



Overtime Work Patterns and Their Organizational Implications in Limpopo's Health and Agricultural Sectors: A Secondary Data Analysis

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ABSTRACT

With an emphasis on the organizational ramifications for human resource management, this article investigates the overtime work patterns in the agricultural and health sectors in the province of Limpopo. Excessive overtime has substantial financial and human costs, even though it is necessary to meet service demands, particularly during peak periods. Using publicly accessible reports, policy documents, organizational records from provincial departments, and national labour statistics, this study uses a qualitative secondary data analysis approach. The study identifies the main causes of overtime, such as seasonal demands and a lack of workers, and emphasizes the effects on productivity, operational expenses, and employee well-being. The results show a delicate balance between workforce sustainability and service continuity, with overtime leading to burnout, exhaustion, and possible drops in service quality. The paper makes the case for better overtime management techniques that include flexible scheduling, workforce planning, and sector-specific policy changes. The study adds to the body of knowledge by placing overtime work in the larger framework of South Africa's public sector resource constraints and providing helpful suggestions for reducing adverse effects without sacrificing service delivery. Policymakers, HR professionals, and managers looking to improve labour practices in areas vital to Limpopo's socioeconomic growth will find this research useful.

Keywords: Overtime Work, Human Resource Management, Health Sector, Agricultural Sector, Limpopo Province

1.Introduction and Background

In South Africa, working overtime has become a defining feature of public sector employment, particularly in labour-intensive industries like agriculture and healthcare (Nkosi & Ndlovu, 2023; Mokoena & Mokwena, 2022). Workers in these sectors commonly work weekends after regular workweeks in Limpopo Province, which is known for its primarily rural landscape and economic difficulties, in order to meet ongoing service demands that result from systemic workforce shortages, seasonal fluctuations, and emergent situations (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Due to the pressing need to preserve the continuity of vital services and agricultural production cycles that are vital to local livelihoods, these overtime hours are frequently unavoidable (Pretorius et al., 2021).

Overtime has substantial financial ramifications, though, as provincial budgets bear a large portion of the expenses that could be used for permanent staffing or infrastructure upgrades (Department of Public Service and Administration [DPSA], 2022). Beyond financial considerations, the human cost of overtime is becoming more widely acknowledged in the literature due to the correlation between long workdays and declines in employee health, such as increased risks of musculoskeletal disorders, mental health problems, and cardiovascular disease (Virtanen et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Additionally, extended overtime raises absenteeism, burnout, and lowers morale, all of which, ironically, may jeopardize the very service delivery objectives overtime is meant to promote (Caruso, 2020; Nkosi & Ndlovu, 2023).

The relationship between overtime and service quality is particularly important in the health sector. Research indicates that extended working hours during outbreaks or emergency responses can have a detrimental impact on clinical outcomes and patient safety for nurses and other frontline health workers in Limpopo (Mokoena & Mokwena, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). The seasonal increase in work demands in agriculture also causes varying overtime patterns, which can lower overall workforce productivity and increase turnover if improperly managed (Nkosi & Ndlovu, 2023).

Developing sustainable labour strategies requires an understanding of the dynamics of overtime work, given the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of Limpopo and the critical roles that agriculture and health play in local development. By examining the type and scope of overtime in these industries and evaluating its organizational effects, this study seeks to close a significant research gap in the region. The specific goals are to: (1) describe overtime work patterns in the agricultural and health sectors of Limpopo; (2) assess the difficulties and effects these patterns have on organizational effectiveness and human resources; and (3) offer workable suggestions to maximize overtime management without sacrificing critical service delivery.

The following are the main research questions: What are the typical overtime work schedules in the agricultural and health sectors of Limpopo? What problems do this overtime practices cause for the organization? How can the sustainability of the workforce and service demands be balanced through

efficient overtime management? Answering these issues will help advance the expanding conversation in South Africa about labour management in the public sector and lay the groundwork for managerial and policy changes that are adapted to local conditions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Health Impacts of Overtime Work

Prolonged and excessive overtime work poses serious risks to employee health, affecting both physical and mental well-being, as extensive empirical research consistently shows. Numerous chronic illnesses and psychological problems can result from the cumulative stress of long workdays, especially when recovery time is inadequate. These health effects are particularly noticeable in high-stakes industries like healthcare, where worker well-being has a direct impact on safety and service quality.

2.1.1 Physical Health Consequences

The increased risk of developing long-term physical health conditions is one of the most well-documented effects of overtime. According to studies by Virtanen, Magnusson Hanson, and Westerlund (2021) and Caruso (2020), employees who regularly work past regular business hours are at a higher risk of cardiovascular conditions such as stroke, ischemic heart disease, and hypertension. These results can be explained by physiological mechanisms such as prolonged activation of the sympathetic nervous system and elevated blood pressure brought on by extended stress and exhaustion (Virtanen et al., 2021). Long work hours have also been connected to metabolic diseases like obesity, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome, in part because they interfere with circadian rhythms and limit opportunities for physical activity and a healthy diet (Kim & Park, 2022). These factors interact to create a compounded health burden that labour management policies frequently ignore.

2.1.2 Mental Health and Psychological Well-being

In addition to physical health issues, workers who put in excessive overtime frequently suffer from mental health disorders. Because long work hours weaken psychological resilience and raise stress levels, anxiety, depression, and burnout syndrome are frequently reported outcomes (Kim & Park, 2022). Burnout has significant effects on people and organizations. It is typified by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Mental health issues can be especially severe in the healthcare industry, where emotional labour is common. Chronic overtime often leaves healthcare workers feeling frustrated and powerless, which makes it harder for them to handle demands at work (Wang, Li, & Zhou, 2021).

2.1.3 Cognitive Impairment and Workplace Safety

Overtime fatigue affects cognitive function in quantifiable ways. Long workdays impair working memory, attention, reaction time, and decision-making abilities, according to research by Folkard and Lombardi (2020). These cognitive impairments put workers and the people they serve at direct risk by raising the possibility of mistakes and accidents. The cognitive toll of overtime can result in medical errors, compromised patient safety, and suboptimal clinical outcomes in fields like healthcare, where accuracy and attentiveness are crucial. According to Wang, Li, and Zhou (2021), healthcare workers who are tired are more likely to make mistakes and follow safety procedures less closely. Fatigue also impairs the ability to empathize with patients, which lowers the standard of care and patient satisfaction.

2.1.4 Implications for Workforce Sustainability

The health consequences of overtime extend beyond immediate medical outcomes to influence long-term workforce sustainability. Chronic health problems and psychological distress contribute to increased absenteeism, higher rates of disability leave, and early retirement, all of which strain organizational capacity (Caruso, 2020). This creates a feedback loop where reduced staffing levels necessitate further overtime, perpetuating employee health risks and operational challenges.

2.2 Overtime and Job Satisfaction

There is a complex but generally negative relationship between job satisfaction and overtime, particularly when overtime turns into a regular requirement rather than an occasional one. Long-term excessive overtime can damage important facets of employees' personal and professional lives, which has a detrimental effect on their attitudes and behaviours at work. This section examines the effects of overtime on work-life balance, motivation, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions in order to determine how it affects job satisfaction.

2.2.1 Impact on Work-Life Balance

One of the most immediate and tangible consequences of excessive overtime is its disruption of employees' work-life balance. This imbalance has far-reaching effects on both personal well-being and professional effectiveness, especially in demanding sectors such as health and agriculture.

Encroachment on Personal and Family Time

Employees' time for family, leisure, and self-care is frequently disrupted by long workdays (Lee & Chen, 2021; Nkosi & Ndlovu, 2023). There are fewer opportunities for meaningful interaction with loved ones and for engaging in restorative activities like exercise, hobbies, or social gatherings when overtime extends into the evenings and weekends. Employees may have to make tough trade-offs that frequently put work demands ahead of personal obligations as a result of this encroachment, which may result in ongoing conflicts between work and non-work roles.

Increased Stress and Role Conflict

The resulting role conflict, where expectations from work and family roles are incompatible, generates significant psychological stress (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Employees juggling these competing demands may experience guilt, frustration, and anxiety, all of which contribute to overall dissatisfaction. Chronic role conflict has been linked to increased risk of burnout and mental health problems, reducing employees' resilience to workplace stressors (Ahmad et al., 2022).

Perceived Lack of Control and Compulsory Overtime

In the public sector context, including in Limpopo's health and agricultural services, overtime is often compulsory or poorly regulated, which limits employees' control over their schedules (Nkosi & Ndlovu, 2023). This perceived lack of autonomy exacerbates feelings of helplessness and resentment, as workers feel trapped in rigid schedules that do not accommodate their personal needs. Such lack of control has been shown to be a significant predictor of job dissatisfaction and poor psychological outcomes (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

Impaired Psychological Recovery and Rest

Opportunities for psychological recovery are reduced when employees are unable to mentally disconnect from their work during scheduled downtime, such as weekends and evenings (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Employees' ability to refuel cognitively and emotionally is diminished when overtime interferes with these rest periods. This poor recuperation exacerbates stress and exhaustion, resulting in a vicious cycle of deteriorating health and job discontent (Ahmad et al., 2022).

2.2.2 Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout

Extended overtime work significantly contributes to emotional exhaustion, a central dimension of burnout that undermines employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Understanding how overtime induces emotional depletion and its consequences is critical for managing workforce health and productivity.

Emotional Exhaustion as a Core Burnout Component

Feeling emotionally overextended and depleted of emotional resources is known as emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Chronic fatigue, irritability, and a feeling of being overburdened by work demands are some of its symptoms. By decreasing opportunities for psychological recovery and rest, overtime, particularly when prolonged or frequent, exacerbates this emotional strain (Nkosi & Ndlovu, 2023). Long-hour workers report feeling consistently exhausted, both physically and mentally, which impairs their ability to handle ongoing stressors at work.

Impact on Job Engagement and Commitment

Employee passion and dedication to their work deteriorate as emotional exhaustion increases. A diminished sense of accomplishment and disengagement from work result from the depletion of energy needed to maintain motivation and engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Because of this disengagement, routine tasks become tedious and unfulfilling, undermining the intrinsic rewards of work. This eventually leads to cynicism and a decline in organizational loyalty, endangering both individual output and group morale.

Interpersonal and Organizational Consequences

Emotional exhaustion does not only affect individual employees but also disrupts workplace dynamics. Exhausted workers are less likely to engage in cooperative behaviours, such as helping colleagues or participating in team efforts, and more prone to irritability and conflict (Shirom, 2011). These negative interactions can escalate workplace tensions, reduce team cohesion, and impair communication, which ultimately affect organizational climate and productivity.

Pathway to Burnout and Withdrawal

Full burnout, a syndrome that includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, can develop from emotional exhaustion if it is not addressed (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout puts the stability of the workforce at serious risk because it causes withdrawal behaviours like presenteeism, absenteeism, and even turnover. Burnout can drastically lower service quality and organizational resilience in industries where overtime is common, such as healthcare and agriculture.

2.2.3 Reduced Motivation and Perceived Value

Persistent and unmanaged overtime can significantly undermine employee motivation and their perception of being valued within the organization. This erosion of motivation has profound implications for job satisfaction, performance, and long-term workforce engagement.

Impact on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Workers who routinely put in extra hours without receiving the proper credit or material benefits frequently feel that their extra work is ignored or unappreciated. This view reduces extrinsic motivation, which is linked to outside incentives like compensation, promotions, and recognition, as well as intrinsic motivation, which is engagement motivated by one's own fulfilment and interest in the work (Ahmad et al., 2022). Employee motivation suffers when they believe that overtime is required rather than optional and unrewarded, which lowers effort, productivity, and organizational commitment. Not getting credit for overtime can also make some workers feel even more unfairly treated, especially if they believe that other workers are given preferential treatment in terms of benefits or lighter workloads. Morale and cohesiveness are further harmed by this feeling of unfair treatment, which also fuels organizational cynicism and disengagement.

Psychological Contract Breach

The psychological contract, which is the unspoken agreement between employers and employees about their respective responsibilities, may be broken by working overtime without receiving the appropriate recognition or payment (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Employee trust in the employer declines when they believe that their sacrifices, like putting in more hours at work, are not rewarded, supported, or respected in return. Cynicism, decreased loyalty, and an increase in the desire to leave the company are all common outcomes of this breach (Ahmad et al., 2022).

Constraints on Personal and Professional Development

Persistent overtime has a significant negative influence on employees' chances for both professional and personal development. Longer workdays interfere with time spent on skill-building pursuits like training, additional education, or involvement in projects that advance one's career (Lee & Chen, 2021). Employees who perceive little opportunity for skill development or upward mobility may eventually feel that their careers are at a standstill as a result of this stagnation. This is especially important in public sector settings, such as the health and agriculture sectors in Limpopo, where formalized career paths and strict hierarchies make proactive development crucial for promotion. Limitations on development brought on by time may discourage innovation and lower workforce capacity in addition to lowering job satisfaction.

Organizational Implications

Lower productivity, increased error rates, and weakened organizational citizenship behaviours, actions employees voluntarily take to support organizational goals, are all consequences of decreased motivation and a sense of worthlessness (Podsakoff et al., 2000). These impacts exacerbate labour shortages over time, particularly in industries where effective and high-quality services are essential. Organizations must foster a culture of appreciation and fairness, offer career development opportunities, and fairly recognize and reward overtime in order to address these motivational deficits.

2.2.4 Turnover Intentions and Absenteeism

Turnover intentions and absenteeism represent critical organizational outcomes directly linked to employee dissatisfaction with overtime demands. When employees consistently work beyond regular hours without adequate support or compensation, they often experience heightened stress, fatigue, and disengagement, which erode their attachment to the organization and increase their desire to leave (Ahmad et al., 2022; Lee & Chen, 2021).

Turnover Intentions:

When faced with ongoing overtime demands, workers often think about quitting as a coping mechanism to restore control over their work-life balance and enhance their wellbeing. Poor working conditions, including excessive overtime, have been widely linked to turnover intentions, which are employees' conscious and deliberate desire to leave the company. These intentions are a powerful predictor of actual turnover behaviour (Hom et al., 2017). This is especially problematic in the public sector, such as the agricultural and health departments in Limpopo. As disgruntled workers look for better job opportunities in the private sector or other provinces where workload management may be better, the already small pool of skilled workers faces attrition (Mokoena & Mokwena, 2022). The loss of experienced staff not only depletes organizational knowledge but also increases recruitment and training costs, adding financial strain to already tight budgets.

Absenteeism:

Increased absenteeism is a more direct behavioural reaction to stress and burnout associated with overtime and frequently coexists with turnover intentions. In order to recuperate physically and psychologically from extended work hours, employees might take more unofficial absences or sick leave (Johns, 2019). Because absent employees add to their colleagues' workload, this absenteeism pattern further jeopardizes workforce stability and business continuity. Absenteeism has detrimental effects on the quality and safety of patient care in industries like healthcare, which makes it more necessary for remaining staff to work overtime to cover shortages (Wang, Li, & Zhou, 2021).

The Vicious Cycle of Staffing Shortages and Overtime:

Overtime-related absenteeism and turnover produce a self-reinforcing feedback loop in resource-constrained environments like the Province of Limpopo. Employee turnover and frequent absences put additional strain on the remaining staff, requiring even more overtime to continue providing services. This increased demand exacerbates employee weariness and discontent, leading to increased absenteeism and turnover (Nkosi & Ndlovu, 2023). A destabilized organizational environment characterized by diminished capacity, low morale, and compromised service quality is the end result. This vicious cycle poses serious challenges for workforce sustainability and highlights the critical need for systemic interventions. Addressing overtime-related turnover and absenteeism requires not only improving overtime management practices but also investing in staff well-being programs, enhancing recruitment and retention strategies, and fostering a supportive organizational culture that values employee health and job satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2022; Pretorius et al., 2021).

2.3 Overtime in Public Sector Workforces of Developing Countries

Overtime is a pervasive feature of public sector workforces in many developing countries, not as a strategy for enhancing productivity, but as a coping mechanism in the face of structural constraints. While it may offer short-term solutions to service delivery backlogs, its long-term consequences raise concerns about sustainability, employee health, and organizational resilience.

2.3.1 Structural Drivers of Overtime in the Public Sector

Systemic problems like persistent understaffing, strict hiring procedures, and a lack of funding are major contributors to the persistence of overtime work in the majority of developing nations (Mokoena & Mokwena, 2022). Budgetary restrictions frequently hinder public institutions' ability to hire enough full-time employees. Existing employees are being forced to work more hours as a result of the growing demand for services, particularly in industries like healthcare, education, and agriculture. Many public service organizations in sub-Saharan Africa use overtime as a compensatory mechanism to cover up operational inefficiencies, according to Osei-Tutu and Addison (2023). In order to meet performance goals and prevent service disruptions, managers rely on overtime rather than permanent appointments or better planning to address staffing shortages.

2.3.2 Fiscal Constraints and Budget Prioritization

In developing nations, public sector organizations usually have tight and rigid budgets. These limitations frequently stem from more general macroeconomic issues like low tax collections, reliance on donors, and debt repayment commitments (International Monetary Fund, 2022). Governments are usually compelled to put immediate service delivery ahead of long-term human resource development in this situation. A trade-off originating from budgetary rigidity is reflected in the preference for temporary solutions, such as compensating current employees for overtime rather than recruiting new hires. But in the long run, this model is unsustainable and ineffective because it causes absenteeism, burnout, and ultimately increased expenses for hiring and employee turnover (Pretorius et al., 2021).

2.3.3 The Case of Limpopo Province: A Perfect Storm

The province of Limpopo offers a tangible illustration of how these national and international trends appear locally. High unemployment rates, pervasive poverty, and significant infrastructure deficiencies, particularly in rural municipalities, are the province's defining characteristics (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Public services are under more strain as a result of these socioeconomic issues, especially in the healthcare and agricultural sectors, which must function effectively with constrained funding.

In light of these circumstances, the provincial government is depending more and more on overtime to cover gaps in service delivery. However, the province runs the risk of intensifying a cycle of overwork, low morale, and deteriorating service quality if it does not invest in staff development, better working conditions, or systemic reforms. This cycle disproportionately affects front-line workers in clinics, hospitals, and agricultural extension services, many of whom are already operating under high-stress conditions with minimal support.

2.3.4 Governance, Policy Gaps, and Labour Sustainability

The public sector's excessive reliance on overtime is a sign of larger problems with governance and policy. Excessive overtime continues unchecked due to poor human resource planning, a lack of succession plans, and uneven labour standard enforcement (Mokoena & Mokwena, 2022). Furthermore, performance management systems inadvertently encourage long hours over the wellbeing of employees by rewarding output volumes rather than sustainable labour practices. This dynamic leads to a fundamental conflict in provinces such as Limpopo between meeting short-term service goals and developing a stable, motivated workforce that can meet long-term development goals. In the end, ignoring these conflicts could erode public sector capability and public confidence in governmental institutions.

2.4 Sector-Specific Challenges: Health Sector

Because patient care demands are unpredictable and urgent, the health sector poses particular overtime challenges. High patient volumes, emergencies, and epidemics require flexible and extended work schedules, which frequently lead to overtime (Ngcobo & Mabunda, 2023). Long work hours among health professionals have been linked in a number of studies to higher rates of medical errors, lower patient satisfaction, and a breakdown in clinical

protocol adherence (Wang, Li, & Zhou, 2021; Mokoena & Mokwena, 2022). Beyond these outcomes, overworked health personnel often suffer from chronic stress, burnout, and physical exhaustion, leading to higher absenteeism and staff turnover, which ironically intensify overtime pressures on remaining employees (Shah et al., 2023). In resource-limited settings like Limpopo, these challenges are amplified by shortages of qualified staff, inadequate infrastructure, and limited support systems, making the effective management of overtime critical for both workforce health and patient care quality.

2.5 Sector-Specific Challenges: Agricultural Sector

The demand for agricultural labour is very seasonal, with notable peaks during the planting and harvesting cycles necessitating long hours (Nkosi & Ndlovu, 2023). In Limpopo and other rural provinces, livestock farming adds complications pertaining to weekend overtime beyond crop production. Continuous, frequently daily care is required for livestock management, including feeding, health monitoring, milking, and emergency interventions, many of which take place on the weekends (Munyai & Mahlangu, 2023; Dlamini, 2021). Because the biological requirements of animals do not align with regular work schedules, weekend overtime is a crucial aspect of livestock farming.

Research indicates that working overtime on weekends in livestock operations causes worker exhaustion and interferes with the recuperation time that regular weekends off normally provide (Maunya & Mokoena, 2022). Agricultural workers are more susceptible to musculoskeletal injuries and stress-related illnesses due to the physical demands of these jobs and their erratic work schedules (Sithole, 2022). The continuity of farm operations may also be threatened by this pattern, which has an impact on workers' social and familial lives and causes discontent and possible turnover (Dlamini, 2021).

Weekend overtime is crucial to livestock farming, but there are few official systems in place to control or make up for these long hours, especially in Limpopo's informal or small-scale farming environments (Munyai & Mahlangu, 2023). Attempts to guarantee ethical labour practices and safeguard the welfare of employees are hampered by this regulatory gap. In order to handle weekend overtime in livestock management, specific labour laws that take into account both the general labour issues in agriculture and the particular time demands of animal care are needed.

2.6 Gaps in Existing Literature

Although there is a wealth of research on the effects of overtime on health, psychology, and organizations throughout the world, there are still relatively few studies that place these problems in the context of South African provinces like Limpopo. The majority of research tends to extrapolate results to national or international contexts without taking into consideration the governance frameworks, sectoral specificities, and regional socioeconomic conditions that significantly influence overtime dynamics (DPSA, 2022; Pretorius et al., 2021). Understudied interactions exist between overtime patterns and particular difficulties in Limpopo, such as rurality, resource scarcity, and a high disease burden. This gap calls for research approaches that integrate qualitative and quantitative data within local contexts to provide nuanced insights. Addressing this gap will better equip policymakers and managers to design contextually relevant overtime management strategies that mitigate negative impacts while sustaining essential service delivery.

3. Theoretical Framework

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which was first created by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001), serves as the conceptual basis for this investigation. According to the JD-R model, if job demands like workload, emotional stress, and, most importantly, long overtime is not counterbalanced by sufficient job resources, they can result in stress and burnout. These resources, which can mitigate the adverse impacts of job demands and foster employee engagement and resilience, include elements like autonomy, social support, and organizational support.

When excessive or poorly managed, overtime work is a major requirement of the job. It has detrimental effects on motivation and general job satisfaction, shortens recovery times, and increases physical and mental strain (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014; Kim & Park, 2022). The JD-R framework thus explains how persistent overtime contributes to employee burnout, absenteeism, and turnover, which, in turn, affect organizational effectiveness and service delivery outcomes.

The JD-R model offers a useful lens through which to view how resource constraints, including understaffing, rigid scheduling, and insufficient managerial support, intensify the effects of overtime demands in the agricultural and health sectors of Limpopo. The model highlights potential intervention points by highlighting the interplay between demands and resources. These points include improving workplace support systems, expanding human resource capacity, and strengthening policy frameworks to better balance the demands of overtime with the well-being of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

This theoretical grounding supports the study's analysis of overtime patterns and their implications, facilitating evidence-based recommendations aimed at optimizing resource allocation and mitigating the adverse effects of overtime on Limpopo's workforce and organizational outcomes.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative secondary data analysis methodology, focusing on publicly accessible documents and datasets relevant to overtime work in Limpopo's health and agricultural sectors. The use of secondary data is appropriate given the study's aim to analyse broad patterns and organizational implications without engaging directly with individual participants, thereby eliminating the need for ethical clearance (Johnston, 2017).

The provincial government of the province of Limpopo provides official records of workforce management procedures and overtime expenditures through reports like budget statements and annual departmental performance reviews. Furthermore, quantitative indicators of employment trends, working hours, and sector-specific labour dynamics are provided by Statistics South Africa's labour market statistics (2023). To put institutional frameworks controlling overtime practices in context, pertinent policy documents and labour laws released in the previous five years were also examined.

A systematic process was undertaken to identify and extract data points related to overtime frequency, duration, causes, and reported consequences within the two focal sectors. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, involving familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of key themes, and reviewing themes for coherence and relevance to the research questions. This approach enabled the distillation of recurring patterns, sectoral distinctions, and organizational challenges associated with overtime.

Triangulation was used to improve validity and reliability by comparing results from various data sources and document types, guaranteeing a thorough and validated comprehension of the phenomenon (Flick, 2018). In addition to enabling a thorough, contextualized analysis, the findings' credibility is reinforced by their reliance on official and reliable data sources.

The goals of this study are well served by the qualitative secondary data analysis approach, which eliminates the ethical and practical challenges of primary data collection in delicate fields like agriculture and health while enabling an effective and moral investigation of systemic problems pertaining to overtime.

5. Results

The secondary data's thematic analysis reveals unique yet related overtime work trends in the agricultural and health sectors of Limpopo. Chronic staffing shortages are the main cause of overtime in the health sector. Rural clinics and hospitals routinely have fewer employees than is advised, forcing nurses, paramedics, and support staff to work longer hours, often on the weekends, after full weekday shifts, according to reports from the Limpopo Department of Health (2022). Seasonal disease outbreaks and emergency responses are two examples of times when this pattern is exacerbated due to increased patient demand (Mokoena & Mokwena, 2022). Secondary sources document widespread employee fatigue, elevated absenteeism rates, and instances of burnout, adversely affecting both workforce sustainability and quality of care (Wang, Li, & Zhou, 2021).

The pattern in the agricultural sector is different but just as difficult. According to Nkosi and Ndlovu (2023), overtime work is highly seasonal, peaking during planting and harvesting cycles when labour demand spikes. Workers frequently put in more hours than usual to meet production deadlines, which are made worse by market pressures and climatic uncertainties, according to reports from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (2023). These long hours have been connected to higher injury rates, higher turnover intentions, and worker fatigue, all of which jeopardize rural communities' economic stability and productivity (Sithole, 2022).

Overtime pay obligations place a heavy financial burden on both sectors. According to provincial budget analyses, departmental human resource budgets are heavily reliant on overtime expenses, which restricts the amount of money available for hiring new employees and upgrading infrastructure (DPSA, 2022). This financial burden feeds a vicious cycle in which understaffing results in overtime, which further depletes resources for long-term workforce growth.

Organizationally, the analysis reveals that different facilities and districts have different policies regarding the enforcement and implementation of overtime. According to a number of reports, the lack of standardized processes for tracking and authorizing overtime leads to inconsistent practices that occasionally compromise accountability and fairness (Pretorius et al., 2021). Moreover, the limited adoption of flexible work arrangements, such as shift rotations or compressed workweeks, reduces opportunities to mitigate the negative effects of overtime, leaving employees with little recourse for managing work-life balance.

In conclusion, the findings show that although overtime is operationally required in the agricultural and health sectors of Limpopo, it comes at a significant organizational and human cost. These results highlight the need for more strategic overtime management policies that strike a balance between service requirements, worker welfare, and long-term financial viability.

6. Discussion

The results of this study support a wealth of research showing the complex dangers of working too much overtime, especially in settings with limited resources like the Province of Limpopo. Chronic staffing shortages and high patient demand in the health sector are the main causes of persistent overtime, which poses major risks to the quality and sustainability of healthcare services as well as the health of employees. This is consistent with recent studies showing that long workdays cause physical and mental stress in healthcare professionals, which can lead to burnout, absenteeism, and compromised patient safety (Mokoena & Mokwena, 2022; Wang, Li, & Zhou, 2021). In Limpopo's rural and underserved areas, where healthcare capacity is already constrained, the ramifications are severe, making sustainable workforce management an urgent priority.

In the agricultural sector, the reliance on overtime during planting and harvesting seasons underscores the vulnerabilities of labour-intensive production systems in the face of climatic variability and economic pressures. As Nkosi & Ndlovu (2023) suggest, without improved workforce planning and technological interventions such as mechanization, seasonal labour surges will continue to place unsustainable demands on workers, exacerbating fatigue

and turnover risks. This scenario not only affects individual well-being but also threatens the productivity and economic resilience of rural communities that depend heavily on agriculture.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model offers a solid framework for comprehending these relationships. According to the model, employees are strained by excessive job demands, which in this case take the form of prolonged overtime, unless they are counterbalanced by adequate job resources like flexible scheduling, supportive management, and adequate staffing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The results show that public sector organizations in Limpopo currently lack these buffering resources to the point where overtime primarily serves as a negative job demand. The observed detrimental effects on organizational performance and employee well-being are partly caused by this imbalance.

Pragmatically, the study suggests several avenues for policy and managerial intervention. Reforming overtime policies to include flexible scheduling mechanisms could alleviate continuous work pressure and promote better work-life balance. Moreover, targeted recruitment and retention strategies are essential to address chronic understaffing and reduce reliance on overtime. Investment in employee wellness programs, including mental health support and fatigue management, can also mitigate the adverse effects of extended working hours.

Longitudinal studies that look at the long-term effects of overtime on organizational outcomes and employee health should be given priority in future research. Evidence-based policy decisions would also benefit from intervention studies evaluating the efficacy of different overtime management techniques, such as workload redistribution or shift rotation models. Comparative insights that improve national workforce management frameworks may also be obtained by extending research to other provinces or industries.

7. Conclusion

This study has shown that working overtime in the agricultural and health sectors of Limpopo poses significant challenges for organizational sustainability and human resources, even though it is necessary to maintain essential service delivery. Deeper systemic problems like ongoing understaffing, financial restraints, and demand variations by industry are reflected in the ongoing reliance on overtime. The need for more thorough and contextually appropriate management strategies is highlighted by this delicate balance between ensuring employee well-being and fulfilling operational requirements.

Effective overtime management must incorporate policy innovation that promotes flexibility and fairness, strategic resource allocation to address staffing deficits, and sector-specific interventions that account for the unique demands of health and agricultural work. By doing so, provincial institutions can reduce the risks of employee burnout, improve morale, and ultimately enhance service quality and organizational performance.

The findings further suggest that addressing overtime challenges in Limpopo is not merely a matter of administrative adjustment but a critical component of sustainable labour management in socio-economically vulnerable contexts. To strengthen the evidence base, further empirical research is needed to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of proposed interventions and to explore overtime dynamics in other provincial or sectoral settings within South Africa. Such research will be vital for informing policies that promote both workforce resilience and the delivery of essential public services.

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