



Complementary Therapy as an Approach in Managing Occupational Stress

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ABSTRACT

Occupational stress is caused by various reasons, such as, workload and long working hours. This leads to occurrence of trend in using wellness activities to treat physical and psychological illness that is known as complementary therapy, which is Yoga, Aromatherapy, Qi gong, and Islamic Medical Practices (Ruqyah). Therefore, this research offered a perspective on the use of complementary therapies as a tool in improving and maintaining mental health condition of employees located in Penang, Malaysia. Qualitative method was used where 5 complementary therapy practitioners were interviewed to identify the perceptions towards the use of complementary therapy and to identify the type of therapy that can be practiced to reduce stress, as well as, discuss the benefits of complementary therapies. It was found that complementary therapy is very beneficial as it acts as a holistic treatment, natural way of healing and more empowering, as it helps to improve employee's mental, emotional and physical health.

Keywords: occupational stress; complementary therapy; mental health; holistic; conventional

INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is caused by various types of stressors, such as, workload, long working hours, role ambiguity and role conflict experienced by employees leading to

depression, anxiety, work-related stress, burnout and absenteeism (Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor, & Millet, 2005). Complementary therapy is a type of treatment that can also be described as a non-conventional medicine. It serves as an alternative approach to mental health-care that emphasizes on the interrelationship between mind, body and spirit. The commonly used complementary therapies are music therapy, relaxation technique, acupuncture, mindfulness meditation,

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aromatherapy, massage, yoga, Tai chi, Qi gong and massage therapy. World Health Organization (2005) announced that 450 million people are suffering from mental related disorder, and 815 000 people out of 10 to 20 million committed suicide each year with one of the contributing factors of mental related disorder that is occupational stress. However, a study conducted in Malaysia found that employees are stressed due to high workloads (Manshor, Fontaine, & Chong, 2003). Several approaches have been initiated at the workplace in improving the mental health of employees as suggested by European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2014), such as, stress management training, health circles and free counseling session for employees. Another case study was conducted by European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2014) on innovative approaches to mental health promotion at workplace including “The story-telling approach”, health-related individual interview, and financial support for employees who are facing crisis. However, there is no known study that has explored the use of complementary therapy at the workplace as an approach in maintaining, and improving the mental health of employees. Abuduli, Ezat, and Aljunid (2011) mentioned that complementary therapy was proven to be able to help in mental health disorders, such as, insomnia, anxiety and depression, and has been suggested to be applied in 75% of chronic illness and 99% for psychiatric illness in Shenyang, China. The growing interest towards complementary therapy is the result of awareness and crucial role of psychological distress (Park, 2013). Despite the use of complementary therapy practices by health practitioner in the field of psychology, there is no known study that has specifically looked into the effects of complementary practices towards occupational stress. Therefore, this

study offered a perspective on the use of complementary therapy as a tool in improving and maintaining mental health, specifically at workplace, and identifying Malaysian employees’ perception in regard to the use of complementary therapy, as well as, to identify the type of therapy that can be practiced to reduce stress.

The research questions are as follows:

- i. What are the perceptions toward the use of complementary therapies?
- ii. What are the types of complementary therapies practiced by employees to reduce stress?
- iii. What are the effects of complementary therapies on occupational stress?

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- i. To study the perceptions towards the use of complementary therapies.
- ii. To identify the complementary therapies that can be practiced by employees to reduce stress.
- iii. To discover the effects of complementary therapies on occupational stress.

This exploratory research seeks to discover insights and ideas regarding complementary therapy as all approach in handling occupational stress issue in the workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is when environmental condition creates a physical or emotional demand that seeks for adaptive response by the employee (Choi, Tan, Teoh, & Muthuveloo, 2014). Jamal (2011) empha-