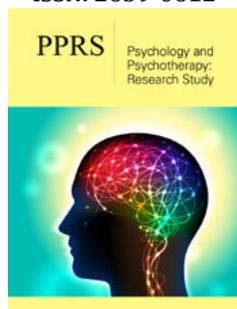


# A Case Report on a Dead Man Walking in a Rural University of South Africa

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ISSN: 2639-0612



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Submission: 📅 March 14, 2022

Published: 📅 April 12, 2022

Volume 5 - Issue 4

**How to cite this article:** Banwari Meel\*. A Case Report on a Dead Man Walking in a Rural University of South Africa. *Psychol Psychother Res Stud.* 5(4). PPRS. 000616. 2022. DOI: [10.31031/PPRS.2022.05.000616](https://doi.org/10.31031/PPRS.2022.05.000616)

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## Abstract

**Background:** Abuse of power in rural universities is less visible to the public but widely prevalent. All kind is of corruption prevalent in this rural university such as financial, promotion, appointments, and so on so forth. Productive staff is generally appreciated and awarded in most universities but in this rural university, they get punished, terminated, or under the stress of disciplinary inquiries.

**Objective:** To report on the abuse of power and difficulties in being academic in the rural university of south Africa.

**Case history:** X was an employee in health as well as in university, a dual system of employment where he has served the university from 1996 to 2018. He has undergone persistent harassment, dehumanization in his initial phase of employment. It becomes more serious later in his service in form of disciplinary inquiries, suspension, stoppage of salary, and birthday bonus. The managers of this rural university tried hard to carry out constructive termination but failed. Mr. X retired after his completion of age 65 with appreciation. The history, duration, and different designs of abuse of power have been described in this report.

**Conclusion:** It is to be guilty of being honest and hardworking in a rural university of south Africa.

**Keywords:** power abuse, management, dehumanization

## Introduction

South Africa came on the world map when the first heart transplant was carried out in 1967 [1]. Recently, it came in the news when the omicron virus was discovered by a South African scientist on 24 November 2021 [2]. South African universities and their academics are doing excellent research work to keep their universities at a very high level among world universities [3]. These universities are known for their academic excellence and on that basis, they are graded all over the world. There is also competition among universities to keep their high grading and therefore academics are working day and night to carry out research and publication. Some universities have the policy to publish two research articles by their academic staff in a year and on that basis, they are promoted and awarded. The management of these universities motivates their staff for the job well done. There is a rural university that also has academics but to carry out the research means you are going to get punishment in form of reduced salary, no promotion, and could be disciplinary enquires. The managers of the university are not academics in the true sense. They are generally waiting to get gifted authorship. They talk a lot about the requirement of research publications but in fact, they are obstacles in research [4]. A recent article published by the author on the obstacles in research publications in a rural university has shown that the main obstacle is an abuse of power in this university [4]. The main purpose of this case report is to highlight the problem of abuse of power and lack of accountability in the rural university of South Africa.

## Case History

The report is a monumental example of victimization. Mr. X has undergone all sorts of pain and suffering but he has confidence that he will clear all the charges. Mr. X was an employee in health as well as in university, a dual system of employment inherited from the Republic

of Transkei. He has served the university and health from 1996 to 2018. In fact, he was primarily employed by the health department as they contributed a salary of more than 60% plus overtime allowance. Mr. X has not understood the culture of the university. He thought if you work hard and do the research publication then you get promotion and appreciation, but this was the opposite in this rural university. He has undergone persistent harassment, dehumanization in his initial phase of employment but keeps on

tolerating as there was no choice. It becomes more serious later in his service in form of disciplinary inquiries, suspension, stoppage of salary, and birthday bonus. The managers of this rural university tried hard to carry out constructive termination but failed. Mr. X retired after his completion of age 65 with appreciation. The history, duration, and different designs of abuse of power have been described in this report (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Calendar of abuse of power from 2008 to 2018 in a rural university of South Africa.

Date	Charges	Origin	Inquiry Commissioner	Outcome	Duration
01.08.2008	DC1:plagiarism	E-mail of a girlfriend through the university of fort hare	A top labour law practitioner (external)	Found not guilty on 22.12.2009	1 year & 4 months and 22 days
04.08.2010	DC2: self-plagiarism with Suspension	Organized emails from editors by the FHS dean	appointed staff (internally)	Withdrawn (13.06.2011) Suspension lifted, 18.10.2010	11 months and 9 days
2010	Professional Death sentence	No reason	-----	Withdrawn by a letter 28.03.2014	Almost 4 and half years
11.07.2013	Forensic audit	No basis of audit	Auditing firm	Continued till date	Continued till retirement
24.02.2016	DC3: absence from duty	Absence without permission	A lecturer from the law faculty	Discontinued	About a month
26.02.2016	Block salary	Dean emailed to HR	blocked	Paid later	1 month
15.09.2018	Stopped Birthday bonus	HR instructions just after the meeting of health and WSU	Kanye	Paid half in October 2018	-----
Dec-18	Group Insurance not refunded	It was refunded to fellow Prof. Cisco	Kanye	It is still not paid	No explanation

## Discussion

Professional jealousy is prevalent in universities but hardly of that level of maliciousness where they tried all the methods to discourage Mr. X, so much so that he must leave the university. It was persistent DCs', reduction in salary of an employee and no promotion [5]. Higher management generally protects a productive staff from internal as well as external threats in a university but in the case of Mr. X, they are played an active role. The union has helped Mr. X, otherwise, he must live the university. The maliciousness is also confirmed by the repeated similar DCs, one after other with more severe punishment even though charges are less serious, but punishment is more. The duplicated article of a staff member of other staff in the same faculty was handed over to the initiator of DC asking for similar DC and suspension as Mr. X. The initiator who was also head of the faculty refused to carry out an inquiry against another staff. He said that he wanted to punish Mr. X. This indicates how malicious the manager of the university. It is surprising that Mr. X has brought the name of the rural university both nationally as well as internationally through his research publications but hardly any impact in the minds of managers.

This case report is a unique case in a rural university where Mr. X has not only survived but also cleared his charges before his retirement in 2018. Mr. X has faced a decade-long, persistent, malicious disciplinary inquiry, suspensions, forensic inquiry,

low paid salary, and birthday bonus from 2008 to 2018 in a rural university of South Africa but Mr. X was cleared of his malicious charges forced on him on his retirement. Two senior staff members were also told for disciplinary inquiry, but they resigned and left the university before the inquiry ensued.

## Disciplinary inquiries

Three disciplinary inquiries one after the other from 2008 to 2018, aim to carry out constructive dismissal. The first two DCs were based on plagiarism so-called double jeopardy in legal terms. Third DC was manufactured through the department of health where they have shown that the department of health is the primary employer of Mr. X in dual employment. It is true that the department of health contributes a major portion of his salary. Mr. X is sandwiched between two employers. Dual employment is complicated. Such an employee must need greater protection as a first employer paying the salary of Mr. X through a second employer and exploiting him [6].

The first DC was not serious as Mr. X plagiarised material of his publication from somebody else, where there was no suspension, while the second DC was less serious, but Mr. X was suspended, where Mr. X was alleged to have plagiarised his own material and published twice. The managers could not succeed in the first DC as the inquiry commissioner was an independent and submitted

report truthfully. Subsequently in the second DC, they were very careful in appointing their own commissioner, a foreign staff from the rural university. They were appointed telephonically without any terms of reference. This fact came into the picture during the process of DC when the union representative asked the head of the institution to be present as a witness. The head was required because he told a team of union representatives that Mr. X is guilty prior to finishing inquiries.

The telephonically appointed commissioner told the union representative that the head is a big man, he cannot call him to appear as a witness. This commissioner comes from a country where there is a concept of the big man and small man, and nobody can ask any question because he is a big man. At this time, the union representative asked him to show his letter of appointment, and the commissioner could not show the letter of an appointment. He was appointed telephonically without issuing any official letter to chair the inquiry. The meeting was over. Later, the charges were withdrawn. Third DC was started in 2016 and managers were assured by the appointed commissioner that he will fix Mr. X. Mr. X went on leave which was approved by his HOD as per the university practice, but the head manager of faculty wanted that Mr. X to get his approval before leaving.

This was not in the practice of faculty as Mr. X has not experienced this kind of situation. The faculty manager was new to his job. The commissioner of inquiry was appointed and before the inquiry started this commissioner told to his colleague about DC against Mr. X and he will fix Mr. X. This colleague was a union member and part of the inquiry later. This was reported by the union member in writing to protect Mr. X, to carry out fair justice. It was surprising to know that this commissioner was also convicted and passed a long time in jail. Probably this was his qualification for an appointment as a commissioner of inquiry for Mr. X. The punishment was not to pay a salary of one month to Mr. X as he considers as suspended. When Mr. X asked that when he is not found guilty then the complainant must be guilty, and his degree must be revoked but the university refused. This is the position of the rural university as they may not have a policy document to revoke the degree.

### **Suspensions**

Generally, a reasonable university carries out an explanation from an employee if there is some dispute or irregularities but in the case of Mr. X, there is no explanation asked by the immediate head of the faculty. It is an unforgettable experience Mr. X has come across in his life which is reminding him regularly even after his retirement. No option of internal inquiry was utilized by the head of the rural university in the case of Mr. X. It was a blessing in disguise as a credible commissioner of inquiry was appointed in first DC, which probably they regretted later. The suspension was not even required but was awarded to Mr. X by the head of the institution. It was so sudden that when Mr. X was coming to work in the morning and found that locks of his office changed. When he asked the reason then the person in charge told him that he has done on the instruction of HR.

When Mr. X went to HR, they issued a letter of suspension. It was surprised to Mr. X. He has finished first DC recently and second DC with suspension which is more rigorous than the first one. The charge was as he has duplicated his article in two journals. Mr. X has reported to his union, and they were surprised by it but firm to help Mr. X. Mr. X has found a similar duplication of four staff members in his faculty but at least one was clearly in the duplication of his work. The union member went to the head of the faculty who has started the malicious DCs and showed him this duplicated article. They asked him to suspend him as well, but this head of the faculty refused to suspend him. He said that it is only Mr. X as we want to punish him. It is sad. Surprisingly the suspension was lifted within two and half months as they needed Mr. X to conduct the 4th year MBChB students' examination.

### **Professional death sentence**

Mr. X utilizes his work material in his writing and if he does not work, then he cannot carry out research. Therefore, they have stopped him to carry out research only he will not allow going to the forensic pathology laboratory. The managers of the university told the manager forensic pathology laboratory not to allow Mr. X to use the laboratory, so-called professional death sentence in legal terms. This was because one cannot get material for publication without a laboratory. This was their intention to stop him from working so that Mr. X. cannot publish. This sanction was taken after more than 4 years. It is sad that universities are motivating their staff for publication and in this rural university stopping Mr. X from publication.

### **Forensic audit**

The managers of the university were still could not stop their thirst to stop the maliciousness against Mr. X. They started a forensic audit to find out something against Mr. X so that he can be chased out from the university. Unfortunately, they failed to find anything, and still report is pending. A letter was written to the university head by the research office regarding a report of the forensic audit, but they could not produce it to date.

### **Freezing research accounts**

The forensic auditor could not find anything, but the frozen research funds were not released. A letter from the research office of a rural university has written to the head of an institution, and then a few approved claims were released from duplicate copies. There were approved claims from the office of the research directorate that was lost and never received those claims.

### **Stoppage of salary**

Stoppage of salary is associated with this third DC and suspension as not to pay one month salary to Mr. X. Subsequently Mr. X was retirement was close by and he was worried about his pension. Mr. X has written several letters and emails to the head of the rural university, but it was not his priority to solve any aggrieved staff issue. He was also behaving like a tourist in university with paid holidays as he was not concerned with anything.

### Stoppage of birthday bonus

There was a meeting organized by the department of health, and the university regarding the issue of Mr. X. Mr. X was presented with a lawyer and a union member. It is two days before the middle of the birthday month of Mr. X. The University HR representative returned to his office and ordered to stop the birthday bonus of Mr. X. This was a surprise to Mr. X, and he reported to the head of an institution, but he has not taken any action.

### Discrimination in payment of Group insurance refund

Mr. X was not refunded unauthorized deduction of group insurance money from his salary but another professor in the same rural university refunded it. When Mr. X raised the issue, then he told how another professor can leak this confidential information to Mr. X.

### Conclusion

Mr. X has undergone a series of humiliation and financial ruin because of this ongoing one after other, never-ending inquiries and suspension. Mr. X has done the highest work to bring the university on the world map by getting international and national awards, and

enormous research publications. Mr. X can recover financially but the pain and suffering were unforgettable. He is walking like a dead man.

### Ethical Issue

This is the case report that was kept anonymous and confidential.

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