

**THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS'  
PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS ON WORK  
PERFORMANCE AND EARLY RETIREMENT  
INTENTIONS: SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A  
MODERATOR**

**CHONG YEE JOAN**

**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

**2014**

**THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS ON  
WORK PERFORMANCE AND EARLY RETIREMENT  
INTENTIONS: SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A MODERATOR**

by

**CHONG YEE JOAN**

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy**

**February 2014**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor and co-supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Intan Osman and Dr. Lilis Surienty for their guidance, concern and invaluable advice throughout the time of my studies.

I wish to thank to the respondents who have made this study a success and I am very grateful for their patient and time for the data provided by them.

I also would like to acknowledge appreciation to my family members and friends for their support and understanding throughout my studies.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	ii
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	iii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	x
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xii
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	xiv
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	xv
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	xvii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Background	1
1.1.1 Malaysian Education System's Scenario	3
1.2 Problem Statement	6
1.3 Research Objectives	8
1.4 Significance of the Study	9
1.5 Scope of the Study	10
1.6 Operational definition of key terms	11
1.7 Organisation of the Chapters	14
1.8 Summary	15
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</b>	
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Work-related Factors	17
2.3 Non-work related factor	20
2.4 Effects of Psychological Stress	21
2.5 Approaches to Stress	26
2.5.1 Response-oriented Approach	27

	Page
2.5.2 Stimulus-oriented Approach	29
2.5.3 Transactional approach	29
2.5.4 Ellis's Theory of Personality (REBT)	32
2.6 Models of Organisational Stress	34
2.6.1 Beehr and Newman's Facet Model	34
2.6.2 Karasek's (1979) Demand-Control (or Job-Strain) Model	35
2.6.3 Johnson and Hall's (1988) Demand-Control-Support (DCS) Model	36
2.6.4 Person-Environmental Fit Model	37
2.6.5 Effort-Reward Imbalance Model	38
2.7 Theoretical Background of the Study	38
2.8 Stress, Anxiety and Depression	40
2.8.1 Stress	40
2.8.2 Anxiety	42
2.8.3 Depression	43
2.8.4 Relationship between Stress, Anxiety, Depression	44
2.9 Irrational beliefs	46
2.9.1 Relationship between Irrational Beliefs and Psychological Stress	48
2.10 An Overview of Organisational Factors	51
2.10.1 Classroom Management	51
2.11 Stakeholder Expectations	54

	Page
2.12 Outcomes Variables	55
2.12.1 Absenteeism and Presenteeism	55
2.12.2 Early Retirement Intentions	59
2.13 Social Support	62
2.14 Theoretical Framework	66
2.15 Hypotheses	71
2.16 Summary	78
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	
3.1 Introduction	80
3.2 Research Design and Procedure	80
3.3 Population and Sample	84
3.4 Sampling Method	86
3.5 Measures	87
3.5.1 Psychological Stress	87
3.5.2 Independent Variables	89
3.5.3 Outcome Variables	91
3.7 Moderator	92
3.8 Pilot Testing of the Instruments	93
3.9 Control Variables	94
3.10 Statistical Analysis	96
3.10.1 Descriptive Statistics	96
3.10.2 Reliability Analysis	96

	Page
3.10.3 Factor Analysis	97
3.10.4 Independent Sample t-test	98
3.10.5 Correlation Analysis	98
3.10.6 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis	99
3.11 Summary	100
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS</b>	
4.1 Introduction	101
4.2 Descriptive Statistics	101
4.2.1 Demographic profile of the respondents	101
4.2.2 Mean and Standard Deviation	105
4.3 Reliability and Validity	106
4.4 Stress, Anxiety and Depression	107
4.5 Independent Samples t-tests	108
4.6 Inter-correlations between variables	109
4.7 Factor analysis	111
4.7.1 Irrational Beliefs	111
4.7.2 Student misbehaviour, frustration towards student learning Abilities and Stakeholder expectations	117
4.7.3 Work performance and Early Retirement Intentions	120
4.7.4 Social Support	123
4.8 Summary of factor analysis	124
4.9 Restatement of Research Hypotheses	127

	Page
4.10 Hypothesis Testing	132
4.10.1 Direct Effects	132
4.10.1(a) Stress	132
4.10.1(b) Anxiety	133
4.10.1(c) Depression	134
4.10.1(d) Absenteeism	135
4.10.1(e) Presenteeism	136
4.10.1(f) Early Retirement Intentions	136
4.11 Interaction Effects	137
4.12 Summary	154
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION</b>	
5.1 Introduction	155
5.2 Background of the Study	155
5.3 Discussion of Results	160
5.3.1 Research Question One	160
5.3.2 Independent Variables	163
5.3.2(a) Research Question Two	163
5.3.3 Outcomes	168
5.3.3(a) Research Question Three	168
5.3.3(b) Research Question Four	172
5.4 Implications	176



	Page
5.4.1 Theoretical Implications	177
5.4.2 Practical Implications	179
5.5 Recommendations for Further Research	183
5.6 Limitations of the Study	186
5.7 Conclusion	187
<b>REFERENCES</b>	188
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>Appendix A: Questionnaire</b>	253
<b>Appendix B: SPSS Outputs</b>	
<i>B1: Demographic Profile of Respondents</i>	260
<i>B2: Mean and Standard Deviation</i>	263
<i>B3: Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for Psychological Stress measure</i>	264
<i>B4: Level of Stress, Anxiety and Depression</i>	267
<i>B5: Independent-samples t-test for response bias between Stress, Anxiety and Depression Among Respondents</i>	268
<i>B6: Inter-correlation relationships between variables</i>	270
<i>B7: Irrational beliefs: Rotated Factors, Item Loadings and Reliabilities</i>	271
<i>B8: Organisation factors and stakeholder expectations: Rotated Factors, Item Loadings and Reliabilities</i>	280
<i>B9: Presenteeism and Early retirement intentions: Rotated Factors Item Loadings and Reliabilities</i>	286
<i>B10: Social support: Rotated Factors, Item Loadings and Reliabilities</i>	293

	Page
<i>B11: Hierarchy Multiple Regression Results: The Relationship between Psychological Stress, Irrational beliefs, Organisational Factors and Stakeholder Expectations</i>	298
<i>B12: Hierarchy Multiple Regression Results: The Relationship between Psychological Stress, Presenteeism and Early Retirement Intentions</i>	317
<i>B13: Logistic regression predicting likelihood of teacher's absent from work</i>	323
<b>Appendix C: List of schools</b>	328
<b>Appendix D: Number of surveys received from each state</b>	330
<b>Appendix E: Letter of approval</b>	331
<b>Appendix F: Table of Random Numbers</b>	347

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
2.1 Summary of Representative Sample of Past Studies on Psychological Stress	23
2.2 Comparison of Major Psychological Stress Theories	33
3.1 DASS severity ratings (Recommended cutoff point)	89
3.2 Measurements of the independent, psychological stress and outcome variables of the study	92
3.3 Variables and Results of Cronbach alpha	93
4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents	102
4.2 Profile of Teachers' School Structure	104
4.3 Mean and Standard Deviation for variables in the study	105
4.4 Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for Psychological Stress measure	107
4.5 Levels of Stress, Anxiety and Depression among 296 <i>Sekolah Kluster</i> teachers in Malaysia	107
4.6 Independent-samples t-test for response bias between Stress, Anxiety and Depression among respondents	108
4.7 Inter-correlation relationships between variables	110
4.8 Irrational beliefs: Rotated Factors, Item Loadings and Reliabilities	115
4.9 Organisation factors and stakeholder expectations: Rotated Factors, Item Loadings and Reliabilities	119
4.10 Presenteeism, Absenteeism and Early retirement intentions: Rotated Factors, Item Loadings and Reliabilities	122
4.11 Social support: Rotated Factors, Item Loadings and Reliabilities	124
4.12 Summary of Factor Analysis	126
4.13 Restated Hypotheses from the results of factor analysis	127

	Page
4.14 Hierarchy Multiple Regression Results: The Relationship between Psychological Stress, Irrational beliefs, Organisational Factors and Stakeholder Expectations	145
4.15 Hierarchy Multiple Regression Results: The Relationship between Psychological Stress, Presenteeism and Early Retirement Intentions	147
4.16 Logistic regression predicting likelihood of teacher's absent from work	148
4.17 Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results	149

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
2.1 Yerks-Dodson's Inverted U	28
2.2 Lazarus and Folkman's theory of stress	31
2.3 ABC theory of personality	33
2.4 Beehr and Newman's Facet Job Stress Model	35
2.5 Karasek Job Strain Model	36
2.6 Johnson and Hall's (1988) Demand-Control-Support Model	37
2.7 Siegrist's Effort-Reward Imbalance Model	38
2.8 Proposed Theoretical Framework of Teachers' Psychological Stress	70
3.1 Flowchart of Research Procedures	83
4.1 Theoretical Framework	131
4.2 Effects of teacher's frustration towards student learning abilities versus peer support interaction on stress	137
4.3 Effects of teacher's low-frustration tolerance versus peer support interaction on stress	138
4.4 Effects of student misbehaviour versus peer support interaction on stress	139
4.5 Effects of teacher's low-frustration tolerance versus family support interaction on stress	140
4.6 Effects of student misbehaviour versus peer support interaction on anxiety	141
4.7 Effects of teacher's frustration towards student learning abilities versus peer support interaction on anxiety	142
4.8 Effects of teacher's low-frustration tolerance versus peer support interaction on depression	143

	Page
4.9 Effects of teacher's frustration towards student learning abilities versus peer support interaction on depression	144

## LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
A Questionnaire	253
B SPSS Outputs	260
C List of schools	328
D Number of surveys received from each state	330
E Letter of approval	331
F Table of Random Numbers	347

# **KESAN TEKINAN PSIKOLOGI GURU TERHADAP PRESTASI KERJA DAN HASRAT BERSARA AWAL: SOKONGAN SOSIAL SEBAGAI SATU PENYERDERHANA**

## **ABSTRAK**

Kajian in dijalankan untuk menentukan tahap tekanan, keresahan serta kemurungan (tekanan psikologi) dalam kalangan guru di sekolah kluster. Kajian ini mengguna Skala DASS untuk mengukur tahap tekanan psikologi guru (responden). Disamping itu kajian ini juga meneliti hubungan antara kepercayaan tidak rasional, faktor organisasi dan jangkaan pihak berkepentingan disamping mengkaji impak tekanan psikologi terhadap prestasi kerja (ketidakhadiran dan kehadiran) dan hasrat bersara awal dalam kalangan guru. Sokongan sosial sebagai penyerderhana diperkenalkan dalam kerangka teori kajian ini untuk melihat kesan hubungan antara pembolehubah bebas dan tekanan psikologi. Kajian in menambah elemen keresahan serta kemurungan bagi mengukur tahap tekanan psikologi dalam kalangan guru di mana kebanyakan kajian lepas memfokus ke atas tekanan sahaja. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk memahami dengan lebih mendalam tentang tekanan psikologi dalam kalangan guru serta punca dan akibat tekanan, keresahan serta kemurungan itu. Beberapa hubungan hipotesis diuji ke atas data yang dikutip melalui soalselidik daripada 296 orang guru di sekolah kluster di Semenanjung Malaysia. Kesan interaksi antara pembolehubah bebas dan tekanan psikologi juga diuji. Hierarki regresi berganda, ujian-t, analisa faktor diguna untuk menganalisa data tersebut. Terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara tekanan psikologi, kepercayaan tidak rasional dengan faktor organisasi. Tambahan pula, tekanan dan kemurungan didapati mempunyai kesan positif terhadap “presenteeism” dan hasrat bersara awal dalam kalangan guru. Sebaliknya, kesan interaksi antara sokongan sosial dengan pembolehubah bebas tidak begitu signifikan. Berdasarkan pengukuran dan intepretasi DASS, responden



didapati mengalami tekanan, keresahan serta kemurungan daripada tahap biasa sehingga tahap teruk. Dalam kajian ini, tekanan psikologi bukan sahaja mengeluarkan simptom tekanan (stres) tetapi juga simptom keresahan dan kemurungan. Implikasi dan cadangan kajian masa depan dibincang dalam tesis ini.

# **THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS ON WORK PERFORMANCE AND EARLY RETIREMENT INTENTIONS: SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A MODERATOR**

## **ABSTRACT**

The study was undertaken to identify the levels of stress, anxiety and depression among teachers teaching in *Sekolah Kluster*. The study used Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) to measure the levels of teachers' psychological stress. In addition, this study examined the relationship between irrational beliefs, organisational factors and stakeholder expectation and the impact of psychological stress on work performance (absenteeism and presenteeism) and early retirement intentions among teachers. Social support as moderator was introduced in the current theoretical framework to see the effects of the relationship between independent variables and psychological stress. This study added anxiety and depression to measure teachers' psychological stress as previous studies were mostly focusing on stress. Its objective was to provide in depth understanding of teachers' psychological stress and its causes and outcomes. Several hypothesised relationships were tested on the data collected by means of questionnaire from a sample of 296 teachers from selected *Sekolah Kluster* in Peninsular Malaysia. Interaction effects between the independent variables and psychological stress were also tested. Hierarchy multiple regression, t-test, factor analysis were used to analyse the data. There was a significant relationship between teachers' psychological stress, irrational beliefs and organizational factors. In addition, stress and depression were found to have a positive impact on absenteeism, presenteeism and early retirement intentions. On the other hand, the interaction effects between social support and the independent variables (irrational beliefs, organisational factors and stakeholder expectations) were

partially supported. Based on DASS measures and interpretation, respondents were found to experience normal to extremely severe levels of stress, anxiety and depression. In this study, teachers' psychological stress was found to not only produce symptoms of stress but also those of anxiety and depression. Implications and recommendations for future research were discussed.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background**

People spend most of their time working and work has become part of their lives. Work and life satisfaction are important elements in everyday lives. A satisfied worker is a productive worker who may be able to put in more effort and commitment in his or her work. However, in any work environment one faces various problems and obstacles, such as increased workload, poor management and peer support, lack of communication, lack of motivation and poor working environment (Rajarajeswari, 2010). If one cannot cope with the situations, one gradually feels the stress which can have a spillover effect on one's personal life. In fact, people cannot avoid stress as stress has become a part of everyone's daily life and stress is the wear and tear that human being experiences as people make adjustments to keep pace with ever changing environment. As a negative influence, stress can result in feelings of anger, negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, while too much of distress would affect one's work performance and quality of life (Mageswari & Prabhu, 2012; Jehangir, Kareem, Tahir Jan & Soherwardi, 2011; Adeniyi, Fakolade & Tella, 2010; Rajarajeswari, 2010; Klassen, Usher & Bong, 2010; Chang & Lu, 2009; Giva & Joekes, 2003). Therefore, interventions or coping strategies such as social support are essential during times of stress and promotes better psychological adjustment to a wide array of stressful conditions (Bagceci & Hamamci, 2012; Zedan, 2012; Hauk, Snyder & Cox-Fuenzalida, 2011; Shen, 2009; Shelley & Stanton, 2007; Austin, Shah & Muncer, 2005; Snow, Swan, Raghawan, Connell & Kleins, 2003).

Psychological stress is considered as one of the leading causes of work-related health problems in almost all professions or occupations (Sundaram & Kumaran, 2012; Zedan, 2012; Fauzia Khurshid, Zahir Uddin Butt & Sufiana Malik, 2011; Chamberlin & Green, 2010; Chang & Lu, 2009; Paice, Rutter, Wetherell, Winder & McMnanus, 2002). For instance, several researchers have pointed out that doctors are the ones who have stressful occupations as they have to work long hours, face difficult patients and handle conflicting work demands. Lawyers are professionals who are also more likely to be affected by psychological distress because lawyers' personality traits, such as perfectionism, and the need for achievement make lawyers more susceptible to stress (Hopkins & Gardner, 2012). Another occupation that is vulnerable to psychological stress is the teaching profession. Teaching is a profession that relates directly to relevant stakeholders. Stress in teaching profession not only affects the psychological well being of teachers but also affects the entire education institution where they work because they may not able to fully focus on nurturing and developing teacher-student relationship (Fauzia Khurshid, Zahir Uddin Butt & Sufiana Malik, 2011; De Nobile & McCormick, 2005). It has been reported that work-related stressors contribute to high turnover, absenteeism, decrease in quality of work and job performance whilst prolonged psychological stress affects well-being of workers either physically or psychologically (Lee, Kim & Yoon, 2011; Mosadeghrad, Ferlie & Rosenberg, 2011; Shahzad, Hayat, Abbas, Bashir & Rehman, 2011; Olaitan, Oyerinde, Obiyemi & Kayode, 2010; Avey, Luthans & Jensen, 2009; Kazmi, Amjad & Khan, 2008; Yang, Che & Spector, 2008). In the long term, a long exposure to an extreme stressful situation can induce a person into psychological distress. (Peisah, Latif, Wilhelm & Williams, 2009).

With the current changes in education reform and structure which are inevitable, teachers have to face changes in working environment, for instance, new responsibilities and demands, changes in student behaviour, contradictions in education system, authority and discipline in the classroom, changes and improvements in curriculum contents and job overload (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008; Yeung & Liu, 2007; Margolis & Nagel, 2006; Kyriacou & Chien, 2004; Dworkin, 2001; Esteve, 2000). These changes are not only affecting western countries but also Malaysia.

Teachers have been chosen as the subject of the study in the current research because among the resources of educations, teachers are the most mobile and important input in an education function and students are the product of teacher's educating efforts (Rao & Jani, 2011). With the changes in education structure, teachers are expected to handle more duties and tasks. Subramaniam, Ahmad, Sinniah and Mahadevan (2011) point out in their study that Malaysian teachers' stress level range from low to high level of stress in difference factors that causes it. Hence, the study involving well-being of teachers deserves a great amount of investigation.

### **1.1.1 Malaysian Education System's Scenario**

Based on the principles of the National Philosophy of Education (NPE), Malaysia is a multicultural nation which aspires to develop a high quality education system and to produce well-rounded individuals for the advancement of the nation. Therefore, human capital development is seen as one of the important factors for Malaysia to progress into the future. With the declaration of the National Philosophy of Education (NPE) and Vision 2020 (Prime Minister's Department, 2012), there have been changes in the roles of teachers which include the responsibilities to educate

students to become useful citizens for the future development and progress of the society and nation (Mok, 2005). In addition, teachers need to act as agents of change to bring creativity and innovations to fulfill the needs of the society and nation, so as to realise the objectives of the National Philosophy of Education (NPE).

Education is therefore seen as the most vital key in addressing the challenges indicated in the vision. Teachers are the main key actors in the process of helping the nation to transit from an industrialised nation to a knowledge-based nation. Teachers also function as parent, and assuming the roles of managing the overall activities of the school. Teachers perform various duties, for instance, managing the class, taking students' attendance, filling students' academic records, encouraging and motivating students in learning and attending to students' problem (Mok, 2005).

Since 2007, Malaysian government has changed the school assessment system aimed at addressing the issues of excessive exam-oriented culture in the national education system (Tan, 2010). One of the changes is the revamping of the PMR and UPSR examinations to school-based assessment from 2016, suggesting that teachers are expected to continuously assess, coach and monitor student performance. In line with this new structure, The National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) agreed to the changes on condition that teachers are given special training in guiding and coaching the students and as well as having extra assistants to lighten their workload (NUTP, 2010). In addition, the former National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP) Secretary-General urged the school top administrators to allow teachers to do what they do best, that is to teach and not to be bogged down with all non-teaching tasks and depriving teachers' time with students (The Sun, 2012).

The Malaysian government believes that an improvement in the national education system is essential in building a strong and competitive workforce (The Sun, 2010). Overall, programmes introduced by the National Key Results Area for Education (NKRA) have introduced policies that promote student-centred approaches to teaching, which would increase more workload for teachers (Ministry of Education, 2012; Najeemah Mohd Yusof, 2011).

Due to global challenges faced by the teaching profession in various countries, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducted a survey, The Teaching and Learning International Survey or TALIS on education systems and teaching conditions globally with the aim of creating a conducive and effective working environment for teachers and the learning environment for students. Up till 2010, TALIS had collected information from 70,000 teachers and 4,000 school principals from 24 countries including Norway, Australia and Malaysia. Within Malaysia, TALIS had collected information on teachers' opinions, perceptions, beliefs, activities that provided invaluable information on the Malaysian education system and the scenario of teachers' working conditions from 20 schools comprising government, MARA and religious schools. Results from TALIS revealed that most of Malaysian teachers felt that there were several areas that needed more guidance and development. 83 % of teachers wanted more training and improvement in classroom management, content and performance standards, student assessment practices, and student's misbehaviour. In general, Malaysian teachers viewed the classroom disciplinary climate rather negatively compared with other participating countries. This finding showed that Malaysian teachers spent most of their lesson time in disciplining students rather than in teaching and imparting knowledge. In addition, the findings suggested Malaysian teachers used more teacher-centred rather



than student-oriented approach such as adapting teaching to meet individual needs (OECD, 2009). Besides TALIS, a report on Teachers for Tomorrow's School published jointly by OECD and UNESCO in 2001, confirmed the importance of providing in-service training and development for teachers and better working conditions to attract qualified applicants into the teaching profession.

In relation to the achievement of excellence in education, *Sekolah Kluster* was announced as one of the important components in the Educational Development Master Plan (EDMP). It is to ensure young generations have equal access and opportunities to good education, such as provided by the *Sekolah Kluster*. *Sekolah Kluster* is a rebranded concept which excels in their own cluster, such as in school administration, student's academic and non-academic results (Ministry of Education, 2006). The main difference between the *Sekolah Kluster* and regular schools is in its decentralised system empowering the *Sekolah Kluster* to select its own teachers, students, with the aim to improve quality of education in Malaysia. Besides, it also serves as an active learning institution which would be able to adapt to the ever changing environment (Ministry of Education, 2006). The success of *Sekolah Kluster*, depends not only on students' performance but also on the development of teachers.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

In the nation's education system, teachers are the most important front liners involved directly in nurturing and cultivating Malaysia's future generation. However, there is a concern that schools have loaded teachers with too much administrative work that limits their focus to deliver quality education. Although, the ministry has agreed to assign clerical staff to support teachers in administrative work, the additional clerical headcount is still insufficient. As discussed earlier, teachers are expected to manage students with disciplinary attitudes and problems as part of their

duties. With the current education system focusing more on examination based assessment, teachers often have no choice but to drill students in passing the subjects (Tan, 2010).

With the introduction of *Sekolah Kluster*, there are more concerns and high expectations from various stakeholders in monitoring the progress of these schools compared to other regular schools. One of the criteria of achieving the status of *Sekolah Kluster* is to consistently obtain a high percentage of student passing rates (e.g. 4.0 and below for regular secondary school) (Ministry of Education, 2006) in public examinations for three consecutive years and to ensure students perform well to pursue tertiary education. Secondly, *Sekolah Kluster* is given guided autonomy to select teachers who achieve *Guru Cemerlang* status and to further develop their respective niche areas to increase its institutional excellence with involvement from various stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, school administrators and the department of education (Ministry of Education, 2006). On a daily basis, teachers face pressure not only from parents, students with disciplinary problems and different learning abilities, but also from demand within the school and the department of education. High expectations from teachers themselves and society might also contribute to teachers' poor well-being and teachers' psychological stress.

Overall, teachers in *Sekolah Kluster* are subjected to various duties and responsibilities due to the high standard set by the ministry (Ministry of Education, 2006). Report from TALIS revealed Malaysian teachers tend to spend most of their lesson time in disciplining students rather than teaching and imparting knowledge (OECD, 2009). In addition, Malaysia's National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP, 2005) conducted a survey of 9000 teachers across primary, secondary and technical schools which showed 69% of Malaysian teachers were stressed out, with

pressure from parents and students misbehaviour as one of the major factors contributing to teachers' psychological stress.

Teachers who are under a great deal of stress tend to have lower performance and health issues. Individuals who experience high level of stress are more likely than those who experience lower level of stress to resort to more aggressive strategies in handling problems, to have higher absenteeism and tend to leave the profession early (Shernoff, Mehta & Atkins, 2011; Nadeem, Bhatti, Muhammad Aamir Hashmi, Shoukat Ali Raza, Faiz Shaikh & Kamran Shafiq, 2011; Lath, 2010; Watson, Harper, Ratliff & Singleton, 2010; Chan, Chen & Chong, 2010; Lazarus, 2006). All these have detrimental effects on students' learning and work environment.

Thus, this study aims to identify the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (psychological stress) experienced by teachers; to investigate the stressors in the teaching profession and the consequences of psychological stress, and to determine whether social support reduces or intensifies the effects of stressors on psychological stress among Malaysian teachers teaching in *Sekolah Kluster*.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

There are four primary objectives in the present study which are to:

1. identify the levels of psychological stress (stress, anxiety and depression) among teachers teaching in *Sekolah Kluster*.
2. investigate the relationship between the stressors (irrational beliefs, organisational factors and stakeholder expectations) and teachers' psychological stress.
3. determine the effects of teachers' psychological stress on work performance and early retirement intentions.

4. determine whether social support would be able to moderate the effects of stressors on psychological stress among teachers teaching in *Sekolah Kluster*.

Thus, the present study is designed to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the levels of stress, anxiety and depression among teachers teaching in *Sekolah Kluster*?
2. Do irrational beliefs, organisational factors and stakeholder expectations predict teachers' psychological stress?
3. Is there any significant effect of teachers' psychological stress on teachers' work performance (absenteeism and presenteeism) and early retirement intentions?
4. Would social support moderate the effect of stressors on teachers' psychological stress?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Teachers are responsible for educating the future generation of Malaysia and students view teachers as the second most important role models after their parents. This study takes a major step towards addressing the issues of teachers' psychological stress in a challenging and highly demanding work environment. Theoretically, the study offers additional insights into the understanding of workplace health by combining the concepts from organisational and psychological perspectives. Secondly, the proposed theoretical framework enhances teachers' psychological stress by adding two common classic stress responses which are anxiety and depression. In addition, with the new variables irrational beliefs, stakeholder expectations, presenteeism and early retirement intentions included in the proposed

framework to examine teachers' psychological stress offer an added contribution to the existing stress framework.

From the practical perspective, teachers teaching in *Sekolah Kluster* could focus on developing interventions (social support) or coping strategies to reduce the incidences of psychological stress among teachers. Reducing stress, anxiety, and depression level is not only desirable but also essential in a society that values quality of life and productivity of its members. The study also draws attention to the importance of support from peer and family members in helping teachers suffering from stress, anxiety and depression to create a healthy and productive work environment.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The study is limited to the investigation of the levels of teachers' psychological stress and its effects on teachers' work performance and early retirement intentions. This study uses irrational beliefs, organisational factors and stakeholder expectations to assess their effects on teachers' psychological stress and subsequently on teachers work performance and early retirement intentions. Social support would be used to test the moderating effects between the stressors and psychological stress.

Data would be collected from teachers who teach in *Sekolah Kluster* in all states in Peninsular Malaysia. *Sekolah Kluster* chosen in this study are secondary schools in their respective states. The list of *Sekolah Kluster* has been obtained from the Ministry of Education and only trained government teachers are selected as samples of the study.

## **1.6 Operational definition of key terms**

The following key terms are used frequently throughout the study.

### Teachers' Psychological Stress

In this study, teachers' psychological stress is conceptualised as a process of adaptation between the individual and the environment, an ongoing interaction that involves perception and cognitions of the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

### Stress

The term stress is conceptualised as a frequent state of over-arousal which reflects continuing difficulty in meeting stressful life demands (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

### Anxiety

Anxiety is perceived as experiencing uneasiness, worrying, fear of harm about unpleasant events or situation (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

### Depression

In this study, depression refers to a state characterised by a loss of self-esteem and sadness of mood. (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

### Irrational beliefs

Irrational beliefs is conceptualised as a negative emotion and behaviour arising from cognitive processes that are considered as illogical in analysing issues, people, oneself, or even situations (Bermejo-Toro & Ursua-Prieto, 2006). It comprises concepts of self-downing attitude, low-frustration tolerance, attitude towards school organisation and authoritarian attitude towards students.

### Self-downing attitude

Self downing refers to the tendency of labelling oneself, other people or life as being "worthless" or "bad" if failure occurs (Macavei, 2005).

### Low-frustration tolerance

Low-frustration tolerance refers to the low level of ability of an individual to withstand or endure the frustration encountered in the workplace (Macavei, 2005).

### Attitude towards school organisation

Attitude towards school organisation refers to one's false beliefs that he or she does not have ability to influence things that happen in the work environment (Macavei, 2005).

### Authoritarian attitude towards students

Authoritarian attitude towards students refers to teachers having a fixed idea on how students should behave in a class situation (Macavei, 2005).

### Organisational factors

Organisational factors refer to specific aspect of job or working conditions that can be assessed.

### Classroom management

Classroom management refers to the classroom disciplinary climate and how a teacher manages teaching and student learning (Magableh & Hawamdeh, 2007). It constitutes student misbehavior and student learning abilities.

### Student misbehaviour

Student misbehavior is conceptualised as improper behaviour that has adverse effects on teaching and learning climate in the classroom (Sun & Shek, 2012).

### Frustration towards student learning abilities

Students who have different learning pace and abilities are likely to become sources of stress among teachers as most of these students have a more passive learning style (Firth, Frydenberg & Greaves, 2006).

### Stakeholder expectations

A stakeholder is an individual or group who can influence the performance of an organisation directly or indirectly (Certo, 2006). These stakeholders tend to have certain expectations from the organisation, and they determine the degree to which expectations are currently being satisfied (Curtice, 2006). In this study, teachers perceive stakeholder expectations as pressure from significant others (Tang & Yeung, 1999).

### Work performance

Work performance refers to performance outcomes which are considered important to meet organisation's objectives (Landy & Conte, 2004, p.165). For the purpose of this study, work performance includes absenteeism and presenteeism.

### Absenteeism

Absenteeism refers to a counterproductive behaviour when an employee fails to report for or remain at work as scheduled (Landy & Conte, 2004, p.177). In this study, absenteeism refers to teachers who are absent from work due to some reasons.

### Presenteeism

Presenteeism refers to a job holder who is physically present at work but functionally absent due to stress and emotional issues as well as health conditions (Munro, 2007). In this study, presenteeism refers to teachers who might be present at work but not performing at their best because of psychological stress.

### Early retirement intentions

In this study, early retirement intentions refer to teachers who intent to leave the profession voluntarily before the legal retirement age which is 58 years old at the time of data collection in 2009 (Public Service Department, 2009). Public civil



servants can opt for early retirement at the age of 40 if he or she has served the government for a minimum of 10 years (Public Service Department, 2009).

#### Social support

Social support is conceptualised as a buffer for psychological stress and lack of support may lead to negative outcomes, such as emotional distress and ill health (Wongpakaran, Wongpakaran & Rutrakul, 2011). In this study, social support refers to support, concerns and help given by peer and family members.

#### Peer support

In this study, peer support refers to physical or emotional comfort offered or provided by friends and co-workers in the workplace.

#### Family support

In this study, family support refers to emotional comfort and supportive relationship provided by family members including spouse, parents and siblings in time of need.

#### Sekolah Kluster

It is a rebranded concept given to schools which excel in their own cluster, such as in school administration, students' academic and non-academic achievement (Ministry of Education, 2006).

### **1.7 Organisation of the Chapters**

The thesis is organised into five chapters:

Chapter one consists of relevant background of the subject, research objectives, problem statement, scope of the study and significance of the study. Chapter two is the literature review of the study. Chapter three outlines the research methodology, including design of the study, determining validity and reliability of the instrument used in this study and the selection of the sample, including procedure and method. Chapter four presents the data analysis section where data collected from the study

are analysed and presented. In Chapter five, discussions and limitations of the study are made for future research.

## **1.8 Summary**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of this study including the background of the Malaysian education system, problem statement, significance of the study, scope of the study and operational definition of key terms. The research questions and objectives have been clearly delineated in order to address the problem related to teachers' psychological stress.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is divided into several sections in order to discuss the relevant literature that creates the basis of this study. A review of stress concepts and theories is discussed followed by a brief discussion on causes and consequences on psychological stress. The other sections are filled with the discussion of its independent variables and outcomes. At the end of this chapter, a proposed theoretical framework and hypotheses are presented.

The study of teachers' psychological stress has been one of the great concerns in education. Various studies on teachers' psychological stress have been published over the years (Fisher, 2011; Gardner, 2010; Meng & Liu, 2008; Al-Mohannadi & Capel, 2007; Kyriacou & Chien, 2004; Kyriacou, 2001). Certain aspects of psychological stress research are considered important and relevant today whether theoretically or empirically as stress affects not only individuals but also organisations. In addition, stress emotions such as depression, anxiety, fear, anger and even ill-health have certain influence on the individual's performance and productivity and this eventually might also affect the overall performance of the organisation (Park, 2007).

Psychological stress can be caused by various factors or variables including work itself, conflicts in organisations, role conflict, role ambiguity, intra or interrelationship among friends, colleagues, superiors or even family members, external environment etc. Findings from several researches have revealed that different causes and consequences of psychological stress affect people differently and produce different outcomes. Generally, why some people feel stress and some do

not most probably has to do with the manner people use coping strategies to cope with the stress or the levels of resistance people respond to a stressor. Therefore, outcomes or consequences are different for each individual. When considering teachers' psychological stress research, work-related factors emerged as a common factor that causes stress among teachers (Education Trade Union Committee for Education, 2011; Tsai, Fung & Chow, 2006).

## **2.2 Work-related Factors**

Work is part of everyone's life but excessive workload is the excess amount of work considered to be overwhelming till one cannot cope with it. If one could not think of a way to cope with the excessive workload, one would definitely feel extreme stress and tired. Therefore, stress and workload is a vital problem that concerns everyone not only educators. Nowadays, teachers are overloaded with work whether quantitatively or qualitatively. Teachers have to accomplish various duties which include administrative work, attending school meetings and training. In addition, they are subjected to work on weekends, which are supposed to be their rest days, supervising extra co-curricular activities, handling more and more demanding parents and students. Thus, the demands placed on teachers have changed and increased in past decades (Steyn & Kamper, 2006; Ingvarson, Kleinhenz, Beavis, Barwick, Carthy & Wilkinson, 2005; Naylor, 2001). Excessive workload has caused fatigue and demoralisation among teachers. Teachers not only have to cope with their quantity of work, but at times teachers have to respond to additional tasks and demands placed by peers, the school, parents, the public and the ministry (Kerr, Breen, Delaney, Kelly & Miller, 2011).

Teachers have insufficient time to prepare teaching materials and class activities as they have to fulfill demands and deadlines made by administrators.

Therefore, time pressure has become another source of stress for teachers (Chan, Chen & Chong, 2010; Torres, Lawver & Lambert, 2009).

In addition, literature shows there are different types of role stressors including role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload. Role conflict occurs when two or more contradictory expectations are placed on a person which results in psychological conflict. Teachers who suffer from psychological conflict are not able to handle issues and problems rationally. This causes dissatisfaction and fatigue among teachers. Role overload happens if teachers are given too much work to a point that teachers do not know which role to play and have inadequate time to execute all roles at once and thus not able to perform any one role satisfactorily. Role ambiguity is another role-related stressor which is defined as one that is not provided or communicated with clear expectations and information about work (Chadha, Sood & Malhotra, 2012; Scheib, 2003). Conley and Woosley (2000) point out that too many role demands cause teachers to suffer from general stress and job dissatisfaction. Individuals experience role stress due to the poor fit between the person and the environment. Eventually work stress jeopardises the performance and well being of the person (Bano & Jha, 2012; Sharma & Devi, 2011; Srivastav, 2010).

Education reform, changes in policies and new guidelines initiated by the relevant authorities that require teachers to play new roles, acquire new teaching methods have probably led teachers to a more stressful situation. Education reform is a process of improving public education in order to further maintain, motivate and enhance national unity. The school as an education institution constantly faces transformation and changes. Policy makers such as the Ministry of Education always review the current state of national education policies and changes would be done in order to improve further the national education system and teachers are directly

affected by the changes and transformation. Policy makers view the transformation as necessary to improve the education system but teachers feel stressed because they view these changes as additional load on their shoulders. One of the reasons is that when any transformation is made, there are changes in teaching context, teaching methods, assessments, curriculum and teaching materials. However, for teachers who do not have positive perception of the reform and changes in education experience tensions, anxiety, even burnout (Margolis & Nagel, 2006; Kyriacou & Chen, 2004; Kyriacou, 2001; Dworkin, 2001).

The classroom is a place where teachers impart their knowledge to students and managing the classroom is not an easy task because teachers need to handle a large group of students with different behaviour and at the same time, teach and complete the school syllabus on schedule. In a class, one can find students who have discipline problem, lack of interest in studies, slow in learning and all these have certain negative effects on those around them. Teachers have been found to spend most of their class time to manage these types of students including disciplining them rather than teaching (Al-Amarat, 2011; Alvarez, 2007; Finlayson, 2005; Nurul Izzah Abdul Samad, Zalina Hashim, Saidi Moin & Haslinda Abdullah, 2010). Findings by Najeemah Mohd Yusof (2011) also reveal that student misbehaviour causes stress among teachers teaching in primary schools. Through a survey conducted by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2009), Malaysian teachers view the quality of Malaysian classroom environment negatively compared to other countries involved in the study. Classroom behavior management is cited as one of the main concerns and issues while student misbehaviour is the source of frustration among teachers.

In addition, researchers have also established other related sources of stress among teachers. These include lack of student-teacher relationship, poor relationship among peers, poor working conditions, lack of control and decision-making power especially concerning teaching, feelings of personal inadequacy, job insecurity, insufficient rewards and recognition, problems of class size, difficult communication with parents, insufficient teaching resources, lack of support and motivation (Akhlaq, Amjad, Mehmood, Hassan & Malik, 2010; Houtman, 2007; Howard & Johnson, 2002).

### **2.3 Non-work related factor**

Non-work related factors such as background characteristics, personality and individual differences and cognition are also important in examining teachers' psychological stress. Every teacher holds different individual expectation and goals when entering the teaching profession. Jepson and Forrest (2006) point out that in understanding psychological stress, individual contributory factor is to be examined as equally important as work environment. Personality traits tend to influence an individual's response to stress. The researchers link stress to Type A behaviour pattern in which Type A individual is often characterised as being easily aroused, achievement-oriented, impatient and excessively competitive (Sogaard, Dalgard, Holme, Roysamb, & Haheim, 2008). Since personality has the tendency to explain how certain people are capable of handling huge amount of stress while some collapse under stressful events, it is therefore relevant to associate personality types as an important factor in determining psychological stress while stress, burnout, job satisfaction have also been linked to the Big Five personality (Dumitru & Cozman, 2012). Apart from that, perfectionism is another personality trait which sets an extremely high standard for oneself and aims for perfection in one's performance.

Perfectionism is divided into adaptive and maladaptive categories. Studies point out that people with adaptive perfectionism benefit from it but people with maladaptive perfectionism suffer from a wide range of psychological distress (Dunn, Whelton & Sharpe, 2006).

Socio-demographics and personal background characteristics are factors which also impact on teachers' psychological stress (Azlihanis Abdul Hadi, Nyi Nyi Naing, Aziah Daud, Rusli Nordin & Mohd Rahim Sulong, 2009; Ravichandran & Rajendran, 2007). Gender differences and stress are also associated. In the majority of the psychological stress findings, females are found to be more likely to have higher stress level compared to males because of temperamental differences and emotional reaction towards the stressful situation or events. They tend to experience higher negative emotional reactions to stressful events than males (Charbonneau, Mezulis & Hyde, 2009). Age is also associated with psychological stress. Some studies have shown that people who are younger are more prone to stress compared to older people (Griffths, Knight & Mohd.Mahudin, 2009). They point out that older workers have lower psychological stress levels compared to younger workers as the former are more in control of their lives and utilise better coping strategies than those of the younger workers. The effects of psychological stress are discussed in the following section.

#### **2.4 Effects of Psychological Stress**

Teachers' psychological stress often has serious impact on teachers as individuals, on the school and the students. Research confirms the long term negative effects of stress both psychologically and physically (Borg & Riding, 1991a, 1991b). There is a substantial body of research and literature that examine the effects of stress not only in the teaching profession but also in other occupations such as nursing (Sundaram &



Kumaran, 2012; Zedan, 2012; Norwood & Rascati, 2012; Fauzia Khurshid, Zhir Uddin Butt & Sufiana Malik, 2011; Engstrom, Skytt & Nilsson, 2011; Chamberlin & Green, 2010; Juthberg, Erikson, Norberg & Sundin, 2010; Chang & Lu, 2009; Paice, Rutter, Wetherell, Winder & McMnanus, 2002). The negative effects of work stress include low job performance and job dissatisfaction. Several studies have revealed that individuals who suffer from job stress have lower self-efficacy, job performance and job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Watson, Harper, Ratliff & Singleton, 2010; Hanif, 2006). Absenteeism, loss of experienced teachers, high turnover rate and lower commitment are found to be related to stress (Wilson, 2002). The negative impact of environmental demands on teachers causes teachers to be dissatisfied with their current job which also leads to higher absenteeism, loss of commitment and psychological disorder among them (Khatibi, Asadi & Hamidi, 2009; Jackson & Rothmann, 2006; Naylor, 2001).

Psychological stress not only affects an individual's job performance, job satisfaction, commitment but also negatively impact on the individual's mental and physical health, such as neck, shoulder and arm problems, heart diseases, accident-prone sickness, and disability (Houtman, 2007). Depression and anxiety are the most common classic stress response and if these symptoms prolong without any remedy, they may lead to serious mental illness and affect the emotional well-being of the person. In addition, the cost of mental health to the society is substantial (Seedat, Stein, Jackson, Heeringa, Williams & Myer, 2009; OECD, 2009; Netterstrom & Conrad, 2007). The following table depicted the summary of the past literatures of psychological stress.

Table 2.1

## Summary of Representative Sample of Past Studies on Psychological Stress

<b>Author(s) (year)</b>	<b>Variables examined</b>	<b>Sample characteristics</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Tang (2008)	Work stress, commitment, job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behavior	200 employees taking further education in universities	High level score in work stress, job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour.
Catano, Francis, Haines, Kirpalani, Shannon, Stringer & Lozanki (2010)	Occupational stress, occupational health, family work relationship	1440 staffs from 56 universities in Canada	lack of job security and work-life balance predicted job dissatisfaction; work-life imbalance predicted psychological distress
Cho, Kim, Chang, Fiedler, Koh, Crabtree, Kang, Kim & Choi (2008)	Occupational stress	8,522 workers in Korea	inadequate social support and discomfort are important risk factors; also a predictor for depressive symptoms.
Wang & Zhang (2007)	Occupational stress and mental health	500 secondary and primary schools teachers in China	More than half feel moderately stressed; overall, stress affects their health and work; negative effect on students, affecting student's studies and performance.
Ahghar (2008)	Role of school organisational climate and occupational stress	220 secondary school teachers in Tehran	Forty percent of secondary school teachers in Tehran suffer from moderate to high level of stress. Open and engaged organisational climate are significantly related to occupational stress.
Philip & Schupbach (2010)	Emotional labour, Emotional exhaustion and dedication (a longitudinal study)	102 teachers	Reported moderate level of stress and high dedication among teachers. Dedicated teachers

			are more in deep acting and emotionally exhausted teachers use more surface acting.
Cheng & Ren(2010)	Job stress, job characteristics demographics	153 elementary resource room teachers	Working conditions and education levels were emerged as important predictors of job satisfaction.
Catano, Francis, Haines, Kirpalani, Shannon, Stringer & Lozanki (2008)	Occupational stress, occupational health, family work relationship	1440 staffs from 56 universities in Canada	Job stressors such as diverse skills and abilities among students, role ambiguity are the main predictors of job dissatisfaction.
Griva & Joeekes (2003)	coping strategies, job satisfaction,	166 teachers from UK	Job demands as significant predictor.
Barhem, Abdullah, Sidin & Alsagoff (2004)	Work stress	216 Malaysian customs officers and 248 Jordanian customs officers	Role ambiguity the main source of stress.
Wang, Repetti & Campos (2011)	Job stress, family social behaviour, neuroticism	32 dual-earner middle- class families	Job stress associated with negative social behaviour and vice versa.
Brunborg (2008)	Personality, psychosocial work conditions, social support, job stress	212 employees	No interaction effects; but strong main effects of personality on job stress.
Eres & Atanasoska (2011)	Teacher stress level	416 Turkish teachers and 213 Macedonian teachers	Turkish teachers have mild stress level and Macedonian teachers have moderate stress level.
Olaitan, Oyerinde, Obiyemi & Kayode (2010)	Job stress	624 teachers in South-west Nigeria	Major source of stress is society; majority of the teachers suffer from headaches and the coping strategy used is watching television.
Tahir (2011)	Stress in teaching and academic performance	Teachers teaching in public colleges in Pakistan	Teaching stress found be a significant factor affecting teacher's academic performance.