

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOURCES OF JOB
STRESS, PERSONALITY TRAITS AND JOB STRESS:
THE MODERATING ROLE OF COPING
STRATEGIES**

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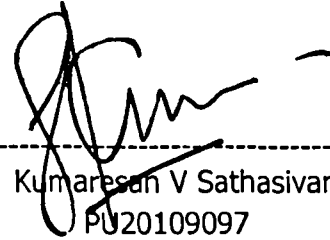


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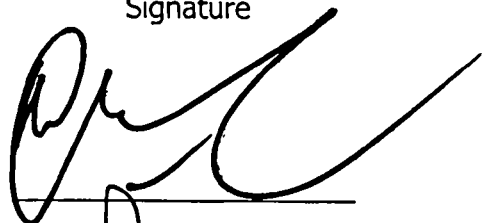
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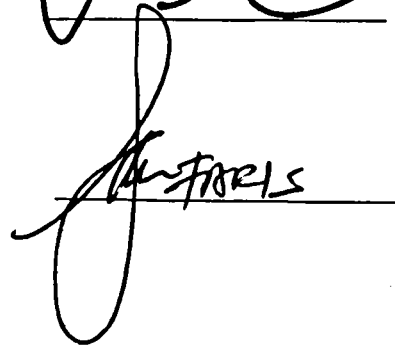
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ABSTRACT

Job stress is ubiquitous in today's organizations, and the costs of these phenomena cut across all levels of society. In recent years, researchers considering job stress in the workplace have made great strides in understanding several aspects of the stress phenomenon in the field of organizational behavior. Thus, it becomes more important that the coping strategies of these job stresses are well explored and directly linked to individuals experiencing this situation, in order to ensure the right methods can be used for the best benefits in coping with work place stresses. This research presents an integration of past research and theory that models the relationship of antecedents of job stress and coping strategies among managers in electronics firms in Malaysia. A total of 400 electronic company managers participated in this study. This study is a survey using multiple questionnaires, namely, 'Job Stress' to measure the levels of job stress , 'Organizational Sources of Job Stress', to measure the sources of job stress , while 'NEO Five Factor Inventory' to gauge the personality of the manager and 'Coping Resources Inventory' to measure coping strategies. A set of demographic factors like gender, marital status and educational status, are also studied as influencing factors to job stress. Coping strategies in this study is positioned as a moderating variable. The implication of the study would be extremely beneficial for electronics organizations in not only identifying the organizational sources of job stress, but also to understand the personality behaviors of their management staffs. More importantly, this study recommends the best coping strategies for managers that would enable the leadership team in the electronics organizations to be able to handle job stress more efficiently. In the years to come, acknowledging the presence of job stress in major industries such as electronics industry in Malaysia, would become critical and the study would be able to help identify coping strategies that organizations can use to enable the best productivity from their management team. Contributions in of this study would prove essential to electronics firms in terms of managing their leadership workforce in terms of their stress management, productivity and well-being of the individuals. This will also allow companies to develop avenues to suit the rightful facilities and forums to address job stress for their employees that would result in work life effectiveness, which will result in highly motivated managers, highly productive organizations and a huge economy boost for the nation.

ABSTRAK

HUBUNGAN ANTARA SUMBER STRES PEKERJAAN , PERSONALITI DAN STRES KERJA: STRATEGI DAYA TINDAK SEBAGAI MODERATOR

Stres pekerjaan merupakan satu fenomena yang berlaku dalam sesebuah organisasi yang melibatkan setiap lapisan masyarakat. Sejak kebelakangan ini, kebanyakan para pengkaji telah memfokuskan kepada konsep memahami fenomena ini dalam bidang tingkahlaku organisasi. Oleh itu, ia menjadi lebih penting bahawa kaedah yang diguna untuk menghadapi masalah stres pekerjaan dapat dikaji secara langsung kepada pekerja yang mengalami masalah ini, untuk memastikan kaedah yang sesuai boleh digunakan dalam menangani stres di tempat kerja yang semakin serius yang boleh menjejaskan produktiviti semasa bekerja. Seramai 400 orang pengurus syarikat elektronik terlibat dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini merupakan kajian berbentuk survei dengan menggunakan soalselidik 'Job Stress' bagi mengukur stres pekerjaan, 'Organizational Sources of Job Stress', bagi mengukur sumber stres pekerjaan, manakala 'NEO Five Factor Inventory' untuk mengukur personaliti para pengurus dan 'Coping Resources Inventory' bagi mengukur strategi daya tindak. Fokus utama kajian ini ialah untuk melihat hubungan antara sumber stres pekerjaan, personaliti dan stres kerja serta peranan strategi daya tindak sebagai moderator dalam kalangan pengurus di perindustrian elektronik di Malaysia. Faktor sosio demografi seperti jantina, status perkahwinan dan taraf pendidikan juga dikaji sebagai faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi stres kerja dan juga strategi daya tindak yang sesuai. Implikasi kajian ini amat berguna untuk industri elektronik, bukan sahaja untuk mengenal pasti sumber-sumber stres kerja dalam sesebuah organisasi, tetapi juga untuk memahami tingkah laku serta personaliti kakitangan pengurusan mereka. Lebih penting lagi, kajian ini akan mengenalpasti kaedah terbaik untuk menangani masalah stres kerja dengan lebih efisien. Adalah diharapkan kajian ini dapat memberi sumbangan kepada bidang industri elektronik dalam memastikan para pengurus di dalam industri ini dapat bekerja dengan lebih efisien. Sumbangan kajian ini adalah penting untuk firma elektronik dalam menguruskan tenaga kerja mereka dari segi pengurusan stres pekerjaan, produktiviti dan kesejahteraan individu. Ini juga akan membolehkan syarikat-syarikat untuk menyediakan latihan atau kemudahan yang sesuai bagi menangani stres pekerjaan untuk pekerja mereka serta melahirkan para pekerja yang produktif dan bermotivasi yang dapat memberi rangsangan ekonomi yang tinggi untuk negara.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE	i
DECLARATION	ii
CONFIRMATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
<i>ABSTRAK</i>	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS	xvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research Problem	5
1.3 Research Questions	8
1.4 Objective of Study	9
1.5 Significance of Study	10
1.5.1 Impacts to the Individual Manager	12
1.5.2 Impact to the Organization	12
1.5.3 Impact to the Economy and Nation	13
1.6 Scope of Study	13
1.7 Definition of Key Variables	15
1.8 Conceptual Research Framework	19
1.9 Hypotheses	20
1.10 The Structure of the Theses	22
1.11 Summary	24

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1	Overview of Electronics Industry in Malaysia	25
2.2	Importance of Managers in Organizations	29
2.3	Job Stress: An Overview and its Implications	36
2.4	Job Stress among Managers	38
2.5	Independent Variables: An Overview of its impact to Job Stress	40
2.6	Transactional Stress Model, Job Stress, Personality And Coping Dimensions	41
2.7	Organizational Variables as Sources of Stress	44
2.7.1	Conflict	46
2.7.2	Work Overload	48
2.7.3	Unfavorable work conditions	50
2.8	Personality Traits as Sources of Stress	53
2.8.1	Neuroticism	59
2.8.2	Extraversion	60
2.8.3	Openness	61
2.8.4	Agreeableness	62
2.8.5	Conscientiousness	63
2.9	An Overview of Coping	65
2.9.1	The Concept of Coping	68
2.9.2	The Historical Development of Coping	70
2.9.3	General Coping Theory	71
2.9.4	The Individual and Organizational Perspective	72
2.9.5	The Coping Mechanism for Job Stress	73
2.9.6	Coping Strategies as Moderators	76
2.9.7	Definition of Coping Resources and Scales	77
a.	Cognitive	79
b.	Social	80
c.	Emotional	81
d.	Spiritual/Philosophical	82
e.	Physical	83
2.9.8	Key Research Validity and Outcomes	84
2.10	Demographic Factors	87

2.10.1	Gender	87
2.10.2	Educational status	89
2.10.3	Marital status	90
2.11	Summary	91

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1	Introduction	93
3.2	Research Design	94
3.3	Population and Unit of Analysis	95
3.4	Sampling Strategy	96
3.5	Data Collection Techniques	98
3.6	Survey Instrument	99
3.7	Questionnaire Design	102
3.7.1	Job Stress Variable	103
3.7.2	Organizational Variables	103
3.7.3	Personality Variables - NEO Five Factor Inventory	103
3.7.4	Coping Variables – Coping Resource Inventory	104
3.8	Data Analysis	106
3.8.1	Validity and Reliability of the Measurement Instruments	107
3.8.2	Normality Testing	109
3.8.3	Descriptive Statistic Analysis	109
3.8.4	Multivariate Analysis	109
3.8.5	Hypotheses Testing	111
3.8.6	Research Ethics	113
3.9	Pilot Study	113
3.9.1	Demographic Details	114
3.9.2	Validity and Reliability of the Instruments	117
3.9.3	Qualitative Results	120
3.10	Summary	121

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1	Introduction	123
4.2	Socio-demographic and Job Stress Profile of the Respondents	124
4.3	Validity of the Instruments	127
4.3.1	Factorial structure and scores of Job Stress	128
4.3.2	Factorial structure and scores of Organizational Variables	129
4.3.3	Factorial structure and scores of Personality Traits	131
4.3.4	Factorial structure and scores of Coping Strategies	134
4.4	Reliability of the Instruments	137
4.5	Normality Testing	139
4.5.1	Missing Data and Outliers	139
4.5.2	Normality Statistics Test for all variables	141
4.6	Model Summary and Coefficient of ANOVA	144
4.6.1	Organizational and Personality variables	144
4.6.2	Coping strategies	146
4.7	Correlation Analysis	148
4.8	Regression Analysis	151
4.8.1	Organizational and Personality variables	152
4.8.2	Coping Strategies	153
4.9	Testing of Hypotheses	154
4.9.1	Organizational Variables relationship to Job Stress (H1)	154
4.9.2	Personality Variables relationship to Job Stress (H2)	155
4.9.3	Demographics Factors relationship to Job Stress (H3)	157
4.9.4	Coping strategy relationship to Job Stress (H4)	165
4.9.5	Coping Strategy as a moderator (H5)	166
4.9.6	Summary of Hypotheses testing	177
4.10	Summary	180

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1	Introduction	182
5.2	Recapitulation of Study	182

5.3	Discussion of Major Findings	183
5.3.1	Organizational variables and job stress	184
5.3.2	Personality variables and job stress	188
5.3.3	Demographics and job stress	190
5.3.4	Coping Strategies and job stress	194
5.3.5	Coping Strategies as moderators	198
5.4	Implications and Contribution of the Study	200
5.5	Limitation of Study	203
5.6	Recommendations	205
5.7	Implications for Future Research	209
5.8	Conclusion	211
	REFERENCES	213
	APPENDICES	
	Appendix A Cover Letter	230
	Appendix B Final Survey Questionnaire	231
	BIODATA OF STUDENT	248
	LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCES	249

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 2.1: Brief Description of NEO-PI Domains. Adapted the NEO Personality Inventory Manual	57
Table 3.1: Electronics Firms Distribution by States in Malaysia	97
Table 3.2: Different variables and the respective questions in the questionnaire	101
Table 3.3: Overall summary of the pilot study's demographic profile	116
Table 3.4: Reliability tests for all variables during pilot study	119
Table 4.1: Overall Summary of Demographic profile of the respondents by frequency and percentage	125
Table 4.2: Overall Summary of job stress profile of the respondents by frequency and percentage	126
Table 4.3: Principle component analysis of job stress: item loading, scale reliabilities and mean relative score	129
Table 4.4: Principle component analysis of organizational sources of job stress: item loading, scale reliabilities and mean relative score	130
Table 4.5: Principle component analysis of personality traits: item loading, scale reliabilities and mean relative score	132
Table 4.6: Principle component analysis of coping: item loading, scale reliabilities and mean relative score	135
Table 4.7: Reliability tests (Cronbach's Alpha value) for all variables	137
Table 4.8: Inter correlation strength for all variables	139
Table 4.9: Skewness and Kurtosis value for all variables	140
Table 4.10: Descriptive Statistics for Organizational, Personality and Job Stress variables	144
Table 4.11: Model Summary for Organizational and Personality Variables	145
Table 4.12: Coefficient of determination of ANOVA for Organizational and Personality variables	146

Table 4.13:	Descriptive Statistics for Coping and Job Stress variables	147
Table 4.14:	Model Summary for coping variable	147
Table 4.15:	Coefficient of determination of ANOVA for coping variables	148
Table 4.16:	Pearson Correlation Analysis among job stress and all other independent variable	150
Table 4.17:	Pearson correlation between job stress and coping strategies	151
Table 4.18:	Regression weights of all organizational and personality variables	152
Table 4.19:	Regression weights of all coping strategies and job stress	153
Table 4.20:	Mean comparison for Male and Female managers against other variables	159
Table 4.21:	Levene's Test/T-test for male and female respondents against all other variable	160
Table 4.22:	Mean comparison for Single and Married managers against other variables	161
Table 4.23:	Levene's Test/T-test for single and married respondents against all other variables	162
Table 4.24:	Mean comparison for Degree and Masters Holders managers against other variables	163
Table 4.25:	Levene's Test/T-test for degree and masters holders' against all other variables	164
Table 4.26:	Hierarchical regression analysis of predicting job stress from conflict interacting with coping strategies	167
Table 4.27:	Hierarchical regression analysis of predicting job stress from work overload interacting with coping strategies	169
Table 4.28:	Hierarchical regression analysis of predicting job stress from unfavorable work condition interacting with coping strategies	170
Table 4.29:	Hierarchical regression analysis of predicting job stress from neuroticism interacting with coping strategies	171

Table 4.30:	Hierarchical regression analysis of predicting job stress from extraversion interacting with coping strategies	173
Table 4.31:	Hierarchical regression analysis of predicting job stress from openness interacting with coping strategies	174
Table 4.32:	Hierarchical regression analysis of predicting job stress from agreeableness interacting with coping strategies	175
Table 4.33:	Hierarchical regression analysis of predicting job stress from conscientiousness interacting with coping strategies	176
Table 4.34:	Table 4.34: Summary of all hypotheses (H1, H2, H3 & H4) test results	178
Table 4.35:	Summary of hypotheses (H5) on moderating effect of coping strategies test results	179

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1: Conceptual Research Framework for this research	20
Figure 2.1: Top 10 Major Export Products, 2013 and 2014	26
Figure 2.2: Map of free industrial zones in Malaysia	29
Figure 2.3: Levels of Management	30
Figure 4.1: Job stress categories breakdown for all managers	127
Figure 4.2: Normality statistics test for Organizational factors and job stress	141
Figure 4.3: Normality statistics test for Personality Traits	142
Figure 4.4: Normality statistics test for coping strategies	143

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

CRI	Coping Resource Inventory
E&E	Electrical and electronics
FFM	Five Factor Model
FIZ	Free Industrial Zones
H1	Hypotheses 1
H2	Hypotheses 2
H3	Hypotheses 3
H4	Hypotheses 4
ICT	Information and communication technology products
LED	Light-emitting diode
MATRADE	Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation
MIDA	Malaysian Industrial Development Authority
MNC	Multi National Corporation
NEO-PI	NEO – Personality Inventory
NEO-PI-R	NEO – Personality Inventory - Revised
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturers
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
VIF	Variance inflation factor
WHO	World Health Organization
Df	Degree of freedom
CON	Conflict
OVERL	Work Overload
WRKENV	Unfavorable Work Conditions
NEU	Neuroticism
EXT	Extraversion
OPN	Openness
AGR	Agreeableness
CONS	Conscientiousness
COG	Cognitive
SOC	Social

EMO	Emotional
SPR	Spiritual/Philosophical
PHY	Physical



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Today's managers face many challenges in the highly competitive working environments, characterized by lack of time, more uncontrollable factors, background distractions, lack of space, general uncertainty, and more administrative tasks that has resulted in job stress. In short, managerial work in organizations is exposed to highly stressful environments. Keichel (1993) identified job stress as one of the key problem in the workforce for the next century. For instance, in a survey by the UK Institute of Directors, 40% of the responding members said stress was a big problem in their company and 90% thought that working practices could be a factor affecting the level of reported stress (Suzanne, et al., 1998). The increasing workloads and roles at the workplace have placed managers under a lot of pressure. This has led to a significant effect on managers' psychological health that inevitably leads to stress and burnout. With job stress becoming an alarming factor for managerial staffs, coping strategies to adopt and overcome the psychological distress has become significantly important.

Furthermore, the weakening of the global economy in the past years has resulted in severe stressful happenings among local and foreign firms in terms of the recent downsizing and retrenchment activities, to stay competitive. Much of the problem stems from Malaysia's heavy reliance on electronics industry, which accounts for 39.1% of total exports (Malaysia's Trade Performance 2010, Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation). Among the working class, jobs have been lost, salaries cut, bonuses trimmed and over time work slashed. With these happenings around the industrial sector, job stress becomes a major phenomenon among Malaysians.

Stress can be described as the distress that is caused as a result of demands placed on physical or mental energy. Stress can arise as the result of factors including anxiety and tension, according to Holmes and Rahe (1967). Stress is caused when life events are felt to be threatening to individual physical, social or mental well-being. The amount of stress experienced by an individual depends on how threatening these life events are perceived to be, individual coping strategies and how many stressful events occur in a short period of time (Smeltzer, 1987). Tension is a natural reaction to anxiety. It is part of a primitive survival instinct where physiological changes prepare the individual for 'fight or flight'. This sympathetic response, as it is known, results in a chemical Adenosine Triphosphate (ATP) being released in the body and causes muscles to tense ready for action (Holmes and Rahe, 1967). Physiologically, blood vessels near the skin constrict, to slow bleeding if injury is sustained, and to increase the blood supply to the muscles, heart, lungs and brain. Digestion is inhibited, the bladder relaxes, the heart rate and breathing speed increase, the body sweats more. The person affected becomes more alert, their eyes dilate and a surge of adrenaline gives rise to an increase in energy. These responses are extremely useful in situations of physical danger but, unlike for primitive humans, many of the anxieties of modern life are not ones that can be solved by a 'fight or flight' reaction or by any physical response (Holmes and Rahe, 1967). Modern day stressful situations tend to continue for much longer periods of time and an immediate response does not relieve the anxiety-provoking situation. Therefore, prolonged states of anxiety can lead to symptoms of stress which prevent the individual from returning to his or her normal, relaxed state. Prolonged stress can therefore be detrimental to health and wellbeing (Williams and Cooper, 2002).

When stressed, individuals often indulge in behaviors which may relieve the immediate feelings of anxiety in the short-term, but which only add to their problems in the longer term (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1987). For example, alcohol, drugs, smoking and/or over-eating are often used to cope with immediate problems of stress. Avoiding, ignoring or failing to recognize underlying problems is also a common occurrence. When too many work demands are placed upon someone, he or she may work harder for longer hours and attempt to keep up with an

impossible schedule instead of trying to reduce such demands. In the long term, such behaviors will only serve to increase the physiological symptoms of tension and deplete physical energy reserves (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1987).

Job stress is stress involving work. According to the current World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, occupational or job-related stress "is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope". Job stress in the workplace appears to be a wide spread cross-cultural phenomenon. Most of the research work on stress has focused on basic elements, namely (a) antecedents of stress, (b) moderators of stress and (c) outcomes of stress (Jerusalem, 1993; Deary and Blenkin, 1996). Depending on the subject's characteristic coping response, potential stressors may result in different outcomes in terms of physical and psychological disturbances (Jerusalem, 1993). Stress models typically show personality and environmental factors as having a strong influence on stress outcomes and coping strategies Deary and Blenkin, 1996). In the case of personality, the dimension of neuroticism, one of the five personality traits, is thought to be an influential antecedent in human stress process (Deary and Matthews, 1993).

Not all job stress is deemed harmful. Stress affects people differently. Some people seem to thrive on extremely stressful lifestyles, while others struggle to cope with everyday life (Williams and Cooper, 2002). Everyone has an optimum level of stress. Too little excitement and too few challenges may lead to an extremely dull life, yet too much stress can lead to health problems. Nevertheless, a certain amount of stress can actually prove to be good for individuals (Beehr and Newman, 1978). Positive stress can act as a spur to achieve better results than would otherwise be attained, and no-one would wish to avoid such potentially stressful but enjoyable events as the birth of a child, forming new relationships or undertaking new challenges (Beehr and Newman, 1978). Stress is also extremely useful in acting as an enabler to avoid problems and dangers. It is a motivator to solve problems and is an important warning signal that something is wrong with an

individual's life, thereby allowing him or her to take some action (Williams and Cooper, 2002).

In many countries, employers have a legal responsibility to recognize and deal with stress in the workplace so that employees do not become physically or mentally ill. It is important to tackle the causes of stress in the workplace as stress at work can lead to problems for the individual, working relationships and the overall working environment. These issues may include lowered self-esteem and poor concentration skills for the employee. The employer may suffer from increasing customer complaints, staff turnover and days lost to sickness. Managing stress in the workplace is therefore an essential part of both individual and corporate responsibility.

In the UK, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has issued a guide entitled *Tackling stress: The Management Standards Approach* (2005) which outlines six key areas of the workplace that should be monitored in order to assess levels of stress. These key areas are as follows,

- a. Demands - Including such issues as workload, work patterns and work environment.
- b. Control - How much the person has control in the way they do their work?
- c. Support - Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organization, line management and colleagues.
- d. Relationships - Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behavior.
- e. Role - Whether people understand their role within the organization and whether the organization ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.
- f. Change - How organizational change is managed and communicated within the organization.

Effectively coping with stress, managing stress and finding ways to reduce unnecessary or unhealthy levels of stress are important life skills that everybody needs. Negative stress, tension and anxiety are extremely common problems in modern life and most people will suffer from potentially dangerous or debilitating symptoms of stress and stress related issues at some point in their lives.

In addition to stress being caused by events, certain situations can lead to people feeling stressed; although as mentioned before the degree of stress will depend, amongst other things, on that individual's coping strategies. The environment can make us stressed: for example, noise, crowds, poor lighting, pollution or other external factors over which we have no control can cause us to feel anxious and irritable.

Adjusting to modern-day life can also be a source of stress. People now communicate with other people in many different ways, for example, through the internet, mobile phones and various broadcast media, thus the expectation of a quick response has increased. We also have many more commodities available to us and some people feel an expectation to maintain a certain lifestyle and level of consumerism. In addition, for many people it is now the norm to manage a full or part-time job and to be the primary career nurturing a family. All of these changes mean that stress is now unfortunately commonplace in both our personal and professional lives.

1.2 Research Problem

Stress is a state that occurs when people are faced with events they perceive as endangering their physical or psychological well-being, and are unsure of their ability to deal with these events (Cook and Hunsaker, 2001). Sources of stress are called stressors. Stressors, based on most studies include variables like environment, individual and organization (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1999). For the past decade, the manufacturing sector has been undergoing constant technological development (Jestin and Gampel, 2002). This is inevitably led to high pressure and job stress among managers in the work environment. Above all, the recent economic slowdown in the global economy from the year 2000 has a significant

effect on the local and multinational firms involving thousands of managers in the country. Many different job stressors contribute to job stress problems among these managers. Stressors prominently related to the organization itself, include conflict, work overload, unfavorable work conditions, and so forth. The other key stressor relates to individual variables like personality traits, personal problems and demographic factors and others. With the presence of job stress in the current world unavoidable, the big question is, whether the managers are aware of the best methods to cope and adapt to this challenges. During the coping phase, the individual acts on the stressor and the activities and efforts chosen are largely dependent on the variety of personal and environmental resources that are at the disposal of the individual (Schafer, 2000).

Almost all studies of job stress and health have focused on formal workers, such as police officers (Boonkuna, 2012) and health professionals (e.g. nurses, physicians) (Cheng et al., 2001). Among formal workers, job stress is a serious and costly occupational health problem that leads to adverse effects on physical and mental health, such as musculoskeletal disorders (Cheng et al., 2001), cardiovascular disease (Schermerhorn et al., 2005), anxiety and depression (Boonkuna, 2012), as well as unhealthy behaviors (E.g., smoking, alcohol, and drug usage) (Cheng et al., 2001), absenteeism and lower productivity (Schermerhorn et al., 2005).

Categories associated with occupational stress are namely associations to factors unique to the job, role in the organization, career development, interpersonal work relationships and organizational structure/climate (Colligan and Higgins, 2006). These individual categories demonstrate that stress can occur specifically when a conflict arises from the job demands of the employee and the employee itself. If not handled properly, the stress can become distress, accordingly to Hurrell (1995). The ability of the employee coping with the specific hours worked, the level of productive rate expected, the physical environment, as well as the expectancy of the work desired by management (Colligan and Higgins, 2006). For instance, research shows that night shifts in particular has a high possibility of negative impact towards the health of the employee. In relation to

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