

**'An investigation into the  
occupational stress that Irish  
Community Pharmacy  
Employees' are experiencing and  
the impact that this has on the  
organisation's overall  
performance'**

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# Abstract

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Retail pharmacies face many challenges in today's increasingly competitive environment. Over the last five years a series of environmental changes (driven by the government's austerity programme) have caused upheaval in the Irish Community pharmacy sector – the impact of the recession, the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) legislation which followed resulting in reduced reimbursement payments, reference pricing and cuts to dispensing fees all taking effect. In a market that is extremely competitive with international supermarket chains opening in-store pharmacies, the trend of sourcing medicines online and out of town healthcare centres opening, pharmacies are having to concentrate on cost saving initiatives (Power, 2012). The Irish Pharmacy Union's 2015 Report states that 30% of pharmacies reported enacting salary cost-saving measures, either through reductions in hours or in rates of pay.

The aim of this research is to identify the factors that contribute to the occupational stress experienced by front of shop workers in an Irish retail pharmacy group. These employees were the focus of the study as research shows that where salary cost-saving measures are made, the focus is on this group of staff, rather than qualified staff.

This study will examine the factors that contribute to the occupational stress experienced by front of shop workers in an Irish retail pharmacy group. It will recommend the appropriate stress management techniques and intervention strategies that can be implemented to assist employees in managing their stress levels.

A quantitative approach was taken by using an established COPSOQ Questionnaire. The results show that certain factors are very influential at contributing to the stress levels of these employees. The study will also discuss the impact of occupational stress on the employees and the organisation. The appropriate occupational stress management strategies are then recommended for use within this organisation.

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# Personal Learning Reflection

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Working in a role where I lead and manage a team of employees and with a great interest in the many aspects of managing people effectively, I was determined to pursue and complete my Masters in Human Resource Management. In a sector where the human contact element is first and foremost in operating a successful business, each and every day I want to be able to lead my team in helping them to deliver their best performance possible. Possessing the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities to facilitate them in doing this, is always what I want to achieve.

Studying for my Masters allowed me to complete a piece of research that would provide me with learning outcomes that I could utilise in my current role as a retail pharmacy manager. It also enabled me to investigate an important work related issue that could potentially have positive outcomes for my store team, and possibly the organisation as a whole.

Occupational stress is a hot topic and with all the daily demands that are placed on us as employees, while also having busy and demanding personal lives, it was definitely an area I wanted to explore more. There is a lot of literature available on occupational stress, but little available on the occupational stress experienced by retail pharmacy employees, so that was an influencing factor in my decision.

The process of completing my dissertation has been extremely challenging and rewarding. I have been pushed to my limits while aiming to complete the best piece of research that I possibly could. Having a full time, all-consuming job as a retail pharmacy manager and studying at the same time has been the hardest and most rewarding experience I have faced in some time. I have developed many skills, including time management, planning-ahead and patience and now also have a far greater understanding of occupational stress in today's work environment.

Ultimately, I am very pleased that I persevered in pursuing my goal, when at times it was extremely demanding and at times isolating being a part-time student. However, I am pleased that I have completed this study and I hope to build on what I have learned into the future.

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# Abbreviations

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COPSOQ	Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire
ESRI	The Economic and Social Research Institute
FEMPI	Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest
HSE	Health Service Executive
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers' Confederation
IPU	Irish Pharmacy Union
NIOSH	National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

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As stated by the Irish Pharmacy Union (Union, 2012), “Stress in Irish community pharmacies has dramatically increased in the last 5 years with the introduction in 2009 of the FEMPI Act (Financial Emergency measures in the Public Interest). This Act is having a major impact on the profit, stability and viability of the Community Pharmacy sector in Ireland”. As a result of the implementation of this Act, as part of the Irish Government’s anti-austerity measures, income to community pharmacies has been greatly reduced due to the reductions in payments, impacting the profitability, stability and viability of the Irish Community pharmacy sector (Union, 2011). In turn, these changes are having a significant impact on pharmacy employees via their rate of pay, an increased workload, a reduction in hours worked, a lack of recognition and low pay and reward policies while the organisation tries to maintain their competitive advantage within the sector (Thornton, 2012). As community pharmacies are a customer service led business, this study will investigate the type and levels of occupational stress that employees are experiencing as a result of their organisation’s cost saving initiatives and consequently the impact on the overall performance of the business.

The implementation of these cuts results in pharmacies having to employ cost saving initiatives to offset the reduction in turnover, ensuring the viability of the business through efficient and effective practices. As wages are the biggest expense in the business, the number of staff employed must be justified in terms of turnover and according to Fitzgerald Power (Power, 2012) “there has been an average reduction in turnover of 20.58% in pharmacies throughout Ireland since 2009”. They suggest that pharmacies reacted to reduced turnover and profit levels by cutting wage costs and reducing staff numbers. Wage costs have a major effect on the profitability of any pharmacy but reducing staff numbers and wages as a cost effective strategy has an impact on the remaining employees. Broadbridge, Swanson and Taylor (2000) state that pharmacy management need to consider the long term benefits gained from adopting such a lean structure, for example, what impact has reduced staff numbers have on the remaining employees. It is from this observation that the research will

be conducted. Reducing staff levels means increased workload, time pressures, tighter deadlines, reduced productivity from remaining employees along with increased absenteeism, increased labour turnover and reduced customer service levels (Hassell, Jacobs and Johnson, 2013). This research will investigate the impact of these changes on the employees occupational stress levels and the knock on effect this has on the organisation's overall performance.

There is a significant amount of research available on occupational stress relating to different sectors and industries. However, the research that is conducted on occupational stress in the Irish community pharmacy sector focuses mainly on the pharmacist. However, from literature reviewed, there is increasing recognition of the importance of the contribution of front line staff to the retail experience where the delivery of high levels of customer service add value to the customer's retail experience (Broadbridge et al., 2000). This in turn promotes consumer loyalty and is the pharmacy sector's unique selling point. The research conducted will therefore focus on the importance of managing occupational stress levels in front of shop pharmacy staff.

Conducting research on occupational stress was very important to the author. As the manager of a large retail pharmacy, it is apparent every day that the fast and continually changing pharmacy environment impacts on all of the employees. With the focus on increased competitiveness, achieving greater efficiencies, reducing staff numbers and the increased job demands while always delivering exceptional customer service, high levels of occupational stress occur frequently.

As a result " this places a premium on organisations on being able to understand the causes and consequences of occupational stress, so that appropriate policies and practices can be developed to ameliorate these concerns" (Hart and Cooper, 2001).

# Chapter 2 - Literature Review

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## 2.1 Introduction

‘82% of Irish workers face increased stress at work’ – reported the Irish Examiner newspaper in 2015 (Percival, 2015). This growing level of occupational stress in today’s modern working world can be attributed to growing globalisation, rapid technological advancements, intense local and global competition along with automation of work processes (Babatunde, 2013). As also suggested by Sparks and Cooper, (2001) this has led to employees observing a gradual loss of control over their working lives as they believe that their jobs are less secure and they have to work at a faster pace than previous working generations.

This study is about the occupational stress that front of shop pharmacy employees are now experiencing as a result of the impact of cost saving initiatives introduced by their employers, which are because of austerity measures implemented by the Irish government in 2009. While there is a significant amount of research available on occupational stress relating to different sectors and industries, any research focusing on pharmacy staff is related to the pharmacists and there is little research conducted on the impact of occupational stress on pharmacy employees, specifically staff that work in the front of the stores. This target population is relevant as there is increasing recognition of the importance of the contribution of front line staff to the retail experience where the delivery of high levels of customer service add value to the customer’s retail experience (Broadbridge et al., 2000). In today’s exceptionally competitive retail pharmacy market, delivering a high level of personalised customer service promotes consumer loyalty and is a pharmacy’s unique selling point. The research conducted will therefore focus on the importance of managing occupational stress levels in front of shop pharmacy staff. As all Irish pharmacies have to implement cost saving initiatives to remain profitable, front line staff are always affected. Cost saving strategies in an organisation generally include reducing staff numbers which can be stressful for employees.

This chapter will review a number of different pieces of work in relation to occupational stress; in particular it will provide a definition of occupational stress. It will then look at the different theories / models of occupational stress being identified as being relevant to this piece of work. It will study the role of leaders in an organisation in relation to employees' occupational stress and then what the organisation's role is in managing an employee's occupational stress. It will consider the relationship between employees' occupational stress and the implications for the organisation as a whole. It will review previous research methods involving occupational stress and identify any gaps in this research.

## **2.2 Key Definition of Occupational Stress**

The definition of stress has evolved from originally being defined as 'conceived pressure from the environment' to 'strain from the person' to occupational stress currently being defined as 'interaction between a situation and individual' (Michie, 2002). It is 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work' (Hassell et al., 2013). While all of the literature agrees that pressure can be a positive and motivating factor in performing well, stress occurs when this pressure becomes excessive. While all of the literature reviewed agrees that occupational stress is a big problem, there are differing opinions on what actually causes it.

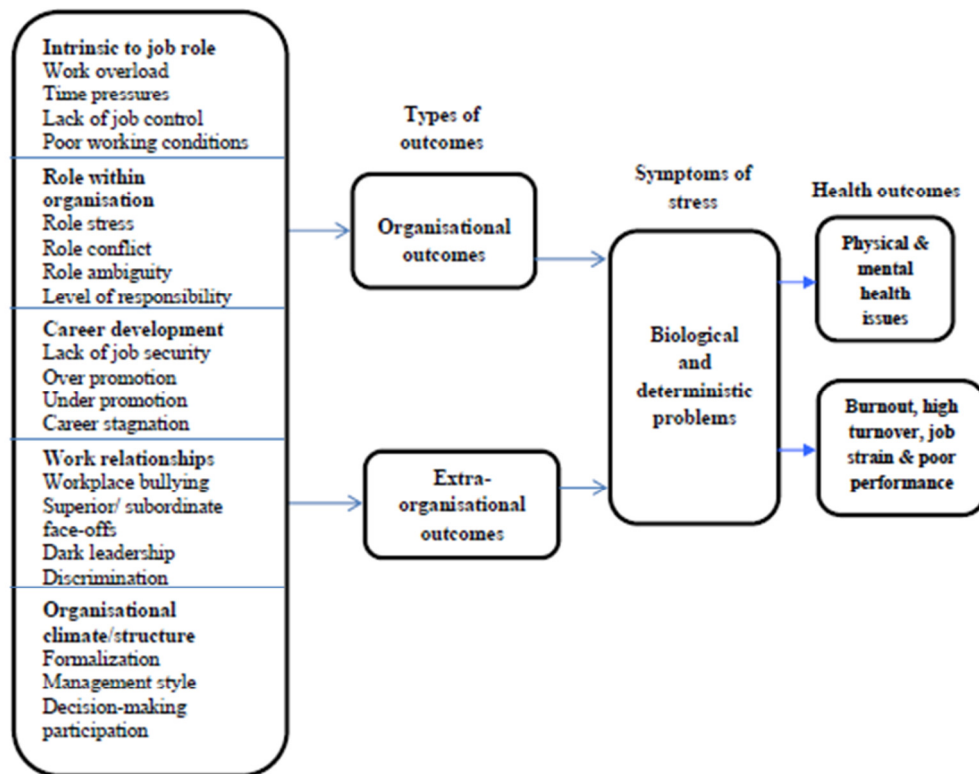


Figure 1 Framework of work-related stress & outcomes

Occupational stress is the internal and external factors that have an impact on an employee's performance and the employee's capacity of coping with these factors will determine the level of stress experienced. According to a report by the Pharmaceutical Journal, occupational stress affects employees' physical, psychological and emotional health as well as their behaviours. As the (HSE, 2017) explain, stress in itself is not an illness but excessive or prolonged stress can lead to ill health. While stress can be a positive, motivating factor helping people achieve their goals and enhance their performance, it is when stress becomes excessive, that it has negative consequences.

Stress is recognised as a major health hazard in today's organisations and is a major contributor to impacting on a person's emotional, social and family life (Sapountzi-Krepia, 2003). Job or occupational stress arises when there is an imbalance between

the demands placed on an employee and their abilities and skills to deal with these job demands. Similarly, it can lead to low motivation and morale, a decrease in performance, sick leave, accidents, low job satisfaction, low quality products and services, poor internal communication and conflicts (Cooper and Schabracq, 2000); (McHugh, 1993) Employees will feel stress commonly in the workplace. A stressful situation can arise from overwork, unfair job demands, pressure to speed up work, excessive monitoring of performance, long hours of work, a lack of support, low pay, understaffing and poor relationships with colleagues (Rehman and Sohail, 2015). Buchanan and Huczynski (2004) argue that environmental factors are also a stressor to employees, such as inadequate physical working environment, inappropriate job design, poor management style, uncertain future and divided loyalties. They state that increasing an employee's workload without a similar increase in the availability of staff to carry out the work can also lead to occupational stress. As Bland (1999) also states stressors can include inadequate time to complete work, too much work, a stressful environment and problems with partners, boss or colleague, contributing to stress levels experienced by the employee. Michie and Williams (2003) also state that aspects of the working environment such as workload/pressure, lack of control over work and poor support from managers can have harmful effects upon employees.

Stress is widely accepted to have two opposite effects on individuals, positive and negative. Acceptable level of stress helps to improve an individual's performance whilst excessive amounts of stress can lead to decreased performance (Stevenson and Harper, 2006). However, some individuals may be better able to cope with higher job demands if they actively seek out roles that are challenging, in order to gain advancement opportunities. As a result, these individuals may not experience high stress levels (Steiber and Pichler, 2015). This view is shared by Kar and Mishra (2015) who argue that the personal traits of an employee can determine the level of stress they experience from their job or situation.

The negative impact of stress on employees, in turn also has a negative impact on the organisation (Hassell et al., 2013). Absenteeism, an increase in staff turnover, reduced productivity and poor performance would all be examples. Similarly, (Cooper and Schabracq, 2000) agree that occupational stress is linked to low motivation, high turnover sick leave, conflict and low job satisfaction. Occupational



stress is not a new issue, however all of the research available shows that the negative effects of occupational stress has adverse effects on the health of employees and on the organisation overall (Rehman and Sohail, 2015).

To conclude, while all of the literature indicates that occupational stress can have either positive or negative effects on individuals, the evidence does suggest that acceptable levels of stress can actually help improve employee performance while excessive levels of stress lead to decreased performance (Stevenson and Harper, 2006). It is managing the levels of negative stress that the employees experience that is important, for both the individual and the organisation.

### **2.3 Theories related to occupational stress**

Work is a significant source of stress and so occupational stress has a considerable impact on an individual's physical and mental health ((NIOSH), 1999). Some critics argue that occupational stress is caused by role ambiguity or role conflict (Sharma, Sharma and Devi, 2012) some such as Hurrell (1995) suggest that stress is an employee problem rather than an organisational issue and others such as (Michie, 2002) argue that pressure from the work environment leads to the person feeling pressure. However, all of the literature reviewed agrees that occupational stress is an important issue and that it can have positive or negative effects, for both the employees and the organisation (Ongori and Agolla, 2008) (Armstrong, 2001) (Stickle and Scott, 2016).

There are too many occupational stress theories/models for the author to discuss fully in this review. Therefore, the models that are most relevant to the target population in this study are discussed. The four main models are:

1. Karasek Demands-Control Model
2. Person-Environment Fit Model
3. Beehr and Newman Model (1978)
4. Institute for Social Research Model

## Karasek Demands-Control Model

The Karasek (1979) Demands-Control model of stress suggests that the level of job control along with the level of decision making that an employee has in their role, will determine the level of stress they experience in their job. Karasek's model discusses the stress related outcomes of high job demands that are psychological, for example, the anxiety associated with not getting a job completed on time. The model suggests that where an employee has high job demands and high level of control, that it has positive outcomes such as motivation and learning for the employee. In contrast, where an employee has low job demands and low control, the employee will generally end up being dissatisfied in their role. However, Miller (1979) argues 'that the level of control that an employee perceives they have in their job, even if it remains unexercised, has a significant impact on the felt stressfulness of demanding or threatening situations'. However, Barling, Kelloway and Frone (2005) argue that Karasek's model is aimed at explaining individual level health related outcomes, more than the organisational ones.

According to the person-environment fit model, similarity between personal characteristics and work environment characteristics leads to positive outcomes, whereas a mismatch leads to unfavourable outcomes. High control levels will suit some employees, low control may suit others. The personality characteristics included in the job demand model suggest that an important underlying issue could be the individual's coping style. A mismatch between the perceived level of control and the employee's coping style will intensify the negative effect (Doef and Maes, 1999).

It is argued by Akerboom and Maes (2006) that Karasek's model focuses on the impact of job characteristics on worker outcomes suggesting that a high workload or high job demands with low control leads to ill health. They suggest that this high demand, low control, low support work environment is what results in the highest incidences of health problems in employees. On reviewing Karasek's model, it does indeed focus on the individual risk factors of occupational stress and does not focus on the corresponding effect on the organisation. Bridger, Day and Morton (2013a) agree that less is known about the effects of stress at an organisational level i.e. turnover, productivity and absenteeism.

## Person-Environment Fit Model

French (1973) developed this model, suggesting that ‘the match between a person and their work environment is key in influencing their health’. This model suggests that in a person’s job, the key factors influencing their health is that their attitude, abilities, resources and demands of the job match their knowledge and skills potential. A lack of fit between the two (either subjective or objective), between the person and their environment, then the greater the strain leading to reduced productivity, health related issues and other work problems (French, Caplan and Harrison, 1982). However, Lazarus (1991) argues that this model doesn’t take into account that the fit between a person and their environment is constantly changing.

When an employee experiences occupational stress, it can firstly have a positive or a negative effect on the person. Cotton and Hart (2003) suggest that ‘the consequences of occupational stress are twofold’. The level of stress experienced will affect the individual, which in turn has consequences for the organisation, through symptoms and costs. The effect of experiencing occupational stress on the individual manifests itself through ill health, poor working relationships with colleagues and management, anxiety and/or depression.

Bakker, Demerouti and Euwema (2005) argue that a revised view on the demand-resources stress model suggests that the risk and resources needed to control stress levels in employees is specific to their actual occupation, i.e. each role has its own demands which cause stress but also resources which can help to control stress (Bakker et al., 2005).

All occupations have stressors, so the retail sector is no different. However previous research by Tuckey, Boyd, Winefield, Bohm, Winefield, Lindsay, and Black (2016) suggests that retailing has some unique factors which cause it to be identified as an above average stressful occupation, such as difficult customers and the broad range of possible job stressors faced by retail workers on a daily basis.

### **Beehr and Newman Model (1978)**

A large number of job characteristics have been proposed as stressors by (Beehr and Newman, 1978). Depending on an individual's characteristics interacting with their work environment, this will lead to consequences for both the employee and the organisation. It is stated by Kar and Mishra (2015) that 'the personal characteristics of an employee can determine the extent of stress they may experience in a situation'. It is suggested that some individuals are more susceptible to stress at work than others, and that these individuals will experience stress regardless of their job demands or environment (Giga et al., 2003). It suggests that an employee will take action that will lessen the stress experienced.

### **ISR Model**

Developed by the Institute for Social Research (ISR) this model focuses on the reaction of employees to their work environment, such as the amount of work they are given to do. This reaction can be psychological, physical or behavioural, and if the response is negative for a long period of time, it can lead to occupational stress having consequences for both the individual and/or the organisation.

## **2.4 Impact on Retail Pharmacy Employees**

As providing excellent customer service to customers is such an integral part of a pharmacy sales assistant role, how they perform in this through their service role can have a major impact on an organisation's performance. As Menon & Dubé, (2004) state 'the employee's attitude and behaviours towards customers determine customers' perceived service quality and satisfaction, which in turn impacts organisational performance'. Frontline employees are caught in a balancing act in aiming to meet customers' service demands and in turn having to meet their management's productivity and performance requirements. As a result, an organisation should want to assist in controlling their employees' occupational stress levels, as if they don't their behaviour and attitude can have a profound effect on their level of customer service their shoppers may experience, resulting in negative outcomes.

All of the literature indicates that there is a strong link between stress at work and its effect on the employees. Occupational stress is not a new phenomenon but all of the studies show that there is a strong relationship between stress at work and its physical and psychological effects on the individual (Rehman and Sohail, 2015). Many previous studies concentrate on general occupational stress, with a minority focusing on retail workers, and even less looking at pharmacy front of shop workers.

## **2.5 Leadership Style and its impact on occupational stress**

It is the function of management in an organisation to continue to operate in a changing environment despite their employees experiencing occupational stress (Ongori and Agolla, 2008). It is the management's responsibility to adapt to changes and to assist employees in stress management techniques. They need to ensure that employees have the necessary training and skillset to ensure they are able to support any changes that are made by the management. Commitment is necessary from senior management to assure staff that managing stress is important.

Employers have a responsibility and a duty of care to look after their employees. Where an employee feels that their job role/tasks are unclear i.e. role ambiguity this can lead to stress (IBEC, 2011). An employer should ensure that all policies and procedures are clear to avoid any confusion. Niall O'Callaghan of Mercer stated that 'employers who proactively look to provide support and resources to help staff manage stress will see dividends in terms of improved productivity and morale, along with lower staff turnover' (Percival, 2015). When employees are experiencing negative stress at work it affects their levels of engagement and then they in turn are not delivering their best results for their employer, resulting in negative outcomes for the organisation.

Management must develop appropriate interventions to manage stress within their organisations (Ongori and Agolla, 2008). All of the literature reviewed for this study agrees that the support and involvement of supervisors, managers and role models along with active leadership at the top of the organisation are required in order for a company to assist its employees in managing their occupational stress

levels. Line managers in particular are crucial in identifying any of their team who may be experiencing high stress levels. Additionally, senior management need to show commitment to their employees in managing occupational stress through the company's stress management agenda and need to drive the culture where they show that it is taken seriously (Robertson, 2016). The leaders of an organisation have the greatest influence over working conditions, job demands and environment and so any changes or intervention strategies must be driven from the top down.

Armstrong (2001) goes so far as to state that 'the main risk factors associated with workplace stress are related to deficiencies in the design and management of work'.

The literature all agrees that the employer should ensure that all of the organisational structures, policies and procedures are clear, unambiguous and not cause confusion or difficulties for its employees. Clearly defined job roles, providing adequate training and assisting in the job demands that are placed on employees, will all go towards helping to control employees' occupational stress (IBEC, 2013). It is the management's responsibility to adapt to changes and to assist employees in stress management techniques. They need to ensure that employees have the necessary training and skillset to ensure that they are able to support any changes that are made by management. Demonstrating to employees that managing occupational stress is important to the company is necessary to show commitment.

## **2.6 Occupational Stress Interventions**

Dewe, O'Driscoll and Cooper, (2010) stated that 'enough research has been conducted on what causes people to get ill in the workplace... that it is solutions to these problems that is now needed'. Inevitably, stress will occur in the workplace, it is helping employees to cope with it through interventions that are required. It is argued by Nielsen, Taris and Cox (2010) that interventions to prevent occupational stress and to improve the well-being of employees do not work. Neck and Cooper (2000) agree that interventions put in place to help employees, generally do not affect the subordinate employees who are affected by changes in the organisation the most.

Cooper, Geurts and Kompier (2000) argue “that organisations should focus on reducing the stressors at work rather than focusing on reducing the effects of stress and state that the level of intervention from an organisation is a barrier to progress in reducing work related stress”. This would suggest that in times of change it is even more important that organisations commit to stress management strategies to help prevent and manage occupational stress (Hassell et al., 2013).

Any organisation that is undertaking to introduce stress management initiatives, should perform a proper needs assessment to ensure that the benefits to its employees are maximised and to ensure that it is not just a paper exercise. Good communication between employees and management will enhance the success of any interventions introduced that are aimed at improving employee well-being, and which subsequently will have a positive impact on the organisation (Sparks et al., 2001).

## **2.7 Previous research methodologies used (and their limitations)**

Previous research into occupational stress has been predominately quantitative based as the target population may be reluctant to share their experiences or coping mechanisms used in dealing with stress. An example would be the personal impact stress has on their working lives and personal relationships, so in this study quantitative research will be the method used, which is consistent with previous research methods , i.e. (Ramakrishna and Ravinarayana, 2016) ,(Blumberga and Austruma, 2015).

Existing research demonstrates the link between stress and employee turnover, suggesting that stress management interventions will benefit the employer, by helping the employee (Bridger et al., 2013a). The investment of organisations in the recruitment and training of employees is lost when staff leave, costing the organisation money while placing extra demands on the staff that remains. Organisations need to invest more in stress management strategies. To help identify

employees at risk, individual differences need to be known to identify what contributes to stress and burnout (Childs and Stoeber, 2012).

## **2.8 Gaps in current research**

It has been suggested by Levi, Sauter and Shimomitsu, (1999) that “enough research has been conducted on the link between stress and ill health, and between job stressors and strain outcomes”. They suggest that more research is needed on stress management interventions. However Kahn and Byosiere (1992) argue that previous studies focused on reducing stress management rather than reducing the stressors. As there is no stress management interventions available to the target population that will be used for this study, the research conducted will focus on identifying stress management techniques that are needed in the retail pharmacy sector.

The literature reviewed suggests that stress can be either good or bad but that the key is to develop strategies and coping skills to help individual employees manage their stress through stress management plans. Each employee handles stress differently according to his or her individual character and behaviour. An employee’s coping behaviours are difficult to change so individual stress management programs are needed to help staff with stressful situations (Cooper and Kenny, 2003). Existing research states that further studies are needed in order to have practical and efficient interventions to manage occupational stress in organisations and to facilitate employee’s practical stress management techniques (Ongori and Agolla, 2008).

The existing literature recommends that further research is needed in the cost to the organisation between workload and occupational stress. It also states that research is needed into the relationship between the impact of workloads, staffing and skill mix and the impact that these have on absenteeism, staff turnover and reduced productivity (Hassell et al., 2013).

The literature reviewed agrees that occupational stress is a leading factor in contributing to ill health in employees. When occupational stress has a negative impact on employees, in turn this has a negative impact on the organisation (Hassell



et al., 2013). It is important for organisations to continually evaluate their current stress management practices and to develop person-focused techniques to help staff manage their own coping mechanisms (Dewe, O’Driscoll and Cooper, 2012). As suggested by Ongori and Agolla (2008) managers need to understand and develop strategies and interventions to manage and minimise stress in their organisations .

According to the pharmacy journal , pharmacies are experiencing an unprecedented level of workplace pressure as changes in organisational structures, cultures and management practices combine with demands of newer pharmacy roles and public expectations . Pharmacy employers have a responsibility and a duty of care towards their employees, for developing programmes that focus on addressing occupational stress, but to also have a personalised strategy to help them cope with the stress is beneficial.

Some literature suggests that any future research on this topic should be more occupation specific. McElfatrick, Carson, Annett, Cooper, Holloway and Kuipers (2000) suggests that ‘ the coping habits of a single occupational group can only be measured properly if an occupation-specific measure is used’.

## **2.9 Literature Review Conclusion**

All of the literature reviewed shows that there is a very strong link between occupational stress and the physical, psychological and behavioural effects it has on employees. It is obvious that these outcomes can have major implications for both an organisation and an employee. The majority of previous studies concentrate on general occupational stress, with a minority focusing on retail workers, and even less studies looking at pharmacy front of shop workers. For this reason, this study will focus on front of shop pharmacy employees.

It is not clearly apparent what the community pharmacy sector are doing to manage the workplace stress of their employees (Hassell et al., 2013). I would conclude that it is impossible to eliminate stressors within a retail pharmacy as it is such a fast moving and evolving sector, but what is needed are interventions/strategies, supported fully by top management to help employees to cope with their occupational stress levels.

Having studied the existing literature, we have settled on the definition of stress. We have also looked at potential sources of occupational stress and these will now lead us into the development of our research. The research that will be conducted by this study will identify how the employers of retail pharmacy stores can help employees identify their stressors and how to manage their levels of stress through the use of stress management techniques available to them in the organisation.

The objective of this research is to identify the leading causes of occupational stress within the Irish community pharmacy sector and to determine what the solutions are to minimise its effects, on both the individual and the organisation.

# Chapter 3 - Research Questions

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In today's workplace environment, occupational stress is on the increase. It is clear from the literature reviewed in this study that is a global problem and impacts employees in all professions. The overall aim of this research is to investigate the levels of occupational stress that front line employees within an Irish retail pharmacy chain are experiencing. The relationship between several individual, environmental and organisational factors that employees experience daily will be analysed to determine how these factors affects their occupational stress levels.

The main research objective for this study is:

***‘ An investigation into the occupational stress that Irish Community Pharmacy Employees are experiencing and the impact that this has on the organisation’s overall performance’***

The sub-objectives for the study are as follows:

1. To identify the causes of occupational stress in the front of shop employees in Irish community pharmacies
2. Is the organisation or the individual employee responsible for managing the individual's level of occupational stress?
3. How can the risk of occupational stress be managed by the organisation and what is its role?
4. What intervention strategies can be implemented in retail pharmacies for managing levels of occupational stress in the workplace?
5. Do stress levels increase at certain times?

# Chapter 4 – Methodology

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## 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to identify the leading causes of occupational stress within the Irish retail pharmacy employees of a specific pharmacy chain. Research shows that significant changes have taken place within this sector over the last number of years and there is a corresponding impact on employees, with the front of shop employees being impacted first (Power, 2015). This study hopes to identify the leading causes of occupational stress within this subgroup of pharmacy employees and from the research carried out identify the solutions needed to minimise its effect on both the individual and the organisation.

This chapter will explore the research methods used in this study and discuss why they were appropriate, relevant and served the correct purpose needed to gather the data necessary in order to answer the research question. It will also discuss why certain methods were used and will justify why other methods were not. It will also identify the limitations encountered by the researcher due to the time constraints with this research. (Fuller and Tinkham, 2002, Clarke and Cooper, 2000)

## 4.2 Research Philosophy

How a researcher views the world will determine which research philosophy they adopt and will justify the research method used. Whichever philosophy is chosen will depend on the research objectives of the study Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) (Bridger et al., 2013b). Saunders et al (2009) developed the research ‘onion’ to demonstrate the different stages a researcher must pass when considering an effective methodology. The positivist approach in research lends itself to analysing data gathered through quantitative methods

Using the positivist method, allows the validity of findings through replication and this means that findings can be very useful in organisations to promote organisational effectiveness and efficiency (Hogan and Sinclair, 1996). A main goal of this study for the researcher is to use the data gathered and analysed to help

introduce occupational stress management interventions to help improve the work environment for the participants of the study.

The nature of the research objectives for this study has led to a deductive approach being taken.

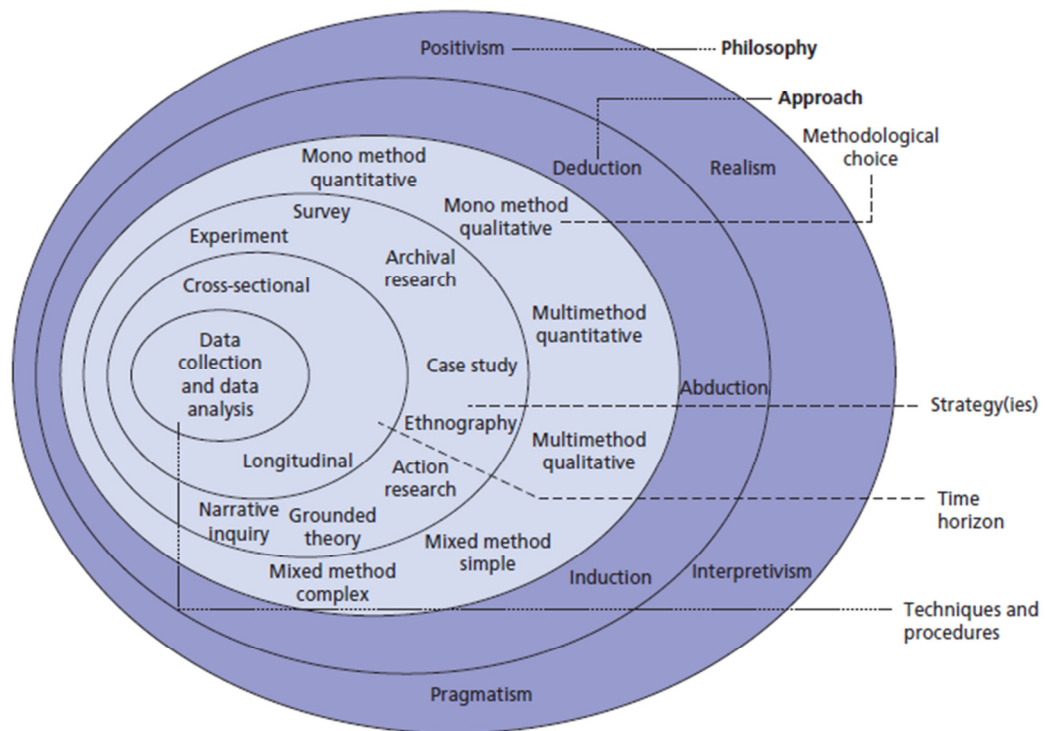


Figure 2 : The Research 'Onion' Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill

### 4.3 Research Design

This study employed an exploratory, cross-sectional survey design to assess the levels of occupational stress in a sample of front line employees in a specific retail pharmacy group. The purpose of the design enabled the researcher to identify the factors that lead to increased levels of occupational stress that front line employees may experience in their day-to-day working lives.

A descriptive questionnaire was used as it established employees' attitudes, views and opinions of the factors leading them to experience varying levels of occupational

stress in their working day. Distributing an online questionnaire is an inexpensive research method and takes little time to conduct.

#### **4.4 Sampling frame**

The researcher selected the front of shop pharmacy employees only, within one specific retail pharmacy chain in Ireland to be participants for this study. This deliberate choice of participant was required as the employees who work in the front of the shops have the knowledge, experience and opinions required to provide the data necessary for analysis in this research. In total one hundred and fifty employees were invited to participate in the study. The literature shows that this target population, of front line staff is relevant as there is increasing recognition of the importance of the contribution of them to the retail experience where the delivery of high levels of customer service add value to the customer's retail experience (Broadbridge et al., 2000). In this study, managers, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians were not selected to participate in the questionnaire, as the focus of the study was to measure the level of occupational stress experienced by employees who work in the front of the stores only.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability method of deliberately choosing the participants to be involved in the research process. It is used when the researcher has a very specific purpose and so the sample selected includes people of interest and excludes the people who do not suit the purpose (Ilker, Abubakar and Alkassim, 2016). While purposive sampling is not an ideal method for statistical analysis, in this study it was necessary due to the time and resources constraints of getting the analysis completed in a specific time-frame and the size of the organisation. However, being an employee of the named organisation was an advantage in getting access to distribute the questionnaire in relation to the research topic that may not be available to other researchers.

In any future research conducted where time and resources are not a factor, the COPSOQ questionnaire could be circulated to all retail pharmacies in Ireland using the probability sampling method. The use of random sampling would be the best method to ensure that every retail pharmacy employee, i.e. managers, pharmacists,

pharmacy technicians and front of shop employees, have a chance of being selected to participate in the research. As a result the researcher could generalise to the whole retail pharmacy population in Ireland and the larger the sample used, the more generalised the results will be.

Employee profile details held by Human Resources for the employees (sample population) provided the email addresses required to circulate the questionnaire. The questionnaire was emailed to the HR department to be reviewed and approved and was then circulated to the sample population because data protection legislation means the researcher does not have access to that personal data. Accessing the necessary employees' email addresses in this way ensured that all of the employee profile information was accurate and up to date. This aligns with good practice in sampling frames as indicated by (Denscombe, 2010) , by ensuring that the profiles of the sample population are relevant, complete, precise and up-to-date.

To reduce participant / subject bias and to ensure complete anonymity to the participants, HR circulated the questionnaire directly to the participants. Anonymity was assured as the when the questionnaire responses were returned via email, the link in Google Documents to view senders email address was switched off. Initially some concern was indicated by the organisation in relation to some of the questions in the survey due to their sensitive nature. The researcher assured the senior management of the confidentiality and anonymity of the survey and subsequently highlighted the positive approach that could be taken from the study, for example, some individual or organisational learning's for future benefits.

## **4.5 Research Instrument**

A wide range of different data collection methods were used in previous studies conducted on occupational stress and they were analysed through the literature review process. The use of a questionnaire was the research instrument eventually settled on for this study. According to (Saunders et al., 2009) 'the use of a questionnaire as a data collection tool is one of the most widely used data collection techniques as it provides an efficient way of collecting responses from a large sample prior to quantitative analysis'. Resources available to the researcher for the

period of this study also had an influence on the instrument chosen. It is essential that the research objectives be answered through the method selected. It also needed to be a valid and reliable method in order to ensure that it would measure what it was intended to measure and to ensure consistency.

As stated by Saunders et al (2009) ‘the design of any questionnaire affects the response rate and the reliability and validity of the data collected’. To fulfil these requirements, an already developed questionnaire may be used by a researcher, according to Bourque and Clark (1994), so the questionnaire selected was the established Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) (see fig. 4) developed by the Danish National Research Centre for Working Environment. It is a proven instrument tool in gathering valid and reliable information for assessing psychological stress and stress at work. It can also be used within the scope of an organisation’s risk assessment (COPSOQ.ie) . It includes the main theories of work including the Job-Strain, Demand Control-Support and Effort-Reward-Imbalance models, making it useful in any workplace ([www.copsoq-network.org](http://www.copsoq-network.org)). This questionnaire has been used in many comparative studies in various European countries to help employers make decisions on preventative measures in the workplace and proves the validity of its use in organisations (Berthelsen, Hakanen, Kristensen, Lonnblad and Westerland (2016). A number of validation studies on the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire can also be viewed on the COPSOQ website. Another benefit of using the COPSOQ questionnaire is that “ it is generic in the sense that it is applicable across job groups and provides a broad and detailed description of the working environment” (Kristensen, 2001).



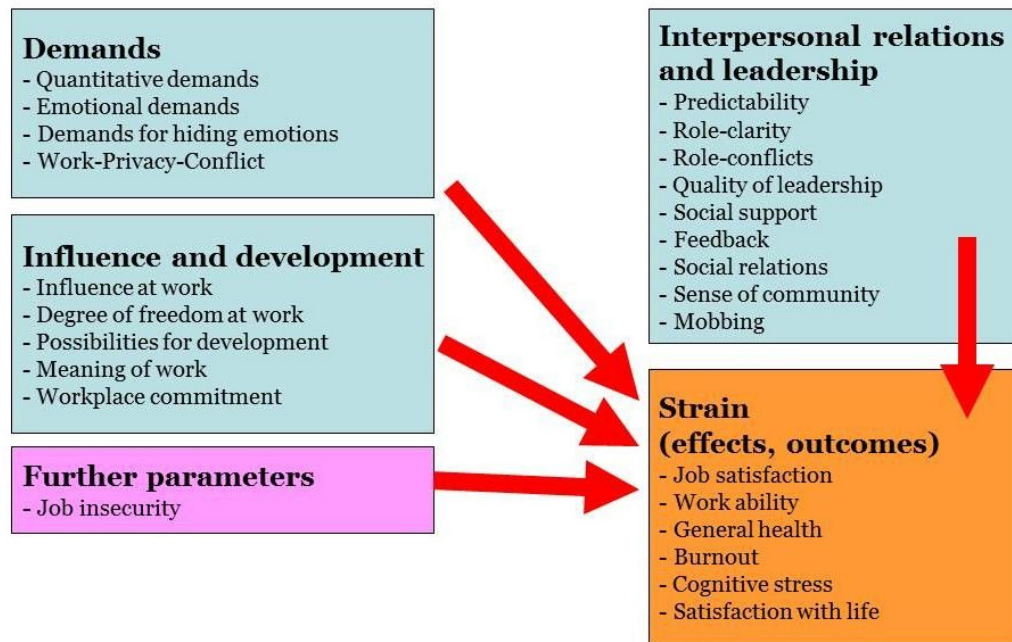


Figure 3: COPSOQ Questionnaire Factors

Having selected a questionnaire as the appropriate research instrument it was essential that it would provide the data needed that could be statistically analysed. The COPSOQ descriptive questionnaire was chosen as it would provide the ‘particular characteristics of a specific population of employees’ at a fixed time for comparative purposes’ (Gill and Johnson, 2010). In this way, a representative sample of the population for this organisation was achieved ensuring that the findings would be accurate and specific to this company.

The questionnaire used was an intranet-mediated questionnaire, circulated electronically using the e-mail addresses stored by the HR department of the company. Witmer, Colman and Katzman (1999) state that questionnaires circulated via personal email addresses, ‘offer greater control because most users read and respond to their own email’. Having the questionnaire distributed in this manner ensured that the respondents of the sample population, i.e. front of shop employees only, received and answered the questionnaire.

The first section of the questionnaire was the introduction to explain clearly and concisely why the participant was been invited to take part in the study.

Dillman (2007) argues that to ‘achieve as high a response rate as possible, this should be done on the first page of the questionnaire’. In this section, the respondents were also assured of complete anonymity, confidentiality and their option to withdraw from participating at any time. Confidentiality and participant consent freely given are important factors in any research questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents by answering a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question on the first page on whether ‘they agreed to participate in the survey or not’.

## **4.6 Questions**

The COPSOQ questionnaire used in this study contains 41 questions using the Likert scale. The respondents answered on a five point scale, (from “strongly agree” = 5 to “strongly disagree” = 1) to measure how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a statement. According to Batchelor, Bloor, Owens and Read, (1994), ‘attitudinal measures in the form of Likert scale can generate more valid data than single measures alone’. An open-ended question was included at the end of the survey where the respondent could provide any additional feedback on the questions asked if they needed to.

## **4.7 Pilot Test of Questionnaire**

Pilot testing a questionnaire is essential to ensure that the data collected will provide the correct information to answer the research questions. Pilot testing allows any changes needed to be done prior to the questionnaire being distributed to the sample population.

While the use of established questionnaires means that no pilot testing is required, for this study the researcher did conduct a pilot test in order to ensure that all questions were easily understood and that no question was found to be difficult. The pilot test participants were encouraged to provide any feedback on the questionnaire, such as layout, structure, length of time to complete and any comments that they felt would assist in improving the questionnaire format. The researcher also added in a

free text question at the end of the questionnaire for any additional information that any of the participants felt they wanted to include. Any modification to an already established research instrument could affect its reliability and validity. However, this extra question did not affect the scales used to assess the stress levels being measured. The questionnaire was initially circulated to ten front line employees of the pharmacy group, selected at random through employee profiles to gain feedback on the questionnaire.

#### **4.8 Data Analysis**

The responses received from the questionnaire were uploaded from excel into the statistical software package (SPSS) version 23. The data was then collated and coded to facilitate analysis of the data. Exploratory data analysis was firstly conducted to help the researcher understand the data. Descriptive statistics determining the mean, and standard deviations were used. SPSS Inferential Non-parametric analysis was conducted throughout the analysis stage along with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) technique when the researcher wanted to explore any significant differences across groups. A correlation (Spearman) test was also used to test for changes in variables.

#### **4.9 Ethics**

Protection of participants' personal information, anonymity and confidentiality was considered at all times while carrying out the research process. The researcher consulted with senior management for their consent and approval prior to asking HR to circulate the questionnaire. It was extremely important for the researcher to ensure complete anonymity and confidentiality to the respondents as the researcher is a colleague. As (Gill and Johnson, 2010) suggest in order 'to establish trust with respondents to assure them of confidentiality and anonymity' it is essential for the researcher to establish his / her integrity. The introduction part of the survey explained the questionnaire's purpose and what the data would be used for, to fulfil this requirement.

## 4.10 Limitations of the Methodology

The research conducted for this study focused on an Irish retail pharmacy group. This specific sampling frame means that the results cannot represent any other retail sector or organisation. Further research is required to see if the findings from this study would have implications for other target populations, such as across the retail pharmacy sector, across other retail pharmacy chains, independent pharmacies and ultimately across other retail sectors, both across Ireland and within Europe. Conducting a wider analysis, such as a comparative study would provide richer data in relation to the research objectives stated. It would also provide more insights into the levels of occupational stress experienced by a wider population, ultimately increasing the generalisability of the research.

Ideally the researcher would use a mixed methods approach in any future research conducted. Conducting interviews and focus groups would provide more detailed information on the stressors within the organisation and would complement the data obtained through the questionnaires. Interviews would gather a more detailed perspective on the questions asked. Using two research techniques in this way is known as a mixed methods approach and provides triangulation. Triangulation is thought to help overcome any bias that comes from using just one method – using multiple methods to address the same questions will improve the data gathered (Gill and Johnson, 2010) and would check the validity of any findings.

As the sample used in this research was small, the data collected along with the results cannot be replicated on a larger scale. The use of purposive sampling, therefore reduces the generalizability of this study. As the results from this study are specific to the present sample, further research is needed to replicate the findings in more representative samples.

The researcher of this study is an employee of this organisation so some bias may be introduced as a result. The use of an already established questionnaire helped to minimise this.

## **4.11 Methodology conclusion**

In this chapter, we have discussed the factors that contributed to the chosen research methods approach adopted and the research design selected and why they were the most appropriate in this study. We have also considered the research limitations that indicate where future research can be conducted in this area.

# Chapter 5 - Data Analysis and Results

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## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the analysis of the data gathered in this study and will then examine the results found. The results are based around the research question, which is to investigate the levels of stress experienced, by front of shop workers in an Irish community pharmacy group. It also reviews results that have become apparent from the data received through the questionnaire.

The established COPOSQ questionnaire (short workplace version) was used as the research instrument in this study. This version contains a number of questions relating to a variety of particular workplace demands that are placed on the employees. For this reason, a new set of scales were constructed, by grouping together the workplace factors to make 14 composite work scales in total. Finally, a complete COPSOQ Stress Composite Score was generated to measure the overall level of stress being experienced by front of shop employees.

The questionnaire was distributed to a total of 150 front of shop employees (N = 150) using Google documents and the responses were uploaded into an Excel file as they were received, each given a unique ID number. This file was then exported to SPSS software (version 23) and the data recoded to allow the statistical analysis to be undertaken. A total of 84 responses were received within the defined time-frame,

This chapter will focus on presenting the data obtained from the questionnaire through descriptive statistics and non-parametric analysis where relevant, in order to answer the research questions and to facilitate the discussion from the results, which will be presented in chapter 5 of the study.

## 5.2 Reliability Statistics Table

The Reliability Statistics Table below shows the value for Cronbach Alpha as .802 and demonstrates high reliability of the COPSOQ Questionnaire used for this study. A reliability test conducted through SPSS indicates a high level of internal consistency in relation to the specific sample, with a Cronbach Alpha of  $<.802$  for the 41 questions. The reliability statistics table re-confirms the validity and reliability of the researcher using the established COPSOQ questionnaire as the instrument for this research. As Sproull, (2004) indicates, ‘when an established instrument is used, instrument testing is not necessary’.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.802	41

Table 1 Cronbach Alpha for questionnaire

## 5.3 Demographic Variable of Respondents

### Gender Demographic

The majority of respondents were female, 76% (N = 64) and 24% were male (N=20) (see Table 2). This corresponds with the participation of female employees compared to male employees in the organisation. Participants ranged in age from under 21 years to three employees being over 60 years of age . A total of 84 participants responded to the questionnaire.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	20	23.8	23.8	23.8
	Female	64	76.2	76.2	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 Summary Statistics for Gender

**Breakdown of male vs female employees'**

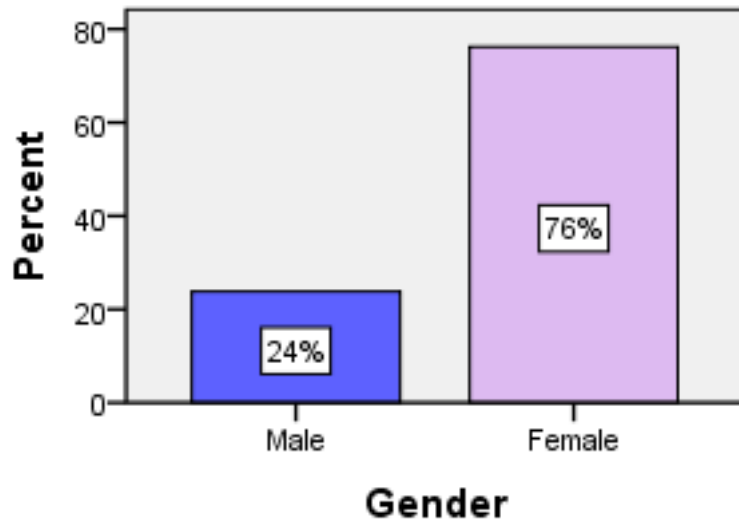


Figure 4 Gender Breakdown

**Age Demographic:**

All participants selected for this study were employees working in the front of the stores in this pharmacy group. This population was focused on as research shows that they are the first group to be impacted by cost saving measures in an organisation. 61% of participants are aged between 21 years and 40 years old. Age participation is shown in Figure 5 below:

**Age of employees within organisation**

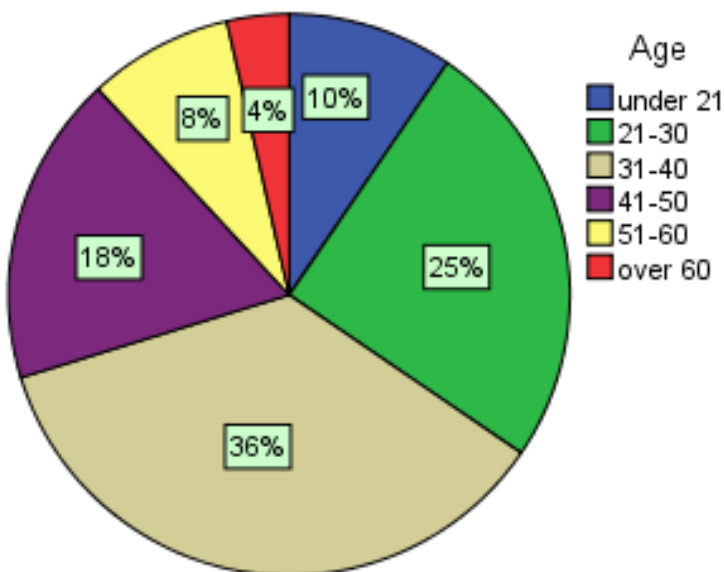


Figure 5 Pie chart of age demographic



## 5.4 Overall occupational stress levels

Results indicated that the majority of front of shop employees had average stress levels with no participant reporting a high level of work related stress.

Firstly, from analysing the data, a total composite stress score was created by combining all of the occupational stress subscales into one complete occupational stress scale, which would demonstrate the overall level of stress that employees felt they were experiencing – this is called the COPOSQ Stress Composite score. Results indicate that the respondents are experiencing average stress levels in this organisation:  $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = .347$  (see figure 6).

Results also show that there is little difference in the level of stress experienced by male and female employees : Male ( $M= 2.77$ ) and female ( $M = 2.93$ )

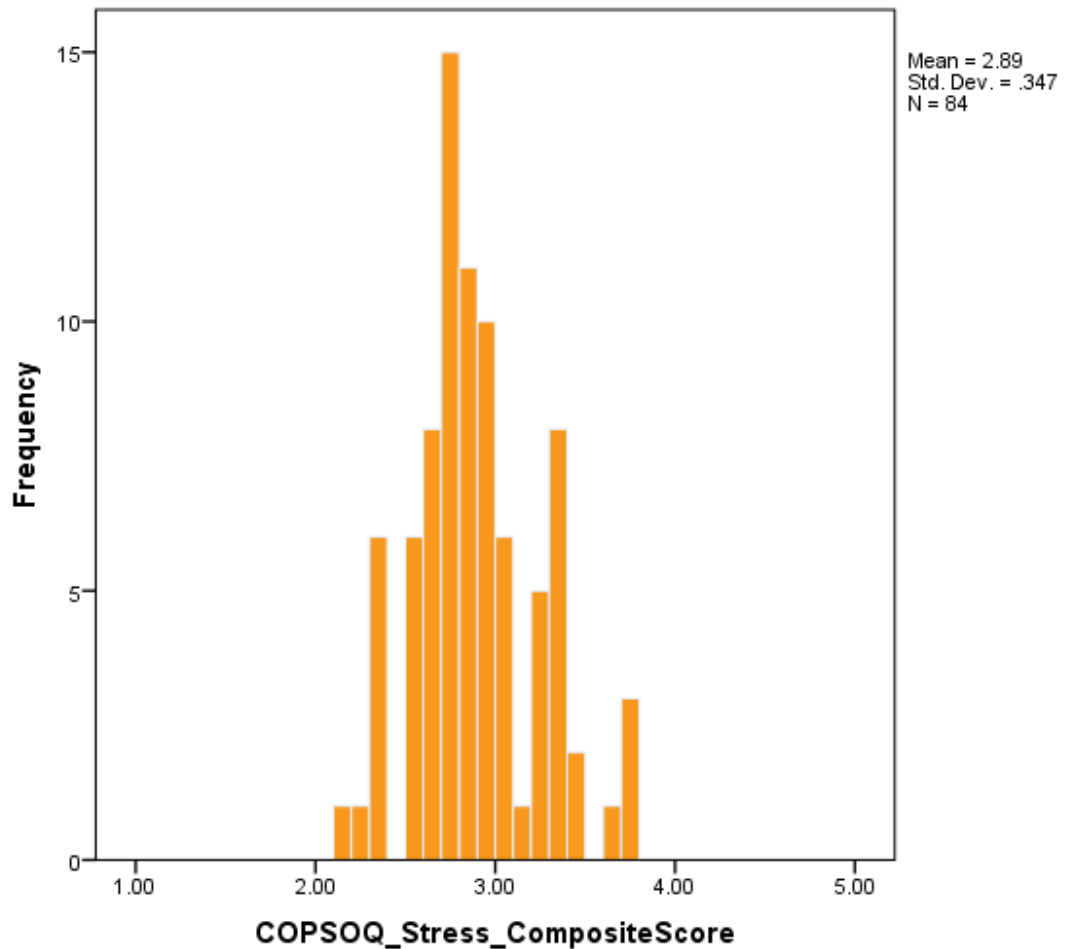


Figure 6 COPOSQ stress score

## 5.5 Research Question 1

*‘To identify the causes of occupational stress in the front of shop employees in Irish community pharmacies’*

The results were analysed to identify which stress factor contributes most to employee stress level in this organisation. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the Means which suggests that ‘insecurity at work’ is the factor which contributes most to the employees stress levels (M =3.77). ‘Influence at work’ is the second highest factor with M =3.60, and ‘commitment to the workplace’ ( M = 3.39) the third highest influencing factor. The mean value of each composite stress variable is shown below (see table 3).

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
composite insecurity at work	84	1.50	5.00	3.7798	1.00631
composite influence at work	84	1.11	5.00	3.6058	.85030
composite commitment to the workplace	84	1.50	5.00	3.3929	.83259
composite feedback	84	1.50	5.00	3.3333	.71698
composite social support	84	1.00	5.00	3.0000	.82870
composite role conflict	84	1.33	5.00	2.9841	.89608
composite predictability	84	1.00	4.50	2.9286	.81825
composite meaning of work	84	1.00	5.00	2.7619	.95840
Composite quantitative demands	84	1.33	3.67	2.5714	.55866
composite job satisfaction	84	1.75	4.00	2.5476	.55221
composite role clarity	84	1.00	4.00	2.4643	.72305
composite emotional demands	84	1.50	3.50	2.4524	.58915
composite quality of leadership	84	1.00	5.00	2.2738	1.16268
composite sense of community	84	1.00	4.50	1.9881	.83224
Valid N (listwise)	84				

Table 3 Composite Scores

## 5.6 Insecurity Level experienced by employees

$H_0$  : no difference in the level of insecurity at work experienced

$H_a$ : there is a difference in the level of insecurity experienced between the different departments

Analysis of variance showed a statistically significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level for the scores for the different departments staff worked in. A one way Anova Test was undertaken to ascertain if there exists a difference in the level of insecurity at work experienced by employees in relation to the department of the store they work in. A difference was observed at the 5% level of significance, between departments

and the level of insecurity experienced with  $p = .044$ . This result supports the alternative hypothesis that there is a relationship between the department an employee works in and the level of insecurity experienced (see table 4).

$$[F(2,81) = 3.25, p = 0.044]$$

#### ANOVA

composite insecurity at work

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.259	2	3.130	3.259	.044
Within Groups	77.791	81	.960		
Total	84.051	83			

Table 4 Anova - insecurity at work

An independent samples t-test was also conducted to examine if there were any differences in insecurity at work between male and female employees. Results showed that there was no significant difference between the two:

Male = (M = 4.00; SD = .760) compared to

Female = (M = 3.71; SD = 1.067) and  $p = .265$

Based on those results, an independent samples t-test was used to examine the differences in overall stress levels between the Over The Counter (OTC) department staff and the Cosmetics staff. A significant difference was observed, at the 5% level of significance, between the OTC employees and the Cosmetic employees. The results showed that stress levels for OTC employees were higher (M = 2.95; SD = .340) than those for cosmetic employees (M = 2.77; SD = .361);  $t = 2.16, p = .034$

## 5.7 How stress levels impact employee's performance

$H_0$  : ...that stress levels do not impact employee performance

$H_a$ : ...that there is a relationship between stress levels and employee performance

Employees were asked to self-report on their performance levels in the workplace.

Figure 7 shows that 47 % of employees believe they deliver above average performance and 26% report as giving an excellent performance in their role

suggesting that any occupational stress experienced by them is not affecting their work performance.

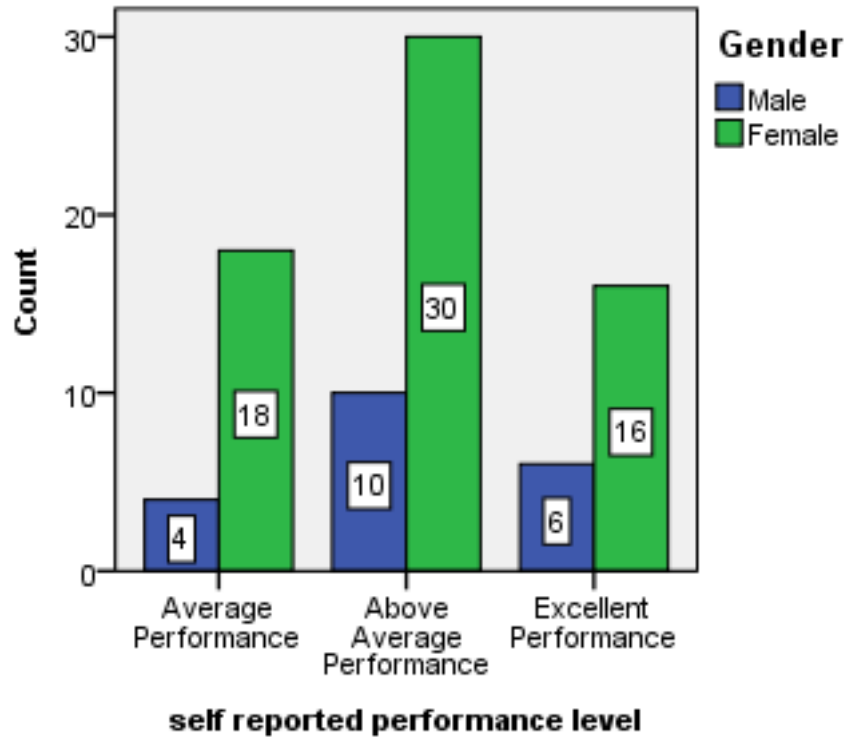


Figure 7 Graph of performance

A non-parametric correlation test (Spearman) was undertaken to assess if there is an association between stress and the employees' performance level. Based on the results of the study, the stress indicators and performance level are not statistically significantly correlated but are independent of one another:

$$r = -.105, n = 84, p = .343$$

Results support the null hypothesis that the stress levels of these employees are not negatively affecting their self-reported performance.

## 5.8 Influence in the workplace

The results show that influence in the workplace is an important factor in reported stress levels. To correspond with the result of influence affecting the stress levels, a correlation test was run (see table 5). The results show that there is a significant relationship between an employee feeling they have a level of influence in their jobs and the corresponding effect on their occupational stress levels. As one of these variables goes up or down, so will the other one. This shows that influence is significant in the levels of occupational stress experienced.

$$R = 0.642, N = 84, p = .001$$

Correlations			COPSOQ_Stress _CompositeScore	composite influence at work
Spearman's rho	COPSOQ_Stress_CompositeScore	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.642**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	84	84
composite influence at work		Correlation Coefficient	.642**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	84	84

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 Correlation for influence

Respondents answered strongly in relation to influence in their workplace. 40.5% feel they 'seldom' have any influence on work decisions with a further 11.9 % stating they 'never' have influence on work decisions (see table 6 and figure 8).

	Do you have a large degree of influence on the decisions concerning your work?	Can you influence the amount of work assigned to you?	Do you have any influence on what you do at work?	Can you decide when to take a break?	Can you take holidays more or less when you want?
Always	7.1%	0.0%	2.4%	7.1%	2.4%
Often	11.9%	7.1%	0.0%	14.3%	7.1%
Sometimes	28.6%	31.0%	35.7%	47.6%	35.7%
Seldom	40.5%	28.6%	42.9%	19.0%	23.8%
Never	11.9%	33.3%	19.0%	11.9%	31.0%

Table 6 Influence scores

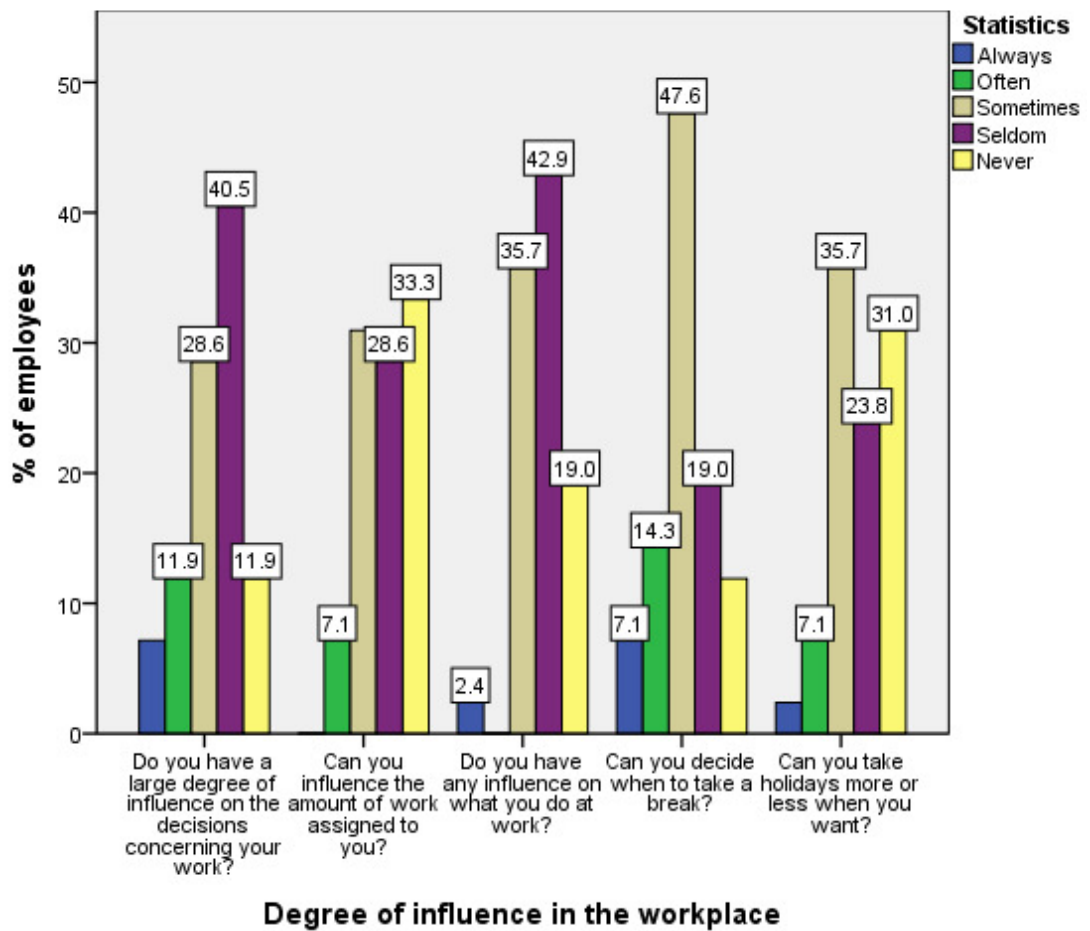


Figure 8 Graph of influence

## 5.9 Commitment in the workplace

This was the third highest factor in contributing to occupational stress levels with this population.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine the difference in commitment to the workplace between male and female employees. A significant difference was observed at the 5% level of significance between this group. The results show that commitment to the workplace was higher for female employees than male employees.

Females - (M = 3.51; SD = .791) Males - (M = 3.00; SD = .858)  $p = .081$

## 5.10 Quality of Leadership

An employee's job satisfaction level can be influenced by the quality of leadership in the organisation. The results show however, that quality of leadership is not an issue impacting on these employees' current stress levels. Table 7 shows that there is a significant relationship between an employee's level of job satisfaction and the quality of leadership in the organisation. Based on these results, job satisfaction is correlated to the quality of leadership. As one of these variables goes up or down, so will the other one. This shows that effective leadership is significant for employees having job satisfaction.

$$R = 0.398, N = 84, p = .001$$

The results show however that quality of leadership was not a major contributing factor to the level of occupational stress experienced by these employees.

Correlations			composite job satisfaction	composite quality of leadership
Spearman's rho	composite job satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.398**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	84	84
	composite quality of leadership	Correlation Coefficient	.398**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	84	84

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 Correlation for job leadership



## 5.11 Job satisfaction

Respondents were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction in relation to the questions below (see table 8) below:

Item Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
...work prospects?	2.6429	1.00172	84
...people you work with?	2.1905	1.20717	84
...the physical working conditions?	2.4048	.79333	84
...the way in which your store is run?	2.4762	1.18704	84
...the way your abilities are used?	2.5952	.90672	84
...your salary?	3.0238	.99367	84
..your job as a whole, everything taken into consideration?	2.5476	.85595	84

Table 8 Statistics for job satisfaction

57% of respondents are satisfied with their job as whole, taking everything into consideration, (see figure 9)

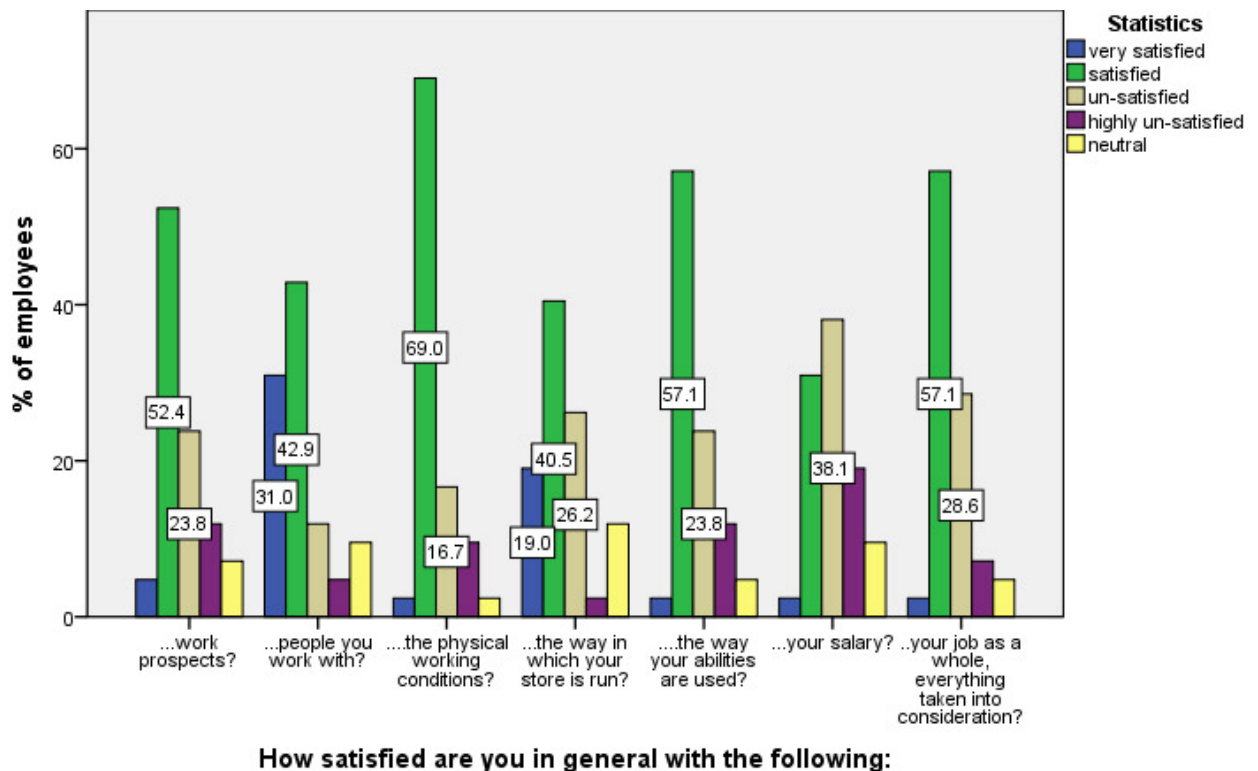


Figure 9 Graph for job satisfaction

# Chapter Six - Discussion

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## 6.1 Introduction

The main objective for this research was to examine the factors within a retail pharmacy chain that contribute to the occupational stress levels of the employees who work in the front of the store. The results delivered some unexpected results, particularly in relation to the factors that cause this group of employees stress. The main factors identified in this study that contribute to the employees' stress levels will be analysed. The necessary intervention strategies to be implemented by the organisation to help minimise the impact of occupational stress, on employees and the organisation will also be discussed.

The question remains – is it the individual or the organisation that is responsible for managing occupational stress levels? As suggested by Barling et al, (2005), while stress management strategies will help employees manage their stress, ultimately they do not remove the source of workplace stress'. As causes of stress in the workplace generally cannot be removed altogether, the best strategy is to provide stress management interventions and training that will assist employees in managing the levels of occupational stress experienced. As the literature states, not all stress has a negative effect, it can be a positive and motivating force, it is when it becomes a chronic issue that it negatively impacts the individual and the organisation (Stevenson and Harper, 2006) (Hassell et al., 2013).

## 6.2 Insecurity at work and occupational stress

The leading factor contributing to stress in these participants is insecurity in the workplace. This relates to becoming unemployed, new technology reducing number of jobs and possibly being transferred to another store. With the pace of changes occurring in the last number of years in the pharmacy sector, due to the government austerity measures leading to reduction in staff numbers, it is no surprise that this is

the leading cause of stress. The balance between reducing costs and maintaining the commitment of employees can only be done through good communication and management techniques. Management of this company must ensure that effective leaders are in the stores to reassure the employees and to actively lead them through any periods of change and uncertainty. This is supported by research also conducted by the ESRI (2015) which shows that the ‘degree of certainty workers feel they have in their jobs plays a much bigger role in driving consumer spending than previously thought’.

### **6.3 Influence at work and occupational stress**

In the review of the literature, the Karasek Demands-Control model of stress suggests that the level of decision-making an employee has in their role has a corresponding effect on their stress levels. When an employee feels they have a level of influence and decision making control on the job they do, they experience less stress. This is supported by the results found in this study, as the ‘influence at work’ subscale was the highest contributor towards stress levels than any other factor surveyed.

### **6.5 Limitations of the study**

Statistical significance between occupational stressors identified in this study will be impacted by the small population size, i.e. to ensure that these results are significant, the questionnaire should be conducted again with a much larger group of employees.

Conducting a longitudinal study over a period of time would allow any changes and developments in the organisation, work environment or the pharmacy sector to be observed. However, this study would require access to an organisation on more than one occasion, which may prove difficult.

Any data collected through questionnaires may limit understanding, as the data collected is related to a specific point in time. It should be noted that if this survey was conducted again, the respondents might give different answers.

If researcher was conducting this study a mixed methods approach would be taken. The COPSOQ questionnaire would be circulated however, it would be followed up with a focus group to improve accuracy of the findings. It would also provide a more detailed analysis of the levels and causes of occupational stress in this organisation. The mixed methods approach would give a more complete overview on the study topic.

## Chapter 7 - Conclusion

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The main objective for this research was to identify the key factors that contribute to the occupational stress levels of employees who work at the front line in a retail pharmacy in Ireland. The established COPSOQ questionnaire was the instrument used to measure the key factors, using the data gathered to recommend strategies to put in place to help employees cope with it. While all of the 14-workplace demands measured caused stress at some level or another, three factors were most prominent in being the lead causes of it within this organisation.

The results and subsequent analysis from this study show that insecurity, influence at work and commitment to the workplace are the lead factors causing these employees to experience higher occupational stress levels. This information must be used to encourage the senior management to review their policy on stress management interventions and to integrate them into the general management of the company through the policies and procedures. Obvious benefits will be gained through improved employee performance, better health and safety and the company's productivity and efficiencies will be higher.

The results obtained from this study can be measured against values that are specific to an organisation or sector specific for comparative purposes. This allows the company to identify stressors that are causing increased levels of stress and to compare with similar organisations. This is an advantage associated with using the COPSOQ questionnaire as for a small fee the Danish National Research Centre have a database of a reference population for comparative purposes. As suggested on the COPSOQ website ' by a company utilising the COPSOQ questionnaire and comparing their results with the reference values from their database, each company can see whether its results are striking high or low and so consider if action is needed' (COPSOQ)

This study was important for the researcher to undertake, as occupational stress in organisations is an important factor in the health and well-being of its employees. In a retail pharmacy environment, the importance of the role of the front line staff

cannot be underestimated. A high service delivered by these employees or conversely a low standard of service significantly adds or reduces to the consumer's retail experience. It is with this in mind that as a manager of a retail pharmacy, the researcher understands the importance of always delivering the optimum level of service of possible, through the employees and so enhancing the unique selling point of the business.

As retail organisations today must strive to remain competitive through adopting money saving measures and driving employee productivity levels, instances of occupational stress will continue to rise.

# Chapter 8 - Recommendations & Financial Implications

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This chapter will outline the recommendations for stress intervention strategies and will consider any associated financial implications involved in their implementation. Workplace stress interventions for reducing occupational stress must be a long-term plan and require commitment and support from top management. Strategies that are focused on organisational and employee factors will deliver the most benefit to both parties.

Further research could be undertaken on this topic throughout the Irish retail pharmacy sector. Assisted by the Irish Pharmacy Union, all retail pharmacies in the province, and subsequently the country could participate in this research to identify occupational stress levels within their own organisations. This would deliver excellent comparative information for all of the pharmacies who participate.

Conduct an extensive employee opinion survey throughout this whole organisation, capturing data from all employees.

Conduct a risk assessment to detail psychosocial risks to employees within the organisation and also within their specific role.

Through the use of a stress audit, help managers and employees identify potential stressors and conduct additional stress management training sessions for all employees. Training assists in providing employees with coping strategies to assist in managing their stress levels. Training would also help increase awareness for all employees and promote an organisational culture where openness is encouraged. Managers should review the effectiveness of any stress management interventions / training to ensure that they are being effective.

Provide access to services for employees who may require further help if stress is becoming an issue for them, assuring them of confidentiality and support.

Ireland's Health & Safety Authority operate a national state sponsored risk assessment programme to assist organisations in identifying the major factors that

contribute to higher stress levels. It assists companies in introducing interventions to help prevent and manage work-related stress.

This company should aim to review its policies on stress management straight away and a short to medium plan put in place that is reviewed every three months initially. The interventions must be researched to adopt the most appropriate to the organisation and its employees, and then the cost of interventions analysed by the accounts department.



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## Appendix B - Scales of COPSOQ Questionnaire

**Table 1.** Main scheme for the development of the three versions of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ).

Context and level	Scales	Sample questions
<b>Workplace</b>		
Type of production and tasks	1. Quantitative demands 2. Cognitive demands 3. Emotional demands 4. Demands for hiding emotions 5. Sensory demands	Do you have enough time for your worktasks? Does your work require that you remember a lot of things? Is your work emotionally demanding? Does your work require that you hide your feelings? Does your work require that you have very clear and precise eyesight?
Work organization and job content	6. Influence at work 7. Possibilities for development 8. Degree of freedom at work 9. Meaning of work 10. Commitment to the workplace	Do you have a large degree of influence concerning your work? Do you have the possibility of learning new things through your work? Can you decide when to take a break? Do you feel that the work you do is important? Do you enjoy telling others about your place of work?
Interpersonal relations and leadership	11. Predictability 12. Role clarity 13. Role conflicts 14. Quality of leadership 15. Social support 16. Feedback at work 17. Social relations 18. Sense of community	At your place of work, are you informed well in advance about, for example, important decisions, changes, or plans for the future? Do you know exactly how much say you have at work? Are contradictory demands placed on you at work? To what extent would you say that your immediate superior is good at work planning? How often do you get help and support from your colleagues? How often does your superior talk with you about how well you carry out your work? Do you work isolated from your colleagues? Is there a good atmosphere between you and your colleagues?
Work-individual interface	19. Insecurity at work 20. Job satisfaction	Are you worried about becoming unemployed? Regarding your work in general, how pleased are you with the people you work with?
<b>Individual</b>		
Health and well-being	21. General health 22. Mental health 23. Vitality 24. Behavioral stress 25. Somatic stress 26. Cognitive stress	In general, would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor? How much of the time during the past 4 weeks have you been a very nervous person? How much of the time during the past 4 weeks did you feel worn out? During the past 4 weeks, I have not had the time to relax or enjoy myself. How much of the time during the past 4 weeks have you had a stomach-ache or stomach problems? How much of the time during the past 4 weeks have you found it difficult to think clearly?
Personality	27. Sense of coherence 28. Problem-focused coping 29. Selective coping 30. Resignation coping	I believe I can cope with most situations in life. What do you usually do when problems arise at work? - Do you try to find out what you can do to solve the problem? - Do you try to think of something else or do something you like? - Do you accept the situation because there is nothing to do about it anyway?

## Appendix C – copy of first part of the questionnaire

*Copy of information given at start of questionnaire circulated*

### Occupational stress in front of shop pharmacy employees

Dear Colleague

I invite you to participate in the following questionnaire. I am currently writing my thesis, and the purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data to evaluate the levels of occupational stress experienced by front of shop pharmacy employees. Part of my study requires collecting data from participants through the use of an online questionnaire. All data will be kept confidential and is anonymous. Your responses will not be used for any purpose other than my thesis as the outcome of this research is for academic purposes only. Your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary, you do not have to take part and you are free to withdraw at any time. Questions relate to your work requirements, work /life balance, work relationships and associated behaviour. If you have any questions about this research or require any other information about this study, I can be contacted at the following email address:

XXXXXXXXXX

It should take you approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please complete the questionnaire as soon as possible.

Thank you for your assistance.

## Appendix D – copy of the questions used for the survey

Questions taken from the COPSOQ Questionnaire

Do you have to work very fast?
Is your workload unevenly distributed so it piles up?
How often do you not have time to complete all your work tasks?
How often do you get help and support from colleagues?
How often do you get help and support from your manager?
Does your work put you in emotionally disturbing situations?
Do you get emotionally involved in your work?
Does your work require you to hide your feelings?
Do you have a large degree of influence on the decisions concerning your work?
Can you influence the amount of work assigned to you?
Do you have any influence on what you do at work?
Can you decide when to take a break?
Do you feel that your place of work is of great personal importance to you?
Would you like to stay in your current place of work for the rest of your working life?
Is your work meaningful?
Do you feel that the work you do is important?
Do you feel that the work you do is important? Are you proud to be part of the company?
Are you well informed in advance of changes, important decisions and future plans?



Do you receive all the information you need in order to do your work well?
Are contradictory demands placed on you at work?
Do you sometimes have to do things, which seem to you to be unnecessary?
Is your manager good at work planning?
To what extent is your manager good at solving work conflicts?
How often are your colleagues willing to listen to your problems at work?
How often do you talk with your manager about how well you carry out your work?
How often do your colleagues talk to you about how well you carry out your work?
Do you feel part of community at your place of work?
Is there good co-operation between your colleagues at work?
How often do you get help and support from your manager?
Are you worried about becoming unemployed?
Are you worried about you or your job becoming redundant?
Are you worried about being transferred to another store against your will?
being difficult for you to find another job?
...work prospects?
....the physical working conditions?
....the way your abilities are used?
..your job as a whole, everything taken into consideration?