

Factors Impacting Employee Absenteeism and the Managers' Perception of its Causes in the Hotel Industry

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Abstract

The economic viability and success of a hotel depends on the optimisation of all resources, including Human Resources (HR). Absenteeism is an occurrence that can have a significant negative impact on optimising HR in South African hotels in the Gauteng Province. The objective of this study is to identify the factors that contribute to employee absenteeism, as well as describing the hotel employers' perceptions of employee absenteeism. A quantitative research approach was followed in this study. A survey questionnaire was developed in order to collect data from 13 establishments, with a 3-star to 5-star grading, in the Gauteng Province. The findings reveal that absenteeism is mainly due to family responsibilities including childcare, other causes identified were strikes, fatigue, transport problem and genuine illness. It is evident from the findings that delivery of quality services can be affected negatively, due to abuse of sick leave and the cost associated with absenteeism. The results of this research project will contribute by creating an awareness of the negative impact that absenteeism has on the hotel and what employers could do to improve employee attendance.

Keywords: Absenteeism, family responsibility, perception, hotel, employees, Gauteng Province

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic brought the South African economy to a near standstill during the strictest phases of lockdown. The accommodation providers were dealt a heavy blow as both international and local travelling were banned. The effect of the pandemic will continue to influence the economic viability of hotels in the near future (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020). Post pandemic the hotel industry will continue to experience financial difficulties until tourists rediscover their desire to travel. Currently hotels are in a survival struggle and all their resources must be applied optimally. One of these resources that is essential to economic survival is human resources (HR). Unfortunately, uncontrolled and mismanaged absenteeism can be detrimental to optimal use of HR. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To assess the impact of personal characteristics (demographics) on absence in hotels.
- To assess the impact of job situation on absence in the hotels.
- To assess the impact of social factors on absence in hotels.

An employee is considered absent when he/she is not at work when they are scheduled to be and it is measured by frequency or duration of workdays missed (Davey, Cummings, Newburn-Cook & Lo, 2009). Karimbil, (2019) lists four basic types of absenteeism namely; authorised absenteeism, unauthorised absenteeism, wilful absenteeism and absenteeism caused by circumstances beyond the employee’s control. Karimbil (2019) further explains that authorised absenteeism is when the employee is not at work with the permission of a superior. This type of absenteeism is planned and can be managed appropriately, unlike the following three types of absenteeism that are unplanned and difficult to manage. Unauthorised absenteeism is when the employee is not at work without the permission of a superior and without providing information to the employer (Karimbil, 2019). Wilful absenteeism is described as the employee taking a deliberate decision not to attend work (Karimbil, 2019). An increase of 1% in the absenteeism rate equates to a decrease in productivity of 0.66% in an organisation (Grinza & Rycx, 2020). Rasmussen, Sweeny and Sheehan (2017), estimated that the South African economy would lose 7.0% of GDP annually by 2030 due to absenteeism. It was reported that up to 15% of employees are absent on any given day, costing the South African economy R16 billion a year (OCSA, 2017). The Process Model (Figure 1) identifies numerous aspects influencing absenteeism.

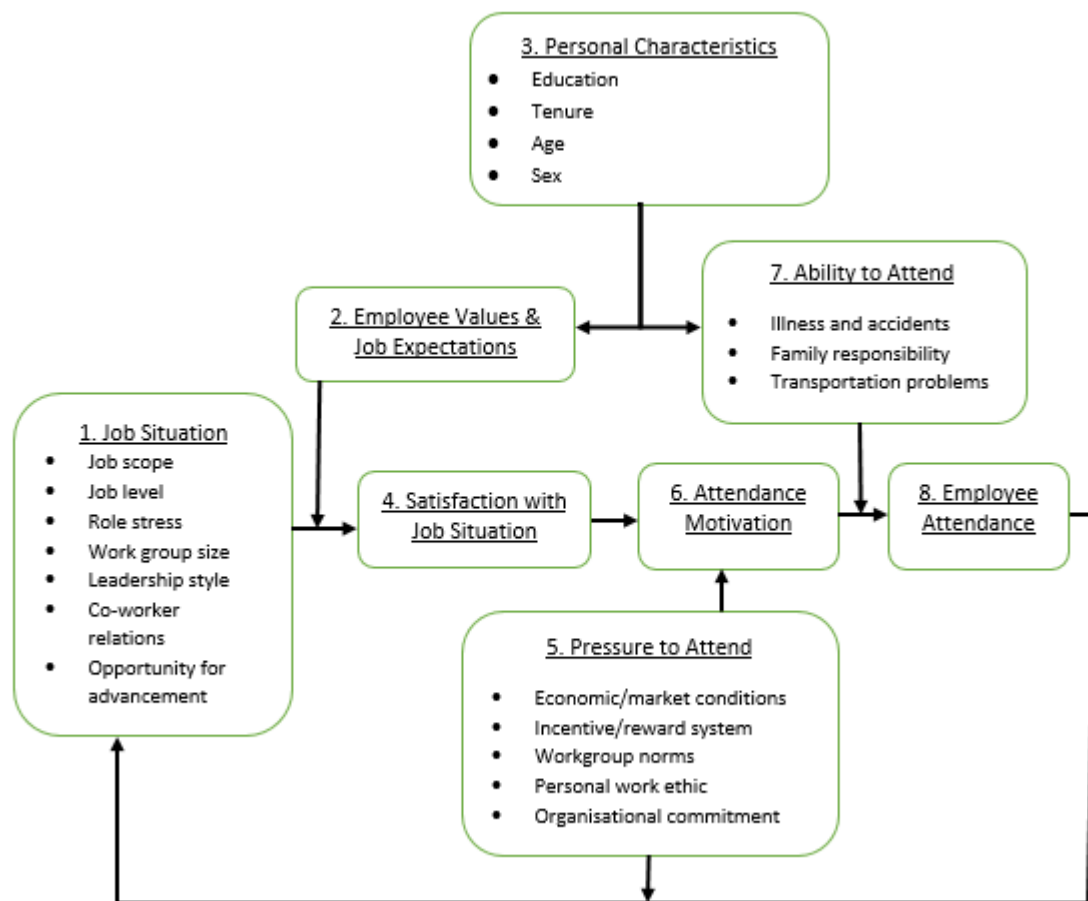


Figure 1: Attendance Process Model (Rhodes & Steers, 1978)

According to the model above Employees’ personal characteristics will affect his values and job expectations and job situation, values and expectations will be a determining factor for job satisfaction. The model shows that if the employee is satisfied with the job situation he/she will be motivated to attend work. However, a motivated employee must also be able to attend work. The model shows various aspects that place pressure on the employee to attend work. Any of

the aspects highlighted in the model that are negative or poorly managed in the hotel can contribute to absenteeism.

Personal characteristics/demographics

The model indicates that personal characteristics and demographics play a role in absenteeism (Figure 1). Kocakülâh, Bryan and Lynch (2018) as well as Shamian, O'Brien-Pallas, Thomson, Alksnis and Kerr (2003) support above mentioned and identified employees' personal characteristics as possible reasons for absenteeism. Personal characteristics and job characteristics have a significant relationship to absenteeism (Salleh & Ringim, 2017). Personal characteristics have a bearing on amongst other, fatigue that is seen as one of the predictors of future absenteeism (Brborović, Daka, Dakaj & Brborović, 2017; Fan & Smith, 2018). Researchers found a relationship between the following personal characteristics and absenteeism; gender, marital status, age, education and tenure (Adepoju & Adamu, 2017; Ichino & Moretti, 2009). According to Gilleskie (2010), as well as Jansen, Otten, and Van der Zee, (2017), women are more likely to be absent from work than men. A significant correlation was identified between gender and work stress (Quinn & Smith, 2018). However, other authors reported that these personal characteristics show no significant relationship with absenteeism. In his study in hospitals in India, Chaudhari (2020) found no significant correlation between absence and gender as well as marital status. This is in contrast to a study done in Sri-Lanka by Dinushi, Ekanay and Appuhamy (2015), where male employees who were married had significantly higher levels of absence. Pandey and Dhanopia (2020) state that married employees with children have increased family responsibilities that could result in both men and women missing work. Kocakülâh, Kelley, Mitchell and Ruggieri (2016) confirm that childcare problems are among the main reasons for employees failing to report for work.

Job situation

Absenteeism has a direct relationship with job level, Absenteeism was reported to be higher among blue-collar employees who are low-income earners, have fewer responsibilities and more repetitive jobs (Fourie & Keyser, 2018). This class of workers also have less satisfying work when compared to that of white-collar employees. Job levels are directly related to income and CAMS (2007) statistics confirm that lower-income earners, namely employees earning R5,000 per month or less have an absenteeism rate of 2,3%. This absenteeism rate drops to 1,33% in the group that earns between R10,000 and R15,000 per month (CAMS, 2007). It is a known fact that salaries in the hospitality industry are low, and the Department of Labour had to gazette a Sectoral Determination to enforce a minimum wage for hospitality employees (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75, of 1997 by Sectoral Determination 14: Hospitality Sector).

Another aspect that is related to job level is job scope. Utami and Harini (2019) states that poor job scope that is often linked to boredom at work contributes to higher absenteeism levels. Boredom, as an emotion, is known to be prevalent in the workplace and has negative consequences for organisational productivity and the employee (Van Hooff & Van Hooff, 2014). This was also confirmed by the study done by Reijseger, Schaufeli, Peeters, Taris, van Beek & Ouweneel, 2013), which highlighted that boredom is caused by working in an unchallenging, "passive" job. One of the negative consequences of boredom is reduced organisational belonging and participation, the impact of this becomes continuous destruction, low risk taking and suppressed innovation by employees (Moradi, Hamidi & Eskandari, 2019). The job process model further includes leadership styles as a segment of the job situation. Frooman, Mendelson and Murphy (2012) reported that leadership style influences supervisors' behaviour and that in turn affects employees' illegitimate absenteeism levels. Research by

Nielsen and Daniels (2016) confirm that there is a relationship between leadership and absenteeism. According to Htut and Lin (2019), employees who receive social support from their supervisors are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. However, Rahman and Bin Kabir (2020) stated that satisfaction with management is not the most important factor relating to absenteeism. One possible explanation could be that people with strong career orientation place less emphasis on social relations. Leadership, supervision style and behaviour can affect stress levels of employees. Stress is shown as an element of the job situation (Figure 1). Mat Saruan, Mohd Yusoff, Mohd Fauzi, Wan Puteh, & Muhamad Robot (2020) found that the following non-workplace stressors (e.g. conflicts with spouse, pressure from relatives, etc.) as well as workplace stressors (e.g. workload, lack of support, etc.) added to the stress employees experienced at work. Negative co-worker relationships can increase stress levels and will have a negative effect on employee attendance behaviour (Lieke, Johns, Lyons & Ter Hoeven, 2016). However, Yang, Shen, Zhu, Liu, Deng, Chen and See (2016) found that when employees perceive co-worker support they experienced lower employee stress levels.

According to Mashaba and Maile (2019), poor working conditions are a major contributory factor to absenteeism. Working conditions such as working hours, remuneration, health and safety, in the hotel determine the employees' quality of work life (Elmately, 2015). Lack of opportunities, lack of time for task performance, lack of autonomy and the perception of heavy demand from tasks leading to work stress are identified in many studies as work conditions that lead to absenteeism (Maia et al., 2019; Brunner et al., 2019). Nanjundeswaraswamy (2016) adds salary and rewards, work facilities and security as other work conditions that affect absenteeism. Due to financial constraints, hotels often operate with minimum staff levels and employees work long hours receiving poor remuneration. Ticharwa, Cope and Murray (2019), as well as Maila, Martin and Chipps (2020), describe that when employees experience a heavy workload due to minimum staff levels it is detrimental to both the physical and mental health of employees and it contributes to higher absenteeism rates. Altintas and Turanligil (2018) concur that excessive workload creates pressure for an employee who fails to keep up with work.

Ability to attend

Illness influences employees' ability to attend work. Family responsibility, illness, transport and strikes are some of the social factors that can affect absenteeism. Gncobo (2016) explains that illness of children, the spouse and personal illness contributes to absenteeism levels. The HIV/AIDS pandemic also lead to sick leave. HIV/AIDS prevalence among the South African workforce ranges from 7,9% to 25% (Basson & Roets 2013). Badubi (2017) mentions numerous social factors that contribute to absenteeism such as; minor and serious illness, personal problems, family responsibilities, pregnancy and maternity related issues, injuries, stress, burnout, fatigue, alcohol- or drug-related issues, bad weather, transport problems, labour disputes, organisational culture, unmet expectations, poor job-person match, supervisor personality and workplace abuse. Karimbil (2019), in addition to the above, added factors such as disengagement, dependents that are elderly and poor adjustment to working conditions as possible causes to absenteeism rates. In the model, it is shown that values and expectations influence the individuals' job satisfaction levels (Figure 1). Absenteeism can result when there is a negative gap between the employees' values, job expectations and the actual job experience. Such employees will tend to experience low morale, poor attendance and low motivation that will manifest in higher absenteeism levels than those of satisfied employees (Karimbil, 2019; Naderi & Shams, 2020). The alignment of employees' values and job expectations to the organisation's practices were found to enhance the employees feeling of belonging (Ruane, 2020).

Absenteeism and job satisfaction

Personal characteristics of the employee, job situation, values and expectations will contribute towards job satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Figure 1). Budi Susanto and Susetyarsi (2017) determined that employees that experience job satisfaction are less frequently absent. These employees tend to deliver higher quality work, ensure delivery of service quality to the hotel customers and are more productive (Al Zabir, Mozahid, Bhuiyan, Lima & Tasnim, 2018). De Reuver, Van de Voorde and Kilroy (2019) also identified other contributors to job satisfaction such as opportunity-enhancing practices. Bipath, Venkatesamy and Naidoo (2019) whose research revealed that improved working conditions, financial rewards, the opportunity for advancement and opportunity for promotion all contribute to job satisfaction De Reuver, Van de Voorde and Kilroy (2019) also determined that when managers implement opportunity-enhancing practices there is an increase in job satisfaction. The findings of Fan and Smith (2018) suggest that a positive work-life balance is one of the interventions can also contribute to job satisfaction.

A study by Grinza and Rycx (2020), found that absenteeism is detrimental to organisational success and more severe when the absent employees possess task specific knowledge and where tasks of various employees are highly interconnected. Absenteeism does not merely affect the productivity of the absentee but it also has a negative impact on his/her co-workers, customers, finances, the hotel's image and will derail progress (Badubi, 2017). Smaller firms suffer more severely due to absenteeism, as they do not have staff available to move into critical positions. The above-mentioned aspects are true for most hotels in Gauteng and therefore absenteeism leads to decreased profitability because of below par service quality (Alleyne, Doherty & Greenidge, 2006; Kocakülâh, Bryan & Lynch, 2018; Lee, Cai, DeFranco & Lee, 2020).

Possible solutions

One of the strategic objectives of hotel managers is to maximise profit and this can only be achieved by optimising the use of HR. To achieve optimisation hotel managers must implement measures to manage and control absenteeism in order to optimise the contribution of HR to the hotel's success. Kaiser (2018) emphasises that absenteeism can be effectively managed by creating what he refers to as the "moral attendance climate" in an organisation. This climate is evident when there is provision for discretionary absence and when there is an understanding of acceptable levels of presenteeism (employees show up for duty even when ill). In this climate, employees exhibit high levels of trust and interdependence and are motivated to do what they believe is the right thing. Another contribution to a positive environment at work, as reported by Bayram and Burgazoglu (2020), is that of occupational health and safety training, workplace health programmes and implementing measures to combat high employee stress levels (Leonard, 2016; Mat, Mohd, Mohd, Wan & Muhamad, 2020).

Methodology

A descriptive, quantitative research design was used for this study. This design is preferred because it comprises of a complete description of the situation with minimum bias in collection of data and fewer errors in the interpretation of the data collected (Omar, 2015). Data were gathered at selected star-graded establishments in Gauteng Province, South Africa. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used to select participants from star-rated establishments based on their availability. A survey was done using two questionnaires that were developed for the purposes of this research study.

Two separate questionnaires, both with a 4-point Likert (1 =‘strongly disagree’ to 4 =‘strongly agree’) response scale, were adapted to collect data from the participants (Benade, 2007). The four-point Likert scale was adopted to avoid “no responses” when respondents choose (3) which is a neutral unusable response. One questionnaire was developed to collect data from hotel employees and the other one was designed to collect data from the hotel managers. The questionnaire for the employees consisted of 62 questions aimed at identifying contributory factors causing employee absenteeism, and the other questionnaire for the managers consisted of 55 questions aimed at assessing the managers’ perception of the causes of employee absenteeism. The two questionnaires were close-ended with only six open-ended questions to allow respondents to elaborate a “Yes” response. The questionnaires for the managers had four sections that explored managers’ perceptions of the causes of employee absenteeism.

Contact information on graded hotels in Gauteng was obtained from the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa. These hotels were classified according to star rating and stratified random sampling was done using Strata version 11.0, selecting 40 hotels. Despite the sample of 40 hotels that were selected, the response rate was still low. In the end, only 13 establishments agreed to participate in the study, this constituted 33% response rate. The low response rate is one of the major limitations of the study. Majority 54% of the establishments were 4 star graded followed by 31% with 3 star grading and 15% were 5 star graded. In order to compensate for the low response rate, the researchers increased the number of respondents. From each of the 13 participating establishments 6 employees (from the originally planned three (3) employees) and 1 manager were selected using convenient sampling. This resulted in a total of 78 employees and 13 managers taking part in the study. In order to ensure that the total of 91 responses received were accurately collected, Cronbach’s alpha was used to test for internal consistency and factor analysis was used for data reduction. The results of the Cronbach’s alpha test were above 0.7, which means the instrument accurately determined what it was intended to determine (Taber, 2018). The results show a value of 0.90 for the internal factors and a value of 0.73 for the external factors. This is an indication that the data collected from the 91 respondents was collected accurately. The Statistical Package of Social Sciences program (SPSS), version 11.0 was used to process the data obtained from the questionnaires. The Pearson Chi-Square test was employed to test for associations between factors attributed to employees’ demographic factors and the organisational factors influencing employee absenteeism (Sharpe, 2015).

Results

Personal characteristics/Demographic information that affects absenteeism

Gender and marital status and family responsibility

There was an equal distribution between males and females in this study. The notion that the industry is dominated by females was proven wrong in this study. This was similar to another study done in Nigeria where there was equal distribution between males and females (Karatepe, 2011). This was in contrast with a study done in China and the Netherlands, where the overwhelming majority (over 70%) were females (Jinfan & Zhao, 2015; Spitzbart, 2017). A study in the Middle East on the other hand, found that the industry is male dominated and women occupy entry level and low paying positions (Masadeh, 2013). This however, may have been influenced by the sampling strategy applied in the different studies. The results found a significant correlation ($p=000$) between gender and perception of work stress. This

can be a contributory factor to female employees. This is coupled with the fact Lidbeck and Boström (2020) affirm that females tend to be the primary care-givers of young children.

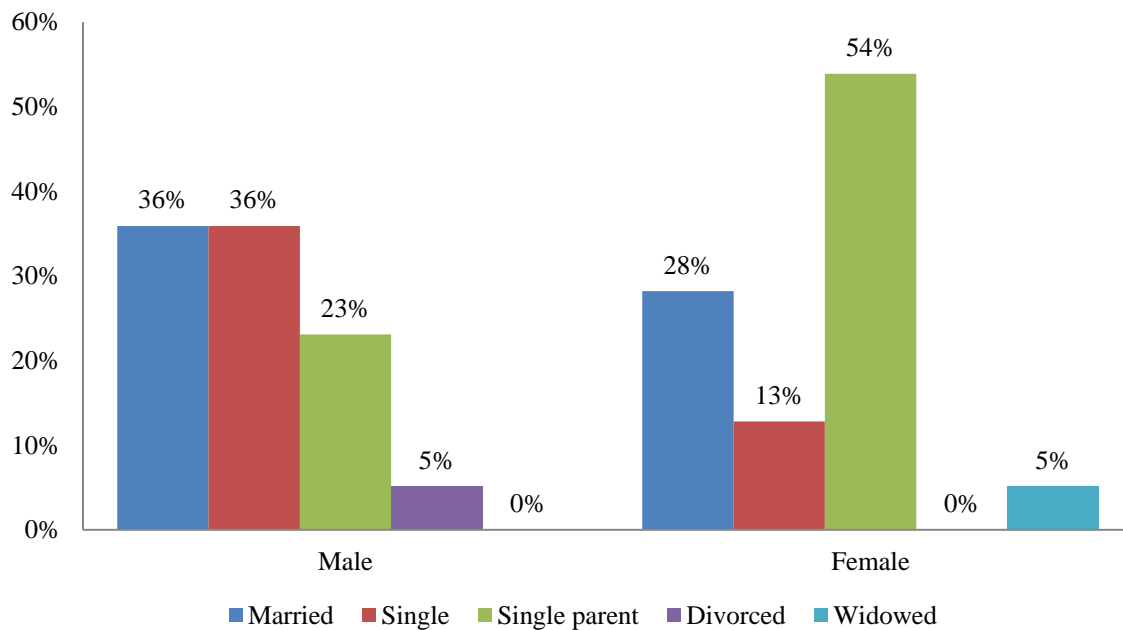


Figure 2: Gender and marital status

Regarding parenting, 54% of the female participants were single parents as compared to only 28% who were married. This is in contrast with only 23% of the males who were single parents with the majority of the males either married or single without children. Married employees had more family responsibilities as compared to single employees. Research has shown that, family responsibilities/family issues and personal issues have a major impact on the employees' morale, resulting in unplanned absences (Kocakulâh, 2016). In this study, the majority of the employees, 65,4%, indicated that they were absent from work because of family responsibilities and 23,1% cited childcare problems. All the managers agreed that family responsibilities contributed to absenteeism while 69,2% cited childcare problems which is an important aspect of family responsibility. This is linked to the fact that 76% of the employees had children and 46,1% had more than two children. In a study done in Malaysia's palm oil plantation, family issues had the highest impact (25.8%) in employee absenteeism (Syahlan, Zulkefli, Muhammad & Sani, 2020). There was a significant correlation ($p=0.018$) between parents of children aged below 15 years and childcare problems. Parents with more than one child also felt unappreciated at work ($p=0.032$) and felt they lacked support from management ($p=0.014$). This is likely to lead to stress and job dissatisfaction, which is known to contribute to absence. Budi Susanto and Susetyarsi, (2017) determined that employees that experience job satisfaction are less frequently absent. In this study, Family responsibility was found to be the major contributing factor to absence in the hotel sector in Gauteng. This is likely to affect female employees more than males.

Tenure and educational level

Tenure and educational level of employees contribute significantly to absenteeism. In terms of tenure, it has been reported that loyalty grows the longer the employee stays with one employer and in turn, it results in reduced absenteeism (Azimifar & Khah, 2014). In this study,

majority of the respondents had less than 5 years working experience. In summary, 64,1% had fewer than 5 years' work experience, 20,5% had from 5-10 years, and 15,4% had more than 10 years' work experience as can be observed in Figure 3.

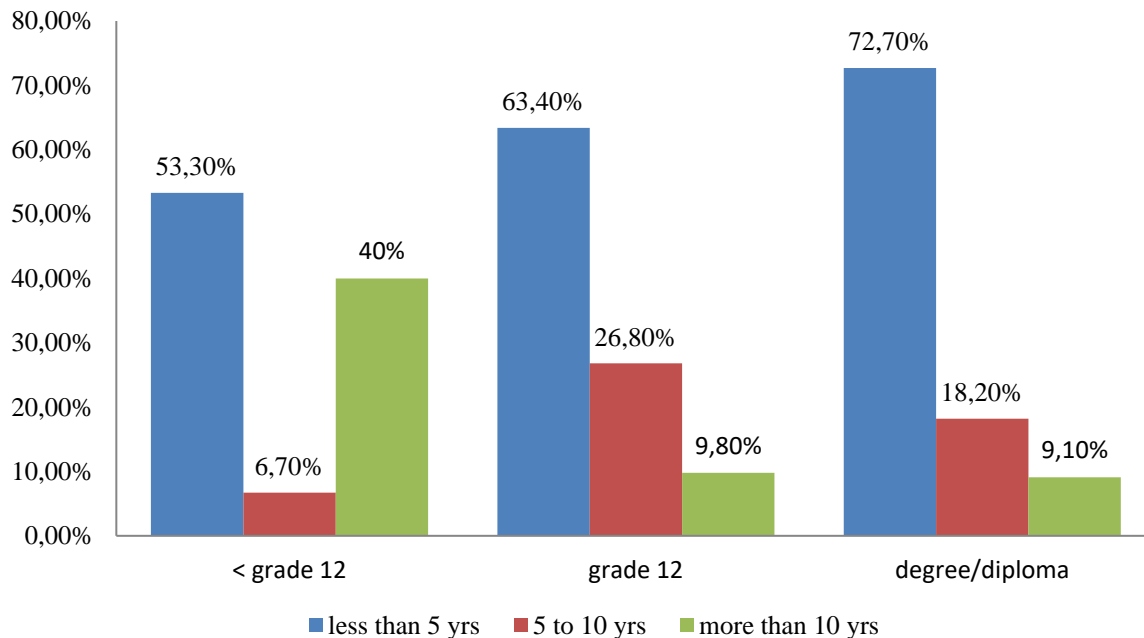


Figure 3: Qualifications and tenure

This is an indication of high turnover in the Gauteng Province hotel sector. Literature has found a link between absenteeism and turnover intention, This is due to the fact that both are classified as forms of withdrawal, together with late coming (Jaddoud, 2018). Karatepe, Razapouraghdam and Hassannia (2020) found that work engagement can mitigate against withdrawal behaviours (late coming, absence and turnover intentions) and job insecurity in the hotel industry. This is another indication that absence and turnover are integrated and if absenteeism is reduced, it has a direct impact on turnover intention.

In terms of qualifications, 52,6% of employees had grade 12 only, 28,2% had a diploma or degree, and 19,2% did not complete high school. Balkis, Arslan and Duru (2015) report that employees with post-school qualifications or secondary level of education, have less chance of being absent than employees with a lower level of education. Faroque, Ferdausy and Rahman (2020) agree that educated employees, who are more involved in their jobs, experience more job satisfaction. This is likely because education paves a way for a better position with responsibility and less repetition that tends to lead to boredom and thus absenteeism.

Job situation

Job scope

In this study, majority of the respondents were in low-level positions. This was confirmed by the high level of boredom.

Of all the employees, 41% reported feeling bored at work, the cause of the boredom was mainly due to the monotony of tasks and that they do the same tasks every day. This is more prevalent in low-level entry-level positions. They felt that their job posed no challenge and they were not acquiring new skills or participating in innovative activities. On the question whether

participants feel motivated to go to work, 65,4% indicated they are not motivated to go to work. This results in reduced organisational participation as confirmed by the study of Moradi et al. (2019), who reported that, with a coefficient of 81%, organisational participation has the highest impact on organisational belonging. They further confirmed that this passivity results in dissatisfaction with the job and the employer. Job satisfaction and low organisational commitment was found to be positively correlated with turnover intention (Reijseger et al., 2013).

In this study, employees complained about non-inclusion in decision-making processes, which is another factor related to organisational participation and job dissatisfaction. Other reasons that were mentioned to contribute to boredom included poor or non-supportive management and a feeling of little appreciation for the efforts of staff. Such are positively linked to “depressive complaints, distress, and counterproductive work behavior” (Van Hooff & Van Hooft, 2014). With 41% of employees reporting boredom, it is evident that there will be a marked degree of job dissatisfaction and low organisation participation in the Gauteng hotel sector. High turnover was already reported in the previous section. This means that hotel owners and managers need to take active steps to moderate and mitigate against job boredom by creating opportunities for employees to work in jobs that do not cause work-related boredom, (Van Hooff & Van Hooft, 2014) suggest job crafting as a potential intervention tool.

Leadership and supervision

The study sample did not reveal major concerns relating to this factor, except that 22% of employees indicated that they were sometimes absent due to lack of support from management. Even though factors related to leadership and supervision were not rated as important, these factors did deter 22% employees from reporting for work.

Working conditions and Job responsibilities

In order to assess the working conditions in this study, employees had to respond to questions relating to: Feeling tired; performance of routine work; understaffing; workload; work stress; salary; working hours. Employees identify workload (20%) and long working hours (18%) as factors that led to fatigue, which is cited as one of the causes of absenteeism. Some 46, 2% employees agreed that fatigue prevented them from reporting for work. The reported high workload seems to have a direct link to the level of stress at work. Santhi and Reddy (2020) opine that long working hours and shifts duties can be causes of stress and dissatisfaction at work, resulting in absenteeism, a decrease in productivity and increased organisational costs. The main finding relating to working conditions in this study was high workload and long working hours, which manifest in fatigue and stress at work.

Ability to attend

Illness

Most studies report that the main reason for absence is illness (Klatzer, 2011), at 61,1% (De Castro, 2020); reports 46.8% (Medeiros & Viera, 2019) and illness is also the most acceptable reason for absence from work (Fiorini, 2019). Fiorini (2019), also reported that the severity of symptoms has a direct impact on the decision to be absent. Mederios and Viera, 2019 reported that most work absences were short (1 to 7 days). In this study, 41 % of employees were absent due to illness in the previous year for 1-3 days, 15% for more than 5 days. This is in contrast to 39,7% who indicated that they were present the entire year (Figure 4). These findings are in line with other literature (Da Costa, Prada, Roberts & Cohen, 2012) and (Vertanen-Greis, Loyttyniemi & Uitti, 2020) who reported a mean of four (4) days Absence due to illness was found to be more common in females as compared to males (Medeiros et al.,2012). One of the

reasons advanced for the short periods of absence were “fit notes”, which are issued by medical doctors to indicate when the employee will be fit to return to work (Fiorini, 2019). Employees are thus likely to return to work within seven days to avoid the requirement of submitting a “fit note” (de Castro, 2020).

Overall, 60% of the respondents reported being absent from work in the previous year. This is a high level for the hotel industry in Gauteng Province. This means that illness had a major impact on the work ability of the hotel employees in Gauteng (Vertanen-Greis et al., 2020). Due to illness absenteeism, management often employ part time or temporary staff, which results in decreased productivity and low customer service (Gering, 2010). Therefore, a proper understanding and management of sick leave should be implemented at the hotels to ensure that the source of illness is not the occupational environment in the work place (Vertanen-Greis et al., 2020). Secondly, the management of sick leave will also address the prevailing scourge of sick leave abuse.

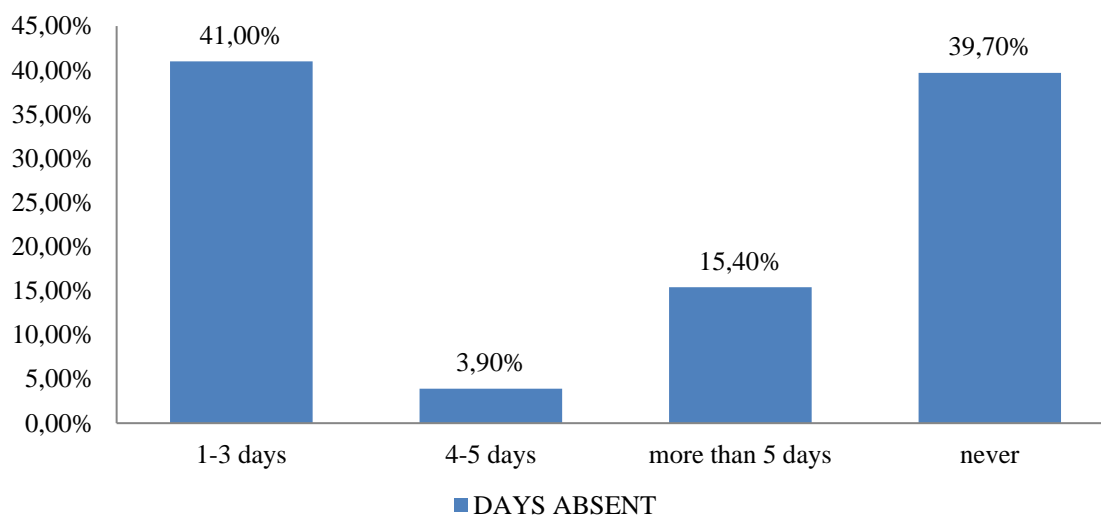


Figure 5: Number of days absent

Sick leave abuse

The majority of the hotel managers that participated (61,5%) indicated that they felt that employees abuse sick leave. This is not a practice only prevalent in the hotel sector. The South African sick leave is open to abuse, as it allows staff members to be absent for a few days without providing sick note (Tladi, 2017). In government, Persal Leave Report (2014/2015) reported a marked growth and increasing cost of sick leave without medical certificates. There is scarcity of literature regarding abuse of sick leave in the private sector and it will not be a surprise if there is similar increase. Tladi (2017) proposed for the public sector, that leave management should have; proper leave planning; proper communication; leave monitoring and record keeping; policy awareness; and employee assistance programmes. This indeed can also work in the hotel sector of Gauteng.

Social factors

Strikes and transportation

Two social factors were identified as leading to increasing absenteeism. The first one was strike action and the second one is public transport. Approximately 48,7% of employees admitted

that they sometimes failed to report for work due to strikes. Labour-related strikes are very common in South Africa. Employees may be absent from work due to strikes within the hospitality industry and strikes in the transport sector. As the majority of employees rely on public transport, any uncertainty means employees are unable to commute. Roughly 43,6% of employees indicated that their failure to report for work could be ascribed to transport problems.

Bešinović (2020) reported that strikes have far-reaching consequences in the provision of essential services such as transport. This is very common in South Africa, where labour disputes tend to spill into the streets and public transport is usually disrupted. The cost of commuting is another social factor that has a negative impact on absenteeism. Some 23% of employees reported that they were absent from work because they did not have money to pay the taxi or bus fare. This is in line with Baguma (2001) and Coetzee, Kagee, and Vermeulen (2011) as well as Newitt, Barnett and Crowe's (2015) findings that financial problems can impede employees' access to public transport. About 61,5% managers stated that employees failed to report for work because of dissatisfaction with earnings. This implies that financial constraints, which have an impact on the ability of the employee to afford the fare to commute, is another major cause of absenteeism in the hospitality industry. Social factors were found to be the second main factor that contributed to absence in the hotel sector in Gauteng.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the personal, job related and social factors that affect absenteeism in the hotel industry. The following characteristics were studied, namely, gender, marital status, number of children, Educational level and tenure. Gender (female), marital status and number of children contributed to employees' family responsibilities which in turn contributed to inability to attend to work. Family responsibility was found to be the major contributing factor to absence in the hotel sector in Gauteng. This is likely to affect female employees more than males. Limited job scope resulting in boredom at work was identified as a job related factor contributing to absenteeism. This was caused by the fact that majority of the respondents had low academic qualifications which resulted in them occupying low-level repetitive jobs. Another job related factor found to contribute to absenteeism was working conditions, this manifested through high workload and long working hours, which resulted in fatigue and stress at work. Illness had a marked contribution on the employees' ability to attend work. Illness thus had a major impact on the work ability of the hotel employees in Gauteng. Labour strikes are endemic in South Africa, and unsurprisingly emerged as the leading social factor contributing to absenteeism. Apart from contributing to late coming, the poor public transport was the second social factor contributing to absenteeism.

In order to address absenteeism, the focus should be on the main causes and those that the hotel industry has an influence on. If absenteeism is to be reduced, attention should be focused on employees' family responsibilities and childcare problems. Wellness intervention in terms of childcare may be a wise investment, since there will be a marked saving in costs with fewer lost working days. Childcare facilities on-site would assist parents of infants and younger children to have better attendance. In order to address boredom specific actions that could be put forward to enhance job satisfaction and to address the high absenteeism rate in hotels are to enrich jobs by considering broadening the scope and depth of a job. Fatigue, stress and illnesses can be reduced by appointing the correct number of staff with the required skills and abilities so that workloads and working hours can be normalised. The national challenges relating to public transport strikes in South Africa are well known. Hotels can arrange special shuttle transport for workers in order to deal with well-known public transport issues. Management must monitor absenteeism rates and ensure that instances of frequent absenteeism

are followed upon. Employees also have a role to play, they need to be made aware of the negative impact their absenteeism has on the hotel, which may improve employees' attendance.

There is a scarcity of studies reporting on absenteeism in the hospitality industry in South Africa. To date, this is the only study that focused on the three factors affecting absenteeism. Limitations of the study were the low response rate and the results are only representative of 3 and 4 star graded hotel in Gauteng. In future, a bigger study sample stratified by star grading should be conducted.

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