

Correlations between inter group relations and the emergence of stress among farm workers in the rural areas of sabah, malaysia

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Abstract: *Inter group relations often considered as the most important factor which brings workers of certain workplace into stressful life. For this reason, this paper presents a discussion on the relationship between inter group relations and stress among workers, in particular the farmers of the rural areas in Sabah, Malaysia. Data were collected through a self administered questionnaire. In this study, 100 farmers were selected as respondents with a median age of 25. In general, inter group relations reported as had significance relationship with the emergence of stress among farm workers in Sabah, Malaysia. Specifically, the study also found significance relationship between stress among farm workers and group corporation and group conflict. Moreover, based on the findings, in brief, there are also recommended or discusses how we can effectively deal with stress in our daily life.*

Key Words: *Inter-group relations; Stress; Group Conflict; Group Cooperation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Life is a struggle when people' working hard to improve their economic status as well as it is considered as struggle to gain monetary rewards. Instead of bringing happiness however, this lifestyle brings stress and everyone experience it. Improving economic status allows us to compete each other, thus makes them considering various aspects of socioeconomic. When the process of considering these aspects become too critical many usually find themselves reacting to the stress which automatically makes their fight mechanism switched.

However, peoples are not only experience stress when working but also everywhere they will always have to involve in social life. As long as we live in this world, problems and troubles will always be a part and parcel of our experience. On some occasions, we may be blessed with gain, fame, praise or happiness and we may also face the unfavorable situations of loss, ill-fame, blame and suffering.

Besides, in workplace, the terms inter-group relations that is consisted of group conflict and group cooperation become a major concern that is contribute to the emergence of stress. This term is of course in this article considered as the most important factor which brings people into stressful life. In accordance based on the findings of this research-based article we take a brief look at the inter-group relations as a factor of the emergence of stress in general and group conflict / group cooperation as a factor of the emergence of stress in particular.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In this post-modern world, peoples' stress particularly among workers as well as among farmers have been recognized as serious problem that everyone worrying about. Nevertheless, many people don't know what the definition of stress is. Defining the concept of stress is however not an easiest task. There are of course long discussions occurred to find which definition is the most suited 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 persons and the environment that is appraised the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being.

In the years of 1990th Bernard & Krupat (1994), and Hendren (1990) has 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. In accordance, the term stress generally refers to mental or physical tension which can affect someone health in a long-term or short-term. The impacts of stress then include physical, psychological/mental/cognitive, and behavior.

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 study, the term stress is defined as mental, emotional or physical tension which can affect peoples' health. Stress also refers to as 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 behavior.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Normally, high status members often favor their own group and sometimes derogate, but low status group members often display exactly the opposite, that is, a bias in favor of the high status out-group. This means, high status group members not only favor their own group but also derogate a low status out-group. This statement however doesn't give us the exact picture of what is inter-group relations. This statement is normally referring to the non-farm or specific industrial organization environment which many workers working in. Responding from this point, the study on the correlation between workers in rural stress problems and the inter-group relations is needed to make us understood what are the inter-group relations impact towards workers' health status 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 term of their group identification. Inter-group relations then consisted of many aspects which normally exist in the same time. This phenomenon is occurring because of the differences in the role of individual that is commonly represents difference in terms of personality and attitude (Dovido, Gartener, Esses & Brewer (2003). Inter-group relation as according to Pratto and Shih (2000) are also concern about the welfare of others and tolerant of other individuals and groups, and group equality and inequality.

Dovido, Gartener, Esses & Brewer (2003) recited that an inter-group relation that is often refers to group conflict and group cooperation is a major factor which bringing peoples into the 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 that 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. In other hands, 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 described as associated with the peoples' stress. A conflict of interests between groups is necessary for negative inter-group attitudes and behavior to occur. Group conflicts are also occurring 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 mean, conflict that is 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 word, 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, Sinha, Gopal & Tiwary (1985) argued that conflict conceived as an interpretation processes which generally part of inter-group relations. As soon as the 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 member, which can be measured by their frequent attendance during group meetings, constructive discussions around common themes. This is as what Corey & Corey (1997) called as group cohesiveness or group cooperation. Yalom (1995) then, defined group harmony or group cooperation as like dignity which, everyone can recognize it but apparently no one can describe it. Yalom (1995) has also defined group harmony as “sticking together” where group member is bonded to one another, by how group member feel towards each other: feelings of solidarity, and commitment among group members.

According to Corey & Corey (1997), and Langfred (1998), 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, have shared pain, and have committed themselves to taking significant risks (Corey & Corey, 1997).

Taking into consideration all relevance aspects being discussed, the group harmony/cooperation can be measured behaviorally, cognitively, and affectively. Specifically, group cooperation / harmony can be measured via their attraction and commitment, and their sense of identity and relatedness. Responding from that definition, group cohesion/harmony/cooperation can be measured by their frequent attendance during group meetings, constructive discussions around common themes, as well as constructive feedback given to and received by group and their level of participation in the group process. The sense of identity and relatedness then can be measured by their ability to identify each group member positively.

Responding from these statements, it could be said that this problem may also occurs in the rural areas of Asia, specifically in Sabah, Malaysia. This problem may occur when the rural folk involved in any development program implemented by the related agencies. In Sabah, Malaysia, the agencies that actively implementing rural development project are Rural Development Corporation, Sabah Rubber Fund Board, Cocoa Malaysia Board, Sabah Forest Development Authority and Malaysia Palm Oil Board. Besides, this study would concentrate on the correlations between inter-group relations and the emergence of stress among farm workers in the rural areas of Sabah, Malaysia. In accordance, there is a question arises concerning the emergence of stress as because of inter-group relations. Does the inter-group relation have a significance positive relationship to the emergence of stress among rural farm workers? So far, no study has been conducted to make this question answered in Sabah. Hence, it should be of interested to investigate the correlation between inter-group relations and stress.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative method to trace the problem being discussed. 100 respondents have been selected as to fill in the questionnaires which provided as a booklet. The sample were drawn from six villages in Matungong, Sabah, Malaysia which participated in development project organized by Sabah Rubber Fund Board namely contract farm. The sample consisted of 60 males and 40 females with a median age of 25 years.

Respondents were asked to complete a set of self-administered questionnaire which consisted of respondent background, inter-group relations items, and stress index. In this study the respondents' level of stress is measured using Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS) popularized by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995). The questionnaire took about 30 minutes to complete. The completed questionnaires were later analyzed used computer software namely SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) utilized Product Moment Correlation.

V. FINDINGS

5.1 Respondent Background

Response rate of 100 per cent was attained (N=100). 60 per cent of respondent were males, while only 40 per cent of respondent were females. Mean age was 25 years. 94 per cent of the respondent were had either form three certificate so called Sijil Rendah Pelajaran/Penilaian Menengah Rendah (SRP/PMR) and form five certificate (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional). 4 per cent had a Diploma, with the remaining 2 per cent with university first Degree.

5.2 Inter-group Relations (Group Conflict, Group Cooperation) in Rural Farm

Inspection of the entire samples mean score for the 'group-conflict' items revealed that only 40 per cent of the respondents accept that group conflict occurred in rural farm. However, 60 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the current phenomenon of rural farm workers' cooperation. They stated that farming

activities in rural areas dominated by the group cooperation. This mean, no significant group conflict occurred in rural farm.

5.3 Stress among Farm Workers

This study also revealed that 80 per cent of the respondents felt stress when they were working in the farm. This happened when they were trying their best to successfully carry their own task as a group member. They were felt stress when trying to show fully contribution to achieve the group aims. They were also felt stress when involving in group conflict which would happen when there are unclear situation or information given by the other group member. The remaining 20 per cent however felt no stress as they were not contributed well to make the group aim come true or even to settled related group conflicts.

Turning to the inter-group relations measure as consisted of group conflict and group cooperation, a significant positive relation was found between stress and group cooperation among rural farm workers ($r = .15$, $P < .01$). Additionally, significant correlations were also found between stress and group conflict ($r = .22$, $P < .01$). These findings indicating that even in rural farm, stress which occurred because of conflict and group cooperation could be found. Hence, there is of course, inter-group relations are significance related to the emergence of stress among rural farm workers.

VI. DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings, it can be recited that the impacts of the inter-group relations towards workers' psychological aspect can be traced in urban areas or even in rural areas. Furthermore, there is of course study of the inter-group relations and relevance aspects have been seen as increased over the past many years. Moreover, as we discuss earlier, inter-group relations considered as one of the major factor that made people living into the stressful situation. This statement 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 peoples in the relevance group into a psychological problem that is so called stress.

There is of course, conflict and cooperation that are the major factors made peoples into stresses minded could happened in the rural farm, urban factory, and of course everywhere. 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. Any given group embodies various qualities, values, or unique traits that are created, followed, and even defended. 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 are also can 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 behavior of a few individuals.

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

Besides, every worker faces the problem of stress in varying degree of intensity some of the times during the working life when they were deal with their environmental aspects as well as their relationship with the other people.

VII. RECOMENDATIONS

An important ingredient for a happy life is the ability to live in harmony with others that is of course 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. Moderate amounts of stress of course do not harm at all but stress is harmful when people experience it for prolonged periods of time without relief or when experience large doses of it at regular

and frequent intervals. Someone which stress for prolonged periods of time will capable to have high blood pressure, migraine, and heart disease, back problems, ulcers, and asthma.

Responding from those potential problems of having stress for long period of time there are the 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 felt 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 called “Deep Muscle Relaxation” which can be simply practices as you can refer to the table as below.

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

Muscle Group	Method of Tensing
Lower Arm	Make fist, 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.

The other hint on how we can effectively reduce stress are by resolve conflict, give in sometimes, don't 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 this all mentioned hints of how we can reduce stress are of course sometimes can't make you fell comfort or healed yourself from stress. If this happened, don't waste your time to practice it. You still have your own choice to use the other hints. Its means, you can simply turn to another way of reduce stress.

Furthermore, there is also available a long term stress management that we can participate to learn how to overcome stress effectively. This program is so called “anticipatory socialization” which often provides by the several stress management organizations. This program is normally designed to help workers anticipate and therefore prepare for the stressors that they will face on the job. This program 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 simplest and applicable for many peoples which everyday live their life in the workplace and generally attached themselves into the phenomenon of inter-group relations.

VIII. 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 the stress caused by the inter-group relations is the greater the health problems happen. Sometimes we not only stress when ever 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 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 life. Besides, 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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