



***INFLUENCE OF WORK ENVIRONMENT, WORKLOAD AND JOB
AUTONOMY ON JOB STRESS AMONG CASUAL DINING RESTAURANT
EMPLOYEES IN THE KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA***

FARAH WAHIDA BINTI AMRAN

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By

FARAH WAHIDA BINTI AMRAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia
in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Science**

April 2019

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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April 2019

Chairman : Hazrina Ghazali, PhD
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Job-related stress is considered a global phenomenon in many industries. Stress at the workplace also happens in the restaurant industry and, stress can affect employee's job performance and productivity. Stress in the restaurant industry is due to excessive working hours, frequent customer contact, shift hours and physically exhausting. The first aim of this study was to identify the influence and the feeling of job stress. The second aim was to determine the most influential factor and the relationship towards job stress and, lastly, the third aim was to identify the stress level among casual dining restaurant. Three variables were used in this study which are work environment, workload and job autonomy. The primary data were derived from the quantitative method and strictly to Malaysian employees only. A total of 700 self-completed questionnaires were distributed to employees who were currently working in casual dining restaurants in Klang Valley area and 487 usable responses were returned for a 69.6% of response rate. Descriptive and inferential analysis was done by using SPSS version 22. For the first aim, the work environment was found to be the contributor to the job stress with a mean score of 3.74. As for second aim, the two most significant relationship were work environment and workload, $F(4, 483) = 28.131, p < .0005, R^2 = .149$. There was no significant relationship by job autonomy. Lastly, most employees were linked to perceived moderate stress level with 84.8%. Also, only a small percentage of respondents perceived high stress level with 5.75%. The limitation of the study was the sample limited to Klang Valley area only. Therefore, it does not represent the whole picture of casual dining employee in Malaysia. Findings obtained in this study also could suggest the casual dining operators strategize ways to minimize stress and ultimately retain their employees in the industry.

Keywords: *job stress, casual dining, restaurant, work environment, workload, perceived stress scale*

Abstrak thesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

PENGARUH PERSEKITARAN KERJA, BEBAN KERJA DAN KEBEBASAN KERJA KE ATAS TEKANAN KERJA DALAM KALANGAN PEKERJA RESTORAN KASUAL DI LEMBAH KLANG, MALAYSIA

Oleh

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Tekanan yang berkaitan dengan kerja dianggap sebagai fenomena global dalam banyak industri. Tekanan di tempat kerja juga berlaku dalam industri restoran dan tekanan dapat mempengaruhi prestasi kerja dan produktiviti pekerja. Tekanan dalam industri restoran selalu dikaitkan dengan waktu kerja yang berlebihan, interaksi dengan pelanggan yang kerap, berkerja mengikut jadual dan keadaan fizikal yang melelahkan. Tujuan pertama kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka persepsi dan rasa terhadap tekanan kerja. Tujuan kedua adalah menentukan faktor yang paling berpengaruh dan perkaitan terhadap tekanan kerja dan ketiga, adalah untuk mengenal pasti tahap tekanan dalam kalangan pekerja restoran makanan kasual. Tiga pembolehubah telah digunakan dalam kajian ini iaitu persekitaran kerja, beban kerja dan kebebasan kerja. Dapatan utama kajian ini diperoleh daripada kaedah kuantitatif dan hanya kepada pekerja warganegara Malaysia sahaja. Sebanyak 700 soal selidik telah diedarkan kepada pekerja yang sedang bekerja di restoran makan kasual di kawasan Lembah Klang dan hanya 487 yang boleh digunakan dan memberi 69.6% kadar tindak balas. Analisis deskriptif dan inferens dilakukan dengan menggunakan SPSS versi 22. Untuk tujuan pertama, persekitaran kerja didapati sebagai penyumbang kepada tekanan kerja dengan min 3.74. Bagi tujuan kedua, persekitaran kerja dan beban kerja telah menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan, $F(4, 483) = 28.131$, $p < .0005$, $R^2 = .149$. Tidak terdapat hubungan yang signifikan dengan kebebasan kerja. Akhir sekali, kebanyakan pekerja dikaitkan dengan tahap tekanan sederhana dengan 84.8%. Juga, hanya sebilangan kecil responden mengalami tahap tekanan tinggi dengan 5.75%. Keterbatasan kajian adalah sampel yang terhad kepada kawasan Lembah Klang sahaja. Oleh itu, ia tidak mewakili keseluruhan situasi pekerja restoran makanan kasual di Malaysia. Penemuan yang diperoleh dalam kajian ini juga boleh mencadangkan pengendali makan kasual untuk merangka cara untuk mengurangkan tekanan dan akhirnya mengekalkan pekerja mereka.

Kata kunci: *tekanan kerja, makanan kasual, restoran, persekitaran kerja, beban kerja, skala tekanan yang dihadapi*



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COR	Conservation of Resources
ETP	Economic Transformation Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GVATI	Gross Value Added of Tourism Index
NKEA	National Key Economic Area
PSS	Perceived Stress Scale
RSA	Rest and Service Area
TDGDP	Tourism Direct Gross Domestic Product

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with the introduction of food and beverage services scenario in Malaysia. Early in this chapter will emphasize on the significant role of food and beverage services and its contributions in the Malaysian economy. Besides the introduction to the industry, the discussion also focuses on the casual dining restaurant which has become the subject of interest in this study. The later parts of the chapter segments into a problem statement, objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, and definitions of terms. This is then lead to the variable determination for this study. On top of that, three research questions are developed. Significance of the study justifies the need to conduct the research in a broader setting to ensure its contribution to the body of knowledge. Last but not least, the chapter also concludes with the description of the important terms used during this study.

1.2 Background of the Study

Economically speaking, under the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), one of the 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) is tourism. Tourism has been one of the important economic sectors in Malaysia ever since and will always remain essential to the nation's economic revolution. Even though food and beverage services are not the major NKEA programme, it is added under the tourism NKEA. Also, India's famous travel magazine "*Travel + Leisure*" announced Malaysia as the "Best International Destination – Food and Drinks 2014" in April 2015. In 2015 too, the Muslim Travel Shopping Index (MTSI) 2015 crowning Malaysia as the second most popular shopping city in the world for Muslim tourists (PEMANDU, 2015). The country's attractiveness as a top tourism and shopping destination in the region has shown that food and beverage services are broadly available across the country regardless of any area especially in tourists' attraction sites.

Food and beverages industry is one of the service-oriented businesses in this fast-paced modern era. Competitions in this industry are intense, therefore, the employees are expected to play an important role when delivery service. In short, the better the employee performance, the greater the guest satisfaction and loyalty will be. In Malaysia, there are generally two major sub-sectors of the food service industry which are commercial and non-commercial industry. The commercial food services are meant to generate profits because the main purpose of the business is to offer services of food and beverages and also place for the business (Cardas Research, 2015). As mentioned, there are a few types of restaurant in the market. These restaurants represent different target market and market sector of the food service industry. They are different in many ways in terms of product line, organization structure, service style and might also financially different.

One of the types is casual dining restaurant and it is one of the biggest trends right now. Casual dining restaurant is a type of restaurant that offers calm and easy ambience and menu items at lower to moderate price. It is a full-service, moderate-upscale type of dining and focuses on themes to represent their image, service, and interior decoration (Nasyira, Othman & Ghazali, 2014). It is somewhat more upscale than fast food restaurant. Casual dining can be any number of themes, from Italian to Thai cuisine. Examples of casual dining restaurant in Malaysia are Secret Recipe, Kenny Rogers Roaster, Nando's and Absolute Thai Restaurant.

As for 2016, Secret Recipe Cakes & Café made 7% value share in the year, hence, led full-service restaurants in Malaysia (Euromonitor International, 2017). The increasing in number of casual dining restaurants in Malaysia is because of the hectic schedules in urban cities and income increases that make consumers dine out during weekdays or even weekend (Euromonitor International, 2016). Adding to that, the increasing in number of dining out patrons also contribute to the expanding of food and beverage services industry that mostly dominated by the people in urban area and has higher a income (Sulaiman & Haron, 2013). On the similar note, the urbanization process in Malaysia has changed the dining pattern due to the hectic lifestyle in the urban area (Basri, Ahmad, Anuar & Ismail, 2016). Thus, the fast growth of restaurants in Malaysia is the reason and the best choice to dine and satisfy their hunger (Ahmad, Ghazali, & Othman, 2013).

1.3 Problem Statement

Food and beverages industry employees were always associated with long working hours, low salary, slow promotion, lack of benefits and supervisory problems. These realities contributed to employee's job stress for decades and continued to be a major problem and concern in the industry (Birdir, Tepeci & Saldamli, 2003). They also added that there were four reasons that make the employees in the food and beverages more vulnerable to job stress; frequent customer contact and the nature of the job where the employees are facing high demands from many sources; unhelpful and unfriendly colleagues and discontented customers; the high levels of staff turnover has become an extra workload on current employees; and inefficient management style and frequent changes in preparation methods create a stressful work environment.

Lu & Gursoy, 2013; Karatepe, 2015 explained that job stress and employee turnover show there is a positive relationship between these two problems and this was supported in many business contexts. In Malaysia, studies to examine the job stress is still limited. A study done by Ghazali (2010) has shown that turnover rates exceed 100% among fast food employees, and thus the problem of employee turnover is one of the main concerns to the industry. The studies also have shown that the employees have the feelings to leave their current job due to stress. While job stress is among the most studied variable in the food and beverages (Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016; Tongchaiprasit, & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016; Sohn, Lee & Yoon, 2016; Mansour, & Tremblay, 2016; Chia & Chu, 2016; Jung & Yoon, 2013; Karatepe, 2013; O'Neill & Davis, 2011), studies on work environment, workload and job autonomy within food

and beverages industry were as wide. Eventually, it has drawn the interest of studying their relationships with job stress as significant relationships were found in other industries. Therefore, to add more studies of the work environment, workload and job autonomy into food and beverages industry studies in the Malaysian setting, this study was conducted to fill such gap.

In the food and beverages, work environment has been found to be a significant factor in determining employee job stress. Ineffective work environment encourages the unhappy employee with their job that ultimately influence the growth of an organization. Owen (2006) stated that, when the work environment is in a tense situation to the employer and employee, it will produce job stress and this will lead to negative and damaging effect on the emotions. Thus, it will be resulting in absenteeism, lower productivity and harmful to wellbeing (Abualrub & Alzaru, 2008; Nakasis & Ouzouni, 2008). For example, in September 2014, 584,000 individuals quit the leisure and hospitality industry, and the turnover rate was 4% which made it the highest among all industry sectors in the USA (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). To relate, this can be attributed to the stressful work environment (Lawson, Davis, Crouter, & O' Neill, 2013). As an industry where the 24/7 nature of the business and culture, hospitality jobs have been widely regarded as stressful (O'Neill and Xiao, 2010). It is important to realize that when there are inequal in the employee's ability and emotion, they will be more likely to have higher stress. Hence, it is important to recognize the counter factors of employee's job stress caused by the work environment.

The second factor that accumulated among Malaysian employees was the workload at the workplace. Heavy workload and consequent job stress can have serious consequences for employees. Also, a heavy workload and a high level of job stress diminish service quality. People-oriented industry employees often exposed to a weighty workload, lengthy and unbalanced working hours (Zhao et al., 2014; Mansour, 2012; Karatepe and Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe, 2008). They are unavoidably exposed to job stress (Kim et al., 2009), giving a big challenge to the hospitality industry (Hsieh and Eggers, 2011). Workload also may affect the employee's creativity and productivity as it will distract their emotions (Hon et al., 2013b; Hon and Chan, 2013a). Thus, it is vital to the organizational managers and supervisors to understand the workload and incorporate this knowledge into their strategic and operational decision making in order to overcome the job stress problem.

Employees are always around co-workers, supervisors and customers, and they work in long hours and can sometimes seem inconsequential (Mulvaney, O' Neill, Cleveland, & Crouter, 2007). When the task level increases, the motivation, engagement and satisfaction level decreases. It also will affect the level service quality, employee orientation, organization climate and job satisfaction of the hospitality industry (Nedeljkovic, Hadzic & Cerovic, 2012). Employees' job attitudes are divided into skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). As literature has shown the relations between work

environment, workload and job autonomy with the job stress, this study would adopt the variables as the antecedents to assess job stress in Malaysian employees.

From an experimental point of view, current studies that are available on the body of literature have been conducted in a Western setting, and now, the focus is shifting to the setting of restaurant in Malaysia's service industry. Even though there are plenty of studies about job stress among restaurant industry workers, only a few have focused on the casual dining restaurant employee and particularly the predictors of the job stress which are work environment, workload and job autonomy. Therefore, this study is done in Malaysia context by using casual dining restaurant as a sample.

1.4 Research Objectives

In this study, the researcher focused on the job stress and it is done with the main interest of discovering whether job stress would yield opposite results when being assessed by the variables.

Hence, the specific objectives of this study are:

- 1) To identify the influence of work environment, workload and job autonomy and the feeling of job stress among casual dining restaurant employees.
- 2) To determine the most influential factor and relationships between work environment, workload and job autonomy towards job stress among casual dining restaurant employees.
- 3) To identify the stress level among employees in a casual dining restaurant.

1.5 Research Questions

To achieve the research objectives, there are three research questions on how the factors would affect employees' job stress in casual dining restaurants. As mentioned, based on the objectives stated the research questions for this study are:

- 1) What are the influence of work environment, workload, job autonomy and the feeling of job stress among casual dining restaurant employees?
- 2) What are the most influential factors and the relationship that will influence employees job stress in the casual dining restaurant employees?
- 3) What are the stress levels of casual dining restaurant employees?

1.6 Significance of the Research

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

Regardless of the huge numbers of researches focused on job stress, but studies on job stress among the casual dining restaurant industry are still limited. Conversely, at present, only a few available literatures had explained on the employees' current psychological situation in their companies. Most studies were done in the Western countries, especially in the USA (Park, Phillips, Canter & Abbott, 2011). Most of the researches on job stress have been carried out in Western countries, to name a few in the UK the USA, Canada and Australia (Spector, Cooper & Aguilar-Vafaei, 2002a). However, in developing countries such as in Southeast Asia, such studies are deficient (Chopra, 2009; Kortum et al., 2008). Theoretically, this study can contribute its part by adding to the availability of literature. There is plenty of research that is done about job stress but, this research entails the element of specification as it is conducted particularly for the casual dining restaurant industry. So, this study would fill the gap in the literature about the job stress in the casual dining restaurant industry. Hence, this study would like to attempt in determining job stress problem in the casual dining restaurant employees in the Malaysia context. With a focus on food and beverage services in Malaysia setting, it is hoped that the findings of current research would come handy as well as beneficial to future researches that have similar study focuses.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

When the relationship among the variables are cleared and achieved, it is hoped to guide the manager when they face these problems. The results can be used to assist and guide the managerial levels to implement specific retention strategies in the casual dining restaurant organization. Instead, this study also provides a better understanding of information and pictures of the key drivers of job stress of the casual dining restaurant employees in the casual dining restaurant industry for future research. Not only that, the results also can be used to educate restaurant practitioners in helping their employees to minimize stress. Once they have the knowledge and information about these factors, they can take corrective measures to eliminate these factors from the work-life of their employees. The actions too can be transformed into cares from the employer to the employee and when the trust has built between them, a strong mutual understanding can be created hence promoting a better image of the industry. Last but not least, this study also provides information and give view of the key drivers of job stress of the casual dining restaurant employees in the casual dining restaurant industry for future research.

1.7 Definition of Terms

The definition of terms used in this study are as follows:

Casual dining restaurant: A type of restaurant that offers calm and easy ambience and menu items at lower to moderate price. It is a full-service, moderate-upscale type of dining and focuses on themes to represent their image, service, and interior decoration (Nasyira et al., 2014).

Job stress: An employee's concern of their job-associated toughness, pressure, burden, and emotional exhaustion (Wickramasinghe, 2016).

Work environment: The condition of surroundings at the workplace of the job which includes in and out, at the desk or even cubicle (Rezaul, 2014).

Workload: Too many works to do within the limited time given (Hon, 2013; Hon et al., 2013).

Job autonomy: The extent to which an employee has his/her liberty and freedom in determining the pace, order approaches in completing a task (Volmer, Spurk and Niessen, 2012).

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