

THE PREVALENCE OF STRESS AMONG PROJECT MANAGER AT CONSTRUCTION SITES

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Abstract: As the business environment is increasingly subjected to fast changing forces which include increased competition, the pressure for quality and advanced technology, innovation, and an increase in the pace of doing business, the demands on managers have grown equally dramatically. It is therefore essential to develop strategies for managing stress to give managers the required additional energy to handle particularly difficult and stressful work situations. It is important that organizations provide the assistance and support on the issue of stress as part of their proactive approach to managing managers' health and safety, by drawing up contingency plans, and to have the necessary infrastructure to deal with such problems. This study investigates the strategies that can be implemented in organizations to reduce stressful situations affecting managers. The main objectives of this study are to identify the source of stress for project manager at workplace, to explore the consequence of stress to the project manager at workplace and to examine the project manager coping ability from stress at workplace. The methodology of this study includes literature reviews, data collection and data analysis. Data was collected by questionnaire survey in Malaysia. The data was analyzed using the average index formula. From the study, some of the factors for source of stress are work environment, colleagues conflict, work cope ability and individualism. The consequences of stress are blood pressure, headache, unusual tiredness, work accident, work pressure, smoking, alcoholic drinks, memory loss and sick leave. Finally, some coping abilities of managers are teamwork, strategic relationship, work-life balances negotiation, exercise and refreshing.

Keywords: *Stress; Manager; Behaviour; Employees; Health and safety*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Stress is not limited to any particular profession (Lath, 2010; Ng, Skitmore, & Leung, 2005). However, Statt (1994) noted that construction work is the third most stressful profession after mining and police work. Specifically, Campbell (2006) found that in the United Kingdom, construction professionals were increasingly viewing their work as being stressful. There is a growing body of research literature on occupational stress among managers and workers in the construction industry (Campbell, 2006; Leung, Chan, Chong, & Sham, 2008; Leung, Chan, & Yuen, 2010; Lingard, Yip, Rowlinson, & Kvan, 2006). In particular, the review of literature shows that very little research has examined stress factors among professionals in the building construction industry in Malaysia. This paper reports on the result of research aimed at identifying coping ability from stress among managers in the building construction industry in Malaysia. Based on the findings, it suggests strategies to eliminate or reduce stress factors among professionals in the industry in this country.

Work-related stress is now a major concern for managers. In the UK, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) figures show that work-related stress, depression or anxiety account for an estimated 12.8 million lost working days per year. Around one in seven working individuals think their job is very or extremely stressful and 420,000 individuals in Britain believe that they are experiencing work-related stress at a level that is making them ill (HSE, 2005). This means that very few organizations are likely to escape the impact of stress-related absence and employee stress. Where stress-related problems lead to an employee being absent from

work, an average of 29 working days are lost. In a recent Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) survey, 40 percent of the responding organizations reported an increase in stress-related absence (CIPD, 2007).

In response to the problem presented by work-related stress, the HSE has established “Management Standards” for stress at work that are designed to help managers tackle the major sources of work-related stress risk. Published in 2004, these represent a “set of conditions that reflect high levels of health, well-being and organizational performance” (HSE, 2004). This study is undertaken to identify manager’s behavior in the building construction industry in order to prevent or reduce stress at construction works.

1.1 Aim and Objectives of Study

The aim of this study was to examine the existence and coping mechanism of stress among project manager at construction sites in Malaysia. To achieve this aim the following objectives had been identified:

- i. To identify the source of stress for project manager at workplace;
- ii. To explore the consequence of stress to the project manager at workplace;
- iii. To examine the project manager coping ability from stress at workplace.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is a pathological human response to psychological, social, occupational and environmental pressures (Seyle, 1978). Drawing from Selye’s submissions, Pulat (1997) and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter pointed that some amount of stress is necessary to generate creativity for optimal productivity. They however warned that too much stress in work environment poses great risk to workers safety, health and emotional stability.

The management standards define controlling characteristic of an organization which affect by risk from work related stress (CIPD, 2007). The Management Standard considers six key areas which include demand, control, support, relationship, role, change. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary source of stress at work (HSE, 2005).

In the last decades several studies investigated the effect of work stress on health. This progress was largely due to the development of theory-based measurements of the stressful aspects of a psychosocial work environment which were applied to working populations. In work stress researches mostly two models are used to detect the factors of work which have an unfavorable effect on health and well-being. One of these is the demand-control model which was developed at the seventies. This model is focused on a specific combination of job task characteristics, i.e. high quantitative psychological demands and a low degree of control over one’s tasks, a combination which causes chronic stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1992). The other model, the effort-reward imbalance (ERI) model concerns the reciprocity of a contractual exchange at work where efforts are compensated by adequate rewards. Lack of reciprocity between (high) efforts and (low) rewards may elicit strong stress reactions which could cause deterioration of health. The model’s other component is over commitment. This indicates that working people often have a motivation to perform and achieve beyond their capacity, which as a risky pattern of coping was identified.

The findings of this study are important to help construction managers, site managers and other partners to specify positive manager behavior related to preventing and reducing stress

at construction site. Thus, it will have an important role in eliminating and reducing stress at construction site.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology serves as a method to achieve the aim and objectives of this study. The aim and objectives of this study were achieved by collected data through literature review and questionnaire survey. The research was carried out in several steps as shown in Figure 1 in order to obtain the research’s aim. First of all, the objectives of were identified. The second step was managing the literature review in order to find out some information about existing preventing stress activities in sites and methods being used for improving manager behaviour. Then, data collection on sources, consequence and coping ability of stress were carried out through questionnaire survey which was distributed among respondents who are managers in construction in Malaysia through email and by hand. This step is a way to complete the two objectives of this research. The last step was associated to the performance of the analyse questionnaire’s data, interpreting the results, and finally writing the result and conclusions.

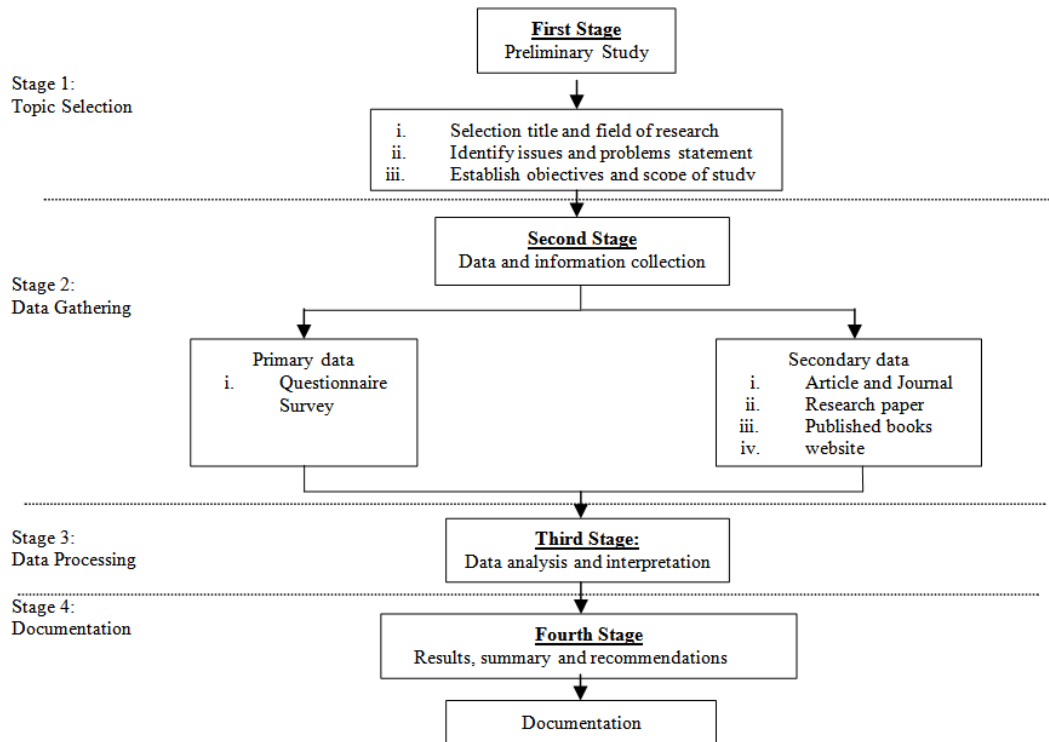


Figure 1: Methodology of the Study

4.0 ANALYSIS METHOD

Subsequent to successful collection of data from questionnaire, analysis was performed on data collected through questionnaire with the help of computer software such as Microsoft Office Excel and Statistical package for social science (SPSS) software. The data then was analyzed by using the frequency, percentage, mean, Relative Importance index, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test and the chart diagram such as bar chart and radar plot were used to visualize the results from the analysis.

4.1 Questionnaire Analysis

A detailed questionnaire was developed and used to get input from professionals associated with the Malaysia construction industry. The perspective of Construction managers, Project managers and Project directors has been analyzed to rank the causes and consequence of stress and coping ability of managers.

4.2 Mean Value

The data generated from questionnaires had been analyzed using the mean value. The feedbacks provided by respondents were categorized into five options, Strongly Agree, Agree, Moderately Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The Multiple-choice questions require the anticipation of the whole range of likely answers, which would be given and formulating the options. The multiple-choice questions are based on Rating scale of five ordinal measures of agreement towards each statement (from 1 to 5) as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Rating scales based on responses

Rating	Category	Mean Index
1	Strongly Disagree	$1.00 \leq \text{Average Index} < 1.50$
2	Disagree	$1.50 \leq \text{Average Index} < 2.50$
3	Moderately Agree	$2.50 \leq \text{Average Index} < 3.50$
4	Agree	$3.50 \leq \text{Average Index} < 4.50$
5	Strongly Agree	$4.50 \leq \text{Average Index} \leq 5.00$

4.3 Reliability tests (Validity assessment):

The reliability of data was determined by calculating Cronbach's alpha (α) by using Statistical Packages for Social Science 16.0 for section two, three and four of questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha varies from zero to 1, higher than 0.7 is considered as acceptable and reliable. For data collected coefficient value (α) of 0.823 was derived, which is considered good. The data is considered reliable and can be further analyzed.

5.0 DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Respondents Information (Frequency Analysis)

Around **89%** percent of the respondents were males while **11%** were females. Among the respondents, **37%** were between the ages of 18 years and 30 years. About **22%** were between 31 years and 40 years of age. Another **22%** of the respondents were between the age of 41 years to 50 years, while **17%** of the respondents were between the age of 51 years to 55 years, with only **2%** 56 years old and above. About **48%** of the respondents were Construction Manager, **28%** were Project Manager, and **24%** were Project director.

Around **49%** of the respondents had been working at construction site for more than 11years, while **9%** of the respondents were new managers that were working at construction site for a year or less than a year.

5.2 Source of stress

The data analysis for the study objective 1 which is to identify the source of stress for project manager at workplace was represented by 9 items. The attainment for this section was by questionnaire survey. The study result findings are shown in Table 2 as bellow.

Table 2: Source of stress

NO	Statement	AI	Category
5	Job Coping	1.89	Disagree
6	Colleagues Conflict	2.10	Disagree
7	Unbalanced Life	2.17	Disagree
8	Job Repetition	2.30	Disagree
9	Ergonomics	2.41	Disagree
10	Job Management	2.58	Moderately Agree
11	Report Confusion	2.97	Moderately Agree
12	Individualism	3.08	Moderately Agree
13	Time Management	3.26	Moderately Agree

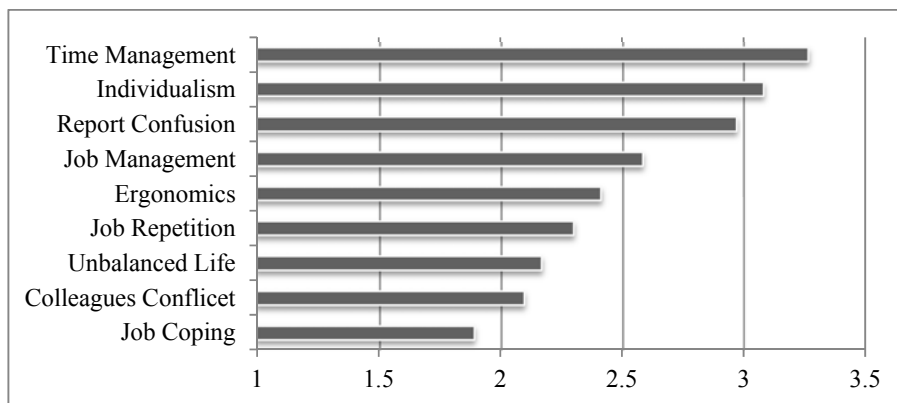


Figure 2: Mean/Average index for study Objective 1

5.3 Consequence of Stress

The data analysis for the study objective 2 which is to explore the consequence of stress for the project manager at workplace was represented by 18 items. The attainment for this section was by questionnaire survey. The study result findings are shown in Table 3 as bellow.

Table 3: Consequence of stress

NO	Statement	AI	Category
14	Sick Leave	2.17	Disagree

15	Body Pains	2.43	Disagree
16	Unusual Tiredness	2.71	Moderately Agree
17	Decision Making	2.76	Moderately Agree
18	Headaches	2.97	Moderately Agree
19	Job Escape	3.02	Moderately Agree
20	Colleagues irritation	3.30	Moderately Agree
21	Forgetfulness	3.47	Moderately Agree
22	Reduced Job Satisfaction	3.60	Agree
23	Work Pressure	3.63	Agree
24	Depression	3.73	Agree
25	Job Burnout	3.80	Agree
26	Job Enjoyment	3.86	Agree
27	Blood Pressure	3.89	Agree
28	Loosing Temper	3.95	Agree
29	Work Accident	4.36	Agree
30	Smoking	4.45	Agree
31	Alcoholic Drinks	4.50	Strongly Agree

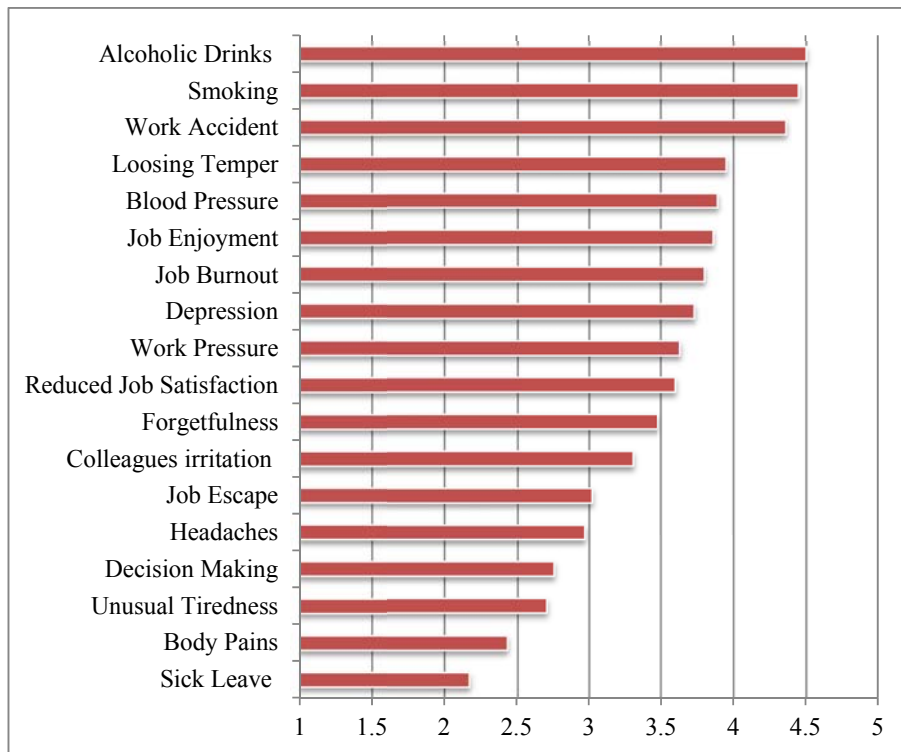


Figure 3: Mean/Average index for study Objective 2

5.4 Stress Copying Ability of Managers

The data analysis for the study objective 3 which is to examine the project manager coping ability from stress at workplace was represented by 28 items. The attainment for this section was by questionnaire survey. The study result findings are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Manager Stress Coping Ability

NO	Statement	AI	Category
32	Job Expectation	1.91	Disagree
33	Mental Support	1.91	Disagree
34	Creativity	1.95	Disagree
35	Teamwork	2.08	Disagree
36	Work-life Balance	2.21	Disagree
37	Work Relationship	2.26	Disagree
38	Work Scheduling	2.34	Disagree
39	Job Qualification	2.43	Disagree
40	Stress Training	2.60	Moderately Agree
41	Strategic Relationship	2.65	Moderately Agree
42	Idea Sharing	2.69	Moderately Agree
43	Refreshing	2.69	Moderately Agree
44	Feedback Performance	2.69	Moderately Agree
45	Manager's Well-being	2.97	Moderately Agree
46	Negotiation	3	Moderately Agree
47	Company's Mission	3.17	Moderately Agree
48	Wellness Program	3.23	Moderately Agree
49	Exercise	3.47	Moderately Agree
50	Stress Room	3.63	Moderately Agree
51	Organization Support	3.72	Agree
52	Rehabilitation Centre	3.73	Agree
53	Job Training	3.82	Agree
54	Employee Preference	4.26	Agree
55	Job Design Factors	4.54	Strongly Agree

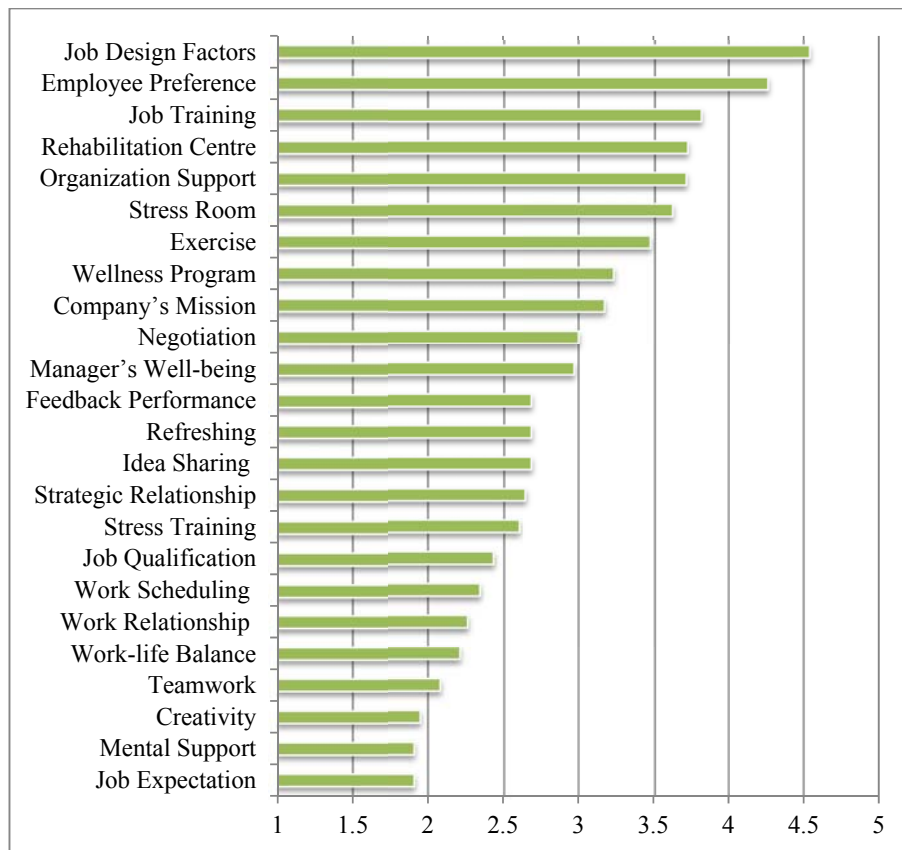


Figure 4: Mean/Average index for study Objective 3

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1 Conclusion

The conclusions of the study are as follows:

6.1.1 Objective 1 - The Source of Stress for Project Manager at Workplace

From the questionnaires, the sources of stress faced by the project manager are:

- i. Safety and comfort ability of work environment
- ii. Lack of support by colleagues
- iii. Lack of copying with their job
- iv. Lack of balanced work and family life
- v. Lack of variety in their job

6.1.2 Objective 2 - The Consequence of Stress to the Project Manager at Workplace

From the questionnaires, the consequences of stress to the project manager at workplace are as follows:

- i. High blood pressure
- ii. Getting headaches
- iii. Unusual tiredness
- iv. Lack of enjoyment by type of work

- v. Irritation by their colleagues
- vi. Lack of handling work pressure
- vii. Involvement of more than one accident this year
- viii. Daily smoking
- ix. Taking two alcoholic drink per day
- x. Forgetting important detail
- xi. Bad effect on making decision
- xii. Lack of innovation
- xiii. Drag before coming to work
- xiv. Ambitious for weekend or holiday
- xv. Finding their job as a burden
- xvi. Losing their temper with other people

6.1.3 Objective 3 - The Project Manager Coping Ability from Stress at Workplace

From the study, the coping abilities of project managers from stress according to priority are:

- i. Focus on the positive aspect of change
- ii. Making a positive contribution in group work
- iii. Managing time
- iv. Avoid to take work home
- v. Getting a good night's sleep
- vi. Mentally support from family and friend
- vii. Maintain a good working relationship with the employee
- viii. Attending a course on stress
- ix. Keep the employee informed of the company's future plans/goals
- x. Considering the employees' ideas in the workplace
- xi. Exercise

6.2 Recommendations

- i. Subordinates should be given opportunities to make suggestions, especially when it comes to preparation of their own work schedules. This will make them feel important and part of the team.
- ii. Reporting to different people confuses managers and should therefore be avoided.
- iii. Management at the construction site should consider employing more staff to avoid the unnecessary tiredness and headaches experienced by the majority of managers due to increased work load, as it may affect the company's efficiency and productivity in future.
- iv. Managers should be encouraged employee to contribute their ideas especially on matters related to their daily jobs.
- v. Managers may need to be given opportunities to choose the tasks they prefer to be involved in. This contributes positively to job satisfaction and reduces the chances of boredom due to repetition of tasks and working without enjoying the actual job.
- vi. Organization should seriously consider offering job training to help managers improve their job performance.
- vii. Training on lifestyle management, stress management, financial management, offering support to managers or managers with family members suffering from

HIV/AIDS or trauma and those with substance abuse problems should also be considered. Exercise, good diet, and any other methods of relaxation should be encouraged to ensure that the managers are always kept at their best performance level. Organizations that put money into preventing stress before it arises will find that workers perform more effectively and have more job-satisfaction, with overall improvement of organisational functioning.

- viii. Managers should be kept informed about the company objectives at all times in order to reduce the chances of stress during times of crisis and change. The business world is full of change which has the potential to cause stress and burnout if this knowledge is introduced too late to the managers.

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8.0 APPENDIX

The results of analysis from questionnaire were shown in Table 1, 2 and 3. The following results were analysis from section 2, 3 and 4 of the questionnaire which is Source of Stress, Consequence of Stress and Stress Copying Ability of Managers.

Table 1: Source of Stress

NO.	Statement		Rate (%)					AI	Category
			SA (1)	A (2)	MA (3)	D (4)	SD (5)		
5	My work environment is comfortable and safe.	NR	10	21	3	10	2	2.41	Disagree
		PR	21.73	45.65	6.52	21.73	4.34		
6	I determine my own work schedule.	NR	3	12	8	16	7	3.26	Moderately Agree
		PR	6.52	26.08	17.39	34.78	15.21		
7	My colleagues are supportive.	NR	8	29	6	2	1	2.10	Disagree
		PR	17.39	63.04	13.04	4.34	2.17		
8	I cope well with my job.	NR	10	31	5	-	-	1.89	Disagree
		PR	21.73	67.39	10.86	-	-		
9	I only use my own idea.	NR	3	13	12	13	5	3.08	Moderately Agree
		PR	6.52	28.26	26.08	28.26	10.86		
10	I have control over my job.	NR	6	18	13	7	2	2.58	Moderately Agree
		PR	13.04	39.13	28.26	15.21	4.34		
11	I have a balanced work and family life.	NR	8	29	3	5	1	2.17	Disagree
		PR	17.39	63.04	6.52	10.86	2.17		
12	I report to one person only.	NR	4	18	5	13	6	2.97	Moderately Agree
		PR	8.69	39.13	10.86	28.26	13.04		
13	There is variety in my job.	NR	8	24	7	6	1	2.30	Disagree
		PR	17.39	52.17	15.21	13.04	2.17		

Table 2: Consequence of Stress

NO.	Statement		Rate (%)					AI	Category
			SA (1)	A (2)	MA (3)	D (4)	SD (5)		
14	I often have stiff neck or back muscles.	NR	9	20	6	10	1	2.43	Disagree
		PR	19.56	43.47	13.04	21.73	2.17		
15	I am suffering from high blood pressure.	NR	1	5	6	20	14	3.89	Agree
		PR	2.17	10.86	13.04	43.47	30.43		
16	I frequently get headaches.	NR	6	14	5	17	4	2.97	Moderately Agree
		PR	13.04	30.43	10.86	36.95	8.69		
17	I frequently experience unusual tiredness.	NR	3	23	6	12	2	2.71	Moderately Agree
		PR	6.52	50	13.04	26.08	4.34		
18	I do not enjoy the type of work that I do currently.	NR	1	6	4	22	13	3.86	Agree
		PR	2.17	13.04	8.69	47.82	28.26		
19	My colleagues often irritate me.	NR	-	12	11	20	3	3.30	Moderately Agree
		PR	-	26.08	23.91	43.47	6.52		
20	I take sick leave at least once every month.	NR	8	29	3	5	1	2.17	Disagree
		PR	17.39	63.04	6.52	10.86	2.17		
21	I cannot handle the work pressure.	NR	2	5	10	20	9	3.63	Agree
		PR	4.34	10.86	21.73	43.47	19.56		
22	I have been involved in more than one accident at work this year.	NR	-	3	1	18	24	4.36	Agree
		PR	-	6.52	2.17	39.13	52.17		
23	I smoke daily.	NR	2	3	-	8	33	4.45	Agree
		PR	4.34	6.52	-	17.39	71.73		
24	I take on average two alcoholic drinks per day.	NR	3	1	-	8	34	4.50	Strongly Agree
		PR	6.52	2.17	-	17.39	73.91		
25	I often forget important details.	NR	5	6	5	22	8	3.47	Moderately Agree
		PR	10.86	13.04	10.86	47.82	17.39		
26	I often feel that I could have made a better decision.	NR	6	17	7	14	2	2.76	Moderately Agree
		PR	13.04	36.95	15.21	30.43	4.34		
27	I do just what is expected of me, nothing less, nothing more.	NR	1	9	5	17	14	3.73	Agree
		PR	2.17	19.56	10.86	36.95	30.43		
28	I feel that I have to drag myself to come to work in the morning.	NR	2	7	7	21	9	3.60	Agree
		PR	4.34	15.21	15.21	45.65	19.56		
29	I can never wait for the weekend or my next holiday.	NR	6	14	4	17	5	3.02	Moderately Agree
		PR	13.04	30.43	8.69	36.95	10.86		
30	I often see my job as a burden.	NR	2	4	6	23	11	3.80	Agree
		PR	4.34	8.69	13.04	50	23.91		

31	I often loose my temper with other people.	NR	-	5	3	27	11	3.95	Agree
		PR	-	10.86	6.52	58.69	23.91		

Table 3: Stress Copying Ability of Managers

NO.	Statement	Rate (%)					AI	Category	
		SA (1)	A (2)	MA (3)	D (4)	SD (5)			
32	I ask employee which tasks they prefer to be involved in.	NR	-	6	6	24	10	3.82	Agree
		PR	-	13.04	13.04	52.17	21.73		
33	You are not sure what is expected of you.	NR	14	26	3	2	1	1.91	Disagree
		PR	30.43	56.52	6.52	4.34	2.17		
34	I consider employee abilities before I choose to get involved with a project/task.	NR	4	30	5	6	1	2.34	Disagree
		PR	8.69	65.21	10.86	13.04	2.17		
35	I remind myself that I am not responsible for keeping those around me happy all the time.	NR	7	17	10	11	1	2.60	Moderately Agree
		PR	15.21	36.95	21.73	23.91	2.17		
36	I focus on the positive aspects of change.	NR	9	31	5	1	-	1.95	Disagree
		PR	19.56	67.39	10.86	2.17	-		
37	I recognize that I make a positive contribution in group work.	NR	10	27	8	1	-	2.08	Disagree
		PR	21.73	58.69	17.39	2.17	-		
38	I manage my time well.	NR	8	24	10	2	2	2.26	Disagree
		PR	17.39	52.17	21.73	4.34	4.34		
39	I never take work home.	NR	10	26	6	3	1	2.10	Disagree
		PR	21.73	56.52	13.04	6.52	2.17		
40	I arrive early at work to have time to myself before I have to start with a task.	NR	8	17	7	9	5	2.69	Moderately Agree
		PR	17.39	36.95	15.21	19.56	10.86		
41	I get at least 20 minutes exercise three times a week.	NR	8	10	2	15	11	3.23	Moderately Agree
		PR	17.39	21.73	4.34	32.60	23.91		
42	I use medicine to help me sleep.	NR	1	5	1	13	26	4.26	Agree
		PR	2.17	10.86	2.17	28.26	56.52		
43	I get a lot of support from my family and friends.	NR	13	27	3	3	-	1.91	Disagree
		PR	28.26	58.69	6.52	6.52	-		
44	I make sure I get feedback on my performance.	NR	5	18	11	10	2	2.69	Moderately Agree
		PR	10.86	39.13	23.91	21.73	4.34		
45	I negotiate with my employee when I feel targets are set too high.	NR	2	18	9	13	4	2.97	Moderately Agree
		PR	4.34	39.13	19.56	28.26	8.69		
46	I maintain a good working relationship with my employee.	NR	7	29	4	5	1	2.21	Disagree
		PR	15.21	63.04	8.69	10.86	2.17		
47	I make sure my employees' ideas are considered in the workplace.	NR	4	21	10	9	2	2.65	Moderately Agree
		PR	8.69	45.65	21.73	19.56	4.34		
48	My employee is interested in my well-being.	NR	7	16	12	6	5	2.69	Moderately Agree
		PR	15.21	34.78	26.08	13.04	10.86		
49	I keep my employee informed of the company's future plans/goals	NR	5	17	6	9	9	3	Moderately Agree
		PR	10.86	36.95	13.04	19.56	19.56		
50	I provide enough opportunity for training to help employee do their job better.	NR	2	8	5	16	15	3.73	Agree
		PR	4.34	17.39	10.86	34.78	32.60		
51	I have attended a training course on stress.	NR	-	-	-	21	25	4.54	Strongly Agree
		PR	-	-	-	45.65	54.34		
52	I would like to attend a course on stress.	NR	9	19	10	5	3	2.43	Disagree
		PR	19.56	41.30	21.73	10.86	6.52		
53	My organization promotes wellness.	NR	2	12	15	10	7	3.17	Moderately Agree
		PR	4.34	26.08	32.60	21.73	15.21		
54	I do make use of our	NR	5	8	4	18	11	3.47	Moderately

	stress' rooms when I am stressed.	PR	10.86	17.39	8.69	39.13	23.91		Agree
55	My organization facilitates rehabilitation for substance abuse.	NR	2	2	19	11	12	3.63	Agree
		PR	4.34	4.34	41.30	23.91	26.08		
56	My organization does offer help in the following areas: Financial management	NR	-	4	12	13	17	3.56	Agree
		PR	-	8.69	26.08	28.26	36.95		
	HIV/AIDS support	NR	2	5	18	11	10	3.47	Moderately Agree
		PR	4.34	10.86	39.13	23.91	21.73		
	Post traumatic stress debriefing	NR	-	2	19	15	10	3.71	Agree
		PR	-	4.34	41.30	32.60	21.73		
Drug addiction	NR	1	2	20	13	10	3.63	Agree	
	PR	2.17	4.34	43.47	28.26	21.73			

*Strong Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Moderately Agree (MA), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), Number of Respondent (NR), Percentage of Respondent (PR), Average Index/Mean (AI)