

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**STRESS AND SUPPORT IN THE NEW
ZEALAND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: A
STUDY OF PROJECT SUPERVISORS AND
MANAGERS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters

in

Business Studies (MBS)

At Massey University, Distance

New Zealand

Steven David Elms

2017

Abstract

The impact that stress has in the lives of individuals is considerable. Although it is a common concept, it is often misunderstood by many individuals. Stress is the way in which an individual responds to a range of environmental stressors. Thus, interventions for stress have received an increasing amount of attention in management literature. A portion of this field that has received a considerably less amount of attention is the role of support as an intervention for stress in the construction industry. This study seeks to explore the impacts of support on stress in construction managers. The first phase of the study utilised a social cross-sectional questionnaire approach and the second half used a semi-structured interview. Participants were sought from the four different sectors within the industry, the quantitative study had 47 respondents and the qualitative study had 11 participants. It is important to note that although a quantitative approach was the original intention of this study, it is the qualitative findings that have contributed the most to the overall findings. The findings of this study, developed using thematic analysis methodology, are conveyed through a matrix which explores the different types of support at different levels during stressful events. The study has concluded that support at a team level is made up of all four types of support: emotional, tangible, informational and companionship. However, as the provider of the support becomes further removed from the individual, the type of support experienced moved towards an informational support focus.

Acknowledgements

As with any piece of writing that is this complex, there is a real need to extend a heartfelt thanks to many people who have helped through many different stages of the project.

First of all, I extend my thanks to my supervisors, Dr Kate Blackwood and Dr David Brougham. Without their help over the past year, this project would not have been achievable. Thanks for your support, your encouragement, your motivation and your ability to alleviate the stressors that consistently seemed to build up. I cannot imagine that I could have achieved this work without your flexibility and willingness to always help no matter how busy you were. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To my participants and the organisations that supported my research, I extend my thanks. Without you, my research would not have been possible. Your engagement, interest and willingness to support my studies was greatly appreciated.

Thirdly, thanks to my family. Dad, thanks for always encouraging me to do better and to keep focused no matter how busy I got, after all it was only a year. Mum, thanks for always being there to listen when I needed to de-stress. Thanks to Nikki, my awesome older sister for her support with transcribing the many hours of interviews. To my other siblings, Daniel, Joe, Kate and Tamara, thanks for the constant encouragement over the past year.

I would like to extend thanks my employer and the rest of team at Isles Construction. Without the support from Cameron and Jim, working full-time and doing my thesis would not have been possible. They showed a great deal of flexibility allowing me to take many hours, days and weeks off for study even though we were experiencing increasing work load levels. Thanks to the boys on the tools for providing my

inspiration and giving me a range of different insights into the industry through many informal conversations during 'smoko' breaks.

Lastly to my flatmates and close friends, of whom there are too many to name, thanks for encouraging me to take breaks and enjoy the study process. Without this encouragement, I am sure my many hours of procrastination would not have been nearly as enjoyable. I credit my sanity to you all.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Table of Figures	vi
Table of Tables	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review	11
2.1 Defining Stress	11
2.1.1 A Stress Model.....	12
2.1.2 Stressors	14
2.1.3 Stressors Specific to Construction Managers	16
2.1.4 Consequences and strains	16
2.1.5 Interventions	19
2.2 Introduction to Support Literature.....	20
2.2.1 Types of Support.....	21
2.2.2 Levels of Support.....	23
2.3 The New Zealand construction industry	25
2.4 Justification for further research.....	26
Chapter Three: Methodology	28
3.1 Study Overview	28
3.1.1 Aim of Study.....	28
3.1.2 Research Design	29
3.2 Phase One: Cross-sectional Survey	30
3.2.1 Participants.....	30
3.2.2 Method of data collection	31
3.2.3 Method of data analysis	36
3.3 Phase Two: Semi-structured Interview	36
3.3.1 Participants.....	36
3.3.2 Method of data collection	36
3.3.3 Data Analysis	39
3.4 Ethical considerations.....	40

Chapter Four: Results	42
4.1 Cross-section Survey Results	42
4.1.1 Results.....	42
4.2 Semi-structured Interview Findings	50
4.2.1 Overview of Stress Experiences	50
4.2.2 Themes.....	52
4.3 Summary	65
Chapter Five: Discussion.....	66
5.1 Phase One - Survey	66
5.2 Phase Two – Interviews	70
5.2.1 The individual	71
5.2.2 Levels of Support.....	72
5.2.3 Team Support.....	75
5.2.4 Organisation Support	77
5.2.5 Industry Support	78
5.3 Implications for practice.....	80
5.4 Limitations and Future Research.....	80
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	83
References	84
Appendixes.....	90
7.1 Appendix One: Scales	90
7.2 Appendix Two: Copyright Permission.....	94
7.3 Appendix Three: Introduction Email	95
7.4 Appendix Four: Online Survey	97
7.5 Appendix Five: Interview Outline.....	105

Table of Figures

Figure 1.0: The Cooper-Cummings Framework (Clarke & Cooper, 2004)..... 13

Figure 2.0: Industry Distribution..... 45

Figure 3.0: Level Responsibility Indicator 46

Figure 4.0: Busyness Results 47

Figure 5.0: Skilled Worker Results 48

Table of Tables

Table 1.0: The Proposed Support Matrix 38

Table 2.0: The Support Matrix..... 40

Table 3.0: Correlations among Variables..... 49

Table 4.0: Overview of Stressful Events 51

Table 5.0: Overview of Themes..... 53