Krantz, Berntsson and Lundberg (2005), neck-shoulder pain, tiredness, headaches, stomach problems, low back pain and sleeping problems are the most frequently-reported symptoms of stress, resulting in sickness and absenteeism.

A couple of stress symptoms have been identified as ranging from frequent illness to nervous disruption and

mental failure (Grobler et al., 2011). Rothmann and Cooper (2008) describe four levels at which stress can be observed. These are cognitive, behavioural, physical and psychological levels. At each of these levels, certain reactions are observable from the individuals experiencing the stress. At cognitive level, the quality of decision-making and levels of memory and creativity will decline drastically. At behavioural level, the employees will tend to be absent from work and suffer from poor time-management and often abuse substance. At physical level, the stressed employee will tend to suffer regularly from headaches, eating disorders, and cardiovascular disease. At psychological level, the employee might feel depressed and anxious and probably have very low self-esteem. According to Khairuddin and Makhbul (2011), the levels of stress experienced by employees affect commitment.

### 5.1.4. Effects of organizational stress to organizations

Stress at work has been linked to increases in accidents, low productivity, and extraordinary boosts in medical insurance (Greenberg, 2011). This is very costly to organisations. El Shikieri and Musa (2012) associate stress with flawed individual functioning in the workplace. They estimate that about 91.5 million working days are lost each year through stress-related illness because the negative effects of stress lead to reduced efficiency, decreased strength to perform, and generally reduced interest in working.

El Shikieri and Musa (2012) further assert that the stressed individual tends to have no concern for the organisation and colleagues, and a complete loss of responsibility. All these lead to reduced outputs and poor product quality, increased overtime and organisational sabotage. All these are highly detrimental to the organisation.

### 5.1.5. Strategies of coping and dealing with stress

Avey, Luthans and Jensen (2009) deliberate on "The Emerging Positive Approach". This approach is about ways that organisations could seek to assist employees handle the ever-challenging work environment, by increasingly recognizing the importance of positivity and concentrating on developing employee strengths, rather than applying the focus on the negative and trying to redress employee vulnerabilities and weaknesses. They further assert that this approach does not require discovering the value of positivity but, rather, calls for a

more positive approach than the dominant negative perspective regarding organisational stress.

Grobler et al. (2011) advises that the best way of dealing with stress is to try and focus on relaxation; however, they warn that it is also important to establish the main factors that contributed to the stress in one's life. Greenberg (2011) encourages using a tactic where an individual creates a formal plan or arrangement of managing one's stress. This plan includes managing one's time wisely, eating a healthy diet, being physically fit, relaxing and meditating, ensuring a good night's sleep, avoiding inappropriate self-talk, and taking time-out. All these help the body fight the negative and dangerous effects of stress by assisting the body stay healthy and clearing one's mind of all the negative thoughts and feelings that lead to stress.

Good relations with fellow colleagues and superiors can help individuals cope with stress (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009). Greenberg (2011) advises employees to adopt a positive affectivity nature, by trying to view people and events in a positive light. This helps them experience positive moods and feelings in a wide range of settings and under many different conditions, therefore contributing negatively to stress. Proper resources in terms of training and working equipment can help with alleviating employees' stress levels (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009).

Decision-making is associated with control. Individuals who believe that they have some control over their work environment often experience lower level of stress than those who feel that they have little or no control at all in what happens in their work environment (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009). It is for this reason that the inclusion of all the employees in the organisation's decision-making is encouraged.

Open and effective communication in an organisation tends to decrease the levels of stress experienced by employees. This communication should also be accurate in order to increase the predictability of the work environment (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009). Organisations are often faced with many changes that often are not communicated to employees. These can include, for example, decreasing budgets or increasing demands. Unpleasant surprises can destroy the employees' morale and lead to stress. DeMauro (1998) commends that managers should communicate openly to their staff even if the communication is about an unpleasant event that might take place in the organisation. She points out that communication builds trust and helps the employees feel good and valuable,

and employees who feel good and valued often experience reduced stress levels. Moreover, good relations with staff are developed with talking or communicating.

The demands of family and one's occupation should be balanced (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009). According to Bell, Rajendran and Theiler (2012), a person's attitudes, emotions, skills and behaviors produced in one domain (either work or personal life) flow into the other. Spillover can have positive or negative effects, and can occur in both directions – work-to-personal life and personal life-to-work. They further argue that good work-life balance and low work-life conflict benefits organizations indirectly, through increased well-being, decreased job stress and decreased burnout of its employees.

### 5.1.6. Organisational resources for managing stress

Leka et al., (1999) stresses the importance of carefully considering the right systems and procedures to assess, prevent, or manage stress in the organisation. The employees should be aware of their organisation's systems, procedures, and resources available to them for stress management. Organisations should make sure that there are internal resources to manage stress in the workplace. These resources could include occupational health services, an in-house psychologist or counsellor, training departments, and even personnel trained and equipped with skills to manage staff well-being.

Greenberg (2011) emphasises that organisations should have some kind of formal programs, like the employee assistance program, in place to assist employees who face various difficulties in their work lives. These programs help address the stress problem by training employees in various stress management techniques like meditation and relaxation.

### 5.2. Intention to quit

Different researchers and authors use different terms to describe quitting, such as turnover, attrition, exit, migration, succession, etc. Unlike the actual employee turnover or quitting, intention to quit is not explicit in that it is only statements about a specific behaviour of interest and not the actual behaviour (Berndt, 1981). Intention to quit can also be termed "turnover intention". Bothma and Roodt (2012) identify turnover intention as a type of withdrawal behaviour that is associated with under-identification with work. They further assert that turnover or intention to quit is the

employee's conscious and deliberate willingness to leave the organisation and it is regarded as the last in a sequence of withdrawal cognitions. Du Plooy and Gert (2010, p.2) and Morrel, Loan-Clarke and Wilkinson (2001) briefly define intention to quit as "the employee's conscious and deliberate wilfulness to leave the organisation". According to Ongori (2007), employee turnover is the rotation of workers around the labour market; between firms, jobs and occupations; and between the states of employment and unemployment.

Intention to quit or leave the organisation has been studied over several decades which in turn contributed to the findings of the negative and positive aspects of employee turnover (Mossholder, Bedeian, Norria, Giles & Feild, 1988). Tuzun and Kalemci (2012) explain that many studies show that intention to quit is a good predictor of actual turnover, therefore making it essential for organisations to investigate and understand the reasons behind turnover intention and how to control or minimise them. Robyn and

Robyn and Du Preez (2013) also explain that the main important reason for investigating employee's intention to quit in any organisation is to assist the human resources take a proactive approach to the organisation's retention strategies and try by all means to decrease the turnover intention. Du Plooy and Roodt (2010) also feel that a proper understanding of why employees intend to quit should assist organisations with a more effective management strategy of employee turnover.

Werbel and Bedeian (1989) on the other hand argued that, turnover is not always detrimental to organisations. For example, there are those employees who simply are poor performers even after many interventions have been tried by the organisation to help them improve their performance. They explain that losing these employees is often beneficial rather than detrimental to the organisation. They further assert that new employees can stimulate management by providing new and innovative ideas and provide skills that are better suited to the organisation's growth.

### 5.3. Relationship Between Stress And Intention To Quit

Grobler et al., (2011) have identified quitting as one of the answers to dealing with stress. They refer to an example of an employee who, due to age, experience stress due to the inability to perform at the normal level that they used to when they were younger. These employees often consider leaving the organisation before their normal retirement age.

Reasons associated with employees' intention to quit

Some researchers have over a number of years attempted to answer the question of what makes employees intend to leave the organisation. They did this by investigating possible reasons of why employees often intend leaving the organisation. Results from this research have disappointingly shown very little consistency in findings. This is partly due to the diversity of employees. It has therefore been concluded that there are many reasons why people voluntarily quit from one organisation to another or why people choose to leave the organisation. Out of these many reasons, the one identified as that which mostly leads the employees to intend to quit is stress. The experience of job-related stress (job stress), and the range factors that lead to job related stress (stressors), make employees want to quit (Ongori, 2007).

Other than stress, certain factors have been found to be associated with intention to quit. These are age, gender, tenure, educational qualifications, and marital status (Werbel & Bedeian, 1989). For the purpose of this study, tenure is defined as the status of holding one's position on a permanent basis without periodic contract renewals ([the American Heritage free dictionary](#)).

According to Hayes, O'Brien-Pallas, Duffield, Shamian, Buchan, Hughes, Laschinger and North (2012), employees' demographic characteristics have been advanced in many models as predictors of withdrawal. One of these demographic characteristics is age.

In a study conducted by Werbel and Bedeian (1989), the influence of age on employees' intention to quit has been investigated. The reason for investigating age as an influence of employee's intention to quit was the fact that employee needs are likely to vary by age. The method that employers use to motivate younger employees might not work for older employees and for this reason, they might intend leaving the organisation by perhaps taking early retirement. On the other hand, those older employees who do not intend to retire early might hold on to the organisation due to fear of struggling to find another suitable employment. Results of this study showed modest to low relationship between age and intention to quit.

Tenure has been identified as one of the factors that may drive employees to having intentions of quitting. According to Wandera (2011), the world of work today is changing and many organisations prefer employing people on short-term contracts rather than permanent appointments. There are many reasons why



organisations prefer short-term contracts as opposed to permanent appointments. Coetzee and De Villiers (2010) blame the growth in non-permanent appointments and casual work arrangements to the increasing strain and pressure on South African organisations to enhance performance and sustain their competitiveness. In support of this belief, Druker and Croucher (2000) believe that organisations use short-term contracts to screen out poor performers so that they can offer permanent employment to those individuals who were considered best performers while on short-term contract. As much as this method looks good for the organisation, Wandera (2011) warns that organisations end up losing the best performing employees because these employees tend to leave the organisation, due to the desire for permanent work, for more permanent appointments with other organizations that have such openings.

Increasing level of education in employees seems to contribute to the employees' intention to quit. Jonathan, Thibeli and Darroux (2013) recognize education level as one of the reasons why employees often intend leaving their current organisations. In support of this view, they point out that as the employee's educational level advances, the perceived reward-cost ratio may be impacted. It is almost obvious that if the reward-cost ratio of staying with current employment differs with other employment, the employee might consider leaving for the better one.

Marital status is another reason that could be linked to employee's intent to quit. For example, an employee would, while in the employ of UFH, get married to someone who resides in another province and decide to join them, and thereby start showing signs of quitting intentions. Spouses might also be transferred to different cities, causing their spouse to want to quit employment to be with their spouses. On the other hand, someone who was married and gets divorced while in the employ of UFH might want to quit employment and start a new life elsewhere.

#### **5.4. South African Institutions of higher learning**

Generally, institutions of higher learning depend on government subsidies and external funding and sponsors. In order for them to keep receiving these sponsors and funding, they need to remain competitive (Robyn & Du Preez, 2013). This is the case for South African institutions of higher learning as well. The employees of any institution play a major role in ensuring that the institution remains competitive. Their well-being is therefore very important.

#### **5.5. Challenges Facing South African Institutions Of Higher Learning**

South African institutions of higher learning used to provide low stress working environments, but that has unfortunately changed. The institutions of higher learning in South Africa have over the last two decades been subjected to many changes, challenges, and problems (Rothmann & Barkhuizen, 2008; Coetzee & Rothmann, 2005). There are many factors that have contributed to these challenges and problems. These include heartfelt inequities and some distortions of the system (Rothmann & Barkhuizen, 2008). Viljoen and Rothmann (2009) seem to also agree that, during the last two decades, institutions of higher learning in South Africa have undergone many rapid changes and faced so many predicaments which have contributed to the high levels of stress experienced by employees of the institutions. These predicaments and changes include financial demands, insecurities, some mergers, changes in management and management styles. These are all crucial and difficult to avoid, and have led to the high levels of stress experienced by employees in institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

There is also uneven and poor articulation amongst the different types of higher learning institutions. Furthermore, students who come from poor background and are under-prepared for the higher learning environment also contribute to the stress-related problems faced by the institutions of higher learning in South Africa. All these factors combined are bound to cause pressure to one group of an institution's employees, for instance, the academic staff members. Once the academic staff members feel stressed and pressured, it is highly likely that they will pressurize the other group of employees, the support staff, making the environment very stressful and difficult to work in (Rothmann & Barkhuizen 2008).

Unequal distribution of resources, declining state subsidy, as well as increased competition amongst the institutions of higher learning have been identified as some of the problems that lead to stressful working environments in South African institutions of higher learning (Rothmann & Barkhuizen, 2008). Erosion in pay and job security have also been identified as major problems facing the institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Staff feel threatened by job insecurity as more appointments are fixed-term contracts as opposed to the previous security of being employed permanently (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009).

## 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The instruments used to collect data will be discussed with a focus on their rationale, validity and reliability. The procedure used to collect data and methods used to analyse data are discussed. A non-experimental survey design, following the quantitative tradition was used in pursuit of the research objectives for this study. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) assert that adopting a quantitative research technique enables the collection of data in the form of numbers, and statistical techniques are used to analyse the data.

### 6.1. Population And Sample

#### 6.1.1. Population

According to Babbie and Mouton (2006), the population for a study is that group (usually of people) about whom we want to draw conclusions. They further explain that we are almost never able to study all the members of the population that interest us, and we can never make every possible observation of them. The population of the proposed study comprised of all the support or administrative personnel of the University of Fort Hare in all three campuses namely: Alice, Bisho, and East London campus. The population constituted 638 employees (N=638).

#### 6.1.2. Sample

According to Gray (2004), a sample is a group of objects, occurrences or individuals chosen from the main population for a study. This study targeted administrative or support personnel at the University of Fort Hare. A research sample was drawn from the population of administrative/support employees working in all three campuses (Alice campus, Bisho campus, East London campus) of the University of Fort Hare. The sample selected was a large portion of the population and thus fairly represented the population. Raosoft calculator was used to calculate the sample size. The recommended sample size of the present study was 225. Based on this recommended figure, 225 questionnaires were distributed and employees were encouraged to partake in the study. From the total number of questionnaires administered, only 135 (n=135) usable questionnaires were returned by the support personnel of the University of Fort Hare. This yields a response rate of 60 percent. According to Sekaran (2000), a response rate of 30 percent is regarded as acceptable for most research purposes. Objectives of the research play a role in deciding the sample size that produces the right quality and quantity

of the information needed. Therefore, in drawing a sample, the researcher should ensure that the characteristics of the population are well represented in order to make meaningful inferences.

### 6.2. Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure used in this research was probability sampling. This is a sampling method where every element of the population had an equal chance of being selected for the sample. The type of probability sampling employed for the research was random sampling. The form of random sampling was cluster random sampling in which “all the members of the selected clusters, or a simple random sample or a stratified random sample drawn from these clusters, constitute the eventual sample” (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005:65).

### 6.3. Research Instruments

A questionnaire was used as the research instrument to collect data. According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1997), a questionnaire consists of a list of questions that must be formulated, constructed and sequenced to produce the most constructive data in the most effective manner. According to Babbie and Mouton (2006), the use of questionnaires is advantageous because questionnaires are economical, speedy, there is no bias (as in interviews: interviewer bias), and the possibility of anonymity and privacy encourages candidates to be willing to respond on sensitive issues, and do so honestly. The questionnaire was used also because it translates the research objectives into specific questions that are asked from the respondents. The respondents were not asked to give their names so that they can be assured that anonymity is maintained. The questionnaire consisted of a covering letter and comprised of the following four sections:

#### 6.3.1. Biographical information instrument

A demographic questionnaire was self-developed for this study, and was handed out to all participants for completion. The questionnaire asked participants to answer questions regarding their age, gender, marital status, race/ethnicity, education level, years at the institution, tenure, and job grade.

#### 6.3.2. Organisational stress instrument

The Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) questionnaire was used to measure occupational stress. This is a 16-item, four-point rating scale ranging from “1” (Strongly

disagree) to “4” (Strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for the whole questionnaire is 0.89 (Pikhart *et al.*, 1996).

**6.3.3. Intention to quit instrument**

Turnover intention scale developed by Roodt in 2004 was used to measure intention to quit. According to Bothma and Roodt (2012), to enhance reliability, behavior intention should be measured within a reasonable time frame. This is a 14-item scale. The Scale adopts a 7-point Likert scale, where participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they experience particular feelings. Responses range from “1” (Never), to “7” (Always). This scale has a reliability coefficient of 0.80 for turnover intention or intention to quit.

**6.4. Method Of Data Collection**

Data for this research was collected through questionnaires, but before data collection, permission was requested from the university’s top management. Once the permission was granted, the respondents were randomly selected from a complete report of support personnel generated from the Integrated Tertiary Software (ITS) used by the institution. Questionnaires were then distributed to these respondents. During the distribution process, the purpose of the study was fully explained, verbally. Even though participation was encouraged, the respondents were informed that participation was optional and that one could withdraw at any stage, if they felt that they did not want to continue with the questionnaire. Respondents were given a week to complete the questionnaires. After the week passed, the questionnaires were collected. After the data collection phase, the researcher checked all the questionnaires for missing data. Those with missing data were discarded.

**7. DATA ANALYSIS**

Statistical analysis was carried out with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Cronbach alpha co-efficient was used to measure reliability of the measuring instruments. Pearson correlation analysis of variance and moderated regression analysis was used to analyse data.

Internal consistencies in terms of Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the three variables (organisational stress, job engagement, intention to quit) are presented in the first part of this chapter. The second part of the chapter presents descriptive statistics for demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, race, qualification, tenure, job status, and job grade. The results relating to the inferential statistical analysis

relevant to the hypotheses of the study are presented, and the chapter is concluded with a summary.

**7.1. Organizational Stress**

*Table 1: Organisational Stress Questionnaire's Coefficient Alpha*

Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha	
Variables	Alpha
Raw	0.508153
Standardized	0.518556

Table 1 above illustrates that the Cronbach’s coefficient alpha of the organisational stress questionnaire in study was 0.50 which shows that the instrument had a low reliability test.

**7.2. Intention To Quit**

*Table 2: Turnover Intention Questionnaire's Coefficient Alpha*

Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha	
Variables	Alpha
Raw	0.818444
Standardized	0.824627

Table 2 above illustrates that the Cronbach’s coefficient alpha of the turnover intentions questionnaire in study was 0.81. This confidently shows that the instrument had high reliability test.

**7.3. Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha For The Whole Questionnaire**

*Table 3: Coefficient Alpha For The Whole Questionnaire*

Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha	
Variables	Alpha
Raw	0.835015
Standardized	0.824486

Table 3 above demonstrates that the Cronbach’s coefficient alpha for the whole questionnaire used in the study was 0.83. This shows that the whole questionnaire was reliable.

7.4. Descriptive Statistics

7.4.3. Marital status of respondents

7.4.1. Age distribution of respondents

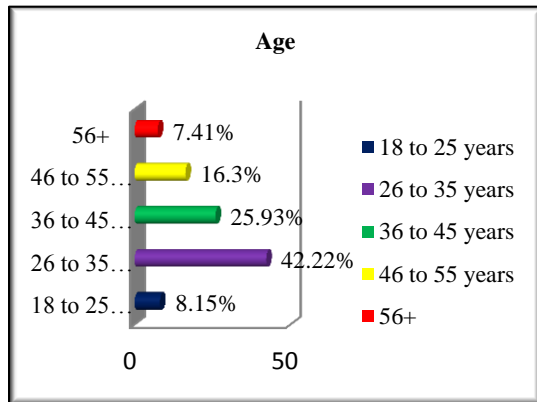


Figure 2: Age Distribution Of Respondents

Figure 2 above shows that the majority of the respondents (42.22%, n=57) are in the age group 26 to 35 years, while 25.93% (n=35) are in the age group 36 to 45 years. 22 respondents (16.3%) fall in the age category 46 to 55 years, 11 respondents (8.15%) fall in the age category 18 to 25 years. A further 7.41% (n=10) fall in the 56+ years age category.

7.4.2. Gender distribution of respondents

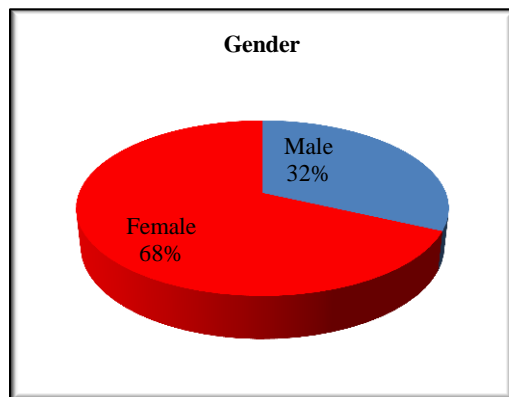


Figure 3: Gender Distribution Of Respondents

Figure 3 depicts the gender of respondents. The majority of the respondents (68%, n=92) are female respondents, while male respondents comprised 32% (n=43) of the sample.

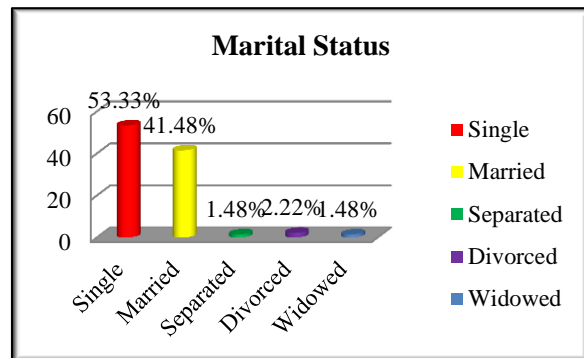


Figure 4: Marital Status Distribution Of Respondents

Figure 4 above illustrates that of the 135 respondents who participated, 72 (53.33%) of the respondents are single, 56 respondents (41.48%) are married, three respondents (2.22%) are single, two (1.48%) respondents are widowed and another two (1.48%) of them are separated.

7.4.4. Racial distribution of respondents

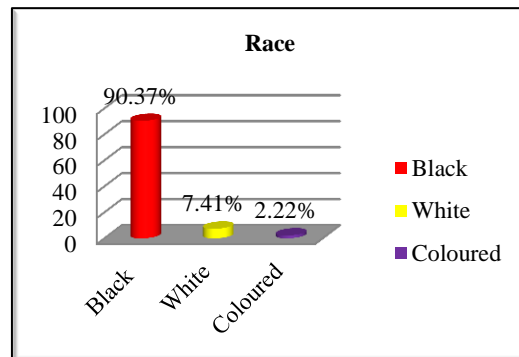


Figure 5: Racial Distribution Of Respondents

Figure 5 above shows the racial distribution of the sample. The majority of the sample were black employees (90.37%; n=122), 7.41% (n=10) were white employees and a further 2.22% (n =3) were coloured employees.

**7.4.5. Educational qualifications of respondents**

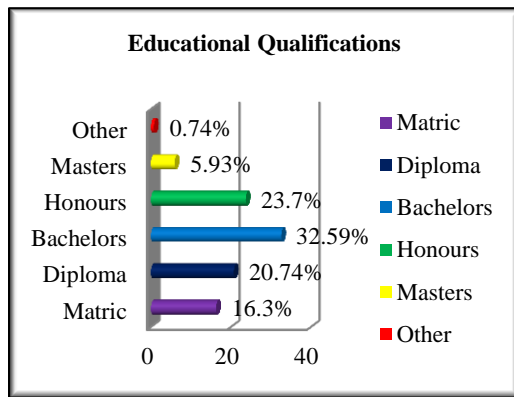


Figure 6: Educational Qualification Distribution Of Respondents

Figure 6 above illustrates the education level of the sample. The graph depicts that the majority of the respondents, 32.59% (n =44) has a bachelor’s degree, 23.7% (n=32) has a honour’s degree, 20.74% (n=28) has a diploma, 16.3% (n=22) has a matric, whilst 5.93% (n=8) possess a master’s degree educational level. One respondents (0.74%) have other qualifications.

**7.4.6. Tenure distributions of respondents**

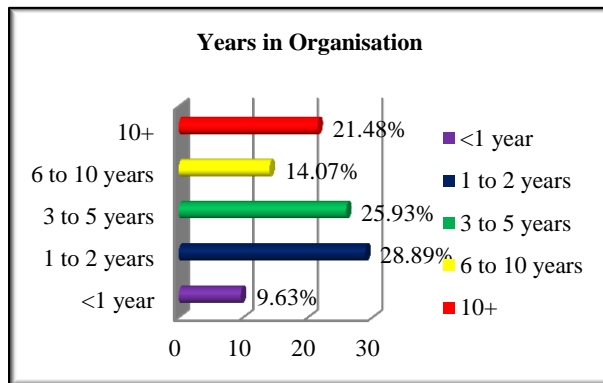


Figure 7: Tenure Distribution Of Respondents

Figure 7 above shows the number of years that the respondents have served in their organisation. Majority of the employees (28.89% or n=39) have been in the organisation for one to two years, 25.93% (n=35) have been in the organisation for three to five years while 21.48% (n=29) have a tenure of over ten years. 19 respondents (14.07%) have worked for six to ten years while 9.63% (n=13) have been with the organisation for less than a year.

**7.4.7. Job status of respondents**

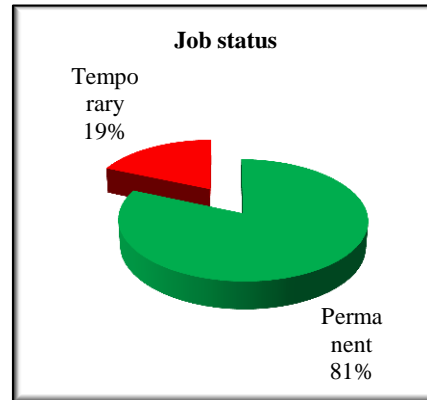


Figure 8: Job Status Distribution Of Respondents

The figure 8 above shows the job status distribution of the respondents. The majority of the employees had permanent jobs (81%; n=110) while 19% (n=10) of them are employed on temporary basis.

**7.4.8. Job grades of respondents**

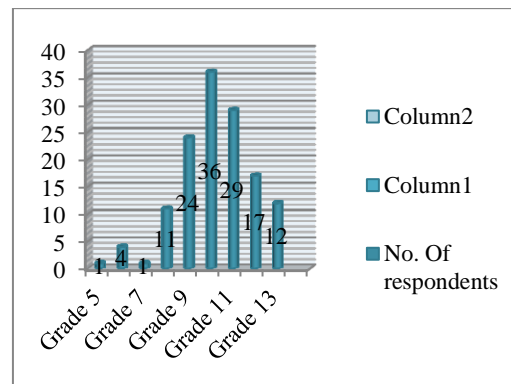


Figure 9: Job Grade Distribution Of Respondents

Figure 9 above shows that the majority of support personnel at UFH are at grade 10 with n=36 (26.7%) personnel occupying this grade. Only 0.7% (n=1) member is occupying a grade 5 senior management post. 3% (n=4) are at grade 6 which is also senior management level. 0.7% (n=1) is at grade 7. Grade 8, middle management has 8.1% (n=11) employees. 17.8% (n=24) are at grade 9. The posts at lower level grades 11, 12, and 13 are occupied by a total of 43 (n=58) support personnel.

## 7.5. Hypothesis Testing

### 7.5.1. Correlations Of Study Variables

Table 4: Correlations Between The Study Variables

Pearson Correlation Coefficients, N = 135 Prob >  r  under H <sub>0</sub> : Rho=0		
	ORG STRESS	TURNOVER
ORGANISATION AL STRESS	1.00000	0.20371 0.0178
TURNOVER	0.20371 0.0178	1.00000

The following hypotheses were developed to scrutinise the relationships between organisational stress, and intention to quit.

### 7.5.2. Hypothesis

$H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit.

$H_1$ : There is a significant relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit.

Table 4 shows the correlations of study variables. It shows that there is a significant positive relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit ( $r=0.20$ ;  $p=0.0178$ ). It shows that employees experiencing organisational stress have high turnover intentions. Hence the alternative hypothesis is accepted in favour of the null hypothesis.

## 8. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results emanating from this study show that there is a significant positive relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit ( $r=0.203$ ;  $p=0.0178$ ). It shows that employees experiencing organisational stress have high turnover intentions. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted.

These findings are in line with previous research findings. A study conducted by Noor and Maad (2008) tested the relationship between work-life conflict, stress and turnover intention. The study yielded results with a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.742, showing that turnover intention is positively correlated with stress. In their study, Noor and Maad (2008) confirmed that as an individual's stress level increases, they are

more likely to leave their stressful position and seek alternative positions either within the field or in another industry.

In a couple of different studies relating to the relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit, finding identified intention to leave as job stress work outcomes. It was explained that job-related stress better explains an intention to leave rather than the resignation itself and that the perception of a stressful work environment favours employee decisions to truly leave their organisation (Paille, 2011; Firth, Mellor, Moore, and Loquet, 2004; Siu & Cooper, 1998; Grobler et al, 2011).

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future researchers should consider the limitations of the present study as mentioned in the previous section. Should the researcher need to generalise the findings of the present study to other institutions of higher learning in South Africa, he/she should do so with caution.

If workers frequently exposed to job stress are associated with high turnover rates and absenteeism, further research on the subject would allow for active stress management policies to be more beneficial for the individual and the economy as a whole (Noor & Maad, 2008).

Future researchers should consider using qualitative research rather than quantitative techniques as used in the present study. This will help to ensure the triangulation of research findings. Triangulation is usually used to counteract common method variance. This means that one can be more confident with similar findings obtained from different methods

## 10. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to establish whether there is a relationship between organisational stress and employee's intention to quit. This was investigated among the administrative or support personnel at the University of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape. The sample consisted of support personnel from all three campuses of the institution namely, Alice, Bisho and East London campus. The results of the study showed that correlations existed amongst the two variables. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between organisational stress and intention to quit. Therefore, using strategies that will lead to reduction of stress in the organisation could help reduce employee's intention to leave the organisation.

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