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**Control Perception
and its
Role in Stress Appraisal and Coping**

A study in work-related stress

A thesis presented in partial
fulfilment of the requirements

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ABSTRACT

Psychological theories view control as integral to emotional well-being and consequently this concept has played a prominent role in stress theories. In the transactional theory of stress control plays an important role in stressor appraisal where it is proposed to influence coping behaviour and coping effectiveness. However, little attention has been paid to the measurement of this important concept. This study adopts the transactional model to examine work-related stress and a major objective of the study is the development of a robust measure of situational control. It is argued that such a measure can not be merely reduced to a simple assessment that an individual either has or does not have control over a given situation, rather, it is important to identify the factors over which an individual strives to have control, as well as the degree of control over these factors that they perceive themselves to have.

A pilot study was used to develop a 35 item scale for measuring situational control. The scale was then used in a survey of work-related stress that was administered to 134 employees in four departments of New Zealand government. Principal component analysis revealed that control perception is a multifaceted concept, and four facets representing predictability, task control, self control and general control were identified. Using these scales the study investigated the role that control plays in predicting coping behaviour and coping effectiveness. Through a series of moderated multiple regression analyses, control was examined as a moderator in the relationship between stress appraisal and coping behaviour. This analysis showed that perceptions of control are associated with problem-focused coping. This result is consistent with other studies and suggests that a greater perception of general control in the workplace is associated with greater use of problem-focused coping. However, the literature is more equivocal on the relationship between control perception and emotion-focused coping. The study found a significant interaction between self control and primary appraisal in predicting emotion-focused coping. In addition to this, situational threat was found to have a significant main effect on emotion-focused coping. The study also examined the influence of control perception and coping behaviour as predictors of perceived coping effectiveness, as proposed by the goodness of fit hypothesis. No evidence was found to support this hypothesis, although coping behaviour and control were both found to have main effects in predicting coping effectiveness.

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