An empirical study on the influence of training on affective job commitment and employee task performance among public service workers in Zambia

Lungowe Sinvula[1*], Victor Chikampa[2], Blessings Mataka and Fred Moonga[4]

[1]Ministry of Works and Supply. Email; lulukasi3@gmail.com

[2]Mulungushi University, School of Social Sciences, Department of Social Development Studies, P.O. Box 80415, Kabwe, Zambia. Email; victorchikampa@gmail.com

[3]Mulungushi University, School of Social Sciences, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, P.O. Box 80415, Kabwe, Zambia. Email;matakab@gmail.com

[4] University of Eswatini ,Department of Social Work, Email: moonga4@gmail.com

Correspondence: Lungowe Sinvula Email: lulukasi3@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: Employee task performance is an important latent variable that determines the effectiveness and success of any organisation. An empirical evaluation of its antecedents is therefore required. This study therefore aimed at determining how the latent variables of training and affective commitment relate to task performance.

Methods: A quantitative ex post facto correlational design was used to achieve the research objectives. Item analysis was performed to determine reliability while dimensionality analysis was used to investigate the factor structures underlying the dimensions of the instruments. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed for the measurement model and through structure equation modelling (SEM) the structural model was investigated.

Results: Reasonable fit with the data was found for the measurement and structural models through confirmatory factor analyses. A positive relationship between training and employee performance was found while non- statistically significant relationships between affective commitment and task performance as well as between training and affective commitment were found.

Conclusion: The study makes a significant contribution to industrial psychology as well as human resource literature. The results of this study have provided empirical support to the proposition that training is a predictor of employee task performance in Zambia. By implication human resource practitioners ought to pay attention to training when trying to enhance employee performance

Key words: Key words: Training, Affective Commitment, Employee Task Performance

INTRODUCTION

In order to improve on, cost effectiveness, efficiency, quality and service delivery of public goods and services to the people of Zambia, the Zambian government introduced the public sector reform program (PSRP) in 1993(Mulikita,2000; Malisase,2020; Mate,2006; Banda & Chibomba,2020). Within the PSRP was the

performance management system framework aimed at management and human resources performance improvements (Litula, 2008). PSRP was based on the organisational development private model of running a business. The need to consequently monitor and assess the performance of civil servants just goes to show the value attached to enhanced employee performance torwards economic growth and national development. Public institutions exist to provide and serve the country with need satisfying public services and goods (Mokena, as cited in Mukwena,2020). For this to be reaslised public institutions will need to coordinate a variety of business functions that need to be performed to combine and transform scarce factors of production into products and services and to get these to the market (Chikampa, 2018). The success with which organisations combine and transform factors of production into products and services with maximum economic utility significantly depends on the work performance of its workforce (Chikampa, 2018). Optimal employee performance is the drive behind an organization's competitiveness and success in that it leads to improved performance quality, Productivity, innovation, customer satisfaction, ,customer loyalty and profitability(Bashir & Long, 2015). If employee performance is so cardinal in determining overall organisational success then there is need to explore its antecedents.

Literature has documented several antecedents of employee task performance such as affective organisational commitment (Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004;Meyer, Stanely, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002),job engagement (Brown & Leigh,1996;Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010), role clarity (Whitaker, Dahling & Levy,2007), job satisfaction (Biswas & Varma,2012;Iaffaldano & Muchinsky as cited in Crede,Chernyshenko,Stark,Dalal & Bashshur,2007;Keaveney & Nelson,1993;Judge,Thorsen,Bono & Patton (2001),leadership (Gani,2006;Siahaan,2017), organisational culture (Siahaan,2017), employee working motivation(Siahaan,2017) as well as training (Elnaga & Imran, 2013;Khan, 2012). Although there are several predictors of employee performance yet due to theoretical and practical reasons as well

as limiting the scope of the study to a governable and meaningful level a selection of variables was necessary. In demarcating the study three considerations were used. The first one was to examine available employee task performance literature to find indicators of future research direction. The second was to consider known antecedents of employee performance. The third consideration was the importance of the variable to organisational effectiveness. Using the criteria as suggested above, it was decided that this study will focus on training and affective commitment.

With these choices made, this study endeavours to provide a unique contribution to the field of industrial psychology through an improved understanding of employee performance.

Research-initiating question
The survival of organisations in Zambia is threatened due to poor workforce productivity (Bureau of African Affairs, 2012; Mills, 2010). The research-initiating question for this study is,therefore: why does variance exist in employee task performance behaviours,with specific reference to the role that affective job commitment and training play in this regard not to the exclusion of other factors in the organisation. The need for this research study is justified on grounds that no Zambian study has yet investigated this specific research problem as well as the importance of employee task performance in determining overall organisational effectiveness and performance.

Objective
The general objective was to examine the relationship between training, affective commitment and employee task performance. From this general research objective, more specific operational research objectives were derived for this study.
1. To evaluate the influence of training on affective commitment.
2. To examine the influence of training on employee task performance.
3. To evaluate the influence of affective commitment on employee task performance

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising employee task performance

Employee performance is both a unitary and a multidimensional construct (Lievens, Conway & De corte,2008; Hattrup,O'Connell & Wingate,1998). The domain of job performance can be summarized in terms of two broad second order factors that are presumed to exist in almost all jobs namely contextual and task performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Chikampa, 2013).Task performance according to Murphy as cited in Myburgh (2013) is the completion of role activities prescribed in the job description. Task performance deals with how effective the job incumbent is at performing activities that contribute to the organisation technical core (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).

Conceptualising training

Training can be conceptualized as process of acquiring job related knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes-that builds up confidence of employees for better performance (Mcclelland, 2002; Lankau & Scandura,2002). Traditionally it is defined as the process by which individuals change their work related skills, knowledge, attitudes and behavior (Karlan & Valdivia, 2011). The ability, motivation and opportunity (AMO) framework can be used to further explain the concept of training (Appelbaum,Bailey,Berg & Kalleberg, 2000). Ability means employees have the right knowledge, attitude and skills to undertake the job (Guan & Frenkel,2018). Motivation refers to employees having the willingness or feeling of obligation to do the job while opportunity indicates the work structure and environment enabling work to be done in the manner preferred by the employee (Boxall & Purcell, 2016).

Conceptualising affective commitment

Affective organisation commitment is one of the dimensions of organisation commitment. Organisational commitment refers to the extent to which the employee is attached, identifies with and is involved with his or her work and the organisational as a whole (Chikampa,2013). According to Porter as cited in Rashid, Sambasivan & Johari(2003) commitment is a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation and a desire to retain membership in the organisation. There are three types of organisational commitment namely normative, continuance and affective commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Meyer and Allen (1990) define affective commitment as an emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organisation.

Relationship between affective commitment and task performance

Affective commitment is seen as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in the organisation(Khan,2015). High involvement work practices implies higher skill and commitment if employees are to successfully perform inrole tasks (Boxall & Mackay,2009). In Meyer et al.,(2002) meta-analytic study affective commitment is positive but weakly correlated(r=.16) with job performance.

Relationship between training and employee performance

Training comprises two core learning competencies, namely transfer and atomization (Burger, 2012; Taylor, 1994). Through transfer the employee adapts and applies crystallized knowledge developed through prior learning to novel learning problems encountered at work (De Goede & Theron, 2010). Through automisation the cognitive insight gained through transfer is written to memory in a manner where it can be retrieved (Burger, 2012; Taylor, 1994; De Goede & Theron, 2010). In attempting to perform work activities that contribute to the organization technical core the employee is faced with novel problems for which no readily available solution exists. A solution can be obtained by transferring crystallized abilities developed through prior learning onto the novel job problem (Chikampa, 2013).

Employees grow by learning skills and knowledge to perform their jobs better (Park, 2007). Using the AMO framework as discussed above, we propose that training is likely to develop employee capabilities and motivate employees to engage in their work to achieve the desired in role work behaviours (Guan & Fenkel,2018). The learnt skills and knowledge acquired empowers employees on how to deal with specific challenges.

As is evident that employees are a crucial resource, it is important to optimize the

contribution of employees to the company aims and goals as a means of sustaining effective performance. In terms of improved service delivery developing high quality employees, satisfied with their training programmes can improve competitiveness of public institutions. This therefore calls for managers to ensure an adequate supply of staff that is technically and socially competent and capable of career development into specialist departments or management positions (Afshan, Sobia,Kamrana & Nasir, 2012).

Empirical evidence has shown that training generate performance improvements by positively influencing the performance of employees through the acquisition and development of employee knowledge, skills, ability competencies and behaviours (Appiah,2010:Harrison,2000;Guest,1997). Postive significant statistical relationship between Training and Performance (Kiweewa & Asiimwe,2014;Afsana,Afrin & Tarannum,2016;Motlokoa,Sekantsi & Munyolo,2018;Sendawula,Kimuli,Bananuka & Muganga,2018).

Relationship between training and affective commitment

Employees perceptions and beliefs on how committed their organizations are torwards them in terms of skills development contribute to the establishment of high quality exchange relationships that create obligation for employees to reciprocate in positive beneficial ways(Chikampa,2013). Employees who believe that their organization is committed to providing training that may lead to improved skills and employability may reciprocate by demonstrating attitudes and behaviours in line with the amount of commitment they feel the employer has for them(Lee & Bruvold,2003;Chikampa,2013). In Lee & Bruvold (2003) it was found that perceived investment in employee development had a positive association with affective commitment-(β=.44; p<.05) for the –Singapore sample and (β=.43;p<.05) for the United Stes of America sample. Research results in Park (2007) indicate that learning and organisational commitment were significantly and moderately correlated with a coefficient of .41. Bashir and Long (2015) also found a statistically significant relationship between training and affective commitment.

Conceptual model

After an in-depth investigation of the literature, a conceptual model was derived. The conceptual model in figure 1 depicts the specific hypothesised causal linkages between training, affective commitment and employee task performance. Training is portrayed as the independent variable whilst affective commitment and employee task performance are dependent variables.
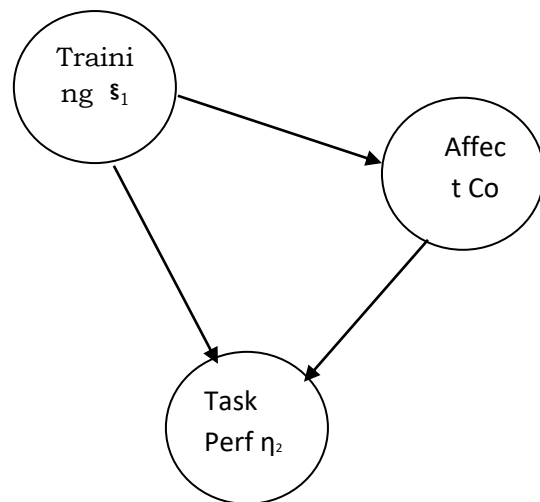

FIGURE 1: The structural model representing the relationships between training, affective commitment and employee task performance.

Statistical hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The overarching research hypothesis was interpreted to indicate that the structural model depicted in the Figure 2 above provides a perfect explanation of the manner in which training influences affective commitment and employee task performance. The research hypothesis was translated into the following exact fit null hypothesis:

H_{01}:RMSEA=0
H_{a1}:RMSEA>0

Where RMSEA is the root mean square error of approximation.

Hypothesis 2: The overarching research hypothesis for the close fit null hypothesis is:

H01:RMSEA<0.05
Ha1: RMSEA > 0.05

Where, RMSEA is the root mean square error of approximation. In order to test the validity of the proposed relationships in the structural model, the following specific research hypotheses were tested:

• **Hypothesis 3**: affective commitment (η_1) is positively related to employee task performance (η_2) (H_{03}: $\beta_{21} = 0$; H_{a3}: $\beta_{21} > 0$).

Hypothesis 4: training (ξ_1) is positively related to employee task performance (η_2) (H_{04}: $\gamma_{21} = 0$; H_{a4}: $\gamma_{21} > 0$).

• **Hypothesis 5:** training (ξ_1) is positively related to affective commitment (η_1)(H_{05}:$\gamma_{11}=0$;H_{a5}:$\gamma_{11}>0$).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Study Design
Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to achieve the objectives set out for this study. A quantitative ex post facto correlational design was used to achieve the research objectives.

Study population
The research hypotheses were empirically evaluated using a sample of 199 employees working in various government departments. 55% (110) of the participants were males while 44,5 % (89) these were females. In terms of education 40% (80) of the respondents had diplomas, followed by those with bachelors degrees at 32.5% (65). 17.5% (35) of the participants were certificate holders while 3% (6) had masters and lastly 2.5 % (5) had PHD's.

Sampling
A non-probability sampling method specifically convenient sampling was used due to the bigger sample sizes required in SEM.

Data Collection Procedure
300 Questionnaires with cover letters were distributed to identified participants and 200 completed questionnaires were returned. Section 1 of the assessment tool solicited for the participants demographic information. Section 2,3 and 4 elicited the respondents views regarding training, affective commitment and task performance on a five point likert scale anchored by 1(strongly disagree and 5 (strongly agree). Training was measured using items from the three dimensions of the training rating scale developed by Tello,Moscoso,Garcia and Chaves (2006). The scale has acceptable reliability coefficients of .89 in Tello et al., (2006). Affective job commitment was measured using items adapted from the affective commitment subscale of Meyer and Allen (1990) job commitment scale. The scale has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient (*a)* of .87 (Meyer & Allen,1990), and between .87- .89 in the studies in Merritt (2012). According to Nunnally (1978) a Chronbach (*a*) greater than 0.70 is generally considerate reliable. Employee task performance was measured using four task performance items from Befort and Hattrup (2003) employee performance scale. The scale had an cronbach alpha of .68 in Befort and Hattrup (2003).

Data Analysis
The success with which the indicator variables comprising the latent variables was evaluated empirically via item analysis,exploratory factor analysis(EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis. Item analysis was done using the statistical package of the social sciences (SPSS 25.0) to evaluate the internal consistency of the satisfaction with training scale, affective commitment and the employee task performance scales by means of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients (*a*). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to examine the unidimensionality assumption with regards to each of the three scales. In particular, the principal-axis factoring extraction method with the direct oblimin-rotated solution was used in SPSS 25.0. The cut-off point for substantial factor loadings was loadings ≥ 0.40 (Hinkin, 1998).

Data was also analysed with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling in Lisrel 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006). According to Mahembe, Engelbrecht & De Kock, (2013) CFA is usually performed to test the measurement

model underlying a measure, whilst the structural model is tested with SEM.

An assessment of model fit was based on various goodness fit indices(Bollen,1989),such as the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), root mean squared residual (RMR), standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) goodness-of-fit index(GFI), adjusted GFI, normed fit index (NFI), non-normed Fit Index (NNFI), comparative fit index(CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and relative fit index (RFI).

The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) focuses on the discrepancy between the observed population covariance matrix and the estimated population covariance matrix implied by the model per degree of freedom (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). Values under .05 are indications of good model fit, those above .05 but less than .08 indicate reasonable fit,values greater than .08 but smaller than .10 indicate a mediocre model fit and those above .10 indicate poor fit(Browne & Cudeck,1993;Diamantopoulos & Siguaw,2000).

The root mean square residual (RMR) is a summary measure of fitted residuals and represents the average value of the residual matrix while the SRMR represents the fitted residual divided by their estimated standard errors (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). Values less than .05 on the latter index are regarded as indicative of a model that fits the data well.

The goodness of fit index (GFI is an indication of the relative of the relative amount of variance and covariances explained by the model (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). Values of the GFI should range between 0 and 1, with values greater than .90 indicating that the model fits the data well (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000).

The normed fit index (NFI) represent the portion of total covariance among observed variables explained by a target model when using the null model as a baseline model (Hoyle,1995). The Non-normed fit index (NNFI) uses a similar logic as the NFI but adjust the normed fit index for the number of degrees of freedom in the model (Kelloway,1998). The two measures should range between 0 and 1. Values greater than

.90 are interpreted as reflecting acceptable fit (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000).

For model comparative assessment purposes the Incremental fit index (IFI), the comparative fit index (CFI) and the RFI are recommended (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw,2000; Schumacker & Lomax , 2004;Balogun,Mahembe & Allen IIe,2020).

RESULTS

Missing Values
Multiple imputation was used as the method to solve the problem of missing values since less than 30 % of the cases constituted missing values and that the observed variables were measured on a 5 likert scale (Mels, 2003). After treating for missing values, a sample size of 200 was retained.

Reliability analysis
Reliability Coefficients results are shown in table 1. They were calculated using SPSS (Version 25) for all the three scales. Scale reliability analysis results can generally be considered satisfactory. All the three scales meet the benchmark reliability standard of greater than 0.60(Nunnally, 1978). The training scale obtained a cronbach alpha of .77, while the affective commitment scale and task performance scale obtained .74 and .64 respectively as shown in table 1. The below .70 value for the task performance scale is acknowledged by the researchers a limitation as well as few items used for measuring both affective commitment and task performance since Item 4 in the employee task performance was deleted because it was a problematic item.

Exploratory factor analysis
Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to investigate the unidimensionality assumption with regards to each of the three scales.
All three scales were found to be uni-dimensional (see table 2). The items comprising the three scales all reflect a single underlying factor. All factor loadings were acceptable (> 0.40) and variance explained in each factor was satisfactory (> 40%) except for the employee performance scale but marginally. Despite low variance the Scale obtained an adequate Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin(KMO) value of .641. According to Tabachinick and Fidel (2007) when the

KMO approaches unity, or at achieves a value bigger than .60 the correlational matrix is deemed factor analysable. The correlation matrix showed that all correlations were larger than .30 and all were significant (p<.05).

Multivariate normality
Robust maximum likelihood (RML) estimation method was automatically performed to normalise the data.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results
 TABLE 1: Reliability of the measurement scales

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach alpha (α)
Training	4	.77
Affective Commitment	2	.74
Task Performance	3	.64

TABLE 2: Exploratory factor analysis output

Dimension	Number of items	Factor loadings	% Variance explained
Training	4	0.53 – 0.86	48.38
Affective Commitment	2	0.76 -0.76	58.39
Task Performance	3	0.51 -0.69	37.93

Measurement model factor loadings
The completely standardised factor loading for the items contained in the overall measurement model are generally satisfactorily large >.50 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

Goodness-of-fit indices for the structural model
A thorough interpretation of all the fit indices as shown in table 3, led to the conclusion that the structural model fitted the data well. The RMSEA value of this

Goodness-of-fit: The measurement model

The goodness of fit statistics for the measurement model are presented in Table 3. The RMSEA value of 0.0726 indicates reasonable model fit in the sample. Results of the incremental fit measures indicate that the model achieved NFI (0.912), NNFI (0.930), CFI (0.954), IFI(0.955), and the RFI (0.868) indices closer and exceeding .90 which represent good reasonable fit(Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000; Kelloway, 1998). The GFI value of 0.919 meets the acceptable.90 levels.

model 0.0726 presents reasonable fit. The goodness of fit index GFI of this model achieved the ideal value of 0.919. The incremental fit indices, namely the NFI; 0.912, NFFI;0.930, CFI; 0.954, IFI; 0.955, RFI; 0.868 are close to or above 0.90, which indicate good comparative fit relative to a baseline model.
Modification indices were also investigated so as to determine the extent to which the structural model was successful in explaining the observed covariance's among the variables. Large modification index values (> 6.6349) would be indicative of parameters that if set free, would potentially improve the fit of the model (p <

0.01). An examination of modification indices suggests no further additional paths between the latent variables that would improve the fit of the structural model.

TABLE 3: Goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement and structural model

Model	RMSEA	PClose Fit	SRMR	GFI	NFI	NNFI	CFI	IFI	RFI
Measurement	.0726	0.106	0.0572	0.919	0.912	0.930	0.954	0.955	0.868
Structural	.0726	0.106	0.0572	0.919	0.912	0.930	0.954	0.955	0.868

Note: RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; Pclose fit, *P*-Value for test of close fit (RMSEA < 0.05); SRMR, standardised root mean residual; GFI, goodness-of-fit index; NFI, normed fit index;NNFI,non-normed fit index; CFI, comparative fit index; IFI, incremental fit index; RFI,relative fit index

Other key findings

The structural equation modelling path (SEM) between affective commitment and employee task performance was insignificant ($t = 0.274$; $p > 0.05$) as shown in table 4, thus hypothesis 3 was not confirmed. A positive relationship between training and employee task performance was found ($t = 3.436$; $p < 0.05$) hence hypothesis 4 was supported. The SEM path between training and affective commitment was found to be insignificant thus not supporting hypothesis 5 ($t = -1.524$; $p > 0.05$) (see Table 4).

Table 4: The gamma and beta matrix of path coefficients for the structural model

Latent Variable	Training	Affective Commitment
Affective Commitment	-0.132 (0.087) -1.524	
Task Performance	0.378 (0.110) 3.436	0.026 (0.095) 0.274

Completely standardised path coefficients in bold. Standard error estimates in brackets *t*-values ≥ | 1.96| indicate significant parameter estimates. *, *p* < 0.05

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to evaluate the relationship between satisfaction with training, affective commitment and employee task performance. The study also aimed at validating a theoretical model explicating the structural relationships between these variables in the Zambian context.

Two scales recorded high reliability coefficients above the .70 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), while the employee task performance scale had an acceptable cronbach alpha above .60 (Nunnally, 1978).The goodness fit indices for both the measurement and structural models indicated reasonable model fit (see Table 3). These results are an indication that the proposed theoretical model underlying the relationships between the three variables is supported and that the indicator variables measured the dimensions as postulated.

Our finding of a positive relationship between training and employee task performance is consistent with previous empirical research studies such as (Kiweewa & Asiimwe, 2014;Afsana,Afrin & Tarannum,2016).

A statistically insignificant path coefficient between affective commitment and employee task performance was found. These results are consistent with those of Khan (2015) who found out that affective commitment did not positively predict employee performance. A non-significant relationship between training and affective commitment was found. The obtained research results are in sharp contrast to those of Atoko, Taylor and Sichinsambwe (2018) who found a significant relationship between the two variables on the Zambian Sample. This suggest that despite undergoing training Zambian workers do

not feel the need to identify with their employer organisations.

Theoretical and practical implications
Practical implications
Theoretically the study makes a significant contribution to human resource management and development literature by providing empirical support to the proposition that training is an antecedent of employee task performance in Zambia. Human resource practitioners will have to consider training when trying to enhance employee task performance.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research
SEM requires bigger sample sizes for good results. A minimal sample size of 200 could have had a huge effect on the results. Future studies should replicate the study using bigger and diverse samples.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study have provided evidence to the extent that training plays an important role in the promotion of employee task performance. However no empirical evidence was found for the path between affective commitment and employee task performance. This means that employee's affective commitment has no effect on how employees will execute their tasks. Furthermore a non significant relationship between training and affective commitment was found.

Availability of data and materials
The data used and analysed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request

Abbreviations

RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

SRMR: Standardised Root Mean Residual

GFI: Goodness of Fit Index

NFI: Normed Fit Index

CFI: Comparative Fit Index

Appendices

None

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L.S. was responsible for Data collection and writing of the article

V.C. was responsible for Statistical analyses, interpretation of results and writing of the article.

B.M. was responsible for writing the article

F.M. was responsible for refining the assessment tools and writing of the article

Corresponding Author
Lungowe Sinvula

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All respondents in this study consented before attempting items from the three measures. Ethical clearance was obtained from Mulungushi University ethical clearance committee.

Consent for publications
No images, individual details or videos for clients' data are part of this paper.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

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We declare that this paper has not been submitted to any journal besides this one

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