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Influence of Working Environment, Workload and Job Autonomy towards Job Stress: A Case of Casual Dining Restaurant Employees in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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Abstract

Work related stress is common in many industries and this situation troubling the organization due to lower productivity or poor performance. Stress at workplace is quite intense in restaurant industry because this industry required high commitments from employee. Employees are expected to work in shifts, long working hours, to have little or no weekend time, do repetitive work, to face with difficult customers, also to work within inefficient management. Even though study on job stress has widely done, but little studies were found on casual dining restaurant industry. Hence, the aim of this study is to determine the influence of workload towards job stress on employees in casual dining restaurant. The study was conducted at casual dining restaurants within Klang Valley area. The primary data of this study was derived from quantitative method and strictly to Malaysian employees only. The sample was all casual dining restaurant employees amounting to 620 people. Data were collected by using self-administered questionnaire. Then, the data were analyzed Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The results showed that workload have positive and significant influence on employee's job stress at casual dining restaurant. Results also found that most of the respondents felt stress between 1-2 times in a week with 52.7% which equals to 327 of respondents. Findings from this study could suggest the casual dining operators and management to highlight factor that could contribute to job stress and strategize ways to minimize stress and ultimately retain their employees in the restaurant.

Keywords: Job Stress, Workload, Casual Dining, Restaurant, Klang Valley

Introduction

Food service industry is one of the people-oriented businesses in this competitive modern era. Competition between companies are intense, thus, the employees are expected to represent a critical part of service. In short, the better the employee performance, the greater the guest satisfaction and loyalty will be. There are a few types of restaurant in the market. These restaurants represent different target market and market sector of the food service industry. In fact, 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 also an in-thing trend at the moment. 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 et al., 2014). It is slightly a bit expensive than fast food restaurant. Casual dining offer table service to the customers, using non-disposable dishes and flatware.

In Malaysia, casual dining restaurants are fall under the full-service category together with the fine dining restaurants. The increasing in number of casual dining restaurants in Malaysia is due to the fact that hectic lifestyles in urban cities and wage expands make consumers keep on feasting out instead of cooking and dining at home either on weekdays or even weekend (Euromonitor International, 2016). Casual dining can be any number of themes, be it Italian to Thai. Examples of casual dining restaurant in Malaysia are Secret Recipe, Kenny Rogers Roaster, Nando's and Absolute Thai Restaurant.

Work in the casual dining restaurants are very demanding. Employees face high levels of workload and job stress. The nature of working in the casual dining restaurant industry requires the employee to work in shift, long working hours, do repetitive tasks, and to face with demanding customers. This is because front of the house employees in a restaurant have frequent interaction with customers compared to other businesses, and thus it makes them more susceptible to job stress (Karatepe, 2015). These are some of the factors that make these employees are more prone to job stress, hence, the turnover. To add, many studies have shown that restaurant industry is high in turnover and labour shortage due to job stress. A report produced by Aon Hewitt in 2015 stated that among the Southeast Asia countries, Malaysia was placed the top second involuntary turnover rate and top third voluntary turnover rate respectively at 6% and 9.5% for the year of 2014 (HR in Asia, 2015).

Concern with the pace of work that requires the employees to work under pressure, which actually work separates them from life. Employees who perceived high stress levels arose from aspects such as frequent customers contact and work pressure will likely have thought of resigning their current job because they felt stress and pressure. Due to this situation, it is afraid that it will give a huge impact to the restaurant industry. Hence, the objective of this study is to determine the influence of workload towards job stress among casual dining restaurant employees.

Literature Review

Job Stress

Describing stress requires progresses over a series of stages on how they evolved than actually occurred. Every researcher has different ways in describing stress, depending on their agendas and approaches in explaining stress. Basically, stress is interpreted as an employee's concern of their job-associated toughness, pressure, burden, and emotional exhaustion (Wickramasinghe, 2016). It is actually one's perception towards environment and condition in their surroundings, be it positive or negative. Stress also happen when a person being under excessive mental and emotional pressure which he/she is not capable to deal with. When they perceived negativity in their surroundings, they tend to develop pressure, hence, the stress. This happened when they unable to control the threats developed by their mental, physical and emotional. Job stress can be sourced from workload, job condition, role conflict and ambiguity, career growth and conflicting demands (Hellriegel et al., 2004). Stress can give negative effects to an individual's life in terms of productivity, creativity, economic as well as the healthcare. This statement was supported by (Tehrani et al., 2013) stated that higher level of job stress can lead to lower mental and (Mohamadi, Nourollahi, & Latifi, 2013) added that is also could lead to physical health, thus, it will make the workers abandons their own healthcare. Even though some level of stress is required to create interest, creativity and productivity, but, too much of stress could results in opposite outcome which it is actually not the level of stress supposed to be.

Working environment

The working environment consists of two bigger aspects which are work and context. Work scope means the attributes of the task such as the sequence of the task is performed and accomplished, which includes training, control on own job-related activities, sense of achievement, variety in tasks and the intrinsic value for a task. Working environment or working condition included working hours, amenities, co-workers and job stability. In research context, working environment is defined as the condition of surroundings at the workplace of the job which includes in and out, at the desk or even cubicle (Rezaul, 2014). Addition to that, it also refers to the positive or negative conditions of the employees' mental state.

Factors within the organization such as salary, working hours, autonomy, organization structure, and communication between managerial and non-managerial levels also plays an important role in determining the job performance (Lane, Esser, Holte, & Anne, 2010). Inflexible working hours and unpredictable working schedules are not applied in the restaurant industry. Some industries may have stable working hours and coming to work at the same time everyday. Bokotic and Babic (2013) found that employees who work under tough working environments are discontented due to this factor. In order to overcome stress in employees, the management should improve the working environment. Employees who are satisfied with the working environment will increase their performance significantly, hence, job stress can be reduced.

Workload

Workload refers to the strength or intensity of job tasks. It is also mean a set of assignments that must be completed by an individual or unit within the time given. One form of job stress is workload, which means too many works to do within limited time given (Hon, 2013; Hon et al., 2013). Excessive

workload is one of the sources of stress at work (Lo & Lamm, 2005) and also emotional exhaustion (Karatepe, 2013). For example, the restaurant industry is a frequent-contact, people-oriented industry that involves many interactions between frontline employees and customers. In the services sector, hospitality jobs (lodging and food service) are among the toughest and too often considered by unfavourable conditions that lead to contrary effects on employees' physical and psychosocial wellbeing (Hsieh et al., 2013, 2015; Karatepe & Tizabi, 2011). Also, in determining the service quality of a restaurant, service performed by the employee always regarded as the most important factor. The quantity of tasks can be increased when the more addition of the workload and therefore the more the addition of the level of employee job stress. Also, a report stated by Kwoh in 2012 showed that 30% of the employees globally admit that they are daunted by intense pressure at work. After all, job performance can be improved with the presence of tolerable motivation. Also, moderate levels of stress and workload will let the individual's focus stay without being bothered.

Job autonomy

Job autonomy is the extent to which an employee has his/her own liberty and freedom in determining the pace, order approaches in completing a task (Volmer, Spurk and Niessen, 2012). Autonomy makes employees feel free and has the ability to control their tasks (Deci et al., 1989). Ng and Feldman (2014), found that not all employees who perceived high autonomy produced more positive job productivity, better lifestyle, and show positive work performance. Thus, job autonomy may be considered as one of the important stress resources that promotes job stress. Choo and Aizzat (2016) showed, in order to satisfy customers' demands, employees must be able to decide promptly and efficiently. In previous study done by Karatepe and Olugbade (2009), stated hospitality frontline employees who have the control will be able to handle stressful situations and overcome the problems effectively. Based on mechanisms of autonomy by Langfred and Moye (2004), high pressure on job performance will discourage employees for they don't have the autonomy and have to deliver the service based on superior order. Hence, it will affect their attitudes, performance and well-being. Also, it will reduce the desired work motivation and feature.

Methodology

Quantitative method was used and a self-administered questionnaire was designed for this study. Several sections were considered for the questionnaire based on the objectives of the study. The questionnaire is adapted and modified based on scenario in casual dining restaurant industry in Malaysia. The questionnaire is available in both Malay and English languages. Convenience sampling was used to gather the data. Respondents are restricted to Malaysia citizen employees, from managerial and non-managerial levels, and work in casual dining outlets within Klang Valley area. The questionnaires were composed in two sections. In the first section, the instruments were related to its respective variables construct. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement for each item on a 5-points Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. In the second section, respondents were asked on constructive questions of demographic profile and open-ended questions.

In this study, a total of 620 questionnaires were usable and analyzed. The data was recorded and descriptive and regression analysis were analyzed using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) version 22. Result and discussion are available in next section.

Results and Findings

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Overall, the percentage of gender between male and female where female made up of 52.3%, while male comprised of 47.7% from the total respondents. A great number of them were singles (88.5%) and the rest of the percentage were married (11.5%). Majority of respondents were age between 21 to 30 years old (60.5%) followed by those aged below 20 years old (32.1%). Of the 620 respondents, only 0.7% were aged between 41 to 60 years old. It clearly shows that this study yielded a larger number of generation Y.

In the demographic section as well, the employees were asked on how many hours they work in a day. For that, a slightly more than half of the employees which accounted for 55.6% had worked for 8 hours, 21.3% worked for 10 hours, followed by 14.2% of the employees had worked for more than 10 hours and lastly only a small number of the employees which is 8.9% had worked for 6 hours in a day. Also, results has found that 52.7% which equals to 327 respondents felt stress 1-2 times in a week, followed by 18.2% which equals to 113 respondents felt stress 3-4 times in a week and only 2.7% which accounted for 17 respondents only felt stress sometimes in a week.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	296	47.7
	Female	324	52.3
Age	Below 20 years old	199	32.1
	21 to 30 years old	375	60.5
	31 to 40 years old	42	6.8
	41 to 50 years old	3	0.5
	51 to 60 years old	1	0.2
Marital status	Single	549	88.5
	Married	71	11.5
Hours of working in the outlet per day	6 hours	55	8.9
	8 hours	345	55.6
	10 hours	132	21.3
	More than 10 hours	88	14.2
Frequency felt stress	1 to 2 times a week	327	52.7
	3 to 4 times a week	113	18.2
	Everyday	56	9.0
	Not at all	107	17.3
	Others	17	2.7

Multiple linear regression

Table 2 shows the summary of regression analysis of the study. The analysis of multiple regression technique with significant level of 0.05 was used to determine the main factor that influence employee's job stress. According to the result of multiple linear regression analysis, the R value of this regression model was 0.307. It means there was positive and moderate relationship of employee's job stress. On top of that, the R² value was 0.94. Meaning that, 94% of variance being explained from the three (3) variables that are working environment, workload and job autonomy. These variables might influence the employee's job stress. The high proportion of variance shows that high probability of this factor as a predictor towards the employee's job stress. The highest variance value may be the most probable influencing factor on the employee's job stress.

Table 2: Summary of regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.307 ^a	0.94	0.90	0.57358

R square = 0.94;

meaning that only 94% of variance in job stress was explained by working environment, workload and job autonomy

- Predictors: (Constant), Working environment, workload, job autonomy
- Dependent variable: Employee's job stress

In Table 3 shows the result of multiple linear regression analysis. From the result, it could be summarized that the only factor that affecting the employee's job stress in casual dining restaurants in Klang Valley area was the workload. It can be concluded that, as the workload higher, the higher the employee's job stress. There were three independent variables in explaining the employee's job stress. Additionally, the effect of workload was significant because of the p value was 0.000 which was less than significant level, 0.05. It indicated that workload was significant in predicting the employee's job stress. However, other variables which are working environment and job autonomy were not significant and unrelated to the dependent variable (employee's job stress).

Employee's job stress is equal to $1.809 + 0.041$ (Working Environment) $+ 0.238$ (Workload) $+ 0.39$ (Job Autonomy). The employee's job stress increases by 0.041 units of working environment, 0.238 units of workload and 0.039 of job autonomy. Moreover, the Standard Coefficients are used to determine the level of factors which influence employee's job stress. Results show the workload ($\beta = 0.256$, $p = 0.000$) influencing the employee's job stress. However, working environment and job autonomy are not predicting to influence the employee's job stress since the p value was more that significant level, 0.05. From the results, it can be concluded that workload is the key factor of employee's job stress among casual dining restaurant employees in Klang Valley. Therefore, it could be concluded that when workload is increasing, the employee's job stress will increase too.

Table 3: Result of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.809	.146		12.402	.000
Working Environment	.041	.036	.051	1.135	.257
Workload	.238	.040	.256	5.960	.000
Job Autonomy	.039	.031	.055	1.266	.206

a. Dependent Variable: Job Stress

Predictors: Working environment (t = 1.135, p = 0.257)

Workload (t = 5.960, p = 0.000)

Job autonomy (t = 1.266, p = 0.206)

Discussion

Job stress is mainly influenced by unsatisfied with the job, lack of commitment to the work, and poorly managed organization. Particularly, by monitoring workload and supervisor-subordinate relationships may reduce stress and increase job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Based on the analysis result, workload would cause the employee's job stress in the casual dining restaurants in Klang Valley.

In this study, a significant relationship had found through a variable – workload. The relationship also was significantly related, thus be the most influential factor of employee job stress. Workload shows the most significant level as the p value was less than 0.05. While this is seen as a problem, it does possibly attract attention to a key question. It is easy to note that workload is positively related to the formation of an employee job stress, but does not indicate what are the causes of that stress. The result of this part of study was found similar to the result from the previous study done by Karatepe (2013). He stated that the job stressor which is workload was statistically significant correlation to employee's job stress. Besides that, another same result that obtained from a previous study that done by Hsieh et al., (2013), stated there was a positive correlation between workload and job stress in foodservice company.

Various items do regression well, but, this is one of the indicatives of workload, not a causation. This can be related to employees who have high-autonomy at their jobs are more positive to job attitudes, showcase better lifestyle, and exposed positive work outcomes. Thus, job autonomy may be considered as one of the important stress resources that promotes job stress (Ng and Feldman, 2014). The findings were similar to the previous study of Barnabas et al., (2013) shown that over workload as a predictor of emotional exhaustions and it caused high job stress. Also, Karatepe (2013) stated that excessive workload is one of the sources of stress at work and emotional depletion of employees. Therefore, it will affect the employee's job stress in the casual dining restaurant. Again, workload supports the most potential determinant of the employee's job stress in the casual dining restaurant.

In order to control the employee's job stress, managers and restaurant operators should highlight the variable that most influences job stress. With the retention of committed employees, the organization could rely on them to achieve the company's goals and targets and stay competitive within the industry. Interactions between individuals in the organization could improve their sense of belonging. The more staff that identify themselves with the company's goals, the more benefits gained by the organization as a result of the committed employees' positive working attitude.

Limitations and Recommendations

The researcher recognizes some limitations throughout this study. Therefore, this study suggests more improvements and recommendations for future explorations. First, the sample was limited to Klang Valley area in Malaysia only. Therefore, it does not represent the whole picture of casual dining employee in Malaysia. It is recommended to expand the study in Peninsular Malaysia in order to get the real picture of the study.

Also, generalization is a limitation. This is because of the lack of probability sampling used. This study employed convenience sampling, which is a type of no-probability sampling. A research that used convenience sampling cannot be used to generalize the population. Thus, in future, it is recommended to apply probability sampling for generalization in the context of Malaysian food and beverage services can be made.

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