

FACTORS AFFECTING WORK-RELATED STRESS OF OFFICE STAFF IN SMALL
MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN KLANG

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ABSTRACT

As is known that work-related stress has an impact on the overall functioning of companies, work-related stress is becoming an increasingly important issue in a competitive business environment for companies. This study aims to identify the factors that influence work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises in Klang. Five factors, namely workload, role ambiguity, role conflict, supervisor support and interpersonal relationship would influence work-related stress of office staff were focused and investigated. Quantitative methods were used to collect and analyse data. 50 participants participated in the questionnaire survey. Results indicated that there are statistically significant relationships between work-related stress and four factors, which are workload, role conflict, supervisor support and interpersonal relationship. Role ambiguity was found having no statistically significant relationship with work-related stress. The findings of this study could contribute to the current and future generations' knowledge of the work-related stress, and its impact on companies.

ABSTRAK

Seperti diketahui bahawa stres kerja mempunyai kesan terhadap fungsi keseluruhan syarikat, stres kerja telah menjadi isu yang semakin penting dalam persekitaran perniagaan yang kompetitif bagi syarikat. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi stres kerja di kalangan staf pejabat di perusahaan-perusahaan kecil, yang terlibat dalam sektor pembuatan, di Klang. Lima faktor, iaitu beban kerja, konflik peranan, autonomi tugas, sokongan penyelia dan hubungan interpersonal yang mempengaruhi stres kerja di kalangan staf pejabat telah diberi tumpuan dan disiasat. Kaedah kuantitatif telah digunakan untuk mengumpul dan menganalisis data. Terdapat 50 peserta mengambil bahagian dalam kajian soal selidik ini. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan secara statistik di antara stres kerja dan empat faktor, iaitu beban kerja, konflik peranan, sokongan penyelia dan hubungan interpersonal. Kesamaran peranan didapati tidak mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan secara statistik dengan stres kerja. Hasil kajian ini boleh menyumbang kepada pengetahuan berkaitan stres kerja pada generasi sekarang dan masa depan, dan kesannya terhadap syarikat.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The working environment of the manufacturing companies has evolved dramatically. Recently, in Malaysia, office staff in these manufacturing companies are subject to a high degree of work-related stress. High level of work-related stress has been one of the major reasons for poor work performance, job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, turnover, burnout, psychological distress, and adverse health effect. These negative effects can affect the organisational effectiveness adversely.

As companies are becoming more technologically advanced and competitive, the percentage of work-related stress experienced among office staff in a manufacturing company would increase. Since negative consequences have been linked with not only decreased profitability of the company, but also an increase adverse health effect, gaining a better understanding of these variables is necessary.

Although some work-related stress may produce positive outcomes to office staff, a majority of the work-related stress is widely recognized as being harmful to personal and company. Thus, more effort should be made to handle the level of work-related stress among office staff. It is often said that the employee is the greatest resource in a company. By investing in the holistic health of office staff, companies can realize significant benefits through operational effectiveness, efficiency, as well as company annual revenue.

The purpose of this study is to study the impact of stressors on work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises in Klang. Understanding how

job stressors affecting work-related stress among employees, is an important challenge for all industries in the 21st century.

1.2 PROBLEM BACKGROUND

Over the years, researchers have looked at the issue of work-related stress as it affects the employees' health, job performance, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment. Review of existing studies provides an understanding of the negative impacts, which result due to an employee who suffers a work-related stress at workplace.

In previous years, many researchers, such as Friedman et al. (1958), Kahn et al. (1964), Buck (1972), Chonko et al. (1983), Boles and Babin (1996), Elsass and Veiga (1997), Dormann and Zapf (1999), Galvin and Dileepan (2002), Leka et al. (2003), laeson (2004), Morrison et al. (2005), Hayes and Weathington (2007), Cosio (2010), Tan and Mohamad Irfan (2011), Aftab and Javeed (2012), Jedin et al. (2013) and other researchers have studied the research related to the work-related stress among employees. As these researchers have stated, work-related stress, if not appropriately handled, may result to negative health of employees, poor work performance, and overall negative impact on a company.

Hayes and Weathington (2007) reported that work-related stress is a costly problem in a company, both for employees and employers. An employee who has a high level of work-related stress has the tendency to lead to absenteeism, negative health impact, and increased turnover rate. Behaviours concomitant with work-related stress such as tardiness, absenteeism, burnout, turnover, and increased use of drugs and alcohol are significantly affected to organisational effectiveness (Landeweerd and Boumans, 1994).

Thus making the understanding of work-related stress among employees is an important issue in all companies especially manufacturing companies. For this to take place, previous studies, or current studies that may enhance or improve upon existing research, are recommended to pave the way for future action research.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Work-related-stress is much in the news at present, but it isn't a new problem. Recently, some studies have shown that rate of work-related stress has increased among

office staff in manufacturing companies in Malaysia. Work-related stress is one of the major health hazards of the modern workplace. This problem has been linked to office staff turnover, office staff absenteeism, low productivity, and increased rates of accidents on and off the job.

Stress at work can be a real problem for the company as well as for the office staff. Office staff that are stressed are more likely to be poorly motivated, unhealthy, less productive and less commitment to the company. A company which their office staff suffer a high level of work-related stress may affect not only their performance in the increasingly competitive market but eventually even their survival.

Therefore, companies have to find out the main source of work-related stress and develop stress management, which may, in turn, contribute to decrease overall work-related stress of office staff in the company.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The ultimate objective of the study is of course to better understanding of the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises in Klang. As such, specifically, this study hopes to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the factors which affect work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.
2. To analyse the impacts of those factors on work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.
3. To propose some feasible advices to handle work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were proposed as part of this research:

1. Does the workload factor significantly affect the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises?
2. Does the role ambiguity factor significantly affect the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises?
3. Does the role conflict factor significantly affect work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises?

4. Does the job autonomy factor significantly affect work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises?
5. Does the supervisor support factor significantly affect the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises?
6. Does the interpersonal relationship factor significantly affect the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises?

1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study is to study the impact of stressors on work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises. This research will explore six stressors or independent variables, namely workload (WL), role ambiguity (RA), role conflict (RC), job autonomy (JA), supervisor support (SS), and finally interpersonal relationship (IR). Figure 1.1 displays the conceptual framework for this study.

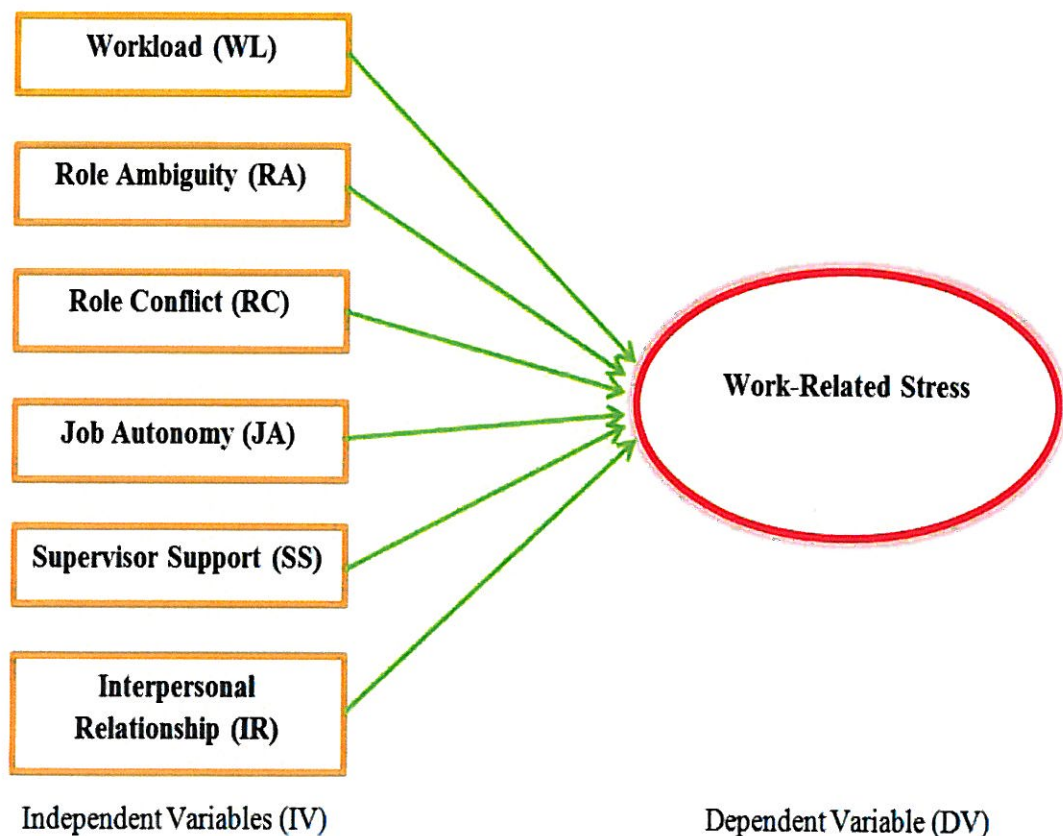


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

1.7 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The alternative hypothesis (H_1) predicts a relationship among variables and the null hypothesis (H_0) predicts that there is no relationship among variables. In accordance with the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are developed:

$H1_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the workload and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H1_1$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the workload and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H2_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the role ambiguity and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H2_1$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the role ambiguity and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H3_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the role conflict and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H3_1$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the role conflict and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H4_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the job autonomy and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H4_1$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the job autonomy and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H5_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the supervisor support and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H5_1$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the supervisor support and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

$H6_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between the interpersonal relationship and the work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

H6₁: There is a statistically significant relationship between the interpersonal relationship and the work-related of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises.

1.8 SCOPE

This research study was conducted on the office staff who work in small enterprise, in Klang. Of course, the industries targeted were known to employ office staff, which is manufacturing sector. The participants were selected within the Klang, Selangor. A survey instrument of questionnaire was used to collect data and response to conduct this research. Approximately 100 copies of the questionnaires were distributed both electronically and by hand to the participants and their networks.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research study is significant because it could provide insight into factors contributing to the high level of work-relates stress among office staff that impacts employee turnover, low company's productivity, and profit losses. An employee is a vital asset for a company. Healthy office staff are able to do their work efficiently, has passion in work, and high level of commitment to the company.

This research study could provide insight into the extent of stress and subsequently increase the company's ability to attract, train, and maintain valued employees, who are vital to company mission success. The findings of this study could contribute to the current and future generations' knowledge of the work-related stress, and its impact on a company.

The results of this study could identify the significance of reducing the work-related stress, and propose some feasible advices handle the problem of work-related stress of office staff in manufacturing companies. The company's leaders might be able to apply this study to any company's setting to improve their understanding of the employee's work-related stress and improve the overall company's benefit.

1.10 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

This section presents specific terms that this study utilized. It is speculated that identifying the use of specific terms, as related to this study, will help provide additional clarity of focus and intent of this study.

Interpersonal Relationship. Interpersonal relationship is social associations, affiliations, or connections between any two or more people (Interpersonal Relationship, n.d.).

Job Autonomy. Job Autonomy is the extent to which a job allows an employee the freedom, discretion, and independence to make a decision, schedule work, and select the methods used to perform tasks (Hackman and Oldham, 1975).

Role Ambiguity. Role ambiguity is the uncertainty on the part of an employee about the primary requirement of what they have to perform in their jobs, and what is expected of them in terms of how they behave (Baron, 2010).

Role Conflict. Role conflict happens when incompatible role expectations exist within the workplace. Such conflicts occur when there are differences between employees and the management about the content of the required job tasks (Kahn and Byosiére, 1992).

Supervisor Support. Supervisor support is defined as the extent to which leaders value their employees' contributions, care about their well-being, and give employees' practical assistance, information, emotional support, and positive feedback (Powell, 2011).

Workload. Workload is the amount of work performed by a person in a given period of time, or the average amount of work handled by a person at a particular instant of time (Janssen, n.d.).

Work-Related Stress. Work-related stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, n.d.).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the definitions and concepts about the office staff, small enterprise, manufacturing sector, work-related stress and the various factors affecting work-related stress as well as a review of existing literature in support of the entire research study will be discussed.

2.2 DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

2.2.1 Office Staff

Office staff is a professional or clerical worker in an office. They are doing work that needs mental rather than physical effort. Office staff historically wears the shirt and tie, defined by office jobs and not "getting their hands dirty" (White Collar, n.d.).

The following are the example of the office staff job:

- Clerk
- Accountant
- Database administrator
- Designer
- Auditor
- Market analyst
- Financial analyst
- Investment analyst

- Tax inspector
- Sale executive
- IT consultant
- Computer programmer
- Human resources specialists

2.2.2 Small Enterprise

In the manufacturing sector, small enterprise is defined as firms with sales turnover from RM300, 000 to less than RM15 million or full-time employees from 5 to less than 75. On the other hand, in services and other sectors, small enterprise is defined as firms with sales turnover from RM300, 000 to less than RM3 million or full-time employees from 5 to less than 30 (SME Corp. Malaysia, 2013).

Besides these, there are additional conditions that must be satisfied to be classified as small enterprise (see Appendix A).

2.2.3 Manufacturing Sector

Manufacturing sector refers to the branch of manufacture and trade based on the fabrication, processing, or preparation of products from raw materials and commodities. Manufacturing sectors include the production of food, textiles, chemicals, machines and equipment (Manufacturing industry, 1996).

Manufacturing enterprise is an enterprise engaged in the production of merchandise for use or sale using labour and tools, machines, biological and chemical processing, or formulation. The term may refer to a range of human activity, from handicraft to high tech (Manufacturing, 2014).

The following are the examples of manufacturing industries which manufacturing enterprise can be engaged:

- Apparel industry
- Furniture and fixtures industry
- Fabricated metal industry
- Pharmaceutical industry
- Lumber and wood industry

- Petroleum refining industry
- Chemical and allied industry
- Rubber and miscellaneous plastic industry
- Textile mill industry
- Food and kindred industry
- Electronic and electrical equipment industry
- Leather industry
- Paper and allied industry
- Printing, publishing, and allied industry
- Primary metal industry
- Stone, clay, glass, and concrete industry
- Automotive industry

2.2.4 Work-Related Stress

Work-related stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Work-related stress can lead to poor health and even injury (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, n.d.). Montgomery et al. (1996) stated that work-related stress as a feeling of dissatisfaction as a result of differences between happenings and perceived conditions in the workplace, and the basic human physiological reactions to the real life conditions in the area of work which employees feel undesirable, uncomfortable, and threatening. Work-related stress can occur when an employee's being faced with job demand and job requirements (Jamal, 1990). In addition, Parker and DeCotis (1983) stated that work-related stress can also occur when employees are faced heavy workload that they can afford.

Some work-related stress is normal for employees. A certain amount of work-related stress may give employees with the energy, force to handle the problem or challenges at the workplace. Work-related stress can raise employees' potential to handle challenges and task such as deadlines and sales or production targets. Not all work-related stress is bad because a certain amount of work-related stress has been proven to improve both performance and effectiveness (Brief et al., 1981). For example, an employee working towards a promotion may be under a certain amount of work-

related stress, and the stress can be a force to push employee to work towards such an opportunity.

It is important to keep in mind that mismanaged work-related stress can produce detrimental effect on the individual and the company. Therefore, mismanaged stress is likely to lead to physical, behavioural, and psychological problem as well as job dissatisfaction among employees (Larson, 2004).

2.3 FACTORS AFFECTING WORK-RELATED STRESS

2.3.1 Workload

The workload is the amount of work performed by a person in a given period of time, or the average amount of work handled by a person at a particular instant of time (Janssen, n.d). A huge pile of unfinished works can create a large work-related stress on employees. Leka et al. (2003) stated that workload is that the excessive demand and pressure that are not met to employees' abilities and knowledge, where there is low job autonomy to expand on the job duties and responsibilities, and where is a little support from other people. An employee would suffer a high level of work-related stress when he or she perceives too large work volume to complete or insufficient time to complete assigned tasks.

A large work volume and a time pressure of time is combined can lead to health problem and be a contributory cause of disease. Prolonged overtime as heavy workload can also produce a high level of stress. In addition, an employee deals these workloads under time pressure in order to meet deadlines has been shown to increase as difficult deadlines draw near (Friedman et al., 1958).

According to Jedin et al. (2013), the workload was a significant relationship with work-related stress in their research study. Their findings show that more workload foreign managers have to handle, the high of work-related stress the foreign managers will encounter. Besides, Aftab and Javeed (2012) found that employee who works at financial sector of Pakistan has a high level of job stress mainly due to excessive workload than normal work. The research has shown that the negative effects involve coming late to work without permission, stayed at home to avoid work and purposely work incorrectly.

In many cases, heavy workload is manageable as extra effort and labour contribution is required for a short period. However, if an employee is repeatedly undergo a high level of work volume, it becomes that workload is excessive and may be harming employees in some way (Lardner and Manshor, 2003).

2.3.2 Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity is the uncertainty on the part of an employee about the primary requirement of what they have to perform in their jobs, and what is expected of them in terms of how they behave (Baron, 2010). Role ambiguity occurs when an employee has ambiguous about his work objectives or working procedures and confusing expectations.

Role ambiguity may be caused by an employee receiving insufficient information about expected role behaviour or work objective when role senders (i.e, co-workers, supervisors, clients) do not communicate satisfactory information to the role incumbent about what is expected (Quick and Quick, 1984). Therefore, the employee does not clear what types of behaviours or action he or she should carry out.

Tan and Mohamad Irfan (2011) stated that role ambiguity is the most significant stressor of work-related stress level among employees in investment banks in Malaysia. This finding shows that the employees who work in banks have to clear about their task objectives, responsibilities to prevent the work-related stress.

The main reason results role ambiguity is the lack of clarity in the job. Role ambiguity can produce negative impact on employee which is low levels of employee involvement in the workplace, low job satisfaction, and high absenteeism. Besides, long period employee has role ambiguity can lead high level of tension, and continuously results to work-related stress (Boles and Babin, 1996).

2.3.3 Role Conflict

Role conflict happens when incompatible role expectations exist within the workplace. Such conflicts occur when there are differences between employees and the management about the content of the required job tasks (Kahn and Byosiene, 1992). Role conflict occurs when the demand of the job differs from what the employee thinks of the job role.

Kahn et al. (1964) identified the following kinds of role conflict: (1) intra-sender conflict, which occurs when a role sender requires a role receiver to perform mutually exclusive or inconsistent roles. For example, role sender may request the role receiver to acquire material that cannot be done without violating rules and at the same time role sender want a role receiver have to follow the rule; (2) inter-sender conflict, which occurs on a role-receiver if the role behaviour demanded by one sender is contradictory with the role behaviour demanded by another role sender. For example, a salesperson which works at a pharmaceutical company, supervisor expects him or her can make a large number of sales and customer expect he or she to tell them of problems with the drugs; (3) inter-role conflict, which occurs when an individual occupies two or more roles whose expectations are incompatible. For example, for some professional women, they may conflict with the demands of the work role and the demands of the family role; (4) person-role conflict, which occurs the role requirements are conflicting with the needs and values of the individual. For example, a supervisor asks one of his subordinate to play dirty tricks on an opponent, and the subordinate confuse on moral grounds.

According to Price (2003), in the United States, sales employee who works in the retail industry faces a high level of work-related stress because of having a high level of role conflict, and results high rates of employee turnover.

Role conflict is the result of divergent role expectations. It exists the expectations of a job are mutually different and the individual cannot meet one expectation without rejecting the other. Chonko et al. (1983) stated that high amounts of role conflict can produce a greater level of work-related stress.

2.3.4 Job Autonomy

Job Autonomy is the extent to which a job allows an employee the freedom, discretion, and independence to make a decision, schedule work, and select the methods used to perform tasks (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Job autonomy provides freedom for employees to expand on the job duties and responsibilities.

Previous researchers have studied that the relationship between level of job autonomy and negatives stress-related outcomes. An employee has a high level of job autonomy will lead to low level of work-related stress because the presence of control

may encourage an employee to believe positive outcomes are possible, thereby reducing feelings of threat (Elsass and Veiga, 1997).

In addition, high job autonomy can increase job satisfaction. Morrison et al. (2005) explained that job autonomy became a critical factor in boosting employees' intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction. The higher job autonomy, the lower level of stress he or she has. Therefore, autonomy can increase motivation and happiness, along with decreasing work-related stress among employees.

2.3.5 Supervisor Support

Supervisor support is defined as the extent to which leaders value their employees' contributions, care about their well-being, and give employees' practical assistance, information, emotional support, and positive feedback (Powell, 2011).

The significant relationship between supervisor support and work-related stress has been shown in previous studies (Terry et al., 1993). A past research found a significant relationship between higher levels of supervisor support resulting in lower levels of work-related stress in a random sample of working former East German citizens (Dormann and Zapf, 1999).

According to Cosio (2010), an employee who works at the university may face a high level of work-related stress due to lack of supervisor support. She found that sufficient supervisory social support is stronger than co-worker support in decreasing work-related stress. This study has shown that supervisory social support appears to be an important protective factor in reducing work-related stress.

In addition, supervisor support has a positive relationship with the quality of life and negative relationship with anxiety, depression, complaints, and job tension in employees of a manufacturing company and a health insurance company (Bailey et al., 1994). Supervisor support may contribute to employees' lower level of stress. Supervisor support plays an important role in employees, well-being. Supervisors are responsible for employees' professional and personal development, even their well-being.

2.3.6 Interpersonal Relationship

Interpersonal relationships are social associations, affiliations, or connections between any two or more people (Interpersonal Relationship, n.d.). Interpersonal relationship at the workplace can cause work-related stress. A failure to build good relationship with bosses, supervisors, or colleagues can lead to work-related stress.

In company, a co-worker can be important sources of support, but they can also be sources of stress. Relationships with bosses, supervisors and colleagues can positively or negatively affect the way a worker feels. In a study on the relationship between managers and employees, there was found that an employee who has a lack relationship with managers can cause job pressure during working (Buck, 1972).

This is true of having to live with other people is one of the stressful aspects of working life. Makin et al. (1996) stated that lack of relationship between bosses, supervisors, and colleagues can be a major source of stress. Poor relationship with colleagues is the most stressful factor within the company (Gavin and Dileepan, 2002).

2.4 SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight some of the studies that have used measures and designs similar to the current research study. According to a literature review, work-related stress exists in a variety of forms from excessive workload, high role ambiguity, high role conflict, high role conflict, low job autonomy, poor interpersonal relationship, and lack of supervisor support.

Once an employee perceives too large work volume to complete or insufficient time to complete assigned tasks, he or she would suffer a high level of work-related stress. A long period employee has role ambiguity can lead high level of tension, and continuously results to work-related stress. Researchers stated that a high level of role conflict can produce a greater level of work-related stress. In addition, when an employee has no freedom or authority to expand on the job duties and responsibilities, the work-related stress would be increased. Some researchers were reported that supervisor support and interpersonal relationship have a negative relationship with anxiety, depression, and job stress in a workplace.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe the research design, data collection procedures and the data analysis techniques used. The data analysis was analysed by using the IBM SPSS Statistics 21. The data analysis techniques were used which are descriptive statistical analysis, normality test, Cronbach's alpha, factor analysis, and Pearson product-moment correlation.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.2.1 Type of Study

The research design consisted of quantitative, correlational approach, designed to analyse the factors affecting work-related stress of office staff in small manufacturing enterprises. In this quantitative correlation research study, the independent variables are workload, role ambiguity, role conflict, job autonomy, supervisor support, and interpersonal relationship; while, the dependent variable is work-related stress.

Quantitative research is research that quantifies the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into useable statistics. Quantitative research used to quantify opinions, behaviours, attitudes, and other defined variables, then generalize results from a sample population. It uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in the research study (Wyse, 2011). Correlational research is used to determine relationships between two or more variables. Correlational research analyses a range of factors, including the nature of the relationship between