

**DETERMINING THE CAUSES OF THE HIGH RATE OF ABSENTEEISM IN  
THE EAST VAAL AREA OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN POST OFFICE.**

**BY**

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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to my beloved parents, the late Kgolane and Mabatane Piet Kgaphola. They were powerful inspirations in my educational life. My gratitude to them is therefore boundless. Their insight and support have always taken me to the very limits of my purpose, allowing me to look beyond it, and I cannot thank them adequately for that. As long as I live, they too shall live; I will always remember them.

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## ABSTRACT

The East Vaal area of the South African Post Office is faced with a high rate of teller absenteeism, which has been observed to be as high as 15 per cent. This adds to the cost of providing quality service to the company's customers. The objectives of this study are to determine the factors that lead to the high rate of absenteeism in the East Vaal area and to make recommendations to the area management that could improve the attendance behaviour of the tellers in the area.

To achieve these objectives, 51 questionnaires were prepared and handed out to the tellers with absenteeism rates of more than three percent in the East Vaal area to be completed. Face-to-face interviews with both the tellers and their branch managers were conducted. Absenteeism records and Employee Assistance Programme reports were also studied to collect more data.

The findings highlighted lack of rewards for employees who reported for work regularly; employee illness; no recognition for good work performance; tellers receiving insufficient remuneration for their work; poor working conditions; and poor management style as the main reasons for the tellers taking unscheduled leave of absence.

Based on the key findings, the main recommendations were that appropriate mechanisms for acknowledging and rewarding good work performance and attendance behaviour should be in place; a sick-leave pool system accessible to tellers should be introduced; establishment of performance evaluation and rewards for tellers; and introducing management practices which lead to a more open expression of opinion and participatory problem-solving

**Key words:** Absenteeism; managing absenteeism; high rate of absenteeism; teller absenteeism; unscheduled absenteeism; workplace absenteeism; causes of absenteeism; effects of absenteeism.

## **Abbreviated Summary**

A major problem facing the East Vaal area of the South African Post Office in the 2000 decade is the high rate of teller absenteeism. This adds to the cost of providing quality service to the company's customers.

The objectives of this study are to determine the causes of the high rate of absenteeism in the area and to make recommendations to the area management that could improve the attendance behaviour of the tellers.

To achieve these objectives, questionnaires; interviews; absence records; and EAP reports were used to collect data.

Lack of recognition for good performance; insufficient remuneration; teller illness; poor working conditions; and poor management style emerged as reasons for absenteeism.

It is recommended that mechanisms for acknowledging and rewarding good performance and attendance behaviour be used. Sick-leave pool system, performance evaluation and rewards; and management practices leading to open expression of opinion be established.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

Robbins, Odendaal and Roodt (2003:15) reported estimation that absenteeism costs organisations millions of rand a year in decreased efficiency, increased benefit payment and payroll costs. In the USA, the estimate is \$40 billion a year, in Canada, \$12 billion, and in Germany, DM60 billion. These figures indicate the organisational importance of keeping absenteeism low.

Many South African organisations are also experiencing high absenteeism rates, which the organisations can ill afford. According to Robbins *et al.* (2003:54) recent statistics reported that up to 10 per cent of South African companies' annual payrolls go to costs directly linked to worker absenteeism, for example medical aid and disability insurance premiums. Further costs include the remuneration of temporary staff and the loss in productivity, which can amount to four times the salary of an absent worker, asserted Robbins *et al.* (2003:54).

In addition to that, Maiden (1999:41-51) asserts that a by-product of South Africa's transition from apartheid to post-apartheid society has been an increased exposure to drug trafficking and its concomitant problems at workplaces like absenteeism and poor productivity. South Africa now boasts a population of more than half a million cocaine addicts and has become a major trafficking centre for mandrax, heroin, LSD and cocaine, explained Maiden (1999:41-51). Swanepoel, Erasmus, van Wyk, and Schenk (2003:561) agreed and further stated that it has been found that up to 89 per cent of males and up to 77 per cent of females in South Africa drink alcoholic beverages. In the mining sector 20 per cent of psychiatric admissions to mine-based hospitals were for chemical dependency and 72 per cent of mine employees drink alcohol – with 44.5 per cent of these indicating that they had lost the ability to control their drinking which result in high rates of absenteeism in the mining sector.

According to estimates by Renwick Management Services (Swanepoel et al. 2003:774), it can cost South African companies as much as R4 million to recruit or replace a top executive, lost through absenteeism and resignation.

For these reasons, South African managers consider absenteeism to be their most serious discipline problem.

In terms of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997, an employee is entitled to 30 or 36 working days' sick leave in a three year period (depending on whether the employee works for five or six days a week). A sick leave cycle means the period of 36 months employment with the same employer. If the total staffs within a company collectively take their full entitlement, the company's absenteeism rate will run at approximately four per cent. It is therefore, generally believed that if a rate falls within four per cent, then the absenteeism figures are acceptable and no further action is required (Robbins et al.2003:15).

However, the South African Post Office's Labour Relations policy on Absenteeism control (LAR14/1297: 21) stated that the normal absenteeism acceptable in the company is three per cent. Any rate higher than three per cent warrants action to be taken by management.

The East Vaal area of the South African Post Office (SAPO) is experiencing high rate of employee absenteeism, which has been observed to be as high as 15 per cent. These high rates of absenteeism add to the costs of providing quality services to customers of the company. The area has been experiencing high levels of declining productivity attributable to the high rate of absenteeism; low levels of education and skills; low levels of motivation and effort on the part of the employees; and poor working conditions. The area management is concerned about this, would like to halt the trend and return the area to improved productivity.

These problems became evident when the area's monthly performance reports were analysed. During the area meetings, the area management had

constantly been complaining about the high levels of absenteeism among its employees. In trying to solve the problem, management had always sought assistance from the Human Resources practitioner. However, due to the seriousness of the problem, there came the realisation that this problem should, in fact, be studied in a research project to determine the cause(s) and recommend strategies for a solution, seeing that absence can be valid (in the case of sickness) or invalid (in the case of shirking).

## **1.2. Problem statement**

Excessive unauthorised absences can seriously affect the overall productivity and profitability of the East Vaal area. According to Matteson (2002:205), absenteeism, no matter the reason, is a costly and disruptive problem facing managers, costly because it reduces output and disruptive because it means the modification of schedules and programmes.

In organisations relying on assembly-line production, absenteeism can be considerably more than merely a disruption; it can result in a drastic reduction in the quality of output. In some cases, absenteeism brings about a complete shut-down of the production facility (Robbins *et al.*, 2003:24). When workers are absent, management has to make adjustments to the normal operations. This may mean making staff work longer and harder; allowing build-up or deferment of work; eliminating certain services; hiring temporary replacements; or permanently maintaining an extra workforce to cover for absenteeism. All these increase the cost of rendering services to clients.

Given the above, it is obviously difficult for the East Vaal area to operate smoothly and to attain its objectives if employees fail to report to their jobs. The workflow is disrupted, and important decisions must often be delayed.

In this study the focus is on the determination of the perceptions of tellers and branch managers regarding the causes of absenteeism in the East Vaal area.

### **1.3. Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study are:

- To determine the causes of the high rate of absenteeism in the East Vaal area of the South African Post Office;
- To make recommendations to the East Vaal area management that could help improve the attendance behaviour of employees.

### **1.4. Value of the research**

This study investigates the factors that lead to high rates of absenteeism in the East Vaal area of the South African Post Office and recommends steps the area management could take to solve the problem. The study will assist the East Vaal area management in improving productivity and performance through proper management and control of absenteeism.

### **1.5 Research methods.**

#### **1.5.1. Research design.**

The research method for the purpose of this mini dissertation is that of descriptive study making use of questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed with the intention of addressing the research objectives.

#### **1.5.2. The population**

There are 176 tellers in the East Vaal area. The research is targeted on 51 tellers whose absenteeism rate is above three percent, which is the maximum rate expected by SAPO, and 23 branch managers who supervise the tellers. Branch managers do not have unacceptable rates of absenteeism; however, branch managers were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire so as to get their views about the causes of absenteeism in the area.

#### **1.5.3. The sampling procedure**

There is no sampling. The questionnaire was distributed among the 51 tellers whose absenteeism is higher than three percent and 23 branch managers who supervise the tellers. Interviews were also conducted with the respondents. This is because the population is not so large that, from a



practical point of view, it is possible to conduct the research on all of them (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2006: 55).

#### **1.5.4. Data collection**

The data was collected by means of a structured closed-ended and a semi-structured open-ended questionnaires (for tellers), and a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire (for branch managers) (Sapsfort, 1999:52; Stockburger, 2004:16). The questionnaires were delivered to the participants at their different workplaces in the East Vaal area of SAPO. The completed questionnaires were collected from the branch managers in the different branch offices of the East Vaal area.

#### **1.5.5. Data analysis**

The collected data is analysed by means of tabular and graphical statistical techniques, performed on word. The tables and graphs are used to compare the different variables on the questionnaire. The most positive responses are discussed so as to show the number of tellers agreeing with the particular statement. This will show how the tellers perceive the causes of absenteeism in the area.

### **1.6. Methods used to ensure validity and reliability**

#### **1.6.1. Ensuring validity and reliability**

The questionnaire was analysed and discussed by:

- The Regional Senior manager Human Resource Management
- The Regional Senior Manager Retail Post Offices
- The Regional Human Resource Manager; and
- The area manager East Vaal

The feedback from the analyses and discussions was used to adjust the questionnaire by taking out inappropriate questions and adding recommended ones.

The questionnaire was reviewed by the study supervisor. There was a covering letter to explain how to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also administered as a pilot project to nine respondents selected randomly from nine different branch offices to see whether the

questionnaire measured what it purported to do, the results of which are explained in chapter three. Further adjustments to the questionnaire were made on the basis of the feedback from the pilot project.

And finally, appropriate statistical techniques were used to analyze the data.

### **1.7. Ethical considerations**

Strict ethical principles were adhered to throughout the study. Respondents participated in the research of their own free will and were informed thoroughly and truthfully about the purpose of the study during area meetings and branch meetings. There is a covering letter attached to the questionnaire further informing the respondents about the anonymity and confidentiality of responses. No unauthorised access will be allowed to the completed questionnaires. No attribution is made to the responses, and respondents remain anonymous.

### **1.8. Outline of chapters**

This mini dissertation is divided into the following chapters:

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter outlines the background to the study, the problem statement, the objectives of the study, the value of the research, the research methods, data analysis techniques, methods of ensuring validity and reliability, and the outline of the study. The following chapter will deal with the literature review of the study.

#### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

This chapter consists of three parts. In the first part information about the Post Office is discussed. In the second part relevant literature study is done to explore existing data and to identify factors that could be used as basis to develop the research questionnaire. In the third part previous research studies are reviewed to study the empirical findings that have been produced.

### **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

This chapter discusses the research methods used to design the research, the target population, the sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis for the study.

### **Chapter 4: Results and findings**

This chapter consists of two parts. The first part deals with the discussion of statistical analyses, whereas the second part deals with the results and findings of the questionnaire.

### **Chapter 5: Summary and recommendations**

In this chapter, summary of the research results, as well as the recommendations and limitations are discussed. Suggestions for future research opportunities are also discussed in this chapter.

### **1.9. Conclusion**

Many factors pertain to employee absenteeism, ranging from, inter alia, employee job satisfaction, employee motivation, the value of the rewards received by employees for attendance at work, and employee illness. These factors must be managed and, where possible, eliminated if their costly and disruptive effects on the organisational performance are to be minimised.

The following chapter will deal with literature review of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

In chapter one a general introduction, problem statement, objectives, and value of the study was done. This chapter comprises of three parts. In the first part background information about the SAPO is discussed. In the second part relevant literature study is done to explore existing data and to identify factors that could be used as basis to develop the questionnaire. In the third part previous research studies are reviewed to study the empirical findings that have been produced.

##### **2.1.1. Background information about the South African Post Office.**

The South African Post Office has been in operation as a company since 1<sup>st</sup> October 1991. Originally SAPO was a parastatal organization under the Department of Post and Telecommunications.

In terms of its licence, SAPO has to provide a number of services at all postal outlets, including those of its agents. All facilities should be able to receive and dispatch basic letters; sell postage stamps; accept and deliver cash on delivery items; insured parcels; ordinary parcels; registered letters and sign-on delivery items; issue and payment of money orders; and accept deposits and pay withdrawals for its Post Bank clients.

The Post Office delivers to an area of more than 1.2 million square kilometres, with more than 2 000 outlets and 5 500 service points. The total assets amount to R8, 691 billion. It is one of the largest business undertakings in the country.

The transition from a government department to a company was a strange and traumatic experience for the employees of the company (Taba, 2005:1). The transition demanded the employees to adapt to a different culture i.e. from a culture of non-profit to that of a profit oriented organization.

The company is divided into six regions namely, Northern, Witwatersrand (Wits), Central, Kwazulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Western Cape regions. The Wits region, in which the study is conducted, is divided into five areas namely, East rand, West rand, Wits central, North rand, and East Vaal area (where the study is conducted).

The South African Post Office has 15 829 permanent employees and 390 non-permanent staff which makes a total number of employees to be 16 219 employed in different levels and categories (SAPO personnel strength 31 March 2010). The East Vaal area has 176 tellers working in the branch offices. The minimum education requirement for appointment as a teller is a grade 12 certificate. The tellers' main responsibilities include:

- Execution of counter financial transactions
- Sell and deliver products and services to all customers
- Receive, accept, and prepare all types of mail items
- Basic merchandising of products
- Deal with public enquiries
- Financial and operational management
- Market products and services and ensure maintenance of a quality service at all times
- Deliver inputs towards the improvement/enhancing of profitability and customer service.

To clarify the concept of absenteeism, a few definitions are offered.

### **2.1.2. Definition of absenteeism**

Hornby (1994:5) defines absenteeism as the frequent absence from school or work, especially without good reason.

Robbins *et al.* (2003:15) go further than this, stating that from business standpoint absenteeism is defined as any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled regardless of the reason. The term 'scheduled' is very significant, because it automatically excludes things like

vacations, holidays and jury duty. The term also eliminates the problem of determining whether an absence is excusable or not. Medically-verified illness is a good example of this. As far as the business is concerned, the employee is absent and is simply not available to perform his/her job. Even this kind of absence costs money (Cascio, 1992:593).

The South African Post Office Labour Relations policy on Absenteeism control (LAR14/1297:1) defines absenteeism as any occasion where an employee is absent from work without permission.

For the purposes of this study, absenteeism will be defined as any occasion when an employee is absent from work without permission regardless of the reason.

### **2.1.3. The cost of absenteeism**

It is estimated that absenteeism in the US results in the loss of more than 500 million workdays per year, about 5 days per employee or \$600 per employee (Matteson, 2002:205). In the UK the annual cost of absenteeism has been estimated to be over one per cent of GDP (Chatterji & Tilley, 2002:669)

In South Africa the economy loses around R12 billion per year due to absenteeism (Paulson, 2006). The AIC Insurance research conducted on absenteeism in South Africa reported that anywhere from 5-18 per cent of staff could be absent on any given day with high cost to the employers (Paulson, 2006). The findings of a study by Moodley (2005) confirmed that absenteeism costs S.A. companies R12 billion and also demonstrated that between R1.8 billion and R2.2 billion of that amount can be attributed to the effects of HIV/AIDS.

Tosi, Risso and Carroll (1995:221) concur, explaining that absenteeism and turnover are the final set of outcomes in the job characteristics model. According to this model four positive personal and work outcomes – high internal work motivation, high quality work performance, high work satisfaction, and low absenteeism and turnover – result when an employee

works in an environment of three critical psychological states which are: experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for work outcomes, and knowledge of the actual results of work activities (Cascio, 1992:420). When absenteeism and turnover are high and out of control, they can amount to a considerable expense for firms.

That led to Gibson, Ivancevich and Donnelly (2000:186) to conclude that absenteeism, no matter the reason, is a costly and disruptive problem facing managers.

In light of the above costs, a number of organisations are using the OB model to improve employee productivity, and to reduce errors, absenteeism, tardiness and accident rates, while at the same time improving customer-friendliness (Robbins *et al.*, 2003:54). The typical Organisational Behaviour model follows a five-step problem solving model: (1) identifying critical behaviours; (2) developing baseline data; (3) identifying behavioural consequences; (4) developing and implementing an intervention strategy; and (5) evaluating performance improvement (Robbins, *et al.* 2003:54). The above figures indicate the importance to an organisation of keeping absenteeism low.

Nevertheless a number of measures could be used to reduce absenteeism in the organisation such as:

- the application of learning theory in the form of incentives to reduce absenteeism;
- substituting well-pay for sick-pay;
- disciplining problem employees;
- developing effective employee training programmes;
- creating mentoring and coaching programmes; and
- applying learning theory to self-management

## **2.2. Identifying factors which can be used to develop a questionnaire.**

In this part of the chapter a literature review will be used as basis to indicate which factors could possibly be included in the questionnaire. The factors that could influence absenteeism will be discussed under the following headings:

- The workplace;
- Management style;
- The employee;
- Biographical characteristics;
- Substance abuse;
- Disease-related factors;

### **2.2.1. The workplace factors**

Aspects of job situation that affect absenteeism are, inter alia, workforce planning; job scope; work patterns; workgroups; child/day care facilities; job dissatisfaction; workplace conflict; union representation; absenteeism policy; and organization culture.

#### **2.2.1.1. Workforce planning**

According to Swanepoel *et al.* (2003:235), excessive turnover and absenteeism, low labour productivity and ineffective training programmes can be reduced and expenses lowered if workforce planning is executed properly.

This argument was supported by Nel, van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono and Werner (2004:156). Nel, Werner, Haasbroek, Poisat, Sono, and Schultz (2008:150); and Bendix (1992:264) further indicated that turnover and absenteeism rates often showed poor management/conflict within the labour relationship. Management should therefore try to reduce or eliminate those factors that cause personal problems like overtime, fatigue, job-related stress, and extensive employee travel (Nel *et al.*, 2004:157; Nel *et al.*, 2008:151). This said, it is clear that the quality of management, especially that of immediate supervisors, influence the level of absenteeism (Armstrong, 1999:799).



An informed understanding of the human aspects of management and organisation are necessary to help managers predict, explain and change human behaviour. This will go towards ensuring that productivity, commitment and job satisfaction are high, while absenteeism and staff turnover are low. These variables of productivity, absenteeism, staff turnover, employee commitment and job satisfaction are critical determinants of the effectiveness of an organisation, stressed Amos, Ristow, Ristow and Pearse, (2008:14). Workforce planning should therefore be done with a focus on the welfare and wellbeing of employees to ensure their total commitment to their job (Adeyemi & Akpotu 2009:137).

As part of workforce planning the job scope given to employees must be considered.

#### **2.2.1.2. Job scope**

Armstrong (1999:799) found that the causes of absence analysed by Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) include job situation factors like job scope. This indicates that a high degree of task repetitiveness is associated with absenteeism, although job dissatisfaction itself is a contributory rather than a primary cause of absence. In determining the job scope of employees, management normally considers work patterns to be used in the firm.

#### **2.2.1.3. Work patterns**

Absenteeism can be influenced by work patterns operating within the firm, such as changes in the normal weekly hours of work; overtime policies; the length and timing of holidays; retrenchment policy; the policy for employing part-timers; and shift systems (Armstrong, 1988:216; Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield (2004:607).

According to Brewster, Carey, Grobler, Holland and Warnich, (2008:114) the perceived advantages for employers in developing flexible patterns of work are that absenteeism and turnover, inter alia, will be reduced. On the other hand, Tosi *et al.* (1995:547) observed that some companies attempt to reduce absenteeism or turnover by changing organisational conditions in such a way

that job satisfaction is improved. This implies a causal relationship between organisational conditions, job satisfaction, and absenteeism and turnover.

In addition, Grobler *et al.*, (2004:22); and Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert, and Hatfield, (2006:23), contended that companies are discovering that family-friendly work environments more than pay for themselves, and that workplace flexibility is not an accommodation to employees but a competitive weapon. Absenteeism is reduced, turnover is cut, efficiency is improved and the bottom line is more attractive. Organisational factors, which include: the size of the organisation; the size of the work group; the nature of supervision; incentive schemes; and the type of work, do have a considerable influence on absenteeism in the workplace (Grobler *et al.*, 2006:23). Carrell, Grobler, Elbert, Marx, Hatfield and van der Schyf (1998:570) supported these views and confirmed that the above organisational factors contribute considerably to high levels of absenteeism in the workplace.

In a review of research Desimone, Weaner and Harris, (2002:586), found that flexitime schedules are positively related to a number of factors, including organisational attachment, attendance, performance, stress, off-job satisfaction, and attitudes.

In some instances, employers have cited advantages such as increased productivity, reduced turnover and reduced absenteeism with the introduction of a compressed work-week (Mondy, Noe & Premeaux, 1999:407). Long working hours cause tiredness, fatigue, loss of concentration and ultimately the decision to stay away from work. Therefore it can be concluded that a compressed work-week can increase employee enthusiasm, morale and commitment to the organisation, as well as reducing costs, turnover and absenteeism (Moerdyk & van Aardt 2003:261). As a result of work patterns within the firm, work groups are formed.

#### **2.2.1.4. Work groups**

Work groups will be discussed under the following subheadings:

- Self managed teams;

- Quality circles;
- Group cohesion.

### **Self-managed work teams**

Although not totally new, self-managed work teams have recently come to the fore as a method of improving employee commitment and thus the general well-being of the organisation. One of the reported successes of self-managed work teams is the reduction of absenteeism and turnover (Brewster *et al.*, 2008:9).

Robbins *et al.* (2003:202), on the other hand, cautioned that overall research on the effectiveness of self-managed work teams has not been uniformly positive. Moreover, while individuals on these teams do tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction, they sometimes have higher absenteeism and turnover rates. It is thus clear that inconsistency in findings suggests that the effectiveness of self-managed teams is situation-dependent. Another important form of self managed work teams is quality circles.

### **Quality circles**

Tosi *et al.* (1995:257) studied the quality circle groups of companies and found that over a 30-month period the quality circle groups of companies had greater increases than those of the non-participants in the percentage of time spent on production, efficiency and productivity. The quality circle group also lowered its absenteeism rate more rapidly than that of the non-participants, argued Tosi *et al.*, (1995:257).

A valuable characteristic of quality circles is their group cohesion.

### **Group cohesion**

Although there are potential disadvantages to cohesive groups, these may result in: increased interaction among members; mutual help and social satisfaction; lower turnover and absenteeism; and often higher productivity (Mullins, 1999: 462).

Groups with high cohesion experience lower job turnover and less absenteeism. As attendance at the job is a prerequisite for productivity, groups with high cohesion and strong conformity can promote high productivity, observed Gerber, Nel and van Dyk, (1998:323). Management can therefore use creative ways to design programmes to reduce absenteeism and increase productivity by establishing on-site child/day care facilities.

#### **2.2.1.5. Child/Day care facilities**

A recent study by Circadian Technologies found that employers who provide on-site child care can reduce employee absenteeism and voluntary turnover by more than 20 percent (Cascio, 2006:60).

Grobler *et al.* (2006:125) concurred, and furthermore advised that strategies for enhancing the ability to attend work should include:

- creating a safe and healthy work environment;
- providing day-care facilities at the work place;
- creating programmes to assist troubled employees;
- providing programmes for reducing job stress; and
- providing recreational and exercise facilities.

However, results of the study conducted by Adebayo and Nwabuoku (2008:363) revealed that perceived organizational support did not predict employee absenteeism.

The above strategies may still not solve all employee problems that could lead to absenteeism. Employees may still feel dissatisfied with their jobs.

#### **2.2.1.6. Job dissatisfaction**

The more people are dissatisfied with their jobs, the more likely they are to be absent. Job dissatisfaction is probably just one of many factors influencing people's decisions to report or not to report for work. For example, Greenberg and Baron (2000:177) found that even people who really dislike their jobs may

not opt for absence if they believe their presence is necessary to complete an important project. By not showing up to work or by quitting to take a new job, people may be expressing job dissatisfaction or attempting to escape from unpleasant situations they may be experiencing.

On this account, absenteeism is regarded as withdrawal behaviour when it is used as a way of escaping an undesirable working environment. Kreitner and Kinicki (1995:161) agreed, noting that one way of reducing absenteeism is to increase job satisfaction. It is important to remember, however, that although high job satisfaction will not necessarily result in low absenteeism, low job satisfaction is more likely to bring about absenteeism (Luthans, 1995:129; 2002:234) (Kristensen, Eskildsen, Nielsen, Frederiksen, & Bisgaard 2006:1645).

Adding to this, Tosi *et al.* (1995:547) pointed out that some research evidence shows that low job satisfaction is correlated with absenteeism and that changing organisational conditions can result in changed job satisfaction. When employees are not satisfied, they try to find ways of reducing their job exposure by staying away. Supporting this argument Greenberg and Baron (1997:186)'s research has shown that the lower individuals' satisfaction with their jobs, the more likely they are to be absent from work.

Managers should note the levels of job satisfaction in their organisations, because there is evidence that dissatisfied employees skip work more often and are more likely to resign (Moerdyk & van Aardt, 2003:259; Robbins, 1998:160; Mullins, 1999:630). Dissatisfied employees may choose not to resign but to follow the company's grievance procedure to address their concerns which could end up in workplace conflict.

#### **2.2.1.7. Workplace conflict**

Nel *et al.* (2008:224) explain that workplace conflict is a direct result of the power struggle between employees and employers, and emerges in many different forms in business and industry. Conflict in the workplace manifests itself, *inter alia*, in high labour turnover, absentee rates, accidents, grievances and dismissals. However, Maribel (2008:18) pointed out that proactive responses to the requirements of employee inclusion in the decision making

process of the company will reduce conflict in the organization and absenteeism will be minimized.

Workplace conflict often leads to workers organising themselves into trade unions to represent their interests.

#### **2.2.1.8. Union representation**

Milward (as quoted by Mabey, Salaman & Storey, 2005:293) draws a comparison which reveals non-union establishments as providing fewer rights and benefits for workers, lower pay, higher rates of accidents and absenteeism, and poorer employee communication. Milward (1994:365) further noted that non-union industrial and commercial workplaces offered few formal mechanisms whereby employees could contribute to the operation of their workplaces in a broader context than that of their specific jobs. Nor were non-union workplaces as likely to have opportunities to air grievances or to resolve problems in ways that were systematic and designed to ensure fair treatment. Broadly speaking, no alternative model of employee representation had emerged as a substitute for trade union representation. Milward (1994:365) consequently concluded that frustrated employees would opt to stay away from work. In order to reduce employee frustrations good employment relations is necessary, the advantages of which are, inter alia: better performance; low turnover; improvement in quality; increase in productivity; and reduced absenteeism, observed (Nel, 2006:61).

One of the ways of establishing sound employment relations is a fair absenteeism policy.

#### **2.2.1.9. Absenteeism policy**

Grobler *et al.* (2006:125) warned that employee absenteeism may continue despite the use of absence control methods: if there is no written absenteeism policy in the company there will be inconsistent enforcement of the policy as well as a lack of absence documentation in the organisation. Where there is a sick leave policy in the company, it is unfortunately true that many employees abuse the provision for paid sick leave as contained in the policy. Employees are also aware of the provisions of section 22 of the Basic Conditions of

Employment Act 75 of 1997 which states that an employee can be on paid sick leave for two days without producing a medical certificate within an eight week period. This means that sick-pay schemes may indeed encourage increased absenteeism (Armstrong, 1999:799).

The South African Post Office Labour Relations policy on Absenteeism control (LAR14/1297:7) also permits employees to take two days' paid sick leave without producing a medical certificate. This may also contribute to the high levels of absenteeism in the East Vaal area as more employees are aware of these policy and legal permission (Ichino & Riphahn, 2005:120).

Grobler *et al.* (2006:125) advised that effective forms of employee discipline for absenteeism should include:

- a written policy statement;
- distinguishing between absenteeism and other examples of employee misconduct as a reason for discipline;
- using progressive discipline on the absence record separately from the other misconduct issues;
- explicit absenteeism standards and a definition of excessive absenteeism;
- allowing employees to improve their records through good attendance; and
- consistent application of the policy.

Lax enforcement by a supervisor should result in the supervisor being disciplined (Grobler *et al.*, 2006:125); otherwise non enforcement of the policy may lead to a bad organization culture.

#### **2.2.1.10. Organisation culture**

If a permissive absence culture exists in an organisation, employees will view sick leave as a benefit to be utilised, or it will be lost. On the other hand, if unnecessary absence is frowned upon by either management or the co-workers, employees will think twice before abusing sick leave (Nel, Gerber,

van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono & Werner, 2002:582; 2004:549). Amos *et al.* (2008:14) and Hartnett (2008:35) stressed that organisational structure and design; organisational culture; human resource policies and practices; technology; and work design have a great impact on workplace absenteeism.

#### **2.2.1.11. Conclusion.**

Workplace structure and organization such as workforce planning, job scope, work patterns, work groups, child/day care facilities, job dissatisfaction, workplace conflict, union representation, absenteeism policy, and organization culture are important long term strategies to control workplace absenteeism. Organizational management practices which lead to a more open expression of opinion and participatory problem solving may result in reduced role conflict, stress, and increased job satisfaction with a consequent reduction in absenteeism.

#### **2.2.2. Management style factors**

Managers appear to have some influence over attendance behaviour. They are able to punish, establish the bonus systems, and allow employee participation in developing plans. Whether these or other approaches reduce absenteeism is determined by the employees' perception of the value of the rewards, the amount of the rewards, and whether the employees perceive a relationship between attendance and reward (Robbins *et al.*, 2003:24).

Managers affect absenteeism in the workplace by influencing the following variables: management control; communication system; motivation strategies; salary/remuneration packages and worker empowerment.

##### **2.2.2.1. Management control**

Beyond a certain point, effectiveness declines with increases in the amount of control exercised. That, in turn, could lead to increased dissatisfaction, absenteeism and turnover, Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw and Oosthuizen, (2001: 407), warned. In addition, Bendix (1992:239; 2007:593) observed that employees may impose individual



sanctions by means of repeated absenteeism, resigning from their positions, or perpetrating industrial sabotage.

A study by De J. Cronje, du Toit, Motlatla and de K. Marais (2004:274) reported that a dearth of control systems for human resources may lead to increased levels of absenteeism and labour turnover. That view was corroborated by Bendix (1992:264; 2007:304), who maintained that high turnover and absenteeism rates are more often than not indicative of poor management or conflicts within the work relationship.

Given the foregoing, Johnson (2005:46) believed that, where there is uncertainty concerning the level of absenteeism, there is almost always a low level of management control, accompanied by a high level of absenteeism. Management control can be supported by a sound communication system.

#### **2.2.2.2. Communication system**

The management of any organisation must have a good communication system. Part of this is to create systems whereby the complaints and grievances of staff can be brought to the surface. If this does not happen, grievances can accumulate to such an extent that they could later be expressed in some other form, such as high absentee rates, staff turnover, or perhaps even strikes. This led Redmond and Hosp (2008:97) to be convinced that people with communication disorders display high absenteeism rates than those without communication disorders.

One of the communication strategies to control employee absenteeism that managers use is absenteeism feedback intervention. Broucek and Bass (2008:45) demonstrated that when people receive feedback documenting their absences as well as the average number of absences during the same period by their co-workers, their attendance improves, significantly reducing subsequent absenteeism among individuals with higher than average absenteeism.

Part of the communication system should include employee motivation strategies.

### **2.2.2.3. Motivation strategies**

Employees go to work because they are motivated to do so. The level of motivation remains high if the individual feels that attendance is going to lead to more valued rewards and fewer negative consequences than alternative behaviour (Gibson *et al.*, 2000:186). On the other hand, Luthans (2002:234) observed that, as with turnover, many variables other than dissatisfaction with the job affect the decision to stay at home. For example, there are moderating variables, such as the extent to which people feel that their jobs are important. After conducting research among state government employees Luthans (2002:234) maintained that employees who believed their work was important evidenced lower absenteeism than that of employees who did not feel that way.

Contributing to this, Swanepoel *et al.* (2003:339) reported that research has revealed some interesting comparisons between the capacity of various motivational theories to explain and predict outcomes on four important organisational variables, viz: productivity, absenteeism, labour turnover and job satisfaction, which are commonly believed to depend on levels of motivation.

In view of the above, Grobler *et al.* (2006:125) introduced specific strategies for enhancing motivation. These include:

- a proper match between the employee and the job;
- job enrichment;
- rewards for good attendance;
- people-oriented supervision; and
- clear attendance standards.

The results of multilevel analysis conducted by Camp and Lambert (2006:144) confirmed that different incentive structures produced differences in the use of sick leave and overall absenteeism is reduced. In addition Hassink and Koning (2005:18) claim that the provision of workplace lottery leads to a substantial decrease in the incidence of sickness of 3.5 per cent and result in lower absenteeism.

The degree to which employees are motivated is influenced to a certain extent by their rewards.

#### **2.2.2.4. Salary/remuneration packages**

According to Armstrong (1999:799), attendance factors like reward systems reduce absenteeism rates. When employees' pay increases, absenteeism goes down. High rewards accompanying high dissonance tend to reduce the tension inherent in the dissonance. Nieman and Bennett (2007:255) agreed, emphasising that the consequences of dissatisfaction with the remuneration package are: poor performance; job dissatisfaction; and grievances, all of which result in high levels of absenteeism among employees. Regardless of how closely rewards are actually correlated to performance criteria, if individuals perceive this relationship to be low, the results will be low performance, a decrease in job satisfaction, and an increase in turnover and absenteeism (Robbins et al. 2003:165). Hellriegel *et al.* (2001:61), share the same opinion that low salaries often lead to absenteeism and turnover. Beside rewards given to employees, empowerment is another important factor in employee absenteeism.

#### **2.2.2.5. Worker empowerment**

The organisational advantage in empowering employees is that this principle can lead to increased productivity, improved job satisfaction, reduced sick leave, and less absenteeism (Tromp, 2008:39). Empowerment should also include employee training. Cloete (1993:172) is of the same opinion, and notes that training has contributed to the significant reduction of absenteeism and resignations in organisations. Absenteeism therefore, not only denies the employee the opportunity to learn from others but also denies other members of the work team the opportunity to learn from the absent employee (Koppenhaver 2006:29).

Counselling services need to be part of the broader empowerment strategy, and Cloete (1993:218) maintains that a lack of counselling services can result in high levels of employee absenteeism.

#### **2.2.2.6. Conclusion.**

The development of a management control system; effective communication channels; motivation strategies; fair remuneration packages; and employee empowerment approaches are important long term strategies in workplace absenteeism management systems.

It is therefore important that managers develop their people management skills if they are going to be effective and successful in reducing absenteeism and its negative effects in the organization.

#### **2.2.3. Employee variables**

The effect of the following employee variables will be discussed in this section:

- values
- unmet expectations
- frustrations
- commitment
- attitudes
- behaviour
- personality
- job-person match
- social problems
- family related issues

##### **2.2.3.1. Employee values**

According to Robbins et al. (2003:79) employee performance and satisfaction are likely to be higher if their values fit well with the organization. This means that managers should strive during the selection of new employees to find job candidates who not only have the ability, experience and motivation to perform, but also a value system that is compatible with the organization. Values lead to expectations which explain why many employees are not motivated on their jobs and merely do the minimum necessary to get by.

Employee values affect the absenteeism rate, in that as far as some workers are concerned, doing less work for the same reward improves the deal made with the employer, the effort–reward bargain (Armstrong, 1999:799).

#### **2.2.3.2. Unmet expectations**

An employee will be motivated to exert a high level of effort when he or she believes that effort will lead to a good performance appraisal; that a good performance appraisal will lead to organizational rewards like a bonus, a salary increase, or a promotion; and that the rewards will satisfy the employee's personal goals and expectations.

Unmet expectations definitely contribute to absenteeism in the workplace, as was observed by Nel *et al.* (2002:582), who explained that if employees' expectations are not met they could abuse sick-leave as a mechanism for withdrawing temporarily from the job or the job situation. Once the employee's expectations are not met, the employee may experience frustration.

#### **2.2.3.3. Worker frustrations**

Workers often feel frustrated in the workplace and may decide to leave by resigning. If this is not possible because of the scarcity of other job opportunities, workers may simply stay away from work for a day or two, either without any reason or by obtaining a doctor's certificate to show that they were sick. Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus and Poisat, (2008:225), noticed that doctors' certificates are fairly readily obtainable and protect workers from disciplinary action. Once employees are protected from disciplinary action, their commitment to their jobs will suffer.

#### **2.2.3.4. Employee commitment**

Greenberg and Baron (2000:184) discovered that being committed leads people to remain in their jobs and show up when they are supposed to be there. High rates of absenteeism may be reliable signs of low organisational commitment, but people's propensity to be absent from work is most likely based, in part, on their national background. Once more, Greenberg and Baron (2000:185) argued that the extent to which people actually express their low commitment by staying away from their jobs may depend on their

national culture. They maintain that low levels of organisational commitment tend to be associated with high levels of absenteeism and voluntary turnover (Greenberg & Baron, 1997:193). Coetser and Rothmans (2006:33) then, concluded that low organisational commitment could be interpreted as an escape from, compensation for, or protest against occupational stressors, which could result in absenteeism. Low employee commitment to their jobs could also result in negative attitude towards their work.

#### **2.2.3.5. Employee attitudes**

Attitudinal factors like job satisfaction and the state of the economy do affect absenteeism in organisations. Grobler *et al.* (2006:23); and Grobler *et al.*, (2004:22), noted that when unemployment is high absenteeism is lower. This was also observed by Carrel *et al.* (1998:570).

Brevis, Ngambi, Vrba and Naicker (2004:308), also found that changing employees' negative attitudes towards the organisation improves job satisfaction, which in turn generates higher productivity, a lower staff turnover, and less absenteeism.

It is important therefore, that managers should be interested in their employees' attitudes because attitudes give warnings of potential problems and influence behaviour. Satisfied and committed employees, for instance, have lower rates of turnover and absenteeism (Robbins *et al.* 2003:79). Given that managers want to keep resignations and absences down – especially among their more productive employees – they will want to do those things that will generate positive job attitudes and behaviour.

#### **2.2.3.6. Employee behaviour**

Some work-related behaviour is dysfunctional in nature. Rather than contributing to organisational performance, it detracts from it. Two of the more common behaviours are absenteeism and turnover. While absenteeism means not turning up for work, there might sometimes be a legitimate cause, such as illness, jury duty or death in the family. At other times, the employee may report a feigned 'legitimate' cause that is actually just an excuse to stay

at home, (Moorhead & Griffin, 1998:106). When an employee is absent, legitimately or not, his/her work is not attended to at all, or a substitute is hired to do it. In either case, the quantity or quality of actual output is likely to suffer. Obviously some absenteeism is expected, but organisations must strive to minimise feigned absenteeism and reduce legitimate absences as far as possible. Employee behaviour is mostly a manifestation of particular personality characteristics.

#### **2.2.3.7. Personality**

Some people are absence prone. According to Armstrong (1999:799), studies have indicated that between 5 and 10 percent of workers account for about half of the total absence, while a few are never absent at all. In addition, Cohen, Fink, Gadon and Willits (2001:294) noted that personal problems lead to high rates of absenteeism.

On the contrary, Robbins et al. (2003:91), argued that the propensity to leave a job depend on the degree to which individuals successfully match their personalities to an occupational environment.

Nevertheless, Avey, Patera and West, (2006) concluded that personality is a potential predictor of employee absenteeism, which may aid in the employee selection process.

#### **2.2.3.8. The job-person match**

If an employee's personality, abilities and skills are not congruent with the job requirements, the person becomes either bored or stressed, and withdraws from the situation by being absent (Nel *et al.*, 2002:582). Amos *et al.* (2008:14) concurred, stating further that the causes of absenteeism include individual employee characteristics like perception; learning; decision-making; and status.

Given this, Fox, (2006:191), intimated that jobs have to be adapted to the way in which individuals want to arrange their lives, rather than suiting the job

itself. This gives individuals choices but also responsibilities, for example, choices between laziness, absenteeism and productivity.

Even if the job-person match can be achieved, the employee's absenteeism may still be high due to the employee's social problems.

#### **2.2.3.9. Social problems**

Social factors such as difficult township circumstances; inadequate transport systems; and township and hostel violence definitely contribute to high levels of absenteeism (Carrell *et al.*, 1998:570; Grobler *et al.*, 2004:607; Grobler *et al.* 2006:124). The greatest impact on employee absenteeism is produced by the company of peers, the workplace climate, and the community where the employee lives, noted Zrilic and uZadru (2007:41)

In like vein, Jacobs and Kritsonis (2007:1) found that absenteeism is influenced by among other factors, lack of community support, an unsupportive work environment, disorderly family life, inclement weather, transportation problems, personal deficits, and poor health.

In their studies of absenteeism Finnemore (1996:66); Lal and Biswas (2004:7) observed that poor access to housing has severe consequences for labour relations, namely: the transmission of contagious diseases such as Tuberculosis (TB) flourish in such circumstances, affecting the health of employees and their children and thus increasing absenteeism.

Adeyemi and Akpotu (2009:137) confirmed and added that good roads, light, water and better housing for employees will help reduce employee absenteeism.

Related to social problems experienced by employees that influence their decision to stay away from work are family-related issues.

#### **2.2.3.10. Family-related issues**

It might be surprising to learn that the leading causes of absenteeism are family-related issues. One might expect personal illness to be the main justification for calling in sick, but this is actually true in about only 1 in 5 cases



(Cascio, 2003:45). Other causes are personal needs, stress and the entitlement mentality (Cascio, 2003:45; Carey, 2009). In addition, Nel *et al.* (2004:157; 2008:151) and Dhaliwal (2009:34) noted personal problems such as family issues, divorce, alcoholism and stress as causes of absenteeism in workplaces. Supporting these arguments Wilson (2009:431) indicated that the examination of factory records showed more than twice, the rate of absenteeism due to certified sickness among women with home ties and responsibilities.

#### **2.2.3.11. Conclusion**

Employee variables such as values, unmet expectations, frustrations, commitment, attitudes, behaviour, personality, job-person match, social problems, and family-related issues do influence the employee's decision to stay away from work. Managers should understand their employees' attitudes, values, expectations and behaviour-determining variables such as frustrations, commitment, job-person match, family and social problems to be able to manage workplace absenteeism.

#### **2.2.4. Biographical characteristics influencing absenteeism**

Biographical characteristics such as an employee's age; gender; marital status; tenure/length of service with an organisation; which have an influence on the absenteeism rate in an organisation are discussed in this section.

##### **2.2.4.1. Age**

The age-absence relationship is partially a function of whether the absence is avoidable or unavoidable. In general, older employees have lower rates of avoidable absence than do younger employees. On the other hand, older employees have higher rates of unavoidable absence, probably due to poorer health associated with aging and longer recovery when injured. This seems to be the case at Johnson and Johnson and Mercedes Benz, where age and health were highlighted as the main reasons for absenteeism among older workers (Robbins *et al.*, 2003:45). Armstrong (1999:799) added that younger employees were more frequently absent than older employees.

Gender is another factor which influences absenteeism among employees.

#### **2.2.4.2. Gender**

Robbins *et al.* (2003:47) reported that research on absence consistently indicates that women have higher rates of absenteeism than men do. The most logical explanation for this finding is that the traditional South African culture has historically placed domestic and family responsibilities on the woman. When a child is ill or someone needs to stay home to wait for the plumber, it has been the woman who has traditionally taken time off from work (Robbins *et al.* 2003:47). Corroborating this argument Wilson (2009:431) reported that home duties which are sufficiently heavy on women interfere at times with their factory work which forces women to stay away from work. In fact, Ichino and Moretti (2009:183) found that the menstrual cycle increases female absenteeism at work.

Linked to gender is marital status of employees within their family environment.

#### **2.2.4.3. Marital status**

Indications are that married employees have fewer absences, undergo fewer turnovers, and are more satisfied with their jobs than are their unmarried co-workers (Robbins *et al.* 2003:47). Marriage, therefore, imposes increased responsibilities that may make a steady job more valuable and important. Resulting from the value attached to a steady job by married employees is employee tenure in a particular company.

#### **2.2.4.4. Tenure**

The research relating tenure to absence is quite straightforward. According to Robbins *et al.* (2003:47), and Gellatly (2006:469), studies consistently demonstrate tenure and seniority to be inversely related to absenteeism. In fact, in terms of both frequencies of absence and total days lost at work, tenure is the single most important explanatory variable, (Robbins *et al.*, 2003:47).

#### **2.2.4.5. Conclusion**

Biographical characteristics have a considerable positive influence on the high rate of workplace absenteeism. Personal factors such as the employee's age,

gender, length of service, and marital status contribute largely to absenteeism in the firm. Management should try to understand these biographical characteristics of their employees so that recruitment and selection of employees can be done properly. Managers therefore, have to redefine job criteria in terms of skills rather than formal education requirements in order to recognise the real value of individual differences to performance and the employee's likelihood to be absent from work.

### **2.2.5. Substance abuse**

Substance abuse is discussed under the following sub-headings:

- Smoking
- Alcohol abuse
- Drug abuse

#### **2.2.5.1. Smoking**

According to Finnemore and van Rensburg (2006:63), smoking is the major cause of heart disease, 30 per cent of cancers and 80 percent of all chronic lung diseases. It is estimated that smoking-related illnesses account for at least 2, 5 million working days being lost per year. On this account, as well as a growing awareness of risk to non-smokers through passive smoking, the Tobacco Products Control Amendment Act of 1999 was promulgated to control smoking in all public places, including workplaces (Finnemore & van Rensburg, 2006:63).

Concurring with the above arguments, Swanepoel et al., (2003:553) added that smoking and drinking impose certain costs on organisations, as they are linked to absenteeism and productivity, as well as to cleaning costs and medical retirements. Korlin, Alexanderson and Svedberg (2009:310) agreed and further indicated that financial costs caused by increased absenteeism and reduced productivity from employees who smoke are significant, and amount to \$34 million a year (Tsai, Wen, Hu, Cheng & Huang (2005:33).

Closely related to smoking is alcohol abuse by employees.

### **2.2.5.2. Alcohol abuse**

Nel *et al.* (2008:364) noted that substance abuse has a negative impact on the workplace, which includes, but is not limited to, impaired productivity; increases in absenteeism and health care costs; theft, fraud, conflict; and workplace violence. Alcohol abuse also causes hangover-related absenteeism and poor work performance (Cascio, 2006:606). According to Byars and Rue (1997:503), compared with non-alcoholic employees, alcoholics incur twice the rate of absenteeism caused by illness. In this connection, management's concern about alcoholism is understandable, for alcohol misuse by employees is costly in terms of productivity, time lost from work, and treatment. Finnemore and van Rensburg, (2006:63), also discovered that the rate of alcohol and drug abuse is increasing in South Africa, quoting that five percent to 35 percent of employees at companies suffer from drinking problems. This results in accidents, high rates of absenteeism and productivity loss. Drug abuse is the next important cause of employee absenteeism.

### **2.2.5.3. Drug abuse**

Alcoholism and substance abuse cause an individual to neglect his diet so that the nutritional value of food intake deteriorates. This in turn destroys stress-coping skills, leading to more drinking. The eventual result is more stress and a deterioration of cognitive processes; emotional problems like depression; lack of motivation; aggression; deterioration of personal affairs; poor work performance; and absence from work (Swanepoel *et al.*, 2001:606).

Cascio, (2006:608) similarly discovered that drug and/or alcohol abuse in general results in violence at work, which disrupts productivity; causes untold damage to those exposed to the trauma; is related to workplace absenteeism; and costs employers billions of dollars. Adding to that Swanepoel, Erasmus, van Wyk and Schenk, (2001:605), pointed out that a chemically-dependent employee costs an organisation approximately 25 percent of his or her salary, in terms of, *inter alia*, absenteeism and poor productivity loss.

In a longitudinal study of 5,465 applicants for jobs with the United States Postal Service, Cascio, (2006:607), found that after an average of 1.3 years of

employment, employees who tested positive for illicit drugs had an absenteeism rate of 59.3 per cent higher than employees who had tested negative. Adding to this argument Newstrom and Davis (1997:289) indicated that absentee rates for workers with drug problems may be as much as sixteen times higher than nonusers, with accidents rates four times as higher.

Nevertheless, studies have shown that such absenteeism can be significantly reduced by the proper use of employee assistance programmes (Byars & Rue, 1997:508).

#### **2.2.5.4. Conclusion**

Substance abuse is a recognised problem in several workplaces as are its effects on productivity, absenteeism, and accidents in organizations. Smoking, alcohol, and drug abuse problems may be a valid explanation for clustering of absences in work groups. For employers, drug and alcohol abuse, as well as smoking cessation programmes may yield important short term economic benefits by reducing absenteeism in addition to enhancing the substance abuse control measures.

#### **2.2.6. Disease-related factors**

De Graaf-Sijl, Hop and Kok (2005) found that work attendance and absenteeism are linked to many different factors, the major, though not sole determinant being disease-related incapacity such as health-related issues; illness; stress; and HIV/AIDS. These factors are discussed in this section.

##### **2.2.6.1. Health problems**

Poor health can lead to absenteeism, low productivity, loss of income in the case of long absences and, in extreme cases, the loss of employees who are difficult to replace (de J. Cronje, du Toit, Mol, van Reenen & Motlatla, 1997:426). The study conducted by Adams and Cowen (2004:1) confirmed that poor health increases the rate of absenteeism, and identified perceived stress, food choices, body mass, systolic blood pressure, tobacco use, physical inactivity, cancer and heart diseases as predictive factors of absenteeism.

Cascio (2006:609) moreover, indicated that 65 percent of adults in the United States are overweight or obese, which costs companies an estimated \$5.5 billion per year in lost productivity due to absenteeism and weight-related chronic diseases. Supporting this argument Foster (2007:8) observed that in addition to the medical and psychosocial consequences of obesity and excess weight, heavier employees have greater risk for absenteeism than normal-weight employees, and as the rate of obesity increases in employees, absenteeism can be expected to increase.

Van den Heuvel, Boshuizen, Hildebrandt, Blatter, Ariens and Bongers (2005:15) however, advised that practising sport reduces the rate of absenteeism tremendously among employees experiencing health-related absenteeism problems.

Given the foregoing, Olssewski (2008/2009:74) concluded that illness, holiday and maternity problems are the most common reasons for employee absenteeism in organisations.

Employees who experience poor health could be suffering from particular illnesses.

#### **2.2.6.2. Illnesses**

Employee absenteeism due to illness has cost implications for the employer, due to employee replacement costs and decreased productivity. From an economic perspective, an employee decides not to attend to work if he/she experiences higher utility in being absent rather than working. This decision thus depends on the costs and benefits of attending work. This, in turn, depends, *inter alia*, on employee job satisfaction, wages, health, sick pay and valuation of leisure time (De Graaf-Sijl *et al.*, 2005).

Grogan (2006:53) supported these arguments and stated that wilful absence is more serious than absence caused by circumstances beyond the employee's control. Although under common law employers were not obliged to grant their employees paid sick leave, employers were not entitled to

terminate contracts summarily merely because employees were incapable of working for short periods owing to illness. This directly increases the cost of production to the employers concerned (Grogan, 2006:53). Managers should, however, bear in mind that employees may be exposed in the work situation to a variety of factors that could lead to illness; and, of course, poor employee health leads to high absenteeism and low productivity (Nel *et al.*, 2004:157; 2008:151). Wilson (2009:431) agreed and reiterated that a contributory cause of absenteeism in workplaces is ill-health, ascribed by many workers to cold and draughty working environment.

In a similar opinion, Venter, Grossett and Hills (2004:269); and Bonilla, Kehl, Kwong, Morphew, Kachru and Jones (2005:802) stated that absences caused by factors which are beyond the control of the employee are illness and accidents. For example, moderate increases in absenteeism were observed among employees during peak influenza season, and monitoring employee absenteeism may be moderately useful for detecting large citywide epidemics, (Besculides, Heffernan & Weiss, 2005:105; Davis, King, Cummings & Magder 2008:260). Speroni, Dawson, Atherton and Corriher (2005:6); and Ogata and Shibata (2009:288) also noted that nurses who received influenza vaccine reported significantly fewer symptoms and related absenteeism than the unvaccinated nurses.

The illness of a family member or the employee him/herself could lead to employee stress which is another significant cause of absenteeism.

### **2.2.6.3. Stress**

Many members of the South African Police Service experience dangerously high stress levels, but lack the necessary life skills to deal with it. They also fail to respond adequately to the reality that police, too, are victims of crime and violence, so there is a growing incidence of, *inter alia*, absenteeism among police members (Welman *et al.*, 2006:19).

Another occupational group with high stress levels are shift workers, particularly those working in mundane, repetitive jobs, such as production operators and security guards, who are also presenting their distress with

symptoms like lowered production and absenteeism (Schultz, Bargrain, Potgieter, Viedge & Werner, 2003:211; Potgieter, 1996:4; Boucsein & Ottman, 1996:1).

Given this, it is estimated that 40 million working days are lost each year in the United Kingdom because of stress. This can be attributed to workload, poor working conditions, shift work, role ambiguity or conflict, relationships and organisational climate (Armstrong, 1999:799). Armstrong (1999:799) argued further that frequent job transfers may also cause confusion and frustration that may result in increased levels of stress and consequently a high rate of absenteeism among employees. Adams (2006:48) stated in addition that psychiatric and stress-related illnesses cause a high rate of absenteeism in organisations.

Supporting this argument, Morris (2001:47) reported that some of the symptoms of stress or stress-related malfunctions are, *inter alia*, taking frequent sick leave. Employees also try to deal with stress-related problems by using drink or drugs. Managers could help employees who are under pressure by reorganising the holiday schedules/ working hours. Managers could also establish counselling services for employees suffering from stress and/or chronic diseases such as HIV/AIDS to minimize their negative effects on the workplace.

#### **2.2.6.4. HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS has tremendous social and economic consequences which have to be addressed by Human Resources practitioners in their organisations. In affecting the population's most productive age group, HIV/AIDS hampers the labour supply and skills levels. HIV/AIDS also imposes direct costs on businesses because of greater absenteeism, lower productivity at work by infected workers, higher labour turnover rates, and thus increased recruitment and training costs. In addition, pension, death benefits and health insurance costs also increase. Recognition of these has led to efforts in the private sector to initiate workplace programmes to combat the epidemic (Nel *et al.*, 2008:365).



Basson, Christianson, Gerbers, Le Roux, Mischke and Strydom (2006:143) reported that injuries, accidents, illnesses like cancer or HIV/AIDS may start as a mild incapacity, developing into a serious condition and affecting the employees' ability to perform in the work situation, which may result in high levels of absenteeism. HIV/AIDS increases absenteeism at workplaces, as it makes people vulnerable to opportunistic diseases such as tuberculosis (TB); consequently productivity declines. Brevis *et al.* (2004:91) agreed, indicating further that HIV/AIDS has cost implications for organisations, in this case, the cost of a high rate of absenteeism.

#### **2.2.6.5. Conclusion**

Health promotion and wellness programmes have an intuitive attractiveness given the substantial contribution of factors such as illness, stress, HIV/AIDS, life style and infectious agents have on workplace absences.

Stress management and stress training have an important role in the workplace. Effective and simple strategies should be developed to assess workplace stress as a component of health promotion and wellness programmes management practices.

#### **2.3. Positive effects of absenteeism**

Although most absences have a negative impact on the organisation, there are situations in which the organisation may benefit by an employee's voluntarily choosing not to come to work. For instance, illness, fatigue or excessive stress can significantly decrease an employee's productivity. Robbins *et al.* (2003:24) found that, in jobs in which employees need to be alert, for example, surgeons and airline pilots, it may be better for the organisation if the employee did not report for work, rather than showing up and performing poorly. The cost of an accident in such jobs could be prohibitive. Even in managerial jobs, where mistakes are less spectacular, performance may be improved when managers absent themselves from work rather than make a poor decision under stress (Robbins *et al.*, 2003:24).

A recent phenomenon is the contagious nature of H1N1 Influenza (Swine flu) disease. It would be better for an employee to stay away from work than to

come to work and put the lives of all the other employees at risk. According to Health News from Medical News Today 17 March (2010), people with influenza symptoms are often told to stay home from work or school , which is why scientists need to understand how household transmission works and how to control it, not only in responding to H1N1 but also in preparing for future pandemics.

But these examples are clearly atypical. Levels of absenteeism beyond the normal range in any organisation have a direct impact on that organisation's effectiveness and efficiency. For the most part, it can be assumed that organisations benefit when employees' absenteeism is low.

#### **2.4. Review of previous research**

In this part previous research is reviewed to investigate further how previous researchers conducted their research. This will contribute to developing the research methodology.

The following research studies were reviewed:

##### **2.4.1. A study conducted at an insurance company**

A research study was conducted by Kim and Garman (2003) at the *Los Angeles Times* to investigate relationships among determinants in the form of stress, physical and psychological responses and absenteeism. The researchers derived a conceptual model from a Health Promotion Model. They tested their model empirically to investigate the relationship between the above-mentioned factors and absenteeism. The researchers used data gathered from white-collar workers at an insurance company in three mid-western states and determined that financial stress was negatively related to organisational commitment but was positively associated with absenteeism. The study indicated that employers might reduce employee absenteeism and improve organisational commitment by helping employees reduce financial stress by means of effective workplace financial education.

Only pre- assessment data was included in the data analysis. A self-report questionnaire was mailed to all 476 employees. A week after the first survey instrument was mailed a thank you-and-reminder post card was mailed to all employees. Three weeks later, a replacement questionnaire and a second follow-up cover letter were sent to non-respondents. To avoid duplicate mailings to the respondents, names were deleted from initial mailing list according to the returned index cards. A total of 262 usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 55 percent.

The researchers in this study derived their own model to investigate the relationship between health factors such as stress, physical and psychological responses, and absenteeism. The study helps this research in that it shows that incentives play a vital role in encouraging respondents to participate in study projects. The study also indicates that follow-ups are very important when respondents are not responding to questionnaires.

#### **2.4.2. A study published by British Occupational Health Research Foundation**

Spurgeon (2002) conducted a study for the British Occupational Health Research Foundation to provide guidance to the public sector on managing attendance at work. The objective of the study was to provide a review of the evidence on which current “best practice” in the field of attendance management is based.

The review was carried out using standard evidence-based review methodology comprising systematic and transparent literature searching, paper selection according to pre-determined criteria and critical evaluation of each paper in terms of the standard of scientific methodology employed.

In accordance with the evidence-based review process, three specific questions to be addressed were identified. Specific search terms were identified to reflect the subject area and an extensive literature search was conducted on eight databases, four library catalogues, relevant electronic journal sites and the World Wide Web. Initially, 214 pieces of literature were

identified. Pre-determined criteria were then applied to select those papers to be included in the final review.

The first criterion concerned the subject area. A wider model of attendance management was assumed to encompass a consideration of the individual and organisational determinants of absence. The second criterion concerned quantitative or qualitative data. A final criterion concerned policy elements detailed in the cabinet resource document.

The researchers used a wider model of attendance management which encompass a consideration of the individual and organizational determinants of absence to develop a strategy for workplace absenteeism control. Their study contributes to this project in that it points to the importance of restricting data collection methods to only relevant sources of information. Irrelevant information must be discarded so that only useful data is collected.

#### **2.4.3. A construction industry absenteeism and turnover study**

The Business Roundtable (2004) reported a study of absenteeism and turnover in the construction industry. Productivity in construction frequently suffers as a result of high levels of absenteeism and worker turnover. There is evidence that all concerned – owners, contractors, and workers – are interested in resolving this problem.

This study examines the source and size of the problem, and makes recommendations to reduce it. The study was aimed at achieving productivity gains in the construction industry through an improved understanding of the causes and effects of absenteeism and turnover.

Data for this study was collected from workers and required the cooperation of owners and contractors. A team of knowledgeable construction people representing owners and contractors was assembled. A faculty member of the University of Houston Clear Lake City School of Business and Industry was retained to devise a questionnaire, based on the team's understanding of the practical problems and the faculty members' sensitivity to humanistic issues to

identify reasons for absenteeism and turnover from the workers' perspective. The questionnaire was designed specifically to measure the attitudes of construction workers to their jobs and to investigate the underlying causes of absenteeism and turnover. That questionnaire was completed by more than 1000 workers on their jobsites.

Based on the pilot-study results, the final questionnaire was divided into four main parts. Part One asked workers to respond to questions about demographic items such as age, type of craft, earnings, union membership, and work-attendance habits. Part Two asked for information about attitudes toward job factors, for example, safety aspects, work quality, supervision, and pay. Part Three asked for opinions about the importance of various items in their decision to quit a job. Part Four covered the importance of various items in a worker's decision to miss work.

The researchers developed a questionnaire to collect data about demographic items, attitudes towards job factors, opinions about their decision to quit a job, and items about their decision to miss work. The study contributed to the research in that it shows how a questionnaire should be structured. It indicated that a questionnaire should be divided into parts, each focusing on specific information sought.

#### **2.4.4. SEO Economic Research study**

De Graaf-Sijl *et al.* (2005) reported a study conducted by SEO Economic Research at the University of Amsterdam to investigate the effects of firm interventions in reducing absenteeism. The study used administrative data on absenteeism in the construction industry for a period of five years, supplemented with a survey on firm interventions. The study distinguished three types of interventions aimed at reducing absenteeism. The first group of interventions involves procedures on absenteeism.

The second group of interventions, which is more general and, is aimed at improving working conditions, seeks to reduce sickness absenteeism and shirking by making work more agreeable. The third group of interventions

consists of general human resources management policies aimed at increasing productivity and job satisfaction. These interventions enhance the work benefits enjoyed by the employee.

Data collection for this study was two fold. The largest Occupational Safety and Health agency in the construction sector (ArboDuo) provided administrative data of construction firms for absenteeism for the period January 2000 to April 2004 and some background characteristics, such as the age and gender composition of the workforce. The researchers set up telephone interviews with 1143 firms that were in the data set for the whole period and had 10 or more employees. The interview contained questions about absenteeism and occupational health and safety policy.

The researchers used a questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire had questions about absenteeism and occupational health and safety policy. This study contributes to the research in showing that a variety of data collection method may yield valuable results. The variety could include methods like telephone interviews and questionnaires, which contribute to the quality of the data collected.

## **2.5. Summary**

A number of factors such as the workplace, management style, the employee, biographical characteristics, substance abuse, and disease-related issues influence the decision to be absent from work. Employees do not just decide to absent themselves; there is always a reason for unscheduled absenteeism. Those factors must be managed, and where possible eliminated so as to minimise their costly and disruptive effects on organisational performance.

Excessive unauthorised absences can seriously affect the overall productivity and profitability of the Post Office. Although some absences are beyond the manager's or supervisor's control, they can be brought down to more acceptable levels by managing them proactively, with the aim of minimising disruption; and treating employees in a fair and compassionate manner.

In this chapter, absenteeism was defined for purposes of this study. The factors that contribute to absenteeism were also discussed with reference to the literature review to identify factors that could be used to develop the research questionnaire.

The following chapter will outline the research methodology.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research methods used to investigate the problem of absenteeism. This will be done by discussing:

- the research objectives;
- the research design;
- the population;
- sampling procedures;
- data collection;
- theoretical discussion of the questionnaire;
- development of the questionnaire;
- composition of the questionnaire
- data analysis;
- data measurement;
- ethical considerations;
- methods of ensuring the validity and reliability of the study;
- problems encountered with the questionnaire;
- conclusion

#### **3.2. Research objectives**

As stated in Section 1.3, the objectives of the study are the following:

- To determine the factors that lead to the high rate of absenteeism in the East Vaal area of the South African Post Office;
- To make recommendations to the East Vaal area management that could improve the attendance behaviour of employees.

According to Welman, et al. (2006:82) and Welman and Kruger (2000:72), the purpose of science is to explain phenomena and, in particular, the causes of these phenomena. In this study, the absenteeism problem is investigated from the perspective of the tellers and their branch managers as it is they who are involved.



### **3.3. Research design**

The research method for this study is descriptive making use of questionnaires. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the questionnaires were designed with the intention of addressing the research problem.

### **3.4. The population**

There are 176 tellers in the East Vaal area. This study is focused on 51 tellers whose absenteeism rates are higher than three percent which is the normal rate expected by SAPO, and 23 branch managers who supervise these tellers with high absenteeism rates. According to Welman and Kruger (2005:64), the smaller the total population, the relatively larger the sample should be to ensure satisfactory results.

### **3.5. Sampling procedure**

In this study no sampling was done. The researcher used a sub-population of tellers who have more than three percent of absenteeism. The study is focused on 51 tellers and 23 branch managers. These 51 tellers are selected on the basis that they have absenteeism rate higher than three percent, and the 23 branch managers were selected on the basis that the tellers are under their supervision. The questionnaires were distributed among all the 51 tellers.

### **3.6. Data collection**

The data can be collected by means of a structured questionnaire with multi-item measures (Ravid, 2000:49; Sekeran, 2000:16). According to Roberts (1999:53), such structured questionnaires will present multi-item measures in order to eliminate misunderstandings and/or misinterpretations.

In addition to the above, Williams (2006:247) pointed out that a range of methods may be used to collect data, including interviews, group discussions and questionnaires. Some combination is likely to be useful, as each method has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, questionnaires allow the collection of quantitative data on a large scale, but the format may be constraining, even if some open-ended write-in questions are included. In fact,

none of the data collection methods is appropriate to all research topics and situations. As a general guideline, it is always best to use a variety of techniques in the study of any topic (Babbie, 1995:231).

Contributing to this, Cooper and Schindler (2001:82) noted that the method selected to collect data will largely determine how the data is collected. Questionnaires, standardised tests, observational forms, laboratory notes and instrument calibration logs are among the devices which can be used to record raw data.

On the other hand, Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:97) argued that a research project stands or falls on the quality of the facts on which it is based. An excellent research design and a very representative sample are not sufficient to ensure good results if the analysis rests on incorrect data. The importance of constructing an appropriate and accurate instrument for measuring and collecting data is an absolute necessity. But the different scales of measurement depend on the type of research and the type of data being collected.

The Likert-type questionnaire was chosen as the main means of collecting data due to the fact that it is relevant to the social sciences, easier to compile, simple to understand and complete by respondents. Respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire without indicating their names, thus anonymity was assured and that would help the respondents to be honest in their answers. At the same time, bias due to personal characteristics of the interviewer is avoided, as no interviewer is used.

Three types of questionnaires were used to collect the data. A Likert-type questionnaire was distributed to all the 51 tellers to complete. The researcher met with the East Vaal area management and the Human Resources management team to inform them of the distribution of the questionnaires, and to ask the area management to allow the tellers and the branch managers to complete the questionnaires without misgiving.

A total of 51 questionnaires were distributed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010. On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010 the researcher contacted the branch managers in the East Vaal area telephonically to check whether any questionnaires had been deposited in the cardboard boxes provided. Some had indeed been deposited, and the researcher went to collect them on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2010. On 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010, the researcher again contacted the branch managers to check whether any more questionnaires had been returned. Some more had been deposited in the cardboard boxes and the researcher went to collect them on the same day.

The researcher also conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the participants (tellers and branch managers) due to the sensitivity of some of the information asked like drug addiction and alcoholism. Open ended questions were used during the face-to-face interviews as another way of getting objective information about the probable causes of absenteeism among the tellers. The face-to-face interviews started on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and were completed on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

According to Welman and Kruger (2005:142), participants may have insufficient knowledge about themselves, may be unable to verbalise their innermost feelings or may deliberately provide incorrect answers if this is not taken cognisance of during data collection.

In view of the above, attendance registers from January 2007 to December 2009 were checked in all the 53 branches of the East Vaal area so as to see how serious the absenteeism problem is. The absence records were checked, the reasons for absence indicated in the records were also scrutinized; and the Employee Assistance Program records of the tellers who were given counselling after their absenteeism exceeded the normal rate, were also reviewed to study the reasons given by those tellers during counselling sessions, as the causes of their absence from work.

### **3.7. Theoretical discussion of the questionnaires**

Questionnaires can be used without direct personal contact with respondents. These are self-administered questionnaires, and are completed by respondents themselves, without the assistance of the interviewer. This can

be done either by distributing the questionnaire and collecting the questionnaire once it has been filled in, or by mailing the questionnaire and asking respondents to return it (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:106)

Welman and Kruger, (2005:127) however, cautioned that the researcher must consider which data collecting method is the most appropriate in view of the researcher's research problem and the particular population in question.

For this study the main questionnaire to be completed by tellers is divided into eight sections addressing the objectives of the study viz:

- Determining the factors that lead to the high rate of absenteeism;
- Recommendations that could improve the attendance behaviour of employees.

Some questionnaire items were developed from existing studies, as they had been shown to be reliable. Nevertheless, additional questions were developed to address the objectives of the study that were both specific to the South African Post Office and easy to analyse.

The second and third questionnaires used for face-to-face interviews with the tellers and branch managers consist of closed and open-ended questions so that probing questions could be asked for clarity.

Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:113) noted that, whether it was constructed to be filled in directly by a respondent or by an interviewer, a questionnaire remains a complex instrument for data collection. When it comes to the construction of a questionnaire, however, although general guidelines can be given, as well as some clues on how to avoid particular pitfalls, there exist few specific rules (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:113).

Corroborating this argument, Babbie (1995:147), indicated that the format of a questionnaire is just as important as the nature and wording of the questions asked. A badly-structured questionnaire could cause respondents to miss questions, or confuse them about the nature of the data desired. In the worst-case scenario, the respondents would probably throw the questionnaire away.

As a general rule, the questionnaire should not be cramped, and should be uncluttered (Babbie, 1995:147).

Babbie (1995:125) furthermore, stated that one technique for creating reliable measures is to ask questions only on matters to which the respondents are likely to know the answer. The questions should be relevant to the respondents, and what is being asked should be clear. The concepts and variables involved and the relationships being investigated should also be clear and should guide the questionnaire design process (Welman *et al.*, 2006:174).

The researcher decided to use questionnaires because questionnaires could be constructed to target the problem investigated. The questions could be designed to ask about relevant issues the respondents have experienced in the course of their work.

### **3.8. Development of the questionnaires**

Some questions were adopted from the following sources:

- a job-satisfaction survey conducted in SAPO by Transformation Africa (2002);
- a questionnaire on job dissatisfaction by Grobler *et al.* (2004:613);
- a questionnaire on absenteeism; sample questions from the Job Description Index by Grobler *et al.* (2004:602, 603) respectively;
- a questionnaire on reducing absenteeism by Levine (2008);
- The Needs Assessment: Interview questionnaires and forms from the Florida State University (2005).

The questions were modified by using the South African Post Office's terminology and concepts to reflect the conditions of SAPO. Most questions were designed in closed-ended form as the closed-ended questions have guided answers to encourage the respondents to take more interest in answering the questionnaire. Key questions used a Likert-type scale. The

responses are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree.

The questionnaire is accompanied by a covering letter, which explains the instructions and procedures for completing the questionnaire. The covering letter also gives the reasons why the study is being conducted. The particulars of the researcher are given in the letter so that respondents can make contact if there is any misunderstanding about the completion of the questionnaire. At the end of the covering letter, the researcher emphasises the reason for the survey and thanks the respondents for taking their time to participate in the project and complete the questionnaire.

### **3.9. Composition of the questionnaires.**

The written questionnaire consists of eight sections ranging through sections A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H. Section 'A' relates to the biographical characteristics of the respondent, who has to mark alternatives with 'X' to indicate his/her particular situation/position. This section is composed of six variables (variables 1-6) listed under 'A'. The purpose of section 'A' is to determine the influence of certain biographical characteristics on absenteeism.

Section 'B' aims to scrutinise the perception of the respondents regarding job satisfaction factors that may affect absenteeism in the workplace. Section 'B' comprises job situation variables in statements that the literature indicates as having an influence on workplace absenteeism. The respondent marks with an 'X' to indicate his/her agreement or disagreement with the particular statement. There are five statements listed (statements 1-5) in section 'B'.

Section 'C' comprises five statements (statements 1-5) regarding work conditions variables that could influence absenteeism from work. Respondents will mark with an 'X' next to the number which best shows the respondent's perception, to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statement.

Section 'D' involves the management's influence on workplace absenteeism. There are five statements (statements 1-5) in section 'D' that aim at determining the influence of management style on absenteeism at workplaces. Different variables have been put in statements to suggest their influence on absenteeism. Respondents mark with an 'X' next to the number on the right hand side of the statement to show their agreement or disagreement with that particular statement.

Section 'E' involves company policies' influence on workplace absenteeism. The section comprises five statements (statements 1-5) on company policies that may have an effect on employees' decision to take unscheduled leave of absence. The respondents mark with an 'X' next to the number which best shows a respondent's agreement or disagreement with a particular statement.

Section 'F' comprises five statements (statements 1-5) about disease-related factors that have an influence on absenteeism. The respondents mark with an 'X' next to the number which best shows a respondent's agreement or disagreement with a particular statement. The statements do not indicate specific illnesses, but only the general disease-related problems that may influence an employee to take unscheduled leave.

Section 'G' is comprised of five statements (statements 1-5) concerning employee morale factors that may influence employees to take an unscheduled leave of absence. The respondent marks with an 'X' next to the number against a particular statement to indicate his/her agreement or disagreement with that statement.

Section 'H' which is the last section of the questionnaire is comprised of five statements (statements 1-5) reflecting some social factors that may cause an employee to take unscheduled leave. This section includes factors on substance-use by employees that can influence absenteeism from work. The statements aim to determine the use of substances and drugs that could lead to absenteeism from work. The respondent marks with an 'X' to indicate

his/her agreement or disagreement with a particular statement relating to influencing absenteeism at workplace.

The questionnaire for the branch managers' interview consists of open-ended questions asking the managers' opinions about the probable causes of the tellers' absenteeism. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify any uncertainty that may arise.

The face-to-face interview questionnaire for tellers consists of semi-structured closed and open-ended questions which allow the tellers to explain issues in their own words. Some probing questions were also posed in order to understand unclear responses.

### **3.10. Data analysis**

The data was analysed by using tables and graphs where necessary. The responses to each section of the questionnaire were summarised, while the most significant results were briefly discussed. Graphic presentations were used to further elaborate on the results.

Responses given during the face-to-face interview with both the tellers and their branch managers were compared to see similarity. The data collected from attendance registers, EAP records, and absence records were compared in order to determine consistency of the reasons given for absence.

### **3.11. Data measurement**

Nominal scales were used to categorize the different variables into groups. Respondents were grouped into gender, educational qualifications, marital status, age, tenure, number of dependants, etc. in order to simplify analysis.

Ordinal scales were also used to compare responses to the statements. The responses were classified into different degrees of agreement (such as strongly agree, agree, unsure, do not agree, and strongly disagree) to enable comparison of the responses.



### **3.12. Ethical considerations**

Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:97) advised that social scientists should never forget their obligations to research participants from whom information is sought and obtained. Because, through data collection, the researcher comes into direct contact with other human beings, it is of prime importance to draw attention to some ethical considerations concerning the rights of the participants.

Strict ethical principles are adhered to in this study. Respondents participated in the research of their own free will, and responses are confidential. No unauthorised access to the completed questionnaire will be allowed. No attribution is made to the responses and respondents remain anonymous. Participants were assured that their identity is not going to be revealed and the study is about the causes of the absence and not the teller who is absent. The area manager, the Human Resource manager and the Human Resource Practitioner addressed the branch managers during the area meeting to assure them that no one will be victimized as a result of his/her participation and honest responses to the interviews and the questionnaire. Furthermore no one must put his/her name on the questionnaire because what is important is the honest information given to the questions and not the name of the participant.

### **3.13. Ensuring validity and reliability**

Reliability is concerned with the consistency of measures. An instrument which produces different scores every time it is used to measure an unchanging value has low reliability. It cannot be depended upon to produce an accurate measurement (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:126). In the abstract, reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, would yield the same results each time (Babbie, 1995:124).

On the other hand, Welman *et al.* (2006:145) and Welman and Kruger (2005:139) explained that reliability is concerned with the findings of the research and relates to the credibility of the findings. In determining whether their findings are reliable, researchers have to ask whether the evidence and conclusions will stand up to the closest scrutiny. Reliability therefore refers to

the extent to which the obtained scores may be generalised to different measuring occasions, measurement forms and measurement test administrators. It stands to reason that, if the researcher measures a construct by means of a particular instrument, comparable measurements should be obtained for the same individuals/things irrespective of when the instrument is administered, which particular version of the instrument is used, and who is applying the instrument.

In view of the above arguments, the questionnaire in this study was developed using inputs from the Regional Manager Retail business, the area manager, the Regional Senior manager Human Resource, and the Regional Manager Human Resource. Questionnaires used by previous researchers were also reviewed and some relevant questions to this study were modified to reflect the SAPO situation and were included in the final questionnaires. The questionnaire was also submitted to the study supervisor for review before administering it to the respondents. The questionnaire was administered to a pilot project of nine tellers to see whether it measures what it is intended to measure. The results of the pilot project showed that seven out of the nine tellers found the questionnaire to be clear and understandable. Two tellers indicated that they did not feel comfortable reporting on their personal work life because that may lead to victimization and punishment. Their concerns were considered by including a statement on the covering letter to the questionnaire asking respondents not to write or indicate their names or identity on the questionnaire. This was to ensure that respondents are anonymous and responses are confidential.

#### **3.14. Problems encountered with the questionnaire.**

After the distribution of the questionnaire very few questionnaires were completed and returned. The researcher made follow-ups through telephone calls to remind and encourage the respondents to fill-in the questionnaire and return it.

Due to the sensitivity of some of the information sought from respondents, the researcher had to conduct face-to-face interviews with both the tellers and their branch managers as a way of getting more information. Because

respondents may purposely give misleading answers on the questionnaire, the researcher also consulted absence records and EAP reports to check the reasons given as the causes of the tellers' unscheduled absences. In this way data collection was enriched and enough information gathered.

### **3.15. Conclusion**

This study employed a variety of data collection methods, viz. a structured survey questionnaire, face-to-face interviews, checking attendance registers, checking absenteeism records and reviewing the EAP records. In respect of the questionnaire design, questions are set in closed and open-ended forms and key questions are based on a Likert-type scale. The results of data analysis and interpretation will be explained in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter consists of two sections. The first section discusses the statistical analysis, while the second section presents the results of the survey questionnaires distributed to the respondents.

#### **4.2. Statistical analysis**

This is the discussion on the statistical analysis of the following:

- Profile of the respondents;
- Non-response bias.

##### **4.2.1. Profile of respondents**

The study focuses on 51 tellers in 23 branches of the East Vaal area. The study is done in the East Vaal area as it is this area management that is complaining about the excessive levels of absenteeism.

Tellers are responsible for promoting, selling and delivery of all Post Office products and services, effectively and efficiently, thereby ensuring excellent customer service to the Post Office's clients. Tellers report to branch managers for their day to day duties.

Tellers perform their duties under the supervision of branch managers. Branch managers are responsible for cost effective service delivery at the branch; effective financial management of the branch; effective stock management of the branch; effective branch staff management, and contributing positively towards the local communities.

##### **4.2.2. Non-response bias**

When conducting a survey by means of distributing questionnaires to collect data, a non-response bias can result. Not enough questionnaires had been completed and returned by 15<sup>th</sup> March 2010. Only 29 out of 51 questionnaires were completed and placed in the cardboard boxes, which represented a response rate of 57 per cent. To avoid non-response bias, follow-up telephone calls were made four days later to remind and encourage the tellers via their

branch managers of the necessity of completing the questionnaires, and the last 22 questionnaires were deposited in the boxes.

### **4.3. Results of the questionnaire**

In this section, the results of the questionnaires will be discussed. The results are discussed individually per section of the questionnaire under the following headings:

- General discussion;
- Table and bar chart;
- Detailed discussion of the results;
- Summary and conclusion.

#### **4.3.1. Determining the influence of biographical factors on absenteeism.**

The results and discussion on determining the possible influence of biographical factors on absenteeism are reported in this section.

##### **4.3.1.1. General discussion.**

Individual respondents were asked to indicate on the questionnaire their specific biographical information. Respondents marked with a cross on the factor which relate to them correctly. According to the results, biographical factors have little influence on the tellers' absenteeism. No specific biographical factor was found to have outstanding influence on the tellers' taking unscheduled leave.

##### **4.3.1.2. Detailed discussion of the results.**

The results indicate that some biographical factors have an influence on the tellers' absenteeism, even though their contribution is minimal, as indicated below:

##### **Gender:**

Male	Female
18	33

Gender shows to have some influence on absenteeism as 18 of the respondents are males and 33 are females. It shows that there are more females taking unscheduled absenteeism than males. This may be because most females have more domestic and family responsibilities than males.

**Marital Status:**

Married	Unmarried	Divorced	Widow
25	23	2	1

Marital status does not show any particular influence on absenteeism. The results show that 25 respondents are married and 23 are not married. There is no significant difference between married and unmarried tellers in terms of their absenteeism.

**Age:**

20-30 years old	31-40 years old	41-50 years old
9	31	11

Age seems to have some influence on absenteeism. The respondents' ages range from 20 years to 50 years with 31 out of 51 tellers falling between 31-40 years old. One reason for this might be that the majority of tellers in the area are below the age of 50 years.

**Tenure:**

0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years
16	22	13

According to the results, tenure does have an influence on absenteeism. The respondents' years of experience range from five years to 16 years with the majority (22 of the 51 tellers) having 6-10 experience in the company. All the tellers with high rates of unscheduled absenteeism have less than 20 years of experience in the company.

**Dependants:**

0-2 dependants	3-5 dependants
25	26

The number of dependants does not have influence on absenteeism. All the respondents have less than four dependants and the responses do not indicate any relationship between the number of dependants and absenteeism.

**Distance to work:**

0-10 km	11-20 km	21-30 km
21	29	1

Distance from workplace does not show any significant influence on absenteeism in this study. The results indicate that no respondent stay more than 30 kilometres from the workplace, and most of them have no transport problems.

**Education:**

Grade 12 =51

The contribution of education seems to be insignificant as all the respondents have a grade 12 education level. This is because the minimum education requirement for appointment as a teller is a grade 12 certificate.

**4.3.1.3. Summary and conclusion.**

According to the results demographic factors have little influence on absenteeism. However, age; gender, and tenure have some influence on the tellers' absenteeism. Education; marital status; and distance to the workplace do not affect the tellers' decision to stay away from work.

### 4.3.2. Determining the influence of job satisfaction factors on absenteeism.

The results and assessment of the perceptions of the tellers regarding the influence of job satisfaction factors on absenteeism are reported in this section.

#### 4.3.2.1. General discussion

Individual respondents were asked to indicate how, in their opinion, job satisfaction factors influence their decision to stay away from work. The responses were ranked on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. The frequencies and percentages are shown on table 4.1 and bar chart 4.1 below.

#### 4.3.2.2. Table and Bar Chart

Table 4.1 and Bar Chart 4.1 reflect the results of this section of the questionnaire, that is, the responses of the tellers. In this section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate with a cross (X) in the appropriate column against the statements, their opinion on how job satisfaction factors influenced their absenteeism. The frequencies and percentages are indicated on the table and the bar chart below.

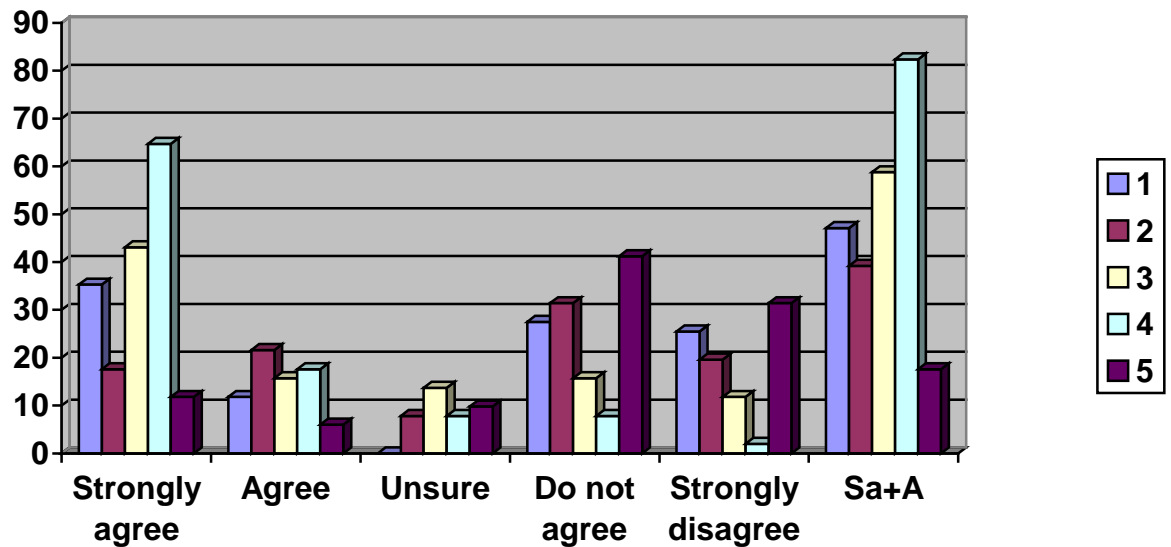
**Table 4.1 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of Job satisfaction factors on absenteeism in frequencies and percentages**

Question	1.Strongly agree	2.Agree	3.Unsure	4.Do not agree	5.Strongly disagree	Total of Sa+A
I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:						
1. I am not given opportunities for training	18 (35.3%)	6 (11.8%)	-	14 (27.5%)	13 (25.5%)	24 (47.1%)
2. I do not receive training relevant to my job	9 (17.6%)	11 (21.6%)	4 (7.8%)	16 (31.4%)	10 (19.6%)	20 (39.2%)



responsibilities						
3. I do not receive training opportunities to further my career	22 (43.1%)	8 (15.7%)	7 (13.7%)	8 (15.7%)	6 (11.8%)	30 (58.8%)
4. There is no recognition for good performance	33 (64.7%)	9 (17.6%)	4 (7.8%)	4 (7.8%)	1 (2%)	42 (82.4%)
5. I do not have the skills to do my work	6 (11.8%)	3 (6%)	5 (9.8%)	21 (41.2%)	16 (31.4%)	9 (17.6%)

**Bar chart 4.1 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of job satisfaction factors on absenteeism in percentages**



#### 4.3.2.3. General discussion of the results

The responses indicate that, in general, lack of recognition for good performance; and lack of training to further one's career; have a great influence on employees' decision to be absent from work.

#### 4.3.2.4. Detailed discussion of the results

The most significant job satisfaction factors causing absenteeism in order of importance are:

- Lack of recognition for good performance = 82.4 per cent of respondents agreed;

- Lack of training opportunities to further one’s career = 58.8 per cent of respondents agreed;
- Lack of opportunities for training in general = 47.1 per cent of respondents agreed;

#### 4.3.2.5. Summary and conclusion

It would appear that the respondents feel that management does not appreciate their contribution to the organization, and respondents are not satisfied with the training opportunities offered to enable them to progress in the company.

#### 4.3.3. Determining the influence of working conditions on absenteeism.

The results and discussion on determining the perception of the respondents regarding their opinion on the influence of working conditions on absenteeism are reported in this section.

##### 4.3.3.1. General discussion

Individual respondents were asked to indicate how, in their opinion, working conditions influenced their absenteeism. Table 4.2 and Bar Chart 4.2 reflect the results of this section of the questionnaire.

##### 4.3.3.2. Table and Bar Chart

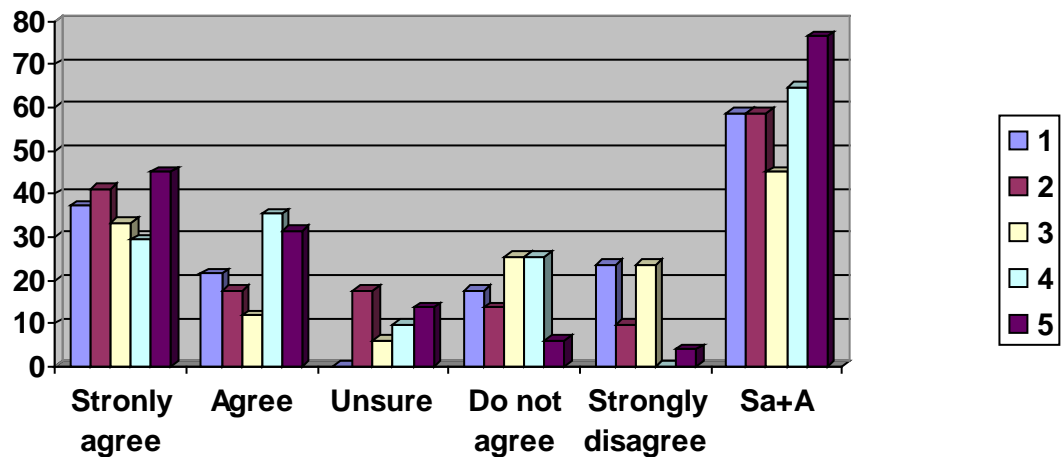
Table 4.2 and Bar Chart 4.2 reflect the responses of the participants.

**Table 4.2 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of working conditions on absenteeism in frequencies and percentages**

Question	1.Strongly agree	2.Disagree	3.Unsure	4.Do not agree	5.Strongly disagree	Total of Sa+A
1. I am overworked	19 (37.3%)	11 (21.6%)	-	9 (17.6%)	12 (23.5%)	30 (58.8%)

2. I do not have the necessary tools to perform my work	21 (41.2%)	9 (17.6%)	9 (17.6%)	7 (13.7%)	5 (9.8%)	30 (58.8%)
3. my work expectations are not met	17 (33.3%)	6 (11.8%)	3 (6%)	13 (25.5%)	12 (23.5%)	23 (45.1%)
4. there are conflicts which are not properly resolved in my workplace	15 (29.4%)	18 (35.3%)	5 (9.8%)	13 (25.5%)	-	33 (64.7%)
5. my working conditions are not conducive to work (heat, light, air conditioning)	23 (45.1%)	16 (31.4%)	7 (13.7%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	39 (76.5%)

**Bar Chart 4.2 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of working conditions on absenteeism in percentages**



#### 4.3.3.3. General discussion of the results

The following working conditions factors showed considerable influence on tellers' absenteeism:

- working conditions are not conducive to work, e.g. heat, light, air conditioning;
- conflicts in the workplace are not properly resolved

- overwork;
- not having the necessary tools to perform work.

#### **4.3.3.4. Detailed discussion of the results**

The most significant working conditions influencing absenteeism are as follows, in order of importance:

- Working conditions are not conducive to work (heat, light, air conditioning) = 76.5 per cent of respondents agreed;
- Conflicts in the workplace are not properly resolved = 64.7 per cent of respondents agreed;
- Tellers are overworked = 58.8 per cent of respondents agreed;
- Lack of tools necessary for performing the work = 58.8 per cent of respondents agreed;

#### **4.3.3.5. Summary and conclusions**

The results point to the inability of management to provide working conditions that are conducive to encourage the employees to achieve their best. The inability to resolve work conflicts add to this.

#### **4.3.4. Determining the influence of management style on absenteeism**

The results and discussions of the influence of management style on absenteeism are presented in this section.

##### **4.3.4.1. General discussion**

Individual respondents were requested to indicate how, in their opinion management style influences their decision to be absent. Table 4.3 and Bar Chart 4.3 show the results.

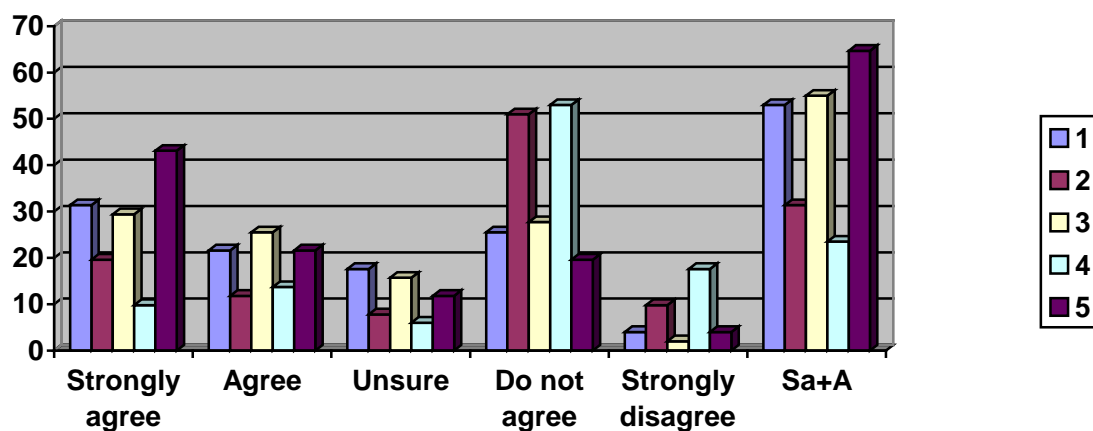
##### **4.3.4.2. Table and Bar Chart**

Table 4.3 and Bar Chart 4.3 reflect the results of this section of the questionnaire.

**Table 4.3 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of management style on absenteeism in frequencies and percentages**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Do not agree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Total of Sa+A</b>
I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:						
1. I do not get help from my supervisor when I need it.	16 (31.4%)	11 (21.6%)	9 (17.6%)	13 (25.5%)	2 (4%)	27 (53%)
2. My supervisor does not involve me in work improvements in my section.	10 (19.6%)	6 (11.8%)	4 (7.8%)	26 (51%)	5 (9.8%)	16 (31.4%)
3. There is only downward communication from management to employees.	15 (29.4%)	13 (25.5%)	8 (15.7%)	14 (27.7%)	1 (2%)	28 (55%)
4. I am not on good terms/relations with my supervisor.	5 (9.8%)	7 (13.7%)	3 (6%)	27 (53%)	9 (17.6%)	12 (23.5%)
5. Management does not address the concerns of employees.	22 (43.1%)	11 (21.6%)	6 (11.8%)	10 (19.6%)	2 (4%)	33 (64.7%)

**Bar Chart 4.3 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of management style on absenteeism in percentages**



#### 4.3.4.3. General discussion of the results

The management style of the manager or supervisor does have an influence on the tellers' decision to be absent. The most important factors in management style influencing absenteeism are:

- management failing to address the concerns of employees.
- one way (downward) communication channel from management to employees.
- no help from the branch manager when needed by tellers.

#### 4.3.4.4. Detailed discussion of the results

The respondents' perceptions on the influence of management style factors on absenteeism in order of importance are:

- Management fails to address the concerns of employees = 64.7 per cent of respondents agreed.
- One way (downward) communication from management to employees = 55 per cent of respondents agreed.
- Workers do not get help from the supervisor when needed = 53 per cent of respondents agreed.

#### 4.3.4.5. Summary and conclusions

The survey indicated that the most important management style factors influencing the tellers' decision to be absent are: management's failure to address the concerns of employees; poor communication channels between management and employees; and unhelpful supervisors to the tellers.

#### 4.3.5. Determining the influence of company policy on absenteeism

The results and discussion of assessing the perception of the respondents regarding their opinion on how the company policy influences the respondents' decision to be absent are reported here.

##### 4.3.5.1. General discussion

Individual respondents were asked to indicate how, in their opinion, company policy influences their decision to be absent from work. The results are shown on table 4.4 and bar chart 4.4 below.

##### 4.3.5.2. Table and Bar Chart

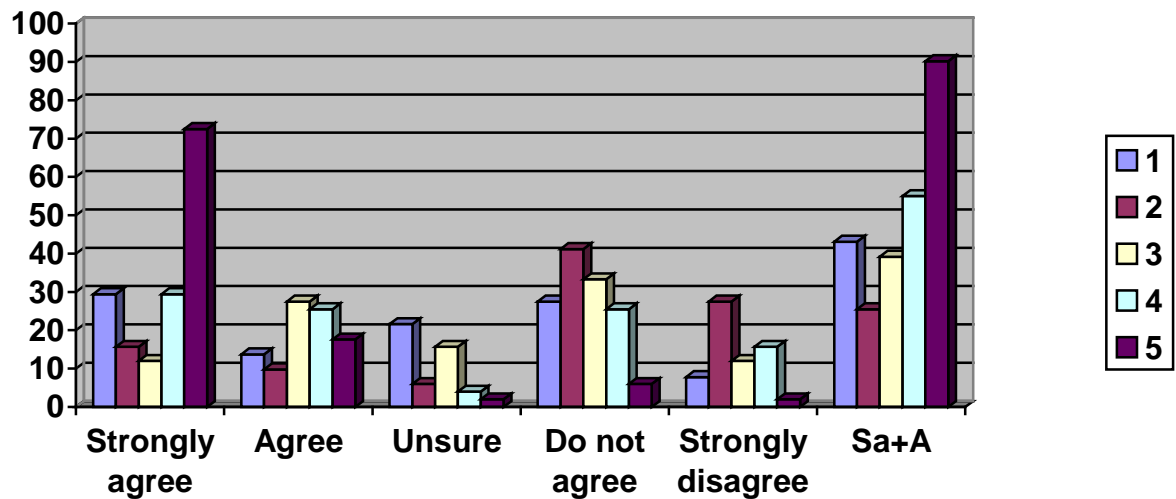
Table 4.4 and Bar Chart 4.4 reflect the results of this section of the questionnaire. The results are indicated in frequencies and percentages.

**Table 4.4 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of company policy on absenteeism in frequencies and percentages**

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Do not agree	Strongly disagree	Total of Sa+A
I often take unscheduled leave of absence because						
1.My working hours are too long	15 (29.4%)	7 (13.7%)	11 (21.6%)	14 (27.5%)	4 (7.8%)	22 (43.1%)
2.There is a paid sick-leave provision that I do not want to forfeit/lose	8 (15.7%)	5 (9.8%)	3 (6%)	21 (41.2%)	14 (27.5%)	13 (25.5%)
3.There is a sick-leave policy in the company	6 (12%)	14 (27.5%)	8 (15.7%)	17 (33.3%)	6 (12%)	20 (39.2%)

that covers me.						
4.I am entitled to a certain number of sick-leave days per leave cycle	15 (29.4%)	13 (25.5%)	2 (4%)	13 (25.5)	8 (15.7%)	28 (55%)
5.There is no reward for employees who come to work regularly.	37 (72.5%)	9 (17.6%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	46 (90.2%)

**Bar Chart 4.4 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of company policy on absenteeism in percentages**



#### 4.3.5.3. General discussion of the results

The results of this section of the questionnaire indicate that the respondents feel that lack of reward for employees who come to work regularly is the main factor influencing their decision to be absent. The second factor influencing their absenteeism is the entitlement to a certain number of sick-leave days per leave cycle. These two factors are the main reasons among company policy factors that influence the tellers' decisions to be absent. The other factors have minor influence, as indicated by the scores.

#### 4.3.5.4. Detailed discussion of the results

The most significant company policy factors influencing the tellers' decision to take unscheduled leave are as follows, according to their order of importance:



- There are no rewards for employees who come to work regularly = 90.2 per cent of respondents agreed.
- Entitlement to a certain number of sick-leave days per leave cycle = 55 per cent of respondents agreed.

#### 4.3.5.5. Summary and conclusion

The results indicate that lack of rewards for employees who come to work regularly; and employees' entitlement to a certain number of sick leave days per leave cycle are the main policy factors causing unscheduled leave-taking by the tellers.

#### 4.3.6. Determining the influence of disease/illness on absenteeism

The results and discussions of assessing the perceptions of tellers regarding the influence of disease/illness factors on absenteeism are reported in this section.

##### 4.3.6.1. General discussion

Individual respondents were asked to indicate how in their opinion disease/illness factors influenced their decision to stay away from work. The responses are shown in table 4.5 and bar chart 4.5 below.

##### 4.3.6.2. Table and Bar Chart

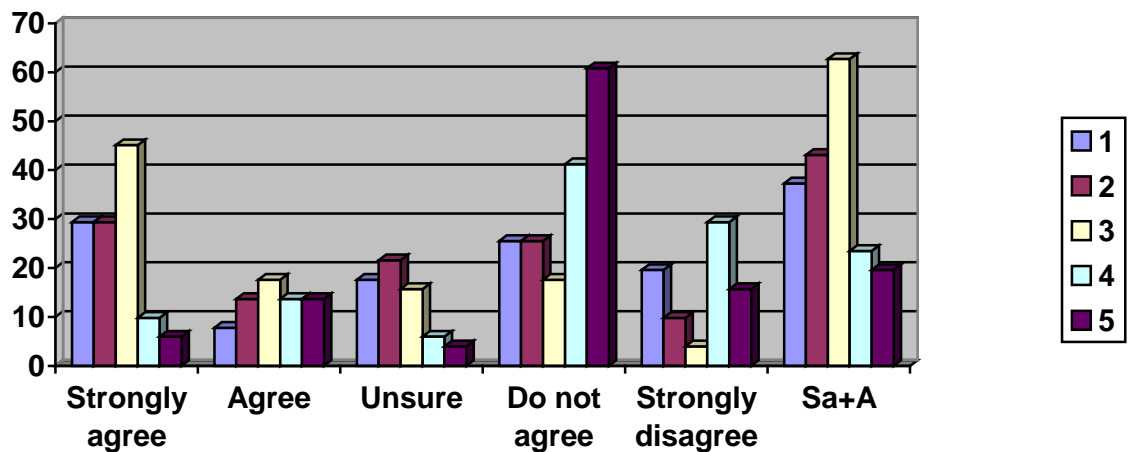
Table 4.5 and Bar Chart 4.5 reflect the results of this section of the questionnaire.

**Table 4.5 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of disease/illness factors on absenteeism in frequencies and percentages**

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Do not agree	Strongly disagree	Total of Sa+A
I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:						
1.I have a chronic disease/illness;	15 (29.4%)	4 (7.8%)	9 (17.6%)	13 (25.5%)	10 (19.6%)	19 (37.3%)

2.I have health problems;	15 (29.4%)	7 (13.7%)	11 (21.6%)	13 (25.5%)	5 (9.8%)	22 (43.1%)
3.My work is stressful;	23 (45.1)	9 (17.6%)	8 (15.7%)	9 (17.6%)	2 (4%)	32 (62.7%)
4.I have a sick child;	5 (9.8%)	7 (13.7%)	3 (6%)	21 (41.2%)	15 (29.4%)	12 (23.5%)
5.A sick family member needs my assistance.	3 (6%)	7 (13.7%)	2 (4%)	31 (60.8%)	8 (15.7%)	10 (19.6%)

**Bar Chart 4.5 reflecting the perceptions of respondents regarding the influence of disease/illness factors on absenteeism in percentages**



#### 4.3.6.3. General discussion of the results

The responses indicated that stressful work is the main disease/illness factor influencing the tellers' decision to be absent. The other factors do not have significant influence.

#### 4.3.6.4. Detailed discussion of the results

The respondents indicated the following perceptions of the influence of disease/illness factors on teller absenteeism, in order of importance:

- Stressful work = 62.7 per cent of respondents agreed.
- Health problems = 43.1 per cent of respondents agreed.
- Chronic disease/illnesses = 37.3 per cent of respondents agreed.

#### 4.3.6.5. Summary and conclusion

Stressful work appears to be a major contributing factor to tellers taking unscheduled leave of absence. Actual sickness contributes insignificantly, compared to stress.

#### 4.3.7. Determining the influence of low employee morale on absenteeism

The results of and discussion on assessing the perceptions of participants regarding their opinion on whether low employee morale factors influence tellers' absenteeism are reported in this section.

##### 4.3.7.1. General discussion

Individual respondents were asked to indicate how in their opinion low employee morale factors influenced their absenteeism. The results are indicated on table 4.6 and bar chart 4.6 below.

##### 4.3.7.2. Table and Bar Chart

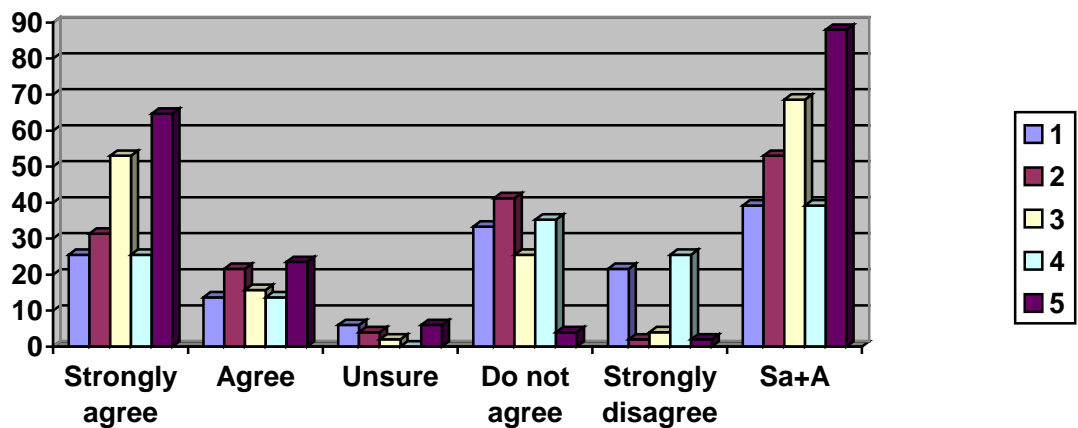
Table 4.6 and Bar Chart 4.6 reflect the results of this section of the questionnaire.

**Table 4.6 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of low employee morale factors on absenteeism in frequencies and percentages**

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Do not agree	Strongly disagree	Total of Sa+A
I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:						
1. I am not involved in the decision making process concerning my work.	13 (25.5%)	7 (13.7%)	3 (6%)	17 (33.33%)	11 (21.6%)	20 (39.2%)
2. I am working in an unsafe physical environment.	16 (31.4%)	11 (21.6%)	2 (4%)	21 (41.2%)	1 (2%)	27 (53%)
3. I do not have opportunities to advance my career in	27 (53%)	8 (15.7%)	1 (2%)	13 (25.5%)	2 (4%)	35 (68.6%)

my company.						
4.I am not happy with my work shifts.	13 (25.5%)	7 (13.7%)	-	18 (35.3%)	13 (25.5%)	20 (39.2%)
5.I am not paid enough for the work I do.	33 (64.7%)	12 (23.5%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	45 (88%)

**Bar Chart 4.6 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of low employee morale on absenteeism in percentages**



#### 4.3.7.3. General discussion of the results

The responses to this section indicate that the main employee morale factors influencing their absenteeism in order of importance are:

- not being paid enough for the work they do;
- no opportunities to advance their careers in their company;
- working in an unsafe physical environment;

#### 4.3.7.4. Detailed discussion of the results

The most significant employee morale factors influencing absenteeism in their order of importance are:

- Not being paid enough for the work done = 88 per cent of respondents agreed.
- Having no opportunities to advance their career in their company = 68.6 per cent of respondents agreed.

- Working in unsafe physical environment = 53 per cent of respondents agreed.

#### 4.3.7.5. Summary and conclusion

Tellers' dissatisfaction with their remuneration as compared to the amount of work they do seems to have great influence on their decision to take unscheduled leave. Lack of opportunities to advance their careers and unsafe physical working environment are the other factors lowering the morale of employees and which result in unscheduled absences.

#### 4.3.8. Determining the influence of social factors on absenteeism.

The results and discussion of assessing the perception of the respondents regarding their opinion of how social factors influence their inclination to take unscheduled leave of absence are reported in this section.

##### 4.3.8.1. General discussion

Individual respondents were asked to indicate how in their opinion social factors influenced their decision to take unscheduled leave of absence. Table 4.7 and Bar Chart 4.7 reflect the results of this section of the questionnaire.

##### 4.3.8.2. Table and bar chart

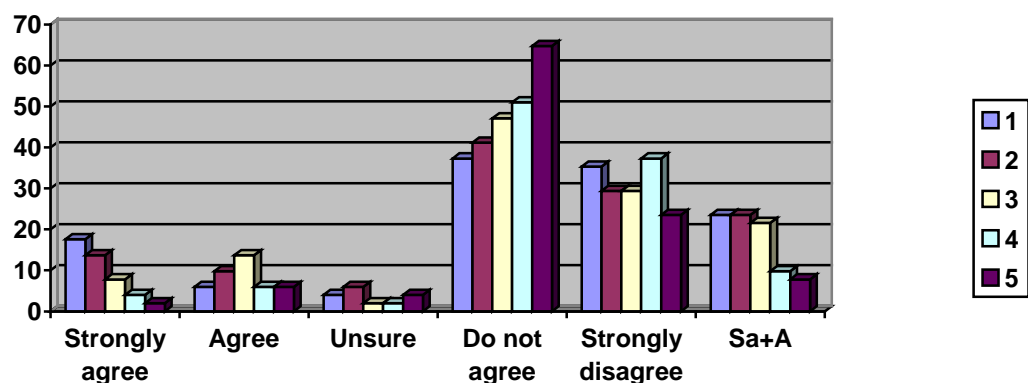
Table 4.7 and Bar Chart 4.7 reflect the responses of the participants.

**Table 4.7 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of social factors on absenteeism in frequencies and percentages**

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Do not agree	Strongly disagree	Total of Sa+A
I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:						
1. There is no transport to and from my workplace.	9 (17.6%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	19 (37.3%)	18 (35.3%)	12 (23.5%)
2. I stay in a violent area.	7 (13.7%)	5 (9.8%)	3 (6%)	21 (41.2%)	15 (29.4%)	12 (23.5%)

3. I have family problems for which I need help.	4 (7.8%)	7 (13.7%)	1 (2%)	24 (47.1%)	15 (29.4%)	11 (21.6%)
4. I have alcohol problems for which I need help.	2 (4%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	26 (51%)	19 (37.3%)	5 (9.8%)
5. I have drug-related problems for which I need help.	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	33 (64.7%)	12 (23.5%)	4 (7.8%)

**Bar Chart 4.7 reflecting the perceptions of the respondents regarding the influence of social factors on absenteeism in percentages**



#### 4.3.8.3. General discussion of the results

The responses to this section of the questionnaire indicate that, in general, social factors have very little influence on the tellers' decisions to take unscheduled leave. However, family problems for which the teller needs help; inadequate transport to and from workplace; and the tellers staying in violent areas; have some influence on the tellers' absenteeism.

#### 4.3.8.4. Detailed discussion of the results

The most significant social factors influencing the tellers' absenteeism in order of importance are:

- Inadequate transport to and from workplace = 23.5 per cent of respondents agreed.
- Staying in a violent area = 23.5 per cent of respondents agreed.

- Family problems for which the teller needs help = 21.6 per cent of respondents agreed.
- Alcohol problems for which the teller needs help = 9.8 percent of respondents agreed.
- Drug-related problems for which the teller needs help = 7.8 per cent of respondents agreed.

#### 4.3.8.5. Summary and conclusion

Social factors have little influence on the tellers' decision to take unscheduled leave. There are no significant social factors influencing absenteeism. Management of the tellers appears to be the problem. The tellers seem to be unhappy with the type of management approach applied to them.

#### 4.3.9. Interviews with tellers

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the tellers to get more objective information about the causes of their absenteeism. A questionnaire with nine open-ended questions was used for the interviews. The results are as follows:

##### 4.3.9.1. Detailed discussion of the results.

Question 1	Yes	No	Not Sure
Do you think issues like work experience, qualifications, age, gender, number of dependants, distance to work and marital status do influence your absenteeism? How/Why?	2	48	1

The majority of the tellers do not consider biographical factors to have any influence on their decision to stay away from work.

<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think issues like opportunities for training, and recognition for good work performance do influence the tellers' absenteeism? How/Why?	47	2	2

Forty-seven tellers out of fifty-one indicated that lack of opportunities for training and lack of recognition for good work performance do influence their decision to take unscheduled leave.

<b>Question 3</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think working conditions like workload, heat, light, air-conditioning, unmet expectations, lack of work tools, do influence the tellers' absenteeism? How/Why?	37	11	3

Thirty-seven out of fifty-one tellers agree that inadequate work conditions cause dissatisfaction and ultimately influence their decision to stay away from their work.

<b>Question 4</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think management style factors like supportive supervisors regarding the tellers' problems, involving tellers in work improvement, management addressing tellers' concerns, effective communication channels, can influence absenteeism? How/Why?	47	1	3

The majority of the tellers agree that management style does influence their decision to be absent. 47 tellers indicated that a supportive supervisor makes the tellers to feel important at work and that could result in them reporting for work daily.



<b>Question 5</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think your company policy regarding sick leave, working hours, incentives for regular work attendance can influence absenteeism? How/Why?	9	41	1

Forty-one tellers do not see company policy as having any significant influence on their absenteeism. But they indicated that provision of incentives for good work attendance can improve their attendance behaviour.

<b>Question 6</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think health problems like illness, stress, sick family members influence your absenteeism? How/Why?	48	1	2

Forty-eight tellers indicated that health problems have a major influence on their unscheduled absenteeism. The tellers reasoned that stress-related problems are the main cause of their health challenges resulting in unscheduled absenteeism.

<b>Question 7</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think issues like involvement in decision making, safety at work, career advancement opportunities, salary package, do influence tellers' absenteeism? How/Why?	50		1

The majority of the tellers, 50 of the 51 tellers indicated that morale factors are contributing immensely to their unscheduled absenteeism. Lack of career advancement opportunities, unsafe working conditions, and low salaries demotivate them and results in unscheduled absenteeism.

<b>Question 8</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think transport problems, substance usage, violence in the area, etc influence tellers' absenteeism? How/Why?	5	44	2

Social factors seem to have insignificant influence on the tellers' absenteeism. 44 out of fifty-one tellers indicated that social factors do not have any influence on their unscheduled absenteeism.

<b>Question 9</b>
What other factors do you think have an influence on tellers' unscheduled absenteeism?

A number of factors were given like staff shortages, frustrations caused by shortages of selling stock, working on holidays and Sundays with insufficient off-duty days.

#### **4.3.9.2. Summary and conclusion**

The results indicate that biographical factors, company policy, and social factors have very little influence on the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism. The main causes of their unscheduled absenteeism are job dissatisfaction factors, poor working conditions, bad management style, illnesses, and low morale factors.

#### **4.3.10. Interviews with branch managers**

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with 23 branch managers to get their opinion regarding the causes of unscheduled absenteeism among their tellers. A questionnaire with nine open-ended questions was used. The results are as follows:

#### 4.3.10.1. Detailed discussion of the results.

<b>Question 1</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think factors like level of education, gender, age, marital status, work experience, number of dependents, and distance to work do influence the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why?	4	19

Nineteen branch managers out of 23 did not see biographical factors as having an influence on tellers' unscheduled absenteeism. The main reason given is that different tellers with various backgrounds take unscheduled leave.

<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think issues like opportunities for training, recognition for good work performance, do influence the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why?	23	0

All the branch managers interviewed agreed that job satisfaction factors like opportunities for training, and recognition for good work performance do influence the tellers' decision to be absent. They reasoned that such factors motivate the tellers and improve their job attendance.

<b>Question 3</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think working conditions like workload, heat, light, air-conditioning, lack of work tools, unmet expectations, and work conflicts do influence the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why?	17	6

Seventeen branch managers agreed indicating that overwork causes tiredness, lack of work tools frustrates the tellers, and during summer offices without air conditioners are extremely hot and during winter they are very cold and result in tellers being sick most of the time and being absent.

<b>Question 4</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think management support, involving tellers in decision making, effective communication channels, failure to resolve tellers' concerns, do influence the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why?	21	2

Twenty-one branch managers agreed and indicated that management style factors are most important in motivating the tellers. They reasoned that if the tellers are not happy with the management style of their branch manager, the result will be high levels of unscheduled absenteeism.

<b>Question 5</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think company policy regarding sick leave, working hours, incentives for good work attendance, can influence the tellers' absenteeism? How/Why?	23	0

All the 23 branch managers agreed and indicated that since the tellers know that the policy allows them to be absent for two days without proof of sickness, many tellers take advantage of it. Lack of incentives for good work attendance makes the problem worse.

<b>Question 6</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think health problems like illnesses, stress, sick family member, etc do influence the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why?	16	7

Sixteen branch managers agreed but cautioned that sickness is just a shield to avoid disciplinary action against the teller concerned. They indicated that most of the tellers that take unscheduled leave have no signs of illness when they report back on duty even though they claim to have been sick.

<b>Question 7</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think morale issues like safety at work, career advancement opportunities, salary package, do influence the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why?	18	5

Eighteen branch managers indicated that morale factors do influence the tellers' decision to be absent. They indicated that low morale caused by low salary, unsafe work environment, and lack of opportunities for career advancement de-motivates the tellers and result in high levels of absenteeism.

<b>Question 8</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think factors like transport, substance abuse, violence in the area, do influence the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why?	2	21

The majority of the branch managers do not see social factors as having any effect on tellers' absenteeism. They pointed that most of their tellers do not have any problems with transport, substance abuse or violence in their areas.

<b>Question 9</b>
What other factors do you think have an influence on the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism?

Most branch managers indicated that it is difficult to know the reason for the tellers' absenteeism since most of the tellers give sickness as the cause. It is difficult for tellers to admit to have substance abuse problems or problems in their families.

#### **4.3.10.2. Summary and conclusions.**

According to the results of the interviews with branch managers the main contributing factors to the tellers' high rate of absenteeism are lack of opportunities for training, lack of recognition for good work performance;

company policy offering certain privileges like allowing employees sick leave for two days without having to produce a medical certificate; poor management style; and low employee morale.

#### 4.4. Attendance registers and Employee Assistance Programme records.

Attendance registers and EAP records were checked to find out the reasons given for the absenteeism. The results are as follows:

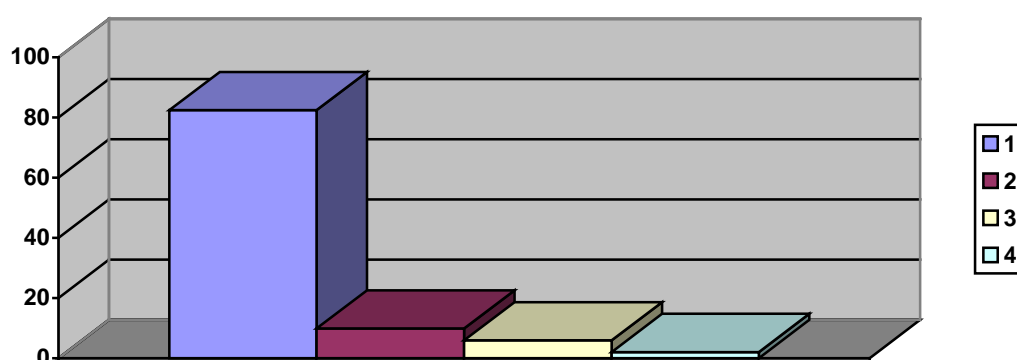
##### 4.4.1. Attendance registers

Fifty one attendance registers were checked and the reasons given are reflected on the following table and bar chart:

**Table 4.8. Showing the findings from attendance registers**

Reason	Number of times cited	Percentage
1. Sickness	42	82.4
2. Child sick	5	9.8
3. Child school summons	3	5.9
4. Municipality offices	1	2

**Bar chart 4.8. Showing the findings from attendance registers in percentages**



According to the attendance registers the main reason for unscheduled absenteeism among the tellers is sickness. Forty-two out of fifty-one records indicate that the teller's sickness is the reason for their absence.

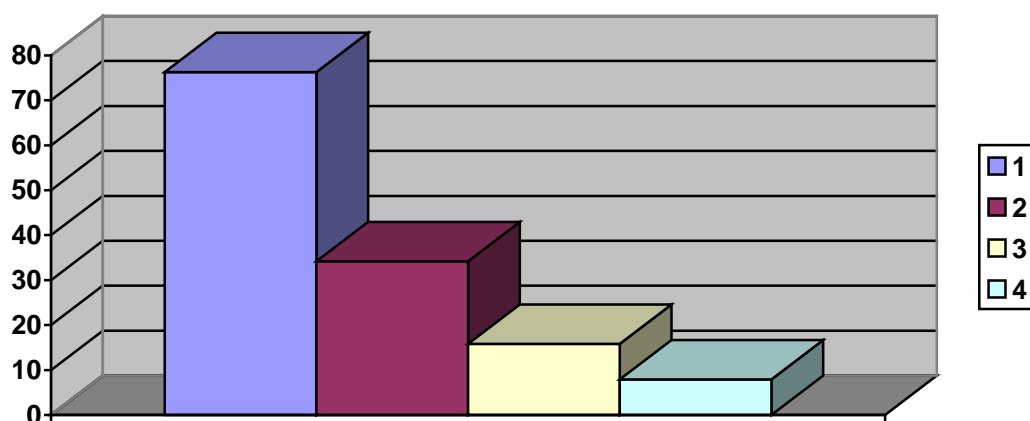
#### 4.4.2. Employee Assistance Programme records

Thirty eight EAP records were checked and the reasons given for the absence are indicated on the table and bar chart below.

**Table 4.9. Showing the findings from the EAP records.**

Reason	Number of times cited	Percentage
1. Sickness	29	76.3
2. Stress	13	34.2
3. Substance abuse	6	15.8
4. Family problems	3	7.9

**Bar chart 4.9 showing the findings from the EAP records in percentages**



The EAP records indicate that the leading cause of unscheduled absenteeism among tellers is sickness. Stress is another important contributor to unscheduled absenteeism.

#### 4.4.3. Summary and conclusions.

It would appear that the main contributing factor for the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism is sickness. Both the attendance registers and the EAP records indicate that the most cited reason for unscheduled absence is illness of the employee, with stress being the second highest cited reason contributing to absenteeism.

#### **4.5. Findings**

The findings of the study highlight a number of interesting details concerning the causes of the high rate of absenteeism in the East Vaal area of Witwatersrand region of the South African Post Office.

Overall the results show that the main causes of the high rate of absenteeism in the East Vaal area in their order of importance are: poor working conditions, poor management style, low employee morale, job dissatisfaction, abuse of sick leave entitlement, low salary and stress. It would appear that the working conditions under which tellers perform their daily duties are not conducive to work in. Poor management style of the supervisors is the second most contributor to the high rates of unscheduled absenteeism. Dissatisfaction with the management style of the supervisors leads to low employee morale and job dissatisfaction which results in unnecessary absences.

According to the interviews with tellers it emerged that the main causes of their absence are, overwork; stress; dissatisfaction with salary; lack of incentives for coming to work regularly; and sick-leave entitlement. The branch managers indicated that sick-leave provision; overwork; and stress are the main causes of the tellers' high levels of absenteeism.

Attendance registers and absence records indicate the main reasons given for absenteeism to be sickness and family commitments. Forty two out of the 51 records cited illness as the reason for absence. Some of the reasons recorded are transport problems; children's school problems; and taking care of a family member.

The Employee Assistance Programme records of thirty-eight tellers who were given counselling indicated the most cited reasons for absence to be sickness; stress; substance abuse and family issues. The records show family commitments as a serious cause of absenteeism among female tellers.

Actual sickness seems to contribute less to unscheduled absenteeism, even though it is the most cited reason for absenteeism according to attendance records and the EAP reports. Even the face-to-face interviews with both the tellers and the branch managers indicated that diseases/illness is not the main



reason for the tellers' unscheduled absences. The results indicate that stress is the most contributing factor to unscheduled absenteeism among illness factors.

These results are consistent with those of Luthans (2002:234), who found that moderating variables such as the degree to which people feel that their jobs are important enter into the employees' decision to stay home. Research conducted among state government employees found that employees who believed that their work was important had a lower absenteeism rate than that of employees who did not feel this way (Luthans, 2002: 234). This was supported by Gibson *et al.* (2000: 186); Armstrong (1999: 799); Nieman and Bennett (2007:255); and, Helriegel *et al.* (2001:61), who discovered that employees' motivation to go to work would remain high if they felt that good attendance behaviour would lead to valued rewards and fewer negative consequences.

Further, the results reinforce the findings of Nel *et al.* (2002:582), who explained that if the employees' expectations were not met they could abuse sick leave as a way of withdrawing temporarily from the job situation. In the same vein Tosi *et al.* (1995:547); and, Armstrong (1999:799), observed that some companies attempted to reduce absenteeism by changing organisational conditions so that job satisfaction was increased.

The findings also corroborated those of Nel *et al.* (2008:264), who stated that the management of any organisation required good communication, particularly in creating communication systems whereby the complaints and grievances of staff could be aired. If not, grievances could accumulate to such an extent that they could be expressed later in some other form, such as high absentee rates, staff turnover, perhaps even strikes.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

The chapter reveals through the tables and bar charts presented and analysed, that a number of factors contribute to the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism. Poor working conditions, poor management style, and low employee morale are the main causes of the tellers' unscheduled absences.

Even though sickness and health problems are given in the absence records and attendance registers as reasons for absence, the responses to the questionnaire showed that actual sickness plays an insignificant role for the tellers' unscheduled absenteeism. The results from the questionnaire also suggest that the respondents' perception of management is mostly not positive. Management should monitor the perceived causes of absenteeism in order to implement proper methods to reduce the absences.

Summary and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, summary of the research results, as well as recommendations and limitations of the study are discussed. Several suggestions for future research opportunities are also proposed.

#### **5.2. Summary of the research results**

The findings in this study highlight a number of interesting reasons for the high rate of absenteeism in the East Vaal area of the Witwatersrand region of the South African Post Office. These include:

- The lack of recognition for good performance. The perceptions of the respondents are that the area management does not recognise the tellers' good performance, which induces them to take unscheduled leave of absence.
- Although the tellers' salaries may have been benchmarked against those of other competitors in the industry, the respondents felt that their pay was not commensurate with their work.
- The results also indicated that there was a lack of reward for employees who reported for work regularly, which influenced their decision to take unscheduled leave of absence.
- Although there were promotion levels above that of teller, the respondents felt that there were no opportunities for advancement in the company if they were to reach those levels.
- The findings indicated that the working conditions in the company were not conducive to work (e.g. heat, light, air conditioning). The offices may be too hot during the summer months, too cold during the winter,

too dark during certain time periods, or the air conditioning in the office was stuffy at times, leading to employees taking unscheduled leave of absence.

- The findings further indicated that the tellers' work was stressful, and that they were overloaded. Stress from overwork leads tellers to take unscheduled leave to avoid coming to the stressful environment.
- Every job requires certain basic, necessary tools and resources if it is to be done properly. If the tools are not there, it causes employee frustration. The respondents' perceptions were that the shortage of these necessary tools was forcing them to counteract their frustration by taking unscheduled leave.
- The findings further revealed that, although the tellers were working in a communication industry, the respondents felt that there was only a one-way communication channel from management to the tellers, so the tellers had been unable to voice their concerns, grievances and frustrations, which had consequently not been addressed. This has caused conflict between the tellers and management. The former have been forced to take unscheduled leave of absence as a coping mechanism.
- The respondents indicated that working in an unsafe physical environment was influencing their decision to take unscheduled leave of absence. Some offices are in violent areas and tellers have often been robbed at gun point.
- The respondents further indicated that they are entitled to a certain number of sick-leave days in a leave cycle. They know that since they cannot transfer their entitlement to the next leave cycle, they better take unscheduled leave so as not to lose their sick leave entitlement.

- Finally, the results indicated a lack of training opportunities for the tellers, even though there is a training department in the region to provide training for all the employees. Possibly tellers have been unable to avail themselves of this training because they are expected to be at their work-stations every working day.

The researcher noted that the information from the official documents (attendance registers and EAP records) emphasize different causes of unscheduled absences from that collected from the questionnaires. For example, according to the attendance registers 82.4 percent of the causes of unscheduled absence are teller sickness. That agrees with the EAP records which indicate that 76.3 percent of the reasons for unscheduled teller absence are the tellers' sickness. The information collected from the questionnaires reveals more than one reason to be the main cause of unscheduled absence as indicated on the above paragraphs. The reason for the different emphasis on the key causes of unscheduled absence could be that the tellers find it easy to give sickness as their reason for not showing up for work because it could be easier for the tellers to get a medical certificate to support their claim. It could be risky for a teller to tell his/her supervisor that he/she (the teller) did not report for work because there is no reward for tellers who come to work regularly. The teller could face disciplinary action.

### **5.3. Recommendations**

The following recommendations should help the East Vaal area management to minimise the higher rate of absenteeism in the area:

- The area management should establish consultative and participatory decision-making structures for providing feedback, and should realise the importance of valuing the tellers' work.
- Management practices which lead to a more open expression of opinion and participatory problem-solving may result in reduced ambiguity, stress and increased job satisfaction, with a consequent reduction in absenteeism.

- Branch managers' training that includes keeping contact with tellers and the use of feedback should be introduced.
- There should be recognition of and support for ill/distressed tellers.
- There should be appropriate mechanisms for acknowledging and rewarding good work performance and attendance behaviour on the part of tellers.
- It is critical for branch managers to devote time daily to the management of the tellers' problems, such as absenteeism, worker compensation and rehabilitation.
- The area management should introduce a system whereby a proportion of accumulated sick-leave entitlements are paid out, either on an annual basis or on termination of employment, or, more commonly, retirement. The rationale should be to encourage employees to preserve their sick-leave entitlement, reduce disruptive unplanned absence and reward employees who do not abuse the system. These positive incentives should form the elements of programmes that seek to develop an effective attendance culture.
- The area management should draw up guidelines on the management of individual cases of regular absence, with an assisted problem-solving approach involving the tellers concerned.
- The area management should introduce a sick-leave pool system, whereby tellers could contribute leave days to the pool, making it accessible to the tellers who suffer from long-term illness or disease. Such a system could assist in creating a positive absence culture in which the pool is owned by the workforce as an insurance against ill health.

- The area management should promote the tellers' use of the Employee Assistance Programme, with the aim of assisting them in dealing with personal, family and work issues. They could consequently participate fully and productively in the workplace. Professional counsellors, provided to the tellers on a voluntary and confidential basis, should perform such services. The area management should seek to maximise the gains available through the Employee Assistance Programmes.
- Training programmes should be provided to develop tellers' existing skills to the required standard. Specific training programmes should be provided for tellers, allowing them to compete equally for promotion opportunities in the company. Those training programmes should be provided to facilitate the tellers' adjustment to structural change and technological innovation in the workplace. The application requirements and procedures for training programmes should be clearly defined, followed and made available to all the tellers.
- The area management should maintain good communications with the tellers. They should be sensitive to the tellers' moods, understand their concerns, provide feedback from management, and act promptly whenever appropriate, to show the tellers that their concerns are being heard. The use of bulletin boards, newsletters and suggestion boxes are all helpful, but face-to-face communication on the job by management is indispensable.
- In today's highly competitive global economy, most organisations are under severe cost pressures. That makes recognition programmes particularly attractive. In contrast to most other motivators, recognising the tellers' superior performance would often cost little or no money. The area management should consider using the suggestion system in which the tellers offered suggestions for improving processes or cutting costs and would be recognised with small cash awards. The manager could personally congratulate a teller in private for a job well done,

send a hand-written note acknowledging something positive the teller had done, or could publicly recognise accomplishments. That would motivate the tellers to demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviour towards their work.

- The area management could also establish performance evaluation and rewards for tellers. They should provide tellers with specific challenging performance objectives and reward them for achieving those objectives. The tellers' behaviour would be influenced by how the area management evaluated performance and what behaviours were rewarded. This would alleviate the tellers' feeling of not being sufficiently remunerated for the work they are doing.

#### **5.4. Limitations of the research**

Some limitations should be noted when interpreting the results of this study. The limitations, however, present opportunities for future study.

- The scope of the study is limited by its size, which included only tellers with absenteeism rate of three percent and higher, in the East Vaal area of the Witwatersrand region of the South African Post Office. This limitation may restrict the generalisation of the findings. The findings may have been different if a broader range of tellers had been selected.
- Even though the response rate was 100 percent, the number of tellers taking unscheduled leave of absence was very low, so it was difficult to conduct meaningful statistical tests. The discussions on taking unscheduled leave of absence in this study relied mainly on description as the means of communicating the survey results. These may have been different if the tellers taking unscheduled leave in the whole of the Witwatersrand region of SAPO had been identified and targeted.
- Finally, the tellers may have been apprehensive about indicating their true feelings on their unscheduled absenteeism, as the cardboard



delivery boxes for their completed questionnaires were in their own branch offices. The tellers might have felt that their identity was not completely concealed.

### **5.5. Future research**

This research indicates that there are different perceptions among the tellers on the causes of unscheduled absenteeism. The research is, however, not representative of all the South African Post Office tellers in general. It is expected that the number of tellers who take unscheduled leave of absence is more than that indicated in the study.

Future research could identify and target those tellers who habitually take unscheduled leave of absence in the South African Post Office or any other organisation where the action research approach is followed and pro-active management is practised. The research could be carried out across the service industry similar to the South African Post Office in order to generalise the findings to the South African environment.

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## **Annexure 'A'**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRES.**

#### **Introductory Letter**

**Please help us to assist you in making your workplace a better place to work in by filling in this questionnaire:**

Directions for completing the questionnaire.

There are 8 sections in the questionnaire ranging from A-H and please answer all of them to the best of your ability and knowledge.

This information will help HR to customise its interventions to suit your needs as our internal client. It will furthermore inform us on what and how to improve our strategies to produce well-informed, better trained, highly confident, most competent cadres of Post Office employees who will be able to give the South African Post Office's customers the services and products that meet and exceed customer expectations.

This instrument provides you with an opportunity to express your feelings about many aspects of your workplace environment. Although it may not include every item you consider important in your workplace affecting absenteeism, it does provide an overall assessment of your workplace. Read each item thoughtfully and indicate a rating for each by marking with an 'X' next to the appropriate answer that explains your situation for **Section 'A'**.

Indicate a rating for each item by circling the appropriate number using the following scale for **Sections 'B' to 'H'**:

**1 – Strongly agree; 2 – Agree; 3 – Unsure; 4 – Do not agree; 5 – Strongly disagree.**

#### **Take Note.**

1. The questionnaire is easy to answer and it will take only 10 minutes of your time to complete.
2. You have been identified as a respondent as the questionnaire targets all Tellers in the East Vaal area. Do not indicate your name on the questionnaire as respondents should be anonymous and confidential.
3. A report/feedback of the results will be made available during area meetings and all the Tellers will be informed accordingly. It will be appreciated if the questionnaire can be completed within one week of receiving it.
4. After completing the questionnaire drop it in the box provided in your office marked 'Completed Questionnaire' and Mr Kgaphola (HR Practitioner in Wits region) will come and collect it there.

Mr Kgaphola SC can be contacted at: Tel: (011) 961 3617. Fax: (086 536 9882. e-mail address: kgaphos @ sapo.co.sa

**Please turn to the next page**



## SECTION 'A' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Please mark with an "X" next to the answer that indicates your situation/position.

- |                             |                    |           |              |          |          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------|--------------|----------|----------|
| 1. Gender                   | Male               | Female    |              |          |          |
| 2. Marital Status           | Married            | Unmarried | Divorced     | Widow    |          |
| 3. Age                      | 20-30yrs           | 31-40yrs  | 41-50yrs     | 51-60yrs | 61-65yrs |
| 4. Tenure/Service           | up to 5yrs         | 6-10yrs   | 11-15yrs     | 16-20yrs | +21yrs   |
| 5. Dependants               | up to 2            | 3-5       | 6-8          | 9-12     | +13      |
| 6. Distance to work         | up to 10KM         | 11-20     | 21-30        | 31-40    | +41      |
| 7. Education/Qualifications | Less than Grade 12 | Grade 12  |              |          |          |
|                             | Diploma            | Degree    | Postgraduate |          |          |

## SECTION 'B' JOB SATISFACTION

I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am not given opportunities for training                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I do not receive training relevant to my job responsibilities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I do not receive training opportunities to further my career  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. There is no recognition for good Performance                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I do not have the skills to do my work                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## SECTION 'C' WORKING CONDITIONS

I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am overworked                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I do not have the necessary tools to perform my work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please turn to the next page

3. My work expectations are not met	1	2	3	4	5
4. Of conflicts which are not properly resolved at my workplace	1	2	3	4	5
5. My working conditions are not conducive to work in (heat, light, air conditioning)	1	2	3	4	5

### **SECTION 'D' MANAGEMENT STYLE**

I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:

1. I do not get help when I need it from my supervisor	1	2	3	4	5
2. My supervisor does not involve me in performance improvements of my section	1	2	3	4	5
3. There is only one way communication at my work (from management to employees)	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am not in good terms/relations with my supervisor	1	2	3	4	5
5. Management does not address the concerns of employees	1	2	3	4	5

### **SECTION 'E' COMPANY POLICY**

I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:

1. My working hours are too long	1	2	3	4	5
2. There is paid sick leave provision that I do not want to forfeit/lose	1	2	3	4	5
3. There is sick leave policy in the company that covers me	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am entitled to a certain number of sick leave days per leave cycle	1	2	3	4	5
5. There are no rewards for employees who come to work regularly	1	2	3	4	5

**Please turn to the next page**

## **SECTION 'F' DISEASE/ILLNESS**

I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:

1. I have a chronic illness	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have health problems	1	2	3	4	5
3. My work is stressful	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have a sick child	1	2	3	4	5
5. Of a sick family member needing my assistance	1	2	3	4	5

## **SECTION 'G' LOW EMPLOYEE MORALE**

I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:

1. I am not involved in the decision making process concerning my work	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am working in an unsafe physical environment	1	2	3	4	5
3. I do not have opportunities to advance my career in my company	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am not happy with my work shifts	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am not paid enough for the work I do	1	2	3	4	5

## **SECTION 'H' SOCIAL FACTORS**

I often take unscheduled leave of absence because:

1. There is no adequate transport to and from my workplace	1	2	3	4	5
2. I stay in a violent area	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have family problems for which I need help	1	2	3	4	5
4. Of alcohol drinking problems for which I need help	1	2	3	4	5
5. Of drug related problems for which I need help	1	2	3	4	5

**Thank you very much for taking your time to participate in this project.**



## Annexure C

### The tellers' interview questionnaire

#### Instruction:

The respondent must answer Yes, No, or Not sure and must motivate his/her answer where necessary.

Question 1	Yes	No	Not sure
Do you think issues like work experience, qualifications, age, gender, number of dependants, distance to workplace, and marital status do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----			

Question 2	Yes	No	Not sure
Do you think issues like opportunities for training, and recognition for good work performance do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----			

Question 3	Yes	N
Do you think working conditions like workload, heat, light, air-conditioning, unmet expectations, lack of work tools, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- -----		

Please turn to the next page

Question 4	Yes	No	Not

			<b>sure</b>
Do you think management style factors like supportive supervisors regarding tellers' problems, involving tellers in work improvement, management addressing tellers' concerns, communication channels, can influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- ----- -----			

<b>Question 5</b>	<b>Y</b>
Do you think your company policy regarding sick leave, working hours, incentives for regular work attendance, can influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----	

<b>Question 6</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think health problems like illness, stress, sick family members, influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- ----- -----			

**Please turn to the next page**

<b>Question 7</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
Do you think issues like involvement in decision-making,			

<p>safety at work, career advancement opportunities, salary package, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism?  How/Why? -----  -----  -----</p>			
---	--	--	--

<b>Question 8</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
<p>Do you think transport problems, substance usage, violence in the area, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism?  How/Why? -----  -----  -----  -----</p>			

<b>Question 9</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
<p>What other factors do you think have an influence on tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? -----  -----  -----  -----</p>			

**Thank you very much for participating in the interview**

**Annexure D**

**Branch managers interview questionnaire**

**Instruction:**

The respondent must answer Yes or No and motivate his/her answer

<b>Question 1</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think factors like qualifications, gender, age, marital status, work experience, number of dependants, distance to workplace do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----		

<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think issues like opportunities for training, recognition for good work performance, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----		

<b>QUESTION 3</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think working conditions like workload, heat, light, air-conditioning, lack of work tools, unmet expectations, work conflicts, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- ----- -----		

**Please turn to the next page**

<b>Question 4</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think management support, involving tellers in decision-making, communication channels, failure to resolve tellers'		



concerns, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----		
--	--	--

<b>Question 5</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think the company's policy on sick leave, working hours, incentives for regular work attendance, can influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- ----- -----		

<b>Question 6</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think health problems like illness, stress, sick family member, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----		

<b>Question 7</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think issues like safety at work, career advancement opportunities, salary package, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----		

**Please turn to the next page**

<b>Question 8</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Do you think issues like transport, substance abuse, violence in the area, do influence tellers' unscheduled absenteeism?		

How/Why? ----- ----- ----- -----		
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<b>Question 9</b>	<b>Yes</b>
What other factors do you think have influence on tellers' unscheduled absenteeism? How/Why? ----- ----- -----	

**Thank you very much for participating in the interview.**