

**DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEASURING INSTRUMENT OF  
SOCIAL SUPPORT**

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- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article. The editorial style specified by the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* (which agrees largely with the APA style) is used, but the APA guidelines were followed in constructing tables.

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## SUMMARY

**Title:** The development of a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support.

**Key words:** Social support, dimensions of social support, organisation, measurement, properties, reliability, validity.

Social support has been proven to play a major role in the well-being of an individual. Unfortunately, the conceptualisation of the construct is vague and many authors disagree about the various properties and dimensions of the construct. Seen from a health-related perspective, social support can be regarded as divided into two main spectrums, the *main-effect model* and the *stress-buffering model*. The *main-effect model* proposes that social support has a beneficial effect, whether or not an individual is under stress, while the *stress-buffering model* proposes that social support buffers an individual from potentially pathological influences. The construct is furthermore conceptualised as consisting of distinct structural, functional and perceptual dimensions. The aim of the research was to develop an instrument which would incorporate all three of these dimensions and could be proven valid and statistically reliable.

A cross-sectional survey design was used. An availability sample of qualified educators in the North-West Province of South Africa was used. The Social Support Survey was developed as a measuring instrument and administered along with a biographical questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data.

Contrary to expectation, factor analysis indicated that the four factors regarding the characteristics of the support, as well as the five factors regarding the types of support, were clustered around the source of support. This might be due to the Likert-scale matrix design of the questionnaire, which required participants to answer a wide range of questions regarding the type, importance, amount, adequacy and accessibility of support.

By way of conclusion, recommendations were made.

## OPSOMMING

**Titel:** Die ontwikkeling van 'n multidimensionele meetinstrument van sosiale ondersteuning.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Sosiale ondersteuning, dimensies van sosiale ondersteuning, organisasie, meting, eienskappe, betroubaarheid, geldigheid.

Daar is bewys dat sosiale ondersteuning 'n kardinale rol speel in die welstand van 'n individu. Die konseptualisering van die konstruk is ongelukkig vaag en onder talle skrywers heers daar nie eenstemmigheid oor die onderskeie eienskappe en dimensies van die konstruk nie. Gesien vanuit 'n gesondheidsverwante perspektief kan sosiale ondersteuning beskou word as dat dit in twee hoofspektra verdeel is, naamlik die *direkte-effekmodel* en die *stresbuffermodel*. Die *direkte-effekmodel* stel voor dat sosiale ondersteuning 'n voordelige effek het, ongeag of die individu stres ervaar of nie, terwyl die *stresbuffermodel* voorstel dat sosiale ondersteuning 'n individu teen potensieel patologiese invloede buffer. Die konstruk word verder gekonseptualiseer as bestaande uit afsonderlike strukturele, funksionele en perseptuele dimensies. Die doel van hierdie navorsing was om 'n instrument te ontwerp wat al drie hierdie dimensies sou inkorporeer en geldig en statisties betroubaar bewys kon word.

'n Dwarsdeursnee-ontwerp is gebruik. 'n Beschikbaarheidssteekproef van gekwalifiseerde onderwysers uit die Noordwes-Provinsie van Suid Afrika is gebruik. Die Sosiale-ondersteuningsopname is as 'n meetinstrument ontwikkel en gepaard met 'n biografiese vraelys aangewend. Beskrywende en inferensiële statistiek is gebruik om die data te analiseer.

In kontras met verwagtinge, het faktoranalise aangedui dat die vier faktore wat verband hou met die eienskappe van ondersteuning, sowel as die vyf faktore wat betrekking het op die tipes ondersteuning, gegroepeer het rondom die ondersteuningsbron. Dit mag die gevolg wees van die Likert-skaal-matriksontwerp van die vraelys, wat van deelnemers verwag het om 'n wye reeks vrae rakende die tipe, belangrikheid, hoeveelheid, toereikendheid en toeganklikheid van ondersteuning te beantwoord.

Ter afsluiting is aanbevelings aan die hand gedoen.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This research article deals with the development and validation of a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support. In Chapter 1 the motivation for the research is discussed in terms of the problem statement and the aims of the research. Both the research method and the chapter layout are discussed.

### 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The only aspect regarding social support most authors agree on is the absence of consensus regarding the conceptualisation of the construct. Chronister, Johnson and Berven (2006) note that social support is a meta-construct, comprising several distinguishable theoretical constructs. Authors also conceptualise three main dimensions regarding the properties and structures of social support. The structural, functional and perceptual dimensions of social support, are commonly incorporated in various studies and measurement designs (Chronister et al., 2006).

The *structural dimension* focuses on an individual's network of social support. These networks distinguish "the quantity (size, frequency of contacts) and the characteristics (composition, density, homogeneity and multiplexity)" of social support networks (Chronister et al., 2006, p. 76). This dimension encompasses the structural ties an individual has with relevant sources such as supervisors, spouses and colleagues. The *functional dimension* focuses on the type and quality of social support. Functional support has been categorised as instrumental, emotional, informational and appraisal support (House & Kahn, 1985). Instrumental support is defined as support received of a practical nature. Emotional support encompasses the empathy received from a significant other. Informational support is defined as useful information that helps one in dealing with problems. Appraisal support is defined as feedback about functioning. The *perceptual dimension* can be seen as a combination of the source and the type (McIntosh, 1991). Properties of this dimension are the number of providers, the amount of resource available and the perceived adequacy of the resource.

Most measuring instruments of social support, however, only use one or two of these dimensions. The aim of the present research is to explore the current research regarding the structures and processes of social support and to conceptualise a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support that could incorporate all of these dimensions.

As far back as 1977, researchers and authors already had the notion that “support is thus considered the most important concept for future study and it also presents the most difficult task for instrumentation. A thorough search in the social and psychological inventories of scales has failed to uncover any means of social support with either known and/or acceptable properties of reliability and validity” (Lin, Dean, & Ensel, 1986, p. 9).

Apart from literature regarding the effects of social support on depression, health, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), occupational stress and other variables (Wattanakit, Williams, Schreiner, Hirsch, & Folsom, 2005; Westaway, Seager, Rheeder, & Van Zyl, 2005; Guay, Billette, & Marchand, 2006), literature on social support as a construct also contains various models and research regarding the structures and processes of social support. The *stress-buffering model* and the *main effect model*, as processes through which social support has beneficial effects on well-being, have been adequately documented by authors such as Cohen and Wills (1985).

“The link between the past and contemporary formulations about the role of social support is still hazy, since it only received its full articulation in the early 1970’s when the epidemiologist, John Cassel, and the social psychiatrist, Gerald Caplan, each contributed seminal papers on the nature and public health implications of social support” (Gottlieb, 1981, p. 21). Cassel identified a category of psychosocial processes which he named “health protective”. These processes involved the strength of social support that was provided by groups of interest to the individual. Caplan was the first to elaborate a scheme for classifying types and structuring social support as a construct (Gottlieb, 1981). He describes three types of social support systems, but does not elaborate on any structural properties.

Social support assessment has taken on a variety of approaches through the years. Gottlieb (1981) notes that some of the approaches have focused on the providers of social support, others on the individual's appraisal of the support and still others on the activities involved in providing social support. These approaches formed a loose collection of what would later become the three dimensions of social support, namely the structural, perceptual and informational dimensions of the construct. Lin (1986) came to the conclusion, already in 1977, that the multifaceted nature of the construct demands a multi-method approach to assessing it. This would also allow for the examination of interrelationships between, for example, individuals' perceptions of adequacy and the structural components of their social networks.

Gottlieb (1981) developed one of the first measuring instruments for social support during the late 1970's. The Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviours (ISSB) consisted of forty items generated by himself and various other sources. Ratings were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "not at all" to "about every day". The internal consistency reliability of the scale yielded alpha coefficients of 0,93 and 0,94 respectively for the first and second administrations. Test-retest correlation coefficients for individual items ranged from 0,44 to 0,90. However, it is noted that the measurement of actual supportive behaviours would be difficult, since the subjects could not rate the frequency of these occurrences. Essentially this, and other initial measures, only assessed the source (structural) or the characteristic (functional) dimensions of the construct, and were not multidimensional.

Social support was often assumed to refer to the provision of aid, which presupposes a concern for the well-being of another person. However, various other conceptualisations have been identified and incorporated into the literature. House and Kahn (1985) recognised instrumental, informational, appraisal and emotional support as distinct facets of the construct. Burleson, Albrecht and Sarason (1994) evaluated a study done by Tardy (1992) on the perceptions of instrumental and emotional support messages. They used three variables, namely "no support", "emotional support" and "instrumental support". Coefficient alphas ranged between 0,83 and 0,93.

Burleson (1994) notes that, between measures of perceived support and measures of received support, perceived support measures have yielded the strongest association with health outcomes. Burleson (1994) provides us with the findings of research done by Sarason (1987) regarding the perceived availability of support. They used the Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI), and found, by means of factor analysis, that separate dimensions could be distinguished, namely support, depth and conflict. This forms the early basis of the perceptual dimension of social support.

House (1987) mentions that, because of its origin in the health sciences and its concern with health as the dependent variable, social support as a construct has not benefited as much as it should have from conceptual and theoretical perspectives. Hupcey (1994) examined a report on 145 different articles based on their method of measuring social support. She found that 58 focused on the measurement of type of support, 25 on support network characteristics, and 39 on both these dimensions. This implies that none of these studies actually measured the individuals' perceptions of the received support, but only the structural and functional dimensions of the construct.

Despite noted limitations, researchers have recognised various dimensions of social support over the past 20 years (Chronister et al., 2006). These dimensions can be grouped into three main categories: Structural, functional and perceptual. The exact interaction and whether one dimension is more or less fundamental to the construct is currently an ongoing research area. Authors such as Caplan (1974) emphasise the importance of the structural and functional aspects, whereas Cobb (1976) emphasises the perceptual dimension (Chronister et al., 2006).

A measure or scale of social support could be subjected to three basic examinations: (1) The basic dimensions should be analysed, (2) the validity and reliability should be established, and (3) the theoretical and phenomenological significance should be revealed (Lin et al., 1986). Accurate measurement of the construct would rely on the incorporation of its various sub-dimensions into the measuring instrument. The absence of one or more of these dimensions would result in an incomplete understanding, or conceptualisation, of the construct.

The utility of the construct lies in its practical applications to various aspects of society and life in general. The impact of self-esteem resulting from social support during a period of unemployment has been evidenced (Walters & Moore, 2002). Clinical pain relieve as a direct result of social support has also been documented (Brown, Shetfield, Leary, & Robinson, 2003). Suicide ideation and the moderating role of social support also has a long history as a research area (Yang & Clum, 1994).

Social support is an important construct in organisational research for a variety of reasons. Robbins, Odendaal and Roodt (2001) mention that expanding your social support network can be a means of reducing tension and stress. Terry, Nielsen and Perchard (1993) prove that social support has a buffering effect on work stress, and a positive effect on psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Employee adjustment to larger-scale organisational change could be improved through social support (Terry & Callan, 1997). Furthermore, Pines, Ben-Ari, Utasi & Larson (2002) submit evidence that social support has a buffering effect on burnout.

It is clear that social support is a construct which demands further research and conceptualisation. It is in this spirit that this research aims to further understand the construct, but specifically create a measuring instrument that assesses the concept as comprehensively as possible. A successful measure of the construct should ideally take into account the structural dimension (the source of social support), functional dimension (the type of support) and the perceptual dimension (number of providers, amount and perceived adequacy).

The following research questions can be formulated based on the above-mentioned description of the research problem:

- How is social support conceptualised in the literature?
- How have the dimensions of social support been conceptualised and measured in the existing literature?
- Is it possible to create a valid and reliable multidimensional measuring instrument of social support?

- How do various dimensions of social support relate to biographical variables of individuals completing the questionnaire, and are there any significant differences?
- What recommendations can be made regarding the conceptualisation and measurement of social support in Organisational and Industrial psychology?

In order to answer the afore-mentioned research questions, the following research objectives are set.

## **1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives are divided into a general aim and specific objectives.

### **1.2.1 General aim**

The general aim of the present research is to develop and validate a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support.

### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of this research are:

- To conceptualise the construct *social support* from the literature
- To conceptualise the dimensions and measurement of the construct *social support* from the literature.
- To create a valid and reliable multidimensional measuring instrument of social support.
- To analyse the relationship between the various dimensions of social support and biographical variables.
- To provide recommendations for further research.

### **1.3 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH**

A certain *paradigm perspective* that includes the intellectual climate and the market of intellectual resources directs the research (Lundin, 1996; Mouton & Marais, 1992). A paradigm directs and supports scientific research through theories, predictions and laws, and in essence it forms a model for scientific research. The scientist commits him-/herself to a certain set of theories or laws, follows a specific methodology and techniques, commits to specific quasi-metaphysical suppositions and reaches conclusions within this framework.

#### **1.3.1 Intellectual climate**

*Intellectual climate* “refers to the non-epistemic or meta-theoretical assumptions and beliefs that are accepted as valid within a discipline at a given point in time. In the human sciences, these would typically include assumptions about human beings in general (different anthropological views such as humanism, behaviourism, existentialism and systems theory) and also the more discipline-specific assumptions and presuppositions about society, culture, economy, history and so on (Garbers, 1996, p. 24).

#### **1.3.2 Discipline**

This research falls within the boundaries of the behavioural sciences and more specifically Industrial Psychology. According to Muchinsky, Kriek and Schreuder (2002, p. 3), “industrial psychology has a more restricted definition than psychology as a whole. It can be defined as the scientific study of people within their work environment, this implies: scientific observation, evaluation, optimal utilisation and influencing of normal and, to a lesser degree, deviant behaviour in interaction with the environment (physical, psychological, social and organisational) as manifested in the world of work”. One could indeed think of Industrial Psychology as a sub-component, or a specialist area of Psychology.

Broadly speaking, a number of fields could be distinguished within the Industrial Psychology discipline. These fields include personnel psychology, organisation psychology, ergonomics,

vocational and career counselling, organisational development, employment relations and many more (Muchinsky et al., 2002). In this specific research, components of various sub-fields can be found such as psychometrics and personnel psychology. Both psychometrics and personnel psychology attempt to measure certain constructs of human behaviour and then explain or predict behaviour or performance. This research attempts to create a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support which could further the current understanding of the construct and provide a more accurate measurement and conceptualisation thereof.

### **1.3.3 Meta-theoretical assumptions**

Firstly, the literature review is done within the positivistic paradigm and within Karasek's demand control support theory. Secondly, the empirical study is done within the positivistic and functionalistic paradigms.

#### **1.3.3.1 Literature review**

According to Struwig and Stead (2001, p. 5), the positivist paradigm is a school of thought that "combines a deductive approach with precise measurement of quantitative data so researchers can discover and confirm causal laws that will permit predictions about human behaviour". The quantitative research strategies are preceded by the positivistic approach which sees reality as existing. "Therefore, context-free laws of behaviour are assumed to exist. In addition, the object being researched is assumed to be independent from the investigators, i.e. the researcher can investigate a phenomenon without influencing it or being influenced by it. Such a philosophy leads to reductionism, in which phenomena can best be understood by examining their fundamental or basic aspects, and determinism that subscribes to the belief that all events have causes." (Struwig & Stead, 2001, p.9.) This approach should inherently guide the researcher to be impartial and objective in his methodology. This does, however, not suppose that the researcher is not part of the reality, for the researcher does become part of the research and cannot be totally objective. This research will therefore emphasise the participants' perspectives and describe the relevant events, beliefs and behaviours.



### **1.3.3.2 Empirical study**

The assumptions of a positivistic approach have already been discussed above, and the functionalistic approach and assumptions will subsequently be explored. The early theme of William James, the forerunner of functionalism, was that behaviour is adaptable, and that in order to survive one has to adapt to one's surroundings. Some of the main assumptions of functionalism are that it emphasises the mental process or functions, not static consciousness. It is concerned with applications, but does not dismiss introspection as a data-gathering method; it simply maintains that it is not the only method (Lundin, 1996).

The concepts taken from as far back as Darwin, and the theme of adaptation as well as focus on applications, will form a foundation for the methodology of this research as well as for the interpretation and use of the results. The objectives of this research could eventually lead to the adaptation of behaviours and result in benefits for individuals and companies.

### **1.3.4 Market of intellectual resources**

“The *market of intellectual resources* refers to the ‘stock’ of resources that are directly related to the epistemic status of science. There are two main categories, namely theoretical resources and methodological resources. Theoretical resources involve the nature and dynamics of reality and include all the theories, models, interpretations, typologies and empirical statements that the scientific community accepts as valid. The methodological resources include all the methods, techniques and approaches that are utilised in the research process.” (Garbers, 1996, p. 24.)

#### **1.3.4.1 Theoretical beliefs**

*Theoretical beliefs* can be described as “beliefs of which testable statements about social phenomena are made” (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 21). When the connotative meaning of a concept is specified, it constitutes the theoretical definition.

## **A. Conceptual definitions**

The relevant conceptual definition is given below:

*Social support* is a multi-dimensional construct which has been conceptualised as incorporating a structural, functional and perceptual dimension (Chronister et al., 2006). It can be attributed to the afore-mentioned multidimensional conceptualisation that this research proposes to develop a measuring instrument that not only measures one or two of these dimensions, but the entire spectrum.

## **B. Models and theories**

A *model* is defined as an abstract or outline that specifies hypothesised relations in a set of data (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

“A *theory* is defined as “a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena.” (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000, p. 11.)

The *demand control theory* is a “two-dimensional design that uses job demands and job control factors to predict stress related illnesses” (Karasek, 1979, p. 285). The theory has been adapted to include social support as a third construct that moderates strain.

### **1.3.4.2 Methodological beliefs**

*Methodological beliefs* can be defined as beliefs that conceptualise the type and structure of science and scientific research (Mouton & Marais, 1990).

The empirical study is presented within the positivistic and functional framework. Basic assumptions of the positivistic framework are that knowledge can only be obtained through the study of observable phenomena. The relevance to this research lies in the psychometric gathering

and statistical analyses of data to obtain results. The results could then be compared with previous results and certain assumptions made.

The root assumption of the functionalist framework lies in the emphasis on mental processes or functions, being able to adapt and finally, in the application of knowledge. In researching the processes of social support and creating a multidimensional measuring instrument, researchers could obtain a more objective conceptualisation of the construct. Interventions could then be implemented which could hold benefits for individuals and organisations.

## **1.4 RESEARCH METHOD**

This research, pertaining to the specific objectives, consists of two phases, namely a literature review and an empirical study.

### **1.4.1 Phase 1: Literature review**

The literature review focuses on the structures and processes of social support. The following sources will be consulted:

- Library catalogues
- Academic search lists
- Internet journals
- Textbooks

### **1.4.2 Phase 2: Empirical study**

The empirical study consists of the research design, participants, measuring battery and statistical analysis.

#### **1.4.2.1 Research Design**

Research designs are used as plans and structures which would enable the researcher to answer the research questions. In this study, a cross-sectional survey design was used. This means that the sample was drawn from a population at a specific time.

This research is descriptive and explorative. *Exploratory research* seeks what is, while *descriptive* predicts relations (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The investigation firstly wished to empirically clarify the distinctions between sources, types and characteristics of support and develop and validate a multidimensional instrument, and secondly, to investigate whether any biographical differences could be evidenced between the observed dimensions.

#### **1.4.2.2 Participants**

The population from which data will be gathered will include primary and secondary school educators. They are professionals teaching to pupils from grades one to twelve. An availability sample will be used from the North-West Province, particularly in the Tlokwe municipal area. Educators from both types of schools (Primary and Secondary) will be approached to willingly participate in the study.

#### **1.4.2.3 Measuring Battery**

The *Social Support Survey* will be developed to measure the structural, functional and perceptual facets of the social support construct. The structural dimension refers to the sources of support. Six different sources will be measured, namely: “My partner”, “My best friend”, “My closest colleague”, “My direct supervisor”, “Union” and “Others”. The last option also afforded participants the option of describing who the “other” sources of support are. The functional dimension refers to the type of support received from a specific source. Types of support encompass *instrumental*, *emotional*, *informational* and *appraisal* facets of the dimension. The respondent can then rate the different types of support he/she receives from a specific source and indicate whether they receive that type of support on a scale of 1 to 4. The Perceptual dimension

refers to the characteristics of the support. The characteristics encompass the importance, the adequacy, the accessibility, and the amount of the support received. The latter characteristics can be rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (low levels) to 5 (high levels).

#### **1.4.2.4 Statistical Analysis and Validity**

*Validity* is defined as consisting of Translation Validity and Criterion-related Validity (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). *Translation validity* in turn encompasses *Face Validity* and *Content Validity*. *Criterion related validity* entails *Predictive Validity*, *Concurrent Validity*, *Convergent Validity* and *Discriminant Validity*. *Face validity* is “a type of validity that assures that, ‘on its face’, the operationalisation seems like a good translation of the construct”, while *content validity* is a “check of the operationalisation against the relevant content domain for the construct” (Trochim & Donnelly, p. 57-59). Face validity for the measure will be obtained by circulating it to academics and senior students in Industrial Psychology. The final version of the measure will reflect recommendations from these sources. Content validity is ensured by a proper review of the social support literature.

Criterion-related validity will be ensured by statistical analysis. The statistical analysis will be carried out with the help of the SPSS-program (SPSS, 2007). Reliability and descriptive statistics can be obtained through this program. Reliability will be assessed through the use of Cronbach alpha coefficients. Descriptive and inferential statistics will be used to analyse the data. Factor analysis will be applied to investigate the factor structure and reliability of the social support measure. Relationships between dimensions of social support will be investigated by using product-moment correlations. Differences in groups can be illustrated through the use of analysis of variance (ANOVA).

## **1.5 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Research proposal and problem statement.

Chapter 2: Research article.

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

## **1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter discussed the research problem, the resulting literature study and the *modus operandi* of the research. The general objective of the study is to conceptualise and construct a multi-dimensional measuring instrument for social support. This will be done by means of an investigation of the literature regarding social support, and more specifically the structures and processes of the construct, as well as an empirical study regarding the subject. Questions and objectives are formulated to direct the study. The positivistic as well as the functionalist paradigms are used to guide and direct the research in terms of the methodology. The research method of this empirical study includes the use of a cross-sectional survey design aimed at educators from primary and secondary schools in the North-West Province of South-Africa. The measuring instrument will assess social support in a multi-dimensional fashion as conceptualized in the literature study. The research results will be presented in the form of a research article. This includes an effort to analyse the results and present it in an organised manner. Thus Chapter 2 covers all aspects of the empirical results in the form of a research article.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# **DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEASURING INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT**

J. C. Oosthuizen

## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this study was to theoretically conceptualise the construct of social support, and specifically distinguish between the various dimensions associated with the construct. A further objective was to create and validate a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support. Three dimensions were incorporated in the questionnaire, namely a structural, functional and perceptual dimension. The instrument incorporated various sources of support, types of support, and characteristics of such support. The Social Support Survey was distributed to educators in the Tlokwe Municipal district in the North-West Province of South Africa. A cross-sectional survey design was used on a sample of educators ( $n=201$ ). Contrary to expectation, factor analysis indicated that the four factors regarding the characteristics of the support, as well as the five factors regarding the types of support, were clustered around the source of support. This might be due to the Likert-scale matrix design of the questionnaire, which required participants to answer a wide range of questions regarding the type, importance, amount, adequacy and accessibility of support.

## **OPSOMMING**

Die doelstelling van hierdie studie was om die konstruk sosiale ondersteuning teoreties te konseptualiseer, en spesifiek te onderskei tussen die verskeie dimensies wat met die konstruk geassosieer word. 'n Verdere doelstelling was die ontwikkeling en validering van 'n multidimensionele meetinstrument van sosiale ondersteuning. Drie dimensies was in die vraelys geïnkorporeer, naamlik 'n strukturele, funksionele en perseptuele dimensie. Die instrument neem ook verskillende ondersteuningsbronne, tipes ondersteuning, en eienskappe van sodanige ondersteuning in ag. Die Sosiale-ondersteuningsvraelys was onder onderwysers in die Tlokwe Munisipale distrik in die Noordwes provinsie van Suid Afrika versprei. 'n Dwarsdeursnee-opnameontwerp was gebruik op 'n studiepopulasie van onderwysers ( $n=201$ ). In kontras met verwagtinge, het faktoranalise aangedui dat die vier faktore wat

verband hou met die eienskappe van ondersteuning, sowel as die vyf faktore wat betrekking het op die tipes ondersteuning, gegroepeer het rondom die ondersteuningsbron. Dit mag die gevolg wees van die Likert-skaal-matriksontwerp van die vraelys, wat van deelnemers verwag het om 'n wye reeks vrae rakende die tipe, belangrikheid, hoeveelheid, toereikendheid en toeganklikheid van ondersteuning te beantwoord.

## INTRODUCTION

“When social support was initially examined during the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, the concept was used in concrete terms, referring to an interaction, person or relationship. However, in the past 15 years, the term has become more and more abstract, encompassing anticipation, perceptions, quality of support, quantity of supportive interactions...”

(Hupcey, 1998, p. 1231)

Cobb (1976, p. 301) defined social support as “...information leading a person to believe that he/she is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued and/or that he/she belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation”. One of the earliest contributors to the study of social support, John Cassel, was concerned with the processes whereby environmental conditions had a negative effect on people. He found that changes in the immediate social environment are capable of altering a person’s resistance to disease. Gerald Caplan was the first to truly elaborate a scheme for classifying the different types of support, although his conceptualization of the helping functions of social support were much clearer than his subsequent understanding of the actual structures (in Gottlieb, 1981).

According to Kreitner and Kinicky (2004), the negative relation between individuals’ physiological health and mortality has been well established in the literature. The process through which social support has a beneficial effect on well-being has been the research arena of various individuals, but notably the researchers Cohen and Wills. They incorporated either one, or both of the models linking social support to well-being into their investigations. The first model is termed the *buffering* model and it proposes that support buffers an individual from potentially pathological influences. The second is termed the *main-effect* model and proposes that social support has a beneficial effect whether or not an individual is under stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

As early as 1976, Cobb proposed that social support consists of various dimensions, of which he identified emotional support, esteem support and network support (in Lin, Dean, & Ensel, 1996).

House (1987, p. 135) subsequently proposed that certain aspects of social support should be distinguished, namely “(1) their existence or quantity (i.e., social integration), (2) their formal structure (i.e., social networks), and (3) their functional-behavioural content (i.e., the most precise meaning of “social support”) – and the causal relationships between the structure of social relationships (social integration and networks) and their functional content (social support) must be clearly understood”.

House (1981) further suggested that social support is an interpersonal transaction involving one or more of his conceptualised dimensions. These dimensions include emotional support, instrumental aid, information and appraisal (Thoits, 1982). This early break from health-related issues surrounding social support, and focus on conceptualizing the construct, had clear implications for measuring the construct. House and Kahn (1985, p. 84), however, mention that the research appeal of the construct is “based neither on the specificity of the concept nor on the emergence of some uniquely successful empirical measure.”

## **Dimensions**

McIntosh (1991) distinguished three dimensions of social support, namely the structural dimension, or the *source* of support, the functional dimension, or the *type* of support, and the perceptual dimension, or the *characteristics* of support that receivers experience.

The structural dimension of support is evidenced in the provided support from various individuals or entities from an individual’s social network. This includes support received from colleagues, friends or supervisors. Asking an individual how much support he/she receives from one person represents what has been called the “*one person is enough*” hypothesis. It may not matter how many people value or respect the individual, as long as he/she receives enough support from at least one source (Abramis & Caplan, 1985). When asking an individual how much support he/she receives from the person closest to them represents what has been called the “*critical supporter*” hypothesis. For example, it may not make a difference that one’s colleagues and supervisors do not show respect and support, providing one’s spouse does.

Some investigators have, for example, focused on the support received from only one source, such as a spouse (Abramis & Caplan, 1985), but found that social support and social conflict were inversely correlated when participants considered the one person closest to them. This means that researchers, who aim to examine the various independent effects of social support, and especially the structural dimension, should consider focusing on a variety of sources. It should be clear that any investigation, or measurement, of sources of support should carefully consider the personal and network realities of the individual before a specific source of support is incorporated into the study.

With regard to the functional dimension, the dimension focuses on the types and quality of social support. Functional support has been categorised as emotional, instrumental, appraisal and informational support (House & Kahn, 1985). Of these, the most frequently studied is emotional support (Hamilton & Sandelowski, 2004). Emotional support encompasses helping others through active listening, empathising, legitimising and actively exploring their emotions (Burleson, 1984). Cultural differences in emotional support should be taken into account, but gender differences in evaluating and giving emotional support seem to be more similar than was previously supposed (Burleson & Gilstrop, 2002). Hamilton and Sandelowski (2004) distinguished four different kinds of emotional support, namely the presence of others, encouraging words, distracting activities, and protecting and monitoring.

Instrumental, or tangible support, is usually assistance of a material or practical nature. This could take the form of helping around the house, financial support or delivering services (Hamilton & Sandelowski, 2004). Deelstra et al. (2003) commented that instrumental support in the work-place might not always be experienced as positive. Individuals might interpret practical help from supervisors as negative critique, which might evoke feelings of incompetence and inferiority. Instrumental support may thus not be perceived as helpful in all situations. These researchers have also found that instrumental support received from a colleague might be more negatively interpreted than support from a superior.

Appraisal support has been seen as a type of emotional support and is defined as an agreement with ideas or feedback, which leads to self-validation (Hamilton & Sandelowski, 2004).

Appraisal support is determined by the degree to which social support network members provide feedback of acceptance. Thus appraisal support can be defined as feedback received from a source of support, be it negative or positive, regarding the actions, behaviours or results obtained by the individual. Niles (1996) noted that appraisal support provides clients in a counselling relationship with opportunities to acquire information that is useful in making self-evaluations. This also assists the counsellor in exploring the clients' multiple perspectives and different concerns. Jackson, Kim and Delap (2007, p. 148) did an interesting study regarding the mediators of belief in control and hypothesise that "Unknown perception of control is said to be present when an individual is unable to identify where or with whom the responsibility lies for the consequences for a given event." Without feedback regarding our actions we would be unable to alter behaviour, and to adjust to situations.

Informational support has been studied less frequently than the other three types. Research has focused on medical interventions through the availability of information. For example, Cox (1986) suggested that women who received information regarding depression after childbirth would be more equipped to deal with any feelings of depression. Heh and Fu (2003) also proved that the availability of information diminished the occurrence of post-partum depression. Van Yperen (1998, p. 30) cautions that the need for informational support might not be the same for everyone: "Employees with weak self-efficacy beliefs may be more dependent on informational support than their counterparts high in self-efficacy." Van Yperen also suggests that different degrees of informational support available to nurses could buffer against burnout and reduce perceptions of inequity. For example, nurses with low levels of self-efficacy would have a stronger need for more job-related information.

### **Characteristics of social support**

In terms of the characteristics of the support, or the perceptual dimension, McIntosh (1991) proposes three properties of social support. Firstly she includes the number of providers. This is used to identify the quantity of the relationship. Secondly she includes the amount of support, which can be defined in terms of how much support is available. Lastly she includes support adequacy. She defines this as the amount of support available compared to the amount needed.

In considering further characteristics of support, one might also wonder which type of support is most important from which source. It might be argued that the partner's most important role is to provide emotional support, while a colleague could provide appraisal and a supervisor informational support. Also, the accessibility of support might play an important role. While a close colleague might be an important source of appraisal support, that colleague will not be able to provide it if he/she is away for training, off sick, or not at work for whatever reason when the support is needed. Thus the *importance* of types of support and the *availability* of types of support warrant further investigation.

The importance and relevance of the social support construct is easily established. According to Kreitner and Kinicky (2004), individuals experiencing lower levels of social support tend to have a poorer cardiovascular system and die earlier, when compared to individuals who experience more social support. Social support also lessens the perception of stress, depression, anxiety and loneliness. It makes sense then that negative social support, or the undermining of another person, may negatively affect that person's health.

The utility of the construct lies in its theoretical application to various aspects of society and life in general. The impact of self-esteem resulting from social support during a period of unemployment has been evidenced (Walters & Moore, 2002). Clinical pain relief as a direct result of social support has also been documented (Brown, Shetfield, Leary, & Robinson, 2003). Suicide ideation and the moderating role of social support also have a long history as a research area (Yang & Clum, 1994). Terry, Nielsen and Perchard (1993) proved that social support has a buffering effect on work stress, and a positive effect on psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Employee adjustment to large scale organisational change could be improved through social support (Terry & Callan, 1997). Furthermore, Pines, Ben-Ari, Utasi & Larson (2002) submit evidence that social support has a buffering effect on burnout.

Social support is an important construct in organisational research for a variety of reasons. Robbins, Odendaal and Roodt (2001) mention that expanding your social support network, can be a means to reduce tension and stress. However, the literature regarding social support is fragmented. Some investigators consider the importance of the different types of support, others



characteristics, and still others merely the presence or number of providers. Thus it was the objective of this research to construct and validate a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support based on the theory and research findings above which would also consider the different dimensions involved.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

Research designs are used as plans and structures, which would enable the researcher to answer the research questions. In this study, a cross-sectional survey design was used. This means that the sample was drawn from a population at a specific time. This research is descriptive and explorative. Exploratory research seeks what is, while descriptive predicts relations (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The investigation firstly wanted to empirically clarify the distinctions between sources, types and characteristics of support, and develop and validate a multi-dimensional instrument, secondly to investigate whether any biographical differences could be evidenced between the observed dimensions.

### **Participants**

The population from which data was gathered included primary- and secondary school educators. They are professionals teaching to pupils from grade one to twelve. An availability sample ( $n=201$ ) was included from the North-West Province, particularly in the Tlokwe (Potchefstroom) municipal area. Educators from both types of schools (Primary and Secondary) were approached to willingly participate in the study. Table 1 gives some details regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=201)*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	43	21,40
	Female	158	78,60
Language	Afrikaans	103	51,20
	English	14	7,00
	Sepedi	4	2,00
	Sesotho	18	9,00
	Setswana	54	26,90
	IsiNdebele	1	0,50
	IsiXhosa	5	2,50
	IsiZulu	2	1,00
Household situation	Single without children	30	14,90
	Single with children	28	13,90
	Married/partner without children	26	12,90
	Married/partner with children	105	52,20
	Living with parents	7	3,50
	Other	4	2,00
Qualification	Grade 12	10	5,00
	Technical college	49	24,40
	Technicon diploma	26	12,90
	University degree	102	50,70
	Postgraduate degree	8	4,00

As revealed in Table 1, an availability sample ( $n = 201$ ) was taken of primary and secondary school educators in public schools. The majority (78,60%) of the participants were female. Only 7% were English-speaking while 51,20% of the participants were Afrikaans-speaking. The languages Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu accounted for the remaining 41,90%. The majority (52,20%) were married, or living with a partner, with children living at home. Only 3,50% were living with parents. More than half of the participants (50,70%) had a university degree, while 5% of responding educators indicated that they were only in possession of a Grade 12 qualification (These are likely to be teachers-in-training). The second largest group had technical college diplomas (24,40%).

## **Measuring Battery**

The *Social Support Survey* was developed to measure the structural, functional and perceptual facets of the social support construct. The structural dimension refers to the sources of support. Six different sources were indicated, namely “My partner”, “My best friend”, “My closest colleague”, “My direct supervisor”, “Union” and “Others”. The last option allowed participants to specify which source of support they were referring to. The functional dimension refers to the type of support received from a specific source. Types of support encompass *instrumental*, *emotional*, *informational* and *appraisal* facets of the dimension. The respondent could then rate the different types of support that he/she receives from a specific source, and indicate whether they receive that type of support, on a scale of 1 to 4. The perceptual dimension refers to the characteristics of the support. The characteristics encompass the importance, the adequacy, the accessibility, and the amount of support received. The latter characteristics could be rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (low levels) to 5 (high levels). Since the scale demanded a wide range of information from participants in complex fashion, a completed hypothetical example of social support begotten from “My Pet” was also included. The scale is attached in Appendix A of this article.

## **Statistical Analysis**

Validity is defined as consisting of Translation Validity and Criterion-related Validity (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). Translation validity in turn encompasses Face validity and Content validity. Criterion related validity entails Predictive validity, Concurrent validity, Convergent validity and Discriminant validity.

### **Translational validity**

Face validity is “a type of validity that assures that ‘on its face, the operationalisation seems like a good translation of the construct”, while content validity is a “check of the operationalisation against the relevant content domain for the construct” (Trochim & Donnelly, p. 57–59). Circulating it to academics and senior students in the Industrial Psychology department, ensured

face validity for the measure. The final version of the measure reflected recommendations from these sources. Content validity was ensured by the researcher by means of a thorough review of the available social support literature.

Criterion-related validity will be ensured by statistical analysis. The statistical analysis will be carried out with the help of the SPSS-programme (SPSS, 2007). Reliability and descriptive statistics can be obtained through this program. Reliability (as indication of construct validity) will be assessed by using Cronbach alpha coefficients. Descriptive and inferential statistics will be used to analyse the data. Factor analysis will be applied to investigate the factor structure and reliability of the social support measure. Relationships between dimensions of social support will be investigated by using product-moment correlations. Differences in groups can be illustrated using analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Predictive Validity assesses the ability to predict something that the operationalisation should theoretically be able to predict. Concurrent Validity assesses the ability of the operationalisation to distinguish between groups it should theoretically be able to distinguish between. Convergent Validity assesses the degree to which the operationalisation is similar to other operationalisations to which it should theoretically be similar, and Discriminant Validity assesses the degree to which the operationalisation is dissimilar to other operationalisations to which it should theoretically be dissimilar (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007).

## **RESULTS**

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for the different types of support, per source and at the item-level. This is an indication of which type of support is received most from which source.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics at Item-level and per Source of Support for Different Types of Support*

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	$\alpha$
<b>Partner</b>					
Instrumental support	1,78	1,62	0,14	-1,64*	0,96
Emotional support	2,09	1,66	-0,12	-1,59*	0,97
Informational support	2,07	1,65	-0,21	-1,62*	0,97
Appraisal support	2,03	1,55	-0,17	-1,47*	0,96
<b>Best Friend</b>					
Instrumental support	2,06	1,53	-0,19	-1,42*	0,97
Emotional support	2,69	1,25	-0,79	-0,19	0,92
Informational support	2,59	1,26	-0,84	-0,21	0,94
Appraisal support	2,55	1,26	-0,76	-0,21	0,93
<b>Closest colleague</b>					
Instrumental support	2,34	1,34	-0,57	-0,86	0,95
Emotional support	2,59	1,16	-0,73	-0,03	0,66
Informational support	2,63	1,16	-0,78	-0,02	0,92
Appraisal support	2,44	1,18	-0,68	-0,11	0,92
<b>Supervisor</b>					
Instrumental support	2,11	1,41	-0,19	-1,21*	0,95
Emotional support	2,18	1,23	-0,29	-0,76	0,93
Informational support	2,41	1,28	-0,56	-0,64	0,92
Appraisal support	2,28	1,28	-0,34	-0,69	0,93
<b>Union</b>					
Instrumental support	1,52	1,43	0,28	-1,32*	0,97
Emotional support	1,16	1,40	0,76	-0,84	0,97
Informational support	1,90	1,51	-0,09	-1,47*	0,96
Appraisal support	1,30	1,36	0,43	-1,33*	0,97

\* High kurtosis

Table 2 indicates that Emotional support had the highest mean for support from a partner (2,09). Emotional support also had the highest mean for the support from a best friend. However, for support from colleagues, supervisors, and union, the highest means were indicated for Informational support. No scales showed a skew distribution, but the scales of Partner (Instrumental, Emotional, Informational and Appraisal), Friend (Instrumental), Supervisor (Instrumental), and Union (Instrumental, Informational and Appraisal) showed high kurtosis. Table 2 also indicates that all Cronbach alpha coefficients were higher than the guideline of

$\alpha \geq 0,70$  (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), except for Colleague Emotional support which was just under the cut-off ( $\alpha=0,66$ ).

Table 3 depicts the descriptive statistics for the different dimensions of social support. The four characteristics scales (importance of support, amount of available support, ease of receiving support and whether receiving enough support) were used to represent the constructs.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics at Item-level and per Dimension of Support for the Characteristics of Support*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Partner: Instrumental Support</b>				
Importance	2,48	1,94	-0,22	-1,57*
Amount	2,29	1,80	-0,18	-1,48*
Accessibility	2,25	1,78	-0,13	-1,44*
Adequacy	2,23	1,86	0,03	-1,48*
<b>Partner: Emotional Support</b>				
Importance	3,06	2,05	-0,60	-1,32*
Amount	2,61	1,89	-0,27	-1,42*
Accessibility	2,45	1,81	-0,17	-1,35*
Adequacy	2,54	1,90	-0,14	-1,46*
<b>Partner: Informational Support</b>				
Importance	2,58	1,91	-0,32	-1,47*
Amount	2,45	1,81	-0,27	-1,38*
Accessibility	2,37	1,80	-0,17	-1,38*
Adequacy	2,41	1,87	-0,10	-1,44*
<b>Partner: Appraisal Support</b>				
Importance	2,80	1,92	-0,45	-1,36*
Amount	2,46	1,74	-0,28	-1,28*
Accessibility	2,48	1,76	-0,26	-1,30*
Adequacy	2,51	1,90	-0,12	-1,47*
<b>Friend: Instrumental Support</b>				
Importance	2,62	1,73	-0,40	-1,15*
Amount	2,49	1,63	-0,44	-1,12*
Accessibility	2,47	1,64	-0,34	-1,06*
Adequacy	2,50	1,68	-0,33	-1,17*

Table 3 (continued)

*Descriptive Statistics at Item-level and per Dimension of Support for the Characteristics of Support*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Friend: Emotional Support</b>				
Importance	3,40	1,39	-1,01*	0,62
Amount	3,14	1,32	-0,81	0,45
Accessibility	3,14	1,36	-0,76	0,19
Adequacy	3,03	1,33	-0,64	0,01
<b>Friend: Informational Support</b>				
Importance	3,14	1,38	-1,02*	0,45
Amount	2,95	1,27	-1,04*	0,77
Accessibility	3,00	1,33	-0,88	0,41
Adequacy	2,92	1,38	-0,67	-0,05
<b>Friend: Appraisal Support</b>				
Importance	3,21	1,44	-0,95	0,30
Amount	2,92	1,38	-0,68	0,02
Accessibility	2,87	1,40	-0,66	-0,20
Adequacy	2,88	1,41	-0,60	-0,24
<b>Colleague: Instrumental Support</b>				
Importance	2,96	1,54	-0,67	-0,43
Amount	2,76	1,43	-0,67	-0,33
Accessibility	2,79	1,45	-0,62	-0,32
Adequacy	2,80	1,53	-0,47	-0,59
<b>Colleague: Emotional Support</b>				
Importance	3,41	3,08	0,60	0,18
Amount	2,87	1,22	-0,67	0,19
Accessibility	2,95	1,26	-0,57	0,14
Adequacy	2,93	1,28	-0,57	0,02
<b>Colleague: Informational Support</b>				
Importance	3,15	1,37	-0,74	0,07
Amount	3,00	1,27	-0,79	0,35
Accessibility	3,03	1,31	-0,73	0,17
Adequacy	2,93	1,35	-0,50	-0,16
<b>Colleague: Appraisal Support</b>				
Importance	3,18	1,41	-0,78	0,16
Amount	2,87	1,30	-0,63	0,09
Accessibility	2,88	1,30	-0,70	0,17
Adequacy	2,94	1,38	-0,56	-0,10

Table 3 (continued)

*Descriptive Statistics at Item-level and per Dimension of Support for the Characteristics of Support*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Supervisor: Instrumental Support</b>				
Importance	2,87	1,61	-0,61	-0,71
Amount	2,52	1,48	-0,40	-0,79
Accessibility	2,48	1,50	-0,35	-0,90
Adequacy	2,39	1,48	-0,20	-0,83
<b>Supervisor: Emotional Support</b>				
Importance	2,84	1,44	-0,48	-0,43
Amount	2,58	1,34	-0,37	-0,43
Accessibility	2,57	1,33	-0,39	-0,45
Adequacy	2,59	1,37	-0,28	-0,51
<b>Supervisor: Informational Support</b>				
Importance	3,23	1,44	-0,95	0,32
Amount	2,84	1,33	-0,68	0,04
Accessibility	2,87	1,33	-0,69	0,12
Adequacy	2,79	1,40	-0,45	-0,34
<b>Supervisor: Appraisal Support</b>				
Importance	3,03	1,50	-0,74	-0,28
Amount	2,69	1,38	-0,54	-0,39
Accessibility	2,56	1,28	-0,61	-0,22
Adequacy	2,64	1,45	-0,37	-0,71
<b>Union: Instrumental Support</b>				
Importance	2,09	1,81	0,11	-1,44*
Amount	1,87	1,61	0,09	-1,41*
Accessibility	1,81	1,60	0,23	-1,19*
Adequacy	1,74	1,60	0,32	-1,20*
<b>Union: Emotional Support</b>				
Importance	1,55	1,70	0,55	-1,19*
Amount	1,39	1,49	0,49	-1,31*
Accessibility	1,52	1,62	0,50	-1,20*
Adequacy	1,46	1,60	0,60	-1,04*
<b>Union: Informational Support</b>				
Importance	2,55	1,82	-0,31	-1,35*
Amount	2,30	1,68	-0,17	-1,24*
Accessibility	2,31	1,67	-0,19	-1,21*
Adequacy	2,20	1,65	-0,04	-1,23*



Table 3 (continued)

*Descriptive Statistics at Item-level and per Dimension of Support for the Characteristics of Support*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Union: Appraisal Support</b>				
Importance	1,84	1,79	0,30	-1,41*
Amount	1,59	1,56	0,39	-1,22*
Accessibility	1,67	1,62	0,34	-1,28*
Adequacy	1,61	1,60	0,45	-1,14*

\* High skewness and kurtosis

Table 3 indicates that the Importance dimension of support constantly scored the highest mean for all the types and sources of social support. This shows that importance, as one of the characteristics of the perceptual dimension of support, was rated higher by participants than the other characteristics (amount, accessibility and adequacy). The importance of emotional support from a friend and the amount and importance of informational support from a friend scales showed high skewness. The importance, amount, accessibility and adequacy of instrumental, emotional, informational and appraisal support from a partner, and the importance, amount, accessibility and adequacy of instrumental support from a friend, as well as the importance, amount, accessibility and adequacy of instrumental, emotional, informational and appraisal support from a union showed high kurtosis.

Table 4 depicts the results of a factor analysis of the characteristics of support items. A principal components analysis indicated that four factors should be extracted. Extraction with an oblimin rotation resulted in 4 factors that were not strongly related ( $r(\text{Factor 1 and 2})=0,09$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 1 and 3})=0,19$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 1 and 4})=0,32$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 2 and 3})=-0,01$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 2 and 4})=0,15$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 3 and 4})=0,07$ ). Subsequently, a varimax rotation was performed. The rotated solution is subsequently reported.

Table 4

*Factor Analysis of all Characteristics of Support Items*

	F1	F2	F3	F4
<b>Partner: Informational</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,80	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,00	0,83	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,00	0,84	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,00	0,82	0,00	0,00
<b>Partner: Emotional</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,81	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,00	0,84	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,00	0,81	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,00	0,81	0,00	0,00
<b>Partner: Informational</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,84	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,00	0,85	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,00	0,86	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,00	0,82	0,00	0,00
<b>Partner: Appraisal</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,84	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,00	0,86	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,00	0,85	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,00	0,80	0,00	0,00
<b>Friend: Informational</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,68
Amount	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,70
Accessibility	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,71
Adequacy	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,70
<b>Friend: Emotional</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,70
Amount	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,74
Accessibility	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,68
Adequacy	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,69
<b>Friend: Informational</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,64
Amount	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,69
Accessibility	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,69
Adequacy	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,68

Table 4 (continued)

*Factor Analysis of all Characteristics of Support Items*

	F1	F2	F3	F4
<b>Friend: Appraisal</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,70
Amount	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,73
Accessibility	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,71
Adequacy	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,67
<b>Colleague: Instrumental</b>				
Importance	0,52	0,00	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,58	0,00	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,56	0,00	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,62	0,00	0,00	0,00
<b>Colleague: Emotional</b>				
Importance	0,23	0,00	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,57	0,00	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,57	0,00	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,60	0,00	0,00	0,00
<b>Colleague: Informational</b>				
Importance	0,51	0,00	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,57	0,00	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,53	0,00	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,59	0,00	0,00	0,00
<b>Colleague: Appraisal</b>				
Importance	0,52	0,00	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,55	0,00	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,57	0,00	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,61	0,00	0,00	0,00
<b>Supervisor: Instrumental</b>				
Importance	0,53	0,00	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,65	0,00	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,64	0,00	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,62	0,00	0,00	0,00
<b>Supervisor: Emotional</b>				
Importance	0,54	0,00	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,59	0,00	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,65	0,00	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,63	0,00	0,00	0,00

Table 4 continued

*Factor Analysis of all Characteristics of Support Items*

	F1	F2	F3	F4
<b>Supervisor: Informational</b>				
Importance	0,60	0,00	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,71	0,00	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,70	0,00	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,70	0,00	0,00	0,00
<b>Supervisor: Appraisal</b>				
Importance	0,61	0,00	0,00	0,00
Amount	0,73	0,00	0,00	0,00
Accessibility	0,71	0,00	0,00	0,00
Adequacy	0,70	0,00	0,00	0,00
<b>Union: Instrumental</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,00	0,80	0,00
Amount	0,00	0,00	0,83	0,00
Accessibility	0,00	0,00	0,83	0,00
Adequacy	0,00	0,00	0,82	0,00
<b>Union: Emotional</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,00	0,81	0,00
Amount	0,00	0,00	0,83	0,00
Accessibility	0,00	0,00	0,84	0,00
Adequacy	0,00	0,00	0,82	0,00
<b>Union: Informational</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,00	0,79	0,00
Amount	0,00	0,00	0,78	0,00
Accessibility	0,00	0,00	0,78	0,00
Adequacy	0,00	0,00	0,78	0,00
<b>Union: Appraisal</b>				
Importance	0,00	0,00	0,80	0,00
Amount	0,00	0,00	0,82	0,00
Accessibility	0,00	0,00	0,82	0,00
Adequacy	0,00	0,00	0,80	0,00

Inspection of Table 4 shows that four factors were extracted. With a cut-off of 0,30 for inclusion of a variable in interpretation of a factor, only one item did not load. The item that did not load related to the importance of emotional support from colleagues. Contrary to expectations, the factors that emerged were not grouped according to the characteristics of social support, but rather according to the source of support. A distinction is visible between work and non-work-

based sources of support. Clear sources of support that emerged were Partner, Friend, Work (comprised of both Supervisor and Colleague Support) and Union.

Table 5 reflects the results of a factor analysis of the types of support. A principal components analysis and the Scree plot indicated that 5 factors should be extracted. An oblimin rotation of the data with 5 factors specified resulted in related factors. ( $r(\text{Factor 1 and 2})=0,21$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 1 and 3})=0,10$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 1 and 4})=-0,48$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 1 and 5})=0,49$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 2 and 3})=-0,01$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 2 and 4})=0,16$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 2 and 5})=0,15$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 3 and 4})=0,07$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 3 and 5})=0,30$ ;  $r(\text{Factor 4 and 5})=-0,46$ ). Results of the pattern matrix are reported below.

Table 5

*Factor Analysis of all Types of Social Support Items*

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
<b>Partner</b>					
Instrumental	0,09	<b>0,73</b>	-0,01	-0,05	0,06
Emotional	-0,00	<b>0,83</b>	0,01	0,03	-0,02
Informational	-0,04	<b>0,83</b>	0,02	0,05	-0,05
Appraisal	-0,03	<b>0,89</b>	-0,07	-0,06	0,04
<b>Friend</b>					
Instrumental	0,09	-0,01	0,00	0,00	<b>0,60</b>
Emotional	-0,04	0,06	-0,02	-0,01	<b>0,74</b>
Informational	-0,05	-0,04	0,07	-0,05	<b>0,65</b>
Appraisal	0,06	0,00	-0,03	0,05	<b>0,83</b>
<b>Colleague</b>					
Instrumental	<b>0,89</b>	0,07	0,07	0,06	-0,01
Emotional	<b>0,44</b>	0,00	-0,04	-0,16	0,14
Informational	<b>0,65</b>	0,00	-0,02	-0,02	-0,05
Appraisal	<b>0,73</b>	-0,07	-0,01	-0,02	0,10
<b>Supervisor</b>					
Instrumental	0,07	0,07	0,15	-0,62	0,10
Emotional	-0,03	-0,03	0,04	-0,82	0,05
Informational	0,91	0,19	0,07	-0,56	-0,01
Appraisal	-0,01	-0,09	-0,10	-0,89	-0,04
<b>Union</b>					
Instrumental	-0,05	-0,04	<b>0,79</b>	-0,01	0,08
Emotional	0,10	-0,04	<b>0,86</b>	0,01	-0,05
Informational	-0,07	0,06	<b>0,72</b>	0,01	0,03
Appraisal	0,04	-0,03	<b>0,88</b>	-0,05	-0,04

Items loading on the first factor relate to support from a Colleague. The second factor is related to support from a Partner. The third factor relates to support from a Union, the fourth from a Supervisor and the fifth from a close Friend. Again it can be seen that the factor analysis did not result in a distinction between different types of support, but rather clustered items that relate to different sources of support together.

Since the scales did not differentiate clearly between the characteristics (Table 4) and types of support (Table 5), it was decided to collapse these two sets of data into single indicators of the

different sources of support. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations between these scales are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Collapsed Scales and Correlations between Indicators of Support*

		Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	1	2	3	4
1	Partner Support	2,50	1,58	-0,49	-1,06 <sup>†</sup>	0,98				
2	Friend Support	2,91	1,04	-0,96	1,28 <sup>†</sup>	0,96	0,14			
3	Colleague Support	2,97	0,99	-0,44	0,91	0,92	0,24*	0,36*		
4	Supervisor Support	2,70	1,08	-0,58	0,10	0,96	0,19*	0,39*	0,46*	
5	Union Support	1,83	1,36	-0,02	-1,18 <sup>†</sup>	0,98	-0,03	0,13	0,09	0,15*

\* Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level

+ Correlation is practically significant  $r > 0,30$  (medium effect)

++ Correlation is practically significant  $r > 0,50$  (large effect)

<sup>†</sup> High Kurtosis

It is evident from Table 6 that all scales showed a normal skewness, but that Partner (negative), Friend (positive) and Union (negative) support presented with high kurtosis. All scales showed excellent reliability, as indicated by Chronbach coefficient alpha's in excess of 0,90. Also, all sources of support were positively correlated, except for the negative statistically insignificant correlation between Partner Support and Union Support. Statistically significant correlations of medium effect were noted between Friend and Colleague support, between Friend and Supervisor support, and between Supervisor and Colleague support. Statistically significant positive correlations also exist between Partner and Colleague support, Partner and Supervisor support, and Supervisor and Union support.

Finally, differences between different age groups, language groups, and tenure were investigated by means of analysis of variance. Results are reported in Table 7 below.

Table 7

*ANOVA – Differences in Age Groups, Language Groups and Job Situation based on Type of Support*

Item	Partner Support	Friend Support	Colleague Support	Supervisor Support	Union Support
<b>Age Groups</b>					
22-35	2,73	3,02	3,20	2,90	1,33
36-41	2,69	2,82	3,01	2,80	2,03
42-46	2,73	3,09	2,85	2,65	1,89
47-53	2,19	2,78	2,88	2,57	1,94
<i>p</i>	0,16	0,39	0,34	0,43	0,08
<b>Language Groups</b>					
Afrikaans	2,79 <sup>a</sup>	2,96	3,08	2,79	1,60 <sup>b</sup>
English	1,98	2,93	2,69	2,50	1,56
African languages	2,22 <sup>b</sup>	2,85	2,87	2,60	2,19 <sup>a</sup>
<i>p</i>	0,02 <sup>*</sup>	0,78	0,21	0,41	0,01 <sup>*</sup>
<b>Tenure</b>					
1-4,6	2,43	2,91	3,06	2,61	1,24
4,6-15	2,79	2,80	3,04	2,86	1,84
15-20	2,65	3,13	2,92	2,66	1,96
20-27	2,35	3,04	2,87	2,74	1,93
<i>p</i>	0,61	0,49	0,84	0,79	0,08

<sup>\*</sup> Statistically significant:  $p \leq 0,05$

<sup>a</sup> Difference in column is statistically significant from <sup>b</sup>

Table 7 indicates that there were no statistically significant differences in terms of job situation (i.e. tenure) or between different age groups regarding social support. However, there was a statistically and practically significant difference regarding social support between language groups. For purposes of the analysis, Afrikaans-speaking, English-speaking and African-language-speaking groups were compared. For the Afrikaans groups, support from a partner presented with a statistically significantly higher mean than the same type of support for the African languages group. For the African languages group, a statistically significant higher mean was obtained for support from a Union than for the Afrikaans-speaking group. In both cases, the mean of the Afrikaans group is also higher than that of the English language group; therefore a



similar relationship might be assumed. However, the small sample size for the English language group ( $n=7\%$ ) might have skewed the current findings.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to theoretically conceptualise social support and create and validate a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support. Three dimensions were incorporated in the questionnaire, namely the structural, functional and perceptual dimensions. The instrument considered various sources of support, types, and characteristics of such support.

In terms of the importance of a specific type of support from a certain source of support, it was found that emotional support from both a partner and a friend were rated highest. Social support, and especially emotional support, has been shown to lower levels of stress in relationships and consequently have an indirect effect on satisfaction with relationships (Cramer, 2004). Research done by Shrout, Herman and Bolger (2006) has shown that, although support of a practical nature also influences close relationships, it serves mainly as an activation agent for the cost and benefit processes of relationships. Even though they co-occur, practical support is a type of support distinct from emotional support. Costs involving supportive gestures could include feelings of incompetence and challenge the recipients' sense of autonomy. Emotional support can relieve these stressors and focus the individual's attention on the positive. As for social support from colleagues, supervisors and participants' unions, informational support was constantly indicated as most important. Feelings of inequity and subsequent disgruntlement in employees could be averted through adequate informational support (Van Yperen, 1998).

It is clear that the first two sources of support (Partner and Friend) are not directly work related, while the latter three (Colleague, Supervisor and Union) are directly work related. This is an indication that social support associated with individuals from outside the realm of work differs from social support associated with individuals and institutions from inside the realm of work, in terms of the role it plays for the focal person. Individuals seemingly prefer an emotional kind of support from non-work related sources, but a more structured, practical kind of support from work-related sources. Regarding occupational stress, LaRocco, House and French (1980) found

that work-related sources of support, such as supervisors and co-workers, were more important as buffers against adverse effects. Although spouses were also important sources, friends and relatives were not.

Descriptive statistics regarding the characteristics of the support items indicated that the importance of support, as opposed to the remaining characteristics of support, namely the amount, accessibility and adequacy thereof, constantly scored the highest means. This indicates that, compared to the remaining characteristics of the perceptual dimension, the individuals attached more meaning to how important a specific source, and the accompanying type of support is. This finding seems to make sense when one considers that the presence of support might be argued to be the most important dimension, when compared to for example amount, accessibility or adequacy. Indeed, if a source of support that is considered important is not offered, considering it in terms of the other dimensions (amount, accessibility and adequacy) is fruitless.

A factor analysis regarding the characteristics of support (Importance, Amount, Accessibility and Adequacy) indicated that four factors could be extracted and, contrary to expectation, the factors were grouped according to the source of support, and not according to the characteristics of the support. Again a distinction between work and non-work-related sources is visible. A factor analysis regarding the types of support yielded five factors, which yet again clustered around the source of support. This might be due to the Likert-scale matrix design of the questionnaire, which required participants to answer a large range of questions regarding the type, importance, amount, adequacy and accessibility of support. The possible influence of response sets cannot be discounted. Also, the questionnaires were administered during a time when the education sector was experiencing a very bad strike, when intimidation was rife, which might have influenced participants' willingness to participate and answer truthfully (Anon, 2007).

Support from a close friend was strongly and significantly related to support from a colleague. This finding might be interpreted as indicating that in a work situation, a close friend and a close colleague might be the same person. Social support received from a friend was also strongly related to the support received from a supervisor. Again, the situation might exist where the

supervisor is a close friend of the person describing social support at work. Colleague, friend and supervisor support were related. This finding seemingly indicates that perceptions of social support may be related across work and non-work realms. Individuals who perceive themselves as having more support in one area, for example at work, might also perceive themselves as receiving good support outside work. Social support from different sources may be said to be related in the sense that it provides the focal person with a resource with which to handle demands emanating from either the work or home domains.

Differences in terms of the experience of social support between groups did not exist for different age or tenure groups. This indicates that individuals of different age groups and with varying periods of work experience did not experience differences in experiencing social support. Differences regarding social support were, however, indicated for different language groups. It was seen that the Afrikaans-speaking and African-language groups differed significantly with regard to support from a partner (Afrikaans-speaking group higher), while the Black group measured higher with regard to support from a union. It has been found that proportionately fewer African American caregivers are spouses, compared to white Americans. The African American group received support from an extended family structure (Hart, O'Neil, Williams, Rapport, Hammond & Kreutzer, 2007). The differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures might also explain these findings. Burleson (2003) states that members of collectivistic cultures will be less comfortable in dealing with the personal ego needs and emotional states of others, and will therefore attach less value to closer relations than more individualistic cultures. Political and historical precedents could also explain the preference of support from a Union by the African-languages group. Since the 1970's, trade unions existed in South Africa and became a galvanising force in collectively representing the interests of black employees (Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk, & Schenk, 2005).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings in terms of the importance of support dimension versus the other characteristics of support (amount, accessibility and adequacy) suggest that it is the most important dimension. Also at a qualitative level, importance seems most significant, since the absence of a source of

support considered as important negates the need for further considerations in terms of its characteristics. This finding highlighted an important consideration, which the questionnaire overlooked: If a source of support is not offered, it makes no sense considering it in terms of its characteristics.

Correlations also seem to suggest that a stronger distinction should be made in defining the different sources of support. For example, the scales measuring Friend support should distinguish it as “friend not at work” in order to separate it from colleague support where a participant might consider a close colleague and a close friend as the same person. Likewise, Supervisor support can be better defined as “Your direct supervisor, who is not a close friend”.

Future investigations might also need to consider a different methodology than the matrix type Likert scales employed here. It might be indicated that multiple items be written to represent the different dimensions of support. However, in the interest of brevity, a multiple item questionnaire may be too time-consuming. More investigation with the current instrument could highlight which dimensions of support are most worthy of investigation. These dimensions could then also be investigated with outcomes of work (such as job satisfaction or organisational commitment), to replicate previous findings.

### **LIMITATIONS**

A small sample size could have negatively influenced the statistical analysis. Generalisation of the results could also pose a problem, seeing that it was obtained exclusively from only one of the nine provinces of South Africa.

This study presented the first attempt at constructing and validating a multi-dimensional measuring instrument of social support. Although the instrument certainly needs further validation efforts, some interesting results were obtained in terms of the importance dimension of social support and the results of the factor analysis indicating different sources. The recommendations need to be implemented and these results would need to be replicated with future samples, and with samples from different occupational groups.

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## **Attachment A**

### **The Social Support Survey**



## **Social Support Survey**

In the table on the next page a number of typical sources of support individuals identify in their lives are indicated. Please work across (left to right) and indicate for each source of support which types of support you receive from them, how important this type of support is to you, how much of it you receive from the particular source, how easy it is to get this type of support from this source, and whether you feel that you receive enough of this type of support.

An example is given in the first line of the questionnaire on the next page: *My Pet*. If you have a dog or cat, you may feel that this animal comforts you when you feel upset or sad (emotional support), and helps you to appreciate the small things in life (appraisal support). Mostly, this animal gives you emotional support (is rated number 1), and some appraisal support (is rated number 2). You don't get any instrumental or informational support from this animal, and therefore it is indicated as '0'. Emotional support in the form of comfort is very important from this source (and scores 5 out of a possible 5), you receive an average amount of it (3 out of a possible 5), it is really easy to get (5 out of 5), since you keep your pet at home, and finally, it is enough (5 out of 5).

In terms of appraisal, my pet sometimes helps me to see life differently, and just appreciate the small things (3 out of 5), I don't often feel this way, however (2 out of 5), and therefore it is not easy to get this type of support from my pet (2 out of 5), but when it happens, it is good and it is enough (5 out of 5)!

We distinguish between the following types of support:

**Instrumental Support** means that the person or union gives you help of a practical nature, such as helping you to solve a problem. *For example*, you are struggling with a difficult calculation. You ask a colleague for help, they put aside their own work, and you work on the calculation together until you solve it.

**Emotional Support** is received when the person or union sympathises with you, or shows an interest in your problems. *For example*, when you return home after a long day at work, there is someone there that you can talk to and they listen to your day's experiences.

**Informational Support.** When someone or the union gives you useful information that helps you deal with a certain problem, they are giving you informational support. *For example*, when you ask your supervisor how a new piece of machinery works, he demonstrates the operation to you, and you learn from his example.

**Appraisal Support.** When someone or something helps you to see things in a different light, or provides you with feedback about your own functioning, they are giving you appraisal support. *Example:* You tell a friend about a difficult situation you are facing at work, and they help you see what you need to do or feel differently in order to make the situation more bearable.

Sources of Support	Types of Support		Characteristics of Support																									
	Please rate the source of support (1 – 4) to give an indication of how much you receive a specific type of support from this source. If you do not receive a specific type, indicate '0'.		How <b>important</b> is this type of support from this source for you?	How <b>much</b> of this type of support do you receive from this source?	How <b>easy</b> is it to get this type of support when you need it?	Do you <b>receive enough</b> of this type of support from this source?																						
			Not at All Very	A Little Lot	A	Difficult Easy	No Yes																					
EXAMPLE: My Pet	Instrumental	0	EXAMPLE: My Pet	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Emotional	1		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Informational	0		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Appraisal	2		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
My Partner (Husband, Wife, Life Partner)	Instrumental	?	My Partner	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Emotional	?	(Husband,	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Informational	?	Wife, Life	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Appraisal	?	Partner)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
My Best Friend	Instrumental	?	My Best Friend	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Emotional	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Informational	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Appraisal	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
My Closest Colleague	Instrumental	?	My Closest	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Emotional	?	Colleague	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Informational	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Appraisal	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
My Direct Supervisor	Instrumental	?	My Direct	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Emotional	?	Supervisor	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Informational	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Appraisal	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
If you belong to a Union:	Instrumental	?	Union	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Emotional	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Informational	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Appraisal	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Other? Please indicate:	Instrumental	?	Other	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Emotional	.		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Informational	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	Appraisal	?		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter the conclusions reached from the literature and empirical study are set out. The limitations of the research are discussed, and recommendations for future research are made.

#### 3.1 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn, as they relate to the objectives of the research:

- **To conceptualise the dimensions and measurement of the construct *social support* from the literature.**

Although multidimensional measuring instruments of social support exist, the aim of this research was to create an instrument that measures all three the dimensions conceptualised in the literature. Authors have conceptualised three main dimensions regarding the structure and properties of the construct. These are the structural, functional and perceptual dimensions (Chronister et al., 2006). The structural dimensions encompass the support networks of the individual. These would typically include support sources such as partners, friends, colleagues, supervisors or even a union. The functional dimension focuses on the type of support. Functional support has been categorised as instrumental, emotional, informational and appraisal by nature (House & Kahn, 1985). The perceptual dimension consists of the abstract interpretation and value judgements the individual attributes to the received support (McIntosh, 1991). These characteristics of support have been conceptualised as the importance of the support and the amount received, and the accessibility and adequacy of the support.

- **To create a valid and reliable multidimensional measuring instrument of social support.**

Factor analysis showed that the scales do not differentiate between the characteristics and types of support, but that it rather clustered around the source of support. This might be due

to the absence of written items for the type and characteristics of support, since the questionnaire was designed in a matrix structure to allow for convenience. The instrument did, however, separate the five sources of support into two distinct categories. Support from a partner and a friend, or non-work-related sources were clustered together. Support from a colleague, supervisor or the union were clustered together. The collapsed scales for these dimensions showed excellent reliability. However, it has to be borne in mind that each of the final collapsed scales is represented by 20 items that were supposed to differentiate between types and characteristics of support. The huge number of items to indicate a single source of support could have skewed reliability coefficient alpha, which is dependent on the number of items.

- **To analyse the relationship between the various dimensions of social support and biographical variables.**

Three different biographical variables were used to gather data on any difference between biographical groups. There were no differences between age and tenure groups in terms of social support. Language groups did, however, show some interesting differences. An ANOVA analysis indicated that the Afrikaans-speaking group preferred support from partner more than did the African group. On the other hand, the African group preferred support from a union above the Afrikaans group.

### **3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The following should be taken into account as limitations of the research:

- Only educators from the North-West Province of South Africa were included in the study, which reduces the significance of any results as far as generalisation is concerned. Also, a single region within this province was targeted. Although the results may be limited in terms of generalisation to other educator samples, the objectives of this study was psychometric in nature, and in that sense irrelevant to the occupational group of participants.

- The largest part of the study population consists of female (78%) and Afrikaans-speaking (51%) individuals. Only 7% of the population were English-speaking individuals. This has a negative effect on comparisons between groups, as it may have skewed results for the under represented English-speaking participants. Also, the questionnaire was administered in English, which was by far the least represented language group, and implies that most participants had to answer the questionnaire in their second or even third language.
- Data gathering was done during a period of instability, resultant from strikes in the educational sector. This could have affected the willingness of the participants to answer openly and truthfully. As a result, a small population was obtained ( $n=201$ ), which could have reduced the accuracy of the statistical analysis.
- This was the first attempt at constructing and validating a multidimensional measuring instrument of social support as it may have skewed results for the under represented English-speaking participants. Also, the questionnaire was administered in English, which was by far the least represented language group, and implies that most participants had to answer the questionnaire in their second or even third language.

### **3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations regarding the research can be made:

#### **3.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation**

- The importance of support from a union, especially for the black language group, should be noted.

#### **3.3.2 Recommendations for future research**

- Future research should attempt to obtain a much larger sample size to optimise the accuracy of the statistical analysis.

- Research into cultural differences regarding the perceptions of social support would be necessary too, if one would wish to generalise findings in the South African context. In this regard, qualitative work might be indicated.
- In terms of the measuring instrument, writing items instead of using the matrix structure could produce better results for both the functional and structural dimensions of social support.
- The findings regarding the importance of informational support should be noted and could form the foundation of future research in South African organisations.
- It is also important to note that, if a source of support is not offered, it makes no sense to consider it in terms of its characteristics. Therefore, the questionnaire should provide participants with an option of not further questions relating to characteristics of support if it is deemed unimportant.
- Correlations suggest that a stronger distinction should be made in defining the different sources of social support. It is for example recommended that the scales measuring Friend support should distinguish it as “A friend not at work”. Likewise for colleague and supervisor support, which might be termed “A colleague who is not your supervisor”, and “A supervisor who is not your friend or colleague”?
- More investigation into the current instrument could highlight which dimensions of social support is most worthy of investigation.
- Future investigations might also consider using translated versions of the questionnaire, and investigating construct equivalence across the diverse South African cultural landscape.

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