

## CONSTRUCTION PROJECT MANAGER WAYS TO COPE WITH STRESS AT WORKPLACE

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**Abstract:** Health and safety issues at workplaces need to be addressed in ensuring the construction sector in our country is free from health and safety problems. Safety issues are often being trumpeted however health issues have been less emphasized even though these issues actually are more significant and could have large impact on the construction industry. Only a handful of workers know that health issues could result in various negative effects to themselves and organization. One of the health issues that can result in various problems is stress at workplace. Stress could result in various health problems and if being kept long enough it could cause death. Therefore, a study on workplace stress among the construction project manager was conducted to examine the ways they cope with the stress at workplace. The primary data had been collected from the questionnaire surveys on the project managers within the construction industry. The data then were analyzed using the percentage score, average index analysis and the diagram such as bar chart had been used to visualize the results from the analysis. From the findings, many project managers thought stress at workplace exist, however this issue is being marginalized and only 30% of respondents acknowledged experience stress in their workplace. This problem existed in the Malaysian construction industry however lack of awareness on this issue has resulted in no action taken. Organizational factor was the main factor that causes these problems in our construction industry. Weakness in planning within organization was the sub factor that triggers the stress problem among project manager. Finally, the survey indicated that there were three ways often being practiced by the project manager to handle stress which were good planning in organization, effective communication between employee and always thinking positively.

**Keywords:** *Workplace Stress; Stress Factor; Construction; Project manager; Contractor*

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### 1.0 Introduction

Stress is defined as a physical and emotion reaction which occurs when a job necessity doesn't equal the source or worker's needs (Cooper and Dewe, 1984). Work stress is an important issue in occupational safety and health at workplaces (Tom et al., 2000). Stress at workplace refers to the employee's perception on surrounding requirements that transcends the available sources (DOSH, 2002). Stress is also construed as external power or pressure which influenced individual physical aspects and material force (Victorio, 2000). Stress at workplace is also referred to imbalance in adaptation between surrounding demand with the individual ability or capability (Spielberger and Sarason, 1987). Stress in workplace is found to be increasing from one day to another. For example, a survey performed by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the percentage of part-time and full-time workers which experience stress at workplace increases to 45% in 2002 compared to only 37% in 2001. This problem will continue to increase if it is not dealt accordingly. It will not only cause a problem to the organization, but would invite variety of illness to the individual involved (Fiona, 2006).

Related knowledge on stress is essential for the project manager, so that the problem can be prevented before becoming a pandemic to the subordinate workers (Abdul Rahim et al., 2010). Apart from that, the management or employer of a construction organization can also benefit from this study. This is because when employer has a considerable knowledge on stress at workplaces and strives to handle them, it will simultaneously reduce employee rate of absenteeism and sick leave, as a consequence of stress (MacKay, 2004). It also could help employer to reduce medical cost if the percentage of sick leave among employees is decreased.

In Malaysia, health issues at workplaces are considered as trivial compared to safety (SOCISO, 2009). The study on health issue in workplace are seldom carried out and not deeply emphasized. Based on query made to the responsible party such as Social Security Organisation (SOCISO), Malaysia Health Ministry and Department Of Safety and Health (DOSH), very minimum related report on health issues at workplaces were being reported. Feedbacks obtained also indicated that no statistics related to occupational stress issue was filed. This shows that in Malaysia, this issue is taken for granted although it is known to be substantial in other country. Apart from that, the agency that is accountable for the employee's welfare is not proactive in dealing with health issue at workplaces. Lack of emphasis on description of the significance of this aspect could result to various problems in the construction industry in this country. Hence, this study was carried out to demonstrate to the construction industry workers in Malaysia to be attentive and prevent this problem from being rampant.

The aim of this study was to examine the project manager ways in coping with workplace stress in construction industry. To achieve the aim of this study, several objectives had been identified as follows:

- i. To identify the project manager related experience on stress at workplace
- ii. To study the factor which influence stress at workplace
- iii. To identify practices by project manager in coping with stress at workplace

## **2.0 Literature Review**

There are many definitions on stress suggested by researchers according to their research findings. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. From the perspective of workplace, stress can be defined as a state of anxiety produced when events and responsibilities exceed one's coping abilities (Seaward, 2004). However, NIOSH (1999) has defined the job stress as harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the workers.

Stress that is spreading among workers, especially in the construction sector would generate problems associated to employee absenteeism. This is due to the fact that employees, whom experience stress, will generally feel lethargic to go to workplace and performing everyday tasks. According to Huseman et al. 1977 (Brief et al, 1981), employees who are unable to fulfill other person request will definitely make the problems of absenteeism to increase. In Great Britain, stress at workplace had caused loss in working days as much as 13.7 million days a year due to absence of employee whom is experiencing stress (HSE, 2007). Study in United States also

shows that a number amounting to one million employees is absent for work in any day of the year due to stress at workplaces (McHugh and Brennan, 1994).

Based on studies done by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2005), a major number of employees took medical leave and could not perform their task appropriately as a consequence of stress. Apart from that, HSE study also showed more than half a million of workers reported to have experience problems related to stress and resulting in illnesses. Stress will surely affect health, causes disease and can be fatal (Mattenson and Ivancevich, 1982).

According to study done by Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB, 2006), the stress level of the construction industry will continue to increase in the period of five (5) coming year. Four major factors that are obtained from the survey done by CIOB (CIOB, 2006) would be work overload (64.1%), pressure (59.9%), conflict of demand (52.2%) and a short constraint of time to accomplish tasks (59.7%).

Every worker must know the effective way to reduce stress. There is several ways to reduce workplace stress for examples change the factor may cause stress, try to avoid stress and improved self-motivated (Murphy, 1995). Thinking positively is the best way that can reduce stress. Based on surveys, meditation is also one of the ways to reduce stress (Brief et al., 1981).

There are four major parties involved in coping with stress which are employer, employee, government and family. Based on Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994, Section 15, employer must prepare a safe and health at workplace for their employee. Other than that, employee must be realistic towards their work (Mattenson and Ivancevich, 1979) and government must make sure the Acts are strong and can protect every employee. Motivation from own family members are effective in reducing workplace stress (Brief et al., 1981).

### **3.0 Methodology**

In this study, the following methodology has been adopted in order to achieve the objective of the study and the methodology of study. The objective was achieved through the questionnaire survey in order to identify the ways project manager use to reduce stress at work.

In this study, the primary data had been collected from the questionnaire surveys which were send to the project manager within the construction industry. Construction organizations being chosen does not focus on certain types of construction only and were chosen randomly. Meanwhile, the secondary data was gathered from several sources such as journals, articles, books, previous researches and electronic resources like websites and online material.

After the compilation of data generated from questionnaire, data analysis was carried out with the help of computer software such as Microsoft Office Excel. The data was analyzed using the percentage score and average index analysis and then the diagram such as bar and pie charts were used to visualize the result from the analysis. The average index formula is shown below.

Average Index =  $\sum a_i x_i / \sum x_i$ . whereas,  $a_i$  = constant which represent the weight for  $i$ ,  $x_i$  = variable that represent the frequency of respondents to the  $I$  ( $i = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5$ ) (Al-Hammad and Assaf, 1996).

The classifications for the rating scale are:  $1.00 \leq \text{Average Index} < 1.50$  (Least Practice),  $1.50 \leq \text{Average Index} < 2.50$  (Less Practice),  $2.50 \leq \text{Average Index} < 3.50$  (Moderately Practice),  $3.50 \leq \text{Average Index} < 4.50$  (Practice) and  $4.50 \leq \text{Average Index} \leq 5.0$  (Mostly Practice) (Majid and McCaffer, 1997).

Then, all the result will be discussed in detail and the conclusion and recommendation will be made accordingly.

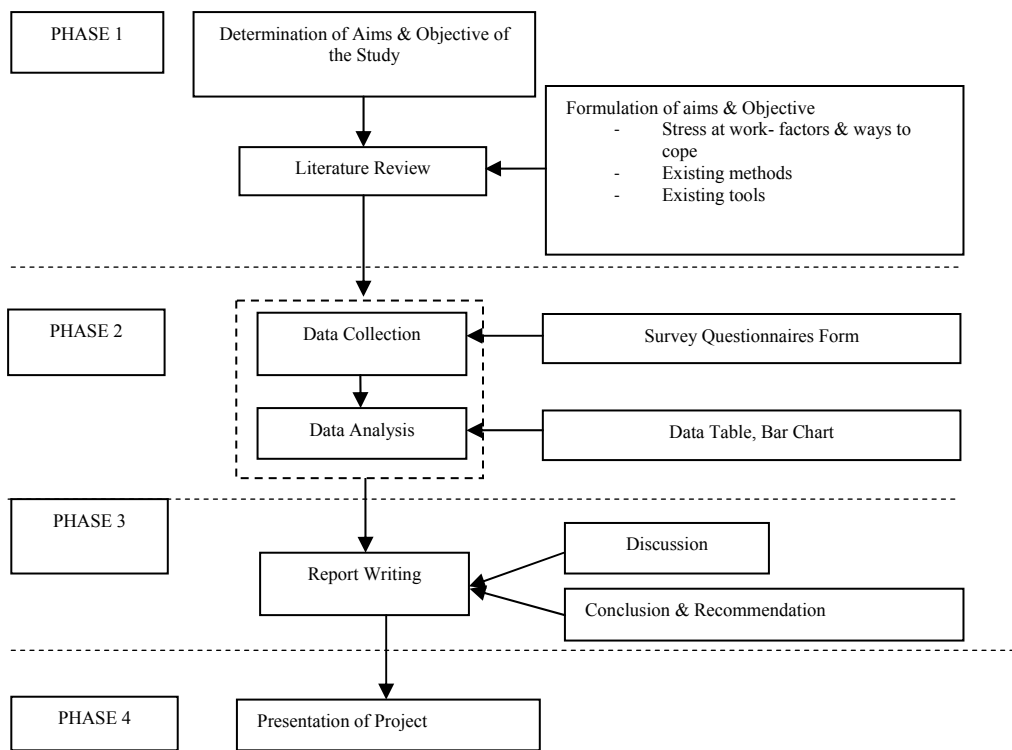


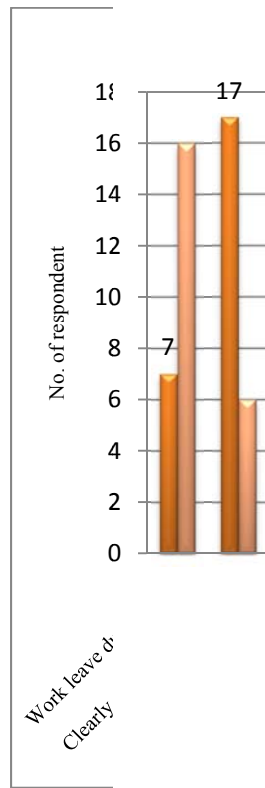
Figure 1: Methodology of the study

#### 4.0 Results and discussion

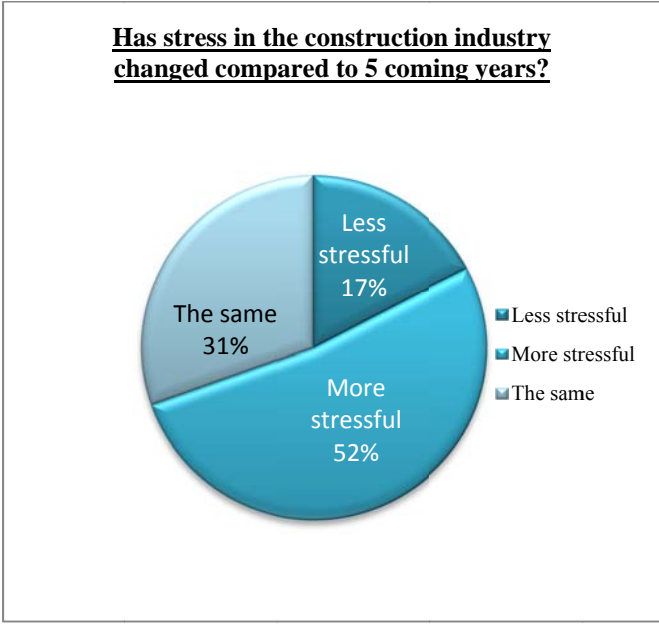
The results presented below were based on the objectives of the study. A total of 27 set of questionnaire forms were distributed to the project manager in the construction industry. However, only 23 respondents gave the feedback, which was equal to 85.2% of total rate of responses.

#### 4.1 Experiences of stress

These surveys had identified the experience in order to know whether their work give the managers thought stress at workplace or experiencing stress at their workplace. Fig 1 shows the number of project manager who are experiencing stress at workplace among the project manager. Fig 2 shows the number of project manager who are not experiencing stress at workplace compared to 5 years ago. From the survey, it is found that the number of project manager will be more stressful for the next five (5) years.



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**4.2 Factor affecting stress at workplace**

These surveys have identified the factors affecting stress at workplace among the construction project manager which will give some indication of factors always affecting stress at the workplace. Figure 4 shows the result of factors affecting stress at workplace referring the experiences of the project manager. From the survey, the main factors occur stress at workplace was the organization factor. Weakness in planning within organization was the sub factor contributed stress problem among the construction project manager.



Figure 4: Factors affecting stress at workplace

### 4.3 Ways being practiced in coping with stress at workplace

Figure 5 shown the ways always being used by the construction project manager to cope with stress at the workplace. Almost all project manager chose to change the factor affecting workplace stress is the best way to cope the stress.

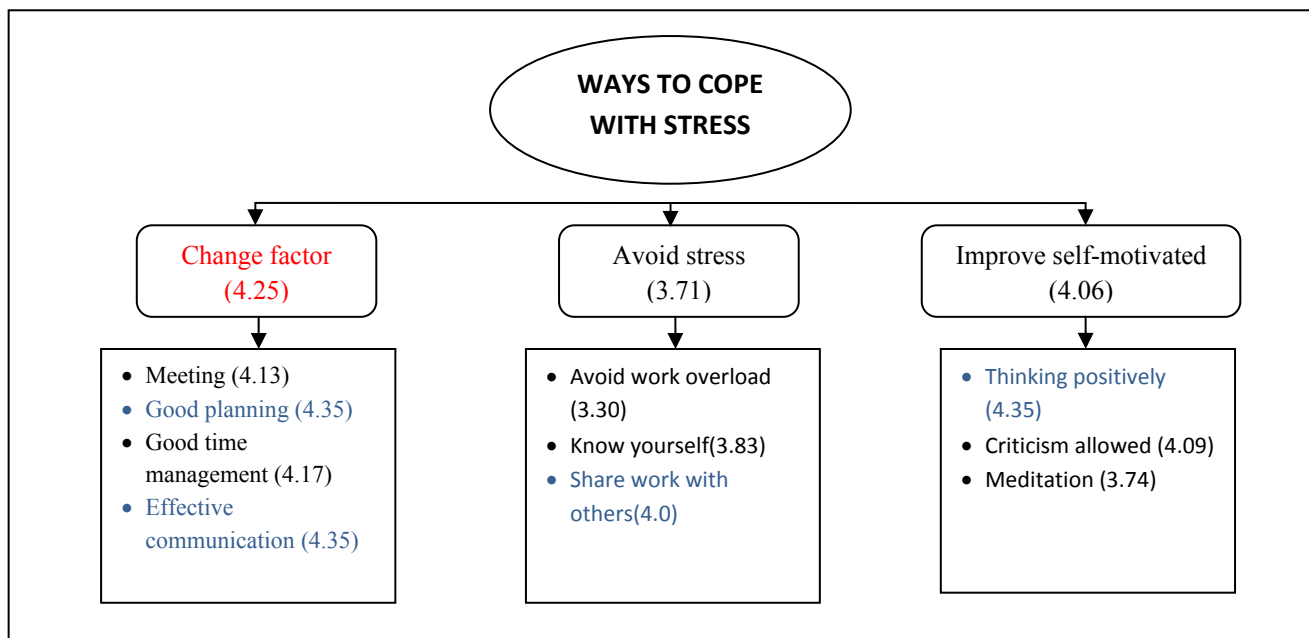


Figure 5: Ways to cope with stress

## 5.0 Conclusion

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study are as follow:

- i. This study had been conducted to identify the experiences of stress among the construction project manager. From the finding, majority of construction project

manager in Malaysia admitted having stress problem at workplace but they just thought this issue is a small problem in the construction industry. It was notable that only 30% of those admitted who had experienced stress. So for the conclusion, there was less awareness about the problem related to stress at workplace among the construction project manager in Malaysia.

- ii. The second objective was to study the factors that influenced stress at the workplace. From the finding it can be concluded that an organizational factor is the major factor that stress occur at workplace. Based on statistical percentage, organizational factor obtained 26.74% agreement. This result also shown that poor planning in organization is the sub factor which influenced stress at workplace among the construction project manager in Malaysia.
- iii. The third objective in this study was to identify the ways normally being practiced by project manager to handle stress at workplace. From the finding it can be concluded that good planning in work, effective communication and positive thinking were the ways normally being practiced by construction project manager in Malaysia. Based on the mean index classification, the three ways obtained high score of 4.35 respectively.

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