Exploring Gender Differences of Executives' Experiences of Psychological Job Strain and their Behavioural Coping Strategies using Critical Incident Technique (CIT)

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

The overarching aim of this research was to explore gender difference in how executives cope with psychological job strain over time, using the Critical Incident Technique.

A background review of the literature set the landscape for this UK study and an integrative literature review explored diverse perspectives on how individuals cope with psychological job strain. Overall, findings identified a dominance of quantitative studies, none specifically with executives and only one UK study with supervisors and managers from 1986. Cross sectional research and short-term recall failed to capture participant reflections and personal impact over the long-term. The gaps identified from the extant literature informed the theoretical foundations of the subsequent empirical study.

Using reflexive thematic analysis, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with UK executives in 2021/2022. Exploring gender differences and asking participants to recount experiences over their career trajectory, this study captured the longer-term experiences of leadership and the impact on the health and wellbeing of senior ranking employees. Findings identified shared gender experiences of positive coping strategies during 'steady state', compared to maladaptive behaviours during periods of 'peak strain', which were often exacerbated by a negative culture and the destructive behaviour of senior colleagues. Maladaptive coping, including a vast increase in working hours, limited sleep and exercise, and poor eating and drinking habits, led to executives experiencing negative mental and physical health issues. Gender differences identified female executives undertaking greater responsibility for others, both internally and externally to the workplace, and greater utilisation of social support. Male executives experienced more severe levels of mental and physical ill-health, including suicidal thoughts, full mental breakdown, cardiovascular problems and cancer.

Suggestions are made for future research, practice and policy development to promote adaptive coping strategies that protect the mental and physical health of executives and all employees.

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Glossary of Terms

BME – Individuals of a Black and Minority Ethnic background.

Buffer Hypothesis – high level of job control buffers the impact of job demands.

CEO – Chief Executive Officer.

CIT – Critical Incident Technique – a method of questioning with a critical incident defined as "an activity or event where the consequences were so clear that the participant has a definite idea regarding the effects." (Flanagan, 1954 P. 327).

Coping – "The constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and / or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person." (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984 P. 141).

Covid-19 Pandemic– Coronavirus infection disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Emotion Focused Coping – Reducing a stressor when it must be endured.

Dual (or Double) Role Burden - The simultaneous and incompatible pressures from work and family.

Epistemology – The study of what constitutes knowledge and a way of knowing about that world.

Eustress - "A positive psychological response to a stressor, as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states." (Nelson and Simmons, 2003 P. 104).

FTSE – Financial Times Stock Exchange.

Glass Ceiling Effect - "A barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy." (Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990 P. 200).

Intersectionality - a metaphor introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage can compound to create obstacles on several levels.

JDC – Job Demand, Control model (Karasek, 1979).

JDCS – Job Demand, Control, Support model (Johnson and Hall, 1988).

Job Strain – The negative physical and psychological toll that job stress takes on an individual.

Job Stress – The demands at work that individuals experience as stressful.

Method – Technique applied to collect and / or analyse data in research.

Methodology – Framework within which research is conducted.

NED – Non-Executive Director.

Ontology – A set of assumptions made about the nature of reality, existence and what the world is.

Patriarchy – Social systems where men have dominance over the group.

Polyvagal Theory –a theory introduced Stephen Porges in 1994 to outline the neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation where the autonomic nervous system responds to perceived safety, danger and threat.

Prejudice – Preconceived ideas not based on reason or experience.

Presenteeism – Workers being on the job, but due to illness not fully functioning.

Problem-Focused Coping – Taking action to resolve the problem.

Psychological Job Strain – "A response produced in the individual to aversive and potentially harmful reactions to long-term exposure to stress, including anxiety, depression and other ill-health such as cardiovascular disease." (O'Driscoll et al., 2009 P. 245).

Psychological Safety – "Feeling able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career." (Kahn, 1990 P. 708).

Psychological wellbeing – The presence of positive feelings.

Sexual Harassment – Unwanted sexual advances, verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature in the workplace.

SPIDER Framework – Literature search strategy framework representing: Sample; Phenomenon of Interest; Design; Evaluation; Research Type.

Stereotypes – Fixed and over simplified image or idea of things or people in society.

The Child Penalty – The negative effect on female income and career prospects more than their male counterparts.

Token Status – Being hired for a role from a minority group so an organisation can give the appearance of equal and fair opportunities.

Triple Role Burden – Unpaid housework, paid labour and childcare responsibilities.

Work Stress – An individual's internal response to stressors characterised by arousal and some level of discomfort (Sutherland and Cooper, 1988).

Work Stressors – Environmental situations or events such as heavy workload, capable of producing a state of psychological stress in an individual (Beehr, 1998).

Workplace Psychological Distress – Negative mental health states, including anxiety and depression, caused by work.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Summary

This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how executives experience psychological job strain during times of peak stress and to identify their behavioural coping strategies. In exploring gender differences, capturing the resulting impact on leadership and health and wellbeing in the long-term, this cross-sectional study asked participants to recall experiences over an extended recall period. The use of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), captured experiences with a positive and a negative outcome to uncover patterns and themes.

A review of the extant literature revealed a dominance of quantitative research, with a limited focus of inquiry through qualitative studies. Additionally, the review highlighted limited research with senior executives and specifically only one supervisor and management study within the UK dated 1986. One identified challenge relating to research on job strain and stress, was that many of the studies take a short-term snapshot of the 'here and now' and do not allow for reflections and personal impact by looking back over a longer time period, such as several months or years. It could be argued therefore that the theoretical foundations do not have an appropriately informed understanding of psychological job strain and behavioural coping strategies in relation to the lived experiences and the longer-term implications on the health and wellbeing of some of the most senior ranking employees.

This study sought to explore these critical areas and redress the methodological imbalance through the use of semi-structured interviews. Using CIT and personal participant reflections, how psychological job strain is experienced by executives in the UK, the impact on their behavioural coping strategies during times of peak job demand and strain compared to steady state, and their experiences of the resulting long-term effect on their health, wellbeing and personal interactions was captured. Through reflexive thematic analysis of the participants' responses, five integrative themes were identified, namely: the Job Demand Control Support Model, including the nature of the demand and causes of strain; coping strategies when in steady state and increased demand; the impact of job strain; actual and perceived gender differences and lastly, CIT reflections and personal learning over the long term.

These insights informed a critical evaluation of the theoretical determinants from the extant literature and extended the psychological job strain and coping literature from the perspective of UK executives.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how executives experience psychological job strain during times of peak stress and to identify their behavioural coping strategies. By exploring gender differences, together with participant reflections and learning over the longer-term, the aims of this study are therefore to:

- Explore how individual executives describe their experience and understanding of psychological job strain.
- Through Critical Incident Technique (CIT), explore both positive and negative experiences of executive job strain in relation to peaks of demand.
- To identify the causes of executives' job strain.
- To explore what behavioural coping strategies executives utilise (or have used) to cope with that strain.
- To explore executives' experiences of any gender differences in relation to job strain and behavioural coping strategies.
- To determine personal reflections, points of learning and the effects of the strain experiences on longer-term life impact.

1.3 Research Design

A review of the existing research into psychological job strain and behavioural coping strategies identified that most studies were conducted using quantitative methodologies. Very few studies were of qualitative or mixed methods design highlighting the overemphasis placed on quantitative analysis. Furthermore, with the cross sectional or short-term nature of the studies, none took a view of the long-term and life impact of job strain, and only one included any management level participants within the UK. To redress this imbalance and to capture the experiential perspectives of participants, this study was designed within the constructivist paradigm, deploying a qualitative methodology to capture reflections and experiences over the life course of an executive employee.

UK executives were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to explore their lived experiences, and by utilising the CIT they were firstly asked to recall a situation of peak strain that resulted in a positive outcome and secondly, one that resulted in a negative outcome. The specific use of CIT allowed for the participants to reflect over their career to detail examples that were of significance for them as an individual. Additionally, the use of CIT facilitated the opportunity for participant reflection and the capture of their personal points of learning. Consideration of the personal effect, resulting life impact and choices made, provided the opportunity for greater self-awareness, personal growth and fulfillment (Calhoun and Tedeschi, 2010).

Using frameworks from the extant literature and the definition of psychological job strain as "a response produced in the individual to aversive and potentially harmful reactions to long-term exposure to stress, including anxiety, depression and other ill-health such as cardiovascular diseases" (O'Driscoll et al., 2009 P.245), the Job Demand Control (JDC) (Karasek, 1979), and the Job Demand, Control, Support (JDCS) (Johnson and Hall, 1988) models, allowed for the capture of themes relating to participant experiences and the strategies they deployed to cope with that strain. With coping defined as the "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and / or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984 P.141), responses were analysed using a reflexive thematic template approach to identify themes and sub-themes to address the aims of this study (King, 2012b).

1.6 Overview of this Thesis

A background review of the literature follows this introduction providing a preliminary review of the landscape for this research study with executives. This includes areas of executive responsibilities, culture, stress and eustress, health and wellbeing, societal expectations, the complexity of intersectionality and the current understanding of gender difference and psychological job strain and coping within a workplace context.

An integrated literature review then follows in Chapter 3, providing a systematic, in depth overview of job strain, coping strategies and gender through the existing literature (Callahan, 2010). The rationale, methodology deployed, and the description of the

literature included is presented, followed by an analysis of the findings, theories, methodologies and measurements used to underpin the subsequent empirical study and shape the focus of inquiry.

Chapter 4 outlines the chosen methodology and ethical choices made to address the research objectives (Allsop, 2013; Bryman, 2012a). Integrative themes that reflect the participants' experiences are explored in Chapter 5 providing context for discussion and analysis in Chapter 6. The final concluding chapter identifies strengths and limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

1.7 Researchers Background

Previously an HR Director in the utilities sector, the researcher is a business owner of over 20 years, working in all sectors as an Executive Coach and leadership consultant. As a senior executive, the researcher has experienced many different organizational cultures and leadership styles. This includes witnessing aggressive behaviour from senior executives towards others, personal impact and experience of bullying, belittling of contribution and exclusion from decision making on the basis of being female, through to the opposite end of the spectrum with being valued for knowledge, insights and the creation of positive cultures that place importance on the mental health, wellbeing and contributions of all employees.

As an HR specialist, management consultant, qualified coach, therapist and supervisor of other professional coaches, the researcher is an advocate for mental health and the positive contributions that all levels of employees can make to an organisation's performance and the bottom line.

1.8 Concluding Remarks

This study therefore seeks to develop an understanding of job demand, control and support, together with behavioural coping strategies and the long-term impact on executives within the UK. By exploration through the lens of executives' personal lived experience, the qualitative methodology adopted intends to provide insights into the experienced gender differences in executive roles. The rich descriptions of executives' personal experiences and the themes identified will provide a much-needed

understanding into how UK executives experience job strain and their behavioural coping strategies. Learning more about this group is paramount for targeting future strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of these workers in order to elevate the leadership experience within UK businesses that also maximises performance, the bottom line and balances the physical and mental health of all employees.

Chapter 2 Background Review of the Literature

The aim of this chapter is to provide a background review of the literature to set the landscape for this UK research study with executives. The wide-ranging responsibilities of executives will be outlined within the complexities of organisational and societal culture. Social identity, stereotypes and intersectionality will be considered together with the impact of stress and eustress on attrition, health and wellbeing. The research within the context of UK business will be outlined concluding with the current understanding of gender difference in psychological job strain and coping.

2.1 Executive Responsibilities and Leadership

With executives holding responsibility for setting the strategy and direction of an organisation, roles can vary widely depending on the size of the business. From a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Director, Non-Executive Director (NED) role, through to a business owner, some executives are appointed in job title only whilst others are a legally appointed director under the Companies Act 1985 (UK Government, 1985). Regardless of the legalities, executives are responsible for many differing aspects within and outside of the organisation. In addition to the responsibility of employees and managing the direction and performance of the business, a large part of an executive role may also entail developing and maintaining relationships with external stakeholders such as shareholders, customers or government bodies, all adding to the daily pressures and requirements on holding such wide-ranging responsibility.

Internally they are responsible for the creation of a compelling vision, attainment of strategic goals and the dissemination of an organisational culture that defines purpose, beliefs, values, and norms that directly or indirectly influence employee attitudes, health and wellbeing and behaviours (Senge, 1990; Prasad and Junni, 2016; Lopes Henriques et al., 2019).

2.2 The Complexities of Organisational Culture and Leadership

With both organisational culture and a leader's behaviours identified as critical determinants of an organisation's effectiveness (Burns et al., 2013; Berson et al., 2008), it is important to note the bidirectional influence of a leaders role in shaping organisational culture as well as the effect of the organisational culture on the leader (Burns et al., 2013; Štreimikienė et al., 2021). Technological advancements and increased

global connectedness are recognised as one of the biggest challenges facing leaders to date (Uhl-Bien, 2017). An organisation's culture can also exist within the larger societal culture of which it is part (Krapfl and Kruja, 2015; Schein and Schein, 2017). This myriad of external factors in the everchanging global and cultural landscape further highlights the difficulties of such interactivity and the challenges that executives must navigate to adapt and thrive in today's complex systems and environment (Uhl-Bien, 2017; Krapfl and Kruja, 2015).

2.3 The Positive Impact of Leadership Style and Culture

A place of high trust and psychological safety; defined as "feeling able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career" (Kahn, 1990 P. 708), is where individuals perform at their best (Wietrak and Gifford, 2024). Leaders can create such a culture with their own high-quality behaviours and transformational leadership skills that have been associated with better employee health and safety in the workplace (Harms et al., 2017; Mullen et al., 2023; Arnold and Connelly, 2013), and greater innovation and higher performance (Wolor et al., 2022; Robertson and Flint-Taylor, 2009). Comprising idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspiration and individualised consideration, when a leader is able to operate with a transformational style they can provide motivation, gain the trust and confidence of followers, inspire and excite employees to accomplish great things with extra effort and increased adaptability and innovation (Prasad and Junni, 2016; Bass, 1990; Cole et al., 2009; Kelly, 1998; Hamling and Jarden, 2017; Block, 2003).

With affect and emotions being an implicit part of the leadership phenomena (Connelly and Gooty, 2015), sincerity in expression, regulation of emotions and being consistent and appropriate in their responses has been linked to increased worker's trust (Caza et al., 2015; Jordan and Lindebaum, 2015), with leaders being viewed as a good boss (Dasborough and Ashkanasy, 2005). Impacting on psychological and physical wellbeing, the actions and behaviours of a 'good boss' are seen as being empathetic and treating employees with consideration in comparison to being difficult, abrasive and even abusive (Kulik et al., 2015; Frost, 2007). These behaviours in turn have been shown to affect employee effort and performance (Aryee et al., 2002; Colquitt et al., 2012), collaboration and teamwork (Sargent and Waters, 2004; Simons and Peterson, 2000), creativity (Kark and Carmeli, 2009; Gong et al., 2012) and leadership effectiveness (Dirks and Ferrin,

2002; Gillespie and Mann, 2004). For executives, the daily pressure of holding such high-level responsibility whilst simultaneously retaining a positive influence on employees, organisational culture and external stakeholders can be challenging. Yet when an organisation encounters difficulties or a crisis, leaders that can handle stressful events and engage in efficient decision-making are when they are needed the most (Harms et al., 2017).

2.4 Poor and Destructive Leadership

When relationships are psychologically unhealthy or when an individual's psychological resources are taxed or exhausted, they are less likely to engage in positive leadership behaviours leading to the experience of, and also becoming the cause of stress and burnout for others (Harms et al., 2017; Skakon et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2008; Schaufeli and Ennzmann, 1998; Xu et al., 2015). Poor and destructive leadership has additionally been shown to be damaging to employees' psychological safety, harmful to health and wellbeing (Montano et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016; WHO, 2024), leading to low innovation (Prasad and Junni, 2016; Lopes Henriques et al., 2019), low job satisfaction and poor employee performance (Wolor et al., 2022).

With such wide-ranging effect, it must also be considered that executives themselves can be at the mercy of more senior leaders and if the behaviour directed towards them is of a negative or abusive nature, how they handle this in addition to the stressors of their role, is of paramount importance. Given the potential impact on others, a leaders' ability to emotionally regulate can have a positive organisational impact and enhance their own decision-making, communication skills and resilience (Haver et al., 2013; Gooty et al., 2010). Therefore, how executives cope with psychological job strain and stressful situations, is fundamental in understanding not only the resulting impact on an individual, but also the wider implications for organisational culture, performance, health and wellbeing.

2.5 Work, Attrition, Health and Wellbeing

Compared to other European countries that have reported improvements in life expectancy and inequalities, the reviews into health equity in the UK demonstrate that life expectancy is declining and the years that people spend in ill-health is increasing

(Marmot, 2020; Marmot and Bell, 2012; Marmot and Allen, 2024). Highlighting a wider issue, with growing numbers of both parents needing to go back to work for financial reasons after child birth, other people having insufficient money to lead a healthy life, resorting to food banks, a rise in homelessness and child poverty, a worrying trend is evident for society overall (Marmot, 2020; Marmot and Allen, 2024; Marmot et al., 2020). As a key researcher on these important studies, Professor Sir Michael Marmot is quoted - "If health has stopped improving, then society has stopped improving" (Marmot, 2020).

Studies into work and health status have been conducted in the UK over many decades. The first longitudinal Whitehall Study from 1967 to 1970 was conducted with 18,000 male civil servants and was the first to demonstrate an association between the lower the job status the worse the health outcomes were. A second longitudinal study conducted in 1985 with 10,308 male and female participants, with thirteen additional waves of data being collected up to January 2023, investigated the relationship between work, stress and health (LSHTM, 2025). Whilst the studies were conducted with civil servants, the impact of work and stress on health can be considered relative to a wider working population. Utilising the data to measure psychological job demands, decision latitude (control) and social support at work, (discussed further in section 2.11), the results found that job strain from high job demand and low decision latitude was associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease for both men and women (Kuper and Marmot, 2003). The research further identified a correlation between social class, employment grade, and rates of illness, such as cardiovascular and respiratory conditions and mortality (Marmot and Bell, 2012). The results of these studies highlight the way work is organised, the work climate, social influences outside of work, influences from early life and health behaviours, all contribute to the social gradient in health and that the impact of the work place on any individual, of any class, is accentuated (Marmot and Bell, 2012; WHO, 2008; Marmot et al., 2020; Marmot, 2020; Marmot and Allen, 2024).

In summary, the impact of the environment both inside and outside of the workplace, societal and organisational cultures, leadership style and the positive and negative impact of personal agency can be seen to have a level of complexity in an individual's life experience and therefore to their health and wellbeing. It is estimated that 15% of UK workers have an existing mental health condition with mental health currently the 5th most common reason for sickness absence and the most common cause of work-limiting

conditions among those aged 44 years and younger. (Mental Health Foundation, 2024). The cost to UK employers was estimated at £42 billion to £45 billion annually through presenteeism, sickness absence and staff turnover (Mental Health Foundation, 2024; Stevenson and Farmer, 2017; Office for National Statistics, 2022). With 0.9 million workers suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2022/23 and 1.8 million workers suffering from work-related ill health, (Health and Safety Executive, 2023), the culture and leadership within UK businesses is key to ensure the physical and psychological health of, not only the executives themselves but all levels of employees.

In the UK, three in ten employees leave to join another organisation every year and the most common length of service for all employee levels is between two and five years (CIPD, 2024). How people are treated and the health and wellbeing of employees at all levels can therefore be considered as foundational for retaining loyal employees. Whilst detail by employee grade level is not available, in 2023, the UK's rate of engagement or job satisfaction was 10%, meaning 90% of employees are disengaged, ranking the UK 33rd out of 38 peer European countries (GALLUP, 2024). Additionally, 31% of employees were actively seeking new roles. The UK also ranked 2nd in daily sadness (27%), 10th in daily anger (20%), and 15th in daily stress (40%), highlighting a worrying decline in employee wellbeing and its impact on life satisfaction and health outcomes (GALLUP, 2024). The role of the leader and organisational responsibility for their employees is therefore highlighted as paramount.

2.6 Stress and Eustress

The workplace, contexts and individuals within it, are far from static and how stressors are experienced can vary greatly and impact people in a multitude of ways (Perrewe and McAllister, 2024). How demands are appraised by an individual will moderate positive and negative responses with a variety of distinct physiological, psychological and behavioural indicators (Simmons et al., 2024; Kupriyanov and Zhdanov, 2014; McGonigal, 2015). There is substantial evidence linking stress, distress and ill-health through autonomic and neuroendocrine responses and, indirectly, through changes in health behaviours (O'Connor et al., 2021; Li et al., 2016). Conversely research suggests that eustress, defined as "a positive psychological response to a stressor, as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states" (Nelson and Simmons, 2003), can have

beneficial effects on health, promoting healthy perceptions and beliefs (Salovey et al., 2000; Simmons et al., 2024).

It must also be noted however, that eustress can become distress or even chronic stress if the frequency or intensity of exposure increases (Hunter and Chaskalson, 2013; Bienertova-Vasku et al., 2020). The concept of demand and control to levels where an individual has the resources to meet the challenges at hand, can buffer strain and therefore promote engagement, which is an indicator of eustress, and wellbeing (Simmons et al., 2024; Demerouti and Bakker, 2011). However, considering 90% of UK employees are said to be disengaged in their current work, together with the increasing global decline in wellbeing (GALLUP, 2024), the relationship between eustress, distress and stress, and the long-term impact on physical and physiological health raises an important question.

2.7 Societal Expectations, Stereotypes and Personality

Historically, gender stereotypes evolved based on the biological and physical sex differences between men and women, such as, men being perceived to be more stoic and stronger. Social expectations and childhood conditioning often teaches men to be tough, unemotional and traditionally to not be rewarded for expressing feelings and showing vulnerability (Kray et al., 2017; Hess et al., 2000; McAllister et al., 2019). Such traits persist and have been suggested to promote the status quo within society and the workplace (Kray et al., 2017; Cortis et al., 2022). Societal expectations in industrialised countries have hence typically shown men to be more likely to undertake certain jobs, valuing money, power and status, with issues like work-life conciliation being less relevant, compared to women who were typically assigned to communion, caregiving and nurture roles within family and organisational settings (González-Morales et al., 2006; Eagly et al., 2012; Eagly and Wood, 2012).

The socially constructed definition of personality types extends these gendered stereotypes with masculine traits typically associated with agency, instrumentality, competence, assertiveness and independence, and feminine traits linked with warmth, nurturance, and compassion (Beehr et al., 2003; Gadinger et al., 2008; González-Morales et al., 2006; Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Siu et al., 1999). Facets underlying these traits have further shown that agency is associated with independence, instrumental competence and leadership competence, and communion traits associating with concern for others,

sociability and emotional sensitivity (Hentschel et al., 2019). Extending the argument further, female gender stereotypes have been shown to be inconsistent with leadership roles due to women being communal, and leaders, like men, being agentic (Eagly and Sczesny, 2019).

To date, men have typically dominated senior positions. Patriarchal organisational culture may therefore be embedded with these societal norms and male values, ways of thinking and expectations (González-Morales et al., 2006; Siu et al., 1999), something that can almost be taken for granted within a structure and culture of dominance, control and subordination (Ferry, 2024; Acker, 1990; Beechey, 1979; Bell et al., 2019; Bell and Sinclair, 2016). Extant literature suggests women tend to experience such things as token status, the glass ceiling effect, sexual harassment and prejudice, with research highlighting that when women do make it to senior roles, they are often constrained by the self-reinforcing gender roles and expectations that perpetuates the traditional gender-unfair practices (Eagly and Sczesny, 2019; Acker, 1990; Acker, 1989; Bell et al., 2019; Bell and Sinclair, 2016; Arnold et al., 1998; Geller et al., 2015).

2.8 Dual and Triple Roles

Further penalising women in their career trajectory to senior positions, the cultural expectations and domination of women rather than men undertaking household, childcare and eldercare responsibilities can add additional pressure of dual and triple roles, with women bearing the direct and indirect costs of informal care for family members (Ettner, 1996; Carmichael and Charles, 2003b; Carmichael and Charles, 2003a; Duxbury and Higgins, 2017; Michaud et al., 2010; Arnold et al., 1998). The 'child penalty', where the mother's income is substantially reduced, impacts women in the workplace showing a negative effect not only on female income but also career prospects, more than their male counterparts (Andresen and Nix, 2022; Ciccia and Verloo, 2012; Michaud et al., 2010; Kleven et al., 2019; Mason and Ekman, 2007). Research shows that some women choose to put their careers ahead of having a family (Martin, 2021; Cram et al., 2015; Mason and Ekman, 2007), and women leaving organisations is often related to the pull of motherhood, rather than due to poor organisational culture, policy and practice (Lim and Mohd Rasdi, 2019). Despite the child penalty and pressures on females in their careers, reaching a senior position is still attainable on a shorter timeline to men, as women are on average two years younger than men on both Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE)

100 and FTSE 250 boards, with an average male age of 59.3 compared to women at 57.4 for FTSE 100, and men at 58.9 and women 56.5 in FTSE 250 companies (Hampton, 2019).

2.9 Social Identity and the Complexity of Intersectionality

Since the philosopher Judith Butler's work in the early 1990's, the male / female binary view has been evolving, with gender not being biologically determined or an inherent identity, but rather identity is constructed (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018; Butler, 1990). Widening the agenda of social roles, the acceptance of multiple gender and sexual identities, including non-binary and transgender status, has also now challenged the two primary sex categories further by disrupting the traditional binary view of sex and gender (Eagly and Sczesny, 2019). As modern society moves further away from this traditional binary view, the importance and consideration of intersectionality becomes ever more important. With intersectionality used as a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage can compound to create obstacles on several levels (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw and Phillips, 1998; Bello and Mancini, 2016), the scrutiny and overhaul of the overlap of gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age and the stereotypical characteristics in the workplace and society is long overdue (Iwasaki et al., 2005; Iglesias and Cormier, 2002; Courtney et al., 2017; Holvino, 2010; Luiz and Terziev, 2024; Bello and Mancini, 2016). With the controversial 'think manager – think male' paradigm no longer having a place (Elsesser, 2015), the scope for an androgynous leadership style that combines both communal and agentic traits is now more relevant than ever, enabling a workplace culture associated with better mental and social wellbeing for all employees (Gartzia et al., 2018; Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Eagly et al., 2016).

2.10 Research Context in UK Business

The initiation of government reviews and the setting of voluntary targets instigated in 2010, sought to improve the performance of UK businesses, by taking full advantage of the talents of people from minority ethnic backgrounds and increasing gender balance on UK Executive Boards. With a view to improving equality and diversity within the workplace and to increase the representation of women in senior positions, the 2015 Davies report highlighted a significant culture shift since 2010, quoting numbers of female executives more than doubling between 2010 to 2015 from 12.5% to 26.1% in

2015 on the FTSE 100 boards and from 7.8% in 2011 to 19.6% on FTSE 250 company boards in 2015 (Davies, 2015). The report also introduced an increased voluntary target for FTSE 350 companies to achieve a minimum of 33% female executive representation by 2020.

In 2016 the Hampton-Alexander Review, picked up the gender mantel from the Davies review (2015), extending the female target to one third of combined Executive Committee and Direct Reports to the Executive Committee in FTSE 100 companies by the end of 2020 (Hampton and Alexander, 2016). The 2016 review also highlighted the growing awareness of the multiple barriers women experience when seeking to progress through their careers in the workplace (Hampton and Alexander, 2016 P.12). To tackle this gender disparity in executive roles, the review outlined various initiatives that companies could undertake, such as tracking progress from entry level upwards by role, promotion rates of women relative to men; and improved representation of women on training programmes in high potential groups (Hampton and Alexander, 2016 P.12). Additionally, a fundamental recommendation was to switch from targets being seen as tokenistic, or a high-level intent, to line manager ownership, with full implementation plans and monitors to measure progress and improvements on an ongoing basis.

A report into the ethnic diversity of UK Boards highlighted the need for corporate culture to reflect a company's commitment to diversity and whilst companies had made great progress on gender diversity, there was still much to do in terms of ethnic and cultural diversity (Parker, 2016). Compared to 14% of the population, the number of directors of colour represented only 8% of the UK total and only nine people of colour held the position of Chair or CEO (Parker, 2016). With the proportion of people of colour estimated to represent 30% of the UK population by 2051, the report recommended that each FTSE 100 Board should have at least one director of colour by 2021 and each FTSE 250 Board at least one by 2024 (Parker, 2016). The McGregor-Smith review highlighted the need for businesses to "stop hiding behind the mantle of 'unconscious bias', that is structural and a result of a system that benefits a certain group of people" (McGregor-Smith, 2017 P. 1). The report outlined those affected being not just from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) background, but also women, those with disabilities, or anyone who has experienced preconceived notions of what makes a good employee (McGregor-Smith, 2017). In 2017 the total number of directors of colour remained at 8% of the total

UK population, with a reduction to six people of colour holding the position of Chair or CEO (Parker, 2017).

The 2018 Hampton-Alexander Review highlighted a 'tokenistic approach to gender equality' with 74 top UK companies reporting only a single female in senior or executive roles, which was termed as "One and Done" (Hampton, 2018 P.32). In 2019 vast improvements were identified with the number of UK FTSE 350 companies reporting only one woman on the executive board as 39, and subsequently to only 9 in 2023 (Hampton, 2019; FTSE Women Leaders, 2023). In 2022 it was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had seen significant disruption across all sectors, with women being disproportionately impacted both personally and professionally (FTSE Women Leaders, 2022). Due to women being the majority of the workforce in the most hard-hit sectors and being more likely to care for young children and elderly relatives, the pandemic created intensified pressure balancing work and home responsibilities. Research from 2020 showed homeworkers consistently worked more hours than non-homeworkers, with 28% of women compared to 16% of men reporting an increase in domestic caring responsibilities (FTSE Women Leaders, 2022). The report went on to quote that around 1 in 4 women aged 50 to 64, had caring responsibilities for older or disabled loved ones (FTSE Women Leaders, 2022).

With new disclosure rules announced for listed companies to report on the diversity of boards and executive management on a comply or explain basis (FCA, 2022), new expectations and aspirational goals were set for the next, and what was considered the final stage in the journey to gender balanced boards and leadership teams by the end of 2025. This increased the voluntary target for FTSE 350 Boards and leadership teams to a minimum of 40% women and for FTSE companies to have a least one woman in one of the four top jobs, i.e. Chair; Senior Independent Director on the Board, and / or one woman in the CEO or Finance Director role (FTSE Women Leaders, 2022). The scope of the review was extended to include the largest 50 private companies (FTSE Women Leaders, 2022). Improvements in listed companies continued in 2023, and the response from the Top 50 private companies reported women's representation at 34.3%, similar to the FTSE 350 companies (FTSE Women Leaders, 2023), however contrary to this 19 boards were still either all male or reporting a single female only (FTSE Women Leaders, 2023 P. 24). In 2023 the ethnic minority target was also extended out to the top 50 private

companies (Tyler, 2023), with 48% having achieved the December 2027 target by the end of 2024 (Tyler, 2025). Additionally at the end of 2024, 95 of FTSE 100 companies had at least one ethnic minority director on their board, and 82% of the FTSE 250 (Tyler, 2025).

In 2024, female non-executive directors were on par with men at 49.9% and the representation of women on FTSE 350 Boards had increased beyond the 40% target to 43%, with the number of females in overall leadership positions at 35% (FTSE Women Leaders, 2025). The 50 largest private companies and the FTSE 100 have increased women in leadership roles to 37%, yet more is still needed to move the proportion of women on boards beyond the overall 31% (FTSE Women Leaders, 2025). In little more than a decade, the culture and dialogue of the top British businesses has substantially changed with diversity being evident across every level in the workplace. More is now being encouraged to help focus on the succession and pipeline of talent further down in organisations to provide a cohort of capable individuals to take British businesses forward (FTSE Women Leaders, 2024; Tyler, 2024; FTSE Women Leaders, 2025).

2.11 Current Understanding of Psychological Job Strain and Coping

Job stress refers to the demands at work that individuals experience as stressful, whereas job strain refers to the negative physical and psychological toll that job stress takes (O'Driscoll et al., 2009). Research into psychological job strain has mostly been based on Karasek's job strain model, which specifies the characteristics of job demands as the task requirements at work, including such things as role conflict and time pressure (Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Karasek, 1979). The job demand - control model (JDC), states that the greatest risk to physical and mental health from stress occurs to workers facing high psychological workload, demands or pressures without the accompanying authority (Karasek, 1979). Notably, initial studies of job stress were conducted with male only participants (Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003 P.610; Karasek, 1979; Karasek et al., 1981), with the authors stating they did not want to "complicate" the findings by including women due to "the additional demand of housework" (Karasek, 1979 P.289). Including JDCS in this empirical research is therefore important to include all genders at a senior level.

The JDC model outlines a 'buffer' hypothesis, whereby a high level of control alleviates the impact of job demands, and a 'strain' hypothesis, where those in jobs of high demand with low control, experience the highest level of job strain (Karasek, 1979; O'Driscoll et al., 2009). The strain hypothesis was supported in a review of 63 studies between 1977 and 1997, and 83 studies between 1998 and 2007, where the findings suggested that working in high-strain jobs was associated with lower psychological wellbeing, lower job satisfaction, more burnout and more job-related psychological distress. (O'Driscoll et al., 2009; Van der Doef and Maes, 1999; Häusser et al., 2010). From the two reviews, job control was highlighted as a stress buffer for those high on active coping (Van der Doef and Maes, 1999), however contrary to this, *active-isolated* workers were found to experience higher prevalence of job strain (Johnson and Hall, 1988), a finding that was supported with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting working lives, with a profound disruption resulting in stress, burnout and a decrease to wellbeing (FTSE Women Leaders, 2022; Mockaitis et al., 2022; Costin et al., 2023; Lilja et al., 2022).

A criticism of the JDC model outlines that in some studies it is not clear whether negative effects are exclusively attributable to either high demands *or* lack of control (Van der Doef and Maes, 1999). It has also been suggested that high levels of job control may actually accentuate rather than reduce the impact of high job demands, and that a simultaneous increase in job control and demand can lead to reverse buffering where the effect is negated (Johnson and Hall, 1988; Brough et al., 2009). The 1988 research was conducted with non-specified employment grade levels, which resulted in the authors speculating whether responsibility levels was an important consideration in future research as it could have a greater impact on some workers (Johnson and Hall, 1988). Indeed, the lack of a buffering effect has shown to create a detrimental impact on wellbeing and psychological strain such as anxiety, depression and cardiovascular diseases in studies with a range of employee levels (Johnson and Hall, 1988; Häusser et al., 2010; Van der Doef and Maes, 1999; O'Driscoll et al., 2009; Shirom et al., 2015; Marmot et al., 1997; Kawachi and Marmot, 1998; Nelson and Simmons, 2003; Alfredsson et al., 1982; Landsbergis, 1988; Karasek, 1989; Karasek et al., 1981; Fransson et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2024; Leiter and Maslach, 2024; Kuper and Marmot, 2003).

In 1988, workplace social support was acknowledged in the JDCS model, with Johnson and Hall including an important dimension linking social support to job control (Johnson

and Hall, 1988). The iso-strain hypothesis predicts work situations characterised by high demands, low control and low social support, to be the most harmful for workers wellbeing (O'Driscoll et al., 2009; Johnson and Hall, 1988; Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Häusser et al., 2010), with increased job control buffering high demands most effectively under conditions of high social support (O'Driscoll et al., 2009; Johnson and Hall, 1988; Brough et al., 2009). Whilst it was supposed in earlier research that there would be reduced validity of the JDC/JDCS model for women compared to men (Van der Doef and Maes, 1999), there was no evidence to support this in the 2010 review of the 83 studies published between 1998 and 2007 (Häusser et al., 2010).

With interacting elements between the individual and the environment, where 'stressors' result in some form of imbalance or strain in the individual's level of equilibrium and sense of wellbeing, the attempts to correct the imbalance, are classed as coping behaviours (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Folkman and Lazarus, 1990; Brough et al., 2005; Tetrick et al., 2023). Folkman and Lazarus identified two major process-orientated functions to coping which they described as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Semmer and Meier, 2015; Dewe et al., 2010). When a stressor is deemed controllable, it is predicted that an individual will attempt to alter the stressor itself by taking a problem-focused or 'active' coping strategy, which has generally been found to be associated with better mental (and sometimes physical) health (Tetrick et al., 2023; Folkman and Lazarus, 1990). Problem-focused coping has also been shown to moderate the relationship between job control and demands, with those showing active coping strategies to profit most from control under conditions of high stress (Semmer and Meier, 2015; Ippolito et al., 2005; Folkman and Lazarus, 1990; de Rijk et al., 1998). Emotion-focused coping, however, where individuals feel they cannot ameliorate the source of the stressor, so aim to reduce it when they feel it must be endured, shows the opposite relationship (Semmer and Meier, 2015; Carver et al., 1989; Folkman and Lazarus, 1990). With the extant studies being cross-sectional and focused on the short-term, there is evidence to support the impact of job strain on current mental health and wellbeing outcomes. The long-term risk of high job strain is far from substantive, further highlighting the importance and need for greater depth of understanding on the long-term implications for individual physical and mental health (Burns et al., 2016; Fan et al., 2019; Giga, 2018; Harvey et al., 2018).

2.12 Gender Difference, Job Strain, Stress and Coping

Despite the growth of job strain and coping research gender-based analysis has been limited (Iwasaki et al., 2005). Studies with managers and executives have, to a small extent been conducted internationally, identifying some similarities but also some considerable gender differences (Iwasaki et al., 2004; Karve and Nair, 2010; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Maki et al., 2005; Beehr et al., 2003; Bellman et al., 2003; Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999; Siu et al., 1999). Similarities show 'taking direct action' and 'problem-focused coping' in times of stress, to be a preferred response by both males and females at manager level (McDonald and Korabik, 1991), which supports findings for those in high level jobs (Menaghan and Merves, 1984). Differences highlight male respondents at varying work grades, reporting stressors as a lack of reward and recognition (Narayanan et al., 1999), and feeling constant pressure to advance in their career and monitoring their personal behaviour in front of females (Maki et al., 2005).

Some findings from these studies have shown that females, especially those working in male dominated industries or professions such as manufacturing and engineering, highlight their experience of stress to be exacerbated by gender-based barriers. The glass ceiling effect, token status and pay disparity, prejudice and discrimination, interpersonal conflict and the burdens and pressures of work-family interface and stereotyping, were all sources of stress and emotional stress reported by women (McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Iwasaki et al., 2004; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Davidson and Fielden, 1999; Narayanan et al., 1999; Maki et al., 2005; Gadinger et al., 2008; Gadinger et al., 2009; Iwasaki et al., 2005; Hochschild and Machung, 2012).

Research has identified contrasting behavioural coping strategies between men and women in studies with non-specific occupational grade levels, with evidence demonstrating that females were more likely to use social support as a buffer and coping mechanism than men (Gadinger et al., 2009; Karve and Nair, 2010; Rao et al., 2003), as well as talking through feelings as a specific strategy to resolve issues (Rao et al., 2003; McDonald and Korabik, 1991). Men were found to use more non-work-related activities, such as exercise, as a coping mechanism (McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Iwasaki et al., 2005), however no specific data into these strategies was found at executive level.

2.13 Concluding Remarks

With women and minorities continuing to seek parity, the complexities of work life balance, intersectionality and gender will remain a focus in business, politics and economics (FTSE Women Leaders, 2024; Carli and Eagly, 2001; Eagly and Sczesny, 2019). Whilst previous research gives insight to various employee levels, less is known about the lived experiences of the under researched executive group. The long-term cost of the pressures on the individual, on organisations and the economy overall is vast. The difficulties women and minorities continue to encounter under societal expectations, and in light of the studies into UK work, health and wellbeing in the UK in addition to the statistics from the UK Government reviews highlighted in the previous sections, identifying lived experiences at executive level as essential.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

The specific aim of this literature review was to extract and integrate diverse perspectives within the extant literature on gender differences in how executives' cope with psychological job strain. The identification of themes, gaps and limitations of previous studies will inform the focus of enquiry and methodological approach for this research.

The literature in this review is addressed through the lens of an integrated review, allowing for the phenomenon of interest to be systematically traced through the existing literature and explored in depth (Callahan, 2010). The rationale for this approach is taken through consideration of the classifications of literature reviews. With meta-analysis suited for similar primary studies and statistical methods; qualitative reviews synthesising findings from individual qualitative studies; and systematic reviews combining evidence of multiple studies on specific clinical problems, this study uses an integrative approach on the basis of it being considered the broadest type of research review (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005).

3.1 Purpose and Scope

This literature review took a broad, integrative approach as it "plays an important role in stimulating further research on the topic" (Torraco, 2005 P. 364), allowing for a review of the empirical literature and the combination of diverse methodologies and data sources on the phenomenon of study (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005; Callahan, 2010; Hart, 2018 P. 93). Using this method allowed for a systematic review of the literature, with the goal to both critically analyse and integrate diverse and potential conflicting perspectives and thereby identifying any central themes within the existing literature that could be addressed in the subsequent empirical chapter of this thesis (Callahan, 2010; Torraco, 2016).

3.2 Method

To minimise bias and to produce robust insights, this integrative literature review used systematic and explicit methods to identify and select relevant literature (Tricco et al., 2011; Cochrane., 2024; Gray, 2018). In extracting and synthesising the resulting research papers, critical analysis was deployed by deconstructing the topic into its sub-elements, such as its main concepts, themes and research methods, and then reconstruction through

specific findings identifying strengths, inconsistencies, and other aspects or deficiencies relating to the phenomenon of interest (Torraco, 2016). This synthesis of the literature enabled the researcher to focus on the core aspects and the unification of the themes, thus providing understanding and perspective on the topic overall (Gray, 2018; Torraco, 2005; Torraco, 2016; Tricco et al., 2011; Cochrane., 2024). Adapted from Cooper's framework, which is primarily aligned with systematic or meta-analysis methods (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005; Cooper, 1998), Whittemore and Knafl's 5 stage framework was adopted with a problem formulation stage, a literature search stage, data evaluation, data analysis and lastly, a presentation stage. Taking this holistic approach enabled the establishment of an appropriate process for the literature review focused within the fields of health policy, human resources, psychology and management sciences (Callahan, 2010; Whittemore and Knafl, 2005; Torraco, 2005; Torraco, 2016).

3.2.1 Framework

The formulation of the literature question is considered fundamental to evidence-based practice (Booth, 2006; Whittemore and Knafl, 2005), to define the boundaries of the literature to be reviewed and the evidence to be examined (Torraco, 2016). This literature review therefore used an exploratory question, typically used for qualitative designs (Booth, 2006), of 'What gender differences are there in executives' experiences of job strain and coping?'. To answer this exploratory question, the SPIDER framework (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation and Research Type), was utilised as an optimal working strategy based on its greater specificity for a combination of qualitative, quantitative and mixed method literature reviews (Methley et al., 2014; Cooke et al., 2012), as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Literature Search Question in the SPIDER Framework

SPIDER	Question Terms
Sample	Executives
Phenomenon of Interest	Gender differences in coping with job strain
Design	CIT, Grounded Theory, Thematic Analysis, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, case studies, observation, surveys
Evaluation	Experiences
Research Type	Qualitative, mixed-methods, Quantitative

3.2.2 Search Criteria

The literature search strategy was designed to consider theoretical and empirical studies of academic literature. With the expertise of the Lancaster University Librarians, five databases incorporating both business and organisational disciplines together with health and psychological perspectives, were identified as key for this review - PsycINFO, Academic Search Ultimate (ASU), Business Source Complete (BSC), Medline Complete and CINAHL.

To identify the relevant key word search terms or 'identifiers' (Gray, 2018 P.101), the first stage was a review of the papers utilised from the 'quick search' contained in the initial research proposal (Hart, 2008 P.8). The second stage utilised the thesaurus and indexing terms in each individual database to establish the correct bibliographies (Gray, 2018; Atkinson and Cipriani, 2018). Following best practice and to conduct an in-depth search in each of the five individual databases, the thesaurus terms for each database were utilised searching 'all fields' on search line 1. The thesaurus terms from the other 4 databases plus additional free text terms added by the researcher, were then grouped together to create a total list of free text terms. Providing greater control over the searching process, the Boolean operator 'OR' was utilised (Gray, 2018 P. 101), with the total free text terms listed in line 2 of the search on the 'Title' field, and the same free text terms and Boolean operator 'OR' utilised on line 3, searching on the 'Abstract field' (Robinson and Dickersin, 2002).

Proximity searches were utilised to identify words within 5 of each other. Inverted commas were used to group words and phrases together; the truncation symbol of an asterisk (*) was utilised to expand the query into multiple options of spellings and the wildcard symbol of a question mark (?) to replace a single letter on alternative spellings. Appendix 1 details the combined thesaurus and free text search terms used across the databases to ensure a full and accurate search, with a full worked example from the first database, PsycINFO, shown in appendix 2.

Due to zero results on all six elements of the SPIDER search, the results from combining the 3 aspects of Phenomenon of Interest of Job Strain, Coping and Gender were utilised for the literature review. Results from the other elements of the SPIDER search were utilised to further inform methodology and design aspects of this review.

To maximise the capture of all relevant peer reviewed articles within the three areas of phenomenon of interest, Scopus and Web of Science databases were then added to the search. Scopus being the largest scientific abstract and citation database, providing additional coverage of humanities literature and Web of Science for its peer-reviewed, scholarly articles in science, social sciences and humanities. As Web of Science and Scopus do not use a thesaurus search, all key word searches from the other 5 databases were used. Proximity searches also differed so 'within (w/n)' was utilised in Scopus and 'N' for Web of Science. Restrictions were applied to the full results to ensure the most relevant papers were selected for review. The criteria together with final results and the number of papers by database, pre and post duplicate removal are detailed in appendix 3. No date restrictions were applied as several papers from the 1980's proved to be of interest and pertinent to the review question.

To test the search results and ensure accuracy in the search strategy to gold standard, 10 pertinent papers utilised in the initial PhD proposal were selected and compared with the results from the literature search in each database (Robinson and Dickersin, 2002). This was conducted by using the final three combined areas of 'phenomenon of interest' search results in the databases' first search line, followed by the title of the individual paper in the second search line with the Boolean operator 'AND'. All 10 were identified in the final search results, as detailed in appendix 4, thus supporting the literature search strategy and terms.

The process and criteria by which the literature was to be included in the review was finalised. Five exclusion criteria were developed and applied at the title screening stage and during the initial and supplementary searches.

- Not directly in the context of the workplace.
- Focus of enquiry not about stress/strain, coping *and* gender.
- The terms stress/strain *or* coping were used to define other concepts, (eg. Burnout / Depression) or used in sectors outside of this research (eg. Law Enforcement).
- Not available in English.
- A book, book chapter, non-empirical review or thesis.

Whilst books, book chapters and non-empirical papers were excluded at this review stage to place the focus on empirical research, those books that were identified were utilised in the broader literature review. No geographical restrictions were placed to maximise the search results.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 PRISMA Flow

The initial execution of the search protocol was conducted in December 2020. Applying unique restrictions in each separate database and the removal of duplicates resulted in 3,855 papers for review. An additional search was conducted in October 2024 to capture any additional papers from January 2020 to October 2024. This supplementary search, with the removal of duplicates, resulted in a further 2,247 papers, totalling 6,102 papers for review. Applying the exclusion criteria, 5,984 papers were rejected. Nine papers had no authorship, 5,320 were not in the context of the workplace; 131 not in the context of stress/strain, coping *and* gender; 482 used stress/strain and coping in a context or a sector outside of this research, one paper was not available in English and 41 of the results were books, book chapters, non-empirical studies or a thesis.

This resulted in 118 papers being taken forward for consideration at abstract stage. Utilising the same exclusion criteria, a further 70 papers were rejected - 21 were not in the context of the workplace; 31 not in the context of stress/strain, coping *and* gender; 13 used stress/strain and coping in a context or a sector outside of this research; 3 were non-empirical studies; one paper was not available in English and one paper from a 2008 study in India was published in a journal no longer available. In total from both searches 48 full papers were then taken forward for full paper review. From the remaining 48 full papers, 20 were rejected. Six studies were not in the workplace; 5 not in the context of stress/strain, coping *and* gender; 3 used stress / strain and coping in a context or a sector outside of this research; 5 were non-empirical studies and one full paper was not available in English.

The full process and criteria by which the literature to be included in the review is described in Figure 1 with the PRISMA flow of studies for the integrated review (Moher et al., 2009).

Total records = 8,462
  PsycINFO = 1,340
  Academic Search Ultimate = 1,051
  Business Source Complete = 251
  MEDLINE = 2,183
  Cinahl = 590
  Scopus = 1,925
  Web of Science = 1,122

Records after duplicates removed =6,102

Records excluded = 5976
- Not directly in the context of the workplace (5320)
- Focus of enquiry not about stress/strain, coping and gender (131)
- The terms stress/strain or coping used to define other concepts / sectors outside of this research (482)
- Not available in English (1)
- Book / Chapter / Non empirical / Thesis (41)
- No authorship (9)

Title stage

Studies included after title screening = 118

Records excluded = 70
- Not directly in the context of the workplace (21)
- Focus of enquiry not about stress/strain, coping and gender (31)
- The terms stress/strain or coping used to define other concepts / sectors outside of this research (13)
- Non-empirical studies (3)
- Not available /not available in English (2)

Abstract screening stage

Studies included for full paper screening = 48

Records excluded = 20
- Not directly in the context of the workplace (6)
- Focus of enquiry not about stress/strain, coping and gender (5)
- The terms stress/strain or coping used to define other concepts / sectors outside of this research (3)
- Non-empirical studies (5)
- Not available in English (1)

Methodological quality stage

Records excluded at Screening Question stage – 0

Studies included in review after full paper Review – 28

Figure 1 PRISMA Flow of Studies for an Integrated Review of Strain, Coping and Gender in the Workplace.

3.3.2 Assessment of Quality

To extract the methodological features and to evaluate the overall quality of the included studies, the MMAT - Mixed Methods Assessment Toolkit, was utilised as the most appropriate tool for evaluating qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005; Hong et al., 2018). The application of this quality assessment tool added rigor to the literature review and ensured those studies that met none of the criteria for methodological quality could be excluded from the final body of literature for review (Pace et al., 2012). The MMAT tool includes two screening questions which preclude non-empirical studies, such as reviews and theoretical papers. As non-empirical and discussion papers were already part of the exclusion criteria, no papers were rejected at this quality appraisal stage.

To analyse the quality of the studies as context for discussion of the literature rather than to create a numerical score (Pace et al., 2012), the subsequent MMAT questions after the screening stage are specific to the different methodologies and require a response of yes, no or can't tell. No further papers were rejected at this stage and therefore the MMAT analysis resulted in all 28 studies being included in the literature review (Appendix 5). Applying the Whittemore and Knafl's 5 stage framework, led to the fourth stage and a review of the pertinent characteristics of each of the 28 articles.

3.3.3 Characteristics of the Studies Selected for Inclusion.

From the 28 papers included in this integrated literature review, 1 was published in the 1980's; 8 were published in the 1990's; 14 from 2000 – 2010; 4 from 2011 – 2020 and 1 from 2021 to 2024, in journals representing a range of disciplines, including psychology, psychiatry, health, behaviour and personality, behavioural medicine, work and organisational and management disciplines.

Of the 28 papers, 5 were qualitative, 3 mixed methods and 20 quantitative. Twenty-four studies were cross-sectional in design with one cohort study conducting a simple one question follow up one year after the original survey. From the three mixed-methods studies, one study applied both questionnaires and interviews with the whole group of 60 participants, one study specified interviews with a selection of participants six months after the questionnaire analysis and the third study conducted interviews with a random sample of questionnaire participants without the time period being specified.

Two of the qualitative studies used grounded theory methodology; one used focus groups for a phenomenological study and two used thematic analysis - one with semi-structured interviews and the second with small group interviews. One qualitative and one mixed methods study, used the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) as the focus for their interviews. None of the studies took a long-term view or captured participant experiences over a lifetime. Out of the 20 qualitative studies, sixteen did not specify a time period, two considered experiences from the previous month (n=2), one up to 6 weeks (n=1) and one up to three months (n=1). From the three mixed methods studies, one specified recent experiences (n=1) and two did not state a timescale (n=2). In the five qualitative studies, three asked for recent or current experience (n=3), one from the past month (n=1) and one did not specify a time (n=1). The quantitative studies highlighted a vast array of measures, with a total of 66 different questionnaires or sections of validated questionnaires being used. Two of the studies used non-validated questions as part of their studies, which the researchers later highlighted as a limitation of their results. Only 5 of the 66 questionnaires or sections were used in more than one study, a summary of which is shown in appendix 6.

Sample sizes for the qualitative studies ranged from 11 to 62 participants; one mixed methods study had 39 qualitative and 247 quantitative participants, the second had 60 qualitative and 881 quantitative participants and the third utilised 60 participants throughout. In the quantitative only studies, sample sizes ranged from 117 to 1886 participants. A total of 14 countries were represented in the 28 included studies. Five countries had more than one study (n=5); 4 countries had only one study (n=4); 3 studies were completed across multiple countries (n=3); with two of those countries also having an additional single study (n=2), all as detailed in table 2.

Table 2 – Included Studies by Country

Country	Number of Studies
USA	7
Sweden	5
Australia	3
Canada	2

India	2
Ghana	1
Spain	1
Slovakia	1
UK	1
Germany	1
Switzerland	1
Germany, Austria and Switzerland	2
Hong Kong and Taiwan	1

Of the 28 studies, 24 were carried out with male and female participants and 4 studies were conducted with female participants only. No studies included participants identifying as any gender other than male or female. A range of sectors and professions were included with recruitment strategies being varied across the studies, with thirteen conducted within organisations. Of the remaining fifteen studies, participants were recruited via memberships of institutions, recruitment databases or attendance at leadership seminars (n=6); from the full-time working population via attendance at a college (n=1); via a newspaper printed survey (n=1); and by direct contact from the researcher or research assistant (n=2). Five studies did not make it clear or specific as to how they had recruited their participants (n=5).

The distribution of employee grades in the 28 studies included no grade specified (n=9); employees in a range of grades (n = 6); managers with senior management level not being specified (n = 6); and senior managers and executives (n=6). The one UK study was conducted with a range of management level participants (n=1).

Finally, within the concepts of strain, coping and gender differences, a review of the aims of the 28 studies and the theoretical perspectives, indicated specific areas of focus in addition to wider study findings. Five of the studies used the lens of sources and causes of stress and strain (n = 5), ten focused on strain and coping behaviours (n=10); five on forms of social support (n = 7); four to health outcomes and recovery (n=4); one linking their findings to job satisfaction (n=1); and one linking coping strategies to leisure activities (n=1). In addition to the main areas of focus, many additionally identified other

aspects such as causes of strain. All papers will therefore be referenced within the analysis and synthesis.

3.4 Analysis and Synthesis

In considering the literature review question, 'What gender differences are there in executives' experiences of job strain and coping', each of the studies were numbered from one to twenty-eight for ease of reference. The body of literature was then reviewed to identify and record the different methodologies used. Stage two extracted detail to code, categorise and integrate data from each of the papers into relevant themes (Cooper, 1998; Whittemore and Knafl, 2005). Data was captured on a spreadsheet on a line-by-line basis. A mind map was then designed to record and categorise the themes and sub-themes, with each of the 28 studies recorded against relevant categories to enhance the visualisation on patterns and relationships and ensure accurate referencing (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005). With a deductive foundation based on the JDCS model and an inductive approach for additional findings, the final themes were then generated by clustering the studies that examined related constructs to identify a narrative within the groups of findings (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005). To add methodological rigour, the process was repeated a second and third time to ensure no data was missed (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005). This enabled the collapsing and reduction of themes and sub-themes into four overall areas pertaining to the sources of job strain and the different theoretical models, namely: causes and sources of stress and job strain; job demand, control and support (JDCS); coping strategies; and the impact of job strain on health and job satisfaction.

The pertinent characteristics of the remaining 28 studies relating directly to the business sector are presented in Table 3, with full details, including limitations of the studies in appendix 7.

Table 3 Pertinent Characteristics of the 28 Included Studies

Author; Title; Date	Theoretical Perspective; Method	Sample Size & Setting	Summary of Findings
Beehr, T. A. et al (2003)	Quantitative. Stressors / strain and social support	117 – 57% female. Employees of a hospital supply company. USA.	Congruence of sources of stressors and of social support make little difference in the moderating or buffering effect of social support. Feminine people react more strongly to social support than masculine.
Bellman, S. et al (2003)	Quantitative. Stressors / strain and social support	204 – 55% female - members of the Institute of Management. Australia.	Gender difference in the use of social support as a moderator of stress. Men higher recognition pressure. Stress lowers organisational commitment.
Bergman, B. and Hallberg, L. R. (1997)	Qualitative. Informal interviews. Sources of stress, social support.	11 Women in Volvo. Sweden.	Stressors: attitudes in the organisation; sexual harassment; career; support; coping; psychosomatic symptoms. Partner and friend support to cope with workplace culture.
Cavanaugh, M. A. et al (2000)	Quantitative. Job stress challenge.	1886 surveys of high-level managers. Average respondent 2 levels below CEO. 91% male. USA.	Results supported the proposition that challenge and hindrance related self-reported stress are two distinct phenomena.
Chariatte, C. et al (2023)	Quantitative. Work stress and social support.	147 surveys heterosexual dual-earner couples, diverse occupations at varying hierarchical levels. Switzerland.	Stressed employees provide more dysfunctional support to their partners and partners provide more emotional and instrumental support to stressed employees. Relationship satisfaction positively related to emotional support provision. Work stress damages intimate relationships.
Christie, M. D. and Shultz, K. S. (1998)	Quantitative. Job stress and coping.	181 – 56 men; 125 women. Mixed grades. USA.	Gender differences only minimally supported. Men more exercise and control coping. Women more emotional.
Davidson, M. J. and Cooper, C. L. (1986)	Mixed methods. Sources of strain and health outcomes.	60 women in-depth interviews; Postal survey questionnaire 696	Women in junior or middle management populations most 'at risk' of highest stress, senior

		women and 185 male managers. UK.	male managers reporting lowest 'occupational stress' levels.
Gaan, N. (2008)	Quantitative. Stress, Job satisfaction and turnover intention.	240 – 189 male; 51 female, IT professionals, India.	Women higher role ambiguity; low supervisory support. No gender difference for role conflict, work overload, team support, organisational commitment, job satisfaction or turnover intention.
Gadinger, M. C. et al (2009)	Quantitative. JDCS related to subjective health.	424 managers, 17.9% women. Germany, Austria and Switzerland.	Female poorer subjective health in isolated high-strain jobs; greater subjective health benefits from social support than job control in high job demand. Both genders, job demands, low control and low social support in isolated high strain jobs associated with the most adverse effects.
Gadinger, M. C. et al (2008)	Quantitative. JDCS related to sleep.	483 managers.,17% women. Germany, Austria and Switzerland.	Highest sleep quality correlated with social support and job control. Isolated high-strain jobs negatively affect sleep. High job control and social support buffer high demand. Females more severely affected by social isolation and low job control.
Gadzella, B. M. et al (1990)	Quantitative. Stress by job level, gender and age.	173 total - 113 staff; 44 midlevel managers; 12 executives; 4 no job classification. USA.	Women report more job stress related to caring responsibilities. Younger age group reported more stress. Staff and mid-level managers reported more stress than executives.
Gadzella, B. M. et al (1991)	Quantitative. Job stressors and coping strategies.	401 – 158 men and 243 women. USA.	Women more stress triggers than men. Men seek support or advice from close friends. Women under stress take time for themselves and exercise but overreact to criticism.
Gonzalez-Morales, M. G. et al (2006)	Quantitative. Work stressors, coping and psychological distress.	461 – 332 men and 129 women in Finance. Spain.	Social support and distress positive correlation for men. Social support coping beneficial effect on psychosomatic complaints for women and a maladaptive effect for men. Direct action used

			more frequently than social support by both genders.
Hancovska, E. (2014)	Quantitative. Stress coping by gender and age.	147 managers. Slovakia.	Gender difference in coping strategies with significant relation to age and strategies. No difference between level of managers.
Iwasaki, Y. et al (2005)	Qualitative. Focus Groups. Stress, coping and Leisure.	36 participants in 3 management focus groups. Canada.	Social support through leisure deflected stress. Men exercise to feel in control. Females use leisure for self-rejuvenation and to be proactively healthy. Stress from dual role, sex discrimination, prejudice, gender stereotyping.
Kirkcaldy, B. and Farnham, A. (1999)	Quantitative. Stress coping by gender and tenure.	160 managers – 85% male; junior (22%); middle (45%) and senior managers (32%). Germany.	Two coping styles – proactive / rational and problem focused / reactive. No relation to gender or age. Senior managers use delegation. Junior managers looked to seniors for advice and social support.
Lindorff, M. (2005)	Quantitative. Stress, perceived support and received support.	572 in 17 major organisations. 435 managers, 105 women, 330 men. Australia.	Strongest support in the domain the stress occurs. Stronger emotional support is received for work and non-work stressors from non-work relationships. Workplace support for work problems – subordinates for tangible assistance; supervisors for information and emotional support.
Love, J. et al (2011)	Qualitative open-ended interviews. Stress and Recovery.	20 women. Various occupational fields. Sweden.	Loop of stress and dysfunctional behaviour threatened the balance of stress and recovery. Coping by setting boundaries and exercising. Own health often put aside in favour of high performance, and perceived responsibility for others.
Maki, N. et al (2005)	Qualitative semi-structured interviews. Job stress sources.	19 – 11 female; 8 male managers in a large manufacturing organisation. USA.	Both genders sleep disturbances. Men pressure to advance; monitoring behaviour around women; health issues; inability to concentrate; short with spouse; lack of emotional

			involvement. Women sexual harassment; ignored in meetings; greater range of physical and behaviour responses to stress.
McDonald, L. M. and Korabik, K. (1991)	Mixed methods. CIT structured interviews plus questionnaires. Work stress coping.	122 questionnaires. Interviews 20 men; 19 women. Managers in two large companies. Middle to Director level. Canada.	No gender difference in coping strategies or general job stress. Men: no reported pressure relating to spousal or work roles. Engage in non-work activity / exercise to distract themselves. Females: sources of stress dual roles; sex discrimination; managing subordinates.
Muhonen, T. and Torkelson, E. (2003)	Quantitative. JDCS and health.	279 total -134 women (40 managers, 94 non-managers) and 145 men (60 managers and 85 non-managers) telecoms, Sweden.	Demand, control and social support effect health symptoms. Control and social support negative relationship to health. Increasing control and support related to fewer symptoms regardless of gender.
Narayanan, L. et al (1999)	Quantitative. Stress and coping.	387 total - 133 clerical; 124 academic group and 130 sales employees. USA.	Low control - stress higher for lower-level employees. Both genders in higher level jobs used problem-focused strategies. Interpersonal conflict more frequent for females.
Rao, K. et al (2003)	Mixed methods: Quantitative questionnaires plus interviews. Support.	60 working married women. India.	Refusal of promotion to managerial level contributed to wellbeing and balance between home and career. Half of participants acknowledged multiple role strain. Social support contributed to significantly higher levels of subjective wellbeing.
Sackey, J. and Sanda, M. A. (2011)	Quantitative. Stressors, strain and social support.	170 women managers from 25 organisations. Ghana.	Supervisor, co-worker, spouse and friend support negative moderator of perceived job stress from work family conflict. Significant stress factors – feeling isolated, inadequate performance feedback, insufficient resources, multiple role strain; prejudice; glass ceiling; negative physical and mental health impact.

Siu, O. Et al (1999)	Quantitative. Stress coping.	627 Range of organisations – 280 Hong Kong and 347 Taiwan.	No difference in coping strategies and locus of control. Significant correlations between job satisfaction and mental and physical wellbeing. No specific gender differences.
Torkelson, E. and Muhonen, T. (2004)	Quantitative. Stress and coping.	279 managers and non-managers in a sales department in telecoms, Sweden.	Problem focused strategies significantly related to seeking emotional support. Active coping - lesser health problems. Both genders problem focused coping at management level. Female managers used social support more than men.
Torkelson, E. et al (2007)	Qualitative. CIT 30 small group interviews. Stress and coping.	62 participants 15 all male, 15 all female interviews customer services in telecoms, Sweden.	No clear gender differences in coping. Active strategies, work harder, more hours, problem solving with others or to influence the managers.
Watson, S. et al (2011)	Quantitative. Stress and coping.	258 total 106 males and 152 females from various businesses and University Australia	Men assess resources available without action; women assess available resources, take action and the subsequent stress experience is dependent upon how success of coping strategies.

Whilst the analysis focused on understanding the areas of convergence, the synthesis focused on the gaps and inconsistencies (Torraco, 2016). The key findings from this fifth and final stage of the review process informed the methodical approach and the specifics of the subsequent empirical research study (Callahan, 2010).

3.5 Key Findings

From the analysis, four main themes were identified, namely: causes and sources of stress and job strain; job demand, control and support (JDCS); coping strategies; and the impact of job strain on health and job satisfaction. The empirical papers that have informed each theme are provided in appendix 8.

3.5.1 Causes and Sources of Stress and Job Strain

Sixteen studies focused on the causes and sources of stress and job strain, with results showing no significant differences in many aspects for both male and female participants. Both genders identified workload as one of the biggest causes of strain (Christie and Shultz, 1998; Gaan, 2008; Narayanan et al., 1999; Davidson and Cooper, 1986), together with time pressures and deadlines (Davidson and Cooper, 1986). The underlying stressors were found to emanate from such things as the threat of unemployment, downsizing and insecurity around work contracts (Christie and Shultz, 1998; Torkelson et al., 2007). Interpersonal conflict, time wasters (Narayanan et al., 1999), issues of lack of co-worker and team support (Gaan, 2008), and ambiguity in communications (Beehr et al., 2003), highlighted general workplace issues, with one empirical study identifying that staff and middle-level managers reported more stress than those on an executive level (Gadzella et al., 1990).

Common sources of stress and strain for men appeared focused on a high level of administration (Gadzella et al., 1991), lack of recognition (Beehr et al., 2003; Bellman et al., 2003), making mistakes (Davidson and Cooper, 1986), and the pressure of advancing their career even when they did not want to (Maki et al., 2005). Women were commonly found to be more self-critical on their personal performance than men (Iwasaki et al., 2005; Gadzella et al., 1991), with one study with senior managers identifying women having a stronger need to prove their capability in the job (Sackey and Sanda, 2011). Two studies found women were also more impacted by a heavy workload (Gadzella et al.,

1990; Sackey and Sanda, 2011), with negative demands and stressors such as personal limitations on job performance, interruptions and constant deadlines being experienced by women at all job levels (Gadzella et al., 1991). Furthermore, a lack of autonomy (Torkelson et al., 2007), limited feedback on performance (Sackey and Sanda, 2011), and greater levels of job ambiguity leading to mental activity overload and pressure on decision making (Löve et al., 2011), were all attributed to higher sources of stress for women than men, with lack of consultation and communications particularly evident for senior female managers (Davidson and Cooper, 1986). Managing others (McDonald and Korabik, 1991), insufficient resources (Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Watson et al., 2011), and interpersonal conflict (Narayanan et al., 1999), were also significant sources of female stress.

Defined as "a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy" (Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990 P.200), the 'glass ceiling effect' led to an increased intention to quit for female participants in one study (Sackey and Sanda, 2011). Harassment (Maki et al., 2005), token status and social isolation due to undertaking a senior role (Gadinger et al., 2008; Gadinger et al., 2009; Sackey and Sanda, 2011), and sexual discrimination and prejudice amplifying the effect of promotion blocks (Hymowitz and Schellhardt, 1986; Cooper Jackson, 2001; Davidson and Cooper, 1986; Bergman and Hallberg, 1997; McDonald and Korabik, 1991), were all areas of strain identified for females.

A consistent theme that was also evident for women was the difficulty of inter-role conflict and achieving a work-life balance (Löve et al., 2011; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Rao et al., 2003; Davidson and Cooper, 1986; Bergman and Hallberg, 1997). The simultaneous and incompatible pressures from work and family leading to double role conflict, and unpaid housework, paid labour and childcare leading to triple role burden (Rao et al., 2003; Sackey and Sanda, 2011; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Iwasaki et al., 2005; Gadzella et al., 1990; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Griffin, 2017), were sources of stress for females not highlighted for men in any of the reviewed studies. Only one study in India found no difference between genders for role conflict, but it was highlighted that females often turned down promotional opportunities to avoid such a conflict (Gaan, 2008).

3.5.2 Job Demands, Control and Support

Historically, research into psychological strain was mostly underpinned by Karasek's (1979) job strain model (Karasek, 1989; Karasek and Theorell, 1990), however, in the 20 quantitative and 3 mixed methods papers included in this review, whilst considering the effects of the model, none of the studies used the Job Demand Control (JDC) or Job Demand Control Support (JDCS) full questionnaires as the lens for their studies. Only one study used a 3-item scale on job demand from the JDC / JDCS (Gadinger et al., 2009), the remaining studies used non-validated questions or a combination of sections taken from a range of other validated questionnaires.

Reviewing the extant literature through the lens of the JDCS model and the hypothesis that active-isolated workers experience higher prevalence rates of job strain (Johnson and Hall, 1988), one study with senior managers found that females in isolated, high-strain jobs experienced discrimination and token role status (Gadinger et al., 2009). Five studies that included senior and executive level employees, also found that women experienced higher levels of strain and job demand than men (Gadinger et al., 2008; Gadinger et al., 2009; Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Gadzella et al., 1991; Davidson and Cooper, 1986). With a range of grades or no specific grade level being identified in two further studies, women perceived that they needed to work harder and outperform more than men to establish their credibility in the workplace (Gaan, 2008; Bergman and Hallberg, 1997).

Four studies also found a general increase in job demand had a negative effect on psychological and physical health for both male and female participants (Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003; Gadinger et al., 2009; Davidson and Cooper, 1986), in addition to one all-female study (Bergman and Hallberg, 1997). Whilst not specifically measuring demand increase, two studies highlighted a negative effect on sleep and tiredness when occupying a high strain role (Gadinger et al., 2008; Davidson and Cooper, 1986), and a further qualitative study, identified sleep disturbance being the most significant physical reaction to stress for both male and female managers (Maki et al., 2005).

The 'buffer hypothesis', which proposes that those with a high level of job control experience a buffer to the impact of job demands, was supported in a quantitative study when managers with more control reported less stress and quitting intention, greater job satisfaction, and better mental and physical wellbeing (Siu et al., 1999). With no studies

specifically considering this buffer hypothesis, no further support was evident in the extant literature.

The original contextual meaning of social support in the JDCS model related to work-place support dichotomized into isolated; limited social support or collective conditions of high social support (Johnson and Hall, 1988 P. 1336). Whilst several definitions of social support have been proposed by social scientists, in adapting House's four levels of support (House, 1981), Dewe, O'Driscoll and Cooper outlined the level of support as *practical* help with a problem that the individual cannot resolve by themselves; *informational* support or advice to reduce ambiguity or uncertainty for an individual, and *emotional* support, linked to a range of emotional needs (Dewe et al., 2010). Despite the availability of these definitions, there is a general lack of clarity in the extant literature on the meaning and context of social support. Additionally, some studies refer to the support provision being external to the workplace, meaning the results are not wholly transferable back to the original model.

With some of the studies taking a broad view of support, both genders appeared to use social support to reduce stress. Women at all levels were found to use social support more frequently than men and from a variety of sources, with female managers noted as seeking emotional social support as a specific coping mechanism for strain (González-Morales et al., 2006; Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004). Social support among women appeared to have a positive effect on their state of mind and physical symptoms (Bellman et al., 2003), psychosomatic complaints (González-Morales et al., 2006), and their sense of security and stability at home (Rao et al., 2003), with the results of one all-female study highlighting they would prefer to obtain support from somebody with psychological competence from outside of the organisation (Bergman and Hallberg, 1997). Women, and those study participants that described their traits as more feminine, were also found to experience greater non-specific overall wellbeing benefits from social support than men (Hancovska, 2014; Beehr et al., 2003).

Men were found to be more likely to seek support from their spouse (Christie and Shultz, 1998), and with a lack of support, male managers in Sweden experienced a negative impact to their general health (Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003). However, contrary to this

men in the financial sector in Spain found social support to be harmful to both psychological distress and psychosomatic complaints (González-Morales et al., 2006).

In support of the JDCS model, both genders experienced a reduction in subjective physical health when working with high demands, low social support and low control (Gadinger et al., 2009), but found an increase in health and sleep improvements when they had access to social support (Gadinger et al., 2009; Gadinger et al., 2008; Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003). Both men and women associated job control with greater overall health benefits and better mental and physical wellbeing compared to social support (Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Gadinger et al., 2009), however, contrary to this, one study highlighted that neither gender experienced the same benefits with an increase in control only (Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003).

The contradictions in the synthesised literature brings a focus to the importance of the quality of the support provided, as identified by a 2023 study where work stress was found to be a threat to employees' wellbeing as well as damaging to intimate relationships with the provision of dysfunctional support (Chariatte et al., 2023).

3.5.3 Coping Strategies

Lazarus and Folkman outlined that stress or strain which occurs in situations when a person exceeds their capacity to cope leads to damage to their personal wellbeing (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Two major process-orientated functions of coping have been outlined as 'problem-focused' for managing the stressor and 'emotion-focused' as dealing with the emotional consequences of the stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Folkman and Lazarus, 1980). Limiting the transferability of the results and direct comparison to the work of Lazarus and Folkman, several studies did not provide terms or a definition of coping. The term 'problem-focused' coping however, was directly quoted in three of the studies (Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999; Narayanan et al., 1999; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004). Differing terms were introduced for tackling the 'problem', such as 'direct-action' coping, (McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Narayanan et al., 1999); 'problem solution' focused coping (Hancovska, 2014); 'task orientated' coping (González-Morales et al., 2006) and rational, logic coping, termed as a more proactive approach compared to the reactive stance of a problem focus (Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999).

Taking a different view and adding to 'emotion-focused' coping and the regulation of emotional responses, the term 'avoidance' coping as an emotional strategy was identified in three empirical studies (Gardner and Fletcher, 2009; Hancovska, 2014; Christie and Shultz, 1998). Passive coping, when little could be done to change or influence the event or demand (Torkelson et al., 2007), and the intentional seeking of emotional social support as a specific coping strategy (Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Christie and Shultz, 1998) were two further terms identified.

3.5.3.1 Problem Focused, Direct Action, Problem Solution and Task-Orientated Coping

Whilst the descriptions and definitions are not consistent, it is evident that some form of action and a focus on the problem had been initiated to deal with the demand. With control coping significantly higher for women in one study (Christie and Shultz, 1998), in several further studies, both men and women were found to experience the positives of a solution focused, proactive and rational approach to coping with the stressor or problem (Torkelson et al., 2007; Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999; Narayanan et al., 1999; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Hancovska, 2014; González-Morales et al., 2006). In an all-female study, women were found to use problem-focused coping in most situations (Bergman and Hallberg, 1997). In a further study there was no statistically significant gender difference at all management levels for both rational logical, proactive coping or reactive problem focused coping (Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999), or in the use of direct-action coping at a non-specified management level (McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Narayanan et al., 1999). This form of coping was also found to provide benefits for both genders in relation to psychological distress (Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999; González-Morales et al., 2006; Torkelson et al., 2007), and additionally for men but not women, in relation to psychosomatic complaints (González-Morales et al., 2006).

A specific aspect of action coping brought time management strategies to the fore for both genders (Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999), with one study finding men gained more benefits from this strategy than women (González-Morales et al., 2006). Men were also found to use planning, control and problem focused strategies more than their female counterparts at a non-managerial level (Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Hancovska, 2014; Narayanan et al., 1999), but there was no gender difference at management level (Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004). A major limitation,

however, is the lack of studies with executives which does not allow for the full transferability of the findings to a senior level.

3.5.3.2 Positive Coping

Positive coping strategies for both genders included spiritual and religious practices (Iwasaki et al., 2005; Maki et al., 2005), leisure activities (Iwasaki et al., 2005), relaxation and minimisation and downplaying of the stressor (Christie and Shultz, 1998). However, contrary to these findings, women more than men, used arts and culture (Iwasaki et al., 2005), taking time for themselves (Gadzella et al., 1991), setting personal boundaries (Löve et al., 2011), and establishing a better – work- life balance through refusal of promotion (Rao et al., 2003). Women were also found to value supervisory support more than men (Gaan, 2008), and their social network (Rao et al., 2003). Using a specific strategy of seeking emotional social support, women managers experienced fewer health symptoms (Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004), highlighting the importance of emotional social support, a coping strategy in one mixed grade study that was specifically found not to be effective for men (Christie and Shultz, 1998).

3.5.3.3 Emotion, Passive, Avoidance and Negative Coping

Passive coping and acceptance was experienced by both male and female participants when they had little or no influence on organisational and job role changes (Torkelson et al., 2007). For both genders, negative coping strategies manifested alongside feelings of helplessness and rumination (Christie and Shultz, 1998), venting emotions (Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004), and working too hard (Torkelson et al., 2007). Whilst both genders were found to use excessive amounts of alcohol, contradictory results identified that men were found to have a greater reliance in two of the empirical studies (Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Davidson and Cooper, 1986) and women in another (Maki et al., 2005). In a further study, all levels of management, (other than supervisors), reported smoking, drinking alcohol, coffee, cola and eating too much to relax (Davidson and Cooper, 1986).

Men were found to implement avoidance strategies more than women in one study with senior managers (Hancovska, 2014), with negative coping strategies manifesting in forms of over-eating and being short with others and their spouse (Maki et al., 2005). Further research suggested alternate negative patterns for women, which manifested as irritability

and overreaction (Gadzella et al., 1991), sarcasm and anger (Maki et al., 2005), shame at loss of control, inability to make decisions, crying, being short with their spouse (Maki et al., 2005), and venting of emotions by female senior managers (Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Torkelson et al., 2007). Notably, the specific gender differences in Maki's 2005 study were extracted from gender specific focus groups. These findings did not emerge in the mixed gender group, prompting the researchers to question the openness of men across all focus groups and women in the mixed-gender group.

3.5.4 Impact of job strain on health and job satisfaction

Linked to the findings on control (section 3.5.2) and coping (section 3.5.3), both genders experienced lesser health problems through the process of active coping strategies (Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004). For example, female workers who perceived high levels of work stressors were found to experience higher levels of psychosomatic complaints, such as depression, than men (González-Morales et al., 2006; Gadinger et al., 2008; Davidson and Cooper, 1986). Women were also found to acknowledge the negative effects on wellbeing from multiple role strain (Rao et al., 2003; Davidson and Cooper, 1986; Bergman and Hallberg, 1997), and job stressors having a greater detrimental impact on both their physical and mental health compared to men (Bellman et al., 2003; Sackey and Sanda, 2011). Specifically, women experienced lower energy levels (Bellman et al., 2003), felt anxious, insecure, afraid or angry (Bergman and Hallberg, 1997), suffered more with depression and experienced physical issues such as weight gain, migraines, neck and stomach pain (Maki et al., 2005). In the same study, the negative impact on men's physical health included increased neck pain, back pain, difficulty losing weight and problems with blood pressure (Maki et al., 2005). It is highly possible that these gender differences are due to the qualitative, mixed focus group nature of the studies and may not relate to a wider executive population.

Financial independence through working was a significant predictor of wellbeing for women in one study, however paradoxically in the same study, refusal of promotion up to management level also contributed to overall wellbeing (Rao et al., 2003). For both genders, job satisfaction was positively associated with positive mental and physical wellbeing (Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Siu et al., 1999), conversely, a lack of recognition was linked to negative job satisfaction and lack of organisational commitment (Bellman

et al., 2003; Gaan, 2008). An increase in demand and strain was linked to negative health symptoms irrespective of gender in a mixed grade study (Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003), with negative effects associated with poor sleep (Maki et al., 2005; Gadinger et al., 2009).

3.5.5 Critical Incident Technique (CIT)

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was only used by two studies as part of their data collection strategies (Torkelson et al., 2007; McDonald and Korabik, 1991). With participants being asked to elaborate on the reasons for the stressful nature of the event and their coping strategies, the researchers were able to directly draw inferences to which situations resulted in the use of different coping strategies (McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Torkelson et al., 2007).

The results with mixed grade employees highlighted passive coping, acceptance and resignation when taking a form of action was considered impossible (Torkelson et al., 2007). A key gender difference highlighted was whilst male and female participants undertook the same role, women were controlled and monitored on their performance more than their male colleagues. No explanation was provided by the researchers but it could be linked to studies where women have to prove their competence in the workplace whereas men do not (Torkelson et al., 2007; Eagly and Sczesny, 2019; Player et al., 2019).

The second CIT study being the only one in the extant literature to specifically focus on *feelings,* female managers were found to seek support and talk to others, whereas the male managers would do things to take their mind off the problem or to suppress their feelings (McDonald and Korabik, 1991).

3.6 Discussion

With the exploratory question of 'What gender differences are there in executives' experiences of job strain and coping?', the extant literature was mostly of a quantitative nature identifying a lack of studies in gender difference on the lived experiences of executives. Through exploration of the literature, common themes were identified in the findings and methodologies used, with the review also drawing attention to differences and ambiguities. As identified by several of the authors, and through the MMAT quality assessment, the samples in these studies were often convenience-based within specific

work groups or geographical locations and the use of heterogeneous quantitative methods and non-validated questionnaires caused disparate results.

With executives reporting less stress than middle managers and staff in one of the studies (Gadzella et al., 1990), it can be considered that access to more resources, power and control over others with the ability to delegate, may relate to this finding. How senior managers or executives cope with their own pressure and the resulting impact on their communications and leadership style may be adding to the strain further down the organisational structure, which may also correlate to the senior female managers experiencing higher sources of stress due to lack of consultation and communication (Davidson and Cooper, 1986).

The 28 papers reviewed in the extant literature ranged from one UK study in the 1980's (Davidson and Cooper, 1986), extending over time to a Swiss study in the 2020's (Chariatte et al., 2023). In reviewing the papers by decade, it is worth highlighting the lack of consistent themes and importantly, the lack of studies relating to the phenomenon of interest for this research. With only one paper in 2014 (Hancovska, 2014), no further studies were identified until 2023 (Chariatte et al., 2023). No consistent themes were evident as sources of strain for men, and only points relating to workload (Davidson and Cooper, 1986; Christie and Shultz, 1998; Narayanan et al., 1999; Gaan, 2008), and time pressure and deadlines (Davidson and Cooper, 1986), were sources of stress highlighted for both men and women. In reviewing the themes for women from the first study in 1986 to the last in 2023, there is a contrasting view. With the 2014 paper taking a specific focus on coping strategies, and the 2023 paper focusing on social support provision, the range of studies from 1986 to 2011 highlighted several issues across sectors and job level that could be linked to underlying stereotypical and cultural expectations, separated conjugal roles and job pressure. Causes of female strain were highlighted as sex discrimination and prejudice (Davidson and Cooper, 1986; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Bergman and Hallberg, 1997), social isolation and being a token female (Gadinger et al., 2008; Gadinger et al., 2009; Sackey and Sanda, 2011), experiencing greater demands and having to work harder than men, promotion blocks, and the glass ceiling effect (Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Davidson and Cooper, 1986; Bergman and Hallberg, 1997; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Gadinger et al., 2008; Gadinger et al., 2009; Gadzella et al., 1991), were all evident in the female experience. Women also identified strain from

responsibility for others, childbearing / child caring, difficulty achieving a work-life balance and career–home imbalance, leading to double or triple role conflict (Davidson and Cooper, 1986; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Löve et al., 2011; Bergman and Hallberg, 1997; Rao et al., 2003; Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Iwasaki et al., 2005).

Whilst the included studies provide a range of findings that both supports and contradicts the hypothesis of the JDCS model, the lack of consistency in research methods and terminology emphasises the inability to make direct comparisons across the reviewed studies. There was evidence to support increased control reducing the level of job strain, with both men and women experiencing health benefits as a result (Siu et al., 1999). It was also evident that both genders were found to cope better and reduce the level of strain by taking an active, problem focused approach to resolve the demand or issue at hand (Torkelson et al., 2007; Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999; Narayanan et al., 1999; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Hancovska, 2014; González-Morales et al., 2006). There was consistency with men and women undertaking leisure activities as a form of positive coping (Iwasaki et al., 2005), however women were found to go further in some studies by actively setting personal boundaries and seeking more forms of relaxation (Iwasaki et al., 2005; Gadzella et al., 1991; Löve et al., 2011). The wide variety of questionnaires used in the array of studies, however, leads to the possibility that there could be more similarities or differences by gender that could be elicited.

Negative coping strategies resulted in both men and women increasing their hours of work, experiencing deterioration in their sleep, in eating, drinking and smoking habits, in addition to expressing more emotions (Christie and Shultz, 1998; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Davidson and Cooper, 1986; Maki et al., 2005). Both genders were found to experience a change in emotions, however this 'emotion' was generally termed as 'anger' for men and 'upset and crying' for women (Maki et al., 2005; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Torkelson et al., 2007; Gadzella et al., 1991), thus highlighting the potential bias in the application of gendered and stereotypical references in the studies around emotions that would need to be considered in any future research.

The lack of consistency or clear definition of social support within the literature provided a further comparison problem. Whilst the original contextual meaning of social support within the JDCS was related to work-place support, there is limited specification within

the literature regarding the type of support sought i.e. whether practical help, informational support or emotional support. This limits the ability to draw full conclusions from the majority of the results or to establish the most effective buffer, however, from the review it was highlighted that support was experienced in different ways by gender (Bellman et al., 2003). Men were more likely to seek support from their spouse (Christie and Shultz, 1998) and women made more general and wider use of social support as a consistent form of coping. In many of the studies, women used social support as a conscious form of problem resolution and importantly as a support mechanism for emotions and enhancing their leisure and exercise activities (González-Morales et al., 2006; Bellman et al., 2003; Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Bergman and Hallberg, 1997).

The quality of support and whether those experiencing high stress would be less able to perceive when others are in need, is an important area of consideration (Chariatte et al., 2023). This was partially, but not fully explored in the extant literature, which raises the question whether individuals would be able to mobilise themselves in this provision to others and if they would, indeed, be less able to receive the intended support directed to them. The use of the Critical Incident Technique in two of the studies did, however, provide for greater insight into the phenomenon of interest (McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Torkelson et al., 2007). Whilst it was evident that both genders would take action to deal with the stressor, gender differences were highlighted in how managers coped with *how they felt* about the stressor. A key difference here identified how women managers would seek support and talk through how they felt, whereas men would look to distract themselves and suppress their feelings (Torkelson et al., 2007). Whilst the current review provided a rich source of data and understanding on gender differences in how employees cope with psychological job strain, it was evident that there are many gaps to this knowledge in relation to executives.

With men historically dominating senior roles, studies into psychological job strain and behavioural coping strategies at a senior level have largely elicited findings for majority male participants. Indeed, the results of such studies may not be relevant to workplaces which now have more women in senior positions than ever before. It is important therefore to understand the experiences of holding an executive role against the backdrop of the drive for business performance, the 24/7 culture with advancements in technology,

and societal expectations and stereotypes that can impact all genders. Organisational Boards need to be capable of drawing on a range of thoughts, experience and expertise and be able to engage with an increasingly diverse range of stakeholders (Parker, 2020). Society and the workplace need to evolve to a level where all individuals can not only freely participate but also thrive in challenging and demanding organisational cultures. Exploring how the under researched executive group deal with job strain and apply behavioural coping strategies and the resulting impact, is a fundamental area of enquiry that needs to be addressed. Understanding what has changed and evolved over the last decades is needed to provide recommendations for a clear and focused way forward as executive roles continue to become diversified.

In summary, there is limited consideration given to the link between context and causes of stress, job strain and coping at a senior level. The lack of consistency in methodological approach and findings, and the low number of qualitative studies is an issue. The lack of studies with executives and with no studies identifying the resulting impact of holding a high-level job over the long term, is a concern. The effects on leadership, behavioural coping strategies and the subsequent effect on health and wellbeing is missing and together with there being only one study from 1986 in the UK into this phenomenon of interest of lived experiences, demonstrates a clear gap which this empirical study sought to help bridge.

3.7 Limitations of the Literature Review

As identified in the quality assessment of the extant literature, there is a limitation to the included studies transferability due to the specific, and often convenience based, sampling. Twenty-seven of the twenty-eight papers provided background and context to their research and clearly identified their methods and results. Whilst still meeting the MMAT quality assessment, one quantitative study did not provide this, instead simply outlining their participant numbers, the 20-statement questionnaire and their results. Context, recruitment methods and limitations would have enhanced the write up of the study, but it was decided to still include the data despite the limited replicability of the research. The age of some of the studies could be considered an issue but does highlight a gap and the lack of more recent studies in this field of enquiry. The broad spectrum of participants and countries and the identification of commonality in findings does suggest that it is useful to analyse the literature.

In reviewing the limitations of the 28 studies, it was evident that ten did not highlight any limitations in their research. Those highlighted in the remaining studies included cross-sectional, single surveys lacking causal inference; limited replicability due to the research design; the measures used not covering all aspects of the research phenomenon, low sample sizes and response rates and the use of non-validated questionnaires.

The review question and search criteria were established to not restrict the search to a particular population, geography or specific culture, although the requirement for papers to be available in English may have resulted in some papers being excluded. Many of the included studies were conducted with specific groups, with the authors also highlighting this specificity as a limitation to transference to a wider population. Whilst it must be considered that some of the results might not translate to wider populations, they do provide for some cross-analysis within the context of the research and contribute to the general understanding of the research phenomenon. This could also be considered a strength for any consistent themes emerging from the data.

Each stage of a literature review naturally presents potential threats to validity, such as inadequate sampling or positively evaluating research that is congruent with the reviewer's own beliefs (Russell, 2005). Whilst the purpose and scope of the review serves to justify or illuminate assumptions that otherwise would be implicit, it is always possible that other assumptions have not been identified by the researcher (Ruona and Lynham, 2004). One suggested strategy to minimise this bias is to ensure that the selection and evaluation of papers is a process carried out by more than one person (Hart, 2018; Hopia et al., 2016; Russell, 2005). As this review and the decisions made at each stage, was carried out by one researcher, to minimise potential bias, evaluation of the review stages, inclusion and exclusion criteria and the resulting papers were considered by the researchers PhD supervisors.

Whilst this might mean that the themes would not emerge in the same way with different researchers if this endeavour was repeated, the opportunity for bias has been minimised by clear identification of the scope and purpose at each stage.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

The aim of this study is to understand how executives experience psychological job strain during times of peak stress and to identify their behavioural coping strategies compared to steady state. The first section of this chapter will discuss the research process, design and philosophical underpinning by outlining the ontological and epistemological stance that informs this inquiry. The theoretical perspective of interpretivism and the choice of thematic analysis as the methodological approach for this study will be outlined, followed by detail of the recruitment and interview process. Following this the data analysis procedures are explained with the last section outlining research reflexivity and ethical issues.

4.1 Research Process and Design

To ensure validity and reliability within the study, Guba's four stage approach to trustworthiness was at the foundation of the design and process. *Credibility* was sought through the demonstration of a clear picture of the phenomenon of study and adopting established research methods; *transferability* by providing a detailed picture of the context to enable others to justifiably apply the results to another setting; *dependability* by providing a detailed study design to enable a future investigator to repeat the study and *confirmability* by taking steps to demonstrate the findings emerged from the data rather than from the researcher's own predispositions (Shenton, 2004; Guba, 1981).

Underpinning the importance of qualitative research lies an individual's freedom of choice as they navigate the social, cultural and historical aspects of their own experiences, which naturally creates a unique and personal version of reality (Kant, 1781 / 2007; Ritchie et al., 2003). By gathering data and taking an inductive approach to the lived experiences of participants, this study aimed to establish patterns, consistencies and meanings for executives within the UK business sector (Ritchie et al., 2003; Gray, 2018; Bryman, 2012b; Lewis and Ritchie, 2003).

In developing the research design, consideration was taken from Crotty's four levels of the research process, that is, the methods to use; the methodology that governs the choice and use of methods; the theoretical perspective that lies behind the methodology and what epistemology informs that theoretical perspective (Crotty, 2014). In Crotty's research structure, ontology sits alongside epistemology in informing the theoretical perspective

(Crotty, 2014). Therefore, with ontology being a set of assumptions made about the nature of reality, existence and what the world is, and epistemology the study of what constitutes knowledge and a way of knowing about that world; together they create a set of assumptions about what constitutes reality (Henn et al., 2009a; Allsop, 2013; Crotty, 2014).

4.1.1 Level One - Ontological Position

Through the different ontological positions there is a common understanding that the social world is governed by normative expectations and shared understandings (Spencer et al., 2004). Social reality and how it should be constructed can be considered on three distinct ontological positions.

Realism claims there is an external reality which exists independently of people's beliefs or understanding about it; materialism holds that only material features of a real-world hold reality; and idealism and its variations, that reality is only knowable through the human mind and socially constructed meanings. As a variant of idealism, relativism posits that reality is only knowable through socially constructed meanings and that there is no single shared social reality, only a series of alternative social constructions (Ritchie et al., 2003). It is recognised that different people may well inhabit quite different worlds and have diverse ways of knowing with distinguishable sets of meanings and separate realities (Crotty, 2014). This study therefore took a relativist ontological position to enable the researcher to represent the participants particular reality, rather than to generalise to a 'truth' (Silverman, 2006), and to also recognise that different people inhabit their own and different realities (Crotty, 2014).

4.1.2 Level One - Epistemological Position

Considering the three main epistemological positions of objectivism, subjectivism and constructivism, this study took a constructivist approach. With objectivism taking the stance that meaningful reality exists separate from consciousness and therefore is external to and independent to 'social actors' (Crotty, 2014; Saunders et al., 2012a), and subjectivism with meaning being imposed on the object by the subject from a level of unconsciousness (Gray, 2018); constructivism rejects the other positions and holds to the perspective that meaning is not discovered but is constructed through our individual

engagement in the world, (Crotty, 2014; Gray, 2018) with language being an important aspect of socially constructed knowledge (Willig, 2013).

There are three main positions of constructivism considered, namely radical constructivism interpreting the paradigm as the individual mind that constructs reality; moderate constructivism which acknowledges that individual constructions take place within a systematic relationship to the external world; and social constructivism, that recognises influences on individual constructions are derived from and are preceded by social relationships (Young and Collin, 2004).

Whilst the terms social constructivism and social constructionism are often used interchangeably, there is a clear difference (Andrews, 2012). Social constructionism places emphasis on the social and psychological worlds that are constructed through social processes and interaction or the collective generation of meaning within groups, with no interest in the cognitive processes that accompany knowledge (Young and Collin, 2004; Crotty, 2014; Schwant, 1984; Andrews, 2012). Social constructivism, however, focuses on meaning making and constructing social and psychological worlds through the individual and their cognitive processes or the individual mind. Social constructivism is an approach that values the inquiry into individuals' experience of making meaning within their own mind (Schwant, 1984).

As the aim of this study was to explore executives' experiences, the epistemological stance of social constructivism was taken, with its dualistic assumption that differentiates it from social constructionism. This philosophical world view, by challenging the suggestion that categories such as the organisation and culture are pre-given, and that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction, but are in a constant state of revision (Bryman, 2012b), it also addresses the criticism of constructionism, as 'an individualistic approach without reference to social interaction, contexts or discourses, all of which make self-reflection, meaning-making and career possible' (Young and Collin, 2004).

4.1.3 Level two - Theoretical Perspective

Being concerned with what constitutes acceptable knowledge, two main research paradigms or theoretical perspectives are espoused. Positivism, that human behaviour can be explained as it is governed by law-like regularities, and interpretivism which opposes that view on the basis that natural science methods are not appropriate for social investigation, as the social world is not governed by regularities. Being closely linked to constructivism, this study took a theoretical perspective of interpretivism to establish "understanding of human behaviour" (Bryman, 2012b P. 28), how we know and how we develop meaning (Bryman, 2012b; Ritchie et al., 2003; Gray, 2018; Crotty, 2014) and the interpretations that participants attach to phenomena in the social world (Henn et al., 2009a).

Within the interpretivist perspective, and from the work of philosophers George Mead and John Dewey in the early 1900's, symbolic interactionism is used as a way of conceptualising human behaviour focused on people's practices, lived realities and how people associate and interact, rather than treating the individual and society as separate beings (Blumer, 1986; Meltzer and Petras, 1970; Carter and Fuller, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2009; Reynolds et al., 2010). With meanings not being fixed but revised and interpreted from such social interaction (Gray, 2018; Crotty, 2014), thematic analysis was chosen as the methodology to allow the researcher to study the participants perspective (Crotty, 2014; Denzin and Lincolm, 2011).

4.1.4 Level Three - Thematic Analysis Methodology

With social constructivism and symbolic interactionism requiring the inquiry into human experience, qualitative investigation provides insight into how people are affected by changes within their environment according to their personal experiences (Silverman, 2014). As a methodology that acknowledges the ways individuals make meaning of their experiences, and how the broader social context impinges on those meanings, thematic analysis allowed for the identification, analysis and interpretation of patterns of meaning within the research data collected (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2016).

Out of the three main orientations to thematic analysis, namely coding reliability that uses a code book with multiple coders; codebook thematic analysis that uses a structured coding framework providing detailed descriptions and restrictions for coding; this research utilised reflexive thematic analysis, with the researchers role in the knowledge production and the active creation of themes as an analytic resource, being key to the approach taken (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Braun, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2021b; Terry et al., 2017). Going beyond the semantic, surface meanings of the data, the analysis at a latent level sought to identify and examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies that executives have in their roles (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The approach to the analysis is detailed in section 4.3.

4.1.5 Level Four - Method

Qualitative methods, being more widely accepted within psychological enquiry and social psychology (Banister, 2011), are diverse and include participant observation; focus groups; discourse analysis; the collection of texts and documents and a wide range of interviewing techniques (Bryman, 2012b). Compatible with Thematic Analysis, the chosen methodology for this study, semi-structured interviews were utilised to enable broad and general questions so that the participants could construct their own meaning of situations and lived experiences (Creswell, 2009; Willig, 2013).

With the goal of constructivist research being to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2009), asking people about their experiences, provided a viable means of extracting the data (Bryman, 2012c). Using such an inductive qualitative approach enabled the appreciation of the underlying motivations, beliefs and decisions that executives have, and an understanding of the meanings that govern their actions with regards to their behavioural coping strategies for psychological job strain (Henn et al., 2009a; Ritchie et al., 2003; Denzin and Lincolm, 2011).

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Sampling Strategy

To address the research aims, and support the credibility of the design, the sampling strategy was purposive, and the participants were drawn from the group that the research

question addressed, based on their executive role (Silverman, 2013b P. 148; Ritchie et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2012b). To gain a broad range of executives' experiences therefore, participants were sought from a range of UK businesses across all industries and with no limitation on size. For the purposes of the study, executives were defined as those individuals working at a CEO, Board, Non-Executive Director (NED), Managing Director, Group or Regional Director or Director level role, with a minimum of 12 months experience at that level. The scope of the sample was limited to those working in the UK to focus on participant differences within a specific geographical context.

4.2.2 Recruitment Process

To recruit voluntary participants, ethical approval on recruitment strategy was first attained from Lancaster University on two levels. Initial recruitment was via the LinkedIn online platform and then a secondary, wider recruitment strategy with the utilisation of the alumni of Lancaster University and the researchers' previous areas of study, if volunteer numbers were not achieved. To commence, the researcher placed a written post and infographic on LinkedIn, providing details of the study and the research being conducted, (as detailed in appendix 10). Snowball sampling was then used to supplement the generation of a sampling pool thereby serving to negate researcher bias in the selection of participants (Saunders et al., 2012b; Bryman, 2012b; Henn et al., 2009b; Ritchie, 2013; Shenton, 2004). The LinkedIn and snowball strategy provided for the full number of participants required for the study, so the utilisation of the second stage alumni recruitment was not required. Participants were recruited on a first come, first served basis. There was no waiting list and therefore the researcher did not select participants. Full details of the sample are outlined in section 4.2.4.

To ensure gender equity, the study considered the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (UK Government, 2004; UK Government, 2024), the Equality Act 2010 (UK Government, 2010), the SAGER guidelines (Heidari et al., 2017) and the UK Gender Identity Classifications (Office for National Statistics., 2021). In accordance with guidelines and to avoid binary descriptors for gender demographics, 'gender identity' was recorded rather than 'sex'. The categories of 'male', 'female', 'transgender male', 'transgender female', 'non-binary', 'prefer to self-describe' and 'prefer not to say' (Human Rights Campaign, 2019; Office for National Statistics, 2018) were used. For the purposes of the study, all categories were coded separately. For reporting purposes and to protect

anonymity of participants, categories with less than two participants would not be reported separately. Any participants that coded as 'transgender male' were to be included in the 'male' category, and those coding as 'transgender female' to be included in the 'female' category. Those coding as 'non-binary', 'prefer to self-describe' and 'prefer not to say' were to be coded separately and included in the overall results.

After expressing an interest, executives were sent email communications, a participant information sheet and an informed consent document which was sent via secure electronic transfer for signature (appendix 11).

4.2.3 The Interview Process

With the goal of social constructivist research being to rely on the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2009), using qualitative semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to gain a relativist appreciation of the underlying experiences executives have of job strain and their behavioural coping strategies. The study further allowed exploration and understanding of the socially constructed meanings that govern their coping behaviours (Henn et al., 2009b), gaining insight into the identification and discovery of stressors and coping strategies for individual executives (Sam Schonfeld and Farrell, 2010).

4.2.3.1 Critical Incident Technique (CIT)

Originally developed by Flanagan as a method in the United States Army Air Force in World War II, the purpose of CIT is summarised as "a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (Flanagan, 1954 P. 327). A Critical Incident is defined as "an activity or event where the consequences were so clear that the participant has a definite idea regarding the effects" (Saunders et al., 2012b P. 391) and where behavioural or other factors had a critical effect (Law, 2016).

CIT was chosen for this study as many qualitative studies have used the method due to its flexibility within several research frameworks, and specifically through critical incident semi-structured interviews, allowing for participant reflection and to promote

personal expression (Kvarnstrom, 2008; Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Cope and Watts, 2000; Wolff et al., 2002; Bott and Tourish, 2016; Sharoff, 2008). It is also highlighted as a viable method to capture the contextual nature of coping, which was considered to be important in this study of executives, by allowing for the identification of specific coping strategies used in relevance to particular situations (Trenberth and Dewe, 2004; Flanagan, 1954; Chell, 2004; Lansisalmi et al., 2000; O'Driscoll and Cooper, 1996).

Used effectively in two of the studies identified in the literature review and being within the scope of an interpretive paradigm and inherent inductive properties grounded in real-life experiences, CIT was suited to this research study as it did not force the respondents into a particular framework, did not require a hypothesis and was culturally neutral (Gremler, 2001; Petrick et al., 2006; Bott and Tourish, 2016; Chell, 2004; Saunders et al., 2012b). The term 'critical incident' having been challenged by some researchers due to 'incident' trivialising critical experiences (Cope and Watts, 2000), and implying discrete events and a 'crisis' (Bott and Tourish, 2016), the term was changed to ensure clarity and to broaden the experiences to be captured. This study therefore used the term 'significant situation', to not limit potential findings just to an 'incident' or 'crisis' but to focus on executives' general experiences and their personal occurrences of peaks of job strain (Bott and Tourish, 2016; Schluter et al., 2008).

Whilst some researchers look to restrict the recall time period for CIT examples to a four-week period prior to the interview to maximise recall, it was noted that "in some situations adequate coverage cannot be obtained if only very recent incidents are included" (Flanagan, 1954 P. 14). Due to the varied nature of an executive's role, the decision was made to not restrict the discussion and to look for a breadth of situations and the longer-term impact. This study therefore initially specified a limitation on time to the previous 12 months (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Wolff et al., 2002; Kvarnstrom, 2008; Bott and Tourish, 2016). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic occurring at the time of conducting the research, the time period was changed to 'the previous 12 months or beyond', in order to allow participants the choice of examples and to not restrict instances to a time scale purely relating to COVID-19. This also allowed for the capture of longer-term reflections and implications of an executive role on participants health and wellbeing.

4.2.3.2 Interview Questions

The semi-structured nature of the participant one-to-one interviews allowed for the collection of demographic information, providing the researcher with the opportunity to cultivate a connection and rapport with the participants at the start of the interview. This was considered critical in encouraging an open and honest exploration of the executives' experiences (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003). An interview guide was designed to enable participants to provide experiences on the key questions identified from the integrated literature review and aligned to the aims of the research. This included two specified CIT questions, as detailed below, together with a number of supplementary questions.

Question one – "Looking back over your time in an executive role, please describe a significant situation that caused you stress and job strain in your role, and which resulted in a positive outcome. This could be over the previous 12 months or beyond. A significant situation is a situation outside of routine events, which triggered your attention to resolve or to 'make a decision', which later resulted in a positive outcome. Please think of a situation that you can easily remember."

The second question mirrored the first question, with the exception of asking for a negative outcome.

As suggested by King (2012), the interview therefore had some consistent questions in order to encourage respondents to tell their story with minimal researcher presupposition, and allowing the participant to choose their own events to discuss (King, 2012a; Sharoff, 2008; Pina e Cunha et al., 2009). As some studies have found participants to have difficulty in recalling events to discuss (Schluter et al., 2008), and to maximise the use of the interview time, this study advised all participants via email of the two broad semi-structured interview questions to recall events and answer open ended questions, one week before the planned interview (Bott and Tourish, 2016; Schluter et al., 2008).

Given the epistemological stance of social constructivism, the interview process acknowledged the role of both interviewer and interviewee as active agents in the co-construction in the content of the interview (Schwandt, 2003). The participants providing specific examples therefore, allowed the researcher to make use of sub questions and probes tailored to each individual as the recall of events unfolded, allowing for a rich

exploration of the participants experiences and behaviour (Keatinge, 2002; Bott and Tourish, 2016; King, 2012a). To minimise structure and response bias, these sub questions consisted of generic probes, such as 'what happened next', 'what did you do' (Chell, 2004; Schluter et al., 2008; Bott and Tourish, 2016; Cope and Watts, 2000). This approach allowed for a greater interactivity between researcher and participant, providing further insights about experiences, coping strategies and outcomes (Turner, 2010).

A copy of the interview guide can be found in appendix 11, which covered the following areas:

- Participant demographics.
- Exploration of significant situations that caused stress and job strain which resulted in (1) positive and (2) negative outcomes using the critical incident technique.
- Exploration of coping strategies and their impact in the two different scenarios.
- Additional themes that emerged during the interview or that the participant wanted to add.
- Executives' experiences of any gender differences at executive level in terms of job strain and coping strategies.
- Participant reflections and learning over the long-term and the personal impact,

The interviews were conducted in 2021/2022 over video conferencing software via a private Microsoft Teams link, allowing the interviewer to observe non-verbal communication to aid understanding (Britten, 1995). Whilst face to face interviews may be considered more effective (Wakelin et al., 2024), others have identified participant preference and other benefits such as greater researcher reach, in the use of video conferencing (Archibald et al., 2019; Braun et al., 2017). Utilisation of an online method allowed the researcher to conduct the interviews at a convenient time and as a cost-effective method with participants over a wide-ranging geographical area, thereby benefiting the study by capturing a wide range of participants. Both the participant and the researcher were in individual quiet rooms, to maintain confidentiality. Four of the participants, however, were interrupted during the interview, with family members or pets entering the room, so the interviews were briefly paused accordingly and restarted once the participant was comfortable.

The interviews were conducted at a convenient time for the participant, with an hour allocated for the discussion. All interviews were conducted within 43 to 127 minutes, with a mean length of 70 minutes and 52 seconds. Some interviews went over the hour, with the agreement and / or request of the participant. Some interviews experienced minor technology and connection issues, which increased the duration. Interviews were recorded on Microsoft Teams with an additional backup encrypted digital recording device to protect against any technical issues. The researcher took handwritten notes throughout the interviews, highlighting areas of interest to ask supplementary questions. This ensured that the researcher did not miss key areas of interest without interrupting the flow and explanation from the participant. At the end of each interview, the researcher made notes to capture non-verbal aspects and any general reflections on the discussion.

4.2.4 Sample Size

Sample sizes in qualitative studies often depend on the study being conducted and are smaller compared to those used in quantitative research which requires the demonstration of statistical incidence (Saunders et al., 2012b). As CIT recommends the capture of approximately 50 incidents (Bott and Tourish, 2016; Flanagan, 1954; Sharoff, 2008), whilst also taking into consideration the number of interviews for a qualitative study to be published being between 20 and 30 (Warren, 2002; Bryman, 2012b), the aim of this study was to recruit 25 participants, to balance the ethical and epistemological requirement for depth of analysis.

Twenty-five participants were recruited on a first come, first serve basis via the original LinkedIn post and Infographic. One participant withdrew on the morning of the scheduled interview and one participant withdrew their data one week after the interview, so the data was destroyed and not included in any level of analysis. Out of the remaining 23 participants, 12 were direct LinkedIn contacts of the researcher that responded to the LinkedIn post and Infographic; 3 participants were recruited by LinkedIn contacts that were not eligible to participate in the study themselves, 7 were referrals from the first 12 LinkedIn participants indicating snowballing; and 2 volunteers were second level referrals from the 7 first level referrals. As the required number of study participants was achieved from the original LinkedIn post, no further recruitment strategies were considered necessary. As all volunteers met the criteria for participation, none were

rejected during the recruitment process. The researcher had no previous connection to any of the participants in relation to job strain, stress, or coping.

Saturation was considered throughout the process, broadly defined as information redundancy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and being the point where no new information, codes or themes were yielding from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021d), or when there were few new critical incident behaviours identified (Flanagan, 1954). The concept of saturation in the constructivist paradigm can be problematic as there can be no assurances that additional participants would not introduce new experiences and alternative perspectives (Tai and Ajjawi, 2016). The researcher was therefore cognisant of 'theoretical sufficiency', or 'data adequacy' as an alternative to saturation to ensure there is enough evidence obtained and 'conceptual depth', to reach a sufficient level of understanding that can allow the researcher to theorise (Sims and Cilliers, 2023; Nelson, 2017), and for data collection to stop when a sufficient or adequate depth of understanding was reached. This alignment with the quality of the data collected, led the researcher to stop data collection after the completion of the twenty third admissible interview.

4.3 Approach to Analysis

4.3.1 Process

Being suited to the epistemological stance of social constructivism, and the ontological position of relativism informing the analysis through the framing of language, data and meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2021a; Braun, 2013), the use of reflexive thematic analysis allowed for codes and categories to represent the themes revealed from the data collected (Saunders et al., 2012a). With themes defined as a concept, trend, idea, or distinction that are extracted from the empirical data (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), meaning and understanding were created as part of the analysis (Tai and Ajjawi, 2016). To create central themes and sub-themes, a matrix-based framework was used for ordering and synthesising the data (Ritchie et al., 2003; Bryman, 2012b), by following Braun and Clarke's six phase process, (Braun and Clarke, 2021c):

1. Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes
2. Systematic data coding
3. Generating initial themes from coded and collated data

4. Developing and reviewing themes

5. Refining, defining and naming themes

6. Writing the report

Phase 1 – Data Familiarisation

Full verbatim transcription of four of the interviews was done by the researcher. The remaining nineteen interviews were professionally transcribed through a formal transcription service supported through Lancaster University, with a signed non-disclosure agreement in place to adhere to current GDPR and data protection regulations.

With transcription being 'a key phase of data analysis within the interpretative quality methodology' (Bird, 2005 P. 227), on receipt of the transcriptions, the researcher reviewed each one individually by listening to the interview recording and reading through the transcription document, making amendments as necessary. The transcriptions were saved under password protected folders within OneDrive and then reviewed for a second and third time, to ensure accuracy and researcher familiarisation with the data.

To ensure trustworthiness in the results and recognising the potential for bias due to the researcher being both the data collector and the data analyst, member checks were utilised as part of the research quality controls and rigour, credibility and confirmability of the results (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Guba, 1981; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Being considered the gold standard and an ethical imperative (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Birt et al., 2016; Guba and Lincoln, 1989), these checks were undertaken on two levels. The first level was initiated during each of the interviews, with the researcher reflecting back to the participant to check understanding of their experiences, with questions such as "Have I understood that correctly?", and "Am I reflecting that back in the right way?". The second level check was conducted with the researcher emailing each individual participant asking if they would like the opportunity to review the transcript and to add any salient points relating to the research (appendix 13). A two-week deadline for replies was allocated. Out of the 23 emails sent, 7 participants did not reply; from the 15 participants that did reply; 4 declined to review or comment and 2 participants stated they would have nothing to add. Nine participants asked to review the transcript, out of which 3 participants provided additional comments and clarification, and 6 participants did not provide any further data.

Phase 2 – Systematic Data Coding

Taking the additional information from the 3 participants together with the data from the full transcripts, a continuum approach to reflexive thematic analysis was taken (Braun and Clarke, 2021b). To provide the lens for the review and interpretation of the data, analysis was conducted using an inductive approach informing a full analysis 'grounded in' the data.

With transcripts anonymised, the coding process was integral to theme development, which meant codes were used as an analytic unit to capture the researchers' individual observations. Themes were considered as multi-faceted concepts of shared meaning and represented a level of patterned response or meaning within the data set, which were then actively created through interpretative engagement with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2014; Braun and Clarke, 2021b). The surrounding data was captured to ensure clarity of context (Bryman, 2012b), with individual extracts of data aligned to as many different themes as possible (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Phases 3, 4 and 5 – Generating, Developing, Defining and Naming Themes

The different codes identified at phase 2 were sorted into potential themes, with codes combined under overarching themes and sub-themes at phase 3. Themes were refined in phase 4, with the creation of thematic maps for each participant at the first level, enabling the researcher to ensure the validity of the individual themes in relation to the whole data set. Themes and sub-themes were then drawn out to an over-all thematic map with relevant participant numbers allocated appropriately. In re-reading the entire data set, the researcher was able to consider each theme and to code additional data within the themes, thus ensuring none were missed from the earlier coding stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2021b).

Themes were refined at phase 5, with the researcher identifying the scope and content of each theme, and how they related to the overall 'story' and results from the data. The full results at Phase 6 are detailed in Chapter 5.

4.3.2 Reflexivity

Braun and Clarke's six phase process, allowed for the researcher to engage in reflexive practices throughout the process, detailing decisions made to identify and limit the

researchers influence on the outcome of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2021b; Silverman, 2013a). Throughout the refinement process, the themes were discussed with the researcher's academic supervisors to underpin the credibility, confirmability and trustworthiness in the data (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Shenton, 2004), which was considered an essential element to ensure the accurate capture of data relating to the executive participant group.

The ongoing reflections of the researcher were captured in a journal format throughout the research process to record and examine thoughts, reactions and opinions in real-time and retrospectively. This incorporated the researcher's perceptions of the participants, the interpersonal dynamics of each interview and the theoretical, epistemological and political stances (Wilkinson, 1998). A summary of this reflective journey is provided in Appendix 14.

4.3.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethics and values of the research design are inherently linked to the paradigm underpinning it (Creswell, 2009), and the constructivist position required an axiological perspective that values and promotes authenticity, trustworthiness, balanced viewpoints, reflexivity and rapport (Mertens, 2014; Shenton, 2004; Guba, 1981).

This study followed best practice outlined in the Lancaster University guidelines and was centred on the five key aspects identified by De Vaus of voluntary participation, informed consent, no harm, confidentiality and anonymity and privacy (De Vaus, 2014). Ethical approval was granted by Lancaster University before participant recruitment commenced. The full ethics proposal is included in appendix 15.

When being asked to recall examples and lived experiences, some participants outlined challenging experiences in terms of their mental and physical health, such as breakdowns, suicidal thoughts, cancer and heart conditions. As a qualified therapist, the researcher was able to handle the conversations with sensitivity and validation, allowing the participant to take their time in their descriptions and to express their emotions. The researcher offered to pause, terminate or reschedule the interview with some participants, all of which declined. Ethical approval was sought for the conduct of this study and there was no need to invoke a distress protocol. Participants were signposted to additional support

outside of the interviews by referral to the Participant Information Sheet (appendix 11) and to contact details of support outside of the research process.

4.3.4 Reporting

As is ethical for researchers to appreciate the contributions made by various stakeholders (Saunders et al., 2012a), upon completion of the study, a report of key, overarching findings was offered to participants. It is also anticipated that a summary of this study will be suitable for publication in relevant journals.

4.4 The Research Objectives Revisited

With the epistemological, ontological and theoretical perspectives being embedded in the research, the research question and aims of the study were:

Research Question:

Exploring gender differences of Executives' experiences of psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies through Critical Incident Technique.

Aims:

- Explore how individual executives describe their experience and understanding of psychological job strain.
- Through Critical Incident Technique (CIT), explore both positive and negative experiences of executive job strain in relation to peaks of demand.
- To identify the causes of executives' job strain.
- To explore what behavioural coping strategies executives utilise (or have used) to cope with that strain.
- To explore executives' experiences of any gender differences in relation to their experiences of job strain and behavioural coping strategies.
- To determine personal reflections, points of learning and the effects of the strain experiences on longer-term life impact.

The social constructivist stance was at the core of this research and the methodology and methods deployed and described in this chapter reflect the qualitative assumptions that have informed design decisions and the execution of this research.

4.5 Concluding Methodological Remarks

In the context of the aims and objectives of this study, social constructivism was identified as the philosophical underpinning for the epistemological, ontological and methodological choices made in the design. This led to the decision to use a qualitative approach to the research, focused on the phenomenon of executives' experiences of psychological job strain and coping strategies.

Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents who had the appropriate level of experience at an executive level within the UK business sector. A semi-structured interview with critical incident technique, allowed for aspects to be probed more deeply into peak experiences of strain. The data collected were analysed using inductive reflexive thematic analysis to capture key themes and a full review.

The axiology of the constructivist approach led to careful consideration of the ethical implications of this research, which were integrated into the research design. The research produced over 25 hours of interviews from 23 participants. An analysis of this data is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Empirical Findings

In line with the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 3, the nature of this study aimed to capture the individual experiences of the UK executive participants in relation to gender difference, psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies. In line with the social constructivist paradigm and the reflexive thematic analysis conducted, themes are presented in a manner as to represent those experiences (Yardley, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The demographics of the twenty-three participants are detailed, themes and sub-themes outlined in line with the findings from the extant literature in Chapter 3, with the addition of the CIT reflections and longer-term implications on the lives of the executives.

5.1 Participant Demographics

Participant demographics were captured at interview stage. Fourteen participants identified as male and nine as female. No participants identified as 'transgender male', 'transgender female', 'non-binary', 'prefer to self-describe' or 'prefer not to say'. All participants held an executive position for over one year, as shown in table 4.

Table 4 - Time at an Executive Level by Gender

Time at an Executive Level	Male	Female
2 to 5 years	1	1
6 to 10 years	1	1
11+ years	12	7
Total Participants by Gender	**14**	**9**

Eleven participants represented at Director level, 6 at Managing Director (MD), Regional or Group Director level; 2 in a Non-Executive Director (NED) role; 2 in a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) role and 2 holding both CEO and NED positions simultaneously. Full demographic characteristics of the 23 participants are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 - Demographic Characteristics of the 23 Participants

	Total	% of Total
Participants	23	100%
Gender		
Male	14	60%
Female	9	40%

Age Range		
40-49	4	17%
50-59	14	60%
60+	5	21%
Ethnicity		
White	22	95%
British Indian	1	5%
Job Title		
CEO + NED	2	9%
CEO	2	9%
NED	2	9%
MD/Group/ Regional Director	6	26%
Director	11	47%
Company Size		
Under 10 Employees	3	13%
10 - 99	5	22%
100 - 499	3	13%
500 - 999	6	26%
1000 – 9999	3	13%
Over 10,000	3	13%
Time in Current Role		
Less than 2 years	8	35%
2 to 5 years	7	30%
6 to 10 years	7	30%
11 to 40 years	1	5%
Time in Current Organisation		
Less than 2 years	8	35%
2 to 5 years	5	22%
6 to 10 years	4	17%
11 to 40 years	6	26%
Time in an Executive Position		
2 to 5 years	2	9%
6 to 10 years	2	9%
11 to 40 years	19	82%
Hours worked per day		
Less than 8	7	30%
9 to 10	9	40%
11 to 12	4	17%
13 to 15	3	13%
Hours worked per week		
Less than 40	3	14%
40 to 50	10	42%
50 to 60	5	22%

70 to 80	3	13%
80+	2	9%
Marital Status		
Married	18	78%
Divorced / Single	2	9%
Living with Partner	3	13%
Family Composition		
Number with Financially Dependent Children	11	48%
Number with Dependant Elders	8	35%

Notably the 14 male participants equating to 61% and the 9 female participants equating to 39% is indicative of the reported current gender split in UK executive positions (FTSE Women Leaders, 2024), and the one British Indian participant equating to the ethnic minority director target for FTSE 350 boards (Tyler, 2024).

At the time of interview, four executives, (18%), had moved into Non-Executive Director (NED) positions and stated their working hours had drastically reduced, which accounts for three participants working less than 40 hours shown in table 5. From the remaining nineteen participants, two had left employment as a direct result of the work-related strain experienced and set up their own businesses and seventeen were still actively employed in executive positions, all in different roles and the vast majority in different organisations. No participants were below the age range of 40 to 49 and no participants at CEO or NED level were below an age range of 50 to 59, as evidenced in table 6.

Table 6 – Participants by Job Level, Age Range and Gender

Job Level & Age Range	Male	Female
CEO; NED; NED & CEO		
o 40-49	0	0
o 50-59	1	2
o 60+	2	1
MD; Group or Regional Director		
o 40-49	1	0
o 50-59	4	1
o 60+	0	0
Director		
o 40-49	1	2
o 50-59	4	2
o 60+	1	1

When considering job level, age range and gender by time spent at an executive level, three of those with under 10 years' experience were on Director level and one at MD, Group or Regional Director level, as detailed in table 7.

Table 7- Time in an Executive Position by Job Level, Age Range and Gender

Time in an Executive Position by Job Level & Age Range	Male	Female

• **CEO; NED; NED & CEO**
   o 40-49
   o 50-59
   o 60+
	0
	1 x 11+ years
	2 x 11+years
		0
		2 x 11+ years
		1 x 11+ years

• **MD; Group or Regional Director**
   o 40-49
 	
   o 50-59
 	
   o 60+
	1 x 11+ years
	
	1 x 6 to 10 years &
	3 x 11+ years
	
	0
		0
		
		1 x 11+ years
		
		0

• **Director**
   o 40-49
 	
   o 50-59
 	
   o 60+
	1 x 2 to 5 years
	
	4 x 11+ years
	
	1 x 11+ years
		1 x 6 to 10 years &
		1 x 11+ years
		
		1 x 2 to 5 years &
		1 x 11+ years
		
		1x 11+ years

Due to the use of snowball sampling, to maintain participant confidentiality and adhere to ethical standards, a more detailed demographic breakdown is omitted.

The duration of peak strain experiences ranged from 4 weeks in one example with the majority lasting for several months and for some, in excess of a year. With the recall of two experiences, all examples were over 12 months before the interview, with the majority being up to 10 years prior and for a few participants, in excess of 10 years, thus highlighting the severity of the experiences and the personal and emotional impact in addition to how the executives had transitioned in their career after the events.

5.2 Developing Themes

Braun and Clarke's six phase process ensured themes and sub-themes were generated. Following a review by the researcher, some sub-themes were collapsed into an overarching theme. For example, in the initial analysis sub-themes of 'Covid' and 'impossible timescales' were identified but later collapsed in to 'external events' and 'the nature of the executive role', respectively. The coding and theme template therefore evolved through the process to ensure that the themes were appropriate to the interpretation of the data set and the research question (B&C, 2006).

As a result of the reflexive thematic analysis, five integrative themes were identified: The Job Demand Control Support Model, including the nature of the demand and causes of strain; coping strategies when in steady state and increased demand; the impact of job strain; actual and perceived gender differences and CIT reflections and personal learning over the long-term. The final template outlining these integrative themes and sub-themes is shown in Table 8.

Table 8 - Final Template of Integrative Themes

Integrating Theme	Sub-Theme (Level 2)	Sub-Theme (Level 3)	Sub-Theme (Level 4)
The JDCS Model	Demand	Internal to Organisation	Workload & nature of the role Cost Cutting Responsibility for others Demands of more senior executives Organisational culture External events Responsibility for others
		External to Org	
	Control	Personal Control	Taking Action Problem Focus Utilisation of Resources
		Lack or loss of Control	
	Support	Practical	Internal External

		Informational	Internal External
		Emotional	Internal External
Coping Strategies	Increase in Hours		
	Positive	Self-Talk Exercise Conscious Balance	
	Maladaptive	Avoidance of Task Food & Beverage Lack of Sleep Cessation of Normal Routine	
The Impact of Job Strain	Health Impact	Physical Mental	
	Personal Impact	Impact on Career Impact on Relationships	
Gender	Theme Differences		
	Participant Experience		
CIT Reflections & Personal Learning			

These themes and sub-themes are discussed in the following sections of this chapter along with example participant quotes. Writing in square brackets within the quotations provides an explanation of identifying data [example]. Three consecutive dots in square brackets [...] signifies omitted utterances such as repeated words, words in round brackets have been left in to highlight emotional responses and letters and numbers in brackets after quotations signify individual participant numbers and gender. More quotes supporting each of the themes and sub-themes are provided in Appendix 16.

5.3 The Job Demand, Control, Support (JDCS) Model

5.3.1 Job Demand

From the participants' narrative, the researcher was able to capture the rich descriptions of the executives' day-to-day job demands, with the contrasting elements of their peak experiences relayed through the use of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954; Norman et al, 1992). Two sub-themes emerged under the over-arching theme of 'demand', namely: 'demands internal to the organisation' and 'demands emanating from outside of the organisation'.

5.3.1.1 Demands internal to the organisation

Considering the demands internal to the organisation, five, third level sub-themes emerged, namely: 'Workload and the nature of the executive role'; 'cost cutting'; 'responsibility for others'; 'the demands of more senior executives' and 'organisational culture'.

Workload and the Nature of the Executive Role

Whilst many participants did not describe their general day-to-day responsibilities as stressful, the capture of peak experiences enabled the researcher to ascertain that additional demands, such as dealing with a major crisis or unplanned events, placed the executives under increased strain. There was no gender difference in how executives described their workload, the nature of the role relating to demand, days filled with continuous expectations and the need to balance multiple tasks with clear decision making. Some participants outlined the constant 24/7 nature of the role: *"And I think you almost become conditioned […], run hard, plate spinning, […] constantly waiting for the phone to ring." (P12 F).* From the interviews, it was apparent that the executives considered the intensity and frequency of the demands, a natural expectation of holding a high-level role and were accepting of that. Such conditioned acceptance does highlight that the executives were not necessarily acknowledging the daily demands as 'stress' or 'job strain' when they were undertaking the role on a day-to-day basis: *"But as I say, I don't recognise it necessarily as stress, I just recognise there is a huge amount going on, […], a lot to get done." (P6 M).*

For some, this could be considered eustress, however the transition from eustress to distress during peak occurrences of demand and strain was noted by the researcher in the descriptions provided. This calls into question an individuals' conscious recognition at the time of the strain as to the longer-term personal impact on their physical and psychological state, as evidenced by the following participants:

"I think stress for me has been good, […], the fuel that's made me perform well in lots of situations. If I wasn't so stressed […], I wouldn't prepare as well, ... but when it tips over and you are constantly running out of time, and you think […], the only way to manage this is to do more and more and more." *(P15 M).*

Cost Cutting

Changes to the organisation through cost cutting exercises and downsizing was highlighted as a demand outside of the day-to-day with an additional negative impact on colleagues within the organisation: *"The only way I could do that was by closing services down (sigh) […] because of money, I found that quite difficult."* *(P18 F).* Such job demands were seen to result in the executives experiencing an amplification and greater negative emotional charge around the actions that they were needing to undertake: *"Downsize, (sigh) which is a nice way of saying sack lots of people, […] we had to take about a hundred and twenty of them [employees] out."* *(P6 M).*

Responsibility for Others in the Organisation

Responsibility for others, ensuring team members performed to an acceptable level and meeting deadlines was a further form of strain for both genders. Whilst delegating tasks to others was often considered a natural part of the role, it was further acknowledged by several participants that their delegation caused pressure further down in the organisational structure. This created another level of strain on the executives due to the negative impact that they were having on others: *"So, […], pressure wasn't only on me, there was a lot of pressure down through the organisation, […] it was a very pressurised period for everyone that was involved in that."* *(P14 M).*

Both genders expressed their concern for other people's welfare: *"For me it's really important that I nurture the emotional, psychological and the physical health of my team."* *(P13 F).* Taking positive action to support others underpinned a sense of importance

in the daily duties for some of the executives by ensuring their team members maintained a healthy work-life balance but notably they were unable to apply the same level of concern for themselves: *"Helping others to take a break, helped me feel like I was doing my job, […] I'm not good at taking my own medicine." (P14 M).*

Other participants identified the negative effect of managing the emotions of others on their own internal wellbeing state: *"It's bad enough trying to manage your own emotional levels and anxieties and then trying to manage someone else's." (P12 F).*

The Demands of More Senior Executives

Without exception, the demands placed on the participants by more senior executives considerably increased the experience of strain and was described in a variety of situations by all participants: *"This was others putting strain on me, to work late so it was just a stressful period […] 14 hours in the office." (P7 M).* The perceived demands for the executives included such things as unrealistic performance or financial targets, unreasonable demands for information and aggressive behaviour: *"The stresses that they [the Board] put the entire management team under […] to deliver these numbers for a ridiculous reason, […] was horrendous. It was one of the worst experiences I had ever had." (P9 M).*

The executives sought to comply with the requests and tolerated the inappropriate behaviour in order to retain their job role, but at the same time placed themselves under more strain. Whilst the element of 'control' within the JDCS model is discussed in section 5.3.2, it was clear that, someone on a higher level having more authority and power over the executives, led to the experiences of demand being described as increased strain, lack of control and no alternative other to do what they could to comply: *"Starved of resource, yet I still had the obligations from the customers on me to deliver. […] The owners of the company were causing me the stress – they were demanding more and more profits, more and more cash generation." (P9 M).*

Many of the participants also outlined the additional pressure placed on them by executive Board members and more senior executives during times of peak demand. Potentially a natural reaction from senior colleagues to an event that may have serious negative consequences on the organisation, however it does highlight the additional pressure on

executives caused by the needs of others, adding to an already seismic burden in times of peak strain:

"So, it was the first time […], when you have got a real, oh shit moment, and you are thinking, how on earth am I going to fix it, but also the pressure from the executive and the board, from everyone to fix it, was immense." (P 17 F).

Organisational Culture

How senior people demonstrate the culture through their own leadership behaviours is something that participants were mindful of and how these behaviours rippled through an organisation, creating either a positive or negative place to work. Some were on the receiving end of negative communication and undermined in front of others: *"He [boss] attacked me personally […], in front of my workforce. I probably took that more personally than anything else."* (P20 M).

Performance measures described by participants were seen to create a culture where employees pushed themselves to the extreme to achieve a reward or recognition, such as a cash bonus:

"But the incentive arrangements […], drove you to do certain things […]. 70% [earnings] was incentive related. Some of it cash and some […] stock […] you get paid on performance you don't get paid for no performance […] and if your performance is bad, you're fired anyway" (P1 M).

When organisational culture and demands were extreme or in times of 'peak' demand, the negative effect on trust and psychological safety was identified as having a detrimental effect on participants. Many participants described their working environment as 'reactionary' and 'toxic', with both genders describing incidents which included aggressive behaviour, poor communication and abuse of power from others:

"And the system is all set up to basically promote narcissism, sociopaths […] and as you get further up […], it's full […], I mean a sea sweep. […] as you go up […] the number of nice people drops significantly." (P8 M).

Many participants outlined the strain and negative impact of a culture absent of positive values such as trust, openness and honesty, leading to both genders highlighting their belief in the importance of shared values within the workplace, which consequently many sought to instil within their own areas of responsibility. Both genders described experiences of verbal abuse and being shouted at: *"When everybody is trying to sort of hold it together, he [boss] completely loses it, […] that doesn't help the situation, and people get stressed, even more stressed." (P 25 F).* A clear gender difference, however, was that many of the male participants described being on the receiving end of more verbally intense threats and physically aggressive behaviour: *"I was pinned against the wall by a very senior executive." (P6 M).*

All of the peak events described were attributed to a culture that challenged psychological safety and caused strain, not only for the executives themselves but for others around them, resulting in several participants highlighting a lack of trust in colleagues and the organisation itself.

5.3.1.2 Demands External to the Organisation

External demands have been shown to come from varied sources. Events were categorised into two sub-themes, namely, external events and responsibility for others.

External Events

Experiences outlined by participants relating to causes of strain external to the organisation, identified such things as changes in the law, demands from governing bodies such as the Health and Safety Executive, and stakeholders. These external events had a direct impact on the business, products or services offered or the executive's role. Whilst more will be discussed relating to control in section 5.3.2, it was apparent in the peak strain examples given, that both male and female executives associated their experiences in the culmination of loss of control:

"So, the Chancellor has now got to his feet and I'm trying to follow the tweet feed […], and he pretty much opens his budget by saying […] I'm going fuck, fuck, fuck, […], and I literally I thought, what do I do. So I jumped off the tube,[…] no signal, I'm legging it up the escalators, tripping over […], cutting my hands at the same time, and then I get

out of the station and I start texting my group chief exec to say fuck, fuck, fuck and by this point our share price is tumbling, and it fell by [..]% in less than one hour." (P21 M).

Responsibility for Others Outside of the Workplace

Highlighted only by female participants as an additional external cause of strain was the responsibility for childcare and other family members. The responsibility for others outside of the organisation created a direct juxtaposition to the responsibilities of the job role. This resulted in the females having to choose one role over the other, whilst simultaneously experiencing guilt:

"My husband [working away] [...], I was left trying to juggle the work and my four-year-old. [...] a lot of guilt, [...] call in lots of favours [...] arrange play dates or I stuck her in front of the telly [...], so I could work." (P3 F).

Those that did not express this responsibility, either did not have financially dependent children or stated that they employed housekeepers or nannies to alleviate the pressure and demand. It was noted by both genders in their interviews when considering gender differences that male colleagues did not have to make the same considerations. It is also noteworthy that several participants made reference to females taking responsibility for the general running of the household, as evidenced in the following quotes:

"So you are doing what a homemaker would be doing, [...] even if you've got a full-time housekeeper, [...] or you have got a nanny, which we had, [...], I don't see men [...] thinking about, okay, what's happening at the weekend, [...] is there any food in the house." (P17 F).

Some male participants highlighted lack of time with family as a cause of strain, not in terms of responsibility for their care or support, but rather in the sense that they felt pressurised by others as they did not have time for their partners, particularly during times of significant peak events: *"Then I'm getting the same questions from my wife that I'm getting from the people that I work with, when is this going [...] to end and I'm – I don't know." (P4 M).*

5.3.2 Control

Considering the control element of the JDCS model, to ameliorate the negative impact of work stressors, the amount of control an individual perceives they have, can relate to the amount of psychological strain that is experienced. Two sub-themes were evident from the thematic analysis in relation to this element, namely, 'taking personal control' and 'lack or loss of control'.

5.3.2.1 Taking Personal Control

Reviewed as part of the JDCS model, coping may also be considered in the context of a specific strategy and will be reviewed further in section 5.4. No gender differences were found in how the executives' maintained control over the demands placed on them: *"And I can cope with any problems, anything that […] is thrown at me, as long as there isn't somebody with one stripe more who is crazy." (P9 M).* An increase in demand tempered with retaining personal control, was described by participants as a key element in reducing the intensity and impact of job strain. Three secondary sub-themes were observed in how personal control was directly exercised; namely 'taking action'; a 'problem or task focus' and 'utilisation of resources'.

Taking Action

Several participants described how 'taking action' was used as a method of exerting control to resolve and move past significant events. The severity and nature of the incidents described implied this way of taking control was used in situations of extreme crisis or when immediate action was required to find appropriate solutions for a way forward: *"Then you get going […] get activated, […] to succeed and to start making progress […] making a plan, […] and getting people in the organisation to pull through." (P14 M).*

Problem Focus

A 'problem focus' was highlighted by several participants of both genders as an approach taken, not only on a day-to-day basis, but also as a more measured approach to resolving a significant event. It can be construed that a 'problem focus' was applied when the initial stress response had calmed, and a more logical, measured approach to resolving the issue at hand could be taken: *"No shouting, screaming, emotion, there was a, we have to work through this logically, what do we have to do?" (P21 M).*

Utilisation of Resources

Participants described how the use of resources, such as team members, was a further way of maintaining or regaining control over situations for some of the participants. The level of the executive position held, ensured access to resources, experts and more junior staff that they were able to enlist or delegate to. This perspective can perhaps be viewed from a more conventional leadership sense, in that the executives retained control and final decision making without the need to influence or convince uncooperative others of a lower grade to a certain course of action. However, developing and empowering others to be part of the solution, was evidenced throughout the interviews for both genders, as shown with the following participant quote: *"You have to organise yourself very well otherwise you become a bottleneck because everything is coming to you for a decision. So, you have to […] make sure that you empower people appropriately." (P1 M).*

Linking to responsibility for others (section 5.3.1), it is noteworthy that several participants acknowledged that in relieving their own pressures, others would experience job strain as a direct result of this delegation. This led to both genders highlighting the efforts that they went to, to ensure their subordinates had time to switch off from the job: *"[working away on a project] I said to the team, we do not want to sit in the bar and just drink alcohol. So, I did things like book clubs, we did [theatre], we did swimming clubs, etc". (P14 F).*

5.3.2.2 Lack or loss of control

As demonstrated in previous sections and the peaks of experiences described, additional demands led to the participants identifying 'lack of control' as the biggest issue relating to the demand and resulting job strain*: "Well demand and control going up is okay. It's when the demand goes up, but the control goes down." (P16 F).* With others exerting control over the executive because of seniority, the experiences shared by the participants highlighted restrictions to their decision making and normal coping methods for both genders: *"So, you've started off with quite a high level of control […], and then the rug has been pulled and […] the control has gone." (P 12 F).*

The serious nature of some of the significant events caused a range of stress responses for the executives. One participant described how they became 'frozen' and unable to think straight, with others expressing their emotional reactions such as anger. These

examples highlight not only the loss of control but the loss of capability in the decision-making process, even for more experienced executives, when demand was extreme and the stress response hijacked the logical, thinking brain. With personal psychological resources being impacted to such an extent, participants described a deterioration in communication and behaviours, potentially having a negative, stress inducing effect on others, including subordinates:

"Well, I was just completely, [...] in a state of shock, [...] (pause) I kind of went into [...], not a blinding panic, but a kind of, oh shit, [...] I just didn't know what to do. And of course, I was incredibly upset, and you feel guilt and you feel all of those, you just feel really, really awful." (P 17 F).

5.3.3 Support

The support element of the JDCS model was highlighted as a specific resource to handle the increase in demand and job strain in general and in contrast to some previous studies, this research sought to identify the differences in the type of support obtained, namely: *practical* help; *informational* and *emotional* support. With the original model intended to capture workplace social support (Johnson and Hall, 1988) and, in light of the lack of consistency in previous research, this study sought to extend the model outside of the workplace by considering whether the support obtained was internal to the organisation or external.

5.3.3.1 Practical Support

Practical support enabled the executives to instigate action and find solutions to problems through delegation to more junior employees and the utilisation of appropriate expertise, generating ideas, innovative solutions and different ways of working. This level of support demonstrated the strength in having team members to resolve issues that they were not able to do on an individual basis, either through the issue requiring particular skills, such as analysis of data, or sheer volume of workload: *"I still think the one thing that kept me going was this group of people who were analysts, [...]. I trusted the team – trusted them all."* (P25 F).

5.3.3. Informational Support

Informational support was sought to gain advice, reduce uncertainty and test the practicality of decision-making. The participants outlined that they talked through their thinking by utilising trusted, knowledgeable colleagues within the organisation or with those that they had previously worked with: *"An ex-colleague, so I trusted him, we had a really good working relationship, so I talked a lot of things through with him." P2F.* The element of 'trust' was the key aspect to this support in the participant descriptions and therefore considered to be both an internal and external source for both genders. Many of the executives in their explanations therefore, highlighted the importance of having that level of support: *"[…] and a couple of other people that I would use in that external mentoring, so again, so some of it was emotional support, some of it was practical support." (P12 F).*

5.3.3.2 Emotional Support

A key difference between genders was identified in how emotional support was described. Male participants described the type of support gained in relation to rational communications and a general 'chat' rather than emotional support:

"Maybe this is a male thing because I've never conceptualised it as a 'oh I need support', but more [...] just nice to go and have lunch […] have a chat. […] a cliché that it's just having a chat." (P19 M).

When directly questioned on support in relation to their emotions and feelings, some of the male participants stated that they would talk things through with a loved one: *"I don't think I could do my job without (wife), because she takes so much pressure off me in a different way and yet her job is quite pressured as well." (P20 M).* None of the descriptions from the male participants however specifically highlighted expression of their feelings. Another key finding attributed only to male participants, emphasised the isolation of the senior role: *"It's very isolating if you are the guy in charge […], who do you talk to." (P1 M),* and potentially the inability to freely express or release their feelings or emotions: *"It's quite lonely at the top sometimes, […] I wish there was somewhere to go. I had all of that responsibility on myself […], I don't, have a lot of places to share." (P22 M).*

Female participants on the other hand sought a range of emotional support both externally and internal to the organisation. It was evident that women actively sought out others to ensure they retained a level of balance whilst dealing with job strain, both from the work, decision making basis outlined in informational support, but specifically from an emotional wellbeing perspective: *"I go to others for emotional support […] family and close friends." (P23 F).*

A finding of concern was the lack of trust in organisational support, internally sourced coaches and offerings, such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP), which drove the executives to seek that level of support outside of the workplace: *"I'm thinking, well would they be looking at how many of the directors are actually accessing that [EAP]. So, […], I'd rather not use it […] [lack of trust]." (P18 F).*

5.4 Coping

The Critical Incident Technique highlighted the reasons of peak strain for participants and identified how individuals coped with that strain. This resulted in three main sub-themes of coping - namely 'increase in hours'; 'positive coping' and 'maladaptive coping', as detailed in table 9 below:

Table 9 – Summary of Positive and Maladaptive Coping Strategies

Positive Coping Strategies	Maladaptive Coping Strategies
Hours of Work Controlled	Hours of Work Increased
Self-Talk	Avoidance of Task
Exercise	Food and Beverage Poor Choices
Conscious Life Balance: • Self-Care • Healthy Diet • Time with Friends & Family • Down time to switch off from work	Lack of Sleep • Hours of sleep given up to work • Restless sleep and waking unable to return to sleep due to excessive thoughts of work issues
	Cessation of Normal Routines (including lack of exercise)

5.4.1 Increase in Hours

For many, long working hours, as captured in the demographics, were described as a way that the executives kept on top of the extensive day-to-day workload. This was further exacerbated when encountering significant 'peak' events or situations, as without exception, all participants stated that they increased their working hours as their first 'go to' method of coping: *"I would have said easily was doing fifty per cent on top of what I would normally do"* (P25 F).

Whilst this strategy started as a positive coping response in the short-term, for many participants, working additional hours evolved into what could be considered maladaptive coping for those with prolonged peak experiences. No differences were found between gender or between the more or the less experienced executives; rather, participants described applying more hours to resolve the presenting issue, and that, then became all consuming. Notably, some executives maintained this increase in hours over longer time periods to hit deadlines or higher targets that rewarded them financially: *"I was doing very silly things like getting up at 3am, writing a business paper to ask the Board in the morning for funding for a billion-dollar project."* (P1 M).

5.4.2 Positive Coping

With the use of CIT and linking to the findings within JDCS, participants coped with the general 'steady state' pressures of the executive role by being action orientated within the workplace and making conscious efforts to maintain a balanced lifestyle. Strategies included incorporating things such as exercise, a healthy diet, time with friends and family and ensuring 'down time' in various ways to switch off from work. Both genders were found to combine time with friends and loved ones with some form of exercise that resulted in talking through work issues, however female participants described this coping strategy as a conscious and specific way of coping with both work problems and their feelings and emotions.

With a more in-depth consideration of positive coping, three secondary sub-themes of 'Self-talk'; 'Exercise' and 'Conscious Life Balance' were identified.

Self-Talk

'Self-talk' was used by the majority of participants, not only as a method of day-to-day coping, but also in dealing with the extreme demands of the role. This strategy can be considered in relation to the senior position isolation and loneliness that many of the participants highlighted: *"But no, I didn't have anybody that I could talk to." (P9 M),* thus resorting to self-talk when the confidential nature of the issues at hand could not be openly discussed with others:

"I remind myself, […] that these problems that I have got to solve, are just problems in isolation, and that they're, but that there isn't an overarching tsunami of madness, and impossibility, [erm] (pause) and hopelessness." (P9 M).

Whilst some participants did not openly acknowledge self-talk as a specific way of coping, it was apparent that executives drew on their previous experience and thought through the implications of their actions without referring to others: *"[…] my internal voice through the process […, I had learnt to channel that, […] listen to it and work a way of bringing my voice or my influence to the table for sure." (P11 F).* It must be noted here that whilst the majority of participant examples were positive, with an increase in strain the utilisation of positive self-talk became harder leading to a more negative stance: *"I do a lot of self-talk and I try and mange to talk […] can normally talk myself out of a negative situation, but on this occasion, I was really struggling with self-talk." P20M.*

Exercise

Exercise was used by both genders as a way of maintaining a general ability to cope with the ongoing pressure of the executive role and relieve anxiety: *"I was probably doing half an hour on the cross trainer […] half past five in the morning, just to sort of burn off that anxiety." (P12 F).* The descriptions provided by some of the male participants and the majority of female participants, however, referred to their exercise regimes as a key part of their wellbeing strategy and a healthy lifestyle: *"One thing I have always been good at is, making sure exercise was prioritised." (P19 M); "I will just go out and have a run or yeah, do some yoga or something like that." (P2 F).*

Several male and female participants used this strategy as a consistent form of enjoyment, accentuating the health benefits both physically and mentally as a genuine part of their life structure and an essential coping strategy for dealing with stress:

"I mean I am a big exercise person […] one of my ways to relax is I go to the gym. [….], and I'm very consistent, […] 4 or 5 days a week, […] I've always done that and if I don't do it, I get unhappy. […] one of the coping mechanisms - is running, […] go to the gym, lifting weights." (P4 M).

During peak experiences, only 6 of the 23 participants stated that some form of exercise remained a part of their coping strategies, albeit in a vastly diminished capacity due to the increased working hours, and notably, mostly solitary activities. For some this was reduced to a walk: *"Well, I just tried to take each day as it came really and always made sure that I went for a walk at lunchtime just to try to clear my head." (P7 M).* For a few of the executives, where exercise was a foundational part of their day-to-day, all other aspects of life, including their personal relationships, were pushed to the sideline in order to maintain some form of exercise:

"I mean 60, 70-hour weeks, working every weekend, […] it did cause quite a significant strain on my relationship. […] but it's like eating for me, I have to go and do exercise of some kind […]." (P4 M).

Conscious Work-Life Balance

An approach of conscious life balance was used by both male and female participants as a way of coping. In addition to exercise and healthy eating, this theme highlighted the common use of various forms of relaxation including theatre visits; meals with loved ones; and activities with friends: *"So ordinarily, […] I would have time, sit down with [spouse], eat good food, I would go to the gym two or three days a week, […] and I'd find a way to balance it all, because you are in control." (P21 M).* Whilst this included activities that participants recognised as important for their health and wellbeing, the executives' descriptions also emphasised the deeper importance of self-care and a connection to others for mental and psychological wellbeing:

"By making time for me, which is my exercise, and getting out and doing my stuff. [...]
what time I need, which will be giving me some energy [...], cooking something nice.
Spending some quality time with my husband, or getting out and going for a walk,
getting some fresh air." (P13 F).

During peak strain, the time for these activities was severely reduced with work pressure
mounting: *"There would be days when [...], I was doing sixteen/seventeen hours [...]*
'till one in the morning [...] So, picking up at [...] seven and eight in the morning, and
then working right the way through to about one am." (P16 F). Participants described their
experiences of swapping their normal positive ways of coping for spending more hours
working:

"My holidays went out the window, [erm] my spare time went out the window, my looking
after myself probably went out the window too. [...] (short pause and sigh), I think the,
the short answer is, because the tasks that you are responsible for, dominate everything,
then everything else just takes second fiddle." (P9 M).

The lack of personal time away from work issues and the subsequent lack of connection
with others, in turn led to the increased use of maladaptive coping strategies.

5.4.3 Maladaptive Strategies

With the increase in working hours, all participants reverted to maladaptive strategies:
"Not sleeping [...] going into the office and having a comfort sausage bap and a can of
Diet Coke type thing ... definitely comfort eating." (P12 F). These maladaptive strategies
often continued for the duration of the significant situation or event and participants only
returned to their normal positive coping strategies when the demand and strain reduced.

For those that experienced an elevated level of strain over longer periods, in excess of a
number of months, participants described how their maladaptive strategies became part
of their normal day-to-day coping strategies, such as drinking too much alcohol, albeit
with negative consequences. These negative strategies only appeared to change when
participants experienced a significant life event that drew them away from the ingrained
and habitual patterns:

"It took a lot longer for me to sort the habit out that I had got into with alcohol, and food and pain killers [...]. Probably about another year / eighteen months. [...] I met my now husband, so [...] that emotional support [...] made things easier to cope with." (P3 F).

Participants detailed maladaptive strategies which aligned with four secondary sub-themes of 'avoidance of task'; 'food & beverage'; lack of sleep' and 'cessation of normal routines'

Avoidance of Task

Avoidance of task was demonstrated by some activities being neglected when demand increased, but this was due to lack of time and capacity resulting from the more urgent focus on a 'crisis', rather than through a conscious choice of avoiding specific tasks that might cause additional strain: *"And then you get a bigger problem and that first problem is minute in a relative sense, so [...] I would just [...] deal with the big ones, the fire fighting and huge ones." (P1 M).*

Food and Beverage

Contrary to how participants used food and drink during their 'steady state' strategies 'food and beverages' were used in a maladaptive way during peak experiences, eating for comfort: *"Yes, food, I'm definitely an emotional eater [...] so I would eat rubbish. I would just grab anything that was to hand." (P23 F),* or turning to unhealthy choices and junk food: *"Eating and drinking more [...] quite a few pizzas in the office quite late at night." (P14 M).* Several participants put this down to lack of time to take proper breaks which also led to others barely eating at all:

"...., I haven't got round to doing it yet, so, just that kind of sheer concentration on working, [...] thinking, [...], I'll make time, I will do breakfast in a moment, or I'll do some lunch in a moment and it would never happen, because you'd just get engrossed in what you were doing." (P18 F).

Increase in coffee consumption, chocolate and convenience snacks was a specific method of coping during periods of increased hours and as a way of counterbalancing lack of sleep, tiredness, and difficulty concentrating. Several participants further described an

increase in their alcohol consumption, many of which highlighting it as a specific issue that turned into a longer-term coping strategy:

"But alcohol, I definitely drunk more in the week, I don't drink generally in the weekdays, […], but […], all through that period and I put weight on. I probably got to the heaviest weight I've ever been. […] I went through a heavy drinking period all through that whole period." (P20 M).

Lack of Sleep

Without exception, all participants stated that they experienced reduced or disturbed sleep during times of peak strain. The increase in working hours, which for some resulted in working 18-hour days, might be considered a natural by-product to lack of time. For many executives however, thoughts of work became all-consuming and disturbed their sleep patterns with participants struggling to get to sleep or waking in the middle of the night unable to get back to sleep because of excessive worries and problem solving:

"I didn't sleep particularly well, but that's probably a combination of too much caffeine, drinking alcohol and just the stress of the work, I would regularly wake up thinking about work during the night or remember things that I was worried I might forget the next day." (P3 F).

For others working through the night was a coping mechanism to get the work done and not impact on family members: *"So through working through the night, [husband] was asleep, so I didn't have anyone to explain that [working through the night] to anyone." (P23 F).*

Cessation of Normal Routines

Emphasising the job strain becoming all consuming, participants were unable to utilise their normal positive coping strategies: *"The exercise goes out of the window, I eat more, and I drink more, and I drink a lot of coffee." (P10 M).* Their focus of attention being totally fixed on resolving the problem to retain control and reduce the strain: *"Sometimes I put myself under pressure by deliberately not doing it [exercise] because I don't have time, because that peak pressure is there […] and then […] it accumulates." (P13 F).*

5.5 The Impact of Job Strain

With the job taking primary focus, without exception all participants related the increase in working hours to having long-term, largely detrimental personal impact. It was commonly expressed that increased and excessive hours was an unhealthy and unsustainable strategy that later led to the two sub-themes of an impact on health and on personal relationships.

5.5.1 Health Impact

With regards to the impact on health, two, third level sub-themes were identified as 'physical health' and 'mental health'. It was apparent however that both genders described a decline in their general wellbeing throughout the peaks of strain, as depicted by these participants: *"weight gain, […], eczema […] classic […], stress related bits and pieces […] I just had a high heart rate[…], for several months [….] whole bunch of, […] physiological impacts."* (P22 M).

"Your skin just never feels as healthy, [….], your eyes are very tired, (short pause) […], I describe it as […] it's too much adrenaline, […] the taste of a metal in your mouth [...] not helpful in terms of your sense of wellbeing, […], just general tiredness […], lack of energy." (P12 F).

Physical Health

A marked difference was noted in the experiences of the male and female participants with regards to their physical health. Only male participants described specific serious illnesses that they related to the strain of work. In particular, two men described their experiences of cancer, with both directly relating it to job strain and prolonged work-related stress accumulated over several years:

"……is getting cancer, and […] and I've got no doubt at all […] that was probably caused, […] stress of work had a huge impact in, in me getting it in the first place, […] because you know, I was under ferocious stress for years." (P9 M).

In addition to the comments made in relation to the impact on general health, two other male participants shared their experiences of their heart health, emphasising the relation to stress and the implications over the long-term: *"And then I had a cardiac arrest, […] I*

think there's no question in mind, […] the stress of it all [work] had ultimately caught up with me." (P10 M). Notably, no female participants outlined any serious physical ill-health issues.

Mental Health

Without exception, all participants commented on the negative impact of work-related stress on their mental health. With no gender differences, some issues linked to lack of sleep, and others to a general deterioration in brain functioning and concentration:

"I became […] anxious, […] had real difficulty sleeping, […], I had to go to the doctor and get help […], I was completely exhausted […], but on the outside, […] I was still fronting up […] some serious jobs […], I had lots of people still working for me […] I tried hard to conceal the strain from everybody else." (P22 M).

These experiences often progressed to a lack of control over their emotional state and ultimately to a deterioration in communication severely impacting themselves and others, both inside and outside of the workplace: *"I have had moments in tears on the kitchen floor, I can't go on, and all this sort of stuff" (P12 F).* For some participants, without a break in the ongoing peak strain, the impact continued on a downward spiral until they reached burnout: *"I didn't cope with it, I ended up … resigning from the role, I ended up on anti-depressants because I wasn't sleeping, because of the stress" (P18 F).* Whilst some female and male participants resorted to short-term medication to manage their mental health, two male participants outlined thoughts of suicide, with one being institutionalised for their own safety: *"I er had a break down […] and I ended up in a mental institution for a month." (P1 M).*

Whilst the female participants also described extensive pressures, none recalled a level of deterioration to the extent of the male participants. Both genders stated they sought the help of coaches and therapists to help them regain balance: *"I actually did some counselling after that [mental health breakdown]" (P15 M); "She was my original coach at [company] […] I would often use her as a sounding board." (P12 F).*

5.5.2 Personal Impact

Taking a wider perspective on the impact and implications of the strain over the longer-term, two sub-themes were established, namely 'impact on career' and 'impact on personal relationships'.

Impact on Career

Regardless of gender, around half of the participants had resigned from their executive positions as a direct impact of the demand and strain they experienced in their role, many of which related to poor culture and the often-toxic behaviour of more senior colleagues: *"I have had some really, really quite nasty [...] behaviour from my line managers and ultimately, [...] I mean CEOs, Executive Vice Presidents, it's meant that I have had to leave." (P8 M).* Some participants chose to leave due to disagreeing with strategic direction: *"So I took the chairman aside [...] I'm resigning, because I think you are doing the wrong thing." (P11 M).*

Others were forced to leave the organisations they worked for when they experienced a clash of values and differing opinions with more senior executives. Those in more senior roles to the executive participants, not wishing to change the trajectory they were on themselves, arranged for termination agreements to remove the executives from their positions:

"Could I have done the job he wanted me to do, no I couldn't, so I would have been working against [...] values all the time, [...] being consumed with stress all the way, but in the aftermath of that[...], the negotiation around the agreement and the way that I was treated by [company name] on exiting, was appalling." (P2 F).

Such agreements included specific terms that naturally led to isolating the individual from colleagues, taking away the ability for them to talk to anyone concerning the reasons for their departure. Any behaviour outside of the terms of the agreement meant the individual would not receive any financial recompense for termination notice, putting an additional level of strain with the executives being cut off from colleagues and their established support networks.

The opposite of this saw some executives staying in organisations and in what they described as stressful positions and toxic cultures to protect the staff that reported directly to them. This altruistic responsibility for others provided additional pressure and strain to the participants, adding a further negative impact on their personal physical and mental health. Conversely, this loyalty and sense of duty to protect employees from the negativity they were experiencing also held the executive back from their own career progression and had a resulting negative impact on health and wellbeing:

"Because I don't, […] ever want to walk out of a company and leave my staff to the vagaries of lunacy, because I have, and part of my problem in staying around is […] I have done it to my own detriment." (P9 M).

Impact on Personal Relationships

Over half of the participants described the direct impact of job strain as a deterioration in their personal relationships, with four executives stating it resulted in a full relationship breakdown and divorce: *"Yeah, I'm sure I was hugely distracted. You know I didn't have the capacity to sort of think about many things for home […], I was always thinking about this problem." (P7 M).* Some participants openly admitted they prioritised work, to the extent that they would take work calls in the middle of family meals and events, choosing to not be present at functions and not have family time. This impacted participants in different ways with some regretting the lack of family time and others accepting that as a sacrifice which was the nature of holding an executive role:

"One Saturday lunchtime, it was [name] dad's[…], seventieth birthday, […] and I said, […]I've got a board meeting that I have to dial into for an hour, just after we had finished starters, and I go and sit in a different part of the restaurant, headphones on, doing this board meeting. It's things like that, it became […] silly, but wasn't just me you know, there's a team of people in the same place." (P21 M).

5.6 Gender

5.6.1 Differences in Gender Experiences

From the previous sections, it is evident that both male and female executives experienced job strain through increased demand, a deterioration in levels of control, personal impact

to career and relationships and a damaging impact to their health and wellbeing. Notably, only the male participants were at the extreme end of both mental and physical health deterioration. The strain of dual and triple roles was evident for females, but not male participants. Whilst both genders utilised support from others in the practical resolution of problems to test their decision making and rectify and resolve problems, women actively sought out others that they trusted to talk through the issues they were facing, and importantly, how they felt about what was happening: *"So, talking it through with people is really a coping mechanism for me, people I trust."* (P2 F).

This level of emotional connection and support gained was only evident for the female executives. With the participants providing rich descriptions of the purpose and value of such interactions, descriptions that were only minimally described by the male participants: *"Emotional, just being able to have somebody to sit and talk things through with. I've got one particular friend who I run with so I kind of off load a bit then."* (P18F). Instead, men talked through their reasons or experience of stress with a close family member or trusted friend, but their descriptions did not entail using this level of support as a mechanism for fully expressing their feelings. This does give a possible indication that men would not actively seek emotional support to the extent where they would be expressing feelings within their friend network.

5.6.2 Experiences of Differences and Similarities

When asked to draw on their experiences of gender differences, female participants felt that men did not generally have the pressure of responsibilities outside of the workplace: *"Men have less pressure as they generally don't take responsibility for domestics and childcare […] It forces women to be more efficient."* (P3 F). With women taking more responsibility for others, both within and outside of the organisation, whilst they experienced the difficulty of balancing such things as childcare with a busy job, they perceived to become not only more efficient but better at boundaries:

"Women are better at boundaries … because of childcare or diligence around the job, and less about some of the play. But there's a sense of guilt… actually away from the kids. So, there's that layer of anxiety on top of the work anxiety… very rarely heard it from male colleagues." (P12 F).

Some male participants acknowledged the additional pressure that women were commonly exposed to, together with a sense of admiration for how females achieved the balance while still attaining high performance in the workplace:

"She's [boss] got two young sons and […] husband has got a very busy job […] very high achieving people, but you know […] she manages to do a phenomenal job and also manages to keep all that lot in line as well, it's brilliant." (P9 M).

Whilst the female participants acknowledged they would express feelings as a way of coping with job strain, one male participant outlined his experience of women openly sharing in the workplace, and by working for a female boss, he and others were now more comfortable talking about issues and problems, in a way that they would not have previously:

"I think it helps them, […] but it can also come across as being even more authentic and real, because they […] talk about things that are going on in their family, […] especially, bad or difficult things, (brief pause) […]. I have talked to [Boss] about this stuff a lot, and its actually helped me because I now talk about these things, which I never would have done before." (P19 M).

Both genders highlighted that men tended to control their behaviour more when there were women present in the workplace or in meetings, and that women were more considerate to the impact of decisions on others and how they might feel. Within the boundaries of the best person for the role, several male participants actively sought out females for positions within their own senior teams to harness these benefits, further highlighting the positive impact that diverse experiences can have on decision-making in executive roles: *"I always wanted to have as many women as I could in my team, because […] it brought a different dynamic […] and a more inclusive set of conversations." (P10 M).*

All participants unanimously stated that they felt any further differences in executives' performance and behaviours within the workplace were due to personality and not related specifically to gender. Many participants referred to the traditional male and female roles in work and home life, stereotypes and societal expectations. Some expressed their views

that the old traditional ways of women having the responsibility for the home and child / elder care, were changing, but thought there was still a long way to go.

The following chapter will discuss these findings in the context of the theoretical determinants of the extant literature and offer new perspectives to extend the current understanding of gender difference in psychological job strain and behavioural coping strategies at an executive level.

Chapter 6 Discussion

With the research objective of "Exploring gender differences of executives' experiences of psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies through Critical Incident Technique", the aim of this study was to contribute to the understanding of how UK executives' experience psychological job strain, the causes of strain, their behavioural coping strategies during times of peak demand compared to steady state, and the type of social support sought and received. Taking a longer-term view rather than the short-term approach of studies in the extant literature, provides insight into the wider implications of job strain for this under researched group and the resulting long-term effect on their health, wellbeing and personal interactions. A focus on gender differences brought similarities and marked differences to the fore, both in terms of actual and perceived experiences, and the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) allowed for personal reflections over the long-term for each of the participants.

This chapter seeks to contextualise the findings discussed in Chapter 5, in line with step six of Braun and Clarke's thematic review process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Studies with executive level managers are extremely limited, only one supervisor and management study from 1986 was evident in the UK within this specific field of enquiry, and none, related to the longer-term impact of the pressure of holding an executive role.

6.1 Findings in Relation to Previous Theory and Research

6.1.1 The JDCS Model and Executives

With the lack of executive studies to date and specifically within the UK, one of the key findings from this study was all participants outlined that whilst the workload, job demand and pressure was consistently high, they did not consider that to be stress but just a natural part of holding a senior position. How these day-to-day experiences were described can be linked to the concept of eustress with individuals appraising the demands as a positive response to occupational stressors. As outlined in Chapter 2, there can be benefits to individuals and the organisation when eustress and strategies for coping are positive and proactive as it can lead to the buffering of strain and enhanced performance (Venkataraman, 2024; Hargrove et al., 2013; Campbell Quick et al., 2009; Perrewe and McAllister, 2024; Nelson and Simmons, 2003; Simmons et al., 2024; Spector, 2015; Johnson and Hall, 1988; Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Edwards and

Cooper, 1988; Le Fevre et al., 2006; Le Fevre et al., 2003). Notably, statements of the job not being stressful, or it just being an accepted part of the role, were commonly made at the beginning of participant interviews. Later, it became apparent through the descriptions that the executives did in fact experience stress, and commonly an imbalance between job demands and control.

From all participant descriptions it was evident that as the strain continued and positive behavioural coping strategies turned into maladaptive patterns, any form of eustress may turn to distress and lead to an increase in personal strain and stress (Hunter and Chaskalson, 2013; Bienertova-Vasku et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2021). As many participants described peaks of strain which progressed over extended periods of time, the negative impact on their personal relationships, career and health and wellbeing was shown to have detrimental effects in the long term, which will be discussed more fully in the following sections.

6.1.2 Causes of Strain, Job Demand and Control

6.1.2.1 Within the Workplace

Linked to responsibilities, the leadership role and culture identified in Chapter 2, specific causes of strain for the executives not found in the extant literature, emanated from external bodies, a change in business direction, and responsibility for strategy and business performance. In support of previous research with lower-level employees and managers (Davidson and Cooper, 1986; Christie and Shultz, 1998; Gaan, 2008; Narayanan et al., 1999; Beehr et al., 2003), the executives also experienced causes of strain due to an increase in demand related to workload, a poor organisational culture, negative communication and behaviour, and the actions or demands of more senior colleagues. A key difference for these high-ranking employees however, identified additional strain in these areas relating to the responsibility for other employees. For many of the participants of both genders, their personal negative experiences led to them trying to protect others within the business from any resulting impact. Whilst some of the male participants outlined actions they took in regard of others, the welfare and consideration of employees was intrinsic in the examples provided by the female participants, a nurturing behavioural trait supported by male and female participants when describing gender differences.

The use of the critical incident technique highlighted a clear difference between participants' peak experiences and the day-to-day operations. This builds upon findings of previous studies that highlighted a simultaneous increase in demand and control provides a buffering effect to strain (Johnson and Hall, 1988; Häusser et al., 2010; Van der Doef and Maes, 1999), but not a reverse buffering (Brough et al., 2009; Johnson and Hall, 1988). The buffering effect could be experienced by executives during normal day-to-day pressure when they were able to maintain a 'steady-state' of eustress, and simultaneous retention of personal control over the demands of the role (Simmons et al., 2024; Johnson and Hall, 1988; Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Le Fevre et al., 2006). It was noted however, that during times of peak demands and incidents that emanated from sources of more perceived power, such as senior colleagues, all participants identified a 'lack of control' as the biggest factor influencing job strain. This was found to negate the buffering effect to the strain and directly supports the strain hypothesis of the JDC / JDCS models with an increase in demand and the lowering of control causing the most strain.

Participants described that relief from job strain was usually achieved after a period of time, with the duration between peak event and relief dependant on the seriousness of the significant event and the availability of viable options and resources to resolve the issues. With no gender differences apparent, the rich descriptions provided by executive participants showed personal control as a key driver for implementing both positive and maladaptive coping strategies, which will be discussed further in sections 6.1.5 and 6.1.6.

6.1.2.2 External to the Workplace

Highlighting a gender difference, for many of the female participants causes of strain related to balancing their time with the responsibility for childcare and elderly relatives on top of the demands of the job (Geller et al., 2015), a strain that was amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic (FTSE Women Leaders, 2022). Supporting the findings of previous research, all participants identified this when describing gender differences. (Rao et al., 2003; Sackey and Sanda, 2011; McDonald and Korabik, 1991; Iwasaki et al., 2005; Gadzella et al., 1990). Notably this level of responsibility for others was not apparent for the male participants, with several of them commenting that their female wives or partners were the care givers in order for them to maintain a high-level job. Showing a link to societal stereotypes, some participants highlighted 'role reversal' with

male partners undertaking the caring and household responsibilities for women to hold an executive position. Many participants outlined in their experience women executives sought to counterbalance the strain of dual and triple roles by engaging nannies and housekeepers to pursue a high-level career, a finding that was supported with one female participant exemplifying this as her coping strategy.

With these responsibilities outside of the workplace, the additional pressure on time needs to be viewed from a broader perspective. Several female participants highlighted dual and triple roles as creating personal strain or what they had witnessed in other women. With extra hours of work being fitted in around family duties, the interruption of flow resulted in a range of emotional responses, such as guilt at lack of time with their children and worry at being out of the workplace. This does call into question how any individual manages to cope with balancing these responsibilities with increased hours of work during times of peak strain.

6.1.3 The JDCS Model and Social Support

In the JDCS model, social support has been shown to have different effects, either by alleviating stress directly or acting as a buffer in the interaction with occupational stressors (Cooper et al., 2001; Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003; Johnson and Hall, 1988; Brough et al., 2009; Dewe et al., 2010; Gadinger et al., 2010; Jonsdottir et al., 2020). This study supports that high demand, low control and low social support were the most harmful to participant wellbeing (Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Häusser et al., 2010; Johnson and Hall, 1988; Del Pozo-Antúnez et al., 2018; Mattos et al., 2017; Van der Doef and Maes, 1999; van der Doef et al., 2000; Van der Doef and Maes, 1998). Further, this study found that both male and female executives sought some form of social support as a general strategy for the daily high pressures of their roles. This supports previous research that suggests increased control buffers high demands most effectively under conditions of high social support (Johnson and Hall, 1988; Sundin et al., 2006; Mattos et al., 2017). The experiences expressed by participants demonstrated that even some support during times of increased demand and lower control helped the executives regain a better sense of perspective and coping. During peak experiences, however, practical support within the workplace was most commonly utilised by participants to deal with the peaks of strain, with the level of informational, and emotional support being diminished due to the increased working time taken to cope with the demand. The use of

social support, was found to reduce the impact of strain, but it did not negate it, as job strain only reduced when the executives regained a level of personal control, and when action was being taken to bring the demands back into a day-to-day manageable level.

The effects of social support on an individual's level of stress and wellbeing therefore appear dependent on perceived availability and the appropriateness of the support provision. The type of support desired and the actual utilisation of the support are therefore key factors for consideration (Brough et al., 2009; Dewe et al., 2010).

6.1.4 The JDC Model, Support and Coping

To date, the extant literature provides limited clarity on the type of support provided and by whom, (as outlined in section 3.5.2). This study therefore sought to expand the original JDCS model and extend previous research with support as a coping mechanism, ascertaining from whom the support was obtained and whether that was internal or external to the workplace. In considering the type of support sought, the three aspects proposed by Dewe, O'Driscoll and Cooper (2010) were identified; namely *practical* help with a problem that the individual cannot resolve by themselves; *informational* support or advice to reduce ambiguity or uncertainty for an individual, and *emotional* support, linked to a range of emotional needs.

6.1.4.1 Practical Support and Coping

Positive coping strategies were commonly found to underpin the steady state day-to-day activities of both the male and female executives in this study, with them taking an active, problem-solving approach to ameliorate stressors and enabling a state of eustress (Salovey et al., 2000; Simmons et al., 2024; Kupriyanov and Zhdanov, 2014; McGonigal, 2015). These coping strategies and approaches to problem solving and taking action have been shown to moderate the relationship between job control and demand and lead to positive health and wellbeing outcomes, (Folkman and Lazarus, 1990; Dewe et al., 2010; Semmer and Meier, 2015; de Rijk et al., 1998; Mullen et al., 2023).

Highlighting the utility of both individualistic and communal approaches to problem solving, both genders used the support of others and internal resources to generate ideas for resolving the presenting problems and to delegate tasks and workload to. The level

and status of the executive role meant the participants had access to support, such as appropriately skilled employees, and both genders galvanised these resources to resolve difficulties. This appeared to relieve some of the demand on participants but simultaneously created a different type of strain for some executives in their need to ensure that others were fulfilling their extended duties. In delegating their excess of workload, it was evident that the peak demands for the executives created a cascade of job strain for others within the organisation, which supports research in the extant literature with those on lower employee grades experiencing strain due to the actions or lack of support from their managers (Beehr et al., 2003; Davidson and Cooper, 1986; Gadzella et al., 1990). Additionally for many participants, delegating job tasks accentuated another level of pressure and created a conflict between the executives concern for their colleague's wellbeing versus ensuring organisational performance and outputs were maintained. So, whilst the workload was shared, it created a different type of strain.

6.1.4.2 Informational Support and Coping

As a coping strategy for general discussions or for testing thinking and decision making, some of participants of both genders highlighted seeking informational support from a limited number of trusted internal colleagues. Contrary to this and supporting and extending Lindorff's research with managers (2005), both genders appeared more likely to draw upon their network for informational support from outside of the workplace. This included trusted sources, such as friends and ex-colleagues, family members and professional coaches and mentors of their own choosing. Within the confines of the gender differences already highlighted in Chapter 5, this external support provided executives with some guidance on the practicalities of resolving the presenting issues.

6.1.4.3 Emotional Support and Coping

With a range of needs to be met, this study found general emotional support provided benefits to both the female and male executives benefitting their overall wellbeing through a connection to friends and family outside of the workplace through such things as leisure and social activities. Building on the buffering hypothesis and extending the original JDCS model from an alternative perspective of outside the workplace, general emotional support was found in this study to act as a moderator between participants

stressful experiences and health and wellbeing by enabling valuable time away from the pressures of the job (Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003; Cohen and Wills, 1985; Johnson and Hall, 1988; Spector, 2015; Gadinger et al., 2010; Jonsdottir et al., 2020).

In support of previous research and considering the executives use of emotional support from a different perspective, this study found women, but not men, were still able to provide emotional support to others whilst also dealing with their own stresses (Brummelhuis and Greenhaus, 2019; Brummelhuis and Greenhaus, 2018; Chariatte et al., 2023). Whilst some of the female participants gained support from their partners, all female executives stated that they would seek support from their trusted network and friendship groups as part of their coping strategies. Highlighting a key gender difference, this finding adds to the many previous studies with lower-level staff and managers, (González-Morales et al., 2006; Hurst and Hurst, 1997; Miller et al., 2000; Muhonen and Torkelson, 2003; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Verhoeven et al., 2003; Bellman et al., 2003; Gadinger et al., 2010), with the female executives actively seeking out others for emotional support, both within and mostly outside of the workplace, gaining positive effects to their psychological wellbeing. In addition to seeking this support for expressing their feelings and emotional release, in describing their wider network of support it was noticeable that the female participants incorporated their leisure activities and exercise routines with talking through issues and problems in both steady state and times of peak strain. With women still the minority gender in executive positions, this connection may be considered a way of coping with token status isolation and working with a dominance of male colleagues and potentially in a patriarchal, masculine culture.

It was evident from the descriptions offered by the male participants that they did not perceive the occasional general 'chat' with friends and ex-colleagues, as emotional support, which may be linked to societal gender conditioning outlined in section 2.7. Providing a valuable insight into executive coping and support, the men in this study did not seek the same level of emotional support as women. For the male executives, emotional support relating to feelings was most commonly sought from their spouse, however, during peak strain and with more time spent working, several of the male participants stated that this was either not possible due to lack of time or that they withdrew further into themselves and suppressed their feelings. In addition, those male participants who were not in relationships, highlighted that they did not have an emotional

outlet for the strain they were experiencing, a finding that directly supports previous research that active, isolated workers experience the highest levels of strain (Johnson and Hall, 1988). Linking to the utilisation of available support (Dewe et al., 2010), this level of self-induced social isolation of male executives under peak strain must be highlighted as cause for concern, particularly in light of the male participants who expressed the greatest impact on their psychological health, such as mental breakdown, suicidal thoughts and referral to a psychiatric unit, which was not evident for the female executives.

Contrary to the descriptions by male participants, women executives described talking about how they felt within the workplace, with many actively encouraging their colleagues to do the same. Male participants that described working for a female boss, outlined the benefits that they attained from these open discussions. In describing themselves and others being more able to participate in conversations and express emotions as time went on, supports the importance of an androgenous agentic and communal leadership style with authentic emotional expression in the building of a culture of wellbeing and performance in the workplace (Rosette and Tost, 2010; Dunlop and Scheepers, 2023; Amaro and Scheepers, 2023; Fürstenberg et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2019; Iszatt-White et al., 2018; Eagly et al., 2016; Gartzia et al., 2018; Blake-Beard et al., 2020). Male participants that worked for male bosses did not describe these experiences per sae but did outline the benefits they found in having female executives as part of the senior team, additionally adding that men were more mindful of their behaviour and communications with women present. Adding to previous research on the benefits of diverse management teams and Boards for innovation, performance and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Di Pietro, 2015; Salomon and Schork, 2003; Slater et al., 2008; Beji et al., 2021; Griffin et al., 2021), several male participants outlined how they valued female executives bringing a different perspective and leadership approach to the table.

6.1.5 Control, Positive Coping, Health and Wellbeing

Extending previous research in a variety of organisational settings in how managers and junior staff adopted positive coping strategies (Kirkcaldy and Furnham, 1999; Rathod et al., 2000; Hurst and Hurst, 1997; Narayanan et al., 1999; Torkelson et al., 2007), when the executives in this study experienced a sense of personal control, participants described how they were able to maintain positive coping strategies. In addition to galvanising

support inside and outside of the workplace to resolve issues and reduce strain (section 6.1.4), positive coping strategies linked to their health and wellbeing centred around exercise, healthy eating and a balance of time for relaxation, hobbies, and connection with friends and family.

With previous research highlighting that women have different coping strategies for relaxation (Emmett et al., 2019), using arts and culture (Iwasaki et al., 2005), taking time for themselves (Gadzella et al., 1991), and leisure activities (Rathod et al., 2000), this study found both male and female executives utilised similar such strategies (Maki et al., 2005; Iwasaki et al., 2005; Christie and Shultz, 1998). Only the women executives however, highlighted the importance of setting personal boundaries relating to health and wellbeing, supporting Love et al's, study (2011). Verbalising how they made conscious choices to achieve a better work-life balance, was a finding not apparent from the descriptions provided by the male participants. It is possible this may be a coping strategy related to the need for women to balance dual and triple roles with responsibilities for others outside of the workplace.

Different motivations were identified in the approach to positive coping, as the female executives acknowledged they experienced greater health and wellbeing benefits, so paid more conscious attention to their wellbeing through healthy eating and moderating such things as alcohol. Several participants of both genders recognised that without exercise their day-to-day behaviour and interactions deteriorated. Considering these aspects, it may be possible that the male participants also made conscious decisions to gain benefits to their wellbeing through such things as work-life balance and dietary choices without the emphasis of such in their interviews. As outlined in section 2.7, this could be linked to social stereotypes and expectations where men are discouraged from verbalising aspects linked to emotions and feelings (Cortis et al., 2022; Hess et al., 2000; Kray et al., 2017; McAllister et al., 2019).

During steady state and peaks of strain both genders used 'self-talk' as a way of resolving work issues and importantly, as has been shown in previous research, as a mechanism for positively maintaining a balance to their mental health (Jones et al., 2024; Rogelberg et al., 2013; Bellomo et al., 2020; Tod et al., 2011; Kross et al., 2014; Hardy, 2006). With this study identifying the difficulties some participants found in continuing with positive

self-talk, the importance of positive language must be emphasised, as negative self-talk has been shown to have detrimental effects on cognitive performance and mental health (Kim et al., 2021; Kross et al., 2014; Hardy, 2006).

Previous research relating to absenteeism and avoidance as maladaptive coping strategies (Christie and Shultz, 1998; Gardner and Fletcher, 2009; Hancovska, 2014), were not evident in this study. However, with the executives exercising positive coping strategies of prioritising effectively and delegating the less important tasks to others, some participants did outline that selected duties were not undertaken. Describing these decisions as conscious choice in prioritisation due to lack of time, this may not be avoidance per sae, but it does demonstrate an overload on the executive's working day, relating to an imbalance between demand and control.

6.1.6 Loss of Control, Working Hours and Maladaptive Coping

With peaks of strain adding more pressure, loss of control was key to the tipping point of eustress turning to distress and stress, which led to maladaptive coping strategies and a negative impact on the executives mental and ultimately, physical wellbeing (O'Connor et al., 2021; Li et al., 2016; Bienertova-Vasku et al., 2020; Hunter and Chaskalson, 2013).

Without exception, the main coping strategy for the increase in demand, lack of control and to deal with significant situations and events, was for the executives to increase their working hours. Notably whilst employees can opt out of the UK working time regulations (UK Government, 1998), half of the participants worked in excess of the recommended maximum 48-hour work week during steady state, with those hours drastically increasing in times of peak strain. In an attempt to regain control of the presenting problems, the increase in hours as a primary coping strategy led to a natural reduction of time available for positive coping strategies and life affirming activities outside of the workplace. The increase in strain and subsequent hours working led to a severe negative impact on sleep for the participants, supporting one of the extant studies with no gender difference (Maki et al., 2005). Exploring the executives' peak strain experiences further, a key factor from this study found that all positive coping strategies were severely restricted or even terminated by the executives, resulting in a deterioration to their normal level of wellbeing and behaviour. With previous research identifying conflicting results for gender differences in the forms of negative coping behaviour, (Maki et al., 2005; Gadzella et al.,

1991; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Torkelson et al., 2007; Hancovska, 2014), this study identified that both male and female executives utilised the same forms of maladaptive coping, namely poor food choices, missing several meals, drinking too much alcohol and coffee and the negation of exercise, supporting a previous study that found those with high decision latitude and demands consume the most alcohol (Kuper and Marmot, 2003). The potential cyclic nature of these inter-connected experiences and choices with greater sleep deprivation, increased levels of tiredness, more stimulants to keep going and other stimulants to switch off from the strain, highlights a worrying finding.

With the maladaptive strategies leading to deterioration in behaviour, the female participants openly outlined their embarrassment in loss of emotional control such as crying with frustration in front of colleagues. Relating to behavioural changes, male participants perceived women to be less at risk of the extreme emotional reactions from colleagues, which they themselves had experienced, including such things as being physically threatened. Both genders put emotional reactions down to personality and not simply to be a point on gender, however there were differences in how men and women described how each gender dealt with increased strain on an emotional level. Some male participants described women as emotionally upset and men as angry. With both being an emotional response, it is interesting to note that the female executives, but not the male, described 'anger' as an emotional reaction in the same way as 'upset'. It can be suggested that these descriptions be directly related to the stereotypes and societal 'norms' outlined in Chapter 2, which gives rise to the question of ingrained expectations and potential societal unconscious bias that individuals apply to their day-to-day experiences.

Research shows excessive working hours, prolonged strain, sleep deprivation, poor food and drink choices and limited exercise, have a negative impact on the physical and psychological state of individuals in the short and long-term (Giga, 2018; Harvey et al., 2018; Barber and Budnick, 2024; Freeman et al., 2020; Bannai and Tamakoshi, 2014; Killgore, 2010; WHO, 2024; Kuper and Marmot, 2003). The adverse effects on personal happiness, interpersonal relationships, workplace conflict, communication, decision making and emotional regulation as well as personal health and wellbeing, are well documented (Harrison and Horne, 2000; Schnyer et al., 2009; WHO, 2024), leading to

such things as cardiovascular disease (Kivimäki et al., 2015), stroke (Janlert, 2015), burnout (Lin et al., 2021), psychiatric disorders, neurodegenerative disorders and mental health disorders (Freeman et al., 2020; Bannai and Tamakoshi, 2014; Anderson and Bradley, 2013). In support of this and adding to research in the extant literature with lower-level employees and managers (Rathod et al., 2000; Hurst and Hurst, 1997; Torkelson and Muhonen, 2004; Torkelson et al., 2007), this study found that the executives maladaptive coping behaviours resulted in poorer communication, irritability and overreaction, anger, venting of emotions, loss of control, inability to make decisions, crying, and being short with their spouse and family members.

Participants identified some short bursts of peak demand over several weeks, but most of the examples identified prolonged bouts of peak strain and increased demand over many months, and for some in excess of a year, with more hours spent working in an attempt to cope and regain control. The longer the period of peak strain, the further deterioration in the executives' coping behaviour and the harder it became to return to positive strategies. Those executives enduring prolonged peak experiences, acknowledged that their maladaptive coping strategies spiralled into long-term habits, survival strategies, excessive behaviours and for some – dependency and addictions, even when the peak strain had receded.

It can be considered that with the extensive responsibilities of executives, it may be likely that more than one significant event would occur simultaneously. Research shows prolonged strain, or occurrences of peak strain experienced in quick succession, can lead to lack of recovery time from the strain (Fritz, 2024; Chawla et al., 2020). In such situations an individual's ability to regain an emotional and physical steady state is limited, which can lead to an ongoing degradation of wellbeing leaving an individual less able to deal with peaks of strain over the longer term (Fritz, 2024; Dishon-Berkovits et al., 2024; Sonnentag, 2018). As outlined in Chapter 2, a deterioration in a leaders psychological and physical state affects effort and performance and potentially has a spiralling negative effect on others within and outside of the workplace without the executives necessarily being consciously aware of the adverse impact (Harms et al., 2017; Skakon et al., 2010; Montano et al., 2017; Dishon-Berkovits et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2016; Simons and Peterson, 2000; WHO, 2024).

6.1.7 Culture, Leadership Style and Bullying

With this study providing unique insights into the experiences of UK executives, the focus on organisational culture, leadership style, bullying and communications came to the fore. Whilst there were positive experiences, the nature of many of the examples provided gives a depth of understanding that goes beyond the increase in demand and reduction or loss of control that executives often cope with. Previous research revealed those on lower grades experience more strain relating to lack of management support and poor communications (Beehr et al., 2003), however, with this study bridging the gap to a senior level, it is evidenced that those in an executive position, also experience the negative impact of poor behaviours within the workplace. In stark contrast to positive experiences, participants' descriptions of negative behaviours include being pinned against a wall and physically and verbally threatened, being isolated or screamed at by more senior colleagues, gives a depth of insight into the lives of senior executives that is not freely or indeed openly witnessed or discussed. The outcome of such negative behaviours relates directly to the executives' experiences of strain and were, to varying degrees, identified by the executives as occurrences relating to steady state as well as peaks of demand. As identified in Chapter 2, this further highlights the importance of culture and wellbeing at all levels within an organisation and the destructive and dysfunctional nature of bullying and poor communications (Montano et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2015; WHO, 2019; WHO, 2024). Many participants highlighted these negative experiences as something that drove them forward to ensure positive leadership attributes and personal values in order to not have a damaging effect on others. Whilst some of the executives stated that they did not consider steady state to be stressful and it just being an accepted expectation of holding a senior role, the negative reflections of their experiences does highlight the flip side of eustress and how quickly experiences can deteriorate to have a detrimental effect (O'Connor et al., 2021; Simmons et al., 2024).

6.1.8 Psychological Safety and Trust

In support of findings in the extant literature for lower-level employees, (Bergman and Hallberg, 1997), lack of trust in colleagues was highlighted for both genders. Additionally, this study identified a common lack of trust in the formal support offered to the executives from within the organisation, such as through Employee Assistance Programmes or coaching support organised by the business. With lack of trust having detrimental consequences for leadership and performance (Van der Berg and Martins,

2013; Colquitt et al., 2012; Simons and Peterson, 2000; Iqbal et al., 2019), one possible explanation relating to lack of trust and the negative effects on physical and mental health, can be linked to polyvagal theory where the autonomic nervous system responds to perceived safety, danger and threat, (Porges, 2011; Porges, 2017; Manzotti et al., 2024), creating an increase in the stress response and a negative impact on sleep. The resulting hormonal changes from this response, such as the increase in cortisol, lowering of testosterone and the blocking of the 'trust' hormone oxytocin (Zak, 2017b), can impact on the multi-dimensional human psychological and neuroendocrine processes (Poulin et al., 2012; Landsbergis et al., 2024). With low oxytocin levels having been shown to negatively impact on communication and connection with others, further research shows a resulting effect on the lowering of the efficiency of the immune system, impacting on general health (Zak, 2017a; Zak, 2017b).

With feeling safe being a fundamental human emotional need (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2004), trust and psychological safety, defined as "feeling able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career" (Kahn, 1990 P. 708), are fundamental for shaping whether individuals speak up without fear of retribution, where they can express ideas, concerns, ask questions and admit to mistakes (Edmondson et al., 2007; Edmondson and Lei, 2014). Conversely, research shows that fear of punishment leads to negative consequences, the hiding of mistakes or withholding of the truth (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Saeed et al., 2022). A negative culture, punishment, bullying and aggressive behaviour not only creates fear, but can have a detrimental effect on the mental health and health and wellbeing of individuals, resulting in lost productivity and turnover for organisations (Ariza-Montes et al., 2014; Wiedmer, 2011; Bugdol and Puciato, 2023; Wolor et al., 2022; Montano et al., 2017; WHO, 2024). Whilst this finding may not be transferable to all executives and organisations, it was an issue raised by several participants and emphasises the importance of building trust and psychologically safe working environments in buffering executives' and employees' strain experiences.

6.1.9 Personal Impact

In considering job strain, increase in hours of work, less sleep and poorer health and wellbeing choices, the implications on the executives had wide ranging negative life effects. Contrary to previous research that found women perceived higher levels of work

stressors and a more negative impact to health than men (Gadinger et al., 2008; Gadinger et al., 2009; Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Gadzella et al., 1991), this executive study found that both genders experienced a negative impact on their mental and physical health. A sustained high level of cognitive arousal, and the effects of strain and stress on physical and mental health are well documented (O'Connor et al., 2021; Fritz, 2024; Landsbergis et al., 2024). Whilst it is evident that the responsibilities of holding a high-level executive role will never be completely free from strain and stressful experiences, the duration and extent of the occurrences relayed by the executives, together with the personal reflections and life impact, have been shown to have long-term damaging implications.

As a result of the strain experiences, all participants experienced a general deterioration in their personal wellbeing with many of the male and female participants outlining their need for medication for mental health issues. With £217.5 million spent on medication to treat depression and anxiety in England alone, (Braithwaite, 2024), and with mental ill-health being the single largest cause of disability in the UK with direct costs of services, lost productivity and reduced quality of life estimated to cost £117.9 billion each year (NHS England, 2022), the level of pressure on individuals is brought to the fore. Only the male participants were at the extreme end of the spectrum experiencing mental breakdown and burnout. The seriousness of deterioration in mental health being emphasised by two of the participants stating they were suicidal. As outlined in Chapter 2, the mental health crisis in the UK is further highlighted with one in four people in England experiencing a mental health problem in 2016, with men being twice as likely to have no one to go to for emotional support (MINDUK, 2016). With the next data set due out in 2025, a clearer picture of full mental health issues is not currently available, however it must be highlighted that in England and Wales in 2022, there was an average of 15 suicides a day, equating to 5,642 people in the year, with three quarters being men (MINDUK, 2024; Office for National Statistics, 2023). In 2024, 1 in 7 UK adults said their mental health was bad or the worst it had ever been, accounting for 18.5% of women compared to 12.5% of men (Braithwaite, 2024). With these statistics, the seriousness of isolation and lack of emotional support in times of psychological strain is brought into sharp focus, particularly with the level of strain and breakdown in personal relationships that the participants outlined in this study.

A finding of note relating to gender difference in health and wellbeing, is that only the male participants outlined severe physical health issues such as heart problems, cancer and diabetes which they directly attributed to job strain and stress. Whilst it is possible that all nine female participants elected to not outline such serious health issues, in light of the honesty and openness throughout the interviews, it raises doubt that all nine would choose to withhold such information, placing the spotlight on a considerable difference with their male counterparts.

6.2 Societal Expectations and Norms

Whilst women and minorities have increased in numbers within the workplace (Blau and Kahn, 2017; Goldin, 2006; Hampton and Alexander, 2016; FTSE Women Leaders, 2024; Parker, 2016; Tyler, 2024), endogenous social norms still see women undertaking the biggest role in childcare and part-time working in order to balance those needs (Barigozzi et al., 2018). 'Child penalty' may not only account for lack of career progression but be an additional strain for women at all levels within organisations. The journey to an executive role for women can be seen to be a more difficult career path to tread than their male colleagues. Navigating a way through a successful career whilst dealing with gender bias, lack of promotion due to the potential of pregnancy or care responsibilities, 'downgrading' their careers after childbirth through opting out of employment or part-time working, are just some of the numerous challenges for women as they balance dual and triple roles (Geller et al., 2015; Arnold et al., 1998; Malik, 2024). Women have still been found to suffer larger pay penalties than men with research estimating a reduction in the mother's earnings of 20% to 25% in heterosexual or adopting couples compared to 10% in same sex female couples as earnings decrease for both mothers (Andresen and Nix, 2022). This drop in earnings decreases over time resulting in the child penalty no longer being statistically relevant five years after birth for same-sex couples, but largely persisting for at least five years after birth in heterosexual and adopting couples, indicating a different approach to child-rearing. (Andresen and Nix, 2022). Additionally, with only 13% of women, compared to 26% of men, being promoted or moved to a better job within five years of parenthood, the challenges faced can be complex against a backdrop of intersectionality and societal bias (Harkness et al., 2019; Costa Dias et al., 2018; Waldfogel, 1998; Baska, 2019).

As highlighted in Chapter 2 and the extant literature in Chapter 3, societal expectations and norms link the masculine with instrumentality, competence, assertiveness and independence, and the feminine type with warmth, nurturance, and compassion (Beehr et al., 2003; Gadinger et al., 2008; González-Morales et al., 2006; Sackey and Sanda, 2011; Siu et al., 1999). These stereotypical views within the workplace are supported by further research that identifies men are more likely to view men as managers but women see men and women (Berkery et al., 2013). Additionally male candidates for leadership roles have been found to be valued for their *perceived potential* compared to female candidates who are valued on *past performance* (Player et al., 2019). The bias against women has been thought to stem from the discrepancy between the traditional female gender stereotypes and the characteristics of a leader (Elsesser, 2015; Eagly and Karau, 2002). Women have been evaluated less favourably and had to deal with the burden of *proving* their leadership competence rather than being *trusted* on their potential like men (Eagly and Sczesny, 2019; Elsesser, 2015). Underpinning changes to these societal traditions, studies have found communal attributes are becoming more desirable in leaders, with organisations needing those who can encourage, nurture and support their subordinates rather than the traditional authority (Elsesser, 2015; Dunlop and Scheepers, 2023), which further supports the need for a leadership style that embraces both communal and agentic traits (Eagly et al., 2016; Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Gartzia et al., 2018).

6.3 Concluding Remarks

From the experiences of the executives in this study, it can be suggested that gender stereotyping and organisations built on patriarchal value systems and preserving the status quo are not providing the foundation for any gender to truly flourish or for men to fully express nurturing and communal qualities within their leadership behaviours. Taking a wider perspective with the complexities of intersectionality and the viewpoint that individuals are respected on the basis of the identity that they adopt, it might be entirely possible that any individual can not only adopt the traditionally assigned male traits but to also merge those with communal traits that society naturally attributes to females. The acceptance in society and organisations of a unified, balanced human being and androgynous leadership style, where both masculine and feminine traits are simultaneously embraced, is a foundation that will enable all levels of employees and businesses to thrive.

If the UK is to continue to meet its diversity targets (FTSE Women Leaders, 2024; Tyler, 2024; FTSE Women Leaders, 2025; Tyler, 2025), an environment of psychological safety and trust is needed to underpin decision making and more diverse perspectives being heard and considered without fear of failure (Newman et al., 2017). How executives cope with job strain therefore appears fundamental to achieving a high performing organisation with an authentic culture that inspires innovation and creativity, whilst simultaneously nurturing the health and wellbeing of employees (Senge, 1990; Prasad and Junni, 2016; Arnold and Connelly, 2013; Harms et al., 2017; Iszatt-White et al., 2018; Lopes Henriques et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2023).

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the study's contribution to executives' experience of psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies. In addition to contribution to knowledge, contextual implications and the strengths and limitations of the study are outlined together with suggestions for future research on an academic, organisation practice and policy level.

7.1 Contribution to knowledge

This study is the first of its kind on UK executives which aimed to develop an understanding of gender difference in the experience of psychological job strain, the causes of strain, behavioural coping strategies and the type of social support sought and received. Taking a longer-term view rather than the short-term approach of studies in the extant literature, through the exploration of their lived experiences, this study provides a unique insight into the wider implications of job strain and the resulting implications on the health, wellbeing and personal interactions for this under researched executive group. Making a significant contribution on three levels, the following sections provide an outline on a theoretical, methodological and empirical level.

7.1.1 Theoretical

The lack of consistent definition and application of the Job, Demand, Control (JDC) and Job Demand Control Support (JDCS) models (Karasek, 1979; Johnson and Hall, 1988), in the extant literature, led to a limitation in the review of the previous studies.

In order to bring the theoretical underpinnings of the models into current application, this study detailed clear definitions on psychological job strain and coping in relation to job demands, control and support. With the JDCS model created for analysis of support within the workplace, this study provides a contribution to knowledge by expanding previous research on two levels. Firstly, by taking a more detailed consideration of the type of support that executives sought and utilised, three levels were considered, namely practical, informational and emotional. Secondly, this study expanded the JDCS model with these three levels by additionally considering the support provision both within and outside of the workplace. In analysing executive's experiences in this multifaceted way, it was evident that internal support was utilised for practical resolution of issues, with the

majority of informational support being sought outside of the workplace to test things such as decision making. Providing a unique perspective on the provision of emotional support, it was apparent that this was mostly gained outside of the workplace. Highlighting the importance of accessibility to trusted sources for emotional balance, it was evident that without a spouse or established network, the negative impact of job strain on an individual's health and wellbeing is compounded. This further highlights the spiralling effect that job strain can have on an individual and the cross over from an individual's work to their personal life. This study therefore extends the original JDCS model to consider the provision of support outside of the workplace and the impact of the complex interactions of work- life stress.

7.1.2 Methodological

Within a social constructivist framework, the use of the Critical Incident Technique in this qualitative study has facilitated insights into the lived experiences of executives that remain largely inaccessible through the positivist and quantitative approach that dominates this field of research. As the 'here and now' cross-sectional nature of quantitative studies typically relies on predefined categories and fixed-response options, the subtle nuances, personal context and complex relational dynamics that are critical to understanding the phenomena of lived experiences are often overlooked.

In taking a longer-term perspective, the data extracted from this study gives an understanding of the multifaceted realities between the environmental, interpersonal and emotional dynamics that executives have to navigate on a daily basis. By identifying experiences in steady state and peaks of strain with both positive and negative outcomes, the longer-term view of this study therefore provides unique insight and broader consideration of the impact of job strain. This captures not only the impact on mental and physical wellbeing in the short and long-term but also the overall consequences on the professional and personal lives of the executives and the resulting ripple effect on those closest to them. This study thereby offers a depth of insight unattainable through conventional quantitative methods and extends the understanding of psychological job strain and behavioural coping strategies for this under researched group.

7.1.3 Empirical

In addition to the methodological and theoretical contributions, this study brought a rare insight into the lived experiences of UK executives. Contrary to previous research, both genders adopted the same positive and maladaptive coping strategies in an attempt to bring the job strain and demand back into a level of control. Without exception an increase in working hours has been seen to lead to the tipping point from eustress to stress and a cascade of maladaptive coping strategies causing a deteriorating effect on health and wellbeing.

Something that could not be captured through quantitative analysis, it is important to emphasise the energy and emotion that was expressed by the participants when outlining the events that underpinned their experiences of job strain. With this study providing unique insight into the experiences of executives, it was evident that many of the participants described extremely negative examples of bullying, being verbally and physically threatened and being placed under extreme pressure to perform to unrealistic targets and other people's expectations. With a lack of trust and psychological safety, the continuation of the strain described between peak and day to day experiences, has seen the impact on the individuals mental and physical wellbeing being evidenced to varying degrees. The downward spiral and cyclic nature of maladaptive strategies with increased working hours whilst simultaneously trying to cope, further amplifies the link to negative changes, not just in terms of communications, behaviour, mental and physical wellbeing in the short-term but also with long-term implications. The spill over from job strain to the negative impact outside of the workplace on personal relationships and families, highlights the compounding pressure on the individual. Whilst not an expressed aim of this research, the fact that these experiences have emerged as an outcome goes some way to highlight the damage to psychological safety that a poor culture can have at all levels within an organisation. In addition to the difficulties in regaining balance and control within the job, the negative external effect highlights the severe nature of some of the outcomes identified by participants which draws a sharp focus on the need for organisations to seriously consider the pressure that is placed, not only on their most senior executives, but the cascade effect on all levels of employees.

In addition to the similarities, this study also provides evidence of gender difference on three levels. Firstly, in support of and extending previous research, female executives appeared to make greater use of their support network, not only in seeking practical and informational support, but importantly to rebalance their emotional responses through the expression of feelings. Through this expression, women were also found to encourage their male counterparts to talk more freely, potentially creating a greater level of trust and support in the workplace. Requiring further research into this specific field of enquiry, this in turn could lead to a faster journey through the stress response and hormonal reset relating to trust and therefore have wider implications for a healthier physical and mental state. Whilst it may not be the case for all female executives, as much is centred on the individuals' abilities and personality traits, it does provide insight into how executives and organisations can find a supported, healthier approach to culture and the nature of holding a senior position.

Secondly, the male participants expressed greater mental and physical levels of ill-health than the female participants. Contrary to this, with previous research showing women experience higher levels of mental and physical ill-health (Braithwaite, 2024), in line with the greater use of emotional expression highlighted, it may be suggested that those with more traditional female traits, are simply more open to reporting how they feel in studies. Whilst this finding may not transfer to a wider executive population, in considering the male and female differences in the utilisation of support, the link to health raises an important question.

Thirdly, despite more women in the workplace, females still maintain a greater responsibility for childcare, family and household than their male colleagues. Highlighted by experience on gender difference by male and female participants, this level of dual and triple role strain identifies the difficulties that women have to deal with as they navigate their way through their careers.

Highlighting the originality of this study, the use of the CIT captured events and corresponding behavioural coping strategies the participants adopted, enabling reflection on how the executives viewed their positive and negative experiences. With a key element to CIT enabling such longer-term learning, without exception all participants were able to find the positives out of their negative examples. With the majority of participants

taking a more positive stance to their own leadership behaviours to lessen the negative impact on others, the executives highlighted that they did not realise how much the continuous strain had caused elevated levels of stress until the peaks of strain had stopped. Participants did openly acknowledge in the interviews that job strain had already led them into the depths of a negative impact on their health and wellbeing.

Societal norms, expectations and stereotypes add to the challenge of intersectionality that women and minorities face in the workplace as they navigate the career pathway, however social norms also place restrictions on men. In the workplace and society overall, greater consideration is needed in the role individuals can undertake without adherence to either the traditional masculine or feminine personality traits, but one that demonstrates a unified approach. With a different view of male and female emotional responses, men could be encouraged to express their feelings and to undertake roles and jobs that have traditionally been assigned to women. Leaders of all genders need to be encouraged to embrace both male and female traits to underpin a positive organisational culture that enables businesses to adapt to the ever-increasing differences in a global market as well as to positively affect every individual's mental and physical health.

7.2 Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this study are underpinned with the utilisation of theory and previous empirical research conducted on job strain and behavioural coping strategies that have informed the foundation of the design and methodology. In adopting qualitative methods, supporting the strain and buffering hypothesis of the JDC and JDCS models, with the utilisation of CIT and a longer-term view, this study has given an insight into the lived experiences of UK executives not previously captured in any previous studies or through the dominance of quantitative research. Utilisation of a snowball recruitment strategy resulted in participants from a range of sectors, with the gender split of 14 men, 9 women and one ethnic minority executive being representative of the current UK executive ratio.

To minimise the risk of respondent bias and researcher reactivity that can be associated with qualitative research, volunteers were provided with a full participant information sheet, and the two main interview questions were provided a week prior to the interview. The study aims and objectives were also reiterated at the start of each interview. The researcher having an HR, coach and therapist background, was able to probe negative

experiences carefully and sensitively, ensuring no adverse reactions for the participants. The utilisation of member checks as part of the research quality controls adds to the rigor, enhancing the trustworthiness in the resulting data. The sample size of 23 may be considered a limitation by some, however, all interviews appeared to enable deep engagement in the topics by the participants, and saturation was considered on the part of the researcher as part of the process.

The methodological limitations of the literature review for this study were identified in Chapter 4, and there are potential drawbacks to researcher bias on findings that need to be acknowledged. To decrease this potential bias, progress and methods of analysis were logged regularly. Member checks were utilised with the participants both during the interviews and with access to their individual transcripts. Discussion and tracing of thoughts and ideas through the evolvement of the study also took place with the researcher's PhD supervisors (Guba, 1981; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). The researcher ensured reflection across the four dimensions of sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance (Yardley, 2017 P. 295).

It was acknowledged that semi-structured interviews may only illicit a 'partial picture' based on the participants perceptions of the interviewer, a desire to withhold some information or not wish to 'cast himself or herself in a socially desirable role' (Saunders et al., 2012a P. 381). As the focus of enquiry was based on retrospective memories of peak experiences, some of the participants may not be able to fully recall the exact details that they went through, but they were able to relay the emotional responses and the extremes of behaviour and resulting impact. Whilst the demographics of the study participants are indicative of the reported current gender split in UK executive positions (FTSE Women Leaders, 2024), the lack of volunteers identifying in gender categories other than male or female, may be considered a restriction on a wider gender perspective.

Whilst the exploratory nature of this study means that it may have limitations in its scope and focus, the participants had different lengths of experience at a senior level and were from a wide range of sectors and size of organisations across the UK. It could therefore be argued that the findings may be transferable to the wider executive population and organisations across the UK business sector.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Whilst empirically supporting some theory and research on the JDC and JDCS models (Karasek, 1989; Johnson and Hall, 1988), there are additional areas of research that would be recommended. A duplicate study could be conducted within the UK public sector and / or a comparison study with an equal number of participants from public and private sectors. A second option could be to undertake a mixed methods study to extend the participant reach. A questionnaire-based approach may capture a wider perspective and qualitative approaches, such as dairy entries for day-to-day reflections and individual interviews, utilised for more depth of understanding with a number of the participants. A third option would be to extend the study out to other countries which could take into account further cultural differences that may influence coping strategies and behaviours relating to societal expectations and stereotypes. Further options would be to repeat this research with other minority groups and to consider intersectionality such as gender plus race; disability; age and sexuality.

Whilst acknowledging the complexities of such a recommendation, consideration and future research are also needed in how women, and those that undertake the traditional feminine responsibilities of dual and triple roles, can progress through their careers with different societal norms and organisational policies enabling supported progression. It can also be considered that a change to stereotypes within industrialised cultures is needed across the board to provide a psychologically safe place where men can freely undertake roles that are traditionally associated with females. A culture where all are free to express feelings and emotions, being able to give and receive emotional support without adhering to labels such as 'big boys don't cry', enabling any human being to be accepted in society and the workplace with gender and traits that they identify with.

Even though all participants highlighted awareness of the level of pressure and strain they were under and the resulting physical and mental ill-health, whilst in the peak of demands, maladaptive coping strategies continued to come to the fore. Whilst all participants understood the need for positive strategies, they were unable to maintain them. A biological study could be included as an element of future research, linked to the neuroscience of trust and polyvagal theory to gain evidence for the impact of the stress response and hormonal changes introduced whilst actively engaging in a high-pressured

role and peaks of strain. Linking any benefits of gaining trusted emotional support to health outcomes by gender in the short and long-term, could relate findings back to the JDCS model. Additionally, this may provide valuable data on eustress and distress responses during steady state day-to-day responsibilities, and peaks of demand within organisational cultural settings that may benefit performance.

7.4 Recommendations for Practice

With this study highlighting common themes in a lack of trust in colleagues and support provided by the business, organisational culture is a foundation stone for future consideration. As has been highlighted in this study, the pressure and strain of holding an executive role and dealing with peaks of job demand can have an extreme and challenging effect on the leaders, and potentially a cascade effect on all employees. Performance targets and bonus arrangements need to be reconsidered and enhanced to include such things such as the executives' wellbeing and that of their employees. Whilst it is acknowledged this concept is not new and may have potential challenges of measuring the subjective experience of wellbeing, with current structures driving individuals to maladaptive coping, excessive hours of work and burnout, the benefits to improved decision making, innovation and company performance can be far reaching. The transition from just financial and performance targets within a capitalist structure may be a challenging one, however with the addition of wellbeing goals, leaders being measured on how they champion equity in addition to modelling self-care, a more sustainable, healthier future for individuals and organisations could be attained.

With many organisations already providing annual physical health checks for senior executives, the extension to support mental wellbeing and how senior employees retain positive coping strategies during times of peak strain is of paramount importance. Developing wider support mechanisms for executives to balance mental health with job demand and overcoming the lack of trust in support provided by the organisation is key. Ensuring clear, confidential coaching agreements are in place with professionals that adhere to the codes of ethics of the UK and international coaching institutions, will aid trust. The establishment of internal mentoring for all employee levels and the external provision of mentoring and wider support to executives is needed. To provide a pipeline of talented leaders, the progression and nurture of individuals through their careers needs to be underpinned with all-inclusive mentoring and leadership programmes that include

the development of emotional intelligence. With full consideration to the complexities of intersectionality and equity, organisations can gain further improvements through the establishment of succession planning that enables all genders to develop the skills that embrace both masculine and feminine traits and an androgynous leadership style within a culture that values difference.

7.5 Recommendations for Policy

With the existing UK Government backed improvements to increase the number of women and minorities at executive level, formal policy change and wellbeing targets could additionally be set for the FTSE 350, the top 50 private companies and beyond. Developing a wellbeing approach would not only ensure a balance of support for mental and physical health within the workplace but provide the foundations for an economy that underpins solutions for achieving health for all.

Wider societal changes also need to be considered to support those women and dual earning couples in navigating the financial challenges relating to the cost of living and childcare. To change the core of society and how future generations navigate the fine balance of work and personal life, further policy change is needed to enable greater education, practical tools and support for all ages. Whilst the UK Government announced some planned changes to education in 2024, more needs to be done in relation to incorporating mental and physical health, overall wellbeing and such things as the management of personal finances, into the curriculum at all school and university education levels, which will provide for a society that is capable of balancing economic growth and public health.

7.6 Concluding Remarks

Being the first of its kind, this UK study adds to the limited body of knowledge about this under researched occupational group and some of the most senior ranking employees. Overall, the experiences of the executive participants in this research support some conceptions and theories pertained in the extant literature. In particular, this extends the literature on job demands, control and support and aspects of behavioural coping strategies as well as extending the research into the executive arena. The rich descriptions provided by the participants give a unique insight to the continuous pressure that senior

employees are under, the extremes of peak experiences of psychological job strain and how these can have a spiralling negative effect on the individual and their personal lives. How women and those undertaking dual and triple role responsibilities are supported during their careers through the balance of these roles is a topic for further debate.

The negative impact of a toxic culture and poor behaviour of colleagues has highlighted additional strain that executives have to cope with. Importantly to note is the resulting impact on individuals, not only on a physical and mental health level but also the behaviours that people are driven to, to perform when under pressure. The difference in how women, and those identifying with the more traditional feminine traits, utilise their support network effectively and the impact that has on their internal state is also linked and worthy of further consideration. The results of this study provides a strong justification for further research and exploration on an academic, policy and organisational level, not only for scrutiny on culture and the expectations of key decision makers, but of societal stereotypes and the mental and physical health impact those expectations are having are all employees.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Thesaurus and Free Text Search Terms by SPIDER

Sample = Executives

PI = Phenomenon of Interest = Job Strain; Coping and Gender

Design = Various Qualitative methods; Thematic Analysis and Grounded Theory

Experiences = Experience

Research Type = Qualitative; Quantitative and Mixed Methods

<u>**Sample:**</u> **Executives**	(DE "EXECUTIVES" OR DE "CHAIRMAN of the board" OR DE "CHIEF compliance officers" OR DE "CHIEF data officers" OR DE "CHIEF executive officers" OR DE "CHIEF human capital officers" OR DE "CHIEF information officers" OR DE "CHIEF legal officers" OR DE "CHIEF marketing officers" OR DE "CHIEF operating officers" OR DE "CHIEF procurement officers" OR DE "CHIEF strategy officers" OR DE "CHIEF technical officers" OR DE "CORPORATE presidents" OR DE "CORPORATE vice-presidents" OR DE "GAY executives" OR DE "HUMAN resource directors" OR DE "INTERIM executives" OR DE "LGBTQ executives" OR DE "MARKETING executives" OR DE "MIDDLE managers" OR DE "WOMEN executives") OR (DE "LEADERSHIP") OR (DE "LEADERS" OR DE "WOMEN leaders") OR (DE "CORPORATE directors" OR DE "OUTSIDE directors of corporations" OR DE "WOMEN directors of corporations") OR (DE "CORPORATE directors' attitudes") OR "director*" OR "top level manager*"
<u>**Phenomenon of Interest**</u> **– Job Strain**	"Occupational Stress" OR "Stress" OR "Psychological Stress" OR "Social Stress" OR "Stress Reactions" OR "Stress and Coping Measures" OR "Stress Management" OR ("job stress" or "stress, occupation*" or "workplace stress" or "job strain" or "role strain" or "role stress" OR "stress tolerance (Psychology)") OR (("job" or "occupation*" or "workplace" or "role") n5 ("stress" or "strain")) or (("psychological") N5 ("stress" or "strain")) or (("work*") N5 ("emotional stress" or

	"emotional strain")) or (("psychosocial") N5 ("strain" or "stress")) or "demands-control" or "demands control" or "demands-control-support" or "demands control support" or "control or demand"
Phenomenon of Interest - Coping	"Stress and Coping Measures" OR "Coping Behavior" OR "coping behav*" or "coping strateg*" or "coping mechanis*" or "coping skill*" or "coping style*" or "adjustment (psychology)" or "life skill*" or "psychological adaptation" or "adaptation, psychological" or "adaptation, psychological" or "coping" or "conflict (psychology)" OR "Behavi*r and Behavi*r Mechanisms" OR (coping N5 (behav* or strateg* or mechanis* or skill* or style*)) OR (("problem-focus*" or "problem focus*" or "emotion-focus*" or "emotion focus*" or "active") N5 ("coping" or "coping behavi*r" or "coping strateg*" or "coping mechanis*")) OR "coping technique*" or "ways of coping" or "social support" or "buffer" or "buffer* effect" or "psychosocial coping"
Phenomenon of Interest - Gender	"Human Sex Differences" OR "gender" or "gender differences (psychology)" or "gender differences (Sociology)" or "gender identity" or "gender role in the work environment" or "sex discrimination in employment" or "gender bias" or "gender role in employment" or "sex discrimination in the work environment" or "gender differ*" or "sex differ*" or "male* vs female*" or "m#n vs wom#n") or (("gender" or "sex") N5 "differ*")
Design 1	"Interviews" OR "Focus Group Interview" OR "Psychodiagnostic Interview" OR "Semi-Structured Interview" OR "Focus Group" OR "Observation Methods" OR "Direct Observation" OR "Participant Observation" OR "Questionnaires" OR "Surveys" OR "interviewing" or "interview* in mental health" or "case stud*" or "businesspeople surveys" or "surveys and questionnaires" or "interview* as topic" or "observation* methods & Observation

	(psychology)" or "participant observation and observation* methods" or "observation" OR "observation (Psychology)" OR "research methodology" OR "social science methodology" OR sociology -- Methodology"
Design 2	"Thematic Analysis" OR "Grounded Theory" OR "critical incident technique" OR "critical incident* method*"
Experiences	"Life Experiences" OR "Experiences (Events)" OR "life change event*" or "life experience* and work experience*" OR "experience*" OR "work experience*"
Research Type	"Mixed Methods Research" OR "Quantitative Methods" OR "Qualitative Methods" OR "mixed-method* research" OR "merged method*" or "Qualitative Research *" or "quantitative research *" or OR "qualitative stud*" or "quantitative stud*" OR "quantitative research method*" or qualitative research method*"

Appendix 2 - Worked Example for the PsycINFO Database Search by SPIDER

S - EXECUTIVES

Line 1 – From Thesaurus - Search on full database
(DE "Top Level Managers") OR (DE "Leadership")

Line 2 – Title and Line 3 – Abstract
"executive*" or "chairman of the board" or "chief compliance officer*" or " chief data officer*" or "chief executive officer*" or "chief human capital officer*" or "chief information officer*" or "chief legal officer*" or "chief marketing officer*" or "chief operating officer*" or "chief procurement officer*" or "chief strategy officer*" or "chief technical officer*" or "corporate president*" or "corporate vice-president*" or "gay executive*" or "government executive*" or "human resource director*" or "interim executive*" or "LGBTQ executive*" or "marketing executive*" or "middle manager*" or "wom#n executive*" or "leader*" or "wom#n leader*" or "corporate director*" or "outside director* of corporation*" or "wom#n director* of corporation*" or "corporate director* attitudes" or "director*"

PI – JOB STRAIN

Line 1 – From Thesaurus - Search on full database
DE "Occupational Stress" OR DE "Stress" OR DE "Psychological Stress" OR DE "Social Stress" DE "Stress Reactions" OR DE "Stress and Coping Measures" OR DE "Stress Management"

Line 2 – Title and Line 3 – Abstract
 ("job stress" or "stress, occupation*" or "workplace stress" or "job strain" or "role strain" or "role stress" OR "stress tolerance (Psychology)") OR (("job" or "occupation*" or "workplace" or "role") n5 ("stress" or "strain")) or (("psychological") N5 ("stress" or "strain")) or (("work*") N5 ("emotional stress" or "emotional strain")) or (("psychosocial") N5 ("strain" or "stress")) or "demands-control" or "demands control" or "demands-control-support" or "demands control support" or "control or demand"

PI – COPING

Line 1 – From Thesaurus - Search on full database
DE "Stress and Coping Measures" OR DE "Coping Behavior"

Line 2 – Title and Line 3 – Abstract
"coping behav*" or "coping strateg*" or "coping mechanis*" or "coping skill*" or "coping style*" or "adjustment (psychology)" or "life skill*" or "psychological adaptation" or "adaptation, psychological" or "adaptation, psychological" or "coping" or "conflict (psychology)" OR "Behavi*r and Behavi*r Mechanisms" OR (coping N5 (behav* or strateg* or mechanis* or skill* or style*)) OR (("problem-focus*" or "problem focus*" or "emotion-focus*" or "emotion focus*" or "active") N5 ("coping" or "coping behavi*r" or "coping strateg*" or "coping mechanis*")) OR "coping technique*" or "ways of coping" or "social support" or "buffer" or "buffer* effect" or "psychosocial coping"

PI - GENDER

Line 1 – From Thesaurus - Search on full database
DE "Human Sex Differences"

Line 2 – Title and Line 3 – Abstract
"gender" or "gender differences (psychology)" or "gender differences (Sociology)" or "gender identity" or "gender role in the work environment" or "sex discrimination in employment" or "gender bias" or "gender role in employment" or "sex discrimination in the work environment" or "gender differ*" or "sex differ*" or "male* vs female*" or "m#n vs wom#n") or (("gender" or "sex") N5 "differ*")

D - DESIGN 1

Line 1 – From Thesaurus - Search on full database
(DE "Interviews" OR DE "Focus Group Interview" OR DE "Psychodiagnostic Interview" OR DE "Semi-Structured Interview") OR (DE "Focus Group" OR (DE "Observation Methods" OR DE "Direct Observation" OR DE "Participant Observation") OR (DE "Questionnaires") OR (DE "Surveys")

Line 2 – Title and Line 3 – Abstract
"interviewing" or "interview* in mental health" or "case stud*" or "businesspeople surveys" or "surveys and questionnaires" or "interview* as topic" or "observation* methods & Observation (psychology)" or "participant observation and observation* methods" or "observation" OR "observation (Psychology)" OR "research methodology" OR "social science methodology" OR sociology -- Methodology"

D - DESIGN 2

PsycINFO
Line 1 – From Thesaurus - Search on full database
(DE "Thematic Analysis") OR (DE "Grounded Theory")

Line 2 – Title and Line 3 – Abstract
"critical incident technique" OR "critical incident* method*"

E - EXPERIENCES

PsycINFO
Line 1 – From Thesaurus - Search on full database
DE "Life Experiences" OR DE "Experiences (Events)"

Line 2 – Title and Line 3 – Abstract
"life change event*" or "life experience* and work experience*" OR "experience*" OR "work experience*"

Appendix 3 - Restriction criteria and final results

Database	Restrictions Applied
PsycINFO	English; Adulthood 18 years & older; Human population group and exclude dissertations
ASU	English and Academic Journals and Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals
BSC	English; Peer Reviewed.
Medline	English; Human; All Adult 19+ years; [MEDLINE; Journal Article]; Peer Reviewed.
CINAHL	English; Peer Reviewed; Human; All Adult
Scopus	Psychology; Social Sciences; Neuroscience; Health Professions; Business, Management & Accounting. Open access articles. English.
Web of Science	Psychology; Social Sciences Interdisciplinary (other topics); Neurosciences ; Womens Studies ; Business ; Management ; Health Care Sciences. Open Access articles. English.

Papers by database – Pre-Duplicate removal December 2020 & October 2024

Database	Results December 2020	Results October 2024	Total Results
PsycINFO	1001	339	1,340
ASU	746	305	1,051
BSC	176	75	251
Medline	1,768	415	2,183
CINAHL	573	177	590
Scopus	960	965	1,925
Web of Science	266	856	1,122
Total	**5,314**	**3,312**	**8,462**

Papers post duplicate removal – Toal 6,102

December 2020 – 3,855

October 2024 – 2,247

Appendix 4 - Gold Standard Search Strategy Testing Results

Author(s) & Date	Title of paper
GADINGER, M. C., et al. 2010	Gender moderates the health-effects of job strain in managers.
MAKI, N., MOORE, S. & GRUNBERG, L. (2005)	The Responses of Males and Female Managers to Workplace Stress and Downsizing.
MAZZOLA, J. J., SCHONFELD, I. S. & SPECTOR, P. E. (2011)	What Qualitative Research has Taught us about Occupational Stress.
IWASAKI, Y., MACKAY, K. & MACTAVISH, J. (2005)	Gender-based Analysis of Coping with Stress among Professional Managers.
MENAGHAN, E. G. & MERVES, E. S. (1984)	Coping with occupational problems: The limits of individual efforts.
MCDONALD, L, M & KORABIK, K. (1991)	Sources of Stress and Ways of Coping Among Male and Female Managers.
NARAYANAN, L., MENON, S. & SPECTOR, P. E. (1999)	Stress in the workplace: a comparison of gender and occupations.
SEMMER, N. K & MEIER, L. L. (2015)	Individual Differences, Work Stress and Health. *In:* COOPER, C. L., CAMPBELL QUICK, J. & SCHABRACQ, M. J. (eds.) *International Handbook of Work and Health Psychology.* Oxford, UK: Willey Blackwell. (Book chapter)
DAVIDSON, M. J. & FIELDEN, S. (1999)	Stress and the working woman. (Book – not used)
DAVIDSON, M. J. & COOPER, C. L. (1992)	Shattering the glass ceiling: The woman manager. (Book– not used)

Appendix 5 - Results of the MMAT Analysis Quality of the Literature

For ease of presentation the qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods papers are presented separately with the questions pertinent to the methodologies. No papers were rejected at stage one, with 44 papers going through at stage two.

Quality Assessment – Stage Two – Qualitative Review

Author(s)	Title	Year	Screening S1 - Are there clear research questions?	Screening S2 - Do the collected data allow to address the research question?	1.1 Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2 Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3 Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4 Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?
Bergman, B. & Hallberg, L. R.	Swedish women in a male-dominated industry: a qualitative study of gender-related problems.	1997	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Iwasaki, Y. et al	Gender-Based Analyses of Coping with Stress among Professional Managers: Leisure Coping and Non-Leisure Coping.	2005	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Löve, J. et al	Balancing extensive ambition and a context overflowing with opportunities and demands: A grounded theory on stress and recovery among highly educated working young women entering male-dominated occupational areas	2011	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Maki, N. et al	The responses of Male and Female Mangers to Workplace Stress and Downsizing	2005	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Author(s)	Title	Year					
Torkelson, E. et al	Constructions of work stress and coping in a female and a male dominated department	2007	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Quality Assessment – Stage Two – Quantitative Review

Author(s)	Title	Year	Screening S1	Screening S2	4.1 Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	4.2 Is the sample representative of the target population?	4.3 Are the measurements appropriate?	4.4 Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	4.5 Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
Beehr, T. A.; et al	The enigma of social support and occupational stress: Source congruence and gender role effects.	2003	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	?	Y
Bellman, S. et al	Gender differences in the use of social support as a moderator of occupational stress	2003	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	?	Y
Cavanaugh, M.A; et al	An empirical examination of self-reported work stress among US managers	2000	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Chariatte, C. et al	Do Work Stressors Relate to Social Support Provision? An Actor-Partner Interdependence Model	2023	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	?	Y

	Among Dual-Earner Couples.								
Christie, M. D. and Shultz. K. S.	Gender differences on coping with job stress and organisational outcomes	1998	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	?	Y
Gaan, N.	Stress, Social Support, Job Attitudes and Job Outcome Across Gender.	2008	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gadinger, M. C. et al	Gender moderates the health-effects of job strain in managers.	2010	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gadinger, M. C. et al	Female executives are particularly prone to the sleep-disturbing effect of isolated high-strain jobs: a cross-sectional study in German-speaking executives.	2009	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gadzella, B. M. et al	Stress as perceived by professionals	1990	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	?	Y
Gadzella, B. M. et al	Differences between men and women on stress producers and coping strategies.	1991	Yes	Yes	Y	?	Y	?	Y
González-Morales, M. G. et al	Coping and distress in organisations: The role of gender in work stress	2006	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	?	Y
Hancovska, E.	Coping with difficult situations and load in management.	2014	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	?	?	Y
Kirkcaldy, B. and Furnham, A.	Stress coping styles among German managers	1999	yes	yes	y	y	y	?	y

Author(s)	Title	Year							
Lindorff, M.	Determinants of received social support: Who gives what to managers?	2005	yes	yes	y	y	y	y	y
Muhonen T and Torkelson E.	The demand-control-support model and health among women and men in similar occupations.	2003	yes	yes	y	y	y	?	y
Narayanan, L. et al	Stress in the workplace: A comparison of gender and occupations	1999	yes	yes	y	y	y	?	y
Sackey, J. and Sanda, M. A.	Sustenance of human capital: social support as a managerial stress reliever for women in developing economies	2011	yes	yes	y	y	y	y	y
Siu, O. et al	Managerial stress in Hong Kong and Taiwan: A comparative study	1999	yes	yes	y	y	y	?	y
Torkelson, E. and Muhonen, T.	The role of gender and job level in coping with occupational stress	2004	yes	yes	y	y	y	?	y
Watson, S.B.et al	Gender influences on the work-related stress-coping process	2011	yes	yes	y	y	y	y	y

Quality Assessment – Stage Two – Mixed Methods Review

Author(s)	Title	Year	Screening S1	Screening S2	5.1 Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed	5.2 Are the different components of the study effectively integrated	5.3 Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative	5.4 Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative	5.5 Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria

					methods design to address the research question?	to answer the research question?	components adequately interpreted?	and qualitative results adequately addressed?	of each tradition of the methods involved?
Davidson, M. J and Cooper, G. L.	Executive Women Under Pressure	1986	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
McDonald, L. M. and Korabik, K.	Sources of stress and ways of coping among male and female managers	1991	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Rao K. et al	Coping and subjective wellbeing in women with multiple roles	2003	Yes	Yes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Appendix 6 - Quantitative Measures Used in Multiple Studies

Measure	Number of Studies
WAYS of Coping / Revised WAYS of Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, 1988; Vitaliano et al 1985)	3
The Stress Incident Record (Folkman et al, 1986)	2
Coping Orientation of Problem Experience (COPE) and Brief COPE (Carver et al 1989; Carver et al 1997)	2
Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) and OSI 2 (Cooper, Sloan & Williams, 1988)	4
Trier Inventory (Over work scale – Chronic Stress – different sections) (Schulz et al, 2004)	2

Appendix 7 - Characteristics of Papers Included in the Integrated Literature Review

Qualitative Studies

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Qualitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Bergman, B. and Hallberg, L. R.	Swedish Women in a Male-Dominated Industry: A Qualitative Study of Gender-Related Problems.	1997	Sources of stress and social support	Informal Interviews	11	11 mixed employee level women in Volvo, Sweden

Key Findings:
Perceptions in 14 categories: Men had a negative attitude to women and were dominant; Women not promoted equally; Discrimination; Men guarded their status in the organisation; Women having to be clever than men in order to succeed; Sexual harassment; Women's abilities underestimated; Men's attitudes were tougher; Lower salary for the same job; Need support outside of the organisation from somebody with psychological competence; Dual role conflict; Problem and emotion focused coping; Stress-related psychosomatic symptoms; Negative workplace culture towards women.

Limitations:
1.Study sample limited. 2.Generalisations cannot be made without caution.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Qualitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Iwasaki, Y. et al	Gender-Based Analyses of Coping with Stress among Professional Managers: Leisure Coping and Non-Leisure Coping.	2005	Stress, Coping & Leisure	Focus Groups	36	3 focus groups of 12. 1 x 12 women; 1 x 12 men; 1 x 6 women and 6 men. Managers in Western Canadian City

Key Findings:

Both genders used leisure for: Socialisation and leisure generated social support; Deflecting stress-inducing thoughts; Feeling rejuvenated; Personal space; Humour & laughter; Spiritual coping; Altruistic coping; Travel; Problem focused coping.

Males: Talking to spouse; Focused on the process or actual act of leisure as a mechanism for escaping from or dealing with stress; Exercise a way of keeping themselves 'on the list'; A way of feeling in control; Playing hard; Leisure spectatorship.

Females: Stronger emphasis on leisure for self-rejuvenation & space for themselves; Outcome focused; Juggling family / home demands and work responsibilities; Sex discrimination and prejudice; Gender stereotyping; Arts and culture used as a stress management tool; Leisure / exercise undertaken to be proactively healthy.

Limitations:
None specified.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Qualitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Löve, J. et al	Balancing extensive ambition and a context	2011	Stress and Recovery	Open ended Interviews	20	20 women between 23 and 29 years. Women with

	overflowing with opportunities and demands: A grounded theory on stress and recovery among highly educated working young women entering male-dominated occupational areas					children excluded. Based on Grounded Theory

Key Findings:
Constantly striving to find a balance in daily life; Participants entangled in a loop of stress & dysfunctional coping behaviour, which threatened the balance of stress and recovery; Setting individual boundaries & buffering stress through exercise; Ambiguity overload - generating intense and constant mental activity due to uncertainty, continuous decision making and evaluation processes; Simultaneous handling of various demands, gender-based structures & performance focus leads to stress; Taking on too much due to striving for performance; Own health often put aside in favour of high performance, fun or interesting activities &a perceived responsibility for others.

Limitations:
None specified.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Qualitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Maki, N. et al	The responses of Male and Female Mangers to Workplace Stress an Downsizing	2005	Job Stress and Coping	Semi-structured interviews 1 to 2.5 hours	19 (out of 32)	11 female and 8 male managers employed in a large manufacturing organisation employing over 100,000 people producing high technology products. West Coast USA

Key Findings:
Both genders: Sleep disturbances most significant.
Males: Constant pressure to advance in career despite feeling otherwise; Challenge of monitoring personal behaviour when working with women; Peer pressure to squelch opinions on gender bias; Neck pain, low back pain and difficulty losing weight, elevated blood pressure and eating to alleviate boredom; Short with spouse, inability to concentrate or think clearly; Lack of emotional involvement.
Females: A greater range of physical and behaviour responses to stress; Shame at loss of emotional control; Migraine headaches, neck pain, stomach pain, grinding teeth during sleep, feeling tired all the time, irregular heartbeat and weight gain; Irritability, becoming angry, raising voice, feeling nervous, crying for no reason; Being short with spouse, unable to make decisions, being sarcastic and depressed; Use of alcohol; Sexual harassment; Ignored in meetings and communications.

Limitations:
1.Self-reports and one interviewer. 2.Results may not be typical of male and female managers in other companies 3.Men may have been less forthcoming in their response due to being interviewed by a female.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Qualitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Torkelson, E. et al	Constructions of work stress and coping in a female and a male dominated department	2007	Stress and Coping	30 small group interviews using CIT	62	15 interviews with men from a male dominated department and 15 with women in a female dominated department. All in customer service in a Swedish telecom company.

Key Findings:
No clear gender differences in coping.
Common Themes: Organisation change and downsizing characterised by passive collective strategies such as collective acceptance, resignation and denial, support among colleagues & collective mobilisation to deal with the inevitable; Coping strategies dependent upon the stressor; Both genders used coping strategy of not seeing themselves as vulnerable to gain a sense of control; Active strategies were attempts to work harder, working overtime, trying to solve the problem together with others or trying to influence managers.

Limitations:
1.Interviewees were requested to describe the coping strategies they used in the situation and therefore less prone to express more passive coping strategies such as venting of emotions or denial. 2.The results may not be generalised to other types of organisations.

Quantitative Studies

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Beehr, T. A. et al	The enigma of social support and occupational stress: Source congruence and gender role effects.	2003	Stressors / strain and social support	Questionnaire survey	102 out of 270 (39% response rate) plus 15 total 117	Employees of admin, customer service, distribution and management departments in a Southern USA supply company

Key Findings:
Congruence between the sources of stressors & social support appeared to make little difference in determining the moderating or buffering effect on the relationship between stressors and strain; Gender role may moderate the relationship between social support and individual strains; More feminine people react more strongly to social support than more masculine people do.

Limitations:
1.Sample size small limiting the power to find significant interactions. 2. All data obtained by a single survey at one time. 3. For the significant interactions, the changes were not large indicating the moderating effects might lead to only small differences in outcomes for employees. 4. Generalisation of results to other samples 5. The nature of social support - are the measures of communication actually measures of social support.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Bellman, S. et al	Gender differences in the use of social support as a moderator of occupational stress	2003	Stressors / strain and social support	Quantitative Questionnaire survey	204 out of 800	Members of Australian Institute of Management, Sept 2000. 55% female. Mid-level managers in over 180 companies.

Key Findings:

Males and females may differ in their use of social support as a moderator of stress & the forms of social support they use to moderate different types of work stress; Need for recognition pressure had a significant and negative direct effect on job satisfaction and organisational commitment for men but not for females; Both genders used social support to reduce stress. Question raised if males were to use social support in the same way as females they may be able to cope with stress much better than they do; Social support did not moderate the direct effect of need for recognition pressure on organisational commitment.

Men: Higher need for recognition pressure; 81% reported currently enjoying good health; social support significant direct negative effect on organisational security; Current health significant positive effect on organisational security, physical symptoms and energy level; Stress lowers organisational commitment.

Women: More committed to their organisations; Lower energy levels; Perceived higher level of social support; Social support significant direct and positive effect on state of mind and physical symptoms; Current health significant positive effects on organisational satisfaction, resilience and physical symptoms; Social support magnified the effect of current health on energy levels.

Limitations:

1. Little confidence in study replication. 2. Insufficient sample size. 3. Study is cross-sectional and based solely on self-report data. 4. PMI does not measure all 4 forms of social support (House 1991) - emotional; instrumental, informational and appraisal.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Cavanaugh, M.A. et al	An empirical examination of self-reported work stress among US managers	2000	Job Stress and Job Satisfaction	Quantitative Questionnaire survey	1886 surveys out of 10,000 posted. 91% men	Managers on an executive search firm's database. Average respondent two levels below CEO. Survey Jun 95. July 96 follow up.

Key Findings:

Self-reported work stress is differentially related to attitude & behavioural work outcomes depending on the stressors; Results supported proposition that challenge & hindrance related self-reported stress are two distinct phenomena; Both related to the work outcomes in question but in opposite directions; Challenge related stress was significantly positively related to job satisfaction and significantly negatively related to job search; Contrast - hindrance related stress was significantly negatively related to job satisfaction and significantly positively related to job search and voluntary turnover. No separate results for females.

Limitations:
1. Response rate low (19%) 2. Personality profiles will impact on results. 3. Demographics - mostly while male - findings may not generalise to more demographically diverse groups. 4. Level of job control may limit the study's findings. 4. Study does not address the nature of the mechanism by which challenge-related self-reported stress is related to positive outcomes and hindrance related stress is related to negative outcomes. 5. Findings suggest that there is a need for further consideration of the categorisations of self-reported work stress. 2. Speculated that challenge related stress may be related to positive feelings (eg eustress, challenge) and hindrance-related stress related to negative feelings (eg distress, frustration) but not able to specifically test these relationships.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Chariatte, C. et al	Do Work Stressors Relate to Social Support Provision? An Actor-Partner Interdependence Model Among Dual-Earner Couples.	2023	Job Stress and Social Support	Quantitative Questionnaire Survey	147 Dual Earner Couples	Swiss working couples

Key Findings:
No gender difference in partners providing emotional & instrumental support to stressed employees when not stressed themselves; Stressed employees tend to provide more dysfunctional support to their partner; Work stress harms wellbeing and also damages intimate relationships by instigating dysfunctional support to the partner; Family responsibilities deplete personal resources which may prevent employees from engaging in behaviours that require effort and initiatives.

Limitations:
1.Cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences. 2. Self-reported questionnaire does not account for longitudinal findings.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Christie, M. D. and Shultz, K. S.	Gender differences on coping with job stress and organizational outcomes	1998	Job stress and work-related outcomes	Quantitative Questionnaire survey	181	56 (30.9%) men & 125 (69.1%) women full time working in services and sales (28.7%); technical / professional (24.3%); clerical (21%) and managerial (13.8%) plus studying psychology and / or business a night. California, USA

Key Findings:
Gender differences only minimally supported; Women use control coping more than men; Men more exercise to increase control coping, providing indirect support that men are more likely to use control coping than women; No significant difference for escape coping but women perceived more emotional support than men.

Males: Informational support strong association with perceived job stress, absenteeism and turnover intention; Strong association - perceived job stress and control coping a trend supported by the sig association of job satisfaction for men with informational support and control coping; Emotional support from spouse. **Females:** Escape coping strongest association with absenteeism; Exercise strongest with turnover intention; Strongest association with perceived job stress was emotional support and job satisfaction with appraisal support; Appraisal, emotional and informational support associated with outcome variables more than other forms of coping.	

Limitations:
None Specified

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Gaan, N.	Stress, Social Support, Job Attitudes and Job Outcome Across Gender.	2008	Stress, Job Satisfaction & Turnover Intention	Quantitative Questionnaire survey	240	Bangalore, India. Four groups of IT professionals. Programmers; System Analysts, Test Engineers and System Administrators. 60 respondents in each group.

Key Findings:
No significant difference between female and male groups for role conflict and work overload; No significant differences between gender for team support, organisation commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intention.
Females experiences higher role ambiguity; Supervisory support need higher.

Limitations:
None Specified.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Gadinger, M. C.; et al	Gender moderates the health-effects of job strain in managers.	2010	Job demands, control and social support related to subjective health.	Self-administered paper questionnaires	424	German, Austrian and Swiss managers. Collected at leadership seminars and through presentation of the study at meetings of staff managers and senior executives.

Key Findings:
Job demands, low job control and low social support (isolated high strain jobs) associated with the most adverse effects for both genders.
Female managers experience poorer subjective health in isolated high-strain jobs; Greater subjective health benefits from social support than job control in high job demands.
Male managers in high job demand experience greater subjective health benefits from job control than from social support; Higher job demands & lower social support associated with reduced subjective health; 3-way interaction for self-rated health suggests the relationship between higher job demands and poorer health is

strongest if both the level of social support & control are low; If both the level of job control and social support are high, higher job demands do not alter the level of self-rated health.

Limitations:

Questionnaire based studies are prone to criticism that the observed associations are inflated by common variance.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Gadinger, M. C. et al	Female executives are particularly prone to the sleep-disturbing effect of isolated high-strain jobs: a cross-sectional study in German-speaking executives.	2009	Job demands, control & social support related to sleep	Self-administered paper questionnaires	483 (response rate 27%)	17.9% respondents women. German economy / Finance sector (23.4%), transport & logistics (7.8%), Electronics (7.3%), public sector and armed forces (15%).

Key Findings:

Highest correlations with sleep quality were observed with social support and job control; Only social support was observed to explain a significant proportion of the variance of sleep quality; Isolated high-strain jobs negatively affects sleep quality; High job control and high social support have a buffering effect on high demand.
Men: Consumption of cola drinks, coffee / black tea positively correlated with sleep quality.
Females more severely affected by social isolation and low job control, regardless of the intensity of demand.

Limitations:

1. Male executives were older and over-represented in higher occupational hierarchies & limited female executives 2. Sleep quality measured with a non-validated questionnaire. 3. Questionnaire based study prone to criticism that the observed associations inflated by common variance.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Gadzella, B. M. et al	Stress as perceived by professionals	1990	Stress levels by job level, gender & age	Questionnaires	173	57 men, 116 women North Eastern Texas, USA. 113 staff; 44 midlevel managers and 12 executives, 4 no job classification

Key Findings:

No significant interactions for the groups on any of the scale variables studied; Younger age group reported higher stress; Staff and midlevel managers reported greater stress than the executives; Women report more stress than men; Suggested that women undertake more responsibilities for caring for the family in addition to professional careers.

Limitations:

None specified

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Gadzella, B. M. et al	Differences between men and women on stress producers and coping strategies.	1991	Job stressors & coping strategies	Stress Questionnaire (Not specified)	401	158 men and 243 women responding to stress questionnaire. No detail on how recruited or where from.

Key Findings:
Men reported higher stress-producing scores with higher administration; Men seek support or advice from close friends.
Women larger number of & more negative stress producers; Women under stress take time for themselves & exercise but overreact to criticism.

Limitations:
None specified

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
González-Morales, M. G. et al	Coping and distress in organizations: The role of gender in work stress	2006	Work stressors, coping and psychological distress	Questionnaires	461 (response rate 25.6%)	332 (72%) men and 129 (28%) women in Spanish Financial institutions

Key Findings:
Direct action used more frequently than social support by both genders; Social support coping not significantly related to psychological distress for women; Relationship between social support and distress was positive for men; The use of social support coping had a beneficial effect on psychosomatic complaints for women and a maladaptive effect for men; The use of direct action coping had a stronger negative relationship with psychological distress and psychosomatic complaints for men than for women;

Limitations:
None specified.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Hancovska, E.	Coping with difficult situations and load in management.	2014	Stress / coping by gender and age	Questionnaires	147 managers	Managers first level, second level, top managers. Sector or companies not specified. Slovakia.

Key Findings:
Significant gender differences in the context of preferences of selected coping strategies of managers; Significant relation between age and selected coping strategies of managers; No significant statistical differences between levels of managers and their preference of selected coping strategies.

Limitations:
None specified.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Kirkcaldy, B. and Furnham, A.	Stress coping styles among German managers	1999	Stress / coping by gender and tenure	Questionnaire 14 item subscale of the OSI	160	85% male, 15% female. 22% junior managers, 45% middle managers and 32% senior managers

Key Findings:
Two broad coping styles, one proactive and rational, the other problem-focused and reactive. The two styles had no relation to sex or age of the managers; Senior managers use delegation and stable relationships more than junior managers who looked for advice / social support from superiors; A senior manager delegates as a way of coping with stress; Less well educated people use time management as a coping technique; Conversely better educated tried to plan their way out by being proactive.

Limitations:
None specified.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Lindorff, M.	Determinants of received social support: Who gives what to managers?	2005	Stress, perceived support and received support	Questionnaires	572 Response rate of 57%	41 Organisations representing 17 major groups by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. 38% middle manager; 56% upper middle and 6% top managers or executives

Key Findings:
Type of support some matching between what is needed in events and what support is provided; Stronger emotional support is received for work and non-work stressors from non-work relationships than from work relationships; The strongest tangible assistance and information is received from supporters in the domain in which the stress occurs; Work relationship for work problems and non-work for non-work problems; The type of support received depends upon the interpersonal or social nature of the stressor; Non-social stressors result in less emotional distress; Emotional support from family members is highly rated; Tangible assistance and information received from workplace supporters is valued for work place problems; Subordinates best at providing tangible assistance and supervisors at providing information; Supervisors providers of emotional support for work problems.

Limitations:
1. Cross-sectional study. 2. relies on self-report measures, therefore subject to common method variance. 3. It does not test the respondents' assessment of the effectiveness of the support received. 4. It does not assess if the support was solicited by the respondent, or independently offered. 5. The results may not be generalisable to other occupational groups. 6. The study analyses support received for work stressors with support from work relationships, however one third of respondents report that the most effective support for the nominated work stressors is received from a relationship outside the workplace.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Muhonen T. and Torkelson E.	The demand-control-support model and health	2003	JDCS and health	Work Demands 11 items; Control 3 items; Social	279	134 women (40 managers and 94 non-managers) and

			Theoretical	Quantitative		
	among women and men in similar occupations.			Support 3 items; Health Symptoms by Hopkins Symptom Checklist 25 (HSCL-25)		145 men (60 managers and 85 non-managers) Swedish telecom company.

Key Findings:

Demands had a significant relationship with health symptoms; Control and support were negatively related to health symptoms; Organisational level did not contribute significantly to the variance in health symptoms for either gender; No 3 way interaction effect with demand-control and demand-social; The overall model accounted for a 33% variance in health symptoms for women and 46% for men.

Limitations:

1. single cross-sectional sample, cannot make causal claims. 2. self-report can lead to inflated correlations attributed to common method variance. 3. the alpha value for social support was low - the measure consisted only of three items. 4. The sample consisted of a specific group of employees and results may not generalise.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Narayanan, L. et al	Stress in the workplace: A comparison of gender and occupations	1999	Stress, coping and occupational group	Stress Incident Record (SIR) Questionnaires -	387	133 clerical (all female) 124 (70 male and 54 female) from different departments 30 sales employees (79 male and 51 female) USA.

Key Findings:

Stressors and reactions differed across occupations; Stressor of low control more frequently reported by employees on lower level job; Common stressors - interpersonal conflict, time wasters and work overload; Academics coped with problem-focused strategies, taking direct action or talking to immediate superiors; Sales and clerical staff seek social support from family or co-workers; Both genders in higher level jobs used problem-focused strategies most often; Frustration and anger prevalent as affective reactions; Interpersonal conflict more frequent sources off stress for females.

Limitations:

1. Subjective experiences of stress cannot be isolated from its broader and larger context.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Sackey, J. and Sanda, M. A.	Sustenance of human capital: social support as a managerial stress reliever for women in developing economies	2011	Stressors / strain and social support	Questionnaire	170 out of 200 (85% response)	Women managers in Ghanaian metropolitan city from 25 organisations with substantial numbers of managerial women.

Key Findings:

Managerial women will perceive supervisors' support as a direct negative moderator of their perceived job stress from work family conflict; perceive co-workers' support as a direct negative moderator of their perceived job stresses from work family conflict; Perceive spousal support as a direct negative moderator of their perceived job stresses from work family conflict; Significantly high scores on stress factors which affected their productivity - feeling isolated, inadequate feedback

about performance, insufficient resources and finance to work with, staff shortage and turnover rates, and too much responsibility; Bearing too much responsibility combining multiple roles of work and home; Technology a major source of stress; Strong need to prove their capabilities in the job environment; Gender a disadvantage and experience prejudiced attitudes; Social support gave perceived less demanding, conflicting and adverse conditions; Glass ceiling and discrimination; Many job stressors harmful consequences on health and organisational performance; inability to concentrate, less communicative, feeling tense, uptight and tired, feeling low energy and excessive fatigue, feeling of job dissatisfaction.

Limitations:
None specified.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Siu, O. et al	Managerial stress in Hong Kong and Taiwan: A comparative study	1999	Sources of stress by gender	Occupational Stress Indicator-2 (OSI-2)Questionnaire - self report	627	Hong Kong 280; Taiwan 347 recruited from a range of organisations and personal networks.

Key Findings:
No difference in coping strategies and locus of control in both groups; Significant correlations between job satisfaction and mental wellbeing, job satisfaction and physical wellbeing and between mental and physical wellbeing; Further sources of stress were negatively related to job satisfaction, mental and physical wellbeing, but were positively related to quitting intention; strain effects, absenteeism and quitting intention positively correlated; Exercise not related to job satisfaction or mental wellbeing.3. Taiwanese managers - recognition most important predictor of work morale and managerial role and hassles were important predictors of personal health.

Males - Higher job satisfaction and better physical and mental wellbeing; Higher tendency of Type A behaviour.

Females - Perceived more sources of stress and higher quitting intension; Greater number of women in lower rank positions; More stress relating to the managerial role, providing indirect support for role conflict.

Limitations:
1. Static group design method was employed with Taiwan subjects and part of Hong Kong subjects. 2. The data collection procedures in two places were not conducted in the same period. 3. The sample size in both groups was unequal.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Torkelson, E. Muhonen, T.	The role of gender and job level in coping with occupational stress	2004	Stress, coping and health	Swedish version of the COPE inventory	279 (67% response)	Managers 89% women 90% men. Non-managers 61% women and 55% men sales department in a Swedish telecom company.

Key Findings:
Problem focused strategies were significantly related to 3 emotion-focused strategies of seeking emotional support, positive reinterpretation and Denial; Active coping was related to lesser health problems; Positive reinterpretation was negatively related to health problems, whereas denial, focus on and venting of emotions and alcohol / drug disengagement were positively related; Gender and organisational level did not account for any significant proportion of the variability in health

problems; Emotion-focused strategy of seeking emotional social support related to the occurrence of fewer health problems; No gender difference in the use of problem-focused coping strategies at managerial level.

Males - Non-managerial males reported more use of planning and more alcohol / drug disengagement as coping strategies.

Females - Seeking emotional social support strategy; Non managerial women used a strategy of seeking instrumental social support, seeking emotional social support and focus on and venting of emotions.

Limitations:
Cross-sectional study, may not generalise to other countries.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Quantitative Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Watson, S. B.; et al	Gender influences on the work-related stress-coping process	2011	Stress / coping by gender	Primary appraisal scale adapted from Folkman et al 1986 - 8 item scale. The multifaceted Control Scale (MCS); Jb related affective wellbeing scale (JAWS); Ways of Coping Checklist	258	106 males and 152 female from various businesses and university Queensland Australia

Key Findings:
Stress coping and stress outcome evident in both female and male groups but stronger for males; Key difference is men appear to assess their resources and experience stress dependant on whether resources are available to them or not - without acting upon identified resources; Women assess their available resources, put these in to action and part of the subsequent stress experience is dependent upon how successful their coping strategies prove to be. 'Distinctive patterns of coping strategy selection' are determined by gender; Coping for males is determined to be a primary appraisal but women is primary and secondary; The capacity for the stress and coping process differs between male and females in reaction to the learned and biological differences that separate the genders.

Limitations:
1. low response rate for males. 2. constructs of coping were limited to coping as a single entity creating a limitation that it remains unknown whether differences occur between men and women as to the types of coping adopted.

Mixed Methods Studies

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Mixed Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Davidson, M. J. and Cooper, C. L. (1986)	Executive Women Under Pressure	1986	Sources of strain and health outcomes.			60 women in-depth interviews; Postal survey questionnaire 696 women and 185 male managers. UK.

Key Findings:
Both genders: Work overload pressures at all levels other than supervisor; Managers - Time pressure and deadlines; middle managers & Supervisors – lack of consultation and communication; All reported smoking, drinking and eating too much, drinking coffee, coke or eating in order to relax
Male: Pressure from leadership / authority aspects of management; rate of pay; Less use of sensitive/sympathetic and cooperative management styles; Drank more alcohol; Sacking someone, disciplining subordinates, making mistakes
Female: High pressure levels from work stressors, home / social and more manifestations of stress; Token woman; career development, relationships at work; prejudice and sex discrimination; minority sex in male-dominated occupation; Career and spouse/partner conflicts; career-home conflict; career and marriage /child-bearing conflict; lack of emotional and domestic support; Greater number of psychosomatic symptoms; Significantly higher detrimental work performance; Lack of consultation and communication; Tiredness; Trouble sleeping. Suggested women experience twice the overall levels of occupational stress compared to men.

Limitations:
None specified.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Mixed Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
McDonald, L. M. and Korabik, K.	Sources of stress and ways of coping among male and female managers	1991	Work stress / coping by gender	Critical Incident structured interview plus WAYS of coping checklist; job stress scale, Work Stressors Questionnaire	122 out of 222 questionnaires. 2 Focus groups of 20 & 19	Managers employed by a major utility company or one of two large insurance companies, Canada. Positions ranged from middle to upper management / director

Key Findings:
Men and women differed in the kinds of work-related situations and events they perceived to be stressful, but did not adopt different strategies to cope with their problems. Some differences in how they handled their feelings about the problems; Direct action coping; No sex differences in general job stress.
Males - No males reported feeling pressure relating to spousal or work roles; Engaged in non-work activity to distract themselves eg exercise.
Females - Sources of stress related to work / home interface, attempts to balance the demands as 'no win' situations; Sex discrimination; Managing subordinates; Talking to others; Job stress experienced by women appears to be a very specific response to particular stressors (prejudice and discrimination plus work/family interface)

Limitations:
1. Study did not address the issue of coping effectiveness.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Theoretical Perspective	Mixed Methodology	Sample size	Sample & Setting
Rao K. et al	Coping and subjective wellbeing in women with multiple roles	2003	Coping, support and reasons for employment	The Coping Checklist (CCL) (Rao et al 1989. 70 items. 2. Subjective Wellbeing Inventory (SWBI) Nagpal and Sell 1985 plus interviews	60	Working married women in India

Key Findings:
Moderately high level of subjective wellbeing; Job interesting and like fixed working hours plus alternative social network; Refusal of job promotion to a managerial level contributed to wellbeing; Careful in not upsetting the delicate balance between home and career; Indian value system reinforces a family rather than individualistic orientation as they are responsible for care of the elders in the family; Support networks are shrinking; Two thirds of participants had active support and encouragement for work from their spouses; Few women received help with household chores and domestic responsibilities - half acknowledged the presence of multiple role strain and sinificantly lower scores on subjective wellbeing; Greater use of social support seeking and less use of denial contributed significantly to higher levels of subjective wellbeing;

Limitations:
1. Cross-sectional design 2. Women only from the banking sector. Coping styles of women working in low prestige jobs with fewer economic and social resources to manage work and family responsibilities are likely to be quite different. 3. Standardised measures were not used to assess job satisfaction and social support.

Appendix 8 - Papers cited in analysis of findings for the integrated literature review by theme

Theme	Authors and Year	Paper Title
Causes and sources of stress and job strain	Beehr, Terry A.; Farmer, Suzanne J.; Glazer, Sharon; Gudanowski, David M.; Nair, Vandana Naig (2003)	The enigma of social support and occupational stress: Source congruence and gender role effects.
	Bellman, Steven; Forster, Nick; Still, Leonie; Cooper, Cary L. (2003)	Gender differences in the use of social support as a moderator of occupational stress.
	Christie, Maryann D.; Shultz, Kenneth S (1998)	Gender differences on coping with job stress and organisational outcomes.
	Gaan, Niharika (2008)	Stress, Social Support, Job Attitudes and Job Outcome Across Gender.
	Gadzella, Bernadette M.; Ginther, Dean W.; Tomcala, Maryjane; Bryant, George W (1990)	Stress as perceived by professionals.
	Gadzella, Bernadette M.; Ginther, Dean W.; Tomcala, Maryjane; Bryant, George W (1991	Differences between men and women on stress producers and coping strategies.
	Iwasaki, Yoshi; MacKay, Kelly; Mactavish, Jennifer (2005)	Gender-Based Analyses of Coping with Stress among Professional Managers: Leisure Coping and Non-Leisure Coping.
	Löve, Jesper; Hagberg, Mats; Dellve, Lotta (2011)	Balancing extensive ambition and a context overflowing with opportunities and demands: A grounded theory on stress and recovery among highly educated working young women entering male-dominated occupational areas.
	Maki, Nancy; Moore, Sarah; Grunberg, Leon; Greenberg, Edward (2005)	The responses of Male and Female Managers to Workplace Stress and Downsizing.

	McDonald, Lisa M.; Korabik, Karen (1991)	Sources of stress and ways of coping among male and female managers.
	Narayanan, Lakshmi; Menon, Shanker; Spector, Paul E (1999)	Stress in the workplace: A comparison of gender and occupations.
	Rao K; Apte M; Subbakrishna DK (2003)	Coping and subjective wellbeing in women with multiple roles.
	Sackey, Jocelyn; Sanda, Mohammed-Aminu (2011)	Sustenance of human capital: social support as a managerial stress reliever for women in developing economies.
	Torkelson, Eva; Muhonen, Tuija; Pedro, Jose Maria (2007)	Constructions of work stress and coping in a female and a male dominated department.
	Watson, Sarah B.; Goh, Yong Wah; Sawang, Sukanlaya (2011)	Gender influences on the work-related stress-coping process.
The Job demand, control, support model (JDCS)	Beehr, Terry A.; Farmer, Suzanne J.; Glazer, Sharon; Gudanowski, David M.; Nair, Vandana Naig (2003)	The enigma of social support and occupational stress: Source congruence and gender role effects.
	Bellman, Steven; Forster, Nick; Still, Leonie; Cooper, Cary L. (2003)	Gender differences in the use of social support as a moderator of occupational stress.
	Christie, Maryann D.; Shultz, Kenneth S (1998)	Gender differences on coping with job stress and organisational outcomes.
	Gaan, Niharika (2008)	Stress, Social Support, Job Attitudes and Job Outcome Across Gender.

	Gadinger, Michael C.; Fischer, Joachim E.; Schneider, Sven; Fischer, Gisela C.; Frank, Gunter; Kromm, Walter (2009)	Female executives are particularly prone to the sleep-disturbing effect of isolated high-strain jobs: a cross-sectional study in German-speaking executives.
	Gadinger, Michael C.; Fischer, Joachim E.; Schneider, Sven; Fischer, Gisela C.; Frank, Gunter; Kromm, Walter (2010)	Female executives are particularly prone to the sleep-disturbing effect of isolated high-strain jobs: a cross-sectional study in German-speaking executives.
	Gardner, Dianne; Fletcher, Richard (2009)	Demands, appraisal, coping and outcomes: Positive and negative aspects of occupational stress in veterinarians.
	González-Morales, M. Gloria; Peiró, José M.; Rodríguez, Isabel; Greenglass, Esther R (2006)	Coping and distress in organisations: The role of gender in work stress.
	Hancovska, Erika.(2014)	Coping with difficult situations and load in management.
	Lindorff, Margaret (2005)	Determinants of received social support: Who gives what to managers?
	Muhonen T; Torkelson E (2003)	The demand-control-support model and health among women and men in similar occupations.
	Narayanan, Lakshmi; Menon, Shanker; Spector, Paul E (1999)	Stress in the workplace: A comparison of gender and occupations.
	Rao K; Apte M; Subbakrishna DK (2003)	Coping and subjective wellbeing in women with multiple roles.
	Sackey, Jocelyn; Sanda, Mohammed-Aminu (2011)	Sustenance of human capital: social support as a managerial stress reliever for women in developing economies.

	Torkelson, Eva; Muhonen, Tuija; Pedro, Jose Maria (2007)	Constructions of work stress and coping in a female and a male dominated department.
Coping Strategies	Christie, Maryann D.; Shultz, Kenneth S (1998)	Gender differences on coping with job stress and organisational outcomes.
	Gaan, Niharika (2008)	Stress, Social Support, Job Attitudes and Job Outcome Across Gender.
	Gadzella, Bernadette M.; Ginther, Dean W.; Tomcala, Maryjane; Bryant, George W (1991)	Differences between men and women on stress producers and coping strategies.
	González-Morales, M. Gloria; Peiró, José M.; Rodríguez, Isabel; Greenglass, Esther R (2006)	Coping and distress in organisations: The role of gender in work stress.
	Hancovska, Erika. (2014)	Coping with difficult situations and load in management.
	Iwasaki, Yoshi; MacKay, Kelly; Mactavish, Jennifer (2005)	Gender-Based Analyses of Coping with Stress among Professional Managers: Leisure Coping and Non-Leisure Coping.
	Kirkcaldy, Bruce; Furnham, Adrian (1999)	Stress coping styles among German managers.
	Löve, Jesper; Hagberg, Mats; Dellve, Lotta (2011)	Balancing extensive ambition and a context overflowing with opportunities and demands: A grounded theory on stress and recovery among highly educated working young women entering male-dominated occupational areas.
	Maki, Nancy; Moore, Sarah; Grunberg, Leon; Greenberg, Edward (2005)	The responses of Male and Female Managers to Workplace Stress an Downsizing.
	McDonald, Lisa M.; Korabik, Karen (1991)	Sources of stress and ways of coping among male and female managers.

	Narayanan, Lakshmi; Menon, Shanker; Spector, Paul E (1999)	Occupational stress and gender: A cross-cultural study.
	Rao K; Apte M; Subbakrishna DK (2003) Siu, Oi-ling; Lu, Luo; Cooper, Cary L (1999)	Coping and subjective wellbeing in women with multiple roles. Managerial stress in Hong Kong and Taiwan: A comparative study.
	Torkelson, Eva; Muhonen, Tuija (2004)	The role of gender and job level in coping with occupational stress.
	Torkelson, Eva; Muhonen, Tuija; Pedro, Jose Maria (2007)	Constructions of work stress and coping in a female and a male dominated department.
Impact of job strain on health and job satisfaction	Bellman, Steven; Forster, Nick; Still, Leonie; Cooper, Cary L. (2003)	Gender differences in the use of social support as a moderator of occupational stress.
	Gaan, Niharika (2008)	Stress, Social Support, Job Attitudes and Job Outcome Across Gender.
	Gadinger, M. C.; Fischer, J. E.; Schneider, S.; Terris, D. D.; Krückeberg, K.; Yamamoto, S.; Frank, G.; Kromm, W.(2009)	Gender moderates the health-effects of job strain in managers.
	Gadinger, Michael C.; Fischer, Joachim E.; Schneider, Sven; Fischer, Gisela C.; Frank, Gunter; Kromm, Walter (2010)	Female executives are particularly prone to the sleep-disturbing effect of isolated high-strain jobs: a cross-sectional study in German-speaking executives.
	González-Morales, M. Gloria; Peiró, José M.; Rodríguez, Isabel; Greenglass, Esther R (2006)	Coping and distress in organisations: The role of gender in work stress.

	Maki, Nancy; Moore, Sarah; Grunberg, Leon; Greenberg, Edward (2005)	The responses of Male and Female Managers to Workplace Stress and Downsizing,
	Muhonen T; Torkelson E (2003)	The demand-control-support model and health among women and men in similar occupations.
	Rao K; Apte M; Subbakrishna DK (2003)	Coping and subjective wellbeing in women with multiple roles.
	Sackey, Jocelyn; Sanda, Mohammed-Aminu (2011)	Sustenance of human capital: social support as a managerial stress reliever for women in developing economies.
	Siu, Oi-ling; Lu, Luo; Cooper, Cary L (1999)	Managerial stress in Hong Kong and Taiwan: A comparative study.

Appendix 9 - LinkedIn Post and Infographic

LinkedIn Post

If you are a Director, CEO or Board member in a UK private sector business with at least 12 months experience of working at that level and are aged 18 and over, then I need your help.

I am conducting PhD research through Lancaster University to explore any gender differences in Executives' experience of psychological job strain and behavioural coping strategies.

Stress and coping are considered key factors influencing health and quality of life, with long-term exposure associated with both harmful and beneficial health outcomes. Research with senior executives is extremely limited and your participation will provide invaluable data to advance knowledge into this field.

I will be conducting individual video interviews with executives which will last no longer than an hour to respect your valuable time. Participation is voluntary. All data will be anonymised and the research fully complies with data protection, GDPR and has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University.
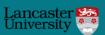
Please see the infographic for more information and direct message me or email me at j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk for a full participant information sheet, so you can consider volunteering.

Those that I have previously coached and advised on stress management and wellbeing, must be excluded from this study, but please feel free to recommend others.

Executive job strain and coping

Can you help?

I am conducting research through Lancaster University to explore any gender differences in Executives' experiences of psychological job strain and behavioural coping strategies.

If you are over age 18, work in the UK private sector and are a CEO, Director or Board member with a minimum of 12 months experience at that level, your participation is needed.

The results will not have any information included that could identify individual data or who took part.

Why this research?

Stress and coping are considered key factors influencing health and quality of life, with long-term exposure associated with both harmful and beneficial health outcomes.

Whilst there is a wealth of research in the health sector, studies into how senior executives are impacted by job strain and what coping strategies they have, is extremely limited.

This research seeks to bridge this gap and your participation will provide invaluable data to advance knowledge into this field.

What will I have to do?

To participate in this research you will be invited to attend a video interview at a time to suit you. It will last no longer than an hour to respect your valuable time.

The purpose of the interview is to understand your experiences of job strain and what behavioural strategies you apply as coping mechanisms.

You will be asked to describe two significant situations over the past 12 months, that caused you stress and job strain in your role and which resulted in one positive and one negative outcome.

You will be advised of the two main interview questions in advance.

Confidentiality
The research will comply with all data protection and GDPR. All data will be anonymised and stored under password protected, encrypted files.

Benefits?
There are no payments for participating but you will be offered a summary copy of the research results.

Participation
Your participation is entirely voluntary. It is completely up to you to decide if you wish to take part.

Interested?

To express an interest in participating please email me at j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk for a full participant information sheet and consent form.

Recommend others?

If you know of other executives that may wish to participate, please forward this information on. Alternatively please give them my email address, or with their permission, forward their details to me so I can contact them.

This research study has been reviewed by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee and is approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University.

j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk

powered by
PIKTOCHART

Appendix 10 - Participant Recruitment Emails 1 to 7

Email 1 - Thanks for Interest

Dear [personal name if possible]

Thank you for responding to my request for executive volunteers. I am conducting PhD research through Lancaster University into the behavioural coping strategies that executives have when dealing with psychological job strain.

Whilst there is a wealth of research in other groups and sectors, there is a gap in knowledge for UK Executives. We do not know enough about this important area and by participating in this research, you will be helping to develop that understanding.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. The research investigating coping strategies for dealing with job strain, will require you to participate in a single interview over Microsoft Teams, which will last no longer than an hour. Both you and myself as principal researcher will be in private, undisturbed rooms in order to maintain confidentiality. All of your responses will be held and utilised under strict anonymity and stored according to GDPR guidelines.

In order for you to be fully informed and to help your decision, I have attached a participant information sheet detailing how the study will work and what will happen to the responses that you provide.

If you are interested in helping with this important study and would like to participate please confirm within two weeks by [date] by emailing me at j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk.

Janice Haddon

University of Lancaster

j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk

Email 2 - If no Reply to First Email

Dear [personal name if possible]

Two weeks ago, I sent you an invitation to participate in a research study looking at the behavioural coping strategies that executives have when dealing with psychological job strain.

If you have already decided not to participate, it would be appreciated if you could advise me of your reasons. If you have not yet decided, I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate. We do not know enough about this important area and by participating in this research, you will be helping to develop that understanding.

Also, if you know of anyone else on an executive level (ie aged over 18, working at Director level, a CEO or Board member, with at least one year's experience at that level) that may wish to participate, with their permission, please let me have their contact details. Alternatively, please forward my email details, j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk, to them and ask them to get in touch.

If you would like to express an interest or if you have any questions, please email myself, the principal researcher at j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk, or telephone me on [new number for research].

Janice Haddon
University of Lancaster
j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk

Email 3 - If Participant Declines to Participate

Dear [personal name if possible]

Thank you for letting me know that you do not wish to participate in the study looking at the behavioural coping strategies that executives have when dealing with psychological job strain.

I very much appreciate you taking the time to reply.

If you know of anyone on an executive level (ie aged over 18, working at Director level, a CEO or Board member, with at least one year's experience at that level) that may wish to participate, with their permission, please let me have their contact details. Alternatively, please forward my email details, j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk, to them and ask them to get in touch.

[Appropriate sign off]

Janice Haddon

University of Lancaster

j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk

[new number for research]

Email 4 - Participant Agrees & Informed Consent

Dear [personal name if possible]

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my study looking at the behavioural coping strategies that executives have when dealing with psychological job strain. Your willingness to participate is greatly appreciated.

I will be emailing you shortly with an Informed Consent form via DocuSign, a secure and encrypted method for electronic signatures. If you could read and electronically sign and return the form through the DocuSign system, I will then contact you to arrange a mutually agreeable time for the Microsoft Teams meeting. If you have any questions in the interim, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate.

Best wishes

Janice Haddon

Principal Researcher

Lancaster University

j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk

Email 5 - Confirmation of Interview & Microsoft Teams Link

Dear [personal name if possible]

I am writing to confirm the time of our scheduled meeting of [day, date, time]. I have sent you a diary appointment and below you will also find the Microsoft Teams meeting link which you can click on at the appropriate time. I will be in a private room for our discussion, and I would respectfully request that you do the same so we can jointly ensure your confidentiality and no interruptions.

As part of the research I would like to collect a few basic details on your demographic information, which will enable me to anonymously report, such as time in your role, age range etc. I have detailed these on the attached document together with two of the foundation questions that I will be using as part of the interview. I would ask that you give some thought to these in preparation for our meeting so we can maximise the time we have on our call. The meeting will take no longer than one hour to respect your busy schedule.

[Microsoft Teams meeting link]

Should you have any questions please contact me on my email
j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk or via telephone on [new specific number for the research].
Otherwise I will look forward to talking with you on [day, date, time].

Best wishes

Janice Haddon

Principal Researcher

Lancaster University

j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk

[new number for research]

Email 6 - Thank you for Participating

Dear [personal name if possible]

Thank you so much for your time yesterday. Your participation in this research is invaluable and I am very grateful for you finding the time in your busy schedule.

I would like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw your data from the study by [date 2 weeks from the interview], should you so wish. You can do this by emailing at j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk. After this date and once your data has been anonymised and analysed, it will not be possible to withdraw the information that you have provided.

Should you feel distressed or you need to talk through any issues, either as a result of participating in this study, or in the future, please contact your GP, or any of the other organisations listed on the Participant Information Sheet.

[if requested on participant consent form, include the following sentence:]

As you have requested a copy of the findings, I will email you with a summary report as soon as the research is completed.

Once again, thank you so much for your participation.

Best wishes

Janice Haddon

Principal Researcher

Lancaster University

j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk

[new number for research]

Email 7 = Thank you but not Required

Dear [name]

Thank you very much for expressing an interest in taking part in this research study. In order to conduct the research, I needed up to 30 participants and have been fortunate to have sufficient volunteers to take part in this study.

As a result, I do not need to arrange any further interviews at this stage. I am very grateful for your interest and will be back in touch should the situation change.

Best wishes

Janice Haddon
Principal Researcher
University of Lancaster
j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk

Appendix 11 - Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent

Participant Information Sheet

Exploring gender differences of Executives' experiences of psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies through Critical Incident Technique.

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

This research is being conducted by Janice Haddon, a student in the Organisational Health and Well Being Doctorate Programme at Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom.
What is this study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore the behavioural coping strategies that executives in the UK have when dealing with psychological job strain.

Stress and coping are considered key determinants of health and quality of life. Stress-coping research therefore has important theoretical and practical implications. The ongoing strategic and employee responsibilities that executives have in their roles can lead to a level of continuous pressure. Long-term exposure to stress and job strain have been associated with working conditions, psychological strain and harmful health effects, such as anxiety, depression and cardiovascular diseases. How individuals respond to this workplace strain is fundamental in understanding what behavioural coping strategies are employed and if these have a positive or negative affect.

Whilst there is a wealth of research in the health sector and largely among company employees, studies into how senior executives are impacted by job strain is limited. This research therefore seeks to bridge this gap and your participation will provide invaluable data to advance knowledge into this field.

How do you define psychological job strain and coping?
Psychological job strain is defined as 'a response produced in the individual to aversive and potentially harmful reactions to long-term exposure to stress' (O'Driscoll et al., 2009 P. 245).

Coping is defined as the 'constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and / or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person' (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The theoretical underpinnings of stress, coping and wellbeing are described as interacting elements between the individual and the environment where 'stressors' result in some form of imbalance or strain in the individual's level of equilibrium and sense of wellbeing. How individuals attempt to correct this imbalance is classed as coping behaviours (Brough et al., 2005).

Why have I been approached?

You have been approached as you are over age 18, are in an executive role as either a Director, CEO or Board member of a UK company in the private sector and have worked on that level for at least 12 months.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary. It is completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

The researcher will arrange a Microsoft Teams meeting, lasting no more than one hour, at a time that is convenient to you. The purpose of the interview is to understand your experiences of job strain and what behavioural strategies you apply as coping mechanisms. The interview will be recorded and transcribed to allow the researcher to carry out the necessary analysis. Interviews will be arranged on a first come, first served basis and if enough interviews have already been completed before you confirm that you would like to take part in the study, the researcher will let you know.

Although it is not compulsory to do so, you will also be asked if you could recommend another one or two UK executives that may like to participate. With their permission, you can then forward their contact details to the researcher, who will then contact them independently, or you can pass on the researcher's contact details to them.

Will my data be confidential?

In the process of the research, data will be collected by the researcher including your email address, contact telephone number, gender identity, age (within a range), ethnicity, job title, industry, company size (number of employees), time in your current organisation, time in your current role, time in an executive position (defined as a Director, CEO or Board role), hours worked per day, hours worked per week, marital status and family composition and a recording of the interview. Your email address and telephone number will only be used to send more information to you on the interview process and to arrange a mutually agreeable interview time. Your details will not be released to any third parties.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed and the recordings and transcripts stored as password protected and encrypted files on the server of the University of Lancaster. Individual codes will be used to link each recording and transcript with the participant and the file of these codes will be password protected and kept of the University of Lancaster servers as encrypted files for 10 years after the study has finished.

The transcripts of the interview will be anonymised and you will be allocated with a unique participant ID. All references to individuals, places, dates, projects and specific events will be removed. Any quotes from interviews used in reporting will not be attributed and care will be taken to ensure that the source of the quote cannot be identified. The specific content of any interview will not be shared with anyone other than the supervisors of the principal researcher. The exception to this would occur if an interviewee were to say something in the interview that places either themselves, or someone else, at significant risk of harm. In this instance the researcher will be required to break confidentiality and speak to her supervisors about the issue. If possible, the researcher will tell the participant if this is necessary.

What will happen to the results?
The results will be summarised and reported in a PhD thesis and may be submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal. You may receive a summary report of the findings, should you so wish, by ticking the appropriate box on the informed consent form that you must sign in order to take part in the study. The report will not have any information included that could identify individual data or who took part. If you wish to withdraw from the study after the interview with the researcher, you may do so within two weeks of the meeting.

Are there any risks?
There are no risks anticipated with participating in this study. However, if you are concerned following participation you are encouraged to inform the researcher or to make use of the resources suggested at the end of this sheet.

Are there any benefits to taking part?
It is hoped that you may find participating interesting and the opportunity to reflect on how you deal with psychological job strain as a result of your role. There are no direct benefits in taking part.
Who has reviewed the project?
This study has been reviewed by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University.

Where can I obtain further information about the study if I need it?
If you have any questions about the study, please contact the main researcher:
Janice Haddon
j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)XXXXXX

Or the supervisors for this research:

Dr Sabir Giga: s.giga@lancaster.ac.uk
Dr. Abigail Morris: a.morris7@lancaster.ac.uk

If you wish to make a complaint or raise concerns about any aspect of this study and do not want to speak to the researcher, you can contact:
Dr Katarina Janke
Tel: (01524) 595103
Department of Health Economics
Email: k.jankemarie@lancaster.ac.uk
Faculty of Health and Medicine
Division of Health Research Lancaster University Lancaster LA1 4YG

If you wish to speak to someone outside of the Organisational Health and Well Being Doctorate Programme, you may also contact:

Dr Laura Machin Tel: +44 (0)1524 594973
Chair of FHM REC Email: l.machin@lancaster.ac.uk

Faculty of Health and Medicine
(Lancaster Medical School)
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1 4YG

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Resources in the event of concern:

Should you feel distressed either as a result of taking part, or in the future, contact your GP and ask for an urgent appointment.

You can also call or message the following:
NHS Help Line on 111 for general advice

The Samaritans – Telephone number: 116 123 or email: jo@samaritans.org for a reply within 24 hours.

Shout Crisis Text Line – Text "SHOUT" to 85258

Informed Consent Form:

Study Title: Exploring gender differences of Executives' experiences of psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies through Critical Incident Technique.

We are asking if you would like to take part in a research project to explore the behavioural coping strategies that executives in the UK have when dealing with psychological job strain.

Before you consent to participating in the study we ask that you read the participant information sheet and mark each box below with your initials if you agree. If you have any questions or queries before signing the consent form please speak to the principal investigator, Janice Haddon, who can be contacted via email at j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk.

Please initial each statement:

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet and fully understand what is expected of me within this study.

2. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and to have them answered.

3. I understand that my interview will be video and audio recorded and then made into an anonymised written transcript.

4. I understand that video and audio recordings will be kept until the research project has been examined.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

6. I understand that once my data have been anonymised

and incorporated into themes it might not be possible for it to be withdrawn, though every attempt will be made to extract my data, up to the point of publication.

7. I understand that the information from my interview will be pooled with other participants' responses, anonymised and may be published.

8. I consent to information and quotations from my interview being used in reports, conferences and training events.

9. I understand that the researcher will share and discuss data with their supervisors as needed.

10. I understand that any information I give will remain strictly confidential and anonymous unless it is thought that there is a risk of harm to myself or others, in which case the principal investigator will need to share this information with their research supervisor.

11. I consent to Lancaster University keeping written transcriptions of the interview for 10 years after the study has finished.

12. I consent to take part in the above study.

13. I would like to receive a summary report of the findings when the study has been fully completed (not compulsory)

Name of Participant _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Research Title:
Exploring gender differences of Executives' experiences of psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies through Critical Incident Technique.

Indicative Interview Questions:

- Welcome and thank you for participating. General rapport building conversation.

- Outline that the meeting will take no more than an hour. Confirm that the participant has received and reviewed the demographic data requirements and the two base interview questions.

- Reiteration of confidentiality and anonymity.

- Reiteration of the purpose of the study and why they have been asked to take part.

- Ask the participant if they have any questions relating to the study, before starting the interview.

- Remind participant of their right to stop the interview and to withdraw within 2 weeks of the interview.

Interview will commence with collecting demographic data (appendix 12) and progress on to research questions, as follows:

1. Demographic – gender identity, age range, ethnicity, job title, industry, company size, time in current role, time in current organisation, time in an Executive role, hours worked per day, hours worked per week, marital status and family composition

2. Looking back over the previous 12 months, please describe a significant situation that caused you stress and job strain in your role, and which resulted in a **positive** outcome. A significant situation is a situation outside of routine events, which triggered your attention to resolve or to 'make a decision', which later resulted in a positive outcome. Please think of a situation that you can easily remember.

3. Looking back over the previous 12 months, please describe a significant situation that caused you stress and job strain in your role, and which resulted in a **negative** outcome. A significant situation is a situation outside of routine events, which triggered your attention to resolve or to 'make a decision', which later resulted in a negative outcome. Please think of a situation that you can easily remember.

Sub Questions and generic Probes:

- What happened next?

- Who was involved?

- What did you do?

- What was the outcome?

- How did that make you feel?

- How would you describe your behaviour in handling this situation?

- How would you describe other people's behaviour?

- Who or what was driving the decision?

- What could have made the action more effective?

4. Add in additional questions if new themes emerge.

Potential additional Questions:

5. What coping strategies do you have to ensure you manage the daily pressures of your role? What do you consider to be positive / negative?

6. (Considering the 'support' element of JDCS), what impact does your responsibility for others have on your daily duties. (plus follow up questions)

7. What impact, if any, does your home and family responsibilities have on your experience of fulfilling your job?

8. Is there anything that we haven't covered in terms of job strain or behavioural coping strategies at work that you think is important?

Thank you so much for your participation. Please email or telephone me if you have any questions concerning this interview.

Remind participant of their right to withdraw within 2 weeks and refer Executive to the participant information sheet for contact details if they wish to make a complaint or if they need further support in any matter.

Appendix 13 – Member Check Emails

Dear

As part of my PhD research quality control measures, I am incorporating 'member checks' into my data review and I would therefore like to email you a copy of the transcript from your interview.

In order for me to do this in a secure and confidential manner, I would like to confirm that this is the correct email for me to use?

The purpose of the review is to give you the opportunity to add any additional information on executive job strain, behavioural coping strategies or gender related specifics that you feel we did not cover in the interview. It is obviously not compulsory for you to review the transcript, so I would appreciate your confirmation if you would like to review the document and if so, if you would like it password protected? If you would like a password on the document perhaps you could confirm your mobile number, and I can text the password for added security.

I understand that you are very busy, so if I do not hear back from you before Monday 21stFebruary, I will assume that you do not wish to receive and review a copy. Once again, I would like to thank you for your time and contribution to my research.

With best wishes

Janice

Janice Haddon

Principal Researcher, Lancaster University

XXXX

Reply email:

Thank you so much [name].

I have attached the document for your review and will look forward to hearing back from you. I have left name and company names in on your version so as to ensure it all makes sense. I will obviously delete that detail should I use any quotes within my thesis.

I hope all is well with you.

Best wishes   Janice

Appendix 14 - Researcher's reflective Journey

Throughout my working career I have always been passionate about how people are treated in the workplace, a passion that led me into the field of Human Resources. In experiencing a wide range of employee and leadership behaviours as I progressed with my own career, undertaking interviews, the application of grievance, disciplinary, harassment and equal opportunities policies, through to coaching, therapy and designing and running leadership programmes, I have always been intrigued by the individual and unique experiences people have within the workplace and how they cope. Why people make the choices that they do; with some working to simply provide for finances to underpin different aspects of their lives, and others having a single determination to progress as high up the organisational ladder as they can, is an area that has always peaked my curiosity.

I have always held a fascination with the psychology of behaviour and the impact that each of us have on others, not only in the workplace but in all aspects of life. An impact that can have a positive effect but also a very negative one - an impact that can then ripple out far and wide. How we deal with the personal impact and how that shapes our own behaviour is an aspect that led me to undertake additional training into the areas of psychotherapy, coaching and counselling. Having experienced peaks of stress myself and witnessed that in others through my work, I became curious to understand in more depth other people's experiences and how they coped with the ups and downs.

When I first broached the subject of stress with Dr Sabir Giga, his challenge on what I actually meant by 'stress' led me into a deeper dive into the topic to define my focus. I realised I was starting too broadly and would have enough for three or four PhDs, so as I started to explore the literature in more depth, it led me to identify the Job Demand, Control, Support model and the relationship to psychological job strain. How this linked to coping strategies, both positive and maladaptive, provided me with the lens that not only supported my natural interest, but excited me to investigate the area more fully.

Janice Haddon
Lancaster University
PhD Organisational Health and Wellbeing

In working with senior leaders, I was fascinated with how they coped with what sometimes seemed like constant pressure and stress. In reviewing the literature, it was apparent that there was limited research in this field with executives. With my understanding that many are bound by contracts of employment that do not allow them to participate in such studies, I was determined to find a way to bridge the gap in the extant literature. With my background in HR and coaching, I was naturally drawn to the personal experiences of individuals which led me to a qualitative approach, an approach that was distinctly lacking in the extant literature. I chose to use semi-structured interviews to enable depth of discussion for greater understanding into lived experiences and for participants to provide as much information as they chose to, and to capture the long-term personal impact.

In designing the detail and recruitment strategy that I was to use, I was aware of the need to undertake the study as a researcher and not as a HR, leadership consultant or coach. I was greatly aware of how individuals might experience the process, what questions or concerns they might have about being involved, which informed my design and participant information. In order for me to gain the widest of experiences and to not have an influence in the detail participants would share, I ensured that I had not worked with any of the volunteers previously relating to stress or coping. To start with I had some concerns that people may not volunteer – if there was limited research out there, it was entirely possible executives just would not participate in such a study. A snowball strategy however, provided me with a range of participants that I did not know, which in turn provided for a depth of experiences from wide ranging business sectors.

I chose the Critical Incident Technique for two main reasons. Firstly, in providing the questions prior to the interviews, the time taken to recall significant events was done outside of the interview and therefore enabled more depth of conversation in the allotted time. Secondly, I wanted to allow for the participants personal reflection to enable me to capture resulting learning and the impact on life choices and decision making their experiences might have had. Many of the volunteers, took this reflective learning away with them from the interview as the conversation had given them pause for thought and the ability to voice resulting decisions they had made. Others took great interest in

considering how they had dealt with the experiences with a positive and negative outcome and how they were able to take the positive learning out of some extremely challenging experiences.

Reviewing the transcriptions gave me greater reflexivity which brought the interviews back to life and a realisation of the depth of information that I had gathered. I was struck by the honesty and detail that the participants were willing to go to and feel deeply privileged that they were prepared to share such depth of personal experiences with me. Having health issues at the time, I could not use technology to record themes, so found myself creating extensive mind-maps. As a kinaesthetic learner, this actually proved a good strategy for me as I could see and track through many sheets of A3 papers simultaneously. This process allowed me to refine my integrative themes and to link them back to previous research.

My personal values of respect and honesty allowed me to remain curious throughout the reflexive thematic analysis process. As the participants had been so open and honest with me, I was stuck by my own need to accurately reflect these experiences so the voice of the UK executive could be heard.

Throughout my PhD journey, I have experienced severe health issues and lost both my parents, my father after caring for him 24/7 for nearly four years following my mother's unexpected passing. It has been a challenging journey and one that I am proud to have completed. I have learnt a lot about myself in the process, the deep love and support that I receive from my family and friends, my patience, resilience, and determination being key factors that I hope will continue to take me forward in life.

Janice Thomas
December 2024

Appendix 15 - Ethics Proposal, Confirmation Letter and Disability Review Letter

Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC)

Lancaster University

Application for Ethical Approval for Research involving direct contact with human participants.

for additional advice on completing this form, hover cursor over 'guidance'.

Guidance on completing this form is also available as a word document

Title of Project: Exploring gender differences of Executives' experiences of psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies through Critical Incident Technique.

Name of applicant/researcher: Janice Haddon

ACP ID number (if applicable)*: 30850994   **Funding source (if applicable)**

Grant code (if applicable):

*If your project has *not* been costed on ACP, you will also need to complete the Governance Checklist [link].

Type of study

☐ Involves existing documents/data only, or the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants. **Complete sections one, *two* and four of this form**

x☐ Includes *direct* involvement by human subjects. **Complete sections one, *three* and four of this form**

SECTION ONE

---

1. Appointment/position held by applicant and Division within FHM   Student, Organisational Health and Well Being.

2. Contact information for applicant:

E-mail: j.haddon@lancaster.ac.uk   **Telephone**XXXX (please give a number on which you can be contacted at short notice)

Address: XXXXXX

3. **Names and appointments of all members of the research team (including degree where applicable)**

Janice Haddon, Student, Organisational Health and Wellbeing.

---

3. If this is a student project, please indicate what type of project by marking the relevant box/deleting as appropriate: (please note that UG and taught masters projects should complete **FHMREC form UG-tPG**, following the procedures set out on the FHMREC website

PG Diploma ☐   Masters by research ☐   PhD Thesis ☐   PhD Pall. Care ☐

PhD Pub. Health ☐   PhD Org. Health & Well Being ☐X   PhD Mental Health ☐
MD ☐

DClinPsy SRP ☐   [if SRP Service Evaluation, please also indicate here: ☐]   DClinPsy Thesis ☐

4. Project supervisor(s), if different from applicant: Dr Sabir Giga and Dr Abigail Morris

5. **Appointment held by supervisor(s) and institution(s) where based (if applicable)**: Dr Sabir Giga – Senior Lecturer in Organisational Health and Well Being, Lancaster University. Dr Abigail Morris – Lecturer in Workplace Health and Well Being, Lancaster University.

SECTION TWO

Complete this section if your project involves existing documents/data only, or the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants

---

1. Anticipated project dates (month and year)

Start date: End date:

2. Please state the aims and objectives of the project (no more than 150 words, in lay-person's language):

Data Management

For additional guidance on data management, please go to Research Data Management
webpage, or email the RDM support email: rdm@lancaster.ac.uk

3. Please describe briefly the data or records to be studied, or the evaluation to be undertaken.

4a. How will any data or records be obtained?

4b. Will you be gathering data from websites, discussion forums and on-line 'chat-rooms'

4c. If yes, where relevant has permission / agreement been secured from the website moderator?

4d. If you are only using those sites that are open access and do not require registration, have you made your intentions clear to other site users?

4e. If no, please give your reasons

5. What plans are in place for the storage, back-up, security and documentation of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc)? Note who will be responsible for deleting the data at the end of the storage period. Please ensure that your plans comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the (UK) Data Protection Act 2018.

6a. Is the secondary data you will be using in the public domain?

6b. If NO, please indicate the original purpose for which the data was collected, and comment on whether consent was gathered for additional later use of the data.

Please answer the following question *only* if you have not completed a Data Management Plan for an external funder

7a. How will you share and preserve the data underpinning your publications for at least 10 years e.g. PURE?

7b. Are there any restrictions on sharing your data?

8. Confidentiality and Anonymity

a. Will you take the necessary steps to assure the anonymity of subjects, including in subsequent publications?

b. How will the confidentiality and anonymity of participants who provided the original data be maintained?

9. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research?

10. What other ethical considerations (if any), not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study? How will these issues be addressed?

SECTION THREE

Complete this section if your project includes *direct* involvement by human subjects

1. Summary of research protocol in lay terms (indicative maximum length 150 words):

This qualitative research seeks to explore and add to our understanding of gender differences in the behavioural coping strategies executives have for dealing with psychological job strain.

The aims of this research are therefore:

- To explore how individual executives' describe their experience and understanding of psychological job strain.
- To explore both positive and negative experiences of executive job strain through Critical Incident Technique.
- To identify the causes of executive's job strain.
- To explore what behavioural coping strategies executives utilise in order to cope with that strain.
- To explore any gender differences in executives' responses.

The study will invite 25 to 30 executives working in the private sector in UK businesses to take part in a semi-structured interview to explore their experiences of psychological job strain and behavioural coping strategies. The interview will utilise Critical Incident Technique (a method of questioning with a critical incident defined as 'an activity or event where the consequences were so clear that the participant has a definite idea regarding the effects' (Flanagan, 1954) to recall one positive and one negative experience of job strain. Responses to a series of open questions and relevant, appropriate follow up questions, will be analysed using a thematic template approach in order to identify themes, sub-themes and differences.

2. **Anticipated project dates (month and year only**)
Start date: May 2020   End date June 2022

Data Collection and Management
For additional guidance on data management, please go to Research Data Management
webpage, or email the RDM support email: rdm@lancaster.ac.uk

3. Please describe the sample of participants to be studied (including maximum & minimum number, age, gender):
The population being studied are English speaking executives working in UK private sector businesses. The research will be conducted with a maximum of 30 participants, over the age of 18 years. Gender and other biases will be minimised through the research design, recruitment strategy and the researcher ensuring all ethics and legal requirements are met throughout the research. Participants will be sought from UK organisations in any private sector, with no limitation on organisation size in order to gain a broad range of executives' experiences. For the purposes of this study, executives are defined as those working in a CEO, Board or Director position, with a minimum of 12 months experience at that level.

4. How will participants be recruited and from where? Be as specific as possible. Ensure that you provide the *full versions* of all recruitment materials you intend to use with this application (eg adverts, flyers, posters).

Following ethical approval from Lancaster University, a purposeful sample of up to 30 executives will be recruited from the researcher's LinkedIn network. A public recruitment post on the researcher's LinkedIn account (appendix 1) and an information graphic (appendix 2) detailing a summary of study information for participants, will ask interested executives to contact the researcher on LinkedIn or via the researcher's Lancaster University email address. Snowball sampling from those volunteers will be used to supplement the generation of the full study sample should the original recruitment post not yield the intended 30 participants. Snowball sampling will serve to negate researcher bias in the selection of participants. The first recruitment email (appendix 3) inviting participation will include the full Participant Information Sheet (appendix 10), which will outline the aims and objectives of the intended research in order that the executive may give full consideration to their participation without any obligation to volunteer. If a response is not received within two weeks, a follow up email (appendix 4) will be sent. The executive will be asked to provide reasons if they decide not to participate. If the executive does not respond to the second email, no further contact will be made. If an executive replies and declines to participate, an email (appendix 5) will be sent thanking them for their time. All emails will be sent via a Lancaster University account.

With confirmation from the executive that they would like to participate, an email (appendix 6) will be sent advising a consent form (appendix 11) will be emailed via DocuSign, with the document being fully encrypted and with a complete audit trail on delivery and receipt. On receipt of the signed consent form, the participant will be contacted to establish a mutually agreeable time for the interview. Once agreed, an emailed calendar invitation (appendix 7) including a Microsoft Teams meeting link will be sent confirming the agreed date and time. A document outlining the demographic participant information to be captured during the interview, together with the two main Critical Incident Technique questions for consideration (appendix 12), will be attached. On completion of the interview an email (appendix 8), will be sent thanking them for their participation and reminding them of their right to withdraw.

Should this direct LinkedIn approach and snowballing not yield the minimum number of participants, then a wider recruitment strategy will be undertaken by utilising the alumni of Lancaster University and the alumni of the researchers' previous areas of study, namely Henley Business College and Nottingham Trent University.

Should the situation arise whereby the researcher has enough participants for the purposes of the research and further expressions of interest are received, the researcher will respond by email (appendix 9), thanking them for considering taking part and explaining that the required number of participants has been achieved.

The semi-structured interview guide (appendix 13) will be piloted before the research commences.

5. Briefly describe your data collection and analysis methods, and the rationale for their use.

Microsoft Teams will be used with video and voice recording, allowing interviews to be conducted regardless of participant and researcher location. Both researcher and participant will each be in a private room, which cannot be overheard and with no interruptions to ensure confidentiality. The Microsoft Teams platform allows for encryption on all audio, video and screen sharing data with controls set so data in transit cannot be intercepted, thus protecting confidentiality for the participant and the researcher. An additional digital recorder will be utilised as a back-up for voice recording, in case of technical issues with Microsoft Teams.

Participant names and dates will be removed from the transcript in order to protect anonymity during data collection, transcription, interpretation and reporting stages. Care will be taken during the interviews not to refer to previous or subsequent interviews. Participants will be assigned a unique participant identification number so that any verbatim quotes used in any reporting of the research cannot be identified or attributed. Transcripts will be analysed using the thematic template method and specific comments or sections of transcript will be cross referenced to particular themes, using NVivo software. Further access to the data will not be given to any third parties other than the researcher's supervisors.

6. What plan is in place for the storage, back-up, security and documentation of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc.)? Note who will be responsible for deleting the data at the end of the storage

period. Please ensure that your plans comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the (UK) Data Protection Act 2018.

On completion of the interviews, the recordings will be downloaded and transferred to the Lancaster University servers, within 24 hours, with the originals then being deleted. All files will be password-protected, names will be removed from the data and stored securely under participant number. Paper copies of notes will be kept in a locked cabinet, within a locked and secure building. These will then be scanned, password protected and stored on the University of Lancaster Servers, with the original notes being shredded.

Files generated and required for NVivo analysis will be stored on the University of Lancaster servers, as password protected files when not in use. When in use they will be worked on in One Drive through the researchers Lancaster login and automatically saved on to the University of Lancaster servers.

Full verbatim transcription will be completed by the researcher or an approved individual via Lancaster University, that has signed a non-disclosure agreement (appendix 14), to adhere to current GDPR and data protection regulations. The leading researcher / author will re-listen to the recordings whilst reviewing the typed transcripts to ensure full accuracy and to commence identification of themes.

Audio and video recordings will be deleted once the research has been completed and examined. Results and data will be retained on the Lancaster University servers for the recommended period of 10 years, following submission of my PhD thesis, as encrypted files. My supervisor, Dr Sabir Giga, will be responsible for all data storage and deletion after the 10 years.

7. Will audio or video recording take place? ☐ no   x☐ audio   x ☐ video

a. Please confirm that portable devices (laptop, USB drive etc) will be encrypted where they are used for identifiable data. If it is not possible to encrypt your portable devices, please comment on the steps you will take to protect the data.

All data will be encrypted.

b What arrangements have been made for audio/video data storage? At what point in the research will tapes/digital recordings/files be destroyed?

Recordings will be downloaded and transferred to the Lancaster University servers, encrypted and password protected within 24 hours, with the originals then being deleted. Audio and video recordings will be deleted once the research has been completed and examined. My supervisor Dr Sabir Giga will be responsible for data storage and deletion, 10 years after the submission of my PhD thesis.

Please answer the following questions *only* if you have not completed a Data Management Plan for an external funder

8a. How will you share and preserve the data underpinning your publications for at least 10 years e.g. PURE?

8b. Are there any restrictions on sharing your data ?

9. Consent

a. Will you take all necessary steps to obtain the voluntary and informed consent of the prospective participant(s) or, in the case of individual(s) not capable of giving informed consent, the permission of a legally authorised representative in accordance with applicable law? yes

b. Detail the procedure you will use for obtaining consent?

When an executive agrees to take part in the study the Informed Consent form will be emailed via DocuSign. When this electronic document and signature is returned to the researcher, the participant will be contacted to arrange a mutually agreeable time for the interview.

10. What discomfort (including psychological eg distressing or sensitive topics), inconvenience or danger could be caused by participation in the project? Please indicate plans to address these potential risks. State the timescales within which participants may withdraw from the study, noting your reasons.

There is no risk of physical harm from involvement in this research. There may however, be some psychological discomfort should the recollection of events cause participants to

experience any distress during the interview. The researcher will be presenting an open and non-judgemental attitude to put participants at ease and to create the necessary rapport. It will also be stated at the beginning of the interview that participants may decline to answer any of the questions, stop the interview at any time and withdrawn from the research for up to 2 weeks after the interview, should they so wish. After two weeks when the interview has been anonymised and analysed, it will not be possible to withdraw the information provided by the participant.

11. What potential risks may exist for the researcher(s)? Please indicate plans to address such risks (for example, noting the support available to you; counselling considerations arising from the sensitive or distressing nature of the research/topic; details of the lone worker plan you will follow, and the steps you will take).

No risks are identified with personal contact due to the interviews being conducted via a private Microsoft Teams link. Should the researcher experience any distress from sensitive data received in the course of the research, full support and counselling will be sought.

12. Whilst we do not generally expect direct benefits to participants as a result of this research, please state here any that result from completion of the study.

There may be no direct benefit to participants taking part in the study. Participants may however, gain a better understanding of their behavioural coping strategies and experiences of job strain as a result of answering the questions. Executives will be offered a summary of the findings when the research is complete.

13. Details of any incentives/payments (including out-of-pocket expenses) made to participants:

No payments or incentives will be made for participation.

14. Confidentiality and Anonymity
a. Will you take the necessary steps to assure the anonymity of subjects, including in subsequent publications? yes
b. Please include details of how the confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be ensured, and the limits to confidentiality.

All files, video and voice recordings will be encrypted and stored securely. Transfer to the Lancaster University servers will be made within 24 hours and the originals deleted. Each transcript will be identified by a unique code that will be linked to the individual's identity in a separate file.

Every effort will be made to protect anonymity at both data collection and interpretation and reporting stages. Care will be taken during the interviews not to refer to previous or subsequent interviews. All names and dates will be removed from the transcript in order to minimise the opportunity to identify individuals. Care will be taken to ensure that any quotes used in any reporting of the research cannot be identified or attributed. Transcripts will be analysed using a thematic template method and specific comments or sections of transcript will be cross referenced to particular themes, using NVivo software. Further access to the data will not be given to any third parties other than the researcher's supervisors.

15. If relevant, describe the involvement of your target participant group in the *design and conduct* of your research.

The semi-structured interview guide will be piloted before the research commences.

16. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research? If you are a student, include here your thesis.

The results of this study will inform the researcher's PhD submission. A copy of a report detailing the overall findings of the research will be offered to participants if they indicate their interest when signing the consent form at the start of the research. Results will be submitted for publication in practitioner, management and academic journals. Presentations and talks at relevant conferences and engagements will also be sought.

17. What particular ethical considerations, not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study? Are there any matters about which you wish to seek guidance from the FHMREC?

No additional ethical problems are anticipated.

SECTION FOUR: signature

Applicant electronic signature: jhaddon   Date 8th June 2020

Student applicants: please tick to confirm that your supervisor has reviewed your application, and that they are happy for the application to proceed to ethical review   / ☐

Project Supervisor name (if applicable): Dr Sabir Giga   Date application discussed 8th June 2020

Submission Guidance

1. **Submit your FHMREC application by email to Becky Case** (fhmresearchsupport@lancaster.ac.uk) as two separate documents:

   i. **FHMREC application form.**
      Before submitting, ensure all guidance comments are hidden by going into 'Review' in the menu above then choosing *show markup>balloons>show all revisions in line.*

   ii. **Supporting materials.**
       Collate the **following materials for your study, if relevant, into a single word document:**

       a. **Your full research proposal (background, literature review, methodology/methods, ethical considerations).**
       b. Advertising materials (posters, e-mails)
       c. Letters/emails of invitation to participate
       d. Participant information sheets
       e. Consent forms
       f. Questionnaires, surveys, demographic sheets
       g. Interview schedules, interview question guides, focus group scripts
       h. Debriefing sheets, resource lists

       Please note that you DO NOT need to submit pre-existing measures or handbooks which support your work, but which cannot be amended following ethical review. These should simply be referred to in your application form.

2. Submission deadlines:

    i. Projects including direct involvement of human subjects **[section 3 of the form was completed]**. The *electronic* version of your application should be submitted to <u>Becky Case</u> **by the committee deadline date.** Committee meeting dates and application submission dates are listed on the <u>FHMREC website</u>. Prior to the FHMREC meeting you may be contacted by the lead reviewer for further clarification of your application. Please ensure you are available to attend the committee meeting (either in person or via telephone) on the day that your application is considered, if required to do so.

    ii. The following projects will normally be dealt with via chair's action, and may be submitted at any time. **[Section 3 of the form has *not* been completed, and is not required].** Those involving:

        a. existing documents/data only;

        b. the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants;

        c. service evaluations.

3. <u>**You must submit this application from your Lancaster University email address, and copy your supervisor in to the email in which you submit this application**</u>

Ethics Confirmation Letter

Applicant: Janice Haddon Supervisor: Sabir Giga
Department: DHR
FHMREC Reference: FHMREC19084

Re: FHMREC19084
'Exploring gender differences of Executives' experiences of psychological job strain and their behavioural coping strategies through Critical Incident Technique'

Dear Janice,

Thank you for submitting your research ethics application for the above project for review by the **Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC)**. The application was recommended for approval by FHMREC, and on behalf of the Chair of the Committee, I can confirm that approval has been granted for the amendment to this research project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- - ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- - reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research to the Research Ethics Officer at the email address below (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress);
- - submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Officer for approval.
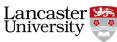
  Please contact me if you have any queries or require further information. Email:- fhmresearchsupport@lancaster.ac.uk

  Yours sincerely,

  Dr. Elisabeth Suri-Payer,
  Interim Research Ethics Officer, Secretary to FHMREC.

Appendix 16 - Participant Quotes by Theme and Sub-Theme

Integrating Theme and Sub-Theme	Participant Quotes
The JDCS Model **Demand – Internal to the Organisation** **Workload and the Nature of the Role**	"It was only when I got into the role, then I realised just how much was expected, in terms of numbers […] I felt overwhelmed and under-supported." P3F "Over that weekend I was sitting reading in detail, their report on what were some of the problems […] so I wrote a paper and I knew the consequences of this was significant […] might be that I would get dismissed from the company." P6M "Nothing comes free in life, and if you are going to get paid you know, the big bucks, and big responsibilities you know, shit is going to happen somewhere, and it's probably not going to wait till you are back in from your holidays, it's going to happen when it happens, and, and you just have to deal, but I don't miss it." P6M "But as I say, I don't recognise it necessarily as stress, I just recognise there is a huge amount going on, and a lot you know, a lot to, to get done." P6M "So, I had to take on that role as well as mine and there was a change of management team […] I was the longer serving individual and was having to get very heavily involved in the refinancing of the company, knowing that I probably wouldn't be kept on after the re-finance. It was very stressful […] under pressure on a continual basis for quite some time – about 4 months." P7M

"Work pressure etc never affected me […] I put the pressure on myself […] I set those stretch targets." P8M

"They will ring you at 2 o'clock in the morning if you are not delivering." P9M

"And I can cope with any problems, anything that's thrown at me as long as there isn't somebody with one stripe more who is crazy." P9M

"I don't really recognise stress myself. I'm more of a bigger picture rather than the details, so I quite like […] a lot going on and stuff happening." P10M

"There was an underlying rate […] which I would describe as being quite high and then severe peaks associated with very big positives or negatives […] you are just kind of like a little on the edge all the time." P11M

"And I think you almost become conditioned to that, run hard, plate spinning, [...] constantly waiting for the phone to ring." P12F

"It was my ability to develop relationships, build trust, create a climate or an environment where people felt […] and it would be equitable, and it would be fair." P13F

"I think stress for me has been good, because it's been almost the, the fuel that's made me perform well in lots of situations. If I wasn't so stressed about going and presenting, I wouldn't prepare as well, [...] but when it tips over and you are constantly running out of time, and you think [...] oh gosh, the only way to manage this is to do more and more and more." P15M

"The backdrop is a job that was already overloaded, breakfast meetings at 7.30am and late evening meetings." P16F

"Which has been very intense for some of my team for a very long time." P19M

"No matter what you are being presented with, no matter what the situation, you either accept it and try and deal with it and make the best of it or you leave." P19M

"I perform better under a certain stress level, but then again it actually becomes unhealthy." P20

"I'm at the front of the machine trying to answer questions, that's where the intensity is for me […] I'm literally on the back foot defensive mode – So draining. Because you don't know where the next inbound is coming from, or the next attack on you so we have got it coming from all, everywhere, it's really intense." P21M

	"There was a high level of risk, but I decided for my own sanity I couldn't pass without a fight – it was extremely stressful at the time […] alongside the normal pressures." P22
	"I think ultimately, if you lead an organisation you have got to be accountable and at times that will be stressful." P25F
The JDCS Model **Demand – Internal to the Organisation** **Cost Cutting**	"Downsize, (sigh) which is a nice way of saying sack lots of people, about a third of my organisation. So, it was about three hundred, three hundred odd people, and we had to take about a hundred and twenty of them out, [erm] because of, basically we […], we lost a product, [….] from the portfolio." (P6 M) "The only way I could do that was by closing services down […] because of money, I found that quite difficult." P18F
The JDCS Model **Demand – Internal to the Organisation** **Responsibility for Others**	"If you are in charge – everyone is looking to you for support, not the other way around. No one ever thinks the boss might need help." P1M "People were working late and be around late, so on a Friday I would, I used to do cakes on a Friday […] now is the time to go home." (P1 M)

"It's bad enough trying to manage your own emotional levels and anxieties and then trying to manage someone else's." P12F

"For me it's really important that I nurture the emotional, psychological and the physical health of my team." P13F

"[working away on a project] I said to the team, we do not want to sit in the bar and just drink alcohol. So, I did things like book clubs, we did [theatre], we did swimming clubs, etc". P13F

"Helping others to take a break, helped me feel like I was doing my job, which actually gave me more energy […] but I'm not good at taking my own medicine." P14M

"So, so I think you know, pressure wasn't only on me, there was a lot of pressure down through the organisation, so, so it was a very pressurised period for everyone that was involved in that" P14M

"So, I'm probably not […] a particularly good politician […] to win over people I felt that logic should win the day but […] it was making it matter enough for people […] it's quite time consuming and I find that quite energy sapping." P15M

	"I had to tell him to shut up, he was starting to bully my team. I just couldn't bear for my team to be treated that way." P17F
	"Taking on some of the workload for them." P18F
	"My senior team has learned where their weaknesses are and how it's not a problem to admit you have got a weakness." P19M
	"There is no point killing myself worrying about all of the people that work for me. You can care but you can only care up to a certain point." P19M
The JDCS Model **Demand – Internal to the Organisation** **Demands of More Senior Executives**	"He was just very unreasonable during this period, so I think the underlying subtext was he was hoping I would quit." P4M "This was others putting strain on me, to work late so it was just a stressful period […] 14 hours in the office." P7M "He would want constant updates from me every day I'd spend an hour updating him." P8M

"Starved of resource, yet I still had the obligations from the customers on me to deliver. […] The owners of the company were causing me the stress – they were demanding more and more profits, more and more cash generation." P9M

"The autocratic attitude in the company was utterly horrendous […] the stresses that they put the entire management team under […] to try to deliver these numbers for a ridiculous reason, purely self-serving from their point of view, was, was horrendous. It was one of the worst experiences I had ever had." P9M

"So, it was the first time […], when you have got a real, oh shit moment, and you are thinking, how on earth am I going to fix it, but also the pressure from the executive and the board, from everyone to fix it, was immense." P17F

"He attacked me personally in […] meetings and stuff like that, in front of my workforce. I probably took that more personally than anything else." P20M

"You have a Board that want answers." P21M

"And the Board and the Executive and the business generally were looking to me to say how confident are you or do we need to settle. And I have never been so stressed in my entire life." P25F

	"I found the whole situation of being forced into a route that I didn't want to take extremely negative for me in terms of how I've been made to manage it." P25F
The JDCS Model **Demand – Internal to the Organisation** **Organisational Culture**	"But the incentive arrangements […], drove you to do certain things […] 70% of that [earnings] was incentive related. Some of it cash and some […] stock […] you get paid on performance you don't get paid for no performance […] and if your performance is bad, you're fired anyway" P1M "Quite a sort of commanding, controlled type style of leadership […] find the PA at her desk at seven o'clock at night in tears because she had been asked to do something that she didn't know how to do, and, and he had been quite rude and demanding to her, and you could see that the pressure and stress for her was mounting." P2F "I was pinned against the wall by a very senior executive […] if I could fire you I would." P6M "And the system is all set up to basically promote narcissism, sociopaths […] and as you get further up, you know, it's full of the, I mean a sea sweep. […] as you go up […] the number of nice people drops significantly." P8M "I stuck to my guns in the sense of my own personal integrity, and I could look myself in the mirror and the sense of doing the right thing." P12F

"[Boss] he had his way of how he wanted me to be supportive and that was going to the pub on a Friday night in London getting pissed, staying out til 10 / 11 o'clock at night with the team and then going home on the milk train, whereas actually if I'd been working all week, I wanted to start the weekend with my husband […] so we just had different outlooks on life […] and I felt he did not value what I could bring. In my opinion nothing good happens after 9pm when you are out like that." P12F

"And that alignment that I have with the mission and values. A lot of my drive to be successful is probably borne out of not wanting to fail." P15M

"That major incident resulted in a massive leadership development programme." P17F

"I'm the type of person that drives for performance but how I do that is actually quite important to me […] so I won't be bullied […] there's a core running through me that cannot bear discrimination." P17F

"I know it's (EAP) confidential, however, I know we get stats […] how many people have used that — I think I'd rather not use it […] I just don't trust it." P18F

"The only thing that really stresses me out is organisational stupidity and incompetence, that's it." P19M

"I was highly motivated as an individual working for him as he appreciated me – it's as simple as that really – thank you, well done, you are doing some great stuff. But then [...] I didn't enjoy (the other boss) that was more about being a narcissist, as a type, style of leadership. It still haunts me today, still sticks in my mind." P20M

"He [boss] attacked me personally […], in front of my workforce. I probably took that more personally than anything else." P20M

"My CEO was probably the model of behaviour. I was pretty blown away, and I think that calm reassurance, leadership – it just helps the rest of you." P21M

"I got some nourishment from my CEO during this period and that's just recognition by the Board and the CEO about endeavours, work done. That calm recognition." P22M

"I can remember him calling me and saying. You need to get back to work, […] from the point of view that he wanted […] you are entitled to two weeks off yeah, […] and I had been away a week, […] And I was almost shocked by the fact that sort of says, how do you decide when I take my bereavement leave, how much I need." P25F

	"When everybody is trying to sort of hold it together, he [boss] completely loses it, […] that doesn't help the situation, and people get stressed, even more stressed." P25F
The JDCS Model **Demand – External to the Organisation** **External Events**	"A lot of pressure to fix it due to external stakeholders." P4M "It was a stock market listing, so I had no control" P6M "I had to juggle all the key stakeholders" P13F "So the Chancellor has now got to his feet and I'm trying to follow the tweet feed over what the announcements are, and he pretty much opens his budget by saying […] So I'm going to use some gratuitous language, I'm going f@*k, f@*k, f@*k, f@*k, f@*k, f@*k, f@*k, f@*k, and I literally I thought, what do I do. So I jumped off the tube, […] no signal, so I'm legging it up the escalators, tripping over and you know, cutting my hands at the same time, and and then I get out of the station and I start texting my group chief exec to say f@*k, f@*k, f@*k and by this point our share price is tumbling, and it fell by 50% in less than one hour." P21M "Our share price is tumbling, and it fell by 50% in less than an hour. So, it was transformative, and it changed the whole destination of our business" P21M

	"A customer claim – a substantial amount of money. It took up a huge amount of resources in the organisation and I suppose in terms of stress and strain for me." P25F
The JDCS Model **Demand – External to the Organisation** **Responsibility for Others**	"My husband at the time worked a lot of anti-social hours himself, […], but because he was away physically working in the office, I was left trying to juggle the work and my four-year-old, […]. So, there was a lot of guilt involved in that, because I just used to take the easiest option possible to keep her entertained, […] call in lots of favours with friends to look after her or arrange play dates or I stuck her in front of the telly with whatever she wanted, sugary snack wise I suppose." P3F "Yea and then I'm getting the same questions from my wife that I'm getting from the people that I work with, when is this going to be finished, when is this going to end and I'm – I don't know." P4M "There was a sense of, for those that had kids, a sense of guilt and actually away from the kids and therefore […] I'm not being a good mum […] There is a layer of anxiety on top of the work anxiety." P12F "So, you are doing what a homemaker would be doing, […] even if you've got a full-time housekeeper, […] or you have got a nanny, which we had, […], I don't see men […] thinking about, okay, what's happening at the weekend, […] is there any food in the house." P17F "His work hours were very different, so through working through the night he was asleep, so I didn't have anyone to explain that to […] my priorities have changed, Mum guilt crept in quite a lot. There is a delicate

	balance […] that Mum guilt but also wanting to show them that if you work hard – but it is a see saw action all the time." P23F
The JDCS Model **Personal Control** **Taking Action**	"Then you get going and you start to kind of get activated, […] to succeed and to start making progress and to start making a plan, […] and getting people in the organisation to pull through." P14M "Once it's moving forward with a decision and then implementing, it takes a lot of the stress away from me, because I feel in control of it." P17F "I am a list maker, satisfaction knowing I've done something […] because all you are doing is fighting fires the whole time […] not having any proactive time, just being constantly reactive is probably the thing that I find the most difficult." P18F "I always manage to make myself anxious, so I do things quicker." P20M "I have only got 3 options here, I can either control something, I can influence something in order to sort of get a better outcome or I can walk away […] and in any situation, I can always control my response to it." P25F
The JDCS Model	"A worse outcome from people because they are distracted by the pressure, not by the problem. I was wired to that problem and that problem needed to be addressed." P14M

Personal Control Problem Focus	"The thing that I was most impressed with is that the executive team remained pretty calm, no shouting, screaming, emotion – there was 'we have to work through this logically, what do we have to do'." P21M "No shouting, screaming, emotion, there was a, we have to work through this logically, what do we have to do?" P21M "Ultimately I try and just keep perspective and not lose it, focus on the problem – to just stay in control." P25F
The JDCS Model Personal Control Utilisation of Resources	"So, you know if you have about 5 people or 6 people maybe working for you, then yeah, you can actually start to do a lot more. But you have to organise yourself very well otherwise you become a bottleneck because everything is coming to you for a decision. So, you have to be willing to you know, make sure that you empower people appropriately and that you are in contact in the right way with those people." P1M "It was an additional burden on me and my team." P6M "I always wanted to have as many women as I could in my team […] it brought a different dynamic to the leadership team, - a different set of conversations, a more inclusive set of conversations." P6M "What I've learnt is that from a team perspective in the workplace, you get much more engagement and traction when you are more human." P13F

The JDCS Model Control	"So, pressure is when you are busy and can do something about it and stress is when you don't have control." P1M
Lack or Loss of Control	"There was a break down in relations […] I had no control." P6M
	"So, you've started off with quite a high level of control over your own area, and then the rug has been pulled and you are not allowed to do any of that […] The control has gone." P12F
	"The culmination of events […] the low point of my professional career. People phoning me, shouting at me […] rather than the support of [organisation] behind me, […] I felt like I had the weight of [organisation]. So, my anxiety levels were growing. That sense of control, empowerment and the ability to do things differently […] that had been taken away." P12F
	"I don't cope very well when personal values are challenged." P13F
	"We were also damaging our reputation with customers, because we couldn't supply […] we went from a position of […] euphoria […] implemented a system […] To oh dear this is now crippling our business." P14M

"What I find difficult is when I'm not master of my own destiny. And when you lose control, obviously you try and defend it and find reasons why it's a really crap idea to change it." P15M

"Having the control helps […] not having that control it does add to the pressure. Well demand and control going up is okay. It's when the demand goes up but the control goes down that's the problem." P16F

"Well I was just completely, you just don't, I was just in a state of shock, and you just kind of, I think back to it, (pause) I kind of went into a kind of, not a blinding panic, but a kind of, oh s*@t, I just didn't know what, you know, I was like, I just didn't know what to do. And of course, I was incredibly upset, and you feel guilt and you feel all of those, you just feel really, really awful." P17F

"Definitely feeling exasperated a lot of the time, because you are literally having just started something and then having to change it again." P18F

"We had an exec call and I did […] burst into tears which is not me […] everybody would say that god you are always so positive and never seem to get stressed and I did on that call, just kind of all too much. It was a big eye opener for everybody to see me as you know being quite vulnerable and obviously clearly very emotional and stressed on that call – 10 weeks, 7 days a week." P18F

"I was excluded from discussions and meetings […] decisions." P22M

	"Sometimes when I'm out of control or think things are getting out of control for me, I go and control things I can control, […] I will go and do things that are menial or things that I will just sort of say, you know, I can definitely control this." P25F
The JDCS Model **Support**	"I asked for support […] but didn't get any […] I had to find it myself […] I talked to peers, there was no support from more senior managers." P3F
Practical Internal	"I had a guy that worked for me, […] We supported each other during this period." P4M "If there's a like mindedness and shared values and goal founded on common understanding, that's everything for me." P9M "I tend to use others in those sorts of situations, rather than internalise it myself. […] talking to colleagues who had specific knowledge." P12F "A mixture of both practical support but also ringing me up and checking in." P17F "Yeah, more delegation […] I'm not going to be around for. A few weeks, a few months." P21M

	"We are both irrational you know – business leaders and we don't do soppy emotional stuff. I think 5% was emotion and 95% rational." P21M "I still think the one thing that kept me going was this group of people who were analysts, […]. I trusted the team – trusted them all because every time I had a wobble, they said please don't settle with them." P25F
Support **Informational** **External**	"Brilliant Chief Executive, really strong relationship with him, really good executive team." P2F "Can we meet for a beer; I just want to talk something through with you?" P10M "Good friend […] a coach […] so I would often use her as a sounding board […] and a couple of other people, external mentoring [...] some of it was emotional support, some of it was practical support." P12F "Friendships outside of work – phone calls in the evening." P18F "Maybe this is a male thing because I've never conceptualised it as a 'oh I need support', but more just [...] just nice to go and have lunch with them and have a chat. How did you tackle this, what options could you see […] and again a cliché that it's just having a chat." P19M "I meet a retired guy every other month and 4 or 5 close colleagues […] To bounce things off." P20M

	"I have a very good friend, a coach [...] we just talk and she puts things into perspective for me if I need it." P25F
Support **Emotional** **Internal**	"Some industries don't provide the right environment for people who at the top of a group of businesses to talk to someone. And you would think that the coaches that you've got would be an option, but the coaches were often polluted because they reported back in a general way to the HR Director and the company." P1M "I had support from one of my direct reports .. developed a relationship that I could talk to him about anything personally and professionally." P6M "We just worked so well as a team and we leant on each other and we supported each other, and that to me I think if I don't feel as if I could talk to them and be open and transparent, I think I would really have struggled." P13F "Practical support but more emotional so everyone together and share […] so they are not feeling isolated." P18F "I am a bottle upper, I don't tend to talk about my worries with anybody […] not really. I had some close colleagues […] but I didn't share directly what was going on." P22M

Support	"If your partner is not around […] or your marriage is breaking down […] So, I used Executive coaches for many, many years." P1M
Emotional External	"An ex-colleague, so I trusted him, we had a really good working relationship, so I talked a lot of things through with him…. And I have got a good, a good support at home, you know, I can talk things through with [husband]." P2F
	"I speak to my family […] the broad picture." P7M
	"Opportunity to discuss things with my wife […] obviously in the bounds of confidentiality." P10M
	"I mean she knows me better than anyone, so she can see probably early signs of stress and, […] you know she's very good at actually helping me to articulate exactly what it is that is the problem." P15M
	"Emotional support from my husband." P17F
	"Emotional, just being able to have somebody to sit and talk things through with. I've got one particular friend who I run with so I kind of off load a bit then." P18F

	"Maybe this is a male thing because I've never conceptualised it as a 'oh I need support', but more [...] just nice to go and have lunch [...] have a chat. [...] a cliché that it's just having a chat." P19M
	"I don't think I could do my job without (wife), because she takes so much pressure off me in a different way and yet her job is quite pressured as well." P20M
	"I'd talk to (partner) about the parts that I could, but some of this was you know, highly confidential, so I couldn't [...] but only her no one else." P21M
	"I go to others for emotional support [...] family and close friends." P23F
	"My supportive relationships are not necessarily within the workplace [...] my support mechanisms are [...] outside of the workplace. They are talking to people who I have previously worked with – emotional and practical." P25F
Coping Strategies **Increase in Hours**	"I was doing very silly things like getting up at 3am, writing a business paper to ask the Board in the morning for funding for a billion-dollar project." P1M "I felt the only way that I could do the job as I saw it, as I expected of myself, was to put in more hours. I ended up taking work home, working evenings and a lot of hours on the weekends, just to keep afloat." P3F

"Working crazy […] I mean 60 /70-hour weeks, working every weekend to get all this stuff fixed." P4M

"I was probably working 80 hours a week." P6M

"I was regularly doing a hundred hours a week, 15 / 16 hours a day." P8M

"It was very all consuming, how I coped with this was to just throw myself into it and to see if I could make it happen. I never thought about it before in this way, but that is actually what I did." P9M

"Working close to 18-hour days to get everything done." P10M

"Twelve-hour days, 6 or 7 days a week." P11M

"So, I was trying to do too much […] almost driving myself into the ground […] because I was trying to prove […] be able to do everything." P12F

"Doing 16 / 17-hour days – picking up at 7 in the morning through til 1am. There were times when I thought I am not really coping." P16F

"I was just in a state of shock […] I was like, I just didn't know what to do […] I was just kind of immobilised." P17F

"Working from 6 in the morning through to midnight and I couldn't have told you what day of the week it was […] there were no days off." P18F

"I was not getting home, instead of working ten or eleven hours, that was like 16-hour days." P20M

"I dial up the intensity of hours […] you end up working 20 hours a day, or whatever it might be." P21M

"I massively increased my working hours – 7am to 9pm / 10pm most days. If I was in a hotel I could easily work til midnight. It was kind of a rollercoaster of work, it was almost constant." P22M

"I would quite often work in the middle of the night because I wasn't getting bothered by anyone within the business […] I was obviously still working through the day. I was averaging 3 or 4 hours sleep a night, and apart from dinner and things like that, the rest of it would have been working, averaging I guess 18 / 19 hours a day. I didn't tend to work weekends because that would involve a confrontational discussion shall we say with my husband, which again, mental health wise and everything, I just didn't have space for all that and I was just going for the easy route. For me apply the hours in my head, hours equal success" P23F

	"I would say that […] I would have said easily was doing fifty per cent on top of what I would normally do" P25F
Coping Strategies **Positive** **Self-Talk**	"What's important in life, all of those, that self-talk, I practice quite a lot." P2F "Just tell myself that you know this is a short-term problem and just get through it. Just live with it and just get on with it." P7M "I remind myself, I remind myself that these problems that I have got to solve, are just problems in isolation, and that they're, but that there isn't an overarching tsunami of madness, and impossibility, [erm] (pause) and hopelessness." P9 M "My internal voice through the process, I had learnt to channel that, so sort of listen to it and, and work a way of bringing my voice or my influence to the table for sure." P11F "I wanted to punch him […] I controlled it by going for a walk actually […] I took myself out of the situation." P12F "I have to think long and deep about what's important to me […] whether or not I'm willing to compromised or I'm willing to stand up for what I believe in." P13F

"I don't believe good decisions are made in the heat of the battle, like you have to kind of take time out, you have to decompress the situation and make sure you are making rational decisions rather than emotional decisions." P14M

"A fairly intense rollercoaster ride in my own mind. It made it a lot more daunting for me personally […] was essentially about 4 or 5 months where I don't think my mind stopped working on the problem for more than about 5 minutes." P14M

"Trained myself to not overthink it, just say, well there's nothing else I can do about that, that's gone, that time has gone. So, giving myself a lecture if you like on slowing down my breathing […] Saying I can do this." P16F

"I'm not a good talker […] I've never shared work stress at home […] I've worked through any kind of stresses that I've had while I'm driving, or I've been on the phone to a colleague and you know just to kind of unwind." P18F

"I sort of think – am I overreacting, maybe I'm just tired, maybe it won't look as bad tomorrow, then tempering myself." P19M

	"I do a lot of self-talk and I try and mange to talk […] can normally talk myself out of a negative situation, but on this occasion, I was really struggling with self-talk." P20M "I would drive home and reset [...] that would be my reset button." P23F "We had a sense of humour about it […] that was one of the coping mechanisms." P13F "Sometimes you just have to walk away, be distracted, go and do other things, talk yourself through, or else you worry yourself to death." P25F "I think that's where the internal chat comes from – ok what am I trying to do here, what am I trying to influence, how many options have I got, what's the next step. So, I do that […] I have got a very logical approach to things." P25F
Coping Strategies **Positive** **Exercise**	"I will just go out and have a run or yeah, do some yoga or something like that." P2F "I am a big exercise person, if I don't I get unhappy […] I am probably a borderline gym addict […] It is so ingrained in what I do, that I wouldn't ever think of not doing it. I mean I am a big exercise person right, so for me one of my ways to relax is I go to the gym […] and I'm very consistent, I go 4 or 5 days a week, I do various other things and that's, I've always done that and if I don't I get unhappy. So uh, I think that was one of the coping mechanisms - is running, go for a run, go to the gym, lifting weights, all of those kind of things." P4M

"I would take the dog for a walk; I always find that relaxing. Well, I just tried to take each day as it came really and always made sure that I went for a walk at lunchtime just to try to clear my head. I would go for a walk at lunchtime, I would treat myself to an ice cream – I actually started to look forward to it. It didn't work entirely but these mechanisms helped, but I wouldn't say they got rid of the stress." P7M

"I play golf 2 or 3 times a week." P9M

"Probably doing half an hour on the cross trainer in the morning, you know, half past five in the morning, just to sort of burn off that anxiety." P12F

"I exercise 5 or 6 days every week and we are big walkers […] It's our way of decompressing, detoxing you know, being out in nature, really important. […] In fact, I was doing my HIT session this morning […] And I solved two problems at work during that hour" P13F

"I go and hit some golf balls – for me that's my meditation and for me going for a walk is not, because I will think." P15M

	"So, I did a lot of walking, even if I was taking my headphones with me and having conversations around work." P16F
	"Exercise – that's my big stress relief." P18F
	"One thing I have always been good at is making sure exercise was prioritised." P19M
	"Walks and I find when I, as soon as I see the sight of the sea." P23F
	"I am a long-distance walker." P2F
Coping Strategies **Positive** **Conscious Balance**	"I brushed up on my Indian cooking skills for something to do when working away." P6M
	"Looking after yourself and making sure you have a social life, and getting some kind of work life balance is really important, otherwise […] I think I'd just get phenomenally bored and fed up." P10M
	"Typically, a Wednesday, I would finish early and we went for a nice meal, the theatre […] so there was a break […] so there was some boundaries." P12F
	"By making time for me, which is my exercise, and getting out and doing my stuff. I'm pretty good at turning my phone off […] what time I need, which will be giving me some energy […], cooking something nice.

	Spending some quality time with my husband, or getting out and going for a walk, or getting some fresh air." P13F
	"I do exercise, I take holidays, I switch the phone off, I switch email off when I'm on holiday and at the weekends. I time box my stuff quite a lot. I do these walks […] lots of arty stuff […] Cinema […] theatre." P17F
	"So ordinarily, I would have time, sit down with [name], eat good food, I would go to the gym two or three days a week, and I'd find a way to balance it all, because you are in control." P21M
Coping Strategies **Maladaptive** **Avoidance of Task**	"And then you get a bigger problem, and that first problem is minute in a relative sense, so issues that were small I would just start to ignore them and deal with the big ones, the fire fighting and huge ones." P1M
Coping Strategies **Maladaptive** **Food and Beverage**	"I did drink more alcohol, […] made less healthy choices food wise […] it was more about convenience, takeaways [...] things like that, […] I used to drink a lot more coffee and I used to buy caffeine tablets […] And I used to max out most days on painkillers, […] fighting headaches […] then my coping mechanisms became the norm. It took a lot longer for me to sort the habit out that I had got into with alcohol, and food

and pain killers and all of that sort of stuff, […] probably for about another year / eighteen months […] I met my now husband, so […] I suppose emotional support for me made things easier to cope with." P3F

"I drank a lot more coffee." P4M

"That period resulted in me drinking more […] I probably drink more than I should anyway, but I find it relaxing." P6M

"Overeating, lots of coffee, drinking." P8M

"I don't do drugs never have, never drank alcohol, if I knew there would be an easy way for me to turn off this noise at the end of the week, you know half a bottle of vodka or something like that […] I think I'd be dead […] I think I'd have gone full on Amy Winehouse." P9M

"Right, because if there was an easy way, I don't do drugs, never have, never drunk alcohol, if I knew that there would be an easy way for me to turn off this noise at the end of a week, or even at the end of a day, and the answer was, you know, half a bottle of vodka or something like that, I think I'd be dead." P11M

"Not sleeping […] going into the office and having a comfort sausage bap and a can of Diet Coke type thing […] definitely comfort eating." P12F

"Alcohol – it was a habit – I didn't need it." P13F

"Eating and drinking more […] Quite a few pizzas in the office quite late at night." P14M

"There would be days when [...], I was doing sixteen/seventeen hours […] 'till one in the morning […] So, picking up at […] seven and eight in the morning, and then working right the way through to about one am." P16F

"Coffee, chocolate […]" P17F

"Alcohol, high alcohol […] and [food] I haven't got round to doing it yet, so just that kind of sheer concentration on working, that you'd kind of keeping thinking, oh I'll make time, I will do breakfast in a moment, or I'll do some lunch in a moment and it would never happen because you'd just get engrossed in what you were doing." P18F

"I think alcohol definitely, and I put weight on […] I probably got to the heaviest wight I've ever been. I got into a bit of a slump and you just […] you are just looking for quick fixes I suppose […] more to calm me down. I went through a heavy drinking period all through that." P20M

	"I get fatter, and I do less exercise, probably stuff on the go that I wouldn't ordinarily do. So, there is a consequence to it and I recognise that." P21M

"I probably drank less and I also ate less as well […] Bit strange […] I gained weight." P22M

"So, when I did have any personal time, most of it involved drink, just to try and relax I guess – I was on a couple of bottles of wine a day." P23F

"So, you end up making unwise choice in terms of food. I'm definitely an emotional eater. So, I would eat rubbish, I would just grab anything that was to hand." P23F

"I wasn't paying a blind bit of notice of what I was eating or drinking, it was just saying once you are immersed you carry on really right up to the end. So I have a problem with comfort eating and stuff like that and I love sugar. When I'm in an intense period […] I don't eat well." P25F |
| **Coping Strategies**

Maladaptive

Lack of Sleep | "My face was grey, my eyes were black, I didn't sleep – maybe 3 or 4 hours if I was lucky. I was so stressed it was unreal." P1M

"I did lose sleep, and stress was there." P2F |

"I didn't sleep particularly well – probably a combination of too much caffeine, drinking alcohol and just the stress of the work, I would regularly wake up thinking about work during the night or remember things that I was worried about." P3F

"5 hours sleep on average […] I had to record comedies and things like that to get to sleep at night." P9M

"Sleepless nights […] what have I missed. Not sleeping […] going into the office and having a comfort sausage bap and a can of Diet Coke type thing […] definitely comfort eating." P12F

"I find it difficult to sleep." P13F

"I would be asleep, and I actually took to having notebooks by the side of me, because I would wake up, write down things, I would email myself at 2 o'clock in the morning, 3 o'clock in the morning, I need to remember this, I need to do that." P14M

"I wouldn't sleep well […] I ended up becoming tired mentally probably more than physically because I was constantly thinking about implications […] future events […] rather than just being in the present. And I just kept that on repeat day after day." P15M

"So probably has mentally more stressful, not sleeping, not sleeping so we'll definitely." P18F

	"It's waking up at night and despite your best efforts it's just nagging away and then it's that kind of classic human thing of narrating conversations in your head with people […] I'd wake up at night 1am, 2am at night and several times." P19M "You would go over in your mind, just couldn't sleep you know, trying to blank things out, but it was very difficult, because my coping mechanisms are normally pretty good." P20M "We were probably surviving on 4 hours sleep." P21M "I don't have a lot of places to share so I had quite a few sleepless nights deciding how I was going to respond to this. I was anxious, I had real difficulty sleeping […] to the point I had to go to the doctor and get help with sleeping […] I was completely exhausted, but on the outside – I tried hard to conceal the strain from everybody else." P22M "Not much sleep, I wake up thinking about it, I dream about it […] I had insomnia. So, through working through the night […] was asleep, so I didn't have anyone to explain that to." P23F
Coping Strategies **Maladaptive**	"Everything becomes second priority so your work and what you have got to deliver consumes your life. My holidays went out the window, my spare time went out the window, my looking after myself went out of the

Cessation of Normal Routine	window too. Everything went to hell in a honey basket really. I probably didn't cope […] all I wanted to do was lie down and just watch tv." P9M
	"My holidays went out the window, [erm] my spare time went out the window, my looking after myself probably went out the window too. […] (short pause and sigh), I think the, the short answer is, because the tasks that you are responsible for, dominate everything, then everything else just takes second fiddle." P9M
	"The exercise goes out of the window, I eat more and I drink more, and I drink a lot of coffee." P10M
	"Sometimes I put myself under pressure by deliberately not doing it (exercise) because I don't have time, because that peak pressure is there as you know and then what happens then is it accumulates." P13F
	"The exercise stopped, everything stopped." P18F
	"I certainly had behavioural changes; we weren't walking much together […] It disrupted the whole pattern […] and the fact that we are not walking, you are not talking are you because when we walk, we talk. I just wasn't finding time for myself; it was all work." P20M

	"Yes, you forget to eat at times […] you are locked in, you have effectively put everything else aside. Those things take a second order priority […] sleep, good quality eating, exercise and so I can logically see that." P21M "It was difficult to apply attention to other things you know, you kind of […] it becomes consuming." P22M "I was not necessarily making, prioritising the right things in my view of life, the family, the friends, the experiences – I was purely going into work mode and blocking most things out." P23M
The Impact of Job Strain **Physical Health Impact**	"I had the usual chest pains and things […] I was getting a lot of minor medical problems, […] back problems […] And […] I have had two different cancers, but you don't know if any of that was related to stress because the research is not there." P1M "High blood pressure." P19M "Weight gain and I had lost my fitness, and they detected an irregularity in my ECG […] Because I was wired up and of course my health was deteriorating." P8M "It manifested itself in me getting cancer and what they called trauma from the counsellor at the time. So, is getting cancer, and […] that's been I think, and, and I've got no doubt at all that interestingly enough, that

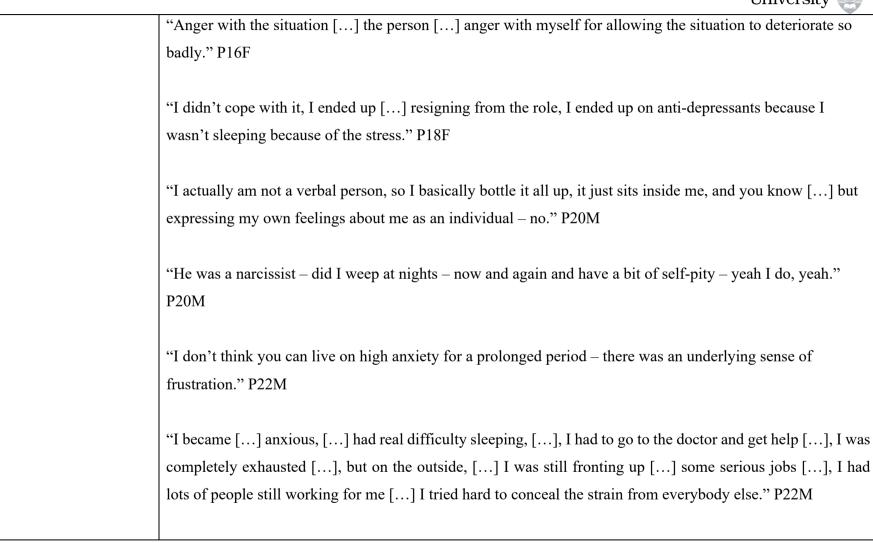|	
	was probably caused, or work, stress of work had a huge impact in, in me getting it in the first place […] because you know I was under ferocious stress for years." P9M
	"And then I had a cardiac arrest […] and you know, I think there's no question in mind, that you know, the stress of it all had ultimately caught up with me." P10M
	"Difficult sleep patterns, I put a lot of weight on. I got diabetes." P11M
	"General tiredness, lack of energy. You know your skin just never feels as healthy, your eyes are very tired, […] you know it's that, I describe it as the, as it's too much adrenaline, but it's, it's almost the taste of a metal in your mouth […] that you get that is not helpful, in terms of your sense of wellbeing, but those would be the key ones, you know, just general tiredness, you know, lack of energy." P12F
	"Bit of weight gain, stupid stuff, you know eczema, classic stress related bits and pieces […] an ECG […] a whole bunch of physiological impacts." P22M
The Impact of Job Strain **Mental Health Impact**	"I er had a break down […] And I ended up in a mental institution for a month." P1M "It's very isolating if you are the guy in charge, or girl in charge, who do you talk to." P1M "I could be quite irritable, […] probably distracted." P2F

"Quite confused and stressed out at times […] it made me miserable I guess." P11M

"I have had moments in tears on the kitchen floor, I can't go on and all this sort of stuff, but he's [husband] always been incredibly supportive, but he could see the damage I was doing to my own health." P12F

"I put myself under significant stress, […] Internal stress […] my own psychological wellbeing […] I start to get emotional, […] take things personally so my ability to be objective and deal with things […] at a distance and professionally become blurred […] but I start to doubt myself." P13F

"So there was a period where I actually did go onto medication for a period of time because I had a little bit of what I can only describe as a bit of a meltdown. […] I've always felt myself as a fairly resilient person and a positive person, and you know, just keep going whatever that Churchillian thing is about, you know just carry on, that's been my attitude, but I literally woke up one morning and […] I just couldn't, just couldn't go in […] I felt shaky and just incredibly anxious […] Two days later having not really got off the sofa and not being able to sleep, I went to see the GP […] prescribed me an anti-depressant […] for acute anxiety. I actually did some counselling after that […] I also went back and got a business coach, which was great as you know just because it's quite lonely at the top." P15M

"Anger with the situation […] the person […] anger with myself for allowing the situation to deteriorate so badly." P16F

"I didn't cope with it, I ended up […] resigning from the role, I ended up on anti-depressants because I wasn't sleeping because of the stress." P18F

"I actually am not a verbal person, so I basically bottle it all up, it just sits inside me, and you know […] but expressing my own feelings about me as an individual – no." P20M

"He was a narcissist – did I weep at nights – now and again and have a bit of self-pity – yeah I do, yeah." P20M

"I don't think you can live on high anxiety for a prolonged period – there was an underlying sense of frustration." P22M

"I became […] anxious, […] had real difficulty sleeping, […], I had to go to the doctor and get help […], I was completely exhausted […], but on the outside, […] I was still fronting up […] some serious jobs […], I had lots of people still working for me […] I tried hard to conceal the strain from everybody else." P22M

	"I took antidepressants for a while just to try to get back into some kind of equilibrium. I did nothing for six months while I got my head back together again. I knew I needed to decompress; it was […] it was absolutely clear that I was in a right old state." P22M

"It's quite lonely at the top sometimes, […] I wish there was somewhere to go." P22M

"I didn't impact on anyone else, and it was just purely an impact I guess on my sleep and mental health." P23F

"Worst Christmas of my life just worrying about it all and the way through. I have never been so stressed in my entire life." P25F |
| **The Impact of Job Strain**

Personal Impact

Impact on Career | "And it took its' toll on me because as part of that I was prohibited from talking to anyone in the company, and when you have been in a company for 25 years, all your friends are largely from a similar environment, and so the isolation was terrible." P1M

"The following week I was pulled into a room with a lawyer and you know, they, they were terminating my contract […[it was embarrassing to, to have to leave the business like that straight away and you know, not being able to have a proper goodbye with people and you know, [erm] yeah, and, and, and so that, that all felt negative. Could I have done the job he wanted me to do, no I couldn't, so I would have been working against |

my type and values all the time, and, and you know, being consumed with stress all the way, but in the aftermath of that you know, the, the negotiation around the agreement and the way that I was treated by [company name] on exiting, was appalling." P2F

"I left because of the continuing pressure." P3F

"I have had some really, really quite nasty et behaviour from my line, line managers and er ultimately, er it's meant, I mean CEOs, Executive Vice Presidents, its meant that I have had to leave." P8M

"Because I don't, I don't ever want to walk out of a company and leave my staff to the vagaries of lunacy, because I have, and part of my problem in staying around is that I wanted to support my staff and protect them against this madness. But I have done it to my own detriment, you know, not to be, not kind of playing violin here, but that's probably what happened." P9M

"You have just changed the goal posts, […] I'm not having this, you know, this doesn't work, so I took the chairman aside and I said, I, I have had enough of this, I'm resigning, because I think you are doing the wrong thing." P11M

	"In terms of my relationship with […] because he'd cut across those personal values, our relationship was over […] personally and professionally at that point in time. That particular day was the catalyst of me leaving." P12M
	"I didn't cope with it; I ended up resigning from the role." P18F
	"So, in the end I left the company […] the definition of insanity if you keep doing what you are doing you will keep getting what you've been getting." P20M
	"The negative outcome at the time was I left the organisation – but in the longer-term now, I look back and think, do you know what, that's the best thing that could have happened you know." P22M
	"It was a conscious decision (to start my own business) – if you make a company, you can decide what the culture looks like." P22M
	"That's one of the reasons I left the business. I walked away thinking I will never, ever, ever, ever put somebody under that level of stress. It just erodes your confidence, your self-esteem […] in the end I couldn't deal with it because I thought I don't' want to go in work, I don't want to be around it you know." P25F
The Impact of Job Strain	"My marriage went down the toilet." P1M

Personal Impact	"It put strain on my marriage at the time but also my husband at the time worked a lot of anti-social hours himself, so […] I was left trying to juggle the work and my four-year-old." P3F
Impact on Relationships	"My personal relationship was put to the back." P4M
	"Yeah, I'm sure I was hugely distracted […] I didn't have the capacity to sort of think about many things for home or whatever, I was always thinking about the problem." P7M
	"My relationship with my wife became very strained. I was snappy with my family, never seeing my family, my kids […] I didn't know them." P11M
	"I find it difficult to sleep, get a bit snappy and short tempered with those closest to me." P13F
	"It sounds a bit extreme, but I kind of didn't exist for that four months […] it clearly puts a strain on your relationship and your time spent with your children. It was a recognition that you know, this will come to an end, and it will be concluded." P14M
	"If I didn't have that time to decompress then it would be difficult. Finding time to be a dad and a husband became squeezed for all of us. For 12 months I wasn't present. I would be in the room and even if my phone

wasn't next to me, I'd probably be thinking about work […] if I heard a ping it was very hard for me to not look at my phone." P15M

"It put terrific strain on our relationship." P16F

"My family probably go the brunt of it at home." P17F

"My home, my relationship has really suffered." P18F

"The biggest effect was on my wife really, in the sense that you know I was just very short, I was angry and constantly being sort of nasty and negatively towards her and it probably took another 6 months after that before I realised what I was doing because you're wrapped up in your own world aren't you." P20M

"So, there is a personal consequence, probably less time connecting with family and kids […] for me it all became about the task. I remember one Saturday lunchtime, it was [name] dad's I don't know, seventieth birthday, and we've gone out for a family mean, and I said, right, I have to leave now, I have prepared it all, but I've got a board meeting that I have to dial into for an hour, just after we had finished starters, and I go and sit in a different part of the restaurant, headphones on, doing this board meeting. It's things like that, it became you know, silly, but wasn't just me you know, there's a team of people in the same place." P21M

	"Work pressures get carried over, coming across into home-life […] I was particularly irritable at that time." P22M
	"I didn't really want to talk, didn't really want to interact at all. It got to the point where they stopped inviting me to things, because I was always saying no, I've got work to do, no I'm drink. And marriage wise, that impacted a lot on that as well […] my communication definitely went down." P23F
Gender Participant Experience	"Because men I think more than women, identify with their role as opposed to as a person, or as a family." P1M
	"I think females in executive roles in big companies are given more latitude […] Because companies are visibly afraid of putting unnecessary pressure on a woman. Men are more likely to stand up if someone is abusing a lady than they are if someone is abusing another man." P1M
	"Women are more comfortable talking about how they are feeling, and I think that helps to manage it. Men are less comfortable. Men internalise a lot more, stress a lot more […] They bottle it up, then there's an explosion." P2F
	"Men have less pressure as they generally don't take responsibility for domestics and childcare […] It forces women to be more efficient […] to get the basic physiological needs to be met for children." P3F

"Men get the promotions as they are more available because the pass the childcare responsibilities to females." P3F

"There is still an underlying idea that women raise the children and men go out to work […] but I do think it's changing. Men are just not we're not nurturing types [...] you see mostly women in HR and […] mostly men in tech […] Men aren't interested in more touchy-feely things. In some ways there's pressures on men that a lot of men don't really understand." P4M

"I think women handle stress better than men […] More calm about it, [....] more reasoned […] and they don't the peaks and troughs that I see with some of the guys. They are strong characters … no difficulty in making tough decisions […] they are more reasoned, thoughtful and it's just this is business […] that's why there's not as many cardiac arrest in women as there are men. Women have a calmness, an ability to see the big picture." P6M

"Women don't give themselves permission to get upset at work because they are trying so hard to be tough in the workplace … because they are not supposed to be expressing emotion at work." P8M

"The society that we live in, […] the identity of the bloke going to work, […] bringing home the bacon […] is a normative style, but women in the workplace, I think it is more difficult […] spouse, mother, daughter,

work colleague […] I think it is even more complicated for women. The woman is seen as the glue of the household, men outsource all that […] They are only dealing with the workplace." P8M

"She's [boss] got two young sons and her […] husband has got a very busy job as well, you know they are very high achieving people, but you know […] she manages to do a phenomenal job, and also manages to keep all that lot in line as well, it's brilliant." P9M

"I would put it down to the individual rather than being any kind of gender bias. I always wanted to have as many women as I could in my team, because I just think, I always felt it brought a different dynamic to the leadership team and a different set of conversations, and a more inclusive set of conversations." P10M

"Not much experience of female senior execs as I work in a male dominated industry."" P11M

"Women are better at boundaries […] because of childcare or diligence around the job, and less about some of the play. But there's a sense of guilt […] actually away from the kids. So, there's that layer of anxiety on top of the work anxiety […] very rarely heard it from male colleagues. It's personality not gender." P12F

"I do feel that men find it more difficult to express their vulnerability when I show my vulnerability, and I express that I need to take some time out […] Then they feel safer knowing that they are not the only ones." P13F

"Gender in my experience hasn't a bearing on this kind of situation – but I do think there are other burdens that generally, and this sounds like a terrible thing to say, but generally the parental burdens feel to be a big bias toward the mother than the father." P14M

"Women at least 8 times out of 10 […] will say […] I've got to go and pick up my daughter […] More than men, they seem to at least in the workspace, show much more responsibility for their family." P15M

"Working for a female boss, even the most macho males now talk about […] psychological state […] so they have start talking – and talking about their own psychological safety, to their own state […] how they are managing on a particular day." P16F

"I think men are stepping up more to the plate, in terms of doing stuff, certain in the generation I grew up in, women that have careers still seem to be thinking about and planning the stuff in the home, whether it's food […] Holidays, whatever it is, they still seem to be doing that as well as having the job. Whereas the men don't seem to have the, what I call, additional things to do. So women are doing some of that even if you've outsourced […] a full-time housekeeper […] have got a nanny." P17F

"I also think women they take on the caring bit as well. A person that has got caring responsibilities on top of a job […] That is very, very hard." P17F

"People tend not to share how they are coping and whether they're feeling stressed. I think women are more likely to talk about that then men are. They are more likely to share how they are feeling." P18F

"I don't think men, the men are dealing with things any better, but I think they are able to portray the fat they are, and I think they are able to appear like they are dismissing these worries and stresses and so on, but I don't think any of us really are. We are just kind of good with the bluster. With women, there tends to be a go to position of 'oh, I've done something wrong, there's something wrong with me' and actually that's almost universally not true, and whereas with men it will be there is something wrong with the environment […] but neither is strictly the right approach. Women I would say put in longer hours than I do which probably isn't healthy." P19M

"I think it helps them, probably deal with things, but it can also come across as being even more authentic and real, because they are […] to talk about things that are going on in their family, […] especially, bad or difficult things, (brief pause) and I think, because […] I have talked to [Boss] about this stuff a lot, and its actually helped me because I now talk about these things, which I never would have done before, because you know, […] I would be mortified to say anything like that. So, I think that's actually helped everyone in general, but I've seen it, I think it helps people, maybe it's because they are just sharing it, maybe it helps … for people to think, I don't even have to be you know, maybe I'm slightly ashamed of it, whatever. So yeah, I think it's actually a positive thing." P19M

"More her own behavioural traits not necessarily anything to do with gender. I personally like to have women in my team, because I think they bring a balance and a professionalism just by their presence, they actually make men behave better and more thoughtful and more thinking." P20M

"Females ask simpler plain English questions […] but the nature of those questions I think, opens up a much broader conversation […] deliberate restricted questions that are more open in nature and it creates a different kind of response and debate." P21M

"I think at more junior levels it tends to be females still doing family management. At senior level most of them have got nannies or support." P21M

"My experience of a woman boss – she went into over communication, there were more meetings, more discussion […]" P22M

"Women tend to take ownership of things and more often than not will take it upon themselves to sort something and they live and breath it, whereas men […] make things other people's problems. Women are far more fluid, take more ownership and actually help, guide and nurture the outcome. There is a delicate balance […] that Mum guilt but also wanting to show them that if you work hard – but it is a see saw action all the time […] men are more black and white." P23F

	"I think women are generally kinder […] that doesn't mean to say I haven't come across some brilliant males who are kind too. It's the females that are doing all the caring." P25F
CIT Reflections & Personal Learning	"So, I would force the staff to go home after cakes on Friday […] well you don't (do that yourself), that's the problem, […] you're negligent. You put everybody else first. […] I wasn't spotting it before until I was hitting the wall." P1M
	"You lose your identity when you stop work, so you need things to do." P1M
	"Very common for people to suffer with mental health issues of varying degrees, particularly if they are in a senior high-pressure role with limited access to support." P1M
	"I learnt massively through that experience […] I would probably be a little bit more savvy […], and probably do a bit more due diligence myself […] and I would never want to put anyone through what I went through." P2F
	"I have always thought about how I speak, how I interact and how I react will change how other people react ever since then really." P4M

"I still get emotional about it, because it was one of those moments in your life where you think […] To do the right thing, however difficult that is, do it […] Relationships […] is all important, that trust and the integrity […] My whole career." P6M

"For me it's about demonstrating the leadership to give people the opportunity to thrive in the organisation, to grow in the organisation, […] to developing […] and contribute to add value to the company." P6M

"Subsequently, my entire management style changed quite significantly […] much more sanguine about how I approach work now." P8M

"I genuinely would have benefited from somebody just to listen […] it was never provided for me, and nor did I provide it for myself." P9M

"It's an odd thing, because you would imagine it would be better if you could drink less coffee and manage the food and […] take the exercise, because you would probably feel better as a result, but it just doesn't work that way." P10M

"It's interesting having talked it through, my coping mechanisms are the same good or bad [experience] […] I hadn't really understood that." P10M

"So, there was quite a lot of reflection for me, having come out the other side of all that to think, well you know about relationships and about how people and how organisations work. Part of my reflection process afterwards […] part of the reason why I left was I had burnt out. I just feel a hell of a lot happier person than when I was under extreme pressure. I think I'm much more considerate and considered now." P11M

"I try to control my anxiety with others […] I could relate to it having an impact […] so I didn't have an impact down on the team." P12F

"You have to nurture yourself before you can grow others." P12F

"I've learnt to spot the warning signs […] I pull myself out of it […] because I've been there too often, and I don't want to go there." P13F

"So, I think leadership is more important than ever during those periods, but obviously you only really reflect on it after you have come through the difficult situations." P14M

"I am more people orientated than I have ever been. It's important to remember that pressure is something you create. Pressure doesn't exist, it's not a physical thing, it's an emotional thing and if you handle and can manage your emotions then you be better decisions." P14M

"I would love to know the secret of how people find balance in an executive role – what is the magic, the secret source of getting into the office for 8am and leaving at 6pm, having a home life, not having to work all weekend. To manage and find balance." P15M

"I actually fancy a glass of wine, so I'm more conscious of that now […] sometimes I think actually no, I need to not have a drink this evening because I'm using it for the wrong reason." P18F

"I have got greater awareness of my emotions, particularly those negative ones, not perfect, not by a million miles, but you can see these things ramping up. Now I meditate and sleep well, I have given up alcohol and caffeine." P19M

"Yes, I think the experiences have shaped me over the years. I've learned a lot about myself and because of my personal experiences and having made mistakes myself, you tend to have a bit more fairness about you and empathy, I think. Our job as an exec is to support the workforce, not to tell them what to do – not to add work to them, you are here to make them more efficient and make them work better and smarter." P20M

"So, they decided they were going to completely overload me with different responsibilities, undermine me and then you know basically break me – and that's what happened. I only realise that now, I only realised it after I had left and had time to reflect." P22M

"On reflection […] you know, the abused becomes the abuser, or you can think […] that's how this made me feel and I'm determined that I'm not going to make anyone else feel like that – and I have taken that second path." P22M

"Working through the night became a habit and it actually continued for quite a few years after – so it turned into a pattern rather than a short-term coping thing." P23F

"I think what that experience taught me was a perspective and keeping people in a place of confidence in order to get the best out of them, not just when times are good. So that confidence is absolutely critical for me. I celebrate people doing little stuff as well as big stuff." P25F

"I don't have the financial stress, I have a lot of choice that I can make, an autonomy […] the decision making is probably more difficult or has different consequences but ultimately that is what I am paid to do […] but I sometimes look and go, you know … I think some people have got definitely more stresses and strains than I have." P25F