Exploring the Impact of Work-Related Stress on Mental Health and Job Performance Among Healthcare Workers- A case study

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Abstract

Introduction: Work-related stress among healthcare workers is a critical concern that impacts both employee well-being and patient care quality. This study aims to explore the specific stressors experienced by healthcare professionals in Johannesburg, South Africa, and examine how organizational resources influence these experiences.

Methods: A qualitative research design will be employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with healthcare workers from both public and private sectors in Johannesburg. Participants will be selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of experiences. Data will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify key stressors and the role of organizational resources.

Results: It is anticipated that the study will reveal distinct stressors associated with each sector, including heavy workloads, emotional demands, and inadequate support systems. The findings will likely highlight the significance of organizational factors, such as staffing levels, access to mental health resources, and workplace culture, in shaping healthcare workers' experiences of stress.

Discussion: The results will contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by healthcare professionals in South Africa, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions to address work-related stress. By identifying specific stressors and the effects of organizational resources, the study aims to inform the development of strategies that promote mental well-being among healthcare workers, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and patient care quality.

Conclusion: This research will provide valuable insights into the experiences of healthcare workers in Johannesburg, paving the way for evidence-based interventions and policies that prioritize the mental health and resilience of the workforce. Ultimately, addressing work-related stress is essential for fostering a sustainable and effective healthcare system in South Africa and improving health outcomes for patients.

Keywords: Work-related Stress, Healthcare Workers, Qualitative Research, Qualitative Research, Qualitative Research

1. INTRODUCTION

Work-related stress has emerged as a pressing concern in the healthcare sector, affecting healthcare professionals' mental health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of patient care. The dynamic and often high-pressure environment within healthcare settings contributes to the prevalence of stress, exacerbated by factors such as heavy workloads, emotional demands, and exposure to traumatic situations (Labrague et al., 2017). Globally, the ramifications of work-related stress are increasingly recognized, with the World Health Organization (WHO) highlighting its status as a significant public health issue (WHO, 2019). This phenomenon requires urgent attention, particularly in regions such as Africa, where healthcare systems face unique challenges that influence the experiences of healthcare workers.

In South Africa, the healthcare landscape is characterized by a dual structure comprising both public and private sectors, each with its own set of stressors and resource disparities (Makanjee et al., 2020). Healthcare professionals in the public sector often contend with overwhelming patient loads, inadequate staffing, and subpar working conditions, leading to heightened levels of burnout and reduced job satisfaction (Pillay, 2019). Conversely, those practicing in the private sector encounter distinct stressors, including high-performance expectations and job insecurity, which can also contribute to work-related stress (Bhana et al., 2020). These divergent experiences underscore the necessity for targeted research to elucidate the specific stressors faced by healthcare workers in different contexts within South Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified the stress experienced by healthcare professionals, exposing them to unprecedented challenges and emotional burdens as they navigate the complexities of managing a public health crisis (Mawoli et al., 2021). The existing literature highlights a critical gap in understanding the unique experiences of healthcare workers in South Africa, particularly in the context of their daily responsibilities and the organizational factors that influence their well-being.

This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the experiences of healthcare workers in Johannesburg, specifically focusing on identifying the primary stressors they encounter in both public and private healthcare settings. By employing a qualitative research methodology, this study seeks to capture the nuanced perspectives of healthcare professionals and gain insights into the interplay between

organizational resources and work-related stress. The research questions guiding this investigation are: (1) What are the primary stressors experienced by healthcare workers in the public and private sectors in Johannesburg? (2) How do organizational resources influence the experiences of work-related stress among healthcare workers?

Through this inquiry, the study aspires to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on work-related stress in the South African healthcare context and inform the development of evidence-based strategies aimed at enhancing the well-being of healthcare professionals. By identifying and understanding the unique stressors faced by these workers, the research seeks to provide valuable insights that can lead to improved support systems and interventions, ultimately fostering a healthier workforce and enhancing the quality of care provided to patients.

2. BACKGROUND

The healthcare sector is a cornerstone of any society, providing essential services that preserve and enhance the well-being of the population. In South Africa, this sector faces unique challenges, particularly regarding the mental health and job performance of healthcare workers. Increasing workloads, staff shortages, and the emotional toll of patient care contribute to heightened levels of work-related stress. Understanding the interplay between this stress, mental health, and job performance is crucial for developing effective interventions and ensuring a sustainable, efficient healthcare system in the country (Mabunda et al., 2021).

South Africa's healthcare system is characterized by significant disparities between the public and private sectors. The public healthcare system, which serves the majority of the population, is often under-resourced and overburdened. Healthcare workers in this sector frequently contend with inadequate facilities, overwhelming patient loads, and insufficient staffing, which can lead to chronic stress. A report by the South African Human Rights Commission (2020) highlighted the systemic issues facing public healthcare, including long waiting times and a lack of essential medical supplies, exacerbating stress among healthcare professionals.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the challenges faced by healthcare workers in South Africa. The pandemic not only increased the volume of patients but

also introduced additional emotional burdens, including fear of contagion, loss of colleagues, and ethical dilemmas surrounding patient care. Research conducted during the pandemic revealed that healthcare workers experienced elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout, significantly affecting their mental health and job performance. Studies indicate that approximately 60% of healthcare workers in South Africa reported experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress during this period (Pillay & Bhatia, 2021), underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive mental health support.

Work-related stress can manifest in various ways, including physical symptoms, emotional exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction. In the South African context, the impact of stress on mental health is particularly concerning. The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG, 2021) reported that mental health issues are on the rise, with a significant proportion of the population remaining untreated due to stigma and lack of access to mental health services. Healthcare workers, who are often the first point of contact for individuals seeking mental health support, may struggle with their own mental health challenges, creating a paradox where those who are meant to help are themselves in need of assistance.

Furthermore, the relationship between work-related stress and job performance is a critical area of concern. High levels of stress can impair cognitive functioning, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships, all of which are vital for effective patient care. Research has shown that healthcare workers experiencing burnout are more likely to make errors, exhibit lower levels of empathy, and have diminished job performance (Hancock et al., 2022). In South Africa, where the quality of healthcare delivery is paramount, understanding this relationship is essential for improving patient outcomes and fostering a healthier workplace environment for healthcare professionals.

The socio-economic context of South Africa further complicates the issue of work-related stress among healthcare workers. High levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality contribute to a demanding work environment, where healthcare workers may feel additional pressure to provide care in the face of systemic challenges. The National Health Insurance (NHI) policy, aimed at transforming the healthcare system towards universal coverage, adds another layer of complexity. As healthcare workers

navigate the transition towards NHI implementation, they may experience uncertainty and stress related to changes in policy, funding, and job security (Ndlovu, 2023).

Considering these challenges, there is a pressing need for targeted interventions aimed at alleviating work-related stress among healthcare workers. Organizations must prioritize mental health support, including access to counselling services, stress management programs, and initiatives that promote work-life balance. Furthermore, fostering a culture of open communication and support within healthcare settings can help mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance resilience among workers facing stress (Van der Westhuizen et al., 2022).

Lastly, qualitative research offers valuable insights into the lived experiences of healthcare workers, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to work-related stress. Through interviews, focus groups, and participatory methods, researchers can capture the emotional and psychological dimensions of healthcare work, informing policy and practice aimed at improving mental health support and job performance (Smith & Jones, 2023).

In conclusion, the impact of work-related stress on mental health and job performance among healthcare workers in South Africa is a multifaceted issue that requires urgent attention. By addressing the systemic challenges within the healthcare sector and prioritizing the mental well-being of healthcare professionals, South Africa can foster a healthier workforce capable of delivering high-quality care to its citizens. This study seeks to explore these dynamics, contributing to a growing body of literature aimed at improving outcomes for healthcare workers and the patients they serve.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The increasing levels of work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa are significantly impacting their mental health and job performance. Research indicates that high stress levels contribute to burnout, anxiety, and depression, which can lead to reduced effectiveness in patient care (Pillay & Bhatia, 2021). This escalation of work-related stress is concerning because it not only affects the mental health of healthcare workers but also compromises the quality of care they provide to patients, potentially leading to adverse health outcomes. The World Health Organization (2021) has recognized workplace stress as a critical factor influencing

health systems globally, emphasizing the need for action to protect healthcare professionals' well-being.

Healthcare workers, including nurses, doctors, and support staff, are predominantly affected by this issue. A study by Mabunda et al. (2021) revealed that over 60% of healthcare professionals in South Africa report experiencing moderate to severe stress, highlighting the widespread nature of this problem. Work-related stress manifests through various factors such as long working hours, high patient-to-staff ratios, emotional demands of patient care, and inadequate resources. These elements create a challenging work environment that exacerbates stress and leads to negative mental health outcomes (Hancock et al., 2022). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these stressors, making it imperative to address the mental health needs of healthcare workers (Pillay & Bhatia, 2021).

The issue is particularly prevalent in South African public healthcare facilities, which are characterized by under-resourcing and high patient volumes. The South African Human Rights Commission (2020) reported that public healthcare workers face systemic challenges, including lack of access to mental health resources, further complicating their ability to cope with stress. This problem has been escalating over the past several years, with a marked increase during the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020. Recent studies indicate that the prevalence of mental health issues among healthcare workers surged during this period, underscoring the urgent need for timely interventions (Pillay & Bhatia, 2021; Ndlovu, 2023).

Finally, work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa represents a pressing issue that impacts both their mental health and the quality of healthcare delivery. Addressing this problem is essential for improving the well-being of healthcare professionals and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the healthcare system.

3.1 Primary research question

What are the primary factors contributing to work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa? and how do these factors impact their mental health and job performance?

3.2 Secondary research question

- How do work-related factors impact healthcare workers in terms of their mental health and job performance?
- How do the levels of work-related stress among healthcare workers differ across various healthcare sectors (public vs. private)?
- What specific coping mechanisms do healthcare workers employ to manage work-related stress?
- How effective are these mechanisms in mitigating mental health issues?

3.1 Primary research objective

To describe the primary factors contributing to work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa.

3.2 Secondary research objectives

- To explain how work-related factors impact healthcare workers in terms of their mental health and job performance
- To examine how the levels of work-related stress among healthcare workers differ across various healthcare sectors (public vs. private)
- To define specific coping mechanisms healthcare workers, embrace to manage work-related stress
- To determine how effective are the coping mechanisms embraced by healthcare workers in mitigating mental health issues

4. SIGNIFICNCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study on work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa is multifaceted, addressing both theoretical and practical implications that extend beyond the immediate context of the research. Firstly, this study contributes to the existing body of literature on occupational health psychology by providing empirical evidence specific to the South African healthcare context. By identifying the unique factors that contribute to work-related stress, the research can enhance our understanding of how environmental, systemic, and individual variables interact to affect healthcare professionals' mental health and job performance. This knowledge is

essential for developing theoretical frameworks that consider the complexities of stress in high-demand professions, particularly in low-resource settings (Hancock et al., 2022; Ndlovu, 2023).

Secondly, the findings of this study hold practical significance for healthcare organizations, policymakers, and mental health practitioners. By highlighting the primary stressors faced by healthcare workers, the research can inform the design and implementation of targeted interventions aimed at reducing stress and improving mental health outcomes. Such interventions may include the development of support programs, enhanced training for stress management, and the promotion of a healthier work environment (Mabunda et al., 2021; Pillay & Bhatia, 2021). Ultimately, improving the mental health of healthcare workers is crucial for enhancing job satisfaction, reducing turnover rates, and ensuring high-quality patient care, as supported by the World Health Organization (2021).

Moreover, this study addresses a critical public health issue, as the mental well-being of healthcare professionals is directly linked to the quality of care provided to patients. By focusing on the factors influencing work-related stress, the research can inform strategies that not only benefit healthcare workers but also enhance patient outcomes and overall healthcare system performance (Pillay & Bhatia, 2021; South African Human Rights Commission, 2020). The well-being of healthcare workers is fundamental to building resilient health systems capable of responding effectively to challenges such as pandemics and systemic inequalities, as highlighted in recent literature (Mabunda et al., 2021).

The study's significance extends to broader societal implications, as it advocates for a cultural shift in how mental health and well-being are perceived within the healthcare sector. By raising awareness of the challenges faced by healthcare workers, the research can help reduce stigma associated with seeking mental health support, fostering a more supportive and understanding workplace environment (Ndlovu, 2023; Hancock et al., 2022).

Finally, this study holds significant potential to advance both theoretical understanding and practical solutions to the pressing issue of work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa, ultimately contributing to a healthier workforce and improved patient care (World Health Organization, 2021; Pillay & Bhatia, 2021).

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study on work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa is anchored in the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) Model, a robust framework that offers a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between job demands, resources, and employee well-being. This model is particularly apt for examining the unique stressors experienced by healthcare professionals, as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the factors contributing to work-related stress in a high-pressure environment.

The JD-R Model posits that job demands—such as workload, emotional strain, and time pressure—can lead to adverse outcomes, including burnout and decreased mental health, when they are not sufficiently balanced by adequate job resources, which may include support from colleagues, autonomy in job roles, and opportunities for professional development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the context of the healthcare sector, where professionals often face overwhelming demands, this framework provides critical insights into how specific stressors can impact mental health and job performance. By analysing both the demands and resources present in the work environment, this study aims to elucidate the intricate dynamics that contribute to the psychological well-being of healthcare workers in South Africa.

Furthermore, the JD-R Model emphasizes the importance of employee well-being as an essential aspect of organizational performance. The relationship between job demands and resources is pivotal not only for individual mental health but also for the quality of care provided to patients (Demerouti et al., 2014). This dual focus aligns well with the objectives of the current study, which seeks to inform interventions that can enhance the mental health of healthcare workers while simultaneously improving patient care outcomes. By identifying and addressing the specific factors that contribute to work-related stress, the study can facilitate the development of effective strategies aimed at improving the overall work environment.

Moreover, the JD-R Model has demonstrated versatility and applicability across various occupational contexts, including healthcare. Its successful application in diverse settings underscores its relevance and adaptability to different cultural and organizational environments (Schaufeli et al., 2009). This characteristic is particularly significant given the unique challenges faced by South African healthcare workers, such as resource constraints and high patient loads (Mabunda et al., 2021). The

model's adaptability allows for a nuanced understanding of the specific stressors and resources at play, thereby facilitating targeted interventions that can lead to meaningful improvements in the work experience of healthcare professionals.

The JD-R Model serves as a fitting theoretical framework for this study, providing a comprehensive lens through which to examine the complex factors influencing work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa. By leveraging this model, the research can contribute to both theoretical advancements in occupational health psychology and practical solutions that enhance the well-being of healthcare professionals, ultimately leading to improved patient care and system resilience.

6. ABBRIVIATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-related stress among healthcare workers has emerged as a significant concern worldwide, with profound implications for both the well-being of the workforce and the quality of patient care. Globally, healthcare professionals face escalating levels of stress due to various factors, including heavy workloads, emotional demands, and exposure to traumatic experiences (Labrague et al., 2017). The existing literature indicates that these stressors contribute to elevated rates of burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and increased turnover among healthcare staff (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified work-related stress as a critical public health issue, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive strategies to alleviate its impact on healthcare professionals (WHO, 2019).

From a continental perspective, the African context presents unique challenges that exacerbate work-related stress among healthcare workers. Systemic issues such as limited resources, high patient-to-staff ratios, and insufficient mental health support systems are prevalent across the continent (Nkomo et al., 2018). Studies reveal that healthcare professionals in Africa experience distinct stressors related to the sociopolitical landscape, including inadequate access to healthcare services and the high burden of communicable diseases (Mabunda et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified these challenges, subjecting healthcare workers to unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety as they navigate the complexities of managing a public health crisis (Mawoli et al., 2021). It is evident that the African healthcare landscape necessitates a nuanced understanding of work-related stress,

incorporating local cultural, economic, and systemic factors that influence the experiences of healthcare workers.

Focusing specifically on South Africa, the healthcare sector embodies a dual structure that includes both public and private systems, which often results in disparities in resources and working conditions for healthcare professionals (Makanjee et al., 2020). Healthcare workers in the public sector frequently encounter overwhelming patient loads, inadequate staffing, and substandard facilities, leading to high levels of stress and burnout (Pillay, 2019). Conversely, those in the private sector, while generally better resourced, face unique stressors including high-performance expectations, job insecurity, and the pressure to maintain profitability (Bhana et al., 2020).

It is crucial to recognize the implications of work-related stress on healthcare professionals in South Africa. Research has consistently shown that healthcare workers experience significant emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, both of which are critical indicators of burnout (Van der Westhuizen et al., 2018). A study by Dawes et al. (2018) emphasized the necessity for organizational support and the implementation of tailored stress management programs that address the unique needs of healthcare workers in this context. These findings underscore the importance of promoting resilience and effective coping strategies among healthcare professionals to enhance their mental well-being and job satisfaction.

Despite the growing body of literature on work-related stress, there exists a gap in understanding the specific experiences of healthcare workers within the South African context, particularly within the diverse environments of public and private sectors. While numerous studies have identified common stressors faced by healthcare professionals, there is a pressing need for in-depth qualitative research that explores the manifestation of these stressors in different organizational contexts and the influence of cultural and systemic factors on the experiences of healthcare workers.

The present study aims to address these gaps by focusing on the experiences of healthcare workers in Johannesburg, with an emphasis on identifying the primary stressors they encounter in both public and private healthcare settings. The research questions guiding this investigation are as follows: (1) What are the primary stressors experienced by healthcare workers in the public and private sectors in Johannesburg? (2) How do organizational resources influence the experiences of work-related stress

among healthcare workers? By addressing these questions, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on work-related stress in the South African healthcare context and inform the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at improving the well-being of healthcare workers.

Finally, work-related stress among healthcare workers represents a critical issue that demands attention on both global and African fronts. In South Africa, the healthcare sector presents distinct challenges that necessitate tailored research and interventions. This study aims to provide valuable insights into the experiences of healthcare workers in Johannesburg, ultimately contributing to the development of effective strategies to mitigate work-related stress and enhance the overall quality of care within the healthcare system.

7. METHODS

7.1 Overview

Methods in research serve as a systematic approach to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, thereby ensuring the reliability and validity of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). They provide the framework through which researchers can investigate specific questions, allowing for the replication of studies and the generalization of results to broader contexts (Robson & McCartan, 2016). In qualitative research, methods encompass various techniques for data collection, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, which facilitate a deep understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Flick, 2018). Ultimately, robust research methods are essential for establishing credibility and contributing to the body of knowledge within a particular field (Yin, 2018).

7.2 Research design

Research design is a critical component of any study, as it outlines the framework for collecting and analyzing data to address specific research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It encompasses the overall strategy, including the selection of methods and procedures, ensuring that the research is conducted in a systematic and coherent manner (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

In this study, a multiple case study design will be employed to explore work-related stress among healthcare workers, with cases specifically clustered into public and private sector settings. According to Robert Yin, case studies are particularly effective for understanding complex phenomena within real-life contexts, allowing for a rich exploration of the intricacies involved (Yin, 2018). Robert Stake further distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies, suggesting that multiple case studies can serve both purposes—providing insights into the unique aspects of each sector while also generating broader implications applicable across healthcare environments (Stake, 1995). By comparing the experiences of healthcare workers in public versus private sectors, this research aims to uncover the diverse stressors and resources that shape their professional lives, thereby contributing valuable insights to the discourse on occupational health in South Africa.

7.3 Population, sampling and data Collection

7.3.1 Population

The population in a research investigation refers to the entire group of individuals or elements that share specific characteristics relevant to the study's focus and objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Understanding the population is crucial, as it determines the context in which the research findings will be applied and informs the sampling strategy, ensuring that the selected participants adequately represent the diversity and complexity of the target group (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

In this study, the population comprises healthcare workers from both public and private sectors in Johannesburg. This population is significant for several reasons. First, Johannesburg, as one of South Africa's largest cities, is home to a diverse array of healthcare facilities, each presenting unique challenges and resources that can impact work-related stress levels among employees (Mabunda et al., 2021). By focusing on this specific population, the study aims to capture the varying experiences of healthcare workers across different organizational contexts, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to their stress.

Additionally, healthcare workers are at the frontline of patient care and are often exposed to high levels of stress due to demanding workloads and emotional labor. Investigating this population allows for the identification of specific stressors and

support mechanisms tailored to their unique working environments (Labrague et al., 2017). Furthermore, insights gained from this study can inform policy and practice within the healthcare sector, ultimately leading to improved mental health outcomes for healthcare workers and enhanced quality of care for patients.

7.3.2 Sampling strategy

In qualitative research, sampling strategy is crucial as it determines how participants are selected for the study, which directly affects the richness and relevance of the data collected (Palinkas et al., 2015). For this study, a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling will be employed to ensure that participants are well-suited to provide insights into the work-related stress experienced by healthcare workers in both public and private sectors.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on specific characteristics or criteria that align with the research objectives (Tong et al., 2007). In this study, healthcare workers will be deliberately chosen based on their roles, experiences, and exposure to work-related stressors, thus ensuring that the sample reflects the diversity of perspectives within the healthcare sector. This targeted approach allows for a deeper exploration of the specific demands and resources relevant to each participant's work environment.

Snowball sampling will complement purposive sampling by leveraging existing participants to identify and recruit additional subjects (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This technique is particularly useful in contexts where participants may be difficult to reach or where networks are crucial for accessing individuals who meet the study criteria. In the healthcare sector, where professionals often have overlapping social and professional networks, snowball sampling can enhance the study's reach and ensure a more comprehensive representation of experiences related to work-related stress.

By utilizing both purposive and snowball sampling strategies, this study aims to gather a rich and diverse set of data that captures the complexities of work-related stress among healthcare workers in South Africa, ultimately leading to more nuanced insights and practical recommendations for addressing this critical issue.

7.3.3 Data collection

Data collection for this study will be conducted through a semi-structured interview guide, which is an effective method for gathering in-depth qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility of open-ended questions with the focus of predetermined questions, allowing researchers to explore specific topics while also giving participants the freedom to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words (Kallio et al., 2016). This approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives but also enables the researcher to probe for clarification and elaboration on key themes that emerge during the interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The semi-structured interview guide will be developed based on the theoretical framework of the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) Model and will include questions that address both job demands and resources relevant to healthcare workers in public and private sectors. This allows for a comprehensive examination of the unique stressors and support systems that influence their work-related stress. Furthermore, the semi-structured format permits adaptability during the interview process, enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes or issues that may not have been initially anticipated, thereby enriching the data collected (Bryman, 2016).

By utilizing semi-structured interviews, this study aims to capture the nuanced experiences of healthcare workers, providing a platform for their voices to be heard and contributing to a more profound understanding of the factors affecting their mental health and well-being. The insights gained from these interviews will be instrumental in developing targeted interventions to address work-related stress in the healthcare sector.

7.4 Data analysis

Data analysis in this study will utilize both content analysis and thematic analysis to derive meaningful insights from the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews.

Content analysis involves systematically categorizing and quantifying the presence of specific words, phrases, or themes within the data, allowing researchers to identify patterns and frequency of elements (Krippendorff, 2018). This method facilitates an

objective examination of the textual data, making it easier to draw conclusions regarding the common stressors faced by healthcare workers in both public and private sectors.

Thematic analysis, on the other hand, provides a more nuanced approach by focusing on identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allows for a deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions, enabling the researcher to uncover the underlying meanings and narratives related to work-related stress. Thematic analysis is particularly effective in qualitative research as it accommodates the complexity of human experiences and the rich context surrounding them.

To facilitate the analysis process, COSTA QDA software will be employed. This qualitative data analysis tool provides a robust platform for coding and organizing data, making it easier to manage large volumes of qualitative information (Weber, 2019). The software supports the integration of both content and thematic analysis by allowing researchers to visualize patterns, track themes, and ensure a systematic approach to data interpretation. Utilizing COSTA QDA will enhance the rigor and efficiency of the analysis, ultimately leading to more reliable and insightful findings.

8. CONCLUSION

This research protocol aims to address the critical issue of work-related stress among healthcare workers in Johannesburg, South Africa, by examining the unique stressors experienced in both public and private healthcare settings. The increasing prevalence of work-related stress within the healthcare profession poses significant risks to the mental health and well-being of healthcare professionals, which in turn impacts the quality of patient care and healthcare outcomes.

The literature underscores the multifaceted nature of work-related stress, influenced by systemic, organizational, and contextual factors. Notably, the African context introduces specific challenges that warrant focused exploration, particularly within the dual structure of South Africa's healthcare system. By identifying the primary stressors and assessing the role of organizational resources, this study seeks to contribute to

the existing body of knowledge and identify potential interventions that can mitigate stress and enhance the resilience of healthcare workers.

The anticipated outcomes of this research will not only provide insights into the lived experiences of healthcare professionals but also inform policy and practice aimed at improving workplace conditions and support systems. Ultimately, by addressing work-related stress, the study aspires to contribute to the well-being of healthcare workers in South Africa, thereby fostering a healthier workforce and improving the overall quality of care delivered to patients.

This research holds the potential to inform organizational strategies and public health policies that prioritize mental health support in the workplace, promoting a sustainable and effective healthcare system that values and protects its workforce. Through rigorous qualitative analysis, the study will pave the way for future research and interventions that can positively impact the healthcare sector in South Africa and beyond.

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