

ENCOUNTERING AND COUNTERING WORK STRESS: A MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF THE OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND COPING MECHANISMS OF FAST FOOD RESTAURANT PERSONNEL IN THE PHILIPPINES

Joselito R. Ereno
Kevin M. Andrade
Shannen I. Miyauchi
Roxy Salinda
Raizelle R. Arevalo
Janilyn Reyes

Colegio de San Juan de Letran Manila, Philippines

Abstract

Food is always viewed as an indispensable household necessity. Based on the 2009 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES), 42.6% of the total expenditure of a typical Filipino household is solely being allocated for food (Limtingco, 2012). As the growing demand for food continues to escalate, fast food providers had proliferated both in the metro and rural provinces to help augment the need. In effect, the demand for human workforce for these companies had also escalated. However, at present, no available literature had yet explicated on the current psychological condition of the working personnel of these companies. Thus, this research is an exploratory attempt meant to delve on the various typologies and severity of stressors currently experienced by the food service personnel in the Philippines. Furthermore, this study statistically accounted for the coping mechanisms used by the fast food service personnel in treating their work related problems.

Keywords: Stress, occupational stress, fast food restaurant, coping strategies, food service industry

Literature Review

Philippine Fast Food Industries

According to Digal (2010), “Fast food” generally refers to the type of restaurants that sell quick and inexpensive take-out foods. In fact, at present, these fast foods are seen to be generally favored by the public and that companies of these nature are expected to experience a value growth of 46.9% on the year 2015 (International Market Bureau, 2012). Furthermore, the trend of urbanization and a general exodus of people living in rural areas to urban localities had propelled the growth of this economy (Euromonitor, 2011). As an effect, the demand for an increased workforce in these companies had also been continually on the rise. According to the National Statistics Office, the total employment in Hotel and Restaurant Industry in the Philippines were 90,101 (55,571 =male, 34,530 = female). Conversely, as the customers continue to demand for fast foods to be truly “fast”, service personnel are thus subjected to a rigorous, service oriented, quality driven and fast-faced service which at times could result to work anxiety. Job stress or occupational stress, if left untreated, could be highly disruptive and might result to employees being unproductive and exceedingly dissatisfied.

Occupational Stress

Though literature mostly points to occupational stress as a common problem in many organizations (Pretrus, 2004; Ongori, 2007; MohdZukr, 2010), the real predicament of most researchers not only stems from accounting stress in various types of industries but also on the applicability and use of the term “stress” depending on the organization. Outten (2009) conceive that the definition of occupational stress is one of the most creatively ambiguous words, with as many interpretations as there are people who use the word. While Chen (2008) assert that there is no universally accepted definition of the term stress, Chamberlin and Green (2010) argue that stress is the by-product of modern life that results from our efforts of trying to balance the demands of the workplace and of family life. For example, several studies (Elwkai, 2003; Dewe, 2003; Caulfield 2004; Cope, 2003) posit that occupational stress is defined as the perception of a discrepancy between environmental demands stressors and individual capacities to fulfill these demands. Though Psychologists cannot agree on one definition for the word stress (Schonfeld, 1990; Thomas, 2012), the widely used definition of stress is psychological and physical reaction to certain life events or situations (Aamodt, 2010), while Kakkos (2011) defines stress as a person’s psychological and physiological response to the perception of demand and challenge.

Nonetheless, the usual causes of occupational stress were already identified in several researches. Shahid, 2006; Torkelson, 2007 for example,

argued that the causes of occupational stress include perceived loss of job and security, lack of safety, complexity of repetitiveness of work and lack of autonomy in the job. Furthermore, occupational stress is caused by poor work performance (Agolla, 2008), work overload (Wickramasinghe, 2010), bullying and harassment (Wallace, 2010), inadequate or poor quality training/management development (Palmer, 2004) and conflicting performance expectation (Buys, et al., 2010). The causes of stress at work were perceived as being predominantly organizational, but the impact of stress on an employee was observed to be more personal and that which extends beyond the expected and salient organizational outcomes (Kinman & Jones, 2005).

Coping Mechanisms

According to Hassim (2010), a direct negative impact of sources of occupational stress on mental health of an individual will elicit coping responses. Coping is defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and the conflicts between them. However, researches that focus on coping strategies to reduce occupational stress were minimal. Folkman and Lazarus (1980) found eight scales of coping behaviors, and described the different coping scales. Problem solving and being confrontative are described as efforts to alter the situation and can therefore be characterized as problem-focused coping. Accepting and escape/avoidance are described as ways of managing a stressful situation through cognitive and emotional efforts without changing the situation itself.

Furthermore, coping responses or strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events (Hassim, 2010). On the other hand, Gbadamosi (2012) defines coping strategies as ways in which individuals choose to respond to stressful situations. Effectiveness of coping strategies may play an important role in reducing stress levels and increasing job performance (Wallace, 2010). Individuals need to possess the necessary coping strategies deriving from either their mental training to sustain positive thinking and/or the organization itself that helps stressed individuals to cope with the effects of stress.

In a study by Folkman and Lazarus (1980), the standard model for research on coping comprises of two main coping dimensions: Problem-focused coping strategies which involve efforts to solve a problem or change a difficult situation in an active way, and Emotion- focused coping strategies which do not change the problem or situation directly but helps develop new meanings to be assigned or serve to regulate the emotions that are aroused.

Though in general, the study of Folkman & Lazarus (1984) indicates that people use both types of strategies to combat most stressful events.

Moreover, one of the most important contributions made by the cognitive theory of stress and coping developed by Lazarus & Folkman is that they have determined that the consequences of stressful events are not a direct result of the stressful circumstances but are determined by the individuals' appraisals of both the circumstances and their options for coping with stress. The above mentioned researchers argued that stress consists of three processes; Primary appraisal is the process of perceiving a threat to oneself, Secondary appraisal is the process of bringing to mind a potential response to the threat, while Coping, as the third process, is the executing of the responses.

Anyhow, Lazarus and Folkman (1980) found that in some situations, problem-focused coping even increases rather than decreases stress. Further researches (Lazarus & Folkman, 1980; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Dewe, Cox, & Ferguson, 1993) also argue that coping strategies should not be grouped into two broad categories, but regarded separately. In this regard, this study would likewise endeavor to test the applicability of the problem-focused coping and emotion-focused model of coping strategies in mitigating occupational stress in the fast food service personnel in the Philippines.

Methodology

The goal of this study is to determine the occupational stressors among Filipino service personnel employed in a leading fast food restaurant in the Philippines. It further identifies the coping strategies used by these service personnel to reduce their occupational stress levels. The research is descriptive-predictive in nature. The research will account for the best coping strategies in reducing the various work stressors.

Participants

The subjects (N= 200, 100 males and 100 females) were food service personnel from a well-known fast food restaurant in Manila, working as full time employees, with an age range of 18 to 25 years old ($M= 21.75$ years, $SD= 1.75$). Respondents were randomly selected and were provided with written informed consent prior to participation.

Instruments

The study made use of two psychological tools in the study; HSE Management Standard Indicator Tool was used to gather data regarding the occupational stressors of the fast food service personnel while COPE Inventory was used to identify their coping strategies.

The HSE Management Standard Indicator Tool, developed by the UK government's health and safety arm, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), is a 35-item questionnaire relating to six primary stressors identified in the Management Standards for Work Related Stress. The Management Standards represent a set of conditions that reflect high levels of health, well-being and organizational performance. These conditions are split into six discrete but related areas, or potential stressors: Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role and Change.

The "Demands" condition includes issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment. "Control" covers how much say the person has in the way they do their work. "Peer Support" includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by colleagues, "Managerial Support" is similar but focused on the support provided by the organization and line management. "Relationships" includes promoting positive working environment to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behavior. "Role" includes whether people understand their role within the organization and whether the organization ensures they do not have conflicting roles. "Change" includes how organizational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organization.

On the other hand, COPE Inventory by Carver et al. (1989) was a 60-item questionnaire developed to assess a broad range of coping responses. COPE inventory has 15 scales, namely, positive reinterpretation and growth, mental disengagement, focus on and venting of emotions, use of instrumental social support, active coping, denial, religious coping, humor, behavioral disengagement, restraint, use of emotional social support, substance use, acceptance, suppression of competing activities and planning. For the detailed psychometric properties, see the work of Carver, C. S. (1997) and Bacanlı, Surucu, and Ilhan (2013).

Data Analysis

For the analysis of data, STATISTICA version 10 software was used. For the descriptive analysis, mean scores and standard deviations were presented. For the inferential statistics, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the impact of the various coping mechanisms to each stressor.

Results and Discussions

Despite the technological advances made to better the operations of restaurants and hotels, fast food service personnel, as the front liners, remain to be the most important agent of quality service to the customers. As such the demand for them to perform better remained crucial. With this expectation also comes an increased job anxiety. In fact, the results of HSE survey indicated that all job stress indicators are above the threshold level

except for control (M=2.84, SD=0.42). Likewise, religious coping was observed to be the most used coping strategy (M=3.19, SD=0.59).

Table 1. Correlation Matrix of Occupational Stress and Coping Mechanism

Stressors	Coping Mechanisms														
	Positive Reinforcement	Mental Disengagement	Verting Emotion	Social Support	Active Coping	Religious Denial	Religious Coping	Humor	Behavioral Disengagement	Restraint	Emotional Social Support	Use	Acceptance	Suppression	Planning
Demands	0.413	0.229	0.498	0.333	0.548	0.325	0.020*	0.812	0.980	0.419	0.119	0.960	0.252	0.730	0.080
Control	0.887	0.909	0.453	0.930	0.854	0.866	0.882	0.379	0.696	0.326	0.592	0.722	0.634	0.589	0.337
Managers' Support	0.227	0.602	0.603	0.899	0.281	0.109	0.019*	0.799	0.094	0.02*	0.02*	0.141	0.256	0.01**	0.158
Peer Support	0.944	0.651	0.594	0.837	0.187	0.00**	0.00**	0.556	0.993	0.079	0.00**	0.052	0.265	0.01**	0.844
Relationships	0.468	0.508	0.089	0.831	0.791	0.00**	0.00**	0.602	0.190	0.906	0.01**	0.081	0.915	0.784	0.470
Role	0.675	0.247	0.149	0.406	0.551	0.00**	0.00**	0.738	0.516	0.378	0.160	0.066	0.597	0.420	0.581
Change	0.184	0.885	0.759	0.942	0.221	0.05*	0.00**	0.890	0.118	0.03*	0.073	0.03*	0.533	0.172	0.01*

Note: * significant at .05 , ** significant at .01

Role: Denial		0.339	0.068				0.328		4.97	0.00					
Role: Rel_Cope		0.240	0.079				0.198		3.00	0.00					
Change (Constant)			2.033	0.388					5.23	0.00	5.47	0.351	0.123		
Change: Planning			-0.303	-0.247			0.079		-3.13	0.00					

Table 2. Regression Summary of the Occupational Stressors as Criterion and Coping Mechanisms as Predictors

Dependent Variable and Predictor	Unstandardised Coefficient		Standardised Coefficient β	t	p	F	R	R ²
	B	SE						
Demand (Constant)	3.316	0.175		18.84	0.00	2.11	0.102	0.010
Demand: Religious Coping	-0.07	0.054	0.102	-1.45	0.14			
	2.37	0.321		7.37	0.00	5.61	0.321	0.103
Man Support (Constant)								
Man Support: Emo_Support	-0.13	0.075	-0.128	-1.79	0.07			
Man Support: Restraint	0.32	0.098	0.255	3.32	0.00			
Man Support: Rel_Cope	0.232	0.074	0.219	3.12	0.00			
Man Support: Suppression	-0.188	0.083	-0.174	-2.25	0.02			
Peer Support (Constant)	2.467	0.333		7.20	0.00	9.96	0.411	0.169
Peer Support: Denial	0.355	0.068	0.350	5.16	0.00			
Peer Support: Rel_Cope	0.248	0.079	0.209	3.14	0.00			
Peer Support: Emo_Support	-0.260	0.081	-0.220	-3.21	0.00			
Rel (Constant)	2.609	0.345		7.56	0.00	11.60	0.388	0.150
Rel: Denial	0.372	0.073	0.342	5.03	0.00			
Rel: Rel_Cope	0.276	0.084	0.217	3.25	0.00			
Rel: Emo_Support	-0.238	0.087	-0.188	-2.73	0.00			
Role (Constant)	1.972	0.301		6.53	0.00	16.33	0.377	0.142
Role: Denial	0.339	0.068	0.328	4.97	0.00			
Role: Rel_Cope	0.240	0.079	0.198	3.00	0.00			
Change (Constant)	2.033	0.388		5.23	0.00	5.47	0.351	0.123
Change: Planning	-0.303	-0.247	0.079	-3.13	0.00			

Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest that Filipino service personnel are more likely to use emotion-based coping mechanisms than those that are problem-based. Rather than solving the problem, they are more inclined to change their affect towards the stressor. As presented in table 2, the results show that Religious Coping and Denial significantly decreases the presence of all stressors. This can be explained by Filipinos' extreme religiosity, with which they use as their source for strength and courage (Licuanan,1994). Filipinos are normally described as being a religious people. Religious coping strategies are readily available for many Filipinos from mostly religious familial backgrounds (Nakoncz, Shik, 2009). Supported by this statement, Filipino service personnel can always tend to resort to their religious coping strategies to lessen their stress at work. They usually find solidarity in their religion that can help them find inner peace or a newer and more meaningful perception of the stress they are experiencing.

On the other hand, contradictory to Tuna's research in 2003, the results of the study also opine that food service personnel would use distancing coping strategies more often such as denial most especially if the cause of stress is the lack of peer support, $\beta=.17$, $t(5.16)=9.96$, $p=.00$, problems in relationships with co-employees, $\beta=.15$, $t(5.03)=11.60$, $p=.00$, and Role Ambiguity $\beta=.16$, $t(-3.13)=5.47$, $p=.00$. Denial is the refusal of a person to believe that he/she is being stressed (Carver, et al. 1989). Through denial, the personnel can get away from stresses that are not serious enough to affect their work performance. When an individual has no control over the stressful event, a distancing response like denial may be the most adaptive approach possible (Bjorck et al., 2001). Carver et al. (1993) supported that denial was consistently related to higher levels of concurrent distress. Filipinos always find a way to forget and ignore the stress that they are currently experiencing.

The results also suggest that Restraint decreases stresses related to Manager Support $\beta=.10$, $t(3.32)=5.61$, $p=.00$. Restraint means waiting until an appropriate opportunity to act presents itself, holding oneself back, and not acting prematurely (Carver, et al. 1989).

Moreover, the results show that Behavioral Disengagement and Humor significantly reduce job stress related to role ambiguity and role and peer support. Although the two coping mechanisms vary greatly because one is positive and the other negative, both decrease role and peer support related stress meaningfully. Behavioral Disengagement can be translated as 'helplessness' of a person to do something about the problem. This leads him to delaying or suspending a goal that is affected by a stressor (Carver, et al. 1989). On the other hand, Filipinos are also known for their capacity to laugh even in the most trying times. They can joke about the challenges they go through in life.

References:

- Aamodt, M. G. (2010). *Industrial/Organizational Psychology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Agolla, H. O. (2008). Occupational stress in organizations and its effects on organizational performance. *Journal of Management Research*, 123-135.
- Bjorck, J. P., Cuthbertson, W., Thurman, J. W., & Lee, Y. (2001). Ethnicity, coping, and distress among Korean Americans, Filipino Americans, and Caucasian Americans. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 421–442
- Buys, N., Matthews, L.R., & Randall, C.(2010). Employees' perceptions of the management of workplace stress. *International Journal of Disability Management* 5(2), 25–31.
- Carver, C.S., Scheier M. F., Weintraub J. K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 267-283.
- Carver, Charles S. (1997). You want to measure coping but your protocol's too long: Consider the brief cope. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*. 92-100.
- Caulfield N. , Chang, D., Dollard M. F, Elshaug C. (2004). A review of occupational stress interventions in Australia. *International Journal of Stress Management*. 149-166.
- Chamberlin M. J. A. , Green, H. J. (2010). Stress and coping strategies among firefighters and recruits. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*. 548–560.
- Cope, C. M. (2003). Occupational stress, strain and coping in a professional accounting profession.
- Dewe, P. (2003). A closer examination of the patterns when coping with work-related stress: Implications for measurement. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. 517–524.
- Digal, L. N., (2010). An analysis of the structure of the Philippine retail food industry. *Philippine Journal of Development*. 14-50.
- Elwkai, M. P. (2003). Factors contributing to occupational stress experienced by individuals employed in the fast food industries. *Work*. 125–140.
- Euromonitor.com*. (2011, August 9). Retrieved September 14, 2012, from www.euromonitor.com/fast-food-in-the-philippines/report:
- International Markets Bureau. (2012). Foodservice Profile: The Philippines. *Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada*. 2-20.
- Gbadamosi, G., & Ross, C. (2012). Perceived stress and performance appraisal discomfort: The effects of core self-evaluations and gender. *Public Personnel Management*, 637-659.
- Hannigan B., Edwards D., Burnard P. (2004). Stress and stress management in clinical psychology: Findings from a systematic review. *Journal of Mental Health*. 235 – 245.

- Health and Safety Executive (2004). HSE Management Standard Indicator Tool.
- Hussin, W. M. (2008). Managing stress at the workplace: The Application of Wan Hussin 3- dimensional stress. *Journal of Management Awareness*. 16-26.
- International Markets Bureau. (2012). Foodservice Profile: The Philippines. *Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada*. 2-20.
- Jaramillo, F., Mulki, J., & Boles, J. S. (2011). Workplace stressors, job attitude, and job behaviors: Is interpersonal conflict the missing link?. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 339–356.
- Kakkos, N., & Trivellas, P. (2011). Investigating the link between motivation, work stress and job performance: Evidence from banking industry. *8th International Conference on Enterprise Systems, Accounting and Logistics (8th ICESAL '11)*. 408-428.
- Kinman, G., & Jones, F. (2005). Lay representations of workplace stress: What do people really mean when they say they are stressed?. *Work & Stress* , 101-120.
- Lazarus and Folkman, (1980). Coping strategies: The problem based and emotion based coping styles. *Journal of Stress Management*.
- Lee, D., & . (2000). Managing employee stress and safety. *MEMIC Partners for Workplace Safety*. 1-24.
- Licuanan, P. (1994). A moral recovery program: Building a people-building a nation.
- Limtingco, E. F. (2012, January 4). *The Freeman*. Retrieved September 5, 2012, from [www.philstar.com: http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=764743&publicationSubCategoryId=108](http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=764743&publicationSubCategoryId=108)
- Chen, M.-J and Cunradi, C. (2008) Job stress, burnout and substance use among urban transit operators: The potential mediating role of coping behaviour. *Work & Stress*. 327-340.
- MohdZukri M. I , Noor Hassim I.(2010). A study of occupational stress and coping strategies among correctional officers in Kedah, Malaysia. *Journal of Community Health*.
- Nakonz, J., & Shik, A. (2009). And all your problems are gone: religious coping strategies among Philippine migrant workers in Hong Kong. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. 25–38.
- Ongori, H. (2007). A review of the literature on employee turnover. *African Journal of Business Management*. 49-54.
- Ongori H., Agolla J. E. (2008). Occupational stress in organizations and its Effects on organizational performance. *Journal of Management Research*. 9-135.

- Outten, H., Schmitt, M. T., Garcia, D. M., & Branscombe, N. R. (2009). Coping Options: missing links between minority group identification and psychological well-being. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 146–170.
- Palmer S., Cooper C., Thomas K. (2004). A model of work stress to underpin the Health and Safety Executive advice for tackling work-related stress and stress risk assessments. *Counseling at Work*.
- Pretrus T., Kleiner B. H., (2004). A three step approach to managing work stress. *Journal of Stress Management*, 144-515.
- Rundle-Gardiner A. C., Carr S. C., (2005) Quitting a workplace that discourages achievement motivation: Do individual differences matter? *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*. 149-156.
- Sara Costa Cabral Mululo, I. G. (2012). A review on predictors of treatment outcome in social anxiety disorder. 92-100.
- Schat, A. C., & Frone, M. R. (2011). Exposure to psychological aggression at work and job performance: The mediating role of job attitudes and personal health. *Work & Stress*. 23-40.
- Schonfeld, I. S., (1990). Coping with job-related stress: The case of teachers. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*. 141-149.
- Semics, LCC (2007). Culture and health among Filipinos and Filipino-Americans in Central Los Angeles. *APHCV / FASGI / PWC / SIPA*. 1-91.
- Shahid, M. N., Latif, K., Sohail, N., & Ashraf, M. A. (2006). Work stress and employee performance in banking sector evidence from District Faisalabad, Pakistan. *Asian Journal of Business and Management Sciences*, 38-47.
- Slattery, J. P., Selvarajan, T. T., & Anderson, J. E. (2008). The influences of new employee development practices upon role stressors. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2268–2293.
- Simpson, J. A. (2007). Psychological foundations of trust. *Association for Psychological Science*. 264-268.
- Thomas A., Matherne M, M., .Buboltz, W C Jr., Doyle A L. (2012). Coping resources moderate stress-strain and stress-satisfaction relationships in educational administrators. *Individual Differences*. 37-48.
- Torkelson, E., Muhonen, T. & Peiró, J. M. (2007). Constructions of work stress and coping in a female- and a male-dominated department. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*. 70-261.
- Torkelson E., Muhonen T. (2004). The role of gender and job level in coping with occupational stress. *Work & Stress*. 267-274.
- Tuna, M. E. (2003). Cross-cultural differences in coping strategies as predictors of university adjustment of Turkish and U.S students. 1-106.

Wallace S. L., Lee J., Lee S. M. (2010). Job stress, coping strategies, and burnout among abuse-specific counsellors. *Journal of Employment Counseling*. 111-122.

Wan Hussin W M A (2008). Managing Stress at the Workplace: The application of Wan Hussin 3-Dimensional Stress Management.

Wickramasinghe, V. (2010). Work-related dimensions and job Stress: The moderating effect of coping strategies. *Stress and Health*. 417–429.