

Perceived Organisational Support, Workplace Stressors and Employee-Being. An Investigation into the Retail Sector in Ireland

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Abstract

Investigating Perceived Organisational Support, the impact it has on the Relationship Between Workplace Stressors and Employee Well-Being Specific to Employees in the Retail Sector in Ireland.

By Vivienne Hannon

Retail is detail and remember service with a smile! The retail sector is Ireland's largest private sector employer. The rise of online retailing has forced retailers to put an extra emphasis on service. The high street is at risk and employee and employers alike are under pressure. Therefore, employee well-being in this sector must be an area of focus. Can retail employees fairly be expected to deliver expert product knowledge and individualised service whilst also trying to secure high numbers of quick sales? Are these conflicting demands damaging? Or are they simply part of the role and to be expected in the retail industry?

This research examines perceived organisational support in the relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being. Workplace stressors are measured by role ambiguity and role conflict. These concepts have a concrete body of literature to support their use and were most applicable to the retail sector. Stressors are likely to impede employee well-being which in turn, over time can affect performance.

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Introduction

Workplace stress and employee well-being have a well-established relationship (Danna & Griffin, 1999). It is somewhat unsurprising that stress felt in or caused by some aspect of work would have a relationship to well-being in work. Are there other factors that can impact this relationship? This research proposes that perceived organisational support impacts this relationship, selecting role ambiguity and role conflict as workplace stressors.

Employee well-being is a domain specific kind of well-being related to work. Why is employee well-being worthy of researching? There are consequences of low well-being for the organisation, the employee and society. Human Resource management as an area of management grew from recognising people as one of the most important resources and the importance of realising, managing and sustaining your workforce's full potential (Gunnigle, Hearty & Morley, 2011). Organisations have a legal duty of care towards their employees through an implied term in their employment contract. If employees are low or high in well-being it can affect their performance (Wright & Ching-Chu-Huang, 2012), and commitment (Meyer & Malin, 2010). This is especially relevant to retail sector workers, who perform boundary spanning roles acting as a representation of the organisation to the public whilst also answering to and meeting internal management expectations (Chung & Schneider, 2002).

Another possible implication from low levels of well-being are absenteeism. An estimated total of 790'000 days of work were lost due to work related illness in Ireland in 2013 (HSA, 2015). Stress was reported to be the second highest cause of short-term absenteeism in the UK (CIPD, 2016), with the latest studies suggesting stress related absence has risen by 37% (CIPD, 2018). Stress-related absence is included here as an implication for organisations as this is a possible consequence of stress on well-being.

More and more organisations are realising the importance of being pro-active for the well-being of employees. Two-thirds of organisations who were surveyed in IBEC'S report on the future trends of HR, stated expected expenditure in this area will rise in

the next five years (IBEC, 2016). These are important concerns and considerations for organisations trying to remain efficient in a competitive environment.

It is important to conduct research in the retail sector, as in Ireland it has been a somewhat neglected industry in research. As well as this, competition is currently fierce for retailers, many shoppers are choosing to shop online rather than on the high-street as such, levels of service must be unwavering, showing this as an important area of research. The level of online retailing has spiked in recent years, technology is also reducing required man-power needs with higher levels of automation and self-service areas. For sectors such as retail, where turnover and absenteeism are high (Whysall, Foster & Harris, 2009) well-being needs to be catered for as a method of managing such issues. The decision to focus on the retail sector is also partly due to it being the largest private sector employer in Ireland (IBEC, 2016). As well as this because stressed employees may impede quality, customer experiences and therefore over-all business performance (Wetzel, de Ruyter & Bloemer, 2000).

Retailers have many uncertainties surrounding Brexit. There are predictions of negative effects to the retail sector in Ireland. Many organisations, even large multi-nationals are reducing costs in anticipation. Uncertainties and grey areas such as this can cause stress with positions feeling less secure. As there are 280'000 jobs dependent on the retail sector there are calls to protect the industry regardless of the Brexit deal (IBEC, 2016). Consumer spending has not recovered to pre-recession levels and is unlikely to do so as the tumultuous Brexit negotiations continue.

Viewing through the lens of organisational support theory, organisations can improve well-being through a variety of actions such as; HR practises and policies. Otherwise known as, perceived organisational support, a theory which will be featured prominently throughout this research. These practises and policies must be unambiguous (IBEC, 2011). Perceived organisational support theorises that employee's over time begin to personify their organisation and make evaluations about the organisations actions and relate them to how much they perceive the organisation to care about them (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986).

Over half of the private sector services offer at least one well-being benefit. However, it is also reported that these benefits are being offered in an attempt to present an organisation as an employer of choice rather than for the employees benefit of their well-being (CIPD, 2018). This is important to note, because, the potential positive consequences of perceived organisational support are less likely to come to fruition if employees suspect the actions to be disingenuous (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Although well-being initiatives are gaining popularity, organisations may be able to look after their employee's well-being through solidifying basic support functions and therefore lowering experienced workplace stressors. As well as this, if an employee perceives the organisation to care about them, they, in turn should feel the need to reciprocate through performing well and remaining committed. The concepts mentioned will be more deeply explored in the literature review along with research in the area.

This research will add to the literature by providing insight into whether levels of perceived organisational support impact the relationship between workplace stressors and on well-being to retail workers in Ireland. This research project is measuring the hypothesised effects of perceived organisational support on the relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being specific to the retail sector in Ireland. The findings certainly show that perceived organisational support has a place in the conversation between workplace stressors and employee well-being.

Literature Review

Introduction

The present research is focusing on the relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being and the impact that perceived organisational support may have on this relationship. It is specific to employees in the retail sector. The following literature review presents the three main concepts and theories that are being measured in this research project. They are; perceived organisational support, employee well-being and workplace stressors (role ambiguity and role conflict). The definition for each is provided. From the literature, it is made clear that a relationship, between workplace stressors and employee well-being has been established (Danna & Griffin, 1990 & Van Katwyck, Fox, Spector & Kelloway, 2000). As well as this, there is support for why perceived organisational support could affect this relationship (Shani & Bamberger, 2016 & Richardson, Vandenberg, De joy, Wilson & McGrath 2008). Furthermore, as retail employees deal with customers regularly they are performing boundary spanning roles (Chung & Schneider, 2002), it is a suitable industry to measure role conflict and role ambiguity. The literature was drawn from multiple disciplines such as human resource and business management, psychology, organisational behaviour and sociology.

First the concept of stress is discussed including an outline of the chosen stressors, role ambiguity and role conflict (Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970). The link with the retail sector is then included. Following this employee well-being is explored. Well-being is first investigated, then employee well-being is looked at. The relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being is then examined. Finally, perceived organisational support is addressed. The theories behind the concept; organisational support theory and social exchange theory are reviewed. As well as this the norm of reciprocation is included in the discussion, this is to understand and justify why perceived organisational support was chosen and why it is expected to have an impact on the relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being.

Workplace Stressors

What is stress? There are many definitions among the literature. The Health and Safety Authority Ireland describe workplace stress as employees having a negative reaction to aspects of their working environment (HSA, 2011). If someone is exposed to stressors over time it can cause strains which have detrimental consequences to physical and mental health such as; heart disease, blood pressure, anxiety, and affect well-being as is the topic of this research (Siegall, 2000). Organisations have reported a 37% increase in absence caused by stress, it is the second highest cause for long-term absence from work (CIPD, 2018). As such, organisations must be aware of the causes to minimise the impact and uphold a duty of care to their employees.

This research focuses on workplace stressors specifically. There are numerous variables which fall under workplace stressors such as; supervisor relations, job control, role conflict and role ambiguity (Ganster, 2008). Workplace stressors can be divided into two groups, they are, environmental stressors and managerial stressors (Soltani, Hajatpour, Khorram & Hosein-Nejati, 2013). Environmental stressors include physical aspects of the work environment such as noise level and temperature. Role ambiguity and role conflict are included under the second group, managerial stressors. This research is focusing on the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict.

The theoretical groundings of the chosen workplace stressors, role conflict and role ambiguity, originate in classical management theory. Henri Fayol is known as one of the founding fathers of modern management. He composed fourteen management principles, two of which are referred to in this section. The classical principles of management specify the principles of the chain of command and the unity of command. The chain of command refers to the clear specified order of power in the organisation. From this classical theory viewpoint, hierachal organisations with a clear line of authority are more effective and satisfying. However, it is not always this clear in modern organisations. The unity of command refers to where a subordinate receives their orders from. Theoretically, receiving orders from one specified person allows for accountability and a better way to evaluate performance

(Hitt, Black & Porter, 2011) and helps to avoid role conflict. Realistically, that one person who is giving orders is not always accessible if questions arise.

Following from the basis of classical management theory, Kahn proposed organisational role theory. It is from this theory that role conflict and role ambiguity fully emerged as workplace stressors. After this work they began to be incorporated into research. Role conflict refers to employees receiving conflicting demands. This could be from colleagues or managers at different levels, or from clients/customers and management. Role ambiguity refers to a lack of clarity on what is involved in the role (Rizzo et al., 1970). Role ambiguity may not be as applicable to the retail sector. Why? The retail sector has typically been classified as a low autonomous work with little progression (Whysall, Foster & Harris, 2009), however the clear set of tasks still remain. This is however, a generalisation as such role ambiguity should still be measured along-side role conflict.

Stressors are an antecedent to strain. Workplace stressors are short term experiences which lead to strains. However, due to the time lag between stressors becoming strains it is difficult to decipher causality (Sanchez & Viswesvaran, 2002). Not all stressors necessarily lead to strain, there are arguments that a certain level of stress are beneficial towards performance (Kim, Knight & Crustinger, 2009). This “good kind” of stress is known as eustress. But how can felt stressors lead to strains which ultimately affect well-being? There are various models which address inter-personal differences.

The cognitive appraisal model was written by Lazarus & Folkman (cited in Mark & Smith, 2012). They propose that, when an individual has an experience they deem to be stressful they appraise the situation. If they consider the situation threatening or likely to be on-going, they subsequently conduct a second appraisal on whether they have the resources to cope. This model is useful as without it the individual experience and interpretation is not taken into consideration very much and everyone is assumed to perceive the same stressors the same way. It is also useful to consider in the workplace setting, if an employee experiences role conflict from receiving conflicting instructions from different colleagues they may perceive one colleague to be more influential than this may not lead to strain as the other instruction is not considered as important making prioritising easier, depending on the setting (Siegall,

2000). However, that is largely assuming the stressors to be a once off occurrence, if something is repeated it could be more likely to have an impact.

Role ambiguity has, in some research been found to be more strongly related to stress and therefore more likely to impede well-being than role conflict. This may be like in the example above when employees are faced with conflicting demands this is more common and may be solved through means of prioritising or problem solving (Stout & Posner, 1984). Conversely, Siegall (2000) found role ambiguity to be less related to strain outcomes. This was found when an appraisal measure was included, but the reliability of this was low.

In a retail environment, role conflict may be more likely to arise from the demands of management and customers (Chung & Schnieder, 2002). An example of such demands are retail employees are frequently expected to provide expert product knowledge and one on one attention whilst also ensuring everyone is catered to and that large queues don't form. Role conflict can also occur with returns policies, employees will be eager to satisfy the customers wishes, especially if they are unhappy with a product. However, retail employees are also expected to follow returns policies and cannot accept return items from every customer. Therefore, role ambiguity and role conflict are still relevant and adequate to apply. Retail employees perform boundary spanning roles. They work for an organisation and are simultaneously representing that organisation to the public through their service.

This is important to note because the level of service employees think they have provided has been found to be reflected in customers opinions on the service they think they have received (Schneider, 1980). The front-line staff help customers form perceptions of the business overall, therefore, to upkeep a quality service, stressors should be minimized so well-being can be maintained.

This brings us to the effort-reward imbalance model. This model incorporates rewards as the buffer for stress. According to this model, as pressures and effort put in are kept high, rewards should also be high. Although this has been useful in some research, it potentially assumes people only work for rewards. As discussed, the workplace stressors of role conflict and role ambiguity are applicable to the retail sector. How these stressors impact on well-being will now be explored in more detail.

Employee well-being

Employee well-being is, as the name would suggest a concept focusing specifically on the well-being of people who are employed. It is a domain specific type of well-being. Research involving employee well-being typically measures how various aspects of the work environment may affect the levels of employee well-being. These include relationships with supervisors or colleagues or workplace stressors such as role ambiguity or role conflict (Knight, Kim & Crutsinger, 2007 & Rizzo et al., 1970) as is the topic of this research. Job satisfaction and affective well-being were commonly used as outcomes (Xanthopoulou, Baker & Iles, 2012). Before employee well-being can be understood, the findings in the literature on overall well-being will be reviewed.

The concept of well-being has long been studied. Originally it was coupled with health (Rydstedt, Johansson & Evans 1998). As research in the field progressed a recognition arose of the need for independent research with each term. From reviewing the previous research conducted in the field, health largely refers to symptomatology in physical and mental health (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Well-being has been construed in many different ways, each with their own justifications and downfall. The literature on well-being is vast and was largely disjointed. An influential review and synthesis of the employee health and well-being literature by Danna & Griffin (1999) helped tie some of the work together and it shaped much of the literature which came after. They called for well-being to include measures of satisfaction and experiences.

As there has been a substantial amount of research completed around well-being, psychological, employee or otherwise it is first necessary to peel the concept back to its origins. Well-being can be brought back to two schools of philosophical thought. These are; hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being. It is important to discuss and understand the differences between these views and research varies depending on which lens of well-being the researcher is viewing through (Meyer & Maltin, 2010).

Hedonic well-being is concerned with positive psychology and is based around an individual's subjective lived happiness (Zheng, Zhu, Zhao & Chi Zhang, 2015). Measuring subjective well-being falls under the hedonic view. It is concerned with

positive felt emotions, life satisfaction and the absence of negative mood (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Eudaimonic well-being dates to the time of Aristotle. It pushes past the idea of being happy and encapsulates a philosophy of awareness, sense of meaning and realising potential, or a life well-lived (Wright & Bennett, 2007). In this view living a life aligning with your values more strongly relates to well-being. Measures under this view are psychological measures of well-being. This research is measuring subjective well-being by focusing on short term affect, this falls under the hedonic view.

Subjective well-being can be broken down into the following; Positive affect and negative affect, life satisfaction, domain specific satisfaction (such as job satisfaction) (Diener, 2000). This research focuses on the domain specific of employee-being but will be looking at positive and negative affect rather than job satisfaction. Emotions were previously thought to be distinct from one another, Russell (1980) created a circumplex model highlighting that there is more cross-over than previously thought. The main axis are arousal and pleasure, emotions are said to be pleasurable to dis-pleasurable or somewhere in between combined with some state of arousal. Emotional affect can be considered high or low arousal and high or low pleasure. For example, being bored can be considered low arousal negative. The circumplex was highly influential. Warr (1987) then proposed the idea that the circumplex of emotion would still be applicable when placed in a specific context, from this affective well-being became more commonly measured to assess employee well-being.

Employee well-being is necessary to measure in isolation because someone high in psychological well-being doesn't necessarily have high levels of well-being at work. Over all life satisfaction has only been shown to have moderate correlations to job satisfaction (Page & Vella-Broderick, 2009). As well as this it is more difficult to incorporate all dimensions of life in an answer when posed with a general question. When measures are more specific to a domain, so are the responses. Organisations and employees benefit from high employee well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The relationship between workplace stress and employee well-being has been established. It is important to conduct research in the area again as there are so many possible variables which can be looked at as well as multiple variables which may

impact the relationship. Organisational constraints which included role conflict and role ambiguity were found to be strongly related to felt negative emotion, or negative affect and counter-productive work behaviour (Pindek & Spector, 2016). The latter variables mentioned were included as measures of well-being.

Stressors have a negative relationship with well-being as they have been shown to cause negative felt-emotion. As earlier discussed, there are inter-personal differences, however self-reported measures of subjective well-being have been shown to be similar to reports from others and recalled memories (Deiner, 2000).

The Role of Perceived Organisational Support

How could perceived organisational support be involved in the aforementioned relationship? What is perceived organisational support? Perceived organisational support is a concept derived from organisational support theory. Organisational support theory itself, has a theoretical basis in social exchange theory. Perceived organisational support posits that employees within an organisation begin to personify the organisation (Luxmi & Yadav, 2011). Drawing from social exchange theory, if the employee feels supported by the organisation, the employee will feel the need to reciprocate. The definition of perceived organisational support widely taken across the literature is that developed from the seminal works of Eisenberger, a prominent author in the area, it is as follows:

“global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being” (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986).

Social Exchange Theory

The bases of the concept perceived organisational support lie in from social exchange theory, which emerged in behaviourist Sociology in the 1960’s (Ritzer, 2001). It was originally focused on interactions at the micro-level but was further developed and theorized at the macro level by Richard Emerson (Ritzer & Stepinsky, 2014). It holds its basis around reward exchange interactions, which lead to felt

obligations of reciprocal norms. There must be an interdependent relationship and an exchange of resources (Crapanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

The rewards or benefits that one receives depend on those which they can provide in return. Exchanges relationships can be positive or negative. Positive exchanges allow both parties to reap benefits, whilst negative exchanges may involve one party holding more power and therefore restricting the exchange capabilities of the other (Ritzer & Stepinsky, 2014). Applying this to organisations, one could make the assumptions that the greater they are rewarded the more effort they will return. However, in organisations the focus is not just on monetary rewards. Social exchange and the norm of reciprocity have been shown to be positively related to affective commitment (Veld & Alves, 2017).

The Norm of Reciprocation

The norm of reciprocity can be a foundational aspect of social groups as they form and develop characteristics and behaviours (Gouldner, 1960). The reciprocity norm is an important factor of perceived organisational support. It is the idea of an accepted ethic, in relation to amounts of help received and returned. Individuals may differ in how they interpret this norm, but it is recognised to be universally accepted even if the levels vary (Gouldner, 1960).

Two main groups were theorized. They are firstly creditors, who like having people indebted to them. They believe the help returned in future will be greater than that given. Secondly, wary recipients; they are more cautious when offering help and tend to be more shielded, viewing generosity as a potential source of weakness for others to take advantage rather than an area to make gains (Eisenberger, Cotterell & Marvel, 1987). Due to the norm of reciprocation, POS has been found to be positively related to performance and affective commitment (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch & Rhoades, 2001).

In employee and employer terms, reciprocal exchange is more powerful than a negotiated one (Molm, 2003). Here, the actions taken by either party are done so over a period of time and the consequences of each party's actions can affect the reciprocal exchange without having meant to. However, the effectiveness of the reciprocal relationship depends on the power balance of both parties involved. As reciprocation involves a number of actors exchanging resources that the other

desires, if one party has any resources there is an imbalance of power in the relationship with however has more resources, holding more power. This is relevantly applicable to the retail sector. The retail industry has high turnover rates, however there are people who are more than satisfied in retail work, largely middle-aged females working full-time (Whysall, et al., 2009).

When a negotiated exchange is being on-going the focus is on the value of what is being exchanged. In reciprocal exchanges there are more variables such as; whether the exchange has been positive or negative, the likelihood or repetition and the value (Molm, 2003). This relates to the formation of perceived organisational support as an employee may receive a once off reward from their organisation but may not feel the need to reciprocate especially if the offer is not in line with usual action taken.

A central assumption of perceived organisational support, as mentioned, is, that employees in an organisation begin to make assumptions about the actions the organisation takes. However, it is the perceived intent behind these actions which aid employees form this perception. If employees believe an organisation is offering them favourable treatment for fair reasons or from the way the organisation is structured employees begin to identify with the organisation. As perceived organisational support helps to fulfil socio-emotional needs, this in turn strengthens the chance of organisational identification. This can result in greater organisational commitment. (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart and Adis, 2017).

Types of Exchanges

Prior to the development of perceived organisational support, organisational commitment was viewed separately as the economic view and emotional view (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The economic view theorized that employees would remain committed to an organisation due to potential high switching costs, as well as a view that changing employers frequently may damage their professional development and reputation. The emotional view refers to the development of sense of identity with the organisation. Perceived organisational support ties these views together (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

The economic view may have been more poignant at the time of publishing but does not transfer to the modern workforce. Employees are less committed to organisations and are switching more frequently. This was highlighted in the Deloitte (2018)

Millennial survey where 43% of millennials said they expected to leave their organisation in the next two years, results were even higher for incoming Generation Z who had a 63% positive response to the same questions.

However, perceived organisational support still supports the emotional view and the relationship between perceived organisational support and commitment has been established. If an employee is experiencing high perceived organisational support this satisfies socioemotional needs (Kurtessis et al., 2017) and therefore, could positively affect well-being.

Exchange can refer to the organisation offering monetary rewards, information or socioemotional rewards such as respect and approval (Eisenberger et al., 2001). The strength of influence of perceived organisational support depends upon the employee's exchange ideology, although all employees to some extent accept exchange ideology (Eisenberger, 1986) the strength of consequences such as reduced absenteeism is greater for employees with a stronger exchange ideology.

Reciprocation as a norm is an aspect of social exchange theory. In the research the positive aspects and exchanges are usually examined, however, the concept does also refer to and is reflected in negative actions and consequences (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Antecedents & Consequences:

There have been numerous research studies with the concept of perceived organisational support at the forefront. This is because it has clear antecedents such as; organisational human resource practises and supervisory support, and consequences such as; job satisfaction, performance (Eisenberger & Rhoades, 2002). The consequences named are positive for both employee and employer. As the nature of work changes the variables need to be retested to show that the validity remains (Baran, Rhoades Shanock, Miller, 2011). As such it is relevant to apply in the current research on the retail sector, a sector which has undergone many changes for various reasons listed previously.

The consideration of perceived organisational support on employee well-being has been well documented. In their narrative review of the literature Baran et al., (2011) highlight well-being as an emerging theme within organisational support theory

since the 2000's. Perceived organisational support has influence on employee well-being through its role in the relationship between employer and employee (Kurtessis et al., 2017). If an employee has high perceived organisational support, then the supports should be available to them to be able to cope with stress and enhance their well-being. This assumption relies on how workplace stressors are defined and measured. For example, in research conducted by Wallace, Edwards, Arnolds and Frazier (2009) organisational support was found to only have a positive relationship on challenge stressors and did not moderate the levels of felt hinderance stressors. However, this research was conducted within one organisation, limiting generalizability.

As perceived organisational support involves the employees developing trust with the organisation, those experiencing higher stress levels in the workplace should have lower levels of perceived organisational support. If workplaces stress is being experienced with low perceived organisational support as one of the causing factors, these employees may also experience strain and be lower in workplace well-being. The impact of social support on the stressor well-being relationship has been explored by Mark & Smith (2012) who found it was related to higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of depression.

Supervisors and managers may be viewed as agents of the organisation, as such, their behaviour affects and is reflected in levels of perceived organisational support. Supervisor support as previously mentioned is an antecedent of perceived organisational support (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Perceived organisational support is important to look at in the retail sector in Ireland as it is a large employer. The retail sector is typically viewed as an unsupportive sector to work in with little prospects or room for growth. As well as this, more Irish people are obtaining higher levels of education. Therefore, many retail workers are part-time as opposed to full-time. As perceived organisational support, like most relationships builds over time it would be therefore be hypothesised that full-time workers will experience higher levels of perceived organisational support than part-time workers.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the relevant concepts in this research; perceived organisational support, workplace stressors and employee well-being. It discussed related concepts and justified why they were not chosen to add to the research. As discussed, the relationship between stressors and employee well-being has been established, as has the reason why perceived organisational support should, in theory, moderate this relationship. Well-being had many measurements which could have been used as it is a psychological concept, however to focus the research on the workplace setting the use of job-related affective well-being scale was justified. The concept of workplace stressors has been criticised and subsequently evolved into the separation of stressors and strains. However, as the research is focused on the retail industry it is still adequate to measure stressors here as the level of job autonomy is low. A plethora of research has been conducted on each section, making conducting a literature review a challenge. However, each term had key seminal authors (perceived organisational support; Eisenberger, Employee well-being Danna & Griffin, Stressors; Rizzo) who paved the way for future findings and tied together some loose ends within each concept.

Research Question

Does perceived organisational support impact the relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being in employees of the retail sector in Ireland?

This research aims to investigate factors that influence employee-being. It aims to first uncover the extent to which the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict relate to well-being. The research also aims to incorporate perceived organisational support by seeing if levels of such affect the stressor-well-being relationship. As well as this the research aims to delve further by seeing if there is a difference between full-time and part-time workers and seeing if length of service relates.

The following hypothesis were formulated, the basis for which can be found in the literature review;

H1; Retail employees working full-time will experience greater levels of perceived organisational support than retail employees working in part-time employment.

H1 a; Retail employees with over one year's service will experience higher levels of perceived organisational support than retail employees with less than one year's service.

H2; Retail employees with high levels of perceived organisational support will experience lower levels of workplace stressors than retail employees with lower levels of perceived organisational support.

H3; Retail employees with higher levels of perceived organisational support will also be higher in well-being than retail employees with lower levels of perceived organisational support who will also be lower in well-being.

Research Objectives:

Construct a survey measuring the three variables involved; perceived organisational support, workplace stressors and employee well-being and administer to retail sector workers in Ireland in Summer 2018.

Test for whether levels of perceived organisational support in retail sector workers in Ireland impacts the relationship between the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict on employee well-being.

Group full-time employees of the retail sector in Ireland and analyse the data to uncover whether they have higher levels of perceived organisational support in 2018 than part-time employees of the retail sector in Ireland in 2018.

Group retail employees in Ireland who have been working with their organisation for less than one year and more than one year, view levels of perceived organisational support and see if the hypothesis is accepted.

Run an analysis to see if the workplace stressors of role conflict and role ambiguity and perceived organisational support impact level of well-being.

Methodology

Introduction

Following the review of the literature it is clear a relationship between workplace stress and employee being has been well established. As well as this perceived organisational support and stress and perceived organisational support and well-being were also shown to have correlating relationships. Therefore, the hypothesised moderating role of perceived organisational support on the relationship between stress and job-related affective well-being will be explored.

Research is a process which has clear steps to follow, however in business research, researchers must remain somewhat flexible to be able to adapt to issues or unexpected occurrences (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this section of paper, the chosen methodology used to carry out the research will be discussed. First there will be an overview of the research philosophy followed by the approach taken and why this was done so over others. After this, the methods used to conduct the research will be laid out and justified. The chosen scales which have been identified in the literature review are presented again, along with their corresponding reliability and validity measures. The limitations faced whilst conducting this research will be identified and discussed. Finally, the ethics involved in the research process will be reviewed.

Research Philosophy:

Research philosophy is important and necessary to reflect on, a researcher typically chooses a topic and methods which have been influenced by their internal philosophies. By recognising internal philosophies and values one can also recognise that this is one interpretation, and to conduct good it is necessary to understand other interpretations (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

Epistemology refers to what knowledge is acceptable in research, within epistemology there are two main philosophies, they are; interpretivist and positivist. Interpretivist research philosophies allow more interpretation on your constructed reality. Interpretivism is highly concerned with people and understanding their view when taken outside of their social roles (Saunders et al., 2012). For example, a manager acts as a manager in the workplace but this social actor is likely to play multiple roles (sister, wife) therefore it is necessary to interpret their view and

experiences on topics. The methodologies associated with interpretivism are more flexible. However, in this research there are three variables; workplace stressors, employee well-being and perceived organisational support. The researcher is taking a positivist approach by assuming these social constructs exist and uncovering patterns between them.

The positivist research philosophy refers to natural scientists studying realities (Bryman & Bell, 2015). These realities are considered to be universal laws, therefore researchers can make presumptions about what should happen between variables based on this (Saunders et al., 2012). These presumptions are the researcher's hypothesis. The research looks for patterns amongst data and causality. As this research is using cross-sectional design, causality cannot be taken from the research but there is still a positivist approach taken in this research.

Theories are also founded and theorised on the basis of the existence of some universal laws. This is considered to be post-positivism research (Mackensie & Knipe, 2006). As discussed in the literature review social exchange is an influential theory in the concept perceived organisational support. It assumes that people try to exchange fairly as they feel the need to reciprocate. Applying this theory to a situation and forming hypothesis based on this is using what is called deductive reasoning (Horn, 2012). Post-positivism largely applies the views of positivism but also accepts there are external realities and that theories cannot be applied perfectly due to this (Robson, 2011).

The philosophy a researcher adopts is also associated with how the researcher finds meaning in the research. Inductive reasoning in research is more open, there are no direct expectations. It is more commonly associated with interpretivism. This is unsuitable for this research as the research is not broadly measuring constructs and then seeking to make sense of them. It is not looking to formulate theories off the results. This research is taking constructs and applying them in a situation.

Associated with philosophies are approaches.

Deductive reasoning is typically associated with positivist research and is opposed to inductive reasoning. Researchers using deductive reasoning, can actually make predictions about situations through the formation of hypothesis. Deductive reasoning is used in this research. From the literature, workplace-stressors and

employee well-being have a relationship. There is also evidence to suggest perceived organisational support will affect this, deductive reasoning make more sense in this approach. Instead of forming theories on what the data is saying, the researcher is testing what is presumed to already be there. If the data does not show what the theories or hypothesis applied have predicted, other theories may be brought in or it may be the case the theory was inadequately applied.

Deductive reasoning is coupled with positivism and is applied in this research where hypothesis have been formulated. Furthermore, the research is measuring multiple things at once, this is more suitable to a quantitative approach which is also associated with Positivism.

Research Methods:

Quantitative methods were chosen were selected as they are most suitable to answer the research question. Primary data was collected by the quantitative method of administering a survey. This was chosen over analysing secondary data as it is important that the research is relevantly up to date. As previously mentioned the retail sector is the largest private sector employer in Ireland, with the uncertainties of Brexit and the rise of online shopping it is an important industry to conduct research in.

Quantitative methods were chosen over qualitative due to the nature of the research. If the research was aiming to delve into the lived experiences and insights, then a qualitative approach may have been more appropriate. However, the research is looking for relationships between variables, therefore quantitative methods are more suitable.

Among the many quantitative approaches that could've been taken, cross-sectional was chosen due to the need to measure multiple variables at once. Experimental design was immediately excluded as the project measures stress and well-being. It would be unethical to purposefully attempt to increase a person's stress level and a controlled environment wouldn't make sense for the research. In the literature there was a call for more longitudinal research in measuring stressors leading to strains and the consequences of perceived organisational support. However, this method had to be eliminated due to time constraints with the research.

Participants

In this research, the participants were employees of the retail sector in Ireland. The research did not limit to a specific age range nor a specific type employment as full-time, part-time were included. Non-traditional employment (part-time) was included due to changing work structures the increase of this inclusion was noted by Rhodes (2012) as prior to this the focus was largely on full-time workers.

The research was not limited to one or more specific retail organisations and was open to employees in any retail sector employment. The retail sector in Ireland is diverse and includes; DIY stores, pharmacies, supermarkets, clothing and footware stores, service stations, local and independent retailers (IBEC,2016).

The survey was administered through social media channels such as Facebook. The research used non-probability convenience sampling. Anyone working in the retail sector was welcome to answer.

The researcher aimed for 80 responses. As the research is cross-sectional, larger samples obtain a better picture and more reliable results. In total there were 65 complete responses. Unfortunately, there was also a relatively high number of incomplete responses (44).

Survey Design

The survey was created on an online survey administering system called lime survey. To use lime survey the research had to request access from the college. Once access was granted the researcher was shown how to navigate the site and enter in the survey. The survey had four sections, each were entered separately. The first page was a welcome page providing information on the study. As well as this there was a page for each section containing a brief outline of what the questions to follow were generally about and what they aimed to measure.

The survey was administered through social media channels such as Facebook. A link to the survey was posted along with a message briefly explaining it was part of a level 9 qualification. The post also explained it was designed to be answered exclusively by employees in the retail sector and asked those not working in retail to refrain from participating (See Appendix A).

The survey put out comprised of three separate scales. This was necessary as three different concepts were measured. These are; perceived organisational support, workplace stressors and job-related affective well-being. Well-being is the dependent variable. As well as three main variables, some demographic questions were added to the beginning. Questions added asked respondents what type of retail employment they are currently (full-time, part-time, other) and how long they have been with the organisation. These questions were added as perceived organisational support takes time to build (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and address H1a Retail employee's with over one year's service in their retail organisational will experiences higher levels of perceived organisational support than retail employee's with less than one year's service in their retail organisaiton.

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Measuring Perceived Organisational Support:

A questionnaire of Perceived Organisational support developed by Eisenberger (1986) is a 16-item questionnaire using a 7-point likert scale (see Appendix B). When the survey was created the questions were evenly phrased with negative and positive wordings to avoid possible bias in responses. The survey was tested for reliability, it holds a reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of .97 (Eisenberger, 1986). This survey of perceived organisational support was commonly used throughout the literature. The researcher tested it for reliability, it returned a Cronbach's alpha of .89 which is highly above the threshold and shows the scale to be highly reliable.

This scale was the prominent scale used throughout the literature. In some cases, researchers took certain questions from this scale and validated them, specific to their own research. It was deemed to be the best to use as it featured heavily throughout the research conducted on perceived organisational support with good validity.

Measuring Workplace Stressors

Workplace stressors consists of many variables such as; working hours or work overload. The stressors selected to measure in this research were role ambiguity and role conflict. Working hours are a common downside to employment with the retail

sector, they could have been chosen to use. However, after reviewing the literature the research hypothesised that perceived organisational support was more likely to impact the stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict. These are relevant to the retail sectors as employees are performing boundary spanner roles. To measure workplace stressors, the questionnaire developed by Rizzo et al., (1970) was incorporated. It is a 30-item indicator with 15 items measuring role-ambiguity and 15 measuring role-conflict. It has been measured for validity and reliability. This questionnaire was commonly used throughout the literature which measures the same variables. The researcher tested it for reliability, it retuned a Chronbach alpha of .50 which is below the required .70. The scale is inconsistent in measuring and unreliable. This affects what can be deducted from the findings as any relationships found in the research based on this measure are unreliable.

Measuring Employee Well-Being

As previously discussed the research on well-being is vast, as such there were many measurements of well-being available. However, as this research is specific to the context of job-related well-being, context free measures such as psychological well-being were excluded. Even with choosing to focus specifically on employee well-being, there were many measures available. Many studies measured job satisfaction as employee well-being. This was more common in earlier research on employee well-being and was the dominant measure.

Job satisfaction as a measure of employee well-being has been both criticised and praised (Wright, 2007). A scale that featured prominently in the literature was that developed by Warr (1990). This scale measured affective well-being and applied the emotional circumplex developed by Russell (1980) to a work context. The survey selected was the job-related affective well-being scale (JAWS) by Katwyk, Spector, Fox & Kelloway (2000). This applied Warr's idea of using the emotional circumplex in a specific setting and showed to be successful. It was tested for reliability and validity. In the current research it held a Cronbach's Alpha of .90. This shows the scale is consistent in measure and highly reliable.

Data Analysis

The data collected from participants was stored electronically. When the researcher decided to stop collection there were a total of 65 complete responses. The data was downloaded into an excel file and coded for use in the statistical package SPSS.

A word document was created containing all the questions and the corresponding codes as well as the answer codes. This data was then entered into SPSS for analysis. The job-related affective well-being scale had the negative emotion words reverse coded. Half of the items in the perceived organisational support scale were also reverse coded (Please see Appendix A).

For analysis the variable were computed, and the weighted mean was found.

Following this each sub-scale within the questionnaire was tested for normality. The results from this have already been mentioned above.

For testing weather full-time employees experience higher levels of perceived organisational support than part-time employees, a one-way ANOVA was used. Following this, a sample t-test is performed to asses if there is variance of perceived organisational support amongst employees with less than one year's service compared to those with over one year. Two bivariate spearman correlations are used to uncover if; perceived organisational support and employee well are related and it perceived organisational support and workplace stressors are related.

Limitations:

The data collected was done so using a cross-sectional design, therefore a causal relationship cannot be established, only correlations. Time-order relationship and common method variance can be problematic with cross-sectional design. Time-order relationship refers to inferring causation and ensuring that respondents have encountered various levels of the independent variable before measuring the dependent (Schutt, 2006).

Another potential limitation here is a possible inflation of correlating relationships due to information being gathered simultaneously. Also, whilst measuring well-

being, it has been reported that self-measurements are somewhat reliant on the respondents' mood at the time of response. Nielson (2017) found that data from self-reports tends to be inflated.

However, it is still the best option in measuring employee well-being for the purposes of this research as the study is not longitudinal. As well as this, the chosen scale asks respondents to answer how often in the past 30 days have they felt a certain way. This is in contrast to asking how they feel at the time of responding. Many of the studies reviewed, recommended the need for more longitudinal research to reinforce stronger relationships between the variables and due to the above-mentioned issues when measuring with cross-sectional research. However, due to time constraints within this research project this was not possible.

As the survey comprised of three separate scales it contained 65 questions, as this is quite long it could have been potentially off-putting to participants. However, an explanation of each segment was provided. The questions were broken up onto several different pages for ease of use.

Finally, the survey was shared on multiple social media platforms which have been outlined above. Some potential respondents notified the researcher that clicking the hyperlink resulted in a security error message being displayed which read "There are problems with the security certificate for this site". Unfortunately, as many people access social media via a handset rather than a desktop this potentially limited the scope of the population sample. The researcher contacted the relevant parties within the college to get more information on the error message. The researcher was informed it can be the case when a survey link is distributed to participants that they try to access from within their organizations and their IT has closed down links to untrusted sites. There was no solution provided.

Finally, although there was a message which advised people the research was specific to retail workers there is no guarantee that only retail workers answered.

Ethics:

Research ethics are of pivotal importance at every stage from formulation, data collection, storage and analysis. They are an integral part of any research project to

ensure the integrity of the work. Specifically, when the research involves human participants.

A proposal of the research was submitted in January. This contained a broad outline of the research and the scales to be used. These were approved by the National College of Ireland Ethics committee. As research continued, a more suitable scale to measure the concept of well-being was discovered. This was subsequently submitted to the educational bodies Ethics committee and was approved for use.

The survey used displayed a welcome message to participants. This message briefly explained the study and the concepts. As well as this, participants were advised that participation was on a voluntary basis and they were free to withdraw at any time. They were also ensured that no personal identifying information would be gathered.

Furthermore, participants were provided with the Researcher's email address and encouraged to use it if they had any queries. At the end of the welcome message it was stated clearly to participants that by clicking "next" they were consenting to be part of the research.

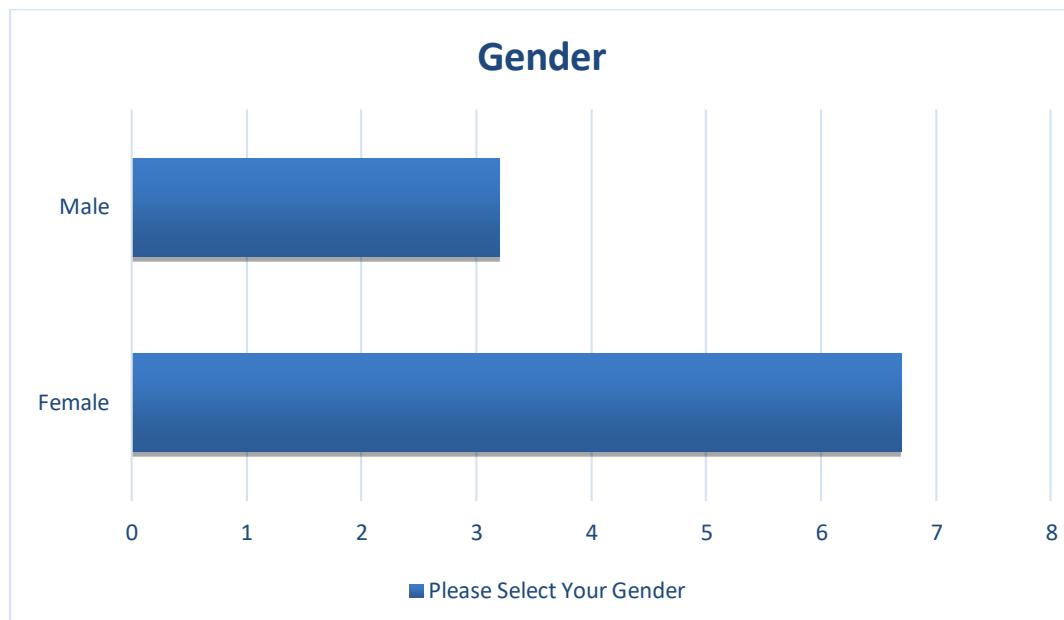
In the final section of the survey, it measured job-related affective well-being. Respondents were asked how often in the past 30 days has any aspect of their job made them feel a certain way. This was followed by a list of adjectives which included emotions such as angry, depressed, miserable and gloomy. This may be a sensitive question for some but as a likert scale is provided with seven options and no further information required does not pose a risk to respondents. It is also justified for use as the aim of the research project, is to measure how well-being is affected.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The survey was created on an online platform. Respondents completed the survey online and the data was stored electronically. Upon finishing the data collection, the data was downloaded into an Excel file and coded for entry into SPSS. Once the data was ready to use after cleansing, descriptive tests were run and the hypothesis outline in the research questions section were tested. The survey had a total of 105 responses. 71 (67.6%) of the respondents were Female and 34 (32.4%) were Male. This is a substantial difference, it is not completely unexpected as the CSO reported in 2016 of the 59.5% of Female's in the Irish workforce, 14.3% of that was in retail (CSO, 2016). Please see the gender distribution illustrated in table 1.

Table 1



Following gender, the researcher looked at the next question in the first section which asked, "What kind of employment are you currently in?" 31 respondents or 27% answered part-time and 70 (77%) were full-time employees. This is important

to note as non-traditional types of employment were noted as an emerging theme by Rhoades (2012). They are important to investigate as they are increasing.

The final question in the first section asked respondents to provide, in years the time they have been working for their retail organisations. A considerable number of responses answered that they were with their retail organisation for less than one year 32 (29.1%) The significance of this will be reviewed in the discussion. 58 (52.7%) respondents answered that they were working for their retail organisation between 1 and 5 years. Only 8 (7.2%) respondents answered that they had been with their organisation for over 5 years, this is supporting the assumption found in the literature that turnover in the retail sector is high. A descriptive mean test was run and the mean answer for this question showed to be 1.6 years. Please see the chart below in Table in 2 and mean in table 3.

Table 2



The Scales

Employee well-being

A reliability analysis was run on the scale used to measure employee well-being which was the job-related affective well-being scale. There are a total of 20 items in the scale, 10 of which were reverse coded.

Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items
0.9	19

Although this scale was previously published the researcher ran reliability and cross checked the “Cronbach’s alpha is item deleted” section on the output table. All items were held reliable. The score of .9 shows the scale to be highly reliable.

Perceived Organisational Support

A reliability analysis was run on the perceived organisational support scale. This scale had 16 items, half of which needed to be reverse coded.

Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items
0.89	16

The Cronbach alpha of .89 is a good score above the required .7 and shows the scale to be consistent in what it is measuring.

Workplace Stressors

A reliability analysis was run the scale which measure the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict. No items in this 29-item scale needed to be recoded.

Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items
0.5	29

The Cronbach alpha returned for this scale is below the required .7 meaning the scale is unreliable. This scoring suggests items were not answered consistently. The implications of this will be further reviewed in the discussion section.

Testing of Hypothesis

Following this the level of perceived organisational support in part-time and full-time workers was examined.

H0: Retail employee's levels of perceived organisational support will vary depending on type of employment.

H1: Retail employees working in full-time employment will experience higher levels of perceived organisational support than retail employees in part-time or other kinds of employment.

To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was used. This was necessary to run as the researcher is looking for variance amongst employment type and levels of perceived organisational support but within employment type there are three groups; full-time, part-time and other. As the ANOVA has assumptions which should not be violated the measures were first tested for normality and homogeneity. Leven's test for homogeneity requires that the value is greater than .05. The returned result was .168, as such it did not violate assumptions of homogeneity variance (Pallant, 2016).

For there to be significance between groups, the *p* value should be less than or equal to .05. The *p* value returned was 0.854. No significant difference was found between types of employment and perceived organisational support ($F(2,74) = .158, p > .05$).

Based on these findings the researcher rejects the null hypothesis.

Post-hoc comparisons showed the mean scores for group 1 ($M = 76.0, SD=23.60$), group 2 ($M = 73.5, SD= 16.9$), group 3 ($M = 70.8, SD =20.2$). Please see this illustrated in table 3.

Table 3

Groups	N	Mean	SD
ANOVA Results			
Part-time	10	76	23.6
Full-time	61	73.5	16.9
Other	6	70.8	20.2

Following this H1a was tested.

H0 Retail employee's length of service will affect levels of perceived organisational support.

H1a Retail employee's with over one year's service in their retail organisational will experiences higher levels of perceived organisational support than retail employee's with less than one year's service in their retail organisaiton.

To test the score of for two groups an independent sample t-test was performed on the variables. Before this was carried out a test for normality was carried out on the perceived organisational support scale and on the responses to the question about length of service. This was to ensure the variables did not breach the assumptions of the t-test. A box-plot was generated and inspected, there were no outliers observed. As the *p* value (.70) was $>.05$ no homogeneity was observed either. The results of these tests showed that neither variable breached the normality or homogeneity assumptions.

The independent t-test was run and an output of .451 was observed as this is $>.05$ which is the cut-off, there is no significant difference between, retail employees with over years-service and retail employee's with under one year-service and their levels of perceived organisational support. As such the hypothesis is rejected.

Retail employee's with under one-year service ($M = 77.04, S = 16.96$) and over one-year service ($M= 73.78, SD= 16.43; t (66) = .758, p= .45$, two tailed).

H2: Retail employees with high levels of perceived organisational support will experience lower levels of workplace stressors than retail employees with low levels of perceived organisational support.

To test this hypothesis non-parametric bivariate spearman correlation was run. The assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity preceding Spearman's correlation were first checked. No violations were found, and the bivariate Spearman correlation was run. The results of the correlation showed that perceived organisational support and the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict have a negative relationship. Perceived organisation support and role

ambiguity ($r = -.59$) and role conflict ($r = -.66$). As there is a negative correlation between perceived organisational support and workplace stressors, H2 can be accepted.

H3: Retail employees with high levels of perceived organisational support will also be higher in well-being than retail employee's with lower levels of perceived organisational support.

As with H2, a bivariate spearman correlation is used to test the above hypothesis. The assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity were not violated. The result of the correlation showed there to be a moderate positive correlation between perceived organisational support and employee well-being, which is broken down in the sub-groups in the table below. H3 can be accepted.

Table 4

High Pleasure	High Pleasure	Low Pleasure	Low Pleasure
High Arousal	Low Arousal	High Arousal	Low Arousal
.471	.458	.421	.524

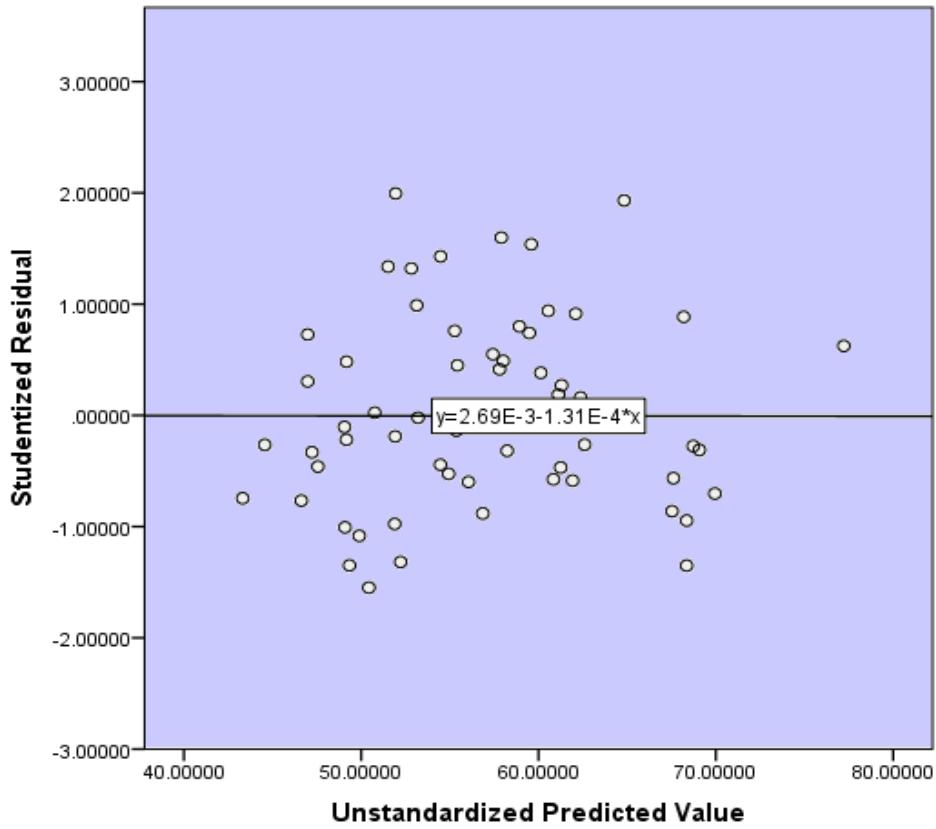
The research was also looking to test if perceived organisational support impacts the relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being. To test this relationship a regression analysis was run. Please see the scatter plot in Appendix B.

A multiple regression analysis was used to explore the relationship of the dependent variable, employee well-being and the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict and perceived organisational support. As the research is interested in whether perceived organisational support is able to predict the relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being it is suitable.

First the assumption of that there is independence of observations was checked by looking at the score of the Durbin-Watson statistic. The observed score should be 2 the score observed in the research was 2.3.

Following this the variables needed to be tested for linearity to show no violation of the fourth assumption. A scatter plot was generated, please see below.

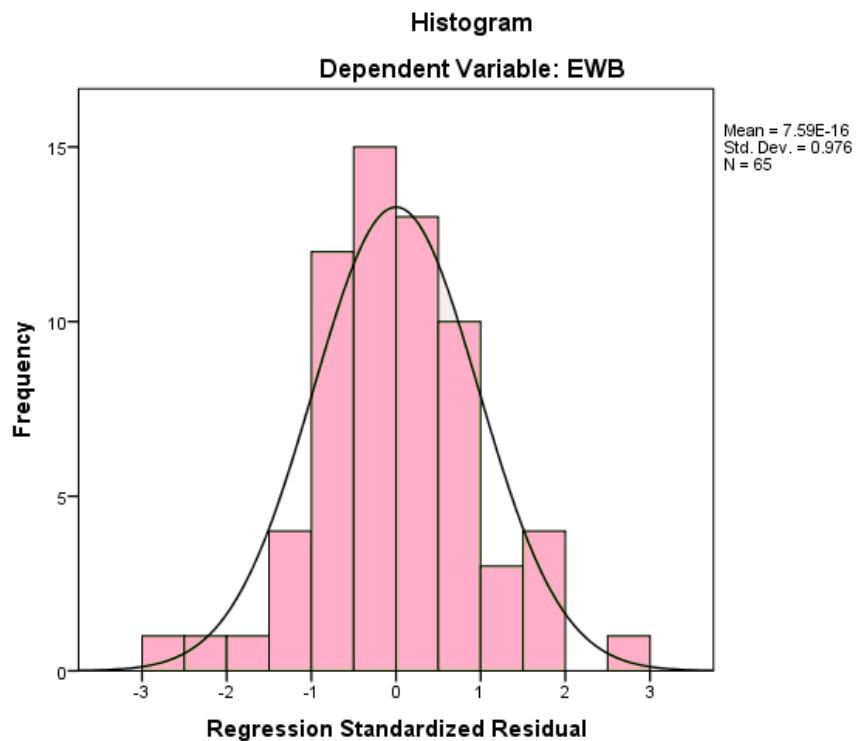
Scatter Plot



The same scatter plot which was conducted to check for linearity is used to check for homoscedasticity. From a visual inspection of the scatter plot there does not appear to be any homoscedasticity or heteroscedasticity.

The next assumption which cannot be violated in multiple regression analysis is that of multicollinearity. The independent variable correlation values were checked, none were above 0.7. The main value to check the is the tolerance score. A tolerance score of less than 0.1 indicates an issue with multicollinearity. After this, the data was checked for any outliers, leverage points or influential points. No outliers were observed. There was one possible leverage point above the recommend .2, it was .204 as it was just above it was kept in the data but a note was made of it. Following this the Cook's distance was checked for influential points. There were 3 influential points above the required value of 1 (.42, .28 & .19)

The next assumption to check is that of normality. Please see the below Histogram.



The normality was also checked by observing the points in the p-p plot.

Looking at the output, the model summary provides the multiple correlation coefficient $R = .585$ suggesting a weak to moderate linear relationship. The next concern is with $R^2 = .342$ ($.342 \times 100 = 34.2$). However, the Adjusted R^2 score is of more concern this was ($R^2 = .310 \times 100 = 31$) meaning 31% of the variation in the dependent variable can be accounted for from the independent variables.

After running this analysis it can be said that employee well-being can be predicted by levels of perceived organisational support and the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict $F(3,61) = 10.5, p < .0005$. Regression coefficients and standard errors can be found in the below table.

Table 5

Variable	B	SE β	β
Role Conflict	0.245	0.27	0.115
Role Ambiguity	-0.459	0.342	-0.174
Perceived Organisational Support	-0.308	0.096	-0.445

This section analysed the data, the hypothesis which were earlier formulated and presented the relevant findings from the analysis. Not all predictions made were shown to have a relationship. However, there are interesting findings amongst the analysis nonetheless. The findings made in this section will be broken down and the relevance discussed in the next chapter.

Discussion

This research set out to uncover whether perceived organisational support impacts the relationship between the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict and employee well-being. To test this out, various hypothesis were tested involving the different variables. Unfortunately, the scale chosen to measure workplace stressors is unreliable which hampers what can be deducted from the findings. From the findings, length of service does not appear to affect perceived organisational support, neither does type of employment. However, retail employees with higher levels of perceived organisational support experienced lower levels of workplace stressors and were higher in well-being. In this section, the relevance of these findings will be discussed with reference to previous literature and findings in the area.

From the first section of the findings, the descriptive statistics it can be seen a much higher percentage of females responded to the survey. While there are more women than men working in the retail sector (CSO, 2016) this could also be to do with how the survey was administered. As it was administered through Facebook there may have been more female respondents likely to see the post from the researcher. This result does not impact the research.

The average number of years a retail employee has been with their organisation from this research is 1.6 years. Only 7.2% of employees had been with their organisation for five years or more. This could be indicative of the retail industry having notoriously high turnover levels (Whysall et al., 2009). It could also be related to people being less loyal to their organisations overall in today's society (Deloitte, 2018).

Implications for Employee Well-Being

Employee well-being was shown to be higher in retail employees who were also higher in levels of perceived organisational support. This is as the researcher hypothesised. Perceived organisational support involves employee's personifying their organisation, to a degree and formulating ideas of how much they think the organisation cares about them. If an employee is working for an organisation that they perceive doesn't care about them this is going to affect their employee well-

being. This finding is in line with the previous literature with some slight differences.

The literature which has already uncovered a relationship between perceived organisational support and employee well-being, mostly used, job-satisfaction as the measure of employee well-being (Eisenberger & Rhoades, 2002). As well as this Mark & Smith (2012) found that social support was positively related to job-satisfaction. This research can still be used to ground results, although social support was measured as opposed to perceived organisational support they are both found with basis in social exchange theory. Again, this research used the measure of job-satisfaction which was largely used throughout the literature. Although this research used the job-related affective well-being the research are both aiming to measure well-being and complement each other. Aside from the findings about job-satisfaction, perceived organisational support was also found to previously fill socio-emotional needs which relate to well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This finding supports previous findings. Perceived organisational support has a positive relationship with well-being, this should be reflected in practise which will be discussed further in the recommendations.

From the multiple regression analysis, perceived organisational support and workplace stressors were both found to be significantly able to predict employee well-being. Although this prediction ability is weak to moderate. What may be affecting this strength is the scale used for workplace stressors. The scale was widely used amongst workplace stress research with success (Rizzo et al., 1970). However, in the current research the scale was found to be unreliable. This is unfortunate as any deductions made from the data involving this scale cannot fully credible, nor generalized. This is fully recognized by the researcher.

However, as research previously recognised a relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being, the findings of workplace stressors as a predictor or employee well-being are consistent with previous research using role ambiguity and role conflict as stressors (Knight, Kim & Crutsinger, 2007). As well as this there are many possible workplace stressors which can affect well-being, the justification for role-ambiguity and role-conflict has been made previously. However, other stressors could potentially have a larger impact on well-being for retail workers such

as, relationship with colleagues or working hours. Perceived organisational support as a predictor on well-being is significant as no similar research on the retail sector in Ireland was found.

It is one of the key findings that both role ambiguity, role conflict and perceived organisational support were found to be influential. Instead of stressors being a large all-encompassing term, more specific stressors have been identified making it easier for organisations to tackle. How organisations can deal with these will be discussed in the recommendations.

The Impact of Perceived Organisational Support

H1 predicted that the type of employment (full-time, part-time or otherwise) would affect the level of perceived organisational support felt by retail employees. This hypothesis was rejected. The norm of reciprocity is a key factor in perceived organisational support (Gouldner, 1960). Norms become norms through socialization and acceptance or norms as standards, as such it was hypothesised employee's in more consistent contact and involvement with the organisation would strengthen levels of perceived organisational support. However, there was no significant finding to support this.

There are a few possible reasons for this, when employees are forming their perceptions of perceived organisational support the distinction between genuine efforts made by the organisation and one's which are not perceived to be genuine are important (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Employee's working in part-time or full-time employment will be exposed to the same efforts made and therefore make the same judgements.

H1a hypothesised that employee's with under one year's service experience lower levels of perceived organisational support than employee's with over one year's service. This too was rejected. The basis of the formation for this is similar to what is stated above. As well as this perceived organisational support has an element of trust, which takes time to build, but this has not affected how quickly it is formed. There was a third group for people who have been employed for 5 years or more, however, the data for this question was very small. As such generalizations could not be made using it in analysis.

Employee's don't just form perceptions of the organisations of rewards or through policies, but also through the interactions with supervisors and managers (Kurtessis et al., 2017) this is because they are viewed as agents of the organisation. This could explain these findings; retail employees are regularly exposed to supervisors and managers immediately in a role. By interacting with agents of the organisation this could affect how quickly perceived organisational support is formed.

An interested thing to take from the finding of H1 and H1a are that employee's do not seem to take long to interpret the actions and form perceptions of their organisations. A possible direction for future research would be to measure perceived organisational support in a longitudinal study, to measure weather the perceptions which are seemingly quickly formed, hold true.

Finally, the findings of H2 will be discussed. This hypothesised that retail employees who were high in perceived organisational support would be lower in levels of felt workplace stressors. A negative correlation was found, and the hypothesis was accepted. This is consistent the literature which supports the idea that employee's will be better able to manage stressors if they have the resources to cope (Wallace et al., 2009).

Role conflict and role ambiguity can be more prevalent in certain industries, which is why the retail industry was chosen. These role stressors can be more prevalent here due to the nature of the work and dealing with customers (Chung & Schneider, 2002). If an employee has the supports necessary, the impact of the stressors will be less, and it will be likely to turn into strain. As mentioned previously (Mark & Smith, 2012) found that social support had a negative relationship with depression. Social support and perceived organisational support differ and are measured differently but have the same theoretical basis so are still comparable. Depression is measure from psychological well-being and is not domain specific, but the research is still relevantly applicable to this research. Although these findings support this research, what can be drawn from them is limited due to the measure of workplace stressors being unreliable.

What can be taken from the findings is this, nature of employment and length of service do not affect perceived organisational support. This is important to note as it alludes that perceived organisational support is formed relatively quickly. How

perceived organisational support is formed matters as the findings showed it negatively affects workplace stressors and positively affects employee well-being. Perceived organisational support and workplace stressors were shown as statistically significant in predicting employee well-being. Employee well-being must be a concern for employers and the consequences of low employee well-being are felt by the employee and the employer. Recommendations for retail organisations based off these findings are outlined in the next section.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate whether perceived organisational support impacted the relationship between workplace stressors and employee well-being. The research has shown that perceived organisational support does have a positive relationship with well-being. Perceived organisational support in theory can seem abstract but it portrays something everyone does in their organisation. By everyone knowing what it is and perhaps taking it as obvious, can downplay to the positive consequences that are coupled with it. It must be made an area of focus again.

It is becoming more common for large organisations to have well-being programmes which usually encourage healthy-eating and exercise. These are good things to be promoting but are they necessary if they basic support systems within an organisation are taken for granted? This research has shown than it is worth revisiting what organisations and employee's take for granted. As well as this any larger type of well-being programmes may not be perceived as genuine if the organisation has not been supportive prior to this.

Role ambiguity and role conflict have been shown to be prevalent in the retail sector. They have also shown to be related to well-being. Role ambiguity is somewhat more manageable, and it is the responsibility of the organisation to ensure each role has purpose.

The well-being of employee's is critical for employee's and employer. Employer's have a duty of care towards their employee's and should therefor act in their best interest. There are aspects of the retail sector which can remain unattractive to some (working hours, weekends). But it is time to look at what can be done, perceived organisational support is something that isn't exclusive to large organisations. Smaller organisations can ensure that they are doing their best to provide a support network for their employee's.

This is especially important at a time when the retail sector is facing many changes. People typically initially resist change, it is important for them to feel supported in their organisation to deal with the change and continue performing at their best.

Based on the findings in this research it would interesting for future research to study

the variances in perceived organisational support and well-being over-time. Perceived organisational support seems to be formed quickly but there is no reference to how malleable this is. As well as this it would interesting to see if it is highly fluctuational whether employee well-being also fluctuates.

Recommendations

As perceived organisational support was shown to have a direct relationship with well-being and an indirect via workplace stressors, recommendations are now made for increasing perceived organisational support.

First, to solidify perceived organisational support in new starters organisations need to have a comprehensive induction phase in place. If there is an induction already in place it needs to be reviewed. Induction is an important tool for organisations to use that is all too often wasted with a brief presentation on company performance. New starters can be told the profit margins in the previous financial year and not be told where their locker is.

Instead organisations should utilize this effective tool at their disposal to effectively place new staff. To implement an induction programme if there was none in place could be rolled out in a matter of weeks. The responsibility can be shared between who is training the new staff in and the manager. This is of virtually no financial burden to the organisation, as the biggest difference for organisations with no induction would be to assign someone to this responsibility. Ensure they will check in with new staff regularly for the first six weeks and provide basic information about the organisation. As the retail environment is seasonal it is not practical to expect the same measures to be applied for staff hired for busy periods such as Christmas, however a condensed induction should still be carried out as these staff may go on to be full-time/permanent in the future. The retail sector on average spends 3.73% of payroll costs on training (IBEC, 2013) a review of the measures in place and increased awareness of their importance is unlikely to add this cost.

For staff who are already with their organisation, clear policies and guidelines and creating an open culture can help staff feel supported. In retail, there can be a large gap between senior management and what is happening on the ground. To bridge this distance and help different levels of staff communicate, higher levels of managers can aim to spend two days a year on the ground performing the same roles as the entry level staff. This gives seniors a better understanding of the more basic issues that potentially lead to larger issues for staff.

As perceived organisational support and the workplace stressors of role ambiguity and role conflict have a negative relationship, organisations need to do their utmost to avoid these workplace stressors. For role ambiguity, employee's need to have a clear job specification that is reviewed annually. It can be tempting for organisations to use the same job specification in advertising all the time, but this can be damaging. It could lead to role ambiguity by not being clear enough and role conflict if the demands of the role have changed and have not been accurately represented.

Another important measure to tackle role conflict is hiring the right staff. Role conflict can occur in retail with conflicting demands from customers and management. Making managers more aware of the conflicting demands can help, but ensuring staff are able to make the right judgements is also important. This can be implemented in recruitment stages. If the recruitment has situational tests similar ones can be added and the right questions at interview stages can also assess candidates.

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Personal Learning Statement

After accepting my place on the Masters programme I was curious and eager to learn. Throughout the course of the year I learned a great deal. My classes were lively, and I truly benefitted from the knowledge sharing that occurred. When faced with the prospect of writing a thesis I was not so enthused. It seemed like a daunting, unmanageable piece of work.

From working in retail in the past and during the year, I was sometimes surprised at suggestions made by upper management, that were clearly unrealistic for people on the ground to implement. This sparked my curiosity to conduct research on well-being in the retail sector.

Initially I tried to put together a survey before my literature review was finished because I was panicking about time for data collection and analysis. I was putting the cart before the horse and it clearly wasn't going to work. However, the skills I learned throughout the year helped me be able to take a step back and reflect on what I had been taught in research methods. That research is a process, and for a good reason. I went back and researched and finished reviewing the literature before attempting anything else. I can recognise now that yes, some time was wasted here but I also learned that dwelling on this wasn't going to help. The best thing to do is plan the way forward.

I hope from the body of work, it is clear I have learned a great deal about perceived organisational support, workplace stressors and employee well-being. I have also learned much about research as a process and quantitative analysis. But mostly, I have learned how take a large piece of work and make it manageable for yourself. A skill which is necessary in work and throughout life. I have also learned about myself.

Appendix A

The below message was displayed for participants to read before completing the survey.

The purpose of this research project is to measure whether levels of perceived organisation support impact the relationship between workplace stress and job-related well-being in retail workers. It contains four sections in total.

This is a research project being conducted as a requirement for level 9 qualification at The National College of Ireland. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a retail worker. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately 10 minutes. Your responses will be confidential, and we do not collect any information which may identify you. Your information will be kept confidential. All data is stored electronically and securely. The results of this study will be used for academic purposes only. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact 17136334@student.ncirl.ie

This research has been reviewed and approved by The National College of Ireland ethics committee for research involving human subjects.

By clicking next you are consenting to be participate.

Appendix B

Perceived Organisational Support Question Coding

Questions Group 1: Demographics

S1Item1 – Please Select your Gender?

S1Item2 – What Kind of employment are you currently in?

S1Item3 – How long have you been in your current employment?

Question Group 2: Perceived Organisational Support

With regards to the following statements please select which applies.

(r) = Reverse scored

Answer Codes: **1** - Strongly Disagree

2 - Disagree

3 - Somewhat Disagree

4 - Neutral

5 - Somewhat Agree

6 - Agree

7 - Strongly Agree

S2Item1 - The organisation values my contributions to its well-being

S2Item2 - If the organisation could hire someone on a lower salary to replace me it would do so. ®

S2Item3 - The organisation fails to appreciate any extra effort from me ®

S2Item4 - The organisation strongly considers my goals and values.

S2Item5 - The organisation would ignore any complaint from me. ®

S2Item6 - The organisation disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me. ®

S2Item7 - Help is available from the organisation when I have a problem.

S2Item8 - The organisation really cares about my well-being.

S2Item9 - Even if I did the best job possible, the organisation would fail to notice. ®

S2Item10 - The organisation is willing to help me when I need a special favour.

S2Item11 - The organisation cares about my general satisfaction at work

S2Item12 - If given the opportunity the organisation would take advantage of me. ®

S2Item13 - The organisation shows very little concern for me. ®

S2Item14 - The organisation cares about my opinions.

S2Item15 - The organisation takes pride in my accomplishments at work.

S2Item16 - The organisation tries to make my job as interesting as possible. ®

Question Group 3: Workplace Stressors

(RA = Role ambiguity, RC = Role Conflict)

With regard to the following statements please select which is most applicable.

Answer Codes: 5 – Strongly Agree

4 – Agree

3 – Neutral

2 – Disagree

1 – Strongly Disagree

S3Item1 – I have enough time to complete my work. (RC)

S3Item2 - I feel certain about how much authority I have. (RA)

S3Item3 - I perform tasks that are too easy or boring. (RC)

S3Item4- Clear, planned goals and objectives for my job. (RA)

S3Item5 - I have to do things that should be done differently. (RC)

S3Item6 - Lack of policies and guidelines to help me. (RA)

S3Item7 - I am able to act the same regardless of the group I am with. (RC)

S3Item8 - I am corrected or rewarded when I really don't expect it. (RA)

S3Item9 - I work under incompatible policies and guidelines. (RC)

S3Item10 - I know that I have divided my time properly. (RA)

S3Item11 - I receive assignments without the man power to complete it. (RC)

S3Item12 - I know what my responsibilities are. (RA)

S3Item13 - I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment. (RC)

S3Item14 - I have to "feel my way" in performing my duties. (RA)

S3Item15 - I receive assignments that are within my training and capability. (RC)

S3Item16 -I feel certain how I will be evaluated for a raise or promotion. (RA)

S3Item17 - I have just the right amount of work to do. (RC)

S3Item18 - I work with two or more groups who operate quiet differently. (RC)

S3Item19 - I know exactly what is expected of me. (RA)

S3Item20 - I receive incompatible requests from two or more people. (RC)

S3Item21 - I am uncertain as to how my job is linked. (RA)

S3Item22 - I do things that are appropriate to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others. (RC)

S3Item23 - I am told how well I am doing my job. (RA)

S3Item24 - I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it. (RC)

S3Item25 - Explanation is clear of what has to be done. (RA)

S3Item26 – I work on unnecessary things. (RC)

S3Item27 - I have to work under vague directives or orders. (RA)

S3Item28 - I perform work that suits my values. (RC)

S3Item29 - I do not know if my work will be acceptable to my boss. (RA)

Group 4: Employee Well-Being

Please indicate the amount to which any part of your job (e.g., the work, co-workers, supervisor, clients, pay) has made you feel that emotion in the past 30 days.

Answer Codes: **5** – Never

4 – Rarely

3 – Sometimes

2 – Quite Often

1 – Several times per day

Question Codes:

S4Item1 - My job made me feel angry

S4Item2 - My job made me feel anxious

S4Item3 - My job made me at ease

S4Item4 - My job made me feel bored

S4Item5 - My job made me feel calm

S4Item6 - My job made me feel content

S4Item7 - My job made me feel depressed

S4Item8 - My job made me feel discouraged

S4Item9 - My job made me feel disgusted

S4Item10 - My job made me feel ecstatic

S4Item11 - My job made me feel energetic

S4Item12 - My job made me feel enthusiastic

S4Item13 - My job made me feel excited

S4Item14 - My job made me feel fatigued

S4Item15 - My job made me feel frightened

S4Item16 - My job made me feel furious

S4Item17 - My job made me feel gloomy

S4Item18 - My job made me feel inspired

S4Item19 - My job made me feel relaxed

S4Item20 - My job made me feel satisfied

Sub Scales:

HPHA (high pleasure high arousal) – Ecstatic, enthusiastic, excited, energetic, inspired (**S4Item10, S4Item12, S4Item13, S4Item11, S4Item18**)

HPLA (high pleasure low arousal) – Satisfied, content, at ease, relaxed, calm (**S4Item20, S4Item6, S4Item3, S4Item19, S4Item5**)

LPHA (Low pleasure high arousal) – Furious, angry, frightened, anxious, disgusted (**S4Item16, S4Item1, S4Item15, S4Item2, S4Item9**) **these items are reverse scored**

LPLA (Low pleasure low arousal) – Depressed, gloomy, fatigued, discouraged, bored (**S4Item7, S4Item17, S4Item14, S4Item8, S4Item4**) **these items are reverse scored**