Inter-group relation and stress: a preliminary discussion

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Abstract: *This paper presents a preliminary discussion about the inter-group relationship and its' impact towards the psychological aspect as well as health in general. It also discusses what so-called relationship between inter-group relations and a worker's psychological aspect which focuses on stress. Moreover, in brief, it also recommends and discusses ways on how the workers effectively deal with their stress during working time.*
Key Words: *Inter-group relations; Workers' Stress; Working Stress.*

I.   Introduction

People work hard to improve their economic status. It is considered as a struggle in order to gain monetary rewards. Instead of bringing happiness, working hard daily would bring stress to everybody especially to the working community. Improving economic status allows us to compete among each other and it is undeniable that everyone has loads of things to think about when they are involved in this competition. When the work load becomes too heavy they would find themselves reacting to the stress which will spontaneously switched their fighting mechanism.

However, some workers are not only experiencing stress when working but also in their social life. Problems and troubles will always be part and parcel of the workers experience. On some occasions, the workers may be blessed with fame, praises or happiness and may also face unfavourable situations such as lost of emotion control, ill-fame in working effectively, blamed by peers and lack of commitment.

Besides that, in a working place environment, the inter-group relations which normally consist of a group conflict and a group cooperation have become a major concern that contributes to the emergence of stress. An inter-group relation is considered as the most important factor which brings workers into a stressful working environment. Thus, this article deals with inter-group relations as a factor of the emergence of stress among workers. To be more specific, the objectives of this article are to discuss the relationship between inter-group relation and the emergence of stress particularly among workers during their working period, and to suggest some techniques in handling working stress.

II.   The Concept of Stress

Nowadays, stress among workers has been recognized as a serious problem that everyone worries about. Nevertheless, many people are ignorant about the definition of stress. However, defining the concept of stress is not an easy task. There are many debates in finding which definitions are the most suitable to represent the term stress. In 1960th Lazarus (1966) defined stress as a transactional process in which an individual was constantly acquiring new information and reappraising the situation. However in 1980th Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as the particular relationship between the person and the environment appraised the person as taxing or exceeding his resources and endangering his well-being.

In 1990th Bernard & Krupat (1994), and Hendren (1990) have defined stress as a complex phenomenon involving three components namely external (environmental) circumstances, a cognitive appraisal of these circumstances, and internal psychological responses. Stress as according to them is generally believed to affect health adversely, but the experience of being born reminds us that is not always the case. Stress is also associated with the problems of low income and poverty that is normally bringing people into much more stressed to survive.

On the contrary, in this post-modern world, Daugall & Baum (2003) defined stress as a mind-body connections or pathways linking environments, behaviors, biological changes to health and well-being. Therefore, in this article the term stress refers to mental or physical tension which can affect someone's health in long or short-term. The impacts of stress then include physical, psychological/mental/cognitive, and behavioral aspects.

Based on the definitions discussed above, symptoms of stress as according to Health Services, University of Minnesota Duluth (1994) can be grouped into three main categories namely physical pain (heart pounding, headaches, sweaty palms, indigestion, skin breaks out, shortness of breath, holding breathe, cold hands, sleeplessness, sleep too much, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, tight stomach, tight muscles), emotional

problems (moody, irritability, depressed anxious, lack of sense of humor, abrasive, hostile, nervous), and mental problems (forgetfulness, loss of concentration, poor judgment, disorganized, fuzzy perception, confused, lack of interest, math errors, stop thinking, diminished fantasy life).

Hence, in this article, the term stress is defined as mental, emotional or physical tension which can affect peoples' health. Stress also refers to a mind-body connections or pathways linking environments, behaviors, biological changes to health and well-being. Moreover, impacts of stress include physical, psychological/mental/cognitive, and behavioral aspects.

III.   The Definitions of Inter-Group Relations and Its Dimensions

Normally, high status members often favour their own group and sometimes derogate, but low status group members often display exactly the opposite, that is, a bias in favour of the high status out-group. This means, high status group members not only favour their own group but also derogate a low status out-group. This statement however does not give us the exact picture of what is inter-group relations. Responding from this point, the discussion about the definition of inter-group relations and its' dimensions is needed to make us understand what is the inter-group relations all about.

Consequently, inter-group relation that is the major concern in the post modern world research refers to relations between two or more groups or between their respective members whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group of its members in terms of their group identification. Inter-group relations then consist of many aspects which normally exist at the same time. This phenomenon occurs because of the differences in the role of individual that commonly represents differences in terms of personality and attitude (Dovido, Gartener, Esses & Brewer (2003). Inter-group relation as according to Pratto and Shih (2000) is also concern about the welfare of others and tolerant of other individuals and groups, and group equality and inequality.

Furthermore, Dovido et al (2003) recited that an inter-group relation that often refers to group conflict and group cooperation is a major factor which contributes to stress. In response to this statement it must be concluded that inter-group relations are consisted of group conflict and group harmony or group cooperation.

Conflict which is the main aspect of inter-group relations refers to a problems occurred when there is social domination of subordinate groups through the power, authority, and coercion of dominant groups. The most powerful members of dominant groups create the rules for success and opportunity in society, often denying subordinate groups such success and opportunities. This ensures that the powerful continue to monopolize power, privilege, and authority. On the other hand, the primary cause of social problems is the exploitation and oppression of subordinate groups by dominants.

Generally, incompatibility of goal or a negative interdependence between groups is a necessary factor for the development for inter-group conflict, which is described as associated with stress. A conflict of interest between groups is necessary for negative inter-group attitudes and behaviour to occur. Group conflicts also occur when the groups had incompatible goals as according to Tetlock (1987) conflicts exist when two or more parties perceive that their current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously.

This means, conflict creates stress is a form of interaction in which people (individual or in group) perceived themselves as being continently interdependent for a struggle over some valuable resources (Gurr, 1998). In other words, in conflict, if one of the two or more realizes the goal the other(s) is left out whereas in cooperation if one realizes the goal the other realizes it too. In this context, Jha *et al*. (1985) recited that conflict is conceived as an interpretation process which constitute the total of an inter-group relations. As soon as two groups start fighting, a built-in mechanism of cooperation seems to be activated in order to prevent the conflict from getting blown out of proportion. Similarly, the events of cooperative relationship seem to contain same gains of conflict.

The other main important concept that is group cooperation then often refers as group harmony or group cohesiveness. This concept is an indicator of the inter-group relations and has to be considered as need to be understood. This is because, group member will also have a sense of identity and relatedness associated with the group and its' members, which can be measured by their frequent attendance during group meetings, constructive discussions around common themes. This is as what Corey and Corey (1997) called as group cohesiveness or group cooperation. Yalom (1995) then, defined group harmony or group cooperation as dignity which, everyone can recognize but apparently no one can describe it. Yalom (1995) has also defined group harmony as "sticking together" where group member are bonded to one another, by how group member feel towards each other: feelings of solidarity, and commitment among group members.

Moreover, Corey and Corey (1997) and Langfred (1998) defined group harmony as a sense of togetherness or community within a group and members have incentives for remaining in the group and share a feeling of belongingness and relatedness. As a result, the group members should be satisfied and have the desire to maintain their in-group status. However, genuine harmony typically comes after groups have struggled with conflict, shared pain, and committed themselves to taking significant risks (Corey and Corey, 1997).

Taking into consideration all definitions being discussed, the group harmony/cooperation can be measured behaviourally, cognitively, and affectively. Specifically, group cooperation / harmony can be measured via their attraction and commitment, and their sense of identity and relatedness. The sense of identity and relatedness then can be measured by their ability to identify each group member positively.

Hence, the concept of inter-group relations is considered as the important factor which has always existed in our modern lifestyle. Inter-group relations is then found to consist of group conflict and group cooperation. This factor of course can bring people into stressful life as according to Singh (1991) inter-group relations that consist of group conflict and group cooperation have a lead to a stressful life. In response, this recognized factor and its' impact towards workers health will be discussed briefly in this article.

IV.   How Can Inter-Group Relations Cause Stress?

The impacts of the inter-group relations towards workers' psychological aspect can be traced in either rural areas or in urban areas. Furthermore, studies on the inter-group relations and relevance aspects have increased over the past many years. Consequently, over the past 25 years, Social Identity Theory (SIT) has been one of the most important theoretical framework for study of inter-group relations. This theory was developed in a large part to account for in-group bias and overall, it has been fairly successful in this respect (Brown, 2000).

However, the ability of SIT to account for out-group favouritism, the opposite of in-group bias, remains unclear. This is because the phenomenon of out-group favouritism represents a problem for SIT, in which the out-group favoritism reflects a more positive evaluation of the out-group than the in-group. Brown (2000) then recited that SIT is inconsistent with the notion of groups engaging in inter-group comparison processes to create and maintain positive social identities. Reflecting from this long debate of SIT, Turner (1999) concluded the in-group bias (the tendency to favour the in-group over the out-group in evaluation and behaviour) as the most important concept in SIT which is pervasive but not necessarily universal feature of inter-group relations.

As we have discussed earlier, inter-group relations are considered as one of the major factor that make people live in a stressful situation. This statement is confirmed by Cohen (2004) when he stated that social relationship has its' impact on the people's health status as well as the creation of stress. Moreover, Singh (1991) stated that inter-group relations often create conflict and cooperation. These two conceptions then could bring in-group or people in the relevant group into a psychological problem that is so called stress.

Belak (1999) in his response to this statement recited that one of the most prominent reasons for inter-group conflict in the urban factory or in the rural farm is simply the nature of the group. Other reasons may be work interdependence, goal variances, differences in perceptions, and the increased demand for specialists. Individual members of a group also often play a role in the initiation of group conflict. Members who violate important aspects of the group, and especially outsiders, who offend these ideals in some way, normally receive some type of corrective or defensive response. Relationships between groups often reflect the opinions they hold of each other's characteristics. When groups share some interests and their directions seem parallel, each group may view the other positively; however, if the activities and goals of groups differ, they may view each other in a negative manner. When trying to prevent or correct inter-group conflict, it is important to consider the history of relations between the groups in conflict. History will repeat itself if left to its own devices.

Limited resources and reward structures can also foster inter-group conflict in rural farm and urban factory by making the differences in group goals more apparent. Differences in perceptions among groups regarding time and status, when coupled with different group goals, can also create conflict. Reorganization of the workplace and integration of services and facilities can be stressful to some and create negative conflict. Some individuals within the group have inherent traits or social histories that impact inter-group conflict, but problems within inter-group relations are not usually caused by the deviate behaviour of few individuals.

At the same time, group cooperation is also recognized as the factor that could bring people into a stressful life especially in an inappropriate working environment. Group cooperation could made people stress when they were collectively setting their own target to prevent the group norm from being violated by the group. Moreover, stress also occurs in the context of group cooperation when a new member, individually or a group of persons enter the relevance group (Tan Kwang How, 1994).

Besides that, every worker especially adolescent workers faces the problem of stress in varying degree of intensity, some of the times during the working life when they deal with their environmental aspects as well as their relationship with the other people. Stress induces by work results in about 20 million days lost each year in United Kingdom at a cost of more than 12 billion pound in 1998. This phenomenon shows that stress and coping strategy have become a serious problem and needs to be addressed by all concerned. Hence, the study of adolescent stress and its coping strategy through inter-group relation perspectives can be concluded as relevance in this new era (post-modern world).

V.   How to Reduce Stress?

An important ingredient for a happy life is the ability to live in harmony with others which refers to how you could reduce stress. To achieve this we must understand that there are many path people can take to reach the same goal. A moderate amount of stress would not harm at all but stress is harmful when people experience it for a long period of time without relief or when experiencing large doses of it at a regular and frequent intervals. Someone with stress for a prolonged period are capable to have high blood pressure, migraine, heart disease, back problems, ulcers, and asthma.

Responding from those potential problems of having stress for long period of time there are several ways of how we can reduce stress. One of the simplest hints on how can we effectively deal with stress is by making you relax. According to Rahmattullah Khan (1995) relaxation must be practiced as often as we can, at least twice a day at first and for twenty minutes each time. This technique is called "Deep Muscle Relaxation" which can be simply practiced as you can refer to the table below.

Table 1: Deep Muscle Relaxation
(as suggested by Rahmattullah Khan, 1995)

Muscle Group	Method of Tensing
Lower Arm	Make first, palm down, and pull wrist towards upper arm
Upper Arm	Tense biceps, with arm by side, pull upper arm towards side without touching (try not to tense the lower arm while doing this, let the lower arm hang loosely)
Lower Leg and Foot	Point toes upward to knees
Thighs	Push feet hard against the floor
Abdomen	Pull in stomach toward back
Chest and Breathing	Take a deep breath and hold it about 10 seconds, then release
Shoulders and Lower Neck	Shrug shoulders, bring shoulders up until they almost touch ears
Back of Neck	Put head back and press against back of chair
Lips	Press lips together, don't clench teeth or jaw
Eyes	Close eyes tightly but don't close too hard (be careful if you have contacts)
Lower Forehead	Pull eyebrows down (try to get them to meet)
Upper Forehead	Raise eyebrows and wrinkle your forehead

Source: Rahmattullah Khan (1995) Relaxation. Working paper presented at First Executive Health Conference, 4-5 October 1995, Kuala Lumpur.

Other hints on how we can effectively reduce stress are by resolving conflict, give in sometimes, do not try to be a super-being, be positive with people, be available, take a breather, make time for recreation, take time out for exercise, practice healthy eating habits, and avoid additional pressures. Some of these hints of how we can reduce stress are sometimes could not make you feel comfort or heal yourself from stress. If this happened, do not waste your time to practice it. You still have your own choice to use other hints. It means, you can simply turn to other ways of reducing stress.

Furthermore a long term stress management is also available where we can participate to learn how to overcome stress effectively. This programme is called "anticipatory socialization" which often provides by the several stress management organization. This programme is normally designed to help workers anticipate and therefore prepare for the stressors that they will face on the job. It is also designed based on the rationale that in any professions training programs foster idealized and unrealistic expectations about what really goes on in the work setting in terms of actual responsibilities that will be assumed and professional, personal, and bureaucratic conflicts that may arise.

There are of course several more hints on how to reduce stress effectively in this post-modern world. However, these discussed hints are assumed as the most simple and applicable for many people in their everyday life at the workplace and generally attached themselves into the phenomenon of inter-group relations.

VI.   Conclusion

Stress is nothing more than a negative state of mind arising out of attachment to worldly pleasures that is when we interact with other peoples (inter-group relations). The stronger the attachment to stress is caused by the inter-group relations the greater the health problems will happen. Sometimes we are not only stressed whenever things go wrong but sometimes we become stress even when things go on smoothly.

Hence, when we experience stress we can overcome them by using one of the suggested methods to reduce stress. We cannot stand ourselves in a stressful life for a prolonged period of time. Life is a continuous journey beset with problems. As long as we live in this world stress will always be part of our lives. Besides that, we should not be disheartened when faced with stress but instead act wisely in overcoming them because "happiness is not as what you possess but what you are".

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