

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
OCCUPATIONAL STRESS, COPING
STRATEGIES WITH JOB SATISFACTION AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG
MALAYSIAN ARMY IN SABAH**

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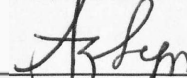
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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS, COPING STRATEGIES WITH JOB SATISFACTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG MALAYSIAN ARMY IN SABAH.

This research looks on the main factors that contributes to daily occupational stress and the coping strategies used by the 257 soldiers of Malaysian Royal Army Force (*Angkatan Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia*) in Sabah toward their level of job satisfaction and psychological distress. Results of this study found out that lack of physical/ mental/ emotional rest was the main factor of military's daily occupational stress and also the predictor for lower level of job satisfaction and higher in psychological distress among the soldiers. Apart from that, other predictors that had the effect on both dependent variables were past critical incidents and lack of family/ colleagues/ organizational support. The results showed that most of the soldiers were prone toward positive style of coping (positive reinterpretation & growth and religion coping) however, this type of coping strategy did not achieve the strength to play as a moderator between the interactions of sources of occupational stress with job satisfaction and psychological distress. The implication of these findings gave important guidelines that the soldiers need to involve in coping skills training and stress management programs in order to widen the scope of coping strategies and to receive information related to the stress-strain relationship.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini adalah untuk melihat faktor utama yang menyumbang ke arah stres pekerjaan harian dan strategi daya tindak yang telah digunakan oleh 257 ahli Angkatan Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia di Sabah ke arah tahap kepuasan kerja dan distres psikologi mereka. Keputusan kajian ini menunjukkan kekurangan rehat dari segi fizikal/ mental/ emosi adalah menjadi faktor utama dalam stres pekerjaan harian di kalangan tentera dan juga peramal untuk rendahnya tahap kepuasan kerja dan tingginya tahap distres psikologi di kalangan tentera. Selain itu, peramal-peramal yang mempunyai kesan ke atas dua pembolehubah-pembolehubah terikat adalah insiden-insiden lepas yang kritikal dan kekurangan sokongan daripada keluarga/ rakan sekerja/ organisasi. Keputusan menunjukkan kebanyakan tentera lebih cenderung ke arah penggunaan strategi daya tindak secara positif (perkembangan & penterjemahan positif dan berserah kepada agama) akan tetapi, jenis strategi daya tindak ini tidak begitu kuat untuk menjadi perantaraan (moderator) di antara interaksi sumber stres pekerjaan dengan tahap kepuasan kerja dan distres psikologi. Implikasi dari keputusan kajian ini dapat memberi petunjuk yang penting bahawa para tentera perlu untuk mendalami latihan-latihan strategi daya tindak dan program pengendalian stres supaya dapat meluaskan lagi skop-skop strategi daya tindak dan menerima maklumat-maklumat berkaitan hubungan di antara stress-keletihan.

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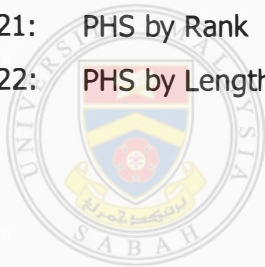
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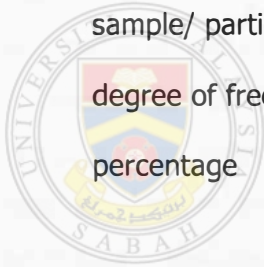
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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

OSI	Occupational Stress Indicator
SOOS	Sources of Occupational Stress
COPE	Coping Oriented to Problems Experienced
JSS	Job Satisfaction Scale
PHS	Psychological Health Scale
U.S.A	United States of America
P-E Fit	Person-Environment Fit
RAMD	Rejimen Askar Melayu Diraja
KAGAT	Kor Agama Angkatan Tentera
LLP	Lain-Lain Pangkat
PTT-K	Pegawai Tanpa Tauliah-Kanan
PTT-R	Pegawai Tanpa Tauliah-Rendah
PCA	Principal Components Analysis
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance

LIST OF SYMBOLS

<i>M</i>	Mean
<i>SD</i>	Standard deviation
<i>r</i>	Reliability
<i>p</i>	Significant value
<i>F</i>	F-ratio
<i>R²</i>	R square
<i>β</i>	Beta coefficient
<i>t</i>	t-value
<	lower than
>	higher than
<i>n</i>	sample/ participant
<i>df</i>	degree of freedom
%	percentage



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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Studies on occupational stress had reach over the past 100 years and yet the research on this topic is still expanding with more theories, models and concepts that had been developed throughout the years. The first major program of research that studied organizational stress was undertaken at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research in early 1960s (Jex, 1998). This research had been used as one of the basis for other researchers in furthering their study on the concepts of occupational stress.

The effects of occupational stress are mostly having the negative impact on the employees' work conditions and life. This happen when employees response negatively toward the stressors and these responses would consider as strains. Jex (1998) described, there are three types of strains that capture the interest of the researchers, which are psychological strains (job dissatisfaction, anxiety, depressed mood), physical strains (headaches, upset stomach, coronary heart disease) and behavioral strains (absenteeism, turnover, poor performance).

Due to these effects, many researchers were concerned about it, thus developed theories or concepts that can overcome this phenomenon. One of the concepts was coping behaviors. Coping is the process of managing taxing circumstances, expanding effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems and seeking to master, minimize, reduce or tolerate stress and conflict (Halonen and Santrock, 1997). The relationship among stress, strain and coping in the workplace were studied very actively in the 1980s (Decker and Borgen, 1993). A lot of literatures on coping were produced and in fact research in coping processes continue to develop from time to time.

Although much of attention has been given to examine stress- strain relationship among workers, narrow focus is needed to study this relationship in specific job particularly among emergency workers such as military, with a mission to further understand how this relationship co-existed and influencing one another in certain conditions. Military is one of important occupation where it seen as a shield for a country in protecting the nation from any threat within or/ and outside the country. Whether playing the role of fighter in the war-zone or a peacekeeper, soldiers need to undergo many hardships in their works through their tough daily training and completing time-frame tasks. These trainings that are imposed onto soldiers are meant to test their physical and mental strength thus preparing them to face whatever challenges they have to face in the future. Apart from that, these soldiers need to be alert at all time and maintaining the level of their performance to the highest. Due to their tough working conditions, these soldiers face many different types of stressors that may influence their satisfaction toward their jobs thus have the impact on the level of performance.

1.2 History of Malaysian Royal Armed Force (*Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia*)

The origin of Malaysian Royal Armed Force (*Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia*) was dated back since 1902 where lots of debate and discussion among the Royal Malay Rulers (*Sultans*) with the British adviser about establishing a legal Malay's army in this country. The dreams of the Kings were soon became reality when the Federal Executive Council Conference passed the first Malay Regiment. On Mac 1st, 1933, about 25 Malay people were selected to join the Malay Regiment Trial Team (*Kompeni Percubaan Pasukan Askar Melayu*). This team then followed the trainings governed by the British officers and due to the good performance showed by the team, in 1934, the team had been upgraded into one comprehensive battalion with four of the Malay soldiers had been awarded to young Lieutenant (Laman Rasmi Tentera Darat Malaysia, 2007).

The successful history of Malaysian Royal Armed Force (*Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia*) continued with the establishment of the second battalion in order to confront the attack from Japanese soldiers in World War II. The first and second

battalion of Malay Regiment was fought side by side with the British Army in defending the country from the invasion of Japanese Army. When the World War II had ended, the country was still in mischief where it needed to face several confrontations and one of it was from Communist Party. With the strength of only three battalions from Malay Regiment, they bravely fought the communist until this Regiment was increased into seven battalions in 1956. When the country had achieve its independence day in August 31st, 1957, the Malaysian Armed Force had increased into 11 battalions with lots of divisions had been developed such as *KOR Perkhidmatan Am*, *KOR Kelengkapan* and *KOR Jurutera dan Elektrik* (Laman Rasmi Tentera Darat Malaysia, 2007).

The successful story of Malaysian Royal Armed Force shines when Malaysia had been given the opportunity to work under the United Nation (UN) to serve as peacemaker in Republic of Congo in 1960. UN believes the strength and commitment of Malaysian Army and with good performance shown by them, UN continued to give missions to Malaysia in peacekeeping mission until today. Malaysia sent its army to Namibia in 1989, Cambodia in June 1993, Bosnia Herzegovina in December 1993, Somalia in 1994, Timor Leste in 2006 and Lubnan from January 2007 until now (Laman Rasmi Tentera Darat, 2007).

The statistic of manpower in Malaysian Royal Armed Force had increased from time to time and according to the statistic prepared by Cordesman and Kleiber (2006), Malaysian military manpower in 2006 was about 80,000 soldiers (exclude the Air force and Navy) with 16 Divisions/KORS in it. The Divisions/KORS in the Malaysian Royal Armed Force are *KOR Agama Angkatan Tentera* (KAGAT), *KOR Jurutera Letrik an Jentera Diraja* (KJLJD), *KOR Ordnans Diraja* (KOD), *KOR Perkhidmatan Am* (KPA), *KOR Perkhidmatan Diraja* (KPD), *KOR Polis Tentera Diraja* (KPTD), *KOR Risik Diraja* (KRD), *KOR Armor Diraja* (KAD), *Rejimen Artileri Diraja* (RAD), *Rejimen Askar Jurutera Diraja* (RAJD), *Rejimen Askar Melayu Diraja* (RAMD), *Rejimen Askar Wataniah* (RAW), *Rejimen Renjer Diraja* (RRD), *Rejimen Semboyan Diraja* (RSD) dan *Rejimen Sempadan* (RS). The roles of this Divisions/KOR are explained in Table 1.1. It is believes that Malaysian military organization is now putting an effort to increase its manpower.

Table 1.1: Divisions/KOR in Malaysian Royal Armed Force (*Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia*)

Divisions/KOR	Roles
KOR Agama Angkatan Tentera (KAGAT)	Making assessment and review of religious instruction and compliance by all levels of Royal Armed Force.
KOR Armor Diraja (KAD)	Perform offensive movements, defensive movements with or without the aid of infantry and other troops. Involve in ceremonial duties such as ceremonial guard cavalry and also royal escort.
KOR Jurutera Letrik dan Jentera Diraja (KJLD)	Providing technical assistance (repair, maintenance and inspection) on all equipment except motor vehicles belong to RAJD and also communication equipments.
KOR Kesihatan Diraja (KKD)	Responsible for providing quality health and dental care to all members in Royal Armed Force.
KOR Ordnan Diraja (KOD)	Managing and receiving the supply (vehicles, ammunitions, explosive weapons).
KOR Perkhidmatan Am (KPA)	Involve in administration such as in clerical works, managing salary and also act as public relation to the Armed Force.
KOR Perkhidmatan Diraja (KPD)	Responsible in road transportation, supply of petrol oil and lubricant, food service and barrack service,
KOR Polis Tentera Diraja (KPTD)	Responsible in enforcing law and regulations of Royal Armed Force.
KOR Risik Diraja (KRD)	Responsible in planning, collecting, evaluating and disseminating tactical intelligence relating to particular interest of the Armed Force.
Rejimen Artileri Diraja (RAD)	Providing effective fire support to combat troops on the battlefield so that enemy can not interfere with the operation team in managing their plans/tactics.
Rejimen Askar Jurutera Diraja (RAJD)	Helping the government to restore essential services and operates the nation's ports, railways, water supply, and electricity and restore public order.
Rejimen Askar Melayu Diraja (RAMD)	Responsible in offensive and defensive operations, frontline in combating enemies, assisting the authorities during natural disaster and helping RS in securing the boarders.
Rejimen Askar Wataniah (RAW)	Providing volunteer force in all phases of conventional wars. Training the volunteers with knowledge of military system.
Rejimen Renjer Diraja (RRD)	Responsible in offensive and defensive operations, frontline in combating enemies.
Rejimen Semboyan Diraja (RSD)	Plan, coordinate and determine the needs of communication system and ICT in implementing operational tasks.
Rejimen Sempadan (RS)	Responsible in securing the boarders from illegal immigrants and enemies.

Source: From Laman Rasmi Tentera Darat Malaysia. Retrieved October 09, 2007, from <http://army.mod.gov.my>.

1.2.1 Malaysian Royal Armed Force (*Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia*) in Sabah

There were three main Malaysian Royal Armed Force's camps in Sabah; Lok Kawi's Camp in Kota Kinabalu, Sri Kinabatangan's Camp in Sandakan and Kukusan's Camp in Tawau.

Lok Kawi's Camp in Kota Kinabalu was established following the Sukarno's confrontation against Malaysia in 1963. The confrontation Indonesia-Malaysia happened because of dissatisfaction with the establishment of Malaysia as an independent country. During the confrontation, an incident that can not be forgotten in the history of Armed Force was the Kalabakan incident where in this incident, a temporary army post in Kalabakan, Tawau had been attacked by the Indonesian Guerilla. About seven members of Royal Malaysian Armed Force were killed and 16 others wounded (Laman Rasmi Tentera Darat, 2007).

Soldiers in Royal Malaysian Armed Force (*Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia*) were responsible to guarding the boarder between Sabah and Kalimantan. Apart from that, they were also responsible to guard Sabah's coast and islands from pirates and illegal immigrants. Due to some difficulties in term of geographical distance as it took time to relocate soldiers to the selected post, another two camps were established. Sri Kinabatangan's Camp was established in 1982 in Sandakan meanwhile Kukusan's Camp was established in 1998 in Tawau (Laman Rasmi Tentera Darat, 2007).

1.3 Nature of Military Work

Military organization belongs and governed under the state's jurisdiction due to the main nature of its mission, which is to protect the nation from the threat of the outsiders. Although most of the military organizations throughout the countries work under the governments' orders, however the military organizations have their own bureaucratic structures and abiding with set of military laws, which somehow separated with the state's laws.

Military organization also has the power to select, recruit and train its own soldiers without any government interference. Due to these reasons, the soldiers need to give full commitment and services for the sake of the organization. That is why military organization is the only organization that presumes that its members will sacrifice their lives as part of their jobs (National Research Council, 2008). Military organization is divided by several divisions. According to Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, military divisions are part of military units. These units consist of well-defined command and control hierarchies from larger units (i.e. army corps) and have clear goals and are organized into functionally distinct subunits such as squads, platoons, battalions, brigades and divisions (Tucker, Sinclair and Thomas, 2005). The hierarchy of units is shown in Table 1.2. These divisions are led by higher ranking officers. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2008), rank refers to a row of people with a degree or position of dignity or also refers to a grade of official standing in a hierarchy. Military rank also refers to a line of soldiers (a body of enlisted soldiers) ranged side by side with close order (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2008). The hierarchy of military rank is shown in Figure 1.1.

It should be recalled that soldiers are not only train to be war fighters but also adding the role as humanitarian aid such as the peacemaker and peacekeeper. Today's military roles are already expanding into humanitarian assistance in disaster relief, pacification of civil disturbances, arms control verification, drug interdiction, election supervision and antiterrorist operations (National Research Council, 2008). Most of these operations are in continuous operations where the soldiers need to stand guard for about 24 hours and the duration of certain operations would be over three to six months. This is when their work schedules are based on shift work where the rotation or changing of members in team would be done. Apart from that, certain operations need them to be relocated to the remote areas where the facilities are not attainable and sometimes they need to serve in the hazardous areas where if they neglect certain safety and orders, their life would be threaten. In order to face all of these situations, the soldiers need to undergo trainings that support them to fulfill their roles and duties and these trainings are tough as the roles are. The basic trainings

are handling weapons, marching training, abseiling, moving toward obstacle training, survival training, flying fox, parachute training and much more. Moreover, the trainings are done in all kind of conditions whether in hot or raining days.

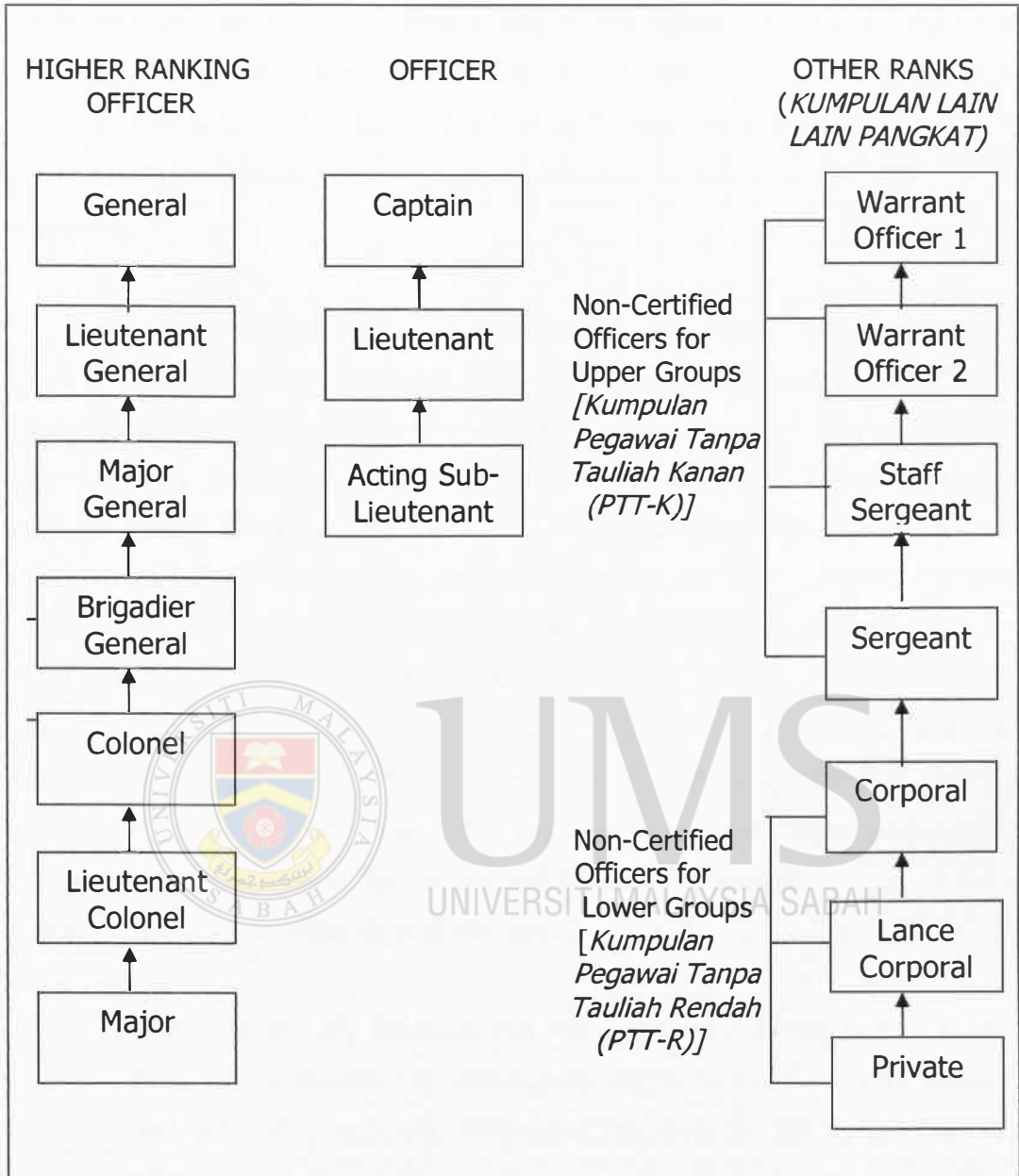
Apart from accomplishing their duties on the field, they also involve with the administration and management of the organization such as equipment maintenance, record keeping, and readiness inspections (Collie, 2005). These varieties of roles lead to very high levels of stress among the soldiers in accomplishing and fulfilling their duties toward the organization and nation.

Table 1.2: Hierarchy of Units in Military Organization

Units	Definition	Person in Charge
Squad	Smallest unit in military organization where it consists of seven to 14 soldiers	Led by a Sergeant
Platoon	Consists of three or four Squads where 42 to 60 soldiers involved in this unit.	Led by Lieutenant
Company	Consists of two or more Platoons where 100 to 250 soldiers involved in this unit.	Led by Captain or Major
Battalion	Two or more Companies involved in this unit (300 soldiers or more).	Led by Lieutenant Colonel
Brigade	Consists of several Battalions (1,000 soldiers or more).	Led by Colonel or Brigadier General
Divisions	Two or more Brigades with various specialized Battalions (7,000 to 22,000 soldiers involved in this unit).	Led by Major General
Army Corps	Consists of two to seven Divisions (50,000 to 300,000 soldiers).	Led by Lieutenant General
Army Groups	Combination of several Army Corps	Led by General

Source: From "Military Unit," by Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, Retrieved May 09, 2008, from [http:// www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).

Figure 1.1: Hierarchy of Ranks in Military Organization



Source: From Laman Rasmi Tentera Darat Malaysia. Retrieved October 09, 2007, from [http:// army.mod.gov.my/](http://army.mod.gov.my/)

1.4 Research Problems

The questions that needed to be answered in this study were mainly focusing on the direction of relationships among the variables in questions. Some of the literatures studied the relationship between occupational stress with job satisfaction and psychological distress among military soldiers. However, not all of

the literatures explained on the types of occupational stress which affecting job satisfaction and psychological distress among the soldiers. Moreover, this study also wanted to examine these relationships based on the demographical variables where according to Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001), the variables in questions were likely to be influenced by individual different, context and also person's role and status.

Apart from that, this study wanted to examine the daily based occupational stress where most of the literatures tend to study on the acute type of stressors. Chronic stress is characterize by the long-term stressors where people face them daily (Day and Livingstone, 2001) and become accustomed to the stressors until they can accept those stressors as a way of life (Collie, 2005) meanwhile acute stress occurs when the situations are highly demand and often involved a specific time of onset and are in short durations (Anshel, Robertson and Caputi, 1997; Day et. al, 2001; Mohd Dahlan A. Malek, Mearns and Flin, 2003). This study tries to focus on the daily work stress or known as chronic stress experience by the Malaysian soldiers in Sabah. As Pflanz and Ogle (2006) described that high job stress was associated with low autonomy and long work hours where these stressors were the characteristics of the military job environment.

Therefore the specific research problem was:

1. What kind of daily stressors that Malaysian Royal Armed Force (*Tentera Darat Diraja Malaysia*) in Sabah perceived to be the main work stressors and did these stressors influenced the level of job satisfaction and psychological distress?

Occupational stressors may lead toward the negative impact on the soldiers (i.e. depression, mental and physical illnesses, poor health level, job dissatisfaction) if there were no action taken to decrease them or the soldiers themselves do not effectively cope with those stressors. This argument is supported by a study done by Day and Livingstone (2001), where they found out that those who were using the negative style of coping or do not effectively cope with the situation tended to have high level of negative health symptoms.