



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**AGE DIFFERENCES, PROACTIVE PERSONALITY, COPING STRATEGIES, JOB STRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG EMPLOYEES IN OUTSOURCING COMPANIES IN MALAYSIA**

**LAI PEI WEN**

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By

LAI PEI WEN

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

**May 2019**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of University Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

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**May 2019**

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**Faculty: Human Ecology**

The job satisfaction in outsourcing industry is depleting globally due to its extensive job stress on employees, challenging environment and rapid economic growth. A study showed that employees in Malaysia only scored 17.8% on the very satisfied categories which infers that most of the employees in Malaysia are experiencing very low percentage of satisfaction as compared to neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia. To date, the research on outsourcing industry is still limited in Malaysia. Proactive personality and coping strategies are known to have direct relationship with job stress and job satisfaction. Age differences is also an important factor in development psychology to study job satisfaction. Hence, the present study examines the job stress, proactive personality, coping strategies, age differences and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia.

Outsourcing companies that have MSC status and provide diverse outsourcing services were the target of this study. Target respondents were employees aged between 25 to 56 years old in the selected outsourcing companies in Klang Valley. Respondents need to have at least a tertiary education level, holding position at executive level and above with at least one year experience to participate in this study. Respondents were selected through multistage cluster sampling method. A total of 245 respondents participated in this study. The four instruments used in this study were the Spector's (1994) Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), Siegrist, Li and Montano's (2014) short version of Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI), Seibert, Crant and Kraimer's (1999) Proactive Personality Scale (PPS), and Carver's (1997) Brief COPE. Data analysis included univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistics.

The Pearson correlation result indicated that age, marital status, length of service, job stress, proactive personality and coping strategies were significantly correlated with job satisfaction. The multiple regression showed that age, length of service, job stress, proactive personality and coping strategies significantly predicted the job satisfaction. The results further revealed that proactive personality had significant moderating effect in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction of proactive employees was highly affected by job stress compared to low proactive employee. Result showed that high proactive personality of employees in outsourcing company did not increase the job satisfaction when they were facing higher job stress. Moreover, results also revealed that problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping had partial mediating effect on the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction. Results further indicated that the respondents using problem-focused coping had higher job satisfaction, while respondents using emotion-focused coping had lower job satisfaction.

This study can be implemented in outsourcing companies to pay attention to the problem of the negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction. Findings also implied that the proactive personality at workplace draws negative impact while problem-focused coping strategies could reduce the negative drawbacks of stress on employees in outsourcing company. The current conceptual model serves as a reference to analyse different job stress definition and job satisfaction aspects particularly for employees in outsourcing companies in the near future.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

**PERBEZAAN UMUR, PERSONALITI PROAKTIF, STRATEGI DAYA TINDAK,  
TEKANAN KERJA DAN KEPUASAN KERJA DALAM KALANGAN  
PEKERJA-PEKERJA DI SYARIKAT-SYARIKAT PENYUMBERAN LUAR DI  
MALAYSIA**

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Kepuasan kerja dalam industri penyumberan luar secara global semakin menurun berpunca daripada tekanan kerja yang tinggi dalam kalangan pekerja, persekitaran yang mencabar serta pertumbuhan ekonomi yang pesat. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa kepuasan kerja pekerja-pekerja di Malaysia hanya menjanginkan 17.8% dalam kategori yang sangat berpuas hati. Ini menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan pekerja di Malaysia mengalami peratus kepuasan yang sangat rendah berbandingkan dengan negara-negara jiran seperti Singapura, Thailand dan Indonesia. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian industri penyumberan luar kurang diberi perhatian di Malaysia. Personaliti proaktif dan strategi daya tindak mempunyai hubungan secara langsung dengan tekanan kerja dan kepuasan kerja. Perbezaan umur juga merupakan faktor penting dalam bidang psikologi pembangunan untuk mengkaji kepuasan kerja. Oleh itu, kajian ini menekankan kepada tekanan kerja, personaliti proaktif, strategi daya tindak, perbezaan umur dan kepuasan kerja dalam kalangan pekerja-pekerja syarikat penyumberan luar di Malaysia.

Syarikat-syarikat penyumberan luar yang mempunyai status *MSC* dan memberikan pelbagai perkhidmatan penyumberan luar telah disasarkan dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini mensasarkan responden dari kalangan pekerja-pekerja syarikat penyumberan luar, di daerah Lembah Klang yang berumur 25 tahun hingga 56 tahun. Responden perlu mempunyai ijazah, memegang jawatan di peringkat eksekutif atau setaraf dengan sekurang-kurangnya satu tahun pengalaman untuk terlibat dalam kajian ini. Responden telah dipilih dengan menggunakan metod persampelan rawak pelbagai peringkat. Seramai 245 orang responden terlibat dalam kajian ini. Empat instrumen telah ditadbir dalam kajian ini iaitu Spector's (1994) "*Job Satisfaction Survey*" (JSS), Siegrist, Li dan

Montano's (2014) versi pendek "*Effort-Reward Imbalance*" (ERI), Seibert, Crant dan Kraimer's (1999) "*Proactive Personality Scale*" (PPS), dan Carver's (1997) "*Brief COPE*". Data dianalisa menggunakan kaedah statistik univariat, bivariat dan multivariat.

Dapatan kajian korelasi Pearson menunjukkan bahawa kepuasan kerja mempunyai kaitan dengan umur, status perkahwinan, tempoh perkhidmatan, tekanan kerja, personaliti proaktif, dan strategi daya tindak. Regresi berganda menunjukkan bahawa faktor-faktor umur, tempoh perkhidmatan, tekanan kerja, personaliti proaktif dan strategi daya tindak berupaya meramalkan kepuasan kerja secara signifikan. Dapatan kajian selanjutnya menunjukkan bahawa personaliti proaktif mempunyai kesan penyerdehana yang signifikan dalam hubungan antara tekanan kerja dan kepuasan kerja. Kepuasan kerja pekerja yang sangat proaktif lebih terjejas oleh tekanan kerja yang tinggi berbanding pekerja-pekerja yang tidak begitu proaktif. Oleh itu, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa personaliti proaktif pekerja yang tinggi dalam syarikat penyumberan luar tidak meningkatkan kepuasan kerja ketika mereka menghadapi tekanan kerja yang lebih tinggi. Namun begitu, dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa daya tindak fokus-masalah dan daya tindak fokus-emosi mempunyai peranan sebagai mediator separa dalam hubungan antara tekanan kerja dan kepuasan kerja. Selain itu, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa responden yang menggunakan daya tindak fokus-masalah mempunyai kepuasan kerja yang lebih tinggi, sementara responden yang menggunakan daya tindak fokus-emosi mempunyai kepuasan kerja yang lebih rendah.

Hasil kajian boleh diaplikasikan dalam mana-mana syarikat penyumberan luar untuk menangani masalah tekanan kerja dan kesannya terhadap kepuasan kerja. Berdasarkan dapatan kajian, personaliti proaktif di tempat kerja boleh membawa impak yang negatif jika pekerja berhadapan dengan masalah atau tekanan kerja yang melampau, manakala daya tindak fokus-masalah dalam kalangan pekerja dapat mengurangkan kesan negatif tekanan kerja dalam kalangan pekerja syarikat penyumberan luar. Model konseptual ini berfungsi sebagai rujukan untuk menganalisa perbezaan definisi tekanan kerja dan aspek kepuasan kerja bagi pekerja dalam syarikat penyumberan luar pada masa akan datang.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the University Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the supervisory committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Adj.	Adjusted
AET	Affective Events Theory
COR	Conservation of Resource Theory
EAA	Early Age Adult
ERI	Effort-Reward Imbalance
GDR	Gender
JDI	Job Descriptive Index
JKEUPM	Jawatankuasa Etika Universiti untuk Penyelidikan Melibatkan Manusia
JSS	Job Satisfaction Survey
LS	Length of Service
Max	Maximum
MAA	Middle Age Adult
Min	Minimum
MS	Marital Status
MSC	Multimedia Super Corridor
MDEC	Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation
OM	Outsourcing Malaysia
PPS	Proactive Personality Scale
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Standard Error
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SSON	Shared Serviced and Outsourcing Network
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Working adults spend most of their life time at the workplace before their retirement (Weir, 2013). Job satisfaction of the employee will affect personal well-being (Mishra, Nielsen, Smyth & Newman, 2014) as well as in organizational aspects (Aziri, 2011). According to Singh and Jain (2013), employee satisfaction refers to “a collection of an individual’s negative or positive feelings toward the job”. There was a long history in the research of job satisfaction and it increasingly received great attention from researchers in various fields (Zhu, 2012).

Ahari, Mehrabi, and Karimi (2013) mentioned in their study that previously employee satisfaction was viewed as unnecessary but the latest studies showed that this viewpoint was totally mistaken. Moyes (2008) stated that job satisfaction is becoming more and more practical and valuable when there is an increase of competition in the working environment. Not only employers want to increase job satisfaction for their employees but employees themselves are also seeking job satisfaction in their jobs (Heywood, 2008).

Among the factors that influence job satisfaction, job stress sits at the top of the list (Manzoor, Usman, Naseem, & Shafiq, 2011; Riaz, Ahmad, Riaz, Murtaza, Khan & Firdous, 2016). Job stress is defined as “the damaging physical and emotion of a person that arise when the wishes of the job do not compete with the abilities, means, or wants of the employee” (Manzoor et al., 2016). In the competitive working environment, high job stress will lead to low job satisfaction and therefore they may feel frustrated or burnout (Ahsan, Abdullah, Yong & Alam, 2009). Even though job stress may not necessary lead to negative outcomes but excessive job stress will increase the cost of organization and decreases the effectiveness of employees (Lee & Lee, 2014).

Outsourcing industry is an example of a stressful industry (UN News Centre, 2010). Beaumont and Sohal (2004) defined outsourcing as “having works that has formally done inside the organization by external party”. In general, outsourcing company is the external service provider to execute functions that a company does not want to perform internally (Davis & Davis, 2012). Outsourcing industry is growing worldwide because of two key factors which are low labour cost and process efficiency through automation (Namasivayam, 2004). Outsourcing industry has started to grow in western countries in the late 1980s but it only became popular in Asia in the mid 2000s (KPMG, 2014).

In Asia, outsourcing industry is popular in countries such as India, China, and Singapore, as well as Hong Kong, Malaysia and Philippine (KPMG International, 2006). Outsourcing industry has tremendous growth in Malaysia as Malaysia is actively competing with neighbouring countries to become one of the top countries in outsourcing service (Strategy Innovation Corporation, 2015). Outsourcing Malaysia (OM) estimated that the Malaysia outsourcing industry by 2017 will have 15 % Compound Annual Growth Rate from its 2012 revenue of US\$1.7bil (The Star, 2013). OM also expected that there will be 88,000 employees in outsourcing industry by 2015 (Outsourcing Malaysia, 2013).

The main types of outsourcing services are Information technology outsourcing (ITO), Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO) (Outsourcing Malaysia, 2013). ITO services include Infrastructure management service, application development and management, information technology (IT) professional service and other IT services. Furthermore, BPO services include finance and accounting, customer-relationship management, human resources and other industry specific services. KPO provides high-end services which require specialized knowledge employees to provide knowledge services such as business and financial research, publishing and media, analytic, legal purchase outsourcing, pharma outsourcing, design and animation.

According to Dhanesha (2014), there are many job related pressure and tension for employees in outsourcing industry such as time zone difference with clients, heavy workload, tight deadlines and working overtime. Similarly, the Shared Serviced and Outsourcing Network (SSON, 2015) also stated outsourcing industry is facing challenges such as labour shortage when demand increased, and the rapid change of technology. At the meanwhile, currency exchange increases the cost and local competition is also affecting Malaysia competitiveness in Asia. Besides the challenges that have been mentioned, OM chairperson David Wong also indicated that outsourcing companies in Malaysia are also facing high expectations from customers (Focus Malaysia, 2014). Wong stated that Malaysia outsourcing companies need to provide specialised solution to their customers in order to compete at global level. According to Hart and Cooper (2001), all these challenges are placing many employees under pressure and produce high levels of job stress.

Meenakshi and Bhuvaneshwari (2013) mentioned that working environment in outsourcing company is highly customer-orientated which brings challenges to the employees who get used to traditional concepts of control and coordination. Researches further revealed that employees who work in outsourcing industry are facing other challenges apart from their professionalism. For example, employees in outsourcing industry need to be ready for cross-cultural communication and language diversity when they are proposing solutions to their clients from other countries (Carmel & Tjia, 2005). Clients are looking for lower prices and higher-level quality of services (Iqbal & Dad, 2103). In order to maintain competitive advantage, 24 hours in seven days operation is needed

(Brooker, 2011). For example, employees in call center which is one of the largest outsourcing services need to adjust to multiple time zones and work under different work shifts. Moreover, the maintenance of client-vendor relationship is another challenge for employee in outsourcing industry (Iqbal & Dad, 2103). In order to achieve win-win situation, sharing of knowledge and expertise can be robust in the long-term relationship (Saxena and Bharadwaj, 2009).

Besides the investigation on the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction, researchers also increasingly looked into the influence of dispositional factors in the career development. Among various types of personality that have been studied previously, Crant (2000) has proposed that proactive personality is a critical determinant in individual in order to be successful in the 21st century dynamic work environment. Proactive employees are more determined, more likely to take initiative and are able to identify opportunities (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999). For instance, Han, Wang and Dong (2014) proposed that proactive personality acts as moderator in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction.

Furthermore, coping strategies are frequently being stated when studied about job stress (Lee, Tsai, Tsai & Lee, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Lee & Cho, 2016). Basically, coping is "the cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage psychological stress" (Lazarus, 1993). Folkman, Lazarus, Schetter, DeLongis, and Gruen (1986) categorized coping strategies into two groups which are problem-focused and emotions-focused. According to Folkman et al., problem-focused coping is aim to resolve the problem while emotions-focused coping is use to regulate the emotional response to the problem. Among the studies on coping strategies, Sudhaker and Gomes (2010) suggested that coping strategies work as a mediator in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction.

In the development across lifespan, changes are influence by normative age-grade (Baltes, 1987). Age-grade refers to a specific age group such as toddler, adolescent, adult or senior. According to Baltes, particular developmental changes and experiences occur in different age grade. In line with Baltes, Levinson (1986) developed life stage developmental model to explain changes across adult development. In the life stage developmental model, life course such as work follows a unique development order in life cycle. Furthermore, Levinson (1986) stated that individuals' biopsychosocial characters vary in different eras in life cycle. Consequently, researchers found that job satisfaction varies in different age groups (Ng & Feldman, 2010; Fiorillo & Nunzia, 2011; Chaubey, Maithel & Gupta 2013).

In summary, job satisfaction does not remain constant in a lifespan and the changes of job satisfaction is affected by many factors. Present study included job stress, proactive personality, coping strategies and age differences to determine the job satisfaction among outsourcing employees. Job stress was

studied as the predictor of job satisfaction while proactive personality was studied as moderator in the relationship of job stress and job satisfaction. Moreover, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping were studied as the mediators in this study. The differences of age in job satisfaction have also been included in this study.

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

Job satisfaction in adulthood is related to many employee's working behaviour such as commitment in job, absenteeism and turnover rate (Aziri, 2011; Eurofound, 2007; Gregory, 2011). High level of job satisfaction can increase organization effectiveness (Zhou & George, 2001) and improve employees' innovation on the job (Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006). In contrast, low level of job satisfaction could affect employees' loyalty (Vandenberg & Lance, 1992), leading to high turnover rate that eventually will increase the overall cost of the organization (Zhou & George, 2001). Besides of the effect on organizational aspect, job satisfaction is also affecting employees' social, physical and mental health (Heller, Judge & Watson, 2002). Researchers suggested that job satisfaction did affect the life satisfaction of employees (Rousseau, 1978; Tait, Padgett & Baldwin, 1989). In other words, they believe that employees who are satisfied in their job will feel happy in their non-work activities such as work-family spill over is a very common phenomenon in affecting the personal life (Ilies, Wilson & Wagner, 2009). Tsai, Chang and Chen (2012) have analysed the job satisfaction scores from various countries. Among the countries studied, Malaysia's employees only scored 17.8% on the very satisfied categories which infers that most of the employees in Malaysia are experiencing very low percentage of satisfaction as compared to neighbouring countries such as Singapore (24%), Thailand (28%) and Indonesia (20.5%).

Most of the employees in job satisfaction studies in Malaysia were targeted from financial institutes (Mansor, Noor & Hassan, 2012; Ling, Bahron, & Boroh, 2014; Vasudevan & Zahari, 2014), academic field (Hashim & Mahmood, 2011; Musa, Mat, Chia, Yusuff, & Suib, 2012; Aslan, Shaukat, Ahmed, Shah & Mahfar, 2014) and medical institutes (Lee, 2008; Alam & Mohamad, 2009; Aidalina & Aniza, 2015). Lack of job satisfaction study in outsourcing industry Malaysia is due to limited resources available from outsourcing industry in Malaysia as they only begin to develop in the year 2006. This implies that the study on the job satisfaction of employees in outsourcing industry in Malaysia is still lacking and need more attention.

Outsourcing industry is having tremendous growth in worldwide. India, as the leading outsourcing service provider has provided adequate attention and researches in different aspects of employees in outsourcing industry. However, the focus of these researches in outsourcing were mostly economic and business management based. From psychology aspects, research attentions were given to employee turnover (Kuruville & Ranganathan, 2010), attrition (Sengupta & Gupta, 2012), and retention (Sengupta & Dev, 2013). Even



though studies were done on job satisfaction in outsourcing industry but the results were ambiguous. For example, job satisfaction level ( $M = 44.06$ ) of outsourcing employees in Kochi city area, India was falling within the range 35 to 50% which indicated that job satisfaction of outsourcing employees were not in the positive side as compared to the other industry from the same city (Bindi & Shanthaamani, 2016). Besides, Kehres' (2011) study also showed that the employees in outsourcing company in Philippines were not entirely satisfied with their job with the mean score of 3.37. This demonstrates that there is room for job satisfaction to be increased in outsourcing industry. Unfortunately, the job satisfaction of outsourcing employees in Malaysia is receiving little attention from researchers.

Examination on the predictor of job satisfaction is essential in order to understand the problem of job satisfaction. One of the key predictors that was related to job satisfaction in various studies was job stress (Altaf, 2011; Obiora & Iwuoha, 2013; Weerasinghe & Batagoda, 2001). Low or moderate job stress served to motivate employees to work and create high job satisfaction but high job stress will result in demotivation and low job satisfaction (Fevre, Matheny & Kolt, 2003). Dhanesha (2014) revealed that the routine of late night shift and heavy work load have inputted enormous stress on outsourcing employees in India. Similarly, researchers (Latha & Panchanatham, 2011; Chavan & Potdar, 2011) also reported that intensive job stress have disturbed the biological balance of outsourcing employees such as headache and digestive disorders. In fact, job stress has now been elevated as one of the global issues that highly impacts the healthiness level of physical and mental of both employers and employees (Karimi & Alipour, 2011). However, only a few studies (Arshad, Yap & Mohamed, 2007; Ahlan, Arshad, Suhaimi & Hussin, 2009; Arshad & Ahlan, 2013) were discussed on the challenges in outsourcing industry in Malaysia in the perspective of business management. Hence, the immediate research attention from the perspective of psychology is urgently needed to examine the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction among outsourcing employees in Malaysia.

Apart from understanding the direct relationship between stress and satisfaction, the more important missing pieces in current research is to explore the moderator that impact the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction in workplace. There is no doubt that proactive personality is highly important in affecting job performance, favourable work characteristics, job satisfaction, and overall career success (Thomas, Whitman & Viswesvaran, 2010). For example, employees work in private sector organizations such as outsourcing company need to proactively face and adapt to the challenges from rapid organizational and technology innovations as well as client requirements (Tummers, Kruyen, Vijverberg & Voesenek, 2015). Else, they will be eliminated or discarded from these competitive environment and facing high level of job stress and low level of job satisfaction. Therefore, the moderating effect of proactive personality in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction are necessary and require more empirical supports to cope with the fast-pacing outsourcing industry.

Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) have already explained the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction in affective-event theory and suggested that one of the moderating effect of dispositional factors was personality. However, understanding the moderating effect of individual personality in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction is only half the battle won. It is also important to understand the mediating effect of coping strategies in this relationship. In fact, strong link has been established between stress and coping strategies as researchers have suggested that people use coping strategies to deal with the difficulties or calm their stressful reactions when encountering stress (Hiebert, 2002). To complete the ideas, personality is the inherent character of an individual while coping strategies is the direct actions of an individual to deal with negative influence of job stress on job satisfaction. Hence, examine the inner personality and external coping strategies in an integrated research model can provide a clearer picture on what are the roles of individual factors in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction.

Several patterns of relationship between age group and job satisfaction were discovered such as positive relationship (Kumar and Giri, 2009), negative relationship (Oshagbemi & Hickson (2003), and U-shape relationship (Yap, Holmes, Hannan & Cukier, 2014). These findings deduce that there are no definite relationship between age group and job satisfaction. Even though the study of age differences in job satisfaction is not a new idea, but most of the studies were not grounded on the theory of developmental psychology. Most of the results of age differences in job satisfaction from previous studies were not clearly discussed or concluded. In addition, the profile of employees' age and job satisfaction in outsourcing industry Malaysia are vague and limited. Hence, the age differences in job satisfaction of outsourcing employees in Malaysia need a more comprehensive research.

Conducting a study on job satisfaction in outsourcing industry in Malaysia is valuable because Malaysia's outsourcing industry is still considered as a young and potential industry as compared to other well developed industries. Lack of researches in the outsourcing industry in Malaysia offers a precious opportunity to address the problem of job satisfaction of working adults in outsourcing industry Malaysia. The knowledge gap of mediating effect of job stress coping strategies was also found in the affective-event theory. Hence, examination of moderating effect of proactive personality and mediating effect of coping strategies in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction is critical to enrich the understanding of variances between job stress and job satisfaction. On the other hand, job satisfaction often varied with the changes and development that happened at different life stages across adulthood. It is vital to examine the age differences in job satisfaction of outsourcing employees to promote in depth understanding on job satisfaction from the perspective of developmental psychology. In addition, the examination of the demographic variables' effect on job satisfaction will provide a fruitful understanding on the job satisfaction problem of employees in outsourcing industry Malaysia.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What are the demographic characteristics (gender, marital status and length of service), age differences, proactive personality, coping strategies, job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia?
2. Is there any relationship between demographic variables (gender, marital status and length of service), age differences, proactive personality, coping strategies, job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia?
3. Do demographic variables (gender, marital status and length of service), age differences, proactive personality, coping strategies, job stress predict job satisfaction of employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia?
4. Does proactive personality moderates the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia?
5. Do coping strategies mediate the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia?

### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

#### **1.4.1 Affective Event Theory**

Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) affective event theory (AET) is the main theory that is guiding current study. Relationship between job stress and job satisfaction can be explain via AET. Affective event theory suggests that employees' attitudes and behaviours can be affected by their mood, emotion and working environment.

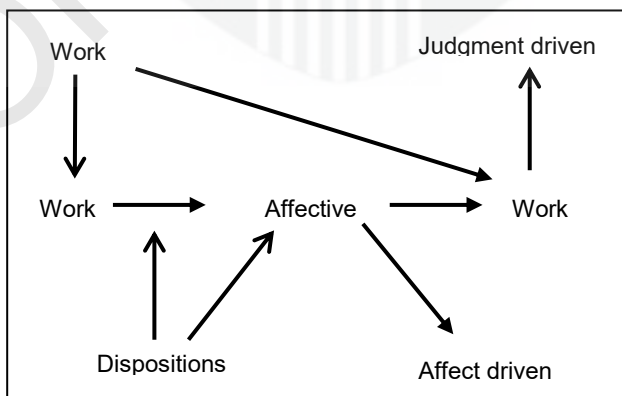
Attitude is the judgement of positive or negative response toward a target object (Schermerhorn, Osborn, Uhl-Bien, & Hunt, 2011). Researchers state that attitude is the evaluative judgement which includes affective and cognitive components (Fisher, 2000). Types of employees' attitudes are job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, and employees' engagement (Schermerhorn et al., 2011). According to AET, job satisfaction is defined as "a positive or negative evaluative judgment of one's job or job situation".



Mood and emotion are the two major components of employee's affective experiences (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). It is necessary to understand the concept of affective experiences in workplace by given that job stress is a type of emotions and its negative consequences on employees' emotions and attitudes (Antoniou, Davidson & Cooper, 2003; World Health Organization, 2005; Sy, Tram & O'Hara, 2006). Mood is longer lasting while emotion is more intense (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Working environment such as job demand, task variety and degree of autonomy will create a work event which will triggers emotion response from employees. The work event can be either hassles or uplifting to the employees to create positive or negative affect.

In AET, occurrence of certain work event will lead to specific emotions reaction, which in turn influence work attitudes such as job satisfaction. According to Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), it is important to study the affective experiences at work because job satisfaction is the summary evaluation of affective experiences and cognitive judgment. As mentioned by Weiss & Cropanzano (1996), another important element to determine job satisfaction is cognitive judgment. Cognitive judgment is the conscious decision and analysis of their job attributes. In AET, both affective experiences and cognitive judgement are equally important for determination of job satisfaction.

In AET, personal dispositions such as personality and emotional predispositions help to shape the event experiences and its affective responses. Individual dispositions can direct influence affective states or moderate the relationship between work event and affective reaction. According to Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), there are two types of emotional predispositions which are positive affectivity and negative affectivity. Individual with positive affectivity are lively, sociable and tend to have positive mood. One the other hand, individual with negative affectivity will be more likely to experience distress and negative mood.



**Figure 1.1: Affective Events Theory: Macro Structure**  
 (Adapted from Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996, p. 12)

### **1.4.2 Transactional Model of Stress**

In transactional model of stress, coping options will be evaluated in the secondary appraisal and converge with the primary appraisal in order to determine the impact of stressful events (Folkman et al., 1986). The primary appraisal process refers to assessment of individual on the degree of hazard in relation to own wellbeing. The secondary appraisal refers to the individual generally assesses about coping resources and capability to manage the hazard. Coping strategy is defined as “cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus, 1993). Folkman et al. (1986) categorised coping strategies into two main types which are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is use to alter the distressed person-environment relation, whereas emotion-focused coping is use to regulate the distress emotion. Role of coping strategies also act as a mediator in the stressful condition to change the emotion state (Lazarus, 1993). According to Lazarus (1993), use of different coping strategies either makes the stressful condition better, unchanged or worse. For instance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal was reported to change the negative emotion to less negative or positive. On the other hand, Lazarus (1993) also stated that coping strategies such as confrontive coping and distancing might cause the individuals to become more distress depending on the situations they are in.

### **1.4.3 Levinson’s Life Stage Developmental Model**

In Levinson’s (1986) life stage developmental model, life courses such as inner wishes, love, family, work, social relationship or biological change have its significances in life. According to Levinson, every life course has its own underlying order. Even though individuals are unique but they go through the same basic sequences. Levinson stated that life cycle as an arrangement of eras. Each era is partially overlapping and has its own biopsychosocial character. A cross- era transition happens to terminate the previous era and initiates the next, and this transition generally lasts about five years. Each era development has a well-defined modal age, with a range of about plus or minus two years of this average. In life stage developmental model, the eras are partially overlapping and include the development of biological, psychological and social aspects that form the microstructure of life cycle (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and McKee, 1978).

According to Levinson (1986), the first era, pre-adulthood with the age from zero to roughly 22 years old. In this stage, individuals grow from highly dependent infancy to childhood. Then from adolescence to the beginning of a more independent and responsible adult life. The first transition is early adulthood transition (17 to 22 years old) occurs before moving into the second

era, early adulthood which start from age 17 to 45 years old. The early adulthood transition modify the relationships with family and other components of the pre-adult world. In this transition period, the pre-adulthood is fully mature and a new era is about to begin. This is the best time to start new kinds of development that are essential in the next era.

The second era, early adulthood is the era full of greatest energy and wealth (Levinson, 1986). However, it is also the era that will experience the greatest conflicts and stress. This era is the time to form and chase youthful ambitions, to establish a role in society, to raise a family. At the end of era, individuals are having more authority in the adult world. Moreover, satisfaction in terms of love, family, occupational advancement, and realization of major life goals can be achieved in this era. In term of stresses, it is when juggling parenthood and occupation burdens, heavy financial responsibilities when earning power is relatively low. The crucial decision on marriage, family, work, and life-style also causes this era to become stressful. The rewards and stress of this era are often equal or the cost even exceed the rewards. According to Levinson, age between 33 to 40 years old form the “culminating phase” which is the phase of enjoying fruitful achievement of the early adult era.

From age 40 to 45 years old is the midlife transition, which is the process of termination of early adulthood and the beginning of middle adulthood (Levinson, 1986). In the early of 40s, individuals are in the full maturity of early adulthood and begin to learn about the dangers and promise of middle adulthood. According to Levinson et al. (1978), the settling down period begins around 30 years old and continue until around 40 to 45 years old. Levinson and his colleagues describes the settling down period as the time for an adult to recognise their early stage dreams. Levinson further stated that only in the “culminating phase” and the transition period, individuals will reach the conclusion of one era and be ready to move into the next. The process and degree of change in the midlife transition may vary enormously in individuals (Levinson, 1986). In this transition period, begin a new step in individuation so that individuals can become more sympathetic, more reflective, less intimidated by inner conflicts and external demands, and genuinely love oneself and others.

Levinson et al. (1978) further stated that individuation is happening in every life transition and is especially important in midlife transition. Individuation involves four major tasks (young/ old; destruction/ creation; masculine/ feminine; and attachment/ separateness) which is the reintegration of fundamental polarity of the characteristics of an adult. In midlife transition, the adult have to integrate the polarities that they encounter in life. In working perspective, this is the time for an adult to entail the meaning of success or failure and the role in occupation.

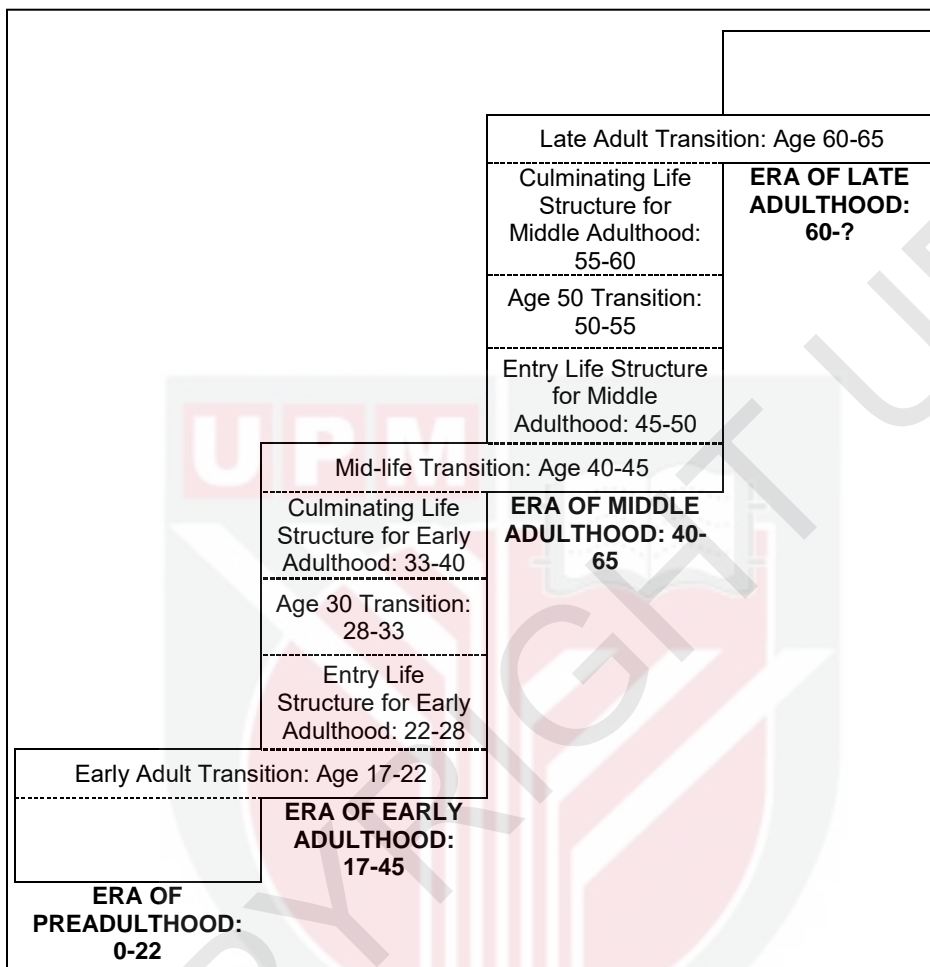
The middle adulthood is the third era starting from about age 40 to 65 years old (Levinson, 1986). The biological capacities at this era are lower than early adulthood. However, individuals in this era are still able to have an energetic,

satisfying and socially valuable life. Most of the individuals at the ages of 40s and 50s already become "senior members" in own social world. Responsibility of the individuals in this era will not only for oneself but also for the others. Perhaps in further also for the development of the young adults who will soon become the leading generation.

The next transition is late adult transition, which is from age 60 to 65 years old (Levinson, 1978). The reduction in physical capabilities in this period will lead to the lessening in support for financial and psychological of family (Levinson, 1978). Finding a new role and harmony in the society and self-development are the important tasks in this transition period. After late adult transition, individuals are entering late adulthood which is the last era starts from ages 60 and above. Individuals in this ending era are to give new meaning to life, face the ending of life cycle and death. The final developmental task of an individual is to accept death and find comforts in the development of life.

After understanding the life cycle proposed by Levinson (1986), another critical element in Levinson's life stage developmental model is life structure which underline the outline of an individual's life at a specific time. The relationships between individual and others as well as the development of these relationships are the primary focus in life structure. The building tasks in life structure include the consideration of aims, expectations, self-investments such as self-conception and relationships of family, professional life and social life. According to Levinson (1986), the building of life structure is within an organized order and persistent pattern in life cycle. The building of life structure can be stressful and it can be opposed to our hope. It usually takes five to seven years and the most up to 10 years in building a life structure. The question on stability and modification takes place after the formation of basic life structure. The preferences in building life structure is different in every transitions and eras.

In the transition period, the existing life structure may be terminated and begin the possibility of a new life structure (Levinson, 1986). Given that no life structure is permanent, hence, the primary task in each transition is to re-evaluate the existing life structure and explore the possibility to form new life structure base on the crucial choices in the subsequent period. Moreover, Levinson also mentioned that individual could have two or three central components in life such as marriage, family and work. According Levinson (1986), the life structure links the self and world together.



**Figure 1.2: Developmental Periods in the Era of Early and Middle Adulthood**

(Adapted from Levinson, 1986, p. 8)

### 1.5 Conceptual Framework

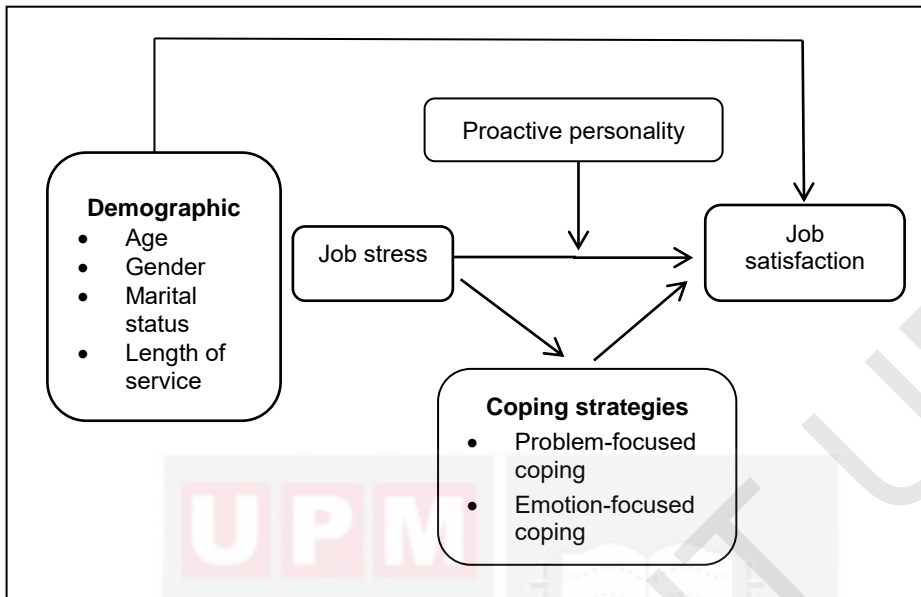
Figure 1.3 presents an overview of the conceptual framework for the study. It outlines the relationships between the independent variables (job stress), the moderating variable (proactive personality), the mediating variable (coping strategies), and the dependent variable (job satisfaction) as well as the antecedent variables (age, gender, marital status and length of service).



The life stage developmental model showed that one of the critical life courses is work. Individuals are facing different challenges and work stress in specific era in life cycle. Furthermore, AET explained that job satisfaction is a kind of job attitude in workplace which will be affected by employee's affective experience in work. AET consistent with life stage developmental model to show that job stress and job satisfaction are two important factors in working life of adulthood. In line with the explanation on the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction, job stress was selected as the predictor in present study.

Life stage developmental model mentioned that each era in life cycle has its own biopsychosocial character. In line with the life stage developmental model, Zacher and Kooij (2017) stated that the cognitive-motivational process in lifespan lead to the changes in proactive personality. Hence, another element in AET was also adopted into this conceptual framework which was personal disposition. Proactive personality is advocated by researchers to be beneficial in workplace, but its role in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction remain unclear. The present study only focused on one type of personal disposition which was using proactive personality as the moderator in the relationship of job stress and job satisfaction.

Even though AET had discussed the moderating effect of personality in the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction, but the effect of another important element which was coping strategies that can influence the effect of job stress on job satisfaction still remains unclear under the AET framework. Hence, the problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping in transactional model of stress was integrated in the conceptual framework as the mediators in the relationship of job stress and job satisfaction. In order to study the job satisfaction from the perspective of developmental psychology, the changes of job satisfaction in different age groups were studied in this conceptual framework. In order to examine the age differences and with the guiding of Levinson' life stage developmental model, the age of 25 to 60 years old who are in early adulthood, midlife transition and middle adulthood were included in this study. The conceptual framework was based on a combination of Cropanzano's AET, Folkman et al.'s transactional model of stress and Levinson's life stage developmental model.



**Figure 1.3: Conceptual Framework of the Study on Age Differences, Proactive Personality, Coping Strategies, Job Stress and Job Satisfaction among Employees in Outsourcing Companies in Malaysia**

## 1.6 Objectives of the Study

### 1.6.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study was to examine the relationships between age differences, proactive personality, coping strategies, job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia.

### 1.6.2 Specific Objectives

1. To describe background characteristics (gender, marital status and length of service), age differences, proactive personality, coping strategies, job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia.
2. To describe the relationships between demographic variables (gender, marital status and length of service), age differences, proactive personality, coping strategies, job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia.

3. To determine the significant predictors of job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia.
4. To determine the moderation effect of proactive personality on the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia.
5. To determine the mediation effect of coping strategies on the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia.

### **1.7 Hypotheses**

In line with the objectives of the study and to answer the research questions, the following hypotheses were developed to determine the relationships between demographic variables, age differences, proactive personality, coping strategies, job stress and job satisfaction:

- H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant correlation between age (early age group= 1, age transition group= 0, and middle age group= 1) and job satisfaction.
- H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no significant correlation between gender (male=1 and female=0) and job satisfaction.
- H<sub>0</sub>3: There is no significant correlation between marital status (married=1 and single= 0) and job satisfaction.
- H<sub>0</sub>4: There is no significant correlation between length of services (one to five years length of service=0 as well as six years and above length of service=1) and job satisfaction.
- H<sub>0</sub>5: There is no significant correlation between job stress and job satisfaction.
- H<sub>0</sub>6: There is no significant correlation between proactive personality and job satisfaction.
- H<sub>0</sub>7: There is no significant correlation between problem-focused coping and job satisfaction.



H<sub>0</sub>8: There is no significant correlation between emotion-focused coping and job satisfaction.

H<sub>0</sub>9: All selected independent variables entered in the regression model do not significantly predict job satisfaction.

H<sub>0</sub>10: The relationship between job stress and job satisfaction is not moderated by proactive personality.

H<sub>0</sub>11: The relationship between job stress and job satisfaction is not mediated by problem-focused coping.

H<sub>0</sub>12: The relationship between job stress and job satisfaction is not mediated by emotion-focused coping.

### **1.8 Significance of the Study**

The findings of current study rebounded to the benefits of society considering that job satisfaction plays an important role in affecting employees' various aspects in lifespan. The importance of job satisfaction justifies the need to study the influences of job stress, proactive personality, coping strategies, and age differences on job satisfaction. From the review on past studies, many researchers focused the examination of job satisfaction in public organizations and this caused a gap in examining this issue in private organizations. At the meanwhile, outsourcing industry is growing fast worldwide. Employees in outsourcing industry are experiencing job stress. Current study fills in the gap by studying the job stress, proactive personality, coping strategies, and age differences on job satisfaction of employees in selected outsourcing companies in Malaysia.

Factors that are associated with high or low job satisfaction were showed in current results so that solutions can be suggested to increase the job satisfaction level. Job stress and job satisfaction are factors that are less controllable by employees. Hence, proactive personality, coping strategies were examined in this study to see what are the actions that can be taken individually to increase job satisfaction. The study can be beneficial to the employers to better understand their employees' personality and coping strategies that are often being used to deal with job stress. As a result, employers can reassess the advantages of proactive personality of employees in workplace. Furthermore, employers can organize a workshop on effective job stress coping strategies that appropriate for their employees. Moreover, this study also beneficial to the employees in increasing job satisfaction when they employ the effective coping strategies to deal with job stress. Finding of age

differences in job satisfaction in this study also can serve as future reference for researchers to examine the job satisfaction factors from the developmental psychology perspective.

## **1.9 Definition of Terminology**

### **1.9.1 Job Satisfaction**

#### **Conceptual Definition:**

Job satisfaction is defined as “a positive or negative evaluative judgment of one’s job or job situation” (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

#### **Operational Definition:**

Job satisfaction is operationally defined as the total score on all the 36 items Spector’s (1994) in Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS). The minimum score was 36 which indicated low job satisfaction while maximum score was 216 which indicated high job satisfaction (Spector, 1994).

### **1.9.2 Job Stress:**

#### **Conceptual Definition:**

Job stress is defined as “the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker” (National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, 1999).

#### **Operational Definition:**

Job stress is operationally defined as the effort-reward ratio in the Siegrist, Li and Montano’s (2014) short version of the effort–reward imbalance (ERI). According to Siegrist et al. (2004), a value less than 1.0 indicated a non-stress condition, whereas values beyond 1.0 indicated an effort reward imbalance or stressful condition.

### 1.9.3 Proactive Personality

#### **Conceptual Definition:**

Proactive personality is defined as “able to identify opportunities, and take initiative to change the environment as well as unconstrained by situational factors” (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

#### **Operational Definition:**

The proactive personality is operationally defined as the average of sum score of 10 items in Seibert et al.'s (1999) Proactive Personality Scale (PPS). Higher scores represented higher levels of proactive personality in participants.

### 1.9.4 Coping Strategies

#### **Conceptual Definition:**

Coping strategies are defined as “cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus, 1993). Generally, there are two major coping strategies which are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is highly action oriented to manage the stressful situation (Berkel, 2009). Emotion-focused coping is to deal with stress in a passive method by restrain emotions from stressful condition and regulate emotions (Erlanson, 2013).

#### **Operational Definition:**

The coping strategies are operationally defined as the total score of 6 items in problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping subscales respectively in Carver's (1997) Brief COPE. The higher score represented participants used the particular coping strategies more frequently.

### **1.9.5 Outsourcing Industry:**

#### **Conceptual Definition:**

Outsourcing industry is defined as “having works that has formally done inside the organization by external party” Beaumont & Sohal (2004).

#### **Operational Definition:**

Outsourcing industry is operationally referring to the outsourcing companies that have formally registered MSC Malaysia status and provide at least two out of three types business service (Business Processing Outsourcing, Information Technology Outsourcing, and Knowledge Processing Outsourcing).

### **1.9.6 Age**

#### **Conceptual Definition:**

Age is defined as measure of time that constitute the temporal marker of changing for an individual (Berube, 2010). . According Levinson’s (1986) life stage developmental model, early adulthood is from 17 to 45 years old. Age around 30 to 45 years old is the period of settling down which include the “culminating phase” and the transition period. The middle adulthood is from 40 to 65 years old.

#### **Operational Definition:**

Age is operationally defined as the question of “what is your age?” in the questionnaire. Early adulthood is from 25 to 35 years old. Age transition adulthood is from 35 to 45 years old. Middle adulthood is from 45 to 60 years old.

### **1.10 Chapter Summary**

The job satisfaction of employees is unstable across lifespan and are affected by multiple factors. Job stress as a globally concerned issue has been selected as the predictor of job satisfaction in current study. Out of many stable

industries in Malaysia, outsourcing industry is a young and rapid growing industry that contribute to Malaysia's economy. By focusing on the development of adult, personal disposition and stress coping strategies play important roles in the relationship of job stress and job satisfaction. Furthermore, job satisfaction changes with the development of adulthood in each era of life cycle, examination of age differences are critical. Together with the examination of demographic variables of employees, the study's general objective is to examine the relationships between age differences, proactive personality, coping strategies, job stress and job satisfaction among employees in outsourcing companies in Malaysia. Subsequently, literature review on past researches in relation to the main variables in the study are discussed in the next chapter.



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Lai Pei Wen was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She completed her primary and secondary education in her hometown with above-average results. She earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology from HELP University, Malaysia in 2013. She had 9 months working experience as research executive in ANOVA Marketing and Research Consultant. She worked with many well-known corporations in different industries such as RHB, AEON, GfK, Ipsos and others. She started her Master of Science degree in Developmental Psychology in 2013 and is currently completing her thesis titled "Age Differences, Proactive Personality, Coping Strategies, Job Stress and Job Satisfaction among Employees in Outsourcing Companies in Malaysia" in the Faculty of Human Ecology at University Putra Malaysia.







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