

ABSTRACT

This study is of exploratory in nature and aims at taking a preliminary step in creating an understanding on the occupational stress faced by Macau's adult students who work full time and study part time. Through the use of a qualitative study technique, the researcher hopes to look at their perception on work and study related stress; to predict the potential sources of their stress; to identify their personal coping strategies and possible manifestations on individual and their workplaces.

The data were collected from semi-structured interviews with the aid of an interview schedule. It was divided into six stages: Stage 1: Background Information; Stage 2: Perception of Stress; Stage 3: Work Conditions; Stage 4: Study Conditions; Stage 5: Coping Strategies; and Stage 6: Manifestations of Stress. Throughout the interview, the researcher was able to obtain information on the intensity, frequency and the meaning that individuals attribute to stressful experiences.

In general, the findings of this research confirmed that "stress" did not happen to the person alone, but it occurred in an interactive manner with the environment. The participants realized that some reasonable amount of stress could also lead to motivation. Stress is being explained as response-based meanings which referred to the symptoms, such as feelings and reactions, that the individual was experiencing from stressful situation. Being an adult student, they felt tired and nervous but they appreciated it

nevertheless.

With respect to their work conditions, their work-related stress was influenced by their social context of their environments especially from the stressors “organizational structure and climate” and “interpersonal relationships at work”.

Regarding the study conditions, the stressor “dispositional factor” causing them to strive hard upon the belief that their efforts could eventually lead to potential benefits in the future. However, “Situational factor” was inevitable due to time-based and strain-based inter-role conflicts associated with an individual.

Of the stress experienced by the participants, they preferred to use “mental disengagement” as their emotion-focused strategy to cope with stress. This reflected that they had low internal locus of control over their present situation.

The manifestations of stress which had been reported did not happen to individuals only but had already spread to their work organizations in the forms of work attitudes and performance.

Lastly, a comparison of this research with other relevant studies from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and United Kingdom was also carried out. Implication drawn from this research could have potential practical contributions for enhancing employers’, educational institutions’, adult students’ and government’s understanding of the adverse influence of stress, and of the effective ways to relieve it.