

## PERCEIVED LEVEL OF STRESS AMONG CASUAL DINING RESTAURANT EMPLOYEES IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA

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**Abstract:** *Work-related stress is considered as the global phenomenon in many industries. Even though stress can be viewed as positive by some employees, but the majority believed work-related stress contributes more to the negative cause. Stress at the workplace also happens in the restaurant industry and stress can affect an employee's job performance and productivity. Stress in the restaurant industry happened due to excessive working hours, shift hours, pressure or conflict with job demand and inefficient management. Albeit research on stress has been an extremely active field for many years, job-related stress in the restaurant industry was claimed had not been widely investigated. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine the employees' perceived stress levels in the restaurant industry, particularly in the Klang Valley area. The primary data of this study was derived from a quantitative method and strictly to Malaysian employees only. A total of 620 self-completed questionnaires were usable for data analysis. 700 questionnaires were distributed to employees who were currently working in casual dining restaurants in the Klang Valley area. Descriptive analysis was done by using the SPSS version 22. Analysis of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), revealed that 76.6% which accounted for 475 of respondents perceived moderate to high-stress level. This indicated employees who perceived high-stress score tend to have a higher stress level at their workplace. Additionally, results also found that most of the respondents felt stress between 1-2 times in a week with 52.7% equals to 327 of respondents. Findings obtained in this study could suggest the casual dining operators and management 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, Perceived Stress Scale, Restaurant, Casual Dining, Klang Valley*

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## **Introduction**

The food service industry is generally divided into two major sub-sectors which are the commercial food services and non-commercial food services. In Malaysia, casual dining restaurants are fall under the full-service category together with the fine dining restaurants and it is part of the commercial food services. As for 2016, Secret Recipe Cakes & Café led full-service restaurants with a 7% value share in the year (Euromonitor International, 2017). Not only that, the inclination of restaurants also has been one of the factors in the development of food service industry. Hence, the expand of restaurants industries provide more job vacancy for people to fill in. At the same time, the foodservice industry is a people-oriented business in this competitive modern era. So, competitions between companies are strong, thus, the employees are expected to represent a critical part of service. For the record, many studies have shown that restaurant industry is high in turnover and labour shortage due to job stress. Every time the employees leave the establishment or organization, it gives a sub-sequential effect for the organization to endure. Malaysia recorded the second highest involuntary turnover rate at 6.0% and third highest voluntary turnover rate at 9.5% in 2014 among South East Asia countries (HR in Asia, 2015). Therefore, there are reports on stress at workplace and it is snowballing globally. The issue concerning job stress has become a worldwide phenomenon and it was not a new topic. In fact, there were thousands of articles regarding job stress.

The psychological conditions, specifically job stress, may possibly transfer the influences of work context to employee creativity and performance (Hon et al., 2013b; Hon and Chan, 2013a). It is common scenery in the restaurant industry where the front-line employee often has to deal with demanding and difficult customers. As for the job scope itself, the employees of the restaurant industry are often associated with long working hours, shift works, repetitive tasks, pressure and conflict, and inefficient management. In restaurant industry too, the frontline employee has to treat customers promptly, offer fast, efficient and professional service to customers. In addition, the restaurant frontline employees have frequent interaction with customers compared to other industries, and thus it makes them more susceptible to stress (Karatepe, 2015). Therefore, it is no surprise that frontline employee job stress can result from frequent customer contact (Kim, Shin & Swanger, 2009).

The employee that perceived psychological hazards such as higher expectations as regards performance, as well as increased competition is living in the more stressful environment ever. With the pace of work that requires them to work under greater pressure, they are actually facing significant changes that separate work from life. Eventually, the negative interaction between work conditions and human factors will lead to emotional disturbance and behavioural problems such as decrease motivation, decrease job satisfaction and also job productivity.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Job Stress***

Stress issue has been acknowledged globally and it can happen in a wide range of work circumstances. In describing stress, the term itself was used in various ways as it a progress through a series of stages in the way they evolved than actually occurred. It has both negative and positive meanings. In this context, it will only be considered as having negative impact and only dealt in workplace perspective. The stress term was first documented by Hans Selye in 1936. He measured stress to be non-specific reaction of human body to any demand on it (Selye, 1978). Overwork can lead to fatal. When an employee unable to cope with the conflict and demand at workplace, he/she then will develop mental and emotional pressure, eventually affect the wellbeing. Basically, job stress defined as “*an employee’s feeling of job-related toughness,*

*pressure, anxiety, frustration, burden, emotional exhaustion, and distress*” (Wickramasinghe, 2016, p. 409). Some of the sources of job stress are workload, job condition, role conflict and ambiguity, career development and conflicting demands (Hellriegel et al., 2004). Previous studies also have demonstrated that employees' emotional work in the service industry is stressful and may lead to burnout despite this work being effective for the required tasks (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Kim, 2008). Research has shown that job stress has a negative effect on quality of service (Varca, 1999), leading to emotional exhaustion and cynicism (O’Neill and Davis, 2011). Sometimes workers change workplace, and even occupations or professions (Wu, 2013). In short, stress plays an important role on how successful or unsuccessful a person is in the productive work activity, and in general in enjoying the live.

### ***Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)***

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein. The instrument originally developed in 1983, remains a widely used choice in helping to understand how different situations affect our feelings and our perceived stress. It is not limited to English-speaking countries, but also has been widely translated into several languages including Japanese (Mimura & Griffiths, 2004), Swedish (Eskin & Parr, 1996), Chinese (Lee & Crockett, 1994), French (Muller & Spitz, 2003), Spanish (Carrobbles & Remor, 2001), and Portuguese (Siqueira Reis, Ferreira Hino, & Romélio Rodriguez Añez, 2010). It is a self-reported instrument designed to measure to which extent ones able to bear with situations appraised as stressful. The perception of stress may influence physical disease such as feelings of anxiety and depression which then will affects the behavioral patterns (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007). The items consist of general questions and also relatively free of content specific to any subpopulation group. Respondents are rate how often they have felt a certain way during the past month on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often) in the measure. By examining the levels of perceived stress among varying populations by using PSS measures, one can better predict the possible physical and psychological implications of such stress.

### **Methodology of Research**

A self-administered questionnaire was designed for this study. The questionnaire development was based on previous studies. Hence, the questionnaire is adapted, and modified in suitable and relevant design for the casual dining restaurant industry in Malaysia. The questionnaires are available in both Malay and English languages. Setting for this study is casual dining restaurants in Klang Valley area and participants are only restricted to Malaysian employees from managerial to non-managerial levels. Convenience sampling was used as the method of data collection. The main criterion in selecting the respondent is they must be Malaysia, hence the data gathered will only from Malaysian employees.

The questionnaire consists of two sections which are the first section was instruments of variables in 5-points Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The second section was constructive questions of demographic profile and open-ended questions on job stress. A total of 620 respondents from casual dining restaurants were collected and analyzed. Data was recorded and analyzed using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) version 22 for descriptive and regression analysis. Result and discussion are available in next section.

## Findings and Results

### *Demographic Characteristic of Respondents*

Overall, about 52.3% of the respondents were female and 47.7% were male. Malay respondents comprised of 91.1%, followed by Chinese 4%, Indian 2.6% and others 0.2%. On the other note, 88.5% of the respondents were single and almost majority (65%) of the respondents were working on full-time basis. Half of the respondents (52.7%) were felt stress between 1 – 2 times in a week, another 18.2% felt stress between 3 – 4 times in a week, 9% felt stress every day, 17.3% never felt stress at all and 2.7% felt stress sometimes in a week.

### *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)*

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of PSS. The perceived stress was obtained by summing all the scores and the total score shows the level of stress they perceived. Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress. Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress. Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress. The result shows that majority of the employees perceived moderate stress which accounted 85.16% and total number of respondents was 528. A number of 35 respondents perceived higher stress level which accounted for 5.65%. Meaning that, the levels of stress perceived by the employees are moderate to high. This can be considered as extremely alarming as it is equivalent to two third of the sample. In addition, due to the nature of work in the food and beverage industry, especially in restaurant industry, employees are more susceptible to stress. Working in the restaurant industry require the employees to work in shifts, do repetitive work, working in long hours also to face with demanding customers. These are few factors that contributed to the easily felt stress by the employees. As the higher stress they perceived, the more they will likely leave the establishment.

**Table 1: Frequency and percentage of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)**

Scale	Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	0 – 13	57	9.19
Moderate	14 – 26	528	85.16
High	27 – 40	35	5.65

## Discussion

The result from the study indicates that casual dining restaurant employees perceived moderate to high-stress level. Thus saying, when the employee perceived higher stress, it showed an association with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and negative affect, and lower level of positive affect (Ezzati et al. 2014). From the study also, the researcher found that when the employees faced the higher level of stress in their work, they tend to feel tired to work hence, the turnover issue. Until now, casual dining restaurant employees are being pressured with their work, demanding customers, relationship with colleagues, relationship with managers, long working hours, high intensity works, mental and physical exhaustion. When job-related stress is not managed promptly and effectively, employees will lose their passion, enthusiasm, and dedication towards their work. This will eventually cause them to showcase passive and negative attitudes. Not only that, it also will affect the job productivity and lead them to a severe state of job stress (Jou et al. 2013; Peng et al. 2013). In addition to that, although stress is always regarded as something normal faced by any worker, it can also be generated unnecessarily in a workplace. This must and should be handled immediately by the management because stress can happen in a wide range of work circumstances, especially when the workers feel that they

receive little or no support or help at all from their employer or top management, their colleagues, or from third party outsiders who come to the organization.

Knowing the factors that may lead to job stress is always a better option than losing the employee. Though employee turnover is common in the restaurant industry, the high employee turnover involves higher costs that include new selection, recruitment, and training. Even though working in food and beverage service has brought negative insight by the public, the rise of interest in food and beverage among Malaysian resulted in the increase of new restaurant establishments and the trend manage to attract young Malaysian to join the industry. By having a good working condition, better facilities and equipment, highly motivated colleagues and friendly colleagues help the employee to work comfortably and pleasantly.

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