Use of Workplace Gossip

As a Coping Mechanism

For Stress

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this cross-sectional quantitative descriptive and correlational study was to explore the relationship between frequency of gossip in the workplace, attitudes towards gossip with problem and emotion focused coping, perceived stress, gender and type of employment. Three questionnaires, the Perceived Stress scale, Brief Cope and Attitudes to Gossip were distributed to a sample size of (n=107) participants using convenience and snowball sampling. Results suggest a relationship between type of employment (managerial/non managerial roles) and frequency of gossip. There was no significant relationship between frequency of gossip, attitudes to gossip and coping with stress. There was also no significant difference found between frequency of gossip for males and females. Post hoc analyses however, showed time spent thinking of others opinions and type of employment each significantly predicted stress. This study contributes to the under researched area of gossip and the relationship with the mental well being of the individual.

INTRODUCTION

From an evolutionary perspective, gossip is a significant form of communication with its origins "(in its broadest sense) the central plank on which human sociality is founded" (Dunbar, 2004, p.109). Gossip is present everywhere and seems to serve different needs both socially and professionally. Gossip continues however, to receive widepread criticism and is viewed with scepticism and negativity particularly within the corporate world. Noon & Delbridge (1993, p.23) highlighted that gossip offers "individual escapism and social mobility" yet it has been "undeservably avoided in organisational analysis". Limited research exists on the use of gossip in the workplace with the main focus on the negative impacts to the organisation. Whilst researchers do suggest individual benefits, society chooses to leave these benefits as unrecognised and largely ignored.

This study will review stress in the workplace from the perspective of Han Selye's (1956) General Adaptation Syndrome and the consequential impact on the individual. An overview of the concept of gossip and the functions of gossip are outlined from both an organisational and individual perspective. Coping with stress in the workplace will be reviewed from the transactional model of stress and coping developed by Lazarus & Folkman (1987) in terms of the appraisal process and the coping strategies deployed, such as emotion or problem focused coping.

The rationale for this study is outlined with the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the use of gossip in the workplace and the mental well being of the gossiper, in terms of coping with stress.

Stress

The experience of stress can be individually unique with varying degrees of impact on mental and physical well-being. Biochemical, physiological, behavioural & psychological changes can occur as a result of stress in an individual. The physiological impact of stress was first identified by Hans Selye (1956) who developed the theory of General Adaptation Syndrome. The General Adaptation Syndrome was broken into three stages, Alarm, Resistance and Exhaustion. An alarm is raised when an individual is first subjected to a stressor which mobilises the individual into a fight or flight response. Within this fight or flight response mode when anticipating danger, physiological responses occur including increased heart rate and blood pressure (Forshaw, 2003, p.101). The next stage involves a period of resistance to the stressor where the body attempts to adapt to the chronic stress. It is during the adaptative process that illnesses can occur and eventually with the ongoing taxation of the body's resources, the individual moves to the next stage of exhaustion.

Despite the negative impacts of stress, Selye (1976, p.56) refers to stress as the "salt of life" proposing it would be undesirable to avoid stress. Indeed, Selye (1980, p.6) goes further and states that only a dead object can experience no stress. Even when in a state of sleep, the body is undergoing some stress as the "heart is pumping" and the "brain is working". According to Selye (1980, p.8), signs of stress can include irritability, loose anxiety, insomnia and a "feeling of just having had enough". Management of these signals and coping with stressors in life is important if we are to ensure physical and emotional well being. The lack of emphasis on individuality and their experience of stress combined with the assumed automaticity of an individual response have led to criticism of Selye's theory. Researchers suggest greater focus is required on emotional and cognitive responses with less reliance on physiological impacts of stress (Christensen, Thompson & Morrisson, 2004, p.119).

Stress can result from many different factors such as the experience of major life events (Holmes and Rahe, 1967) or from daily hassles in our everyday lives (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer & Lazarus, 1981). Major life events can include death of a spouse and divorce whilst daily hassles can simply include "having too many things to do". Ganster & Perrewe (2010, p.3) proposed job stressors such as role ambiguity, role conflict, work overload and job control. The worry of social evaluation involving being judged negatively by others has also been shown to cause stress (Dickerson, Gruenewald & Kemeny, 2004, p.1237).

Research conducted by Duncan, Bowden & Smith (2006, p.2) referenced gossip as "talking healing", a direct support for parents in early childhood centres where informal chatting took place between staff and parents. This informal support allowed parents feel respected and reduced pressure (Duncan, Bowden & Smith, 2006, p.11). The relevancy of the finding could be influenced by the positive interpretation of what constitutes gossip. "Talking healing" appears to suggest a prosocial approach to communication as opposed to evaluative talk about an absent third party proposed by Kurland & Pelled (2000, p.429). Waddington & Fletcher (2005, p.378) propose that gossip helps people with conflict, vunerability and intense emotions whilst Baumeister & Leary (1995, p.498) reflect that social contact with those the individual feels most connected leads to a greater chance of survival. Ben-Ze-Ev (2000, p.188) refutes that gossip is bad on the basis that it is only gossip associated with unverifiable rumor that deserves criticism, in fact, it may provide people with an outlet for anger and frustration. In addition, employees reporting negative rumors seemed to be experiencing a greater level of stress when dealing with change (Bordia, Jones, Gallois, Callan & Difonzo, 2003, p.116).

The Perceived Stress scale developed by Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein (1983) seeks to determine how an individual appraises stressful situations and the degree of predictability, controllability and overload within their lives. The extent to which individuals

control outcomes due to external events or third party interactions can be both empowering and overwhelming. Research undertaken by Crampton, Hodge & Mishra (1998, p.573) showed that participants believed grapevine activity increased during periods of organisational uncertainty (98%) and increased when employees were under stress (92%). Furthermore, 82% of participants believed ambiguous working conditions led to stress for employees with the grapevine serving as a mechanism for employees to express anxiety and release stress (Crampton et al, 1998, p.575). Gossip flows through the grapevine, a means of informal communication, clandestine in nature. Correspondingly, gossip takes place when formal means of communication are considered dysfunctional and information is unclear and hidden (Altuntas,Altun & Akyil, 2014, p.110, Baker & Jones, 1996, p.76). Limited research has however, been conducted to investigate this finding and show whether gossip as a means of communication can help predict and control outcomes and be deployed as a coping method for dealing with stress.

Gossip

Gossip has played the role of maintaining socially functional groups with simple bonding being the most important function among early humans. Dunbar (2004, p.100) further proposes that the broad nature of gossip is "the core of human social relationships, indeed of society itself. Without gossip, there would be no society". Indeed, from a biological standpoint, Dunbar (2004, p.109) argues that human brains have evolved and enlarged as a result of the cognitive requirements of gossip.

Researchers have attempted to define gossip in various ways. For Paine (1967, p.283), gossip is "talk of personalities", community involvement embracing others to converse in the same manner. Eder & Enke (1991, p.494) defined gossip as "evaluative talk about a person who is not present" with Noon & Delbridge (1993, p.25) offering a working definition as " the process of informally communicating value-laden information about members of a social

setting". The later definition proposed by Kurland & Pelled (2000, p.429) combines the concepts as "informal and evaluative talk in an organization, usually among no more than a few individuals about another member of that organization who is not present". It is this definition which appears most prevalent in recent research. The concept of validity is introduced by Litman, Chiung-Hui & Huo-Tsan (2009, p.132) who refer to gossip as "unverified information about other people or events that is shared informally between individuals". Gossip and rumor can often be intertwined and McMinn (2007) references the distinction between rumors and gossip drawn by DiFonzo & Bordia (1998). Overlap appeared when participants often offered examples of gossip when asked for examples of rumor. The constructs are easily confused in the context of everyday living.

The operation of a complex set of ego activities is involved in gossip according to Rosenbaum & Subrin (1963, p.118) with a triangular relationship comprising of the active gossip (gossiper), the passive gossip (listener) and an object of gossip (gossipee) with all three being interchangeable. A sense of trust leading to stronger relationships can emerge for both the gossiper and the listener whilst negatively creating a sense of exclusion damaging relationships with the object of the gossip (gossipee) (Elias & Scotson, 1994; Soeters & van Iterson,2002 as cited by Michelson & Waddington, 2010). From the psychodynamic perspective, Medini & Rosenberg (1977, p.453) refers to two people engaging in gossip as "needy" each communicating and in a process of learning. The meaning of "God's Sib" we are all God's children suggests we are all deep down alike and hearing it through our fellow men is a helpful thing. Jealousy and envy are highlighted as painful emotions and the person afflicted with it is a "lonely beggar searching for almost non–existent support and compassion". The question remains unanswered whether this support and compassion can be achieved for the gossiper in the form of gossip.

Waddington (2012, p.25) raises the question of the legitimacy of gossip highlighting its paradoxical nature. The paradox exists that gossip is all around, commonly used, yet is deemed trivial and superficial. The most common form of gossip is the spoken word, less common is the written word whilst the visual aspect tends to be overlooked. The visual signs of office doors being closed quickly, the exchange of knowing looks in a meeting and people huddling in corridors or canteens can all suggest the activity of gossip (Waddington, 2012, p.9). Given the complexity of gossip, previous research from both the perspective of the organisation and the individual may further support understanding gossip in the context of coping with stress.

Gossip and the Organisation

From an organisational perspective, gossip is generally deemed to have negative consequences, in fact Noon & Delbridge (1993, p.32) highlight researchers often suggest gossip impacts productivity depleting resources of energy and concentration. It has been argued that the grapevine develops as a result of a poor formal communication network within an organisation (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Labianca & Ellwardt, 2012, p.56). Those in authority who object to the formation of the grapevine tend to rigourously disclaim all responsibility for its creation instead blaming the grapevine participants. In addition, poor communication strategies are suggested by DiFonzo & Bordia (1998, p.297) to be responsible for excessive uncertainty and pervasive rumors. Conversely, the grapevine can improve organisation effectiveness and help employees make sense of limited information serving as an early warning signal for organisational change (Crampton et al, 1998, p.570).

Despite the reasons for gossip being prevalent, the negative organisational impact is heavily emphasised by both organisational consultants and researchers. Clegg & Van Iterson (2009, p.275) refers to gossip as "dirt" which is "illegitimate, formally disdained and destructive". Gossip is presented in the form of social and moral order with gossip circulating

among the lower ranks mocking and subverting the upper order and authority. It is argued that this resistance to change projects can only ever be considered ethical transgressions with no validity given it can never exercise power over those in authority. This subversion and mockery can perhaps be seen when Vuksanović (2012) highlights that women in opposition to female managers suggested negative characteristics for such managers as pettiness, hysteria, tendency to gossip and mutual disagreement. In comparison, Leaper & Holliday (1995, p.237) found that women are more likely to seek to establish solidarity with the same gender through the use of gossip.

Gossip has both negative intended and unintended outcomes creating divisiveness, a scenario of "them vs. us" being intended, whilst spoiling of images, wastage of time and sapping of morale are unintended outcomes (Michelson & Mouly, 2004, p.198). Loss of control at a managerial level occurs with gossip challenging the managers authority (Noon & Delbridge, 1993, p.32). For managers, it is suggested that acceptance and manipulation of gossip to serve their purposes be considered (David, 1973, Hirschhorn as cited by Noon & Delbridge, 1993, p.33). Gossip can serve as a diagnostic tool for the manager providing timely learning of troublesome issues and ultimately reinforce the company values (Labianca, 2010).

The challenge for gossip is whether a positive school of thought can emerge as to the benefits of gossip for the organisation. Waddington (2011, p.328) presents a positive viewpoint of gossip that within the space where gossip occurs comes creativity, fresh insights and intuition. Other researchers such as Noon & Delbridge (1993, p.23) also present positive views that gossip protects the organisation and uncovers important aspects of the social organisation of work. Indeed, the importance of gossip in the formation and regulation of groups makes removing gossip from a social setting unfeasible.

Gossip and the Individual

Individual and group motivation for gossip however, can be multi faceted and has more recently been acknowledged by researchers. Beersma & Van Klef (2012, p.2662) found that gossip serves important motives for group members ranging from social enjoyment, a search for information and validation to protecting group norms. Social functions such as forming a sense of belonging to a group and intimacy are also recognised (Altuntas et al, 2014, p.110). Both of these recent studies acknowledge the social aspects of gossip which perhaps naturally align with the social aspects of coping particularly, the use of instrumental and emotional support.

At an individual level, researchers suggest gossip helps an individual learn history, organisational rules, values and behavioural norms. At a social level, it provides entertainment, emotional needs and helps to escape boredom (Foster 2004, Michelson & Mouly 2004 as cited by Altuntas et al, 2014, p.110). At a professional level, Noon & Delbridge (1993, p.34) highlight the benefits as careerism and self-promotion through influencing opinions and enhancement of position as a gatekeeper of important information. Gossip provides previously unclear information for employees reducing insecure emotions and anxiety. Gossip in this way can become the "vehicle for social change" (Noon & Delbridge, 1993, p.32).

Venting of emotions, information seeking, influencing others and creating personal intimacy as constituents of gossip are reaffirmed by Venkataramani, Labianca & Grosser (2012, p.53). The theme of influence and power afforded to the gossiper appears in research yet the real benefit for the gossiper is not clear. Farley (2011, p.365) demonstrated that gossipers who engaged frequently in gossip had a greater need to exert control over others also suggesting women use gossip to confirm their power within the organisation.

Attitudes towards gossip have recently begun to gain some attention in research. The study by Nevo & Nevo (1993) drew attention to the fact that gossip may have an unconscious purpose exploring the relationship between the tendency to gossip and people orientated professions. Within this research, the Tendency to Gossip questionnaire (TGQ) was constructed to investigate sample behaviors from gossip within normal living.

Litman & Pezzo (2004, p.964) proposed that as the subject matter for gossip is infinite and the TGQ identified specific topics, generalisability of the TGQ may be questioned. Gossip attitudes are multidimensional (Litman & Pezzo, 2004, p.965) and in response, the Attitude to Gossip questionnaire was developed. Individual privately held attitudes of gossip exist, either positive or negative, concerning its moral or social value according to Litman & Pezzo (2004, p.965). The moral view reflects beliefs about whether it is ethical to talk about others and truthfulness of gossip. Specifically, it considers truth of rumors, right to talk about others when they are not around, helpfulness and ability to trust gossip. The social view reflects gossip as a fun way to share information and learn about others. Specifically, it considers gossip as an ice breaker, knowing what is going on in others people's lives, great way to pass the time and thinking gossip is always true. (Litman & Pezzo, 2004, p.967).

The intention to gossip formed the basis of the study undertaken by Luna & Chou (2013, p.119). Within this study, attitude and subjective norms were indicators of the intention to gossip whilst perceived behavioral control was unsupported. Attitude was determined by whether gossip was considered socially acceptable. Whilst some individuals openly engage in gossip and embrace the social value, others will openly condemn gossip refuting any attempts to participate in the activity. Having positive or negatives views on the social or moral value of gossip could influence the frequency and function of gossip as a

means of coping and the impact of gossip on the mental well being of the gossiper. The Attitude to Gossip questionnaire developed by Litman & Pezzo (2004) is deployed within this study to determine the values held by participants.

Coping

Coping is a necessary aspect of our lives and resonates with all humans as part of the requirement to manage stress through every day challenges. Lazarus & Folkman (1987) transactional model of stress and coping is based on two theoretical constructs, appraisal and coping. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1987, p.145) humans evaluate their situation from a personal standpoint utilising two types of appraisal, primary and secondary. Primary appraisal concerns the motivational relevance consisting of three types, harm, threat and challenge. Challenge is referred to as stress appraisal where the person must mobilise to cope with obstacles to produce a positive outcome. Secondary appraisal reflects the amount of control the individual believes they have on the outcome. Kieffer (2013, p.90) stated that gossip is used as a means to exercise social control and an attempt to make sense of ambiguous situations whilst Watson (2011, p.1829) stated that locus of control has a strong relationship with gossip. Within the Lazarus & Folkman's transactional model, life events are supplemented with ordinary stressful experiences of daily living to provide adequate measures of stress. Lazarus & Folkman (1987, p.152) distinguish two main functions of coping, problem focused coping directed at altering the troubled person environment relationship and emotion focused coping directed at managing emotional distress. The extent to which gossip could be used as problem focused or emotion focused coping can be influenced by context and the type of gossip being used.

The Ways of Coping scale was developed by Lazarus & Folkman in 1980 in an attempt to gauge the methods used by people when under stress (Carver, Scheier &

Weintraub,1989). Carver (1997) further developed this concept with a new instrument measuring coping methods. Within this study, subscales within the Brief Cope measurement tool are utilised. These subscales include problem focused coping strategies such as active coping and instrumental support whilst emotion focused strategies include emotional support from others, venting and use of humor.

Active coping is when an individual is taking action to eliminate or bypass the stressor (Carver et al,1989, p.268). Tucker (1993, p.31) suggest employees talk with others to support their position, taking their sides in a conflict. The employee, however will stop short of taking up the case but will offer suggestions as to how to handle the conflict. Further, the active step of listening to workplace gossip provides vital information about the workplace culture and adapation to the job (Farrow, 2005). The sharing of information is a key function of gossip (Beersma & Van Klef 2012, p.2662, Noon & Delbridge, 1993, p.32). Gossip perhaps then serves as a means of instrumental support, a problem focused coping method where the individual seeks social support through seeking information. Instrumental support is distinctly different to emotional support where an individual seeks understanding, moral support and sympathy (Carver et al,1989, p.269).

Emotional support can involve recieving empathy and sympathy, often what people mean when they say that they have a "shoulder to cry on" (Forshaw, 2003, p.107). Cobb (1976) outlined social support as the subject believing they were loved and cared for, respected as a member within the group. Within the area of stress research highlighted by Goldsmith (2007, p.163), social support has been shown to protect against stress and thus improving mortality through "changes in cardiovascular, endocrine and immune systems (Uchino, Cacipo, & Kiecolt-Glasser,1996 as cited by Goldsmith, 2007, p.162).

Venting of emotions can be considered maladaptive in nature as it can impede

adjustment for an individual and the ability to move beyond distress. Montero-Marin, Prado-Abril, Piva Demarzo, Gascon, & García-Campayo (2014) appraised venting of emotions as an ineffective coping strategy resulting from work overload and burnout by professionals. In contrast, however, Nils & Rime (2012, p.680) demonstrated there are numerous benefits associated with venting of emotions leading to healing, restoration of beliefs, social integration and reduced distress.

The use of humor compared to venting of emotions is considered an adaptive emotion focused coping method. Morreall (1994, pp.56-64 as cited by Capps, 2010, p.111) raises objections to both gossip and humor as they are both frivolous, mean-spirited and perhaps hostile. Capps (2010, p.111) refutes this suggesting that when gossip is humorous, it "transcends pettiness and viciousness " associated with gossip. Emphirical evidence has shown that those who use humor have a more positive interpretation of stressful events which protect against stressors (Sliter, Kale & Yuan, 2014, p.257).

Rationale for the current study

The pace and demands of personal and professional communication create obvious stressors in everyday lives. Coping with stress in the workplace can be an unavoidable reality and prove costly from a physiological perspective of the individual and an economic perspective for the organisation. Gossip is one form of communication occurring within the workplace predominantly viewed as destructive in society and damaging for organisations. From an individual perspective, previous studies suggest benefits of gossip as tactical in nature with learning, self enhancement and power as current themes.

Whilst limited research has been conducted on gossip generally, research is principally focused on the negative impacts to the organisation. Researchers also suggest that grapevine activity through which gossip flows increases when employees are under stress or at times of organisational uncertainty. Gossip, coping and stress have been independently

researched. This study therefore seeks to draw together these concepts investigating the relationship between the frequency of gossip, attitudes towards gossip (social and moral Value), the use of coping strategies (problem focused coping or emotion focused coping) and perceived stress.

Hypotheses

A - There will be a significant relationship between frequency of gossip and perceived stress.

B - There will be a significant relationship between frequency of gossip and use of emotion focused coping.

C - There will be a significant relationship between frequency of gossip and the use of problem focused coping.

D - Attitude to gossip (Social Value or Moral Value) will significantly predict perceived stress.

E -Attitude to gossip (Social Value or Moral Value) will significantly predict use of emotion focused coping.

F - Attitude to gossip (Social Value or Moral Value) will significantly predict use of problem focused coping.

G - Attitude (Social Value or Moral Value) and frequency of gossip will significantly predict perceived stress.

H - There will be a significant relationship between frequency of gossip and type of employment.

I - There will be significant difference between managerial and non managerial roles and the frequency of gossip.

J - There will be a significant relationship between frequency of gossip and gender.

K- There will be a significant difference between males and females and frequency of gossip.

METHODS

Design

This research study was conducted using a cross-sectional quantitative questionnaire, descriptive and correlational design. The predictor variables were Frequency of Gossip, Attitude to Gossip (Subscales - Social and Moral Value) and Others Opinions. The criterion variables were perceived stress, problem focused coping (Brief Cope sub scales – Active Coping and Use of Instrumental Support) and emotion focused coping (Brief Cope sub scales - Get emotional support from others, Venting and Humor). Additional variables such as Gender, Status of Employment, Full or Part time and Type of Employment – Managerial or Non Managerial were also considered as predictor variables in post hoc analyses.

Participants

Non-probability sampling methods were used combining convenience and snowball sampling providing a total sample size of (n=107) participants. Participants (n=27) 25% obtained through convenience sampling consisted of part time undergraduate students over 18 years of age attending either the BA (Hons) in Psychology and BA (Hons) in Financial Services courses at Dublin Business School. An email was sent to lecturers requesting permission to attend lectures and distribute questionnaires to students for completion in class. Participants (n=80) 75% obtained through snowball sampling consisted of friends and family who were provided an email link to an online questionnaire. The email requested onward distribution to potential participants who fit the inclusion criteria. Total participants (n=107) ranged in age from 24 to 64 years, (M=42.5, SD=10), gender split consisted of Males (n=49) 46%, Females (n= 58) 54%, Employment status - Full time (n = 84) 78%, Part time (n=23) 22%, Employment type - Managerial (n=43) 40%, Non Managerial (n=64) 60%. The inclusion criteria was defined as anyone over 18 years of age and employed. The exclusion criteria was anyone who did not provide informed consent. The method of sampling ensured that the participants were representative of the general population.

Materials

An online survey was developed using the questionnaire builder from within www.kwiksurvey.com. The questionnaires were developed using three existing validated questionnaires - Attitude to Gossip, (Litman & Pezzo, 2004), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), (Cohen et al, 1983) and the Brief COPE, (Carver, 1997).

The Attitude to Gossip Questionnaire (Litman & Pezzo, 2004) is a self-report questionnaire with a 12 – item scale that consists of two six-item subscales that assesses attitudes about the social and moral value of gossip. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement using a five-point scale, anchored by ''Disagree Strongly'' and ''Agree Strongly''. Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 were included as Social Value, for example, Item 1 "Gossip is a good ice breaker " whilst Items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 were included as Moral Value items, for example, Item 2 "Rumors are hardly ever true". The higher the score indicates the stronger positive feelings an individual holds for the social or moral value of gossip. Cronbach's alpha for Attitude to Gossip Social and Moral value were .74 or greater (Litman & Pezzo, 2004, p.967)

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) (Cohen et al, 1983) is a self report questionnaire consisting of ten items which measure the degree to which situations in an individual's life are appraised as stressful. Participants are asked to indicate how often they felt or thought a certain way using a five point scale, anchored by "Never" and "Very Often "An example question is For example "In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something the happened unexpectedly?" The questionnaire has a reliability alpha of .78 and correlates in a predicted way with other measures such as Job responsibilities (Cohen et al, 1983). The higher the score suggests the higher levels of perceived stress for an individual.

The Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) is a self-report questionnaire which consists of 14 subscales used to assess different coping behaviours and thoughts a person may have in response to a specific situation. For the purpose of this research, subscales were grouped into problem focused coping, Active coping - Item 2 and 7, Instrumental Coping Item 10 and 23 and emotion focused coping, Emotional Support - Item 5 and 15, Venting - Item 9 and 21 and Humor - Item 18 and 28. Participants were asked to indicate frequency of use of an item with a scale of 1 "I haven't been doing this at all" to 4 "I've been doing this a lot". Internal reliabilities for the 14 subscales range from α= 0.57 - 0.90 and has strong internal consistency of 0.93, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha (Carver, 1997).

Two additional questions on 1.Frequency of gossip and 2.Others Opinions were developed in relation to gossip. For 1.Frequency of gossip, participants were asked to indicate how often they participated in gossip in the workplace with a scale of 1 "Never (not at all) to 5 " Very Often (several times per week). For 2. Others Opinions - time spent considering others opinions, participants were asked how much time they spent considering the opinions that other people hold of them with a scale of 1 "never (not at all) to 5 "Very Often' (several times a week). Questions on demographic information were included, Age, Gender, Status of Employment – Full time or Part time and Role type – Managerial or Non Managerial. See Appendix A and B for cover sheet and copy questionnaires.

Procedure

The researcher used both convenience and snowball sampling methods. The researcher used convenience sampling through attendance at lectures and distribution of hard copy questionnaires to students. Students were advised that the study was on gossip in the workplace, time period of approximately 20 minutes to complete along with a verbal invitation to participate. Once completed, the questionnaires were collected and participants were verbally thanked for their participation. The researcher used snowball sampling method

by distribution of a questionnaire link sent to family and friends with a request to forward to other potential participants who fit within the inclusion criteria – currently in employment and over 18 years of age. The participants would click on a URL link in the email and populate the survey online. An outline and instructions were contained within the questionnaire. The questionnaire included an introduction sheet outlining the nature of the study, an invitation to voluntarily participate and a clear statement of consent. See Appendix A and B for cover sheet and questionnaires.

As the data was anonymous, participants were advised that they are unable to withdraw from the study once the questionnaire was submitted. Confidentiality was assured and no information was sought on location or place of employment. A separate sheet providing helpline information for AWARE and Samaritans was included in the event that participants were negatively affected by the topic in question.

Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 22 (SPSS 22). Data was downloaded from www.kwiksurvey.com into Microsoft Excel and then saved into SPSS 22. Data from hard copy questionnaires was manually input into SPSS 22 to complete the data sample. All data was recoded and computed in line with the requirements for each questionnaire. Checks were conducted for normality and presence of outliers and validity and reliability was also provided. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test results.

RESULTS

A number of statistical analyses were conducted on the data including Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation co-efficient to investigate relationships between variables, Multiple regression tests for prediction of a relationship, Chi square tests and Independent t-tests to compare groups.

Descriptive Statistics

The following descriptive statistics were used to establish the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores.

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics of the Psychological Variables*

| Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age	42.56	10.00	24	64
Gender	1.54	0.50	1	2
Status of Employment	1.21	0.41	1	2
Type of Employment	1.60	0.49	1	2
Frequency of Gossip	3.05	1.11	1	5
Others Opinions	2.94	0.97	1	5
ATG Social Value	14.36	4.68	6	26
ATG Moral Value	15.59	4.21	7	26
Perceived Stress	16.02	5.72	4	34
Problem Focused Coping	10.17	2.98	4	16
Emotion Focused Coping	13.35	3.79	6	23

Total participants (n=107) ranged in age from 24 to 64 years, (M=42.56, SD=10), gender split consisted of Males (n=49) 46%, Females (n=58) 54%, Employment status was split between Full time (n = 84) 78% and Part time (n = 23) 22%, Employment type was split between Managerial roles (n=43) 40% and Non Managerial roles (n=64) 60%.

The mean and standard deviations as depicted in Table 1 are outlined as follows. The average score for frequency of gossip (M=3.05, SD =1.11) where a score of 3 represents frequency of gossip occurring Sometimes (1 or 2 per month). The average score for the time

spent considering others opinions of you (*M*=2.94, SD=0.97) where a score of 3 represents Sometimes (1 or 2 per month). The scores for Attitude to Gossip (Social Value) (*M*=14.36, *SD*=4.68) out of a maximum score of 26 where the higher the score, the stronger, positive feelings about the social value of gossip. The scores for Attitude to Gossip (Moral Value) (*M* =15.59, *SD*=4.21) out of a maximum score of 26 where the higher the score, the stronger, positive feelings about the moral value of gossip.

The higher the total cope score for the coping scale means the greater the use of that subscale. The average score for problem focused coping (*M*=10.17, *SD*=3.79) out of a maximum score of 16 shows this to be used more often than emotion focused coping (*M* =13.35, *SD* =3.79) which carries a maximum score of 26.

Graph 1.

Figure 1.Problem Focused Coping

Graph 2.

Figure 2 Emotion Focused Coping
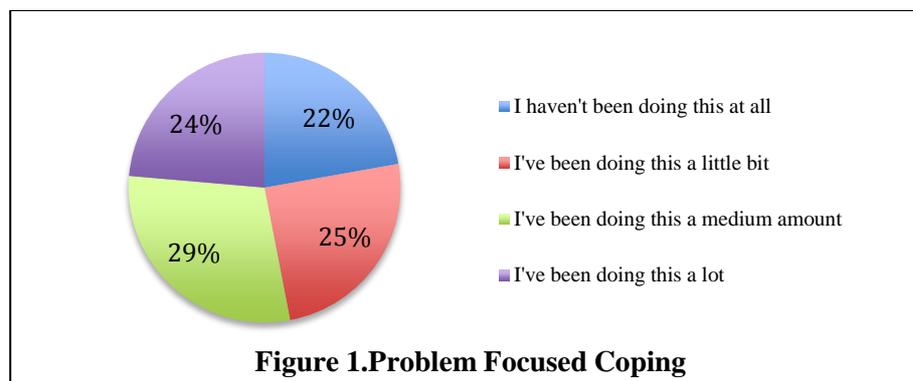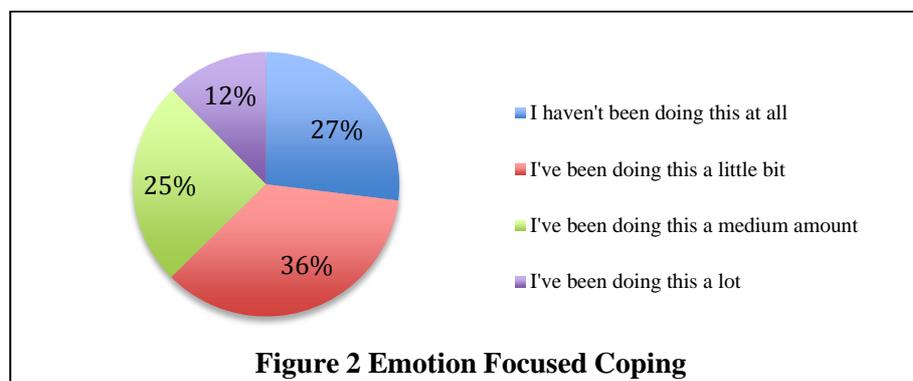
Problem Focused coping (78% of participants) was used more than Emotion Focused coping (73% of participants). 93% of participants used Active Coping with only 63% using Instrumental support. 29% of participants indicated that they did not use Emotional support or Humor at all whilst 47% of participants indicated Venting of Emotions as "doing this a little bit". (See Appendix C for pie charts).

The higher the score for Perceived Stress suggests higher levels of perceived stress. The average score for Perceived Stress ($M =16.02$, $SD =5.72$) out of a maximum score of 40. Scores between 13 and 20 suggests this group of participants had medium levels of stress.

Inferential Statistics

Correlations

Investigation of the relationship between variables was performed using Pearson Correlation co – efficient.

Table 2 *Correlations*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Age	1.000									
2.Gender	0.069									
3.Status of Employment	0.121	.253**								
4.Type of Employment	-.300**	0.050	0.104							
5.Frequency of Gossip	-0.130	0.005	-0.187	0.104						
6.Others Opinions	-0.045	0.180	0.054	0.112	.300**					
7.ATG Social Value	-0.029	-0.051	0.029	0.176	.567**	.210*				
8.ATG Moral Value	0.031	-0.130	-.226*	0.037	0.152	0.120	.236*			
9.Perceived Stress	-0.092	-0.091	0.007	.224*	0.003	.270**	0.038	-0.011		
10.Problem Focused Coping	-0.160	0.137	-0.013	0.019	-0.037	0.094	-0.139	-0.055	-0.156	
11.Emotion Focused Coping	-0.110	0.164	0.065	0.159	0.141	0.152	0.100	0.005	-0.019	.627**

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypotheses A – C that there will be a significant relationship between:

A - frequency of gossip and perceived stress (r (98)=.00, p=.976) was rejected.

B - frequency of gossip and use of emotion focused coping (r (103)=.14, p=.155) was rejected.

C - frequency of gossip and use of problem focused coping (r (103)=-.04, p=.714) was rejected.

Hypotheses D – F Attitude to gossip (Social Value or Moral Value) will significantly predict:

D Perceived Stress, Social Value (r (97)=.04, p=.714) and Moral Value (r (96)=-.01, p=.917) was rejected.

E - use of emotion focused coping, Social Value (r (100)=.10, p=.320) and Moral Value (r (101)=-.01, p=.960) was rejected.

F - use of problem focused coping, Social Value (r (100)=.14, p=.169) and Moral Value (r (101)=-.06, p=.583) was rejected.

There was found to be a weak positive relationship between:

- perceived stress and type of employment (r (98) = .22, p=.027),

- attitude to gossip (social value) and others opinions (r (103)=.21, p=.033),

- perceived stress and others opinions (r (98)=.27, p=.007),

- attitude to gossip (moral value) and attitude to gossip (social value) (r (103)=.24, p=.018).

- status of employment and gender (r (107) = .25, p=.009)

There was found to be a weak negative relationship between:

- type of employment and age (r (107) = .30, p=.002

- attitude to gossip (moral value) and status of employment (r (103) = -.23, p=.022).

Finally, there was found to be a medium positive relationship between others opinions and frequency of gossip (*r* (106)=.30, *p*=.002), a strong positive relationship between attitude to gossip (Social value) and frequency of gossip (*r* (103)=.57, *p*<.001), and a strong positive relationship between emotion focused coping and problem focused coping (*r* (103) =.63, *p*<.01).

Multiple Linear Regression

A multiple regression test was used to determine Hypothesis G Attitude to gossip (Social or Moral value) and frequency of gossip will significantly predict perceived stress.

Checks for normality of data were conducted. The sample size was considered adequate for the number of explanatory variables. Histograms were also used to assess normal distribution of data as outlined in Appendix D - *Figure* 9 – 13 and all variables were normally distributed. No outliers existed within the data analysed and multicollinearity was below the cut off point of .1. The variables were not correlated above .7. Our Mahalanobis distance for all independent variables was also below the cut off point of 13.82.

It was found that attitude to gossip (Social Value) (β = .05, p = .669, 95% CI = -.24 - .38) and frequency of gossip (β = .-.03, p = .821, 95% CI = -1.42 – 1.13) did not significantly predict perceived stress. The results of regression indicate that the two predictors explained 0% of variance ($R2$ = -.019, *F* (2,94) = 0.92, *p*=.912). It was also found that attitude to gossip (Moral Value) (β = -.01, p = .994, 95% CI = -.30 - .27) and frequency of gossip (β = .01, p = .994, 95% CI = -1.03 – 1.07) did not significantly predict perceived stress. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Chi Square Tests

Chi square tests were used to determine Hypothesis H the association between type of employment (Managerial / Non Managerial) with frequency of gossip and Hypothesis J the association between gender and frequency of gossip.

The Chi-square test for association found that there was a weak positive significant relationship between type of employment (Managerial /Non Managerial) and frequency of gossip (X^2 (4, N=107) = 9.57, p = .048). Managerial type roles (98%) were found to gossip more than Non Managerial type roles (91%). Managerial roles (61%) were also found to gossip more than Sometimes (1- 2 times per month) similar to Non Managerial type roles (61%). In addition, Managerial type roles (19%) gossiped fairly often (1-2 times per fortnight) compared to Non Managerial type roles (13%).

Graph 3

Figure 3. Frequency of Gossip
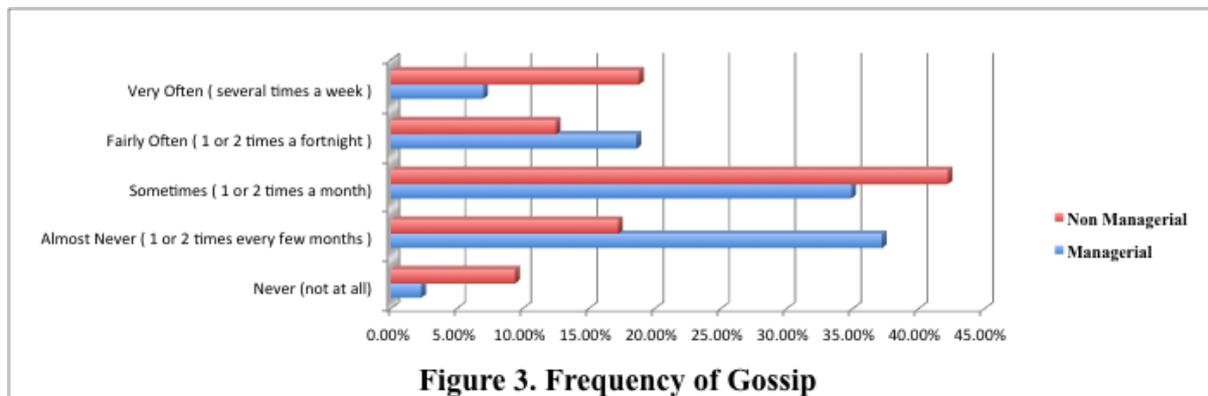
The Chi-square tests for association found that there was no relationship between gender and frequency of gossip (X^2 (4, N=107) = 3.64, *p* = .457). A higher proportion of males were found however to gossip (73%) more than Sometimes (1- 2 times per month) compared to females (64%).

Independent T- Tests

Independent T- tests were also conducted for Hypothesis I to compare frequency of gossip for type of employment and Hypothesis K frequency of gossip for gender. Levene's test for equality of variances showed that the assumptions of homogeneity of variance were met for all three variables. No significant effect was found for Gender (*p*=. 308) or Type of Employment − Managerial/Non Managerial (*p*=.283).

Table 3: *An Independent Samples T-test table displaying the differences between Gender and Type of Employment for frequency of gossip*

Variables	Groups	Mean	SD	*t*	*df*	*p*
Frequency of Gossip - Gender	Male	3.04	1.08	-.05	105	.960
	Female	3.05	1.15			
Frequency of Gossip - Type of Employment	Managerial	2.91	0.97	-.11	105	.288
	Non Managerial	3.14	1.19			

Males (*M* =3.04, *SD* = 1.08) were found to gossip on average the same as females (*M* =3.05, *SD* =1.15). The 95% confidence limits shows that the population mean difference of the variables lies somewhere between -.44 and .42. An independent samples t-test found that there was no statistically significant difference between frequency of gossip for males and females. (*t* (105) = -.05, *p* = .960). Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Managerial roles (*M* = 2.91, *SD* = .97) average score for frequency of gossip was slightly less than Non Managerial roles (*M* = 3.14, *SD* = 1.19). The 95% confidence limits shows that the population mean difference of the variables lies somewhere between -.69 and .20. An independent samples t-test found that there was no statistically significant difference between frequency of gossip for Managerial and Non Managerial type roles (*t* (105) = -1.07, *p* = .288). Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Post Hoc Analyses

Post hoc analyses were conducted including the additional variables of others opinions and type of employment as predictors of perceived stress.

A multiple regression test indicated that frequency of gossip, time spent considering others opinions and problem focused coping were predictors of stress. The results of regression indicate that the three predictors explained 8% of variance ($R2 = .078$, $F (3,92) = 3.685$, $p =. 015$). It was found that frequency of gossip and use of problem focused coping did not predict Perceived Stress whilst time spent thinking of others opinions significantly predicted Perceived Stress ($\beta = .30$, $p =. 004$; 95% $CI = .582 - 3.054$).

A multiple regression test also indicated that attitude to gossip (Social value), frequency of gossip and type of employment were predictors of stress. The results of regression indicate that the three predictors explained 9% of variance ($R2 = .089$, $F (3,94) = 4.14$, $p=.008$). It was found that attitude to gossip (Social Value) and frequency of gossip did not predict Perceived Stress whilst Type of Employment ($\beta = .20$, $p = .045$; 95% $CI = .05 - 4.63$) did significantly predicted Perceived Stress.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this current study was to determine if there is a relationship between the use of gossip in the workplace in terms of coping with stress

Gossip and Stress

The majority of participants confirmed that they gossiped on average once or twice per month with only a small minority indicating that they never gossiped. Participants were found to have moderate positive views of both the social and moral value of gossip. Problem focused coping strategies were deployed more than emotional focused coping strategies. The group of participants showed medium levels of stress with a small number of participants being highly stressed. Despite the frequency which gossip was used, the type of coping methods deployed and the levels of percieved stress for participants, the results for each Hypothesis A – G showed that the null hypotheses could not be rejected.

The finding that there was no relationship between frequency of gossip and perceived stress contradicted the opinions expressed by the majority of participants in the study conducted by Crampton et al (1998). Those participants clearly indicated that the level of grapevine activity increased during periods of organisational uncertainty and importantly facilitated the release of anxiety and stress for employees. The sample however, consisted of managerial type roles with stronger opinions expressed by lower level management. In addition, the level of grapevine activity was influenced by both the ambiguity of the situation and the gravity of the issue assumed by both the speaker (gossiper) and the listener (gossipee). Participants in the current study consisted of both Managerial and Non Managerial roles with a higher proportion of Non Managerial roles. The extent to which dysfunctional formal communication strategies and the level of organisational change influences the frequency of gossip is also not factored in the current study. Whilst

participants were asked about frequency of gossip, the stability of the working environment or indeed the success of the formal communication strategy deployed by employers was not investigated. The uncertainty of inadequate communication has detrimental impacts on employees leading to loss of morale, low productivity and angry emotions (DiFonzo & Bordia 1998, p.298). The relationship between situation ambiguity and stress may therefore be of greater relevance than the relationship with gossip which serves to fill the communication gap.

Gossip serves to help deal with conflict, vunerability and intense emotion according to Waddington & Fletcher (2005, p.378). Participants in the current study showed average signs of stress perhaps reducing the need to use gossip to deal with the intensity of emotion or protect themselves from vunerability. The distinction between typical gossip, harmless in nature and gossip causing substantial harm is argued by Ben-Ze-Ev (2000, p.188) as to why moral condemnation of gossip exists. The further claim that gossip satisfies basic human needs suggests it has an aim but to what extent it alleviates stress remains unclear. The most generous interpretation of gossip as "talking healing" by Duncan, Bowden & Smith (2006, p.2) versus other definitions including a more extreme version as " idle chatter, mere prattle or blather" (Clegg & Van Iterson, 2009, p.287) confirms the lack of clarity as to what really constitues gossip. The definition of gossip was left open for interpretaton for participants in the current study. The manner in which gossip is perceived can be verbal or visual (Waddington 2012, p.25) with visual signals of gossip being less easy to detect. The extent to which participants in the current study interpreted the form of gossip as verbal is unknown.

Gossip and Coping

The degree to which the frequency of gossip serves problem focused or emotion focused coping is considered in the context of the subscales used namely, active coping, instrumental coping, emotional support, venting of emotions and humor. Overall, participants used problem focused coping to a greater extent than emotion focused coping (See Figure 1 and 2). Results for the use of coping methods varied within the subscales. The majority of participants however, were focusing their efforts in a concentrated manner to improve the situation. Active coping was the most deployed coping strategy with instrumental support being the least deployed. Surprisingly, a high number of participants indicated however, that they did not use emotional support or humor at all as a coping strategy. In addition, whilst venting of emotions was deployed, the greatest proportion of participants indicated they had only been using this a little bit. (See Appendix C).

The hypotheses that there was a relationship between frequency of gossip and problem focused coping or emotion focused coping were rejected. Problem focused coping methods incorporate seeking social support through advice, seeking information and assistance. When considering the finding that there is no relationship between gossip and problem focused coping, this perhaps will provide validation for critics of gossip such as Kieffer (2013, p.90). Gossip is used as a means to exercise social control. This social control however, is presented in the most negative sense constituting relational aggression, hurting reputations and creating lack of trust according to Kieffer (2013, p.102). Individuals with higher internal locus of control are more likely to be secure and therefore have less need to participate in gossip (Watson, 2011, p.1821). This leads to a lesser requirement for obtaining instrumental support constituting getting help and advice from others. Levels of internal locus of control for the current participants remain unknown. Conversely, the gossiper may well seek to give advice rather than obtain advice offering suggestions as to how to deal with a

conflict (Tucker,1993, p.31). In this form, the gossiper is clearly the advisor. In the role of the gossipee (listener) however, Farrow (2005) suggests the active step of listening to workplace gossip can help the employee adapt to the workplace culture. The need to use workplace gossip however, may only exist for participants if there is limited opportunity to learn about the culture through formal communication channels.

Previous researchers emphasised the use of gossip as means of emotional support, having a "shoulder to cry on" (Forshaw, 2003, p.107), feeling love and caring as a network member (Cobb, 1976) and receiving emotional assistance through gossip (Goldsmith (2007, p.162). The finding that there was no relationship between frequency of gossip and emotion focused coping corresponds with the low level of use by participants of emotional support as a means of coping. The finding nevertheless contradicts the views held by researchers that gossip can create a sense of belonging highlighted by Altuntas et al (2014, p.110) and addresses emotional needs (Foster 2004, Michelson & Mouly 2004 as cited by Altuntas et al, 2014, p.110). The study conducted by Altuntas et al (2014) focused on the nursing profession leading perhaps to lack of generalisation to other professions. Indeed, the frequency and content of gossip may well be influenced by both the work context and whether stressors concern work or non work related issues. Altuntas et al (2014, p.113) found that nurses gossiped specifically on management styles and work conditions. The extent to which the working environment provides opportunity for conversation can be limited which in turn may not allow for gossip involving lengthy emotional discourse of a sensitive nature. Relationships with colleagues and duration of employment may also influence levels of emotional engagement.

Participants in the current study used minimal venting of emotion as a coping mechanism. Nils & Rime (2012, p.680) proposed venting enables stress reduction and emotional recovery whilst Montero-Marin et al (2014) highlight venting as an ineffective

coping strategy. As Woititz (1987 as cited by Baker & Jones, 1996, p.75) points out, "co-workers become siblings and those in authority take on the role of parent" The difference can be the degree of intimacy experienced between home and work. Having strong levels of family support could override the need to engage in workplace gossip allowing venting to occur at home with those most trusted. The availability of supportive relationships for an individual can be challenging depending on both work and personal circumstances with limited opportunity for venting. Participants also used little humor in dealing with stress yet Morreall (1994, pp.56-64 as cited by Capps, 2010, p.111) suggests the humorous gossip can overcome negative views of pettiness and viciousness. Personality traits could be a key factor influencing the use of humor which was not ascertained within the current study.

Individuals develop attitudes and behaviours when faced with challenges imposed by society and in order to participate in the working world today, individuals need to adapt according to Savickas (2005 as cited by Stoltz, Wolff, Monroe, Mazahreh & Farris (2013, p.69). Behavioural attitudes and social norms are increasingly important factors influencing our behavior within the workplace. Gossip is suggested as a "vehicle for social change" according to Noon & Delbridge (1993, p.32) yet our findings suggest there is no relationship between social or moral attitudes towards gossip, problem focused and emotion focused coping and stress. Participants showed stronger positive views towards the moral value of gossip than the social value of gossip. A strong positive relationship was also found between attitudes to gossip (social value) and frequency of gossip suggesting participants acknowledge the social benefits outlined by researchers (Altuntas et al, 2014, p.110, Beersma & Van Klef, 2012, p.2662) of a sense of belonging and bonding.

Post hoc Analyses

Post hoc analyses focused on the time participants spent considering others opinions and type of employment (managerial/non managerial roles). Participants indicated that they spent an average amount of time considering the opinions other held of them. The findings of this study show a medium positive relationship between others opinions and frequency of gossip, a weak positive relationship between others opinions and attitude to gossip (social value) and attitude to gossip (moral value). In addition, the study found others opinions predicted perceived stress. These findings support previous research that worry of social evaluation, being judged and evaluated negatively by others causes stress (Dickerson,Gruenewald & Kemeny, 2004, p.1237). The potential for "loss of self esteem, social status or social acceptance characterised by potential or explicit rejection" are considered threatening to the social self resulting in negative psychological and physiological outcomes for an individual. (Dickerson, Gruenewald, & Kemeny, 2004, p.1195)

The findings of the study found that there was a weak positive significant relationship between type of employment (managerial /non managerial) and frequency of gossip. Managerial type roles were found to gossip more than non-managerial type roles. In addition, the proportion of managers who gossiped fairly often (1-2 times per fortnight) was higher than Non Managerial type roles. Labianca (2010) suggested the use of gossip to reinforce company policies and values should be seen as a benefit by managers allowing them to also learn in advance of potentially difficult issues. It was also found that type of employment predicted perceived stress. The sense of loss of control and having their authority challenged due to gossip according to Noon & Delbridge (1993, p.32) can lead to stress for managers. Indeed, managers should use gossip as a tool accepting and manipulating it for its own purpose according to David (1973, Hirschhorn as cited by Noon & Delbridge, 1993, p.33) reaffirming that control. In addition, using the informal communication channel could

counterbalance a dysfunctional formal communication process which has been shown to cause stress and confusion for employees.

Finally, there was found to be no relationship between frequency of gossip and gender yet a higher proportion of males were found to gossip more than one or twice a month than females. Females perhaps have their own prejudices in terms of the view that females gossip more than males. This was seen in the study conducted by Vuksanović (2012) who highlighted that women in opposition to recruitment for female managers suggested they hold negative characteristics such as tendency to gossip amongst others. A relationship was found between status of employment and frequency of gossip where full time roles were found to gossip more than part time roles, a finding indicative perhaps of the time spent within the workplace.

Strengths,Weaknesses, and Implications

Whilst previous studies have focused on specific aspects of gossip, this study draws together the concepts of frequency of gossip, attitudes towards gossip and coping with stress. Specifically, given both the occasional clandestine and complex nature of gossip, the study also seeks to explore the use and patterns of gossips, an under researched concept. Within the current study, it is unclear whether participants interpreted gossip in different ways, for example, whether gossip was work related gossip (professional) or non work related gossip (social) in responding to the study. Gossip has been specifically defined in previous research ensuring clarity for participants of what constitutes gossip. Future research should clarify the definition of gossip to ensure a full understanding of the construct whilst highlighting the context, for example, social or professional use of gossip for participants. Information on the levels of social support available to participants was not requested. Clarification on the level of social support available to participants would help determine the requirement for gossip

and the frequency which it may occur. This could entail seeking information on the strength and duration of professional and personal relationships. The level of organisational change and culture being experienced by participants within the workplace was not investigated yet this is seen to have a significant impact on stress. Future research should seek to ascertain the orgnanisational culture, level of organisational change and the success of the formal communication process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study seeks to contribute to the much needed area of research on gossip and the potential impact on the mental well being of individuals. Despite the findings that no significant relationship exists between the use of gossip as a coping mechanism for stress, this does not detract from benefits highlighted in previous studies on the positive impacts gossip may have for both individuals and organisations. Without gossip, the detrimental impact of poor formal communication strategies within organisations may be of greater significance for creating levels of occupational stress for individuals. Crampton et al, (1998, p.577) suggest that killing the grapevine is impossible and any attempts to do so would be unwise. Determining the benefits for the gossiper through further research is essential however, if gossip is to be maintained as Dunbar (2004, p.100) proposed as "the core of human social relationships, indeed of society itself".

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Cover Sheet

Dear Participant

My name is Jennifer Marshall and I am conducting a research project on gossip in the workplace as part of my final year examination within the BA (Hons) Degree in Psychology.

You are invited to take part in the study on a purely voluntary basis. Participation involves completion of the attached survey and the time estimated to complete the survey is 20 minutes.

Please be assured that your participation is anonymous, entirely confidential and responses cannot be attributed to any one participant. The questionnaires will be securely stored and data will be kept in electronic format on a password-protected computer. Access to the data will be restricted to my supervisor and myself. For this reason, it will not be possible to withdraw from the survey once the survey has been submitted. As anonymity is assured, your data will not be returned but should you wish to have results of this study, please feel free to contact me at xxxxx@eircom.net.

Should any of the questions raise difficult issues for you, contact details are included at the end of the survey for your use.

You must be over 18 years old or over and employed on a part time or full time basis to take part in this research. It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the questionnaire you are consenting to take part in the study.

I have read and understood the above information and provide my consent Yes   No

Appendix B Questionnaire

Please indicate :

Age in Years   _____

Gender   **Male   Female**

Employment   **Yes   No**

Status of Employment   **Full Time   Part Time**

Type of Employment   **Non Managerial   Managerial**

Indicate the frequency by which you participate in gossip in the workplace?

1.Never   (not at all)

2.Almost Never   (1 or 2 times every few months)

3.Sometimes   (1 or 2 times a month)

4.Fairly Often   (1 or 2 times a fortnight)

5.Very Often   (several times a week)

How much time do you spend considering the opinions that other people hold of you?

1.Never   (not at all)

2.Almost Never   (1 or 2 times every few months)

3.Sometimes   (1 or 2 times a month)

4.Fairly Often   (1 or 2 times a fortnight)

5.Very Often   (several times a week)

Please indicate the extent to which you AGREE or DISAGREE with each statement below.

Base your responses on HOW WELL DOES EACH STATEMENT BELOW DESCRIBES THE WAY YOU GENERALLY FEEL.

To indicate your response, rate yourself on the following scale:

1 = DISAGREE Strongly
2 = DISAGREE Somewhat
3 = Not sure
4 = AGREE Somewhat
5 = AGREE Strongly

1.	Gossip is a good ice-breaker	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Rumors are hardly ever true	1	2	3	4	5
3.	It's fun to talk about other people.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	It is wrong to talk about others when they aren't around	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I love to know what is going on in other people's lives.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	You can't trust gossip	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I always mind my own business instead of gossiping.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	You should never mention rumors even if you think they're true	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Gossiping is a great way to pass the time	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I have never known gossip to be helpful to anyone.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I like to share what I hear about others.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Gossip is often true	1	2	3	4	5

Instructions

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month.

In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way.
For each question circle one of the following options:

0 = **never** 1 = **almost never** 2 = **sometimes** 3 = **fairly often** 4 = **very often**

1	In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	0	1	2	3	4
2	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	0	1	2	3	4
3	In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?	0	1	2	3	4
4	In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	0	1	2	3	4
5	In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	0	1	2	3	4
6	In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?	0	1	2	3	4
7	In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	0	1	2	3	4
8	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	0	1	2	3	4
9	In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	0	1	2	3	4
10	In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	0	1	2	3	4

These items deal with ways you've been coping with the stress in your life. There are many ways to try to deal with problems. These items ask what you've been doing to cope with this one. Obviously, different people deal with things in different ways, but I'm interested in how you've tried to deal with it. Each item says something about a particular way of coping. I want to know to what extent you've been doing what the item says. How much or how frequently. Don't answer on the basis of whether it seems to be working or not—just whether or not you're doing it. Use these response choices. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can.

1 = I haven't been doing this at all

2 = I've been doing this a little bit

3 = I've been doing this a medium amount

4 = I've been doing this a lot

1. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.	1	2	3	4
2. I've been getting emotional support from others.	1	2	3	4
3. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.	1	2	3	4
4. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.	1	2	3	4
5. I've been getting help and advice from other people.	1	2	3	4
6. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.	1	2	3	4
7. I've been making jokes about it.	1	2	3	4
8. I've been expressing my negative feelings.	1	2	3	4
9. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.	1	2	3	4
10. I've been making fun of the situation.	1	2	3	4

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Should you require support after answering this questionnaire, please do not hesitate to contact the listed organisations below:

Aware

72 Lower Leeson Street,
Dublin 2

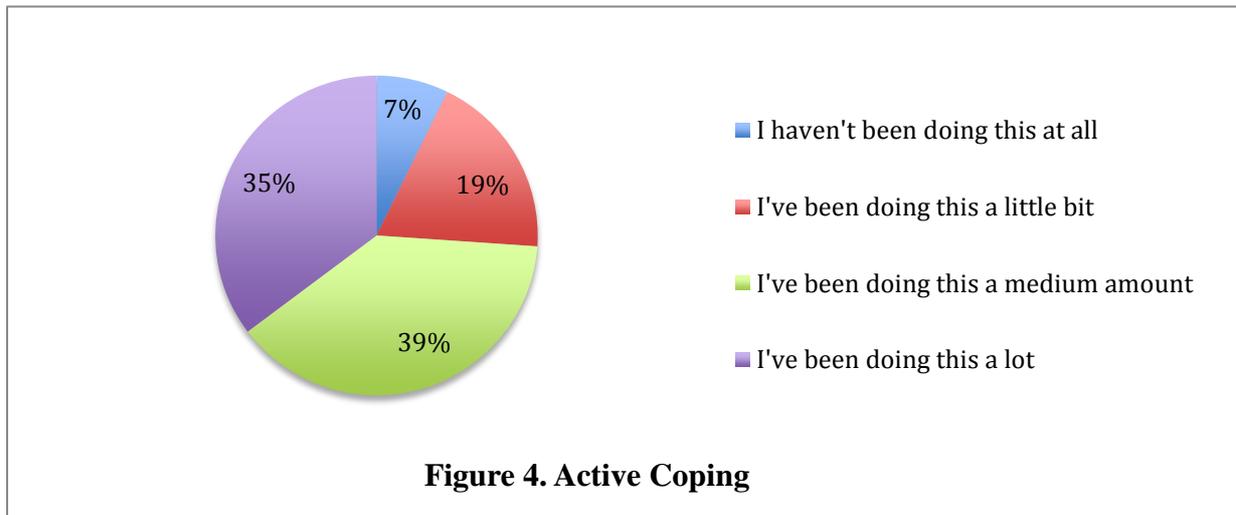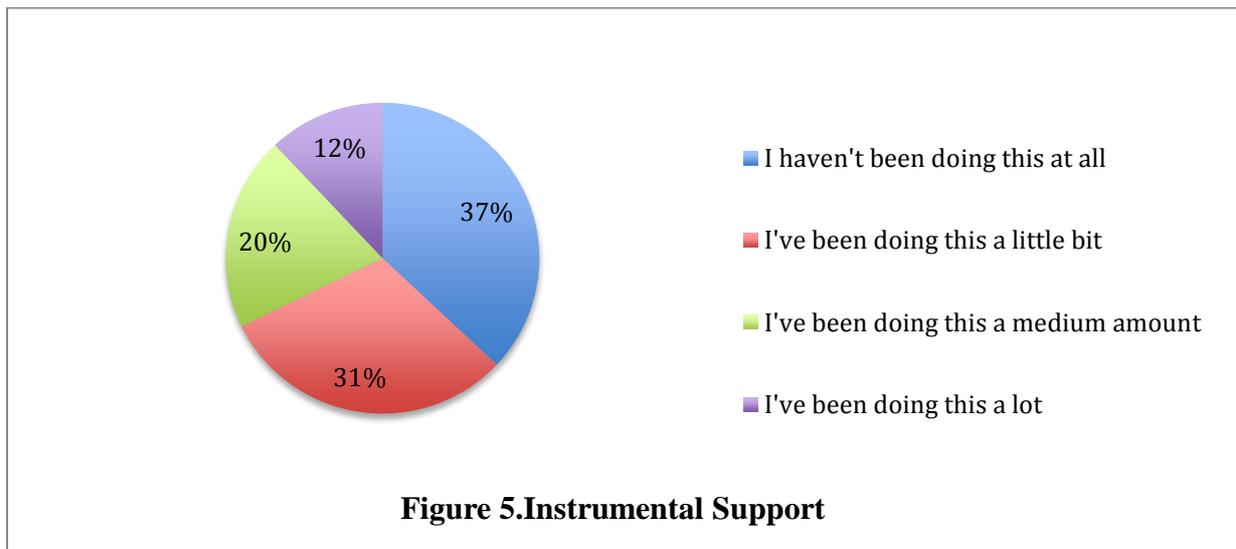The Aware Support Line is 1890 303 302 - Available Monday – Sunday, 10am to 10pm.

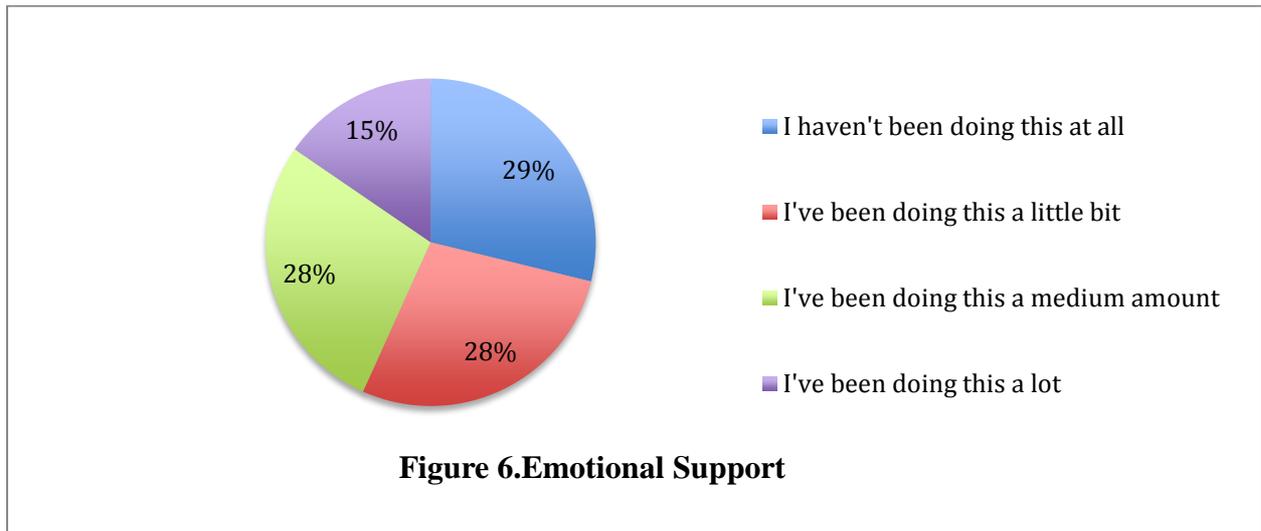The Aware email address is supportmail@aware.ie

Samaritans

4-5 Usher's Court
Usher's Quay
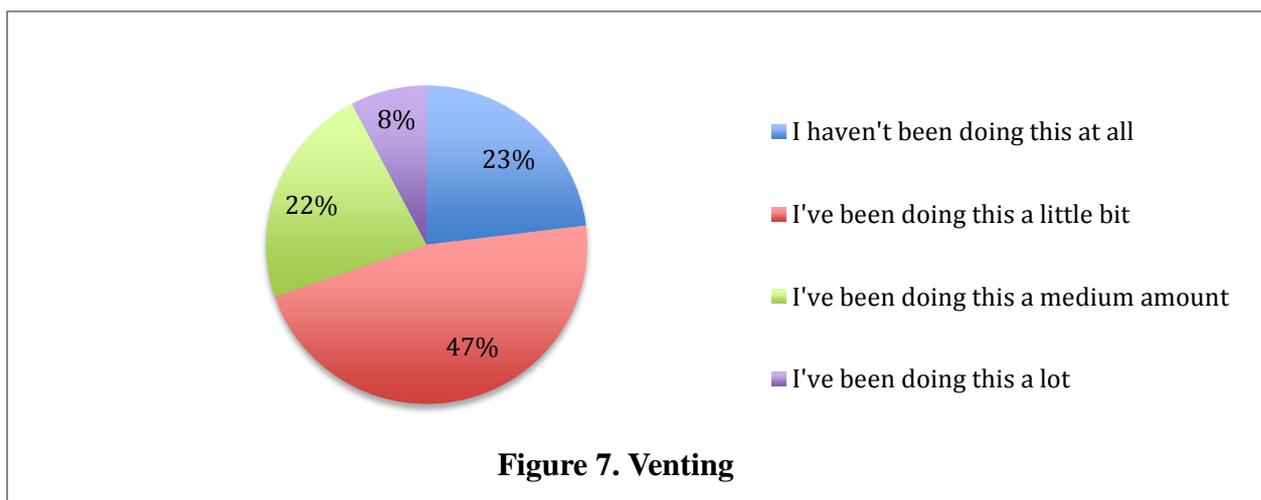Dublin 8

The Samaritans Support Line is 116 123 – Available 24 hours

The Samaritans email address is jo@samaritans.org
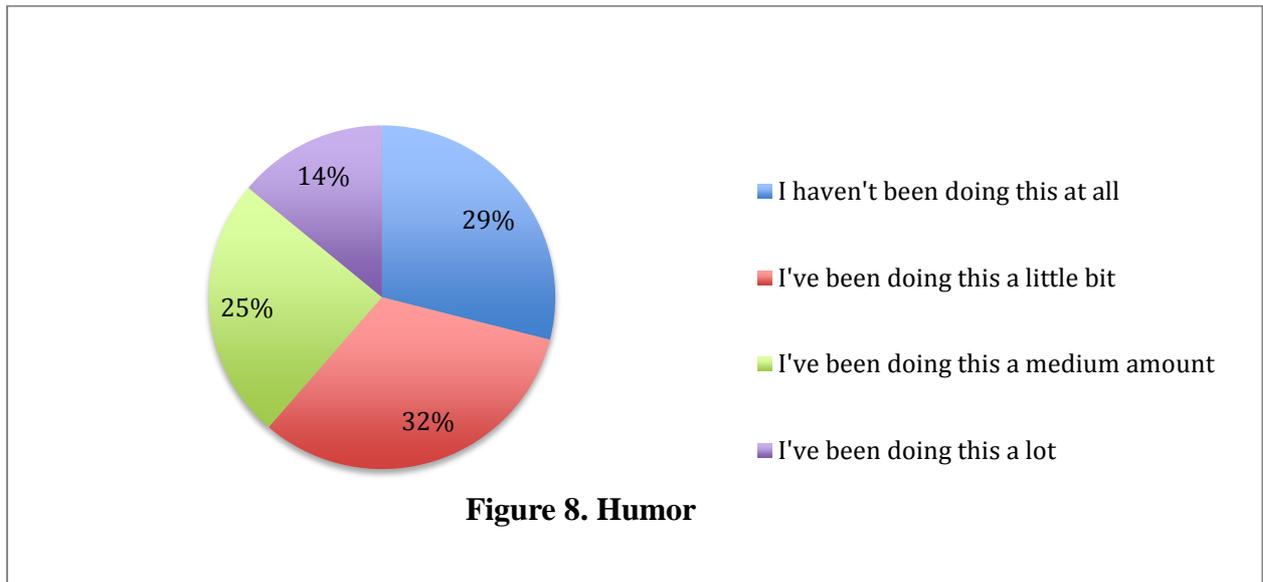
Appendix C Pie Charts

Graph 4

Figure 4. Active Coping

Graph 5

Figure 5.Instrumental Support

Graph 6

Figure 6.Emotional Support

Graph 7

Figure 7. Venting

Graph 8

Figure 8. Humor

Legend:
- I haven't been doing this at all
- I've been doing this a little bit
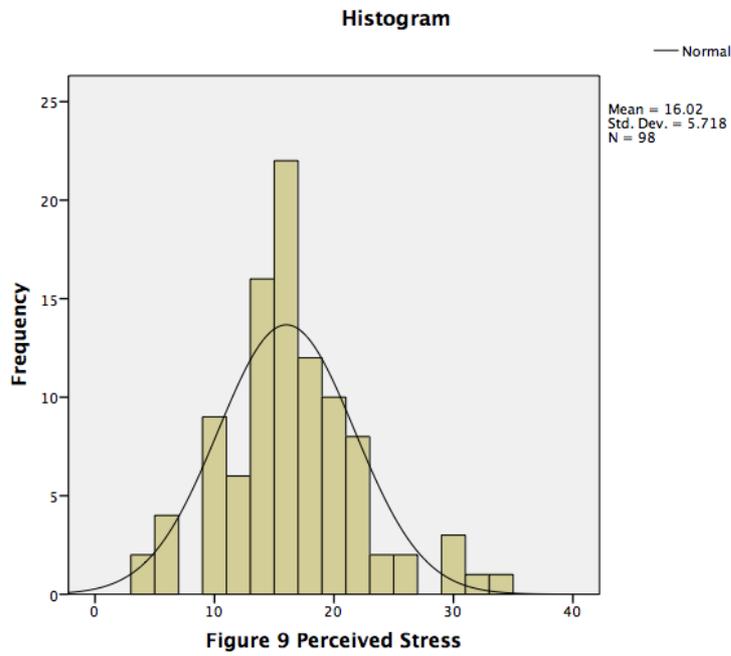- I've been doing this a medium amount
- I've been doing this a lot

Values: 29%, 32%, 25%, 14%

Appendix D Histograms

Graph 9 Perceived Stress

Histogram

Mean = 16.02
Std. Dev. = 5.718
N = 98

Figure 9 Perceived Stress

Graph 10 Problem Focused Coping

Histogram

Mean = 10.17
Std. Dev. = 2.977
N = 103

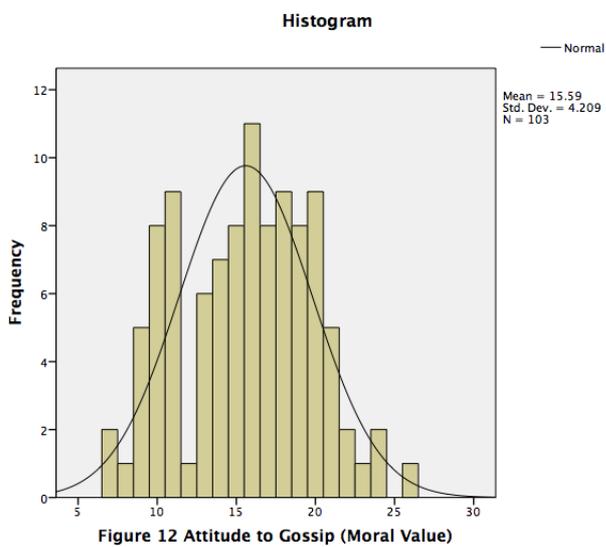Figure 10 Problem Focused Coping

Graph 11 Emotion Focused Coping
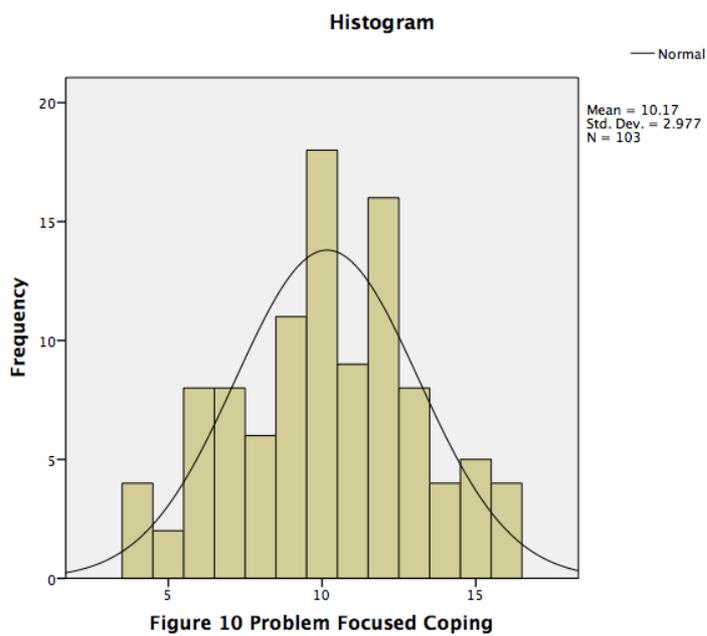
Figure 11 Emotion Focused Coping

Graph 12 Attitude to Gossip (Moral Value)
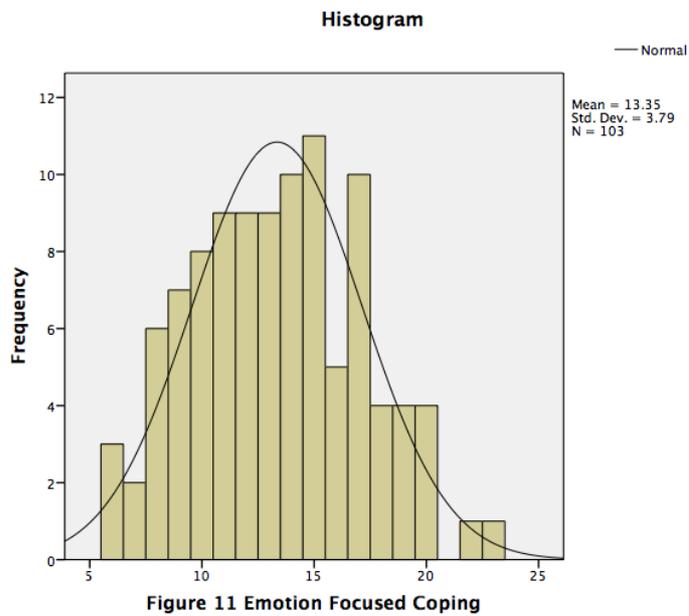
Figure 12 Attitude to Gossip (Moral Value)
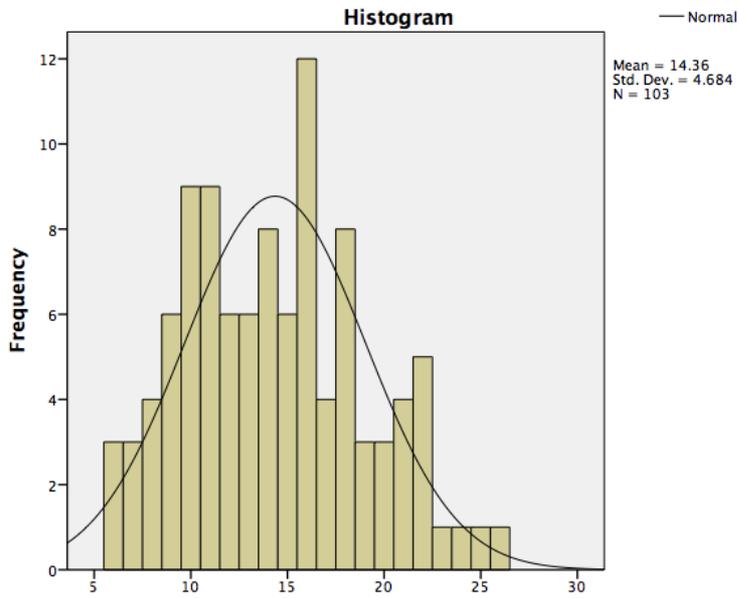
Graph 13 Attitude to Gossip (Social Value)

Figure 12 Attitude to Gossip (Social Value)