

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter reviews the literature in the following areas: definition of stress, main job stressors found in organizations, effects of stressors at work, stress management and relevant studies.

#### **2.1 DEFINITION OF STRESS**

Burrows, King, and Stanley (1987) define stress as “a state of unacceptable divergence between perceived demands and capabilities to adapt” (p. 4), and as “a negative emotional experience which results from negative thoughts or environment” (p. 3).

According to Long (1995), stress is defined as “an interaction between individuals and any source of demand (stressor) within their environment”.

Davidson (1997) stated that stress can be divided into good stress and bad stress. Good stress or eustress urges us to get to work or get up and running. It helps to make our life interesting and enjoyable. As a result, it provides challenges and stimulation for further development, growth and change. On the other hand, bad stress or distress causes anxiety and irritation to human beings. It is a reaction to external pressure which prompts psychological and physiological changes of an undesirable nature.

Rachelson (1984) opines that stress has many definitions. She concluded that “the definitions found in the literature seem to fall into one of three categories: stress as response, stress as stimulus, stress as an interaction/transaction between the two” (p. 29).

#### **2.2 MAIN JOB STRESSORS FOUND IN ORGANIZATIONS**

Stress may be caused by a number of factors. According to Billington (1982), job stressors found in organizations are mainly related to role characteristics like

role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH] (2002), nearly everybody agrees that job stress results from worker characteristics and working conditions. The importance of worker characteristics and working conditions as the primary causes of job stress leads to different prevention strategies. The NIOSH lists job conditions that may lead to stress as: the design of tasks, management style, interpersonal relationships, work roles, career concerns, and environmental conditions.

### **2.3 EFFECTS OF STRESS AT WORK**

Stress has effects both physical and psychological. Billington (1982) found that “various organizational stressors have pronounced negative physical and psychological consequences for an individual” (p. 23). Several studies show that job stress is related to coronary heart disease (CHD). Significant relationships are found between high levels of role conflict and role ambiguity and CHD for white collar workers.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH] (2002) notes that stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems, especially cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders and psychological disorders. Stressful working conditions are associated with increased absenteeism, tardiness, and intentions by workers to quit their jobs.

### **2.4 STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Billington (1982) found that two coping styles: withdraw and seek help and cognitive coping are related to high work stress. Workers who use a coping style involving active confrontation have substantially less work related stress than workers who used passive and defense-oriented coping styles.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (2006), if we perceive

that the demands of the situation outweigh the skills we have, we may consider the situation as stressful reaction or response. Therefore, by understanding ourselves to be in stress-provoking situations, we will be able to handle stress more effectively.

## **2.5 RELEVANT STUDIES**

Billington (1982) found that workers who experience high levels of positive life stress do not suffer from much work stress. However, workers who experience high levels of negative life stress suffer from high work stress.

Agnew (2002), and the Health and Safety Executive [HSE] (2000) conducted a research project, *The Scale of Occupational Stress: The Bristol Stress and Health at Work Study*, published in 2000, and found clear links between high stress scores and adverse working conditions such as having too much to do and not being supported by managers.

The reviewed research studies found that job stress can affect the staff's work efficiency; this research was conducted to measure the stress level of the RBSC employees, to explore the causes of their stress, and to find how they cope with their stress.