Workplace counselling may be considered as an adhoc approach to offer psychological help to employees. This approach is found to be effective in alleviating the work-related or personal problems such as occupational stress, inefficiency, absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, alcohol and drug misuse/abuse, etc. affecting the performance of the employees in the workplace and may provide a wide range of assistance relating to mental and physical health, stress, career development, family problems and so on. In Malaysia, the workplace counselling services may include many organizations such as banks, industries, transport companies and to address particular occupational risks (e.g., prevention of stress among high risk workers, car and bus drivers, airline pilots, workers in the mall, policemen etc).

Some Facts and Figures

1. An estimated 40 million working days are lost each year where employees and their GPs cite stress and mental illness.

2. Non-work related issues may make it difficult for employees to cope with work pressure and may affect performance.

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3. Every individual is vulnerable to stress and depression depending on personal circumstances.

4. Behavioural and health changes in employees may be an indicator that they are under increased pressure and may benefit from counselling intervention.

5. Overall, it can reduce levels of stress in the workplace by more than 50 percent.

6. Levels of sickness absence are reduced 25-50 per cent after workplace counselling, (McLeod, 2003).

7. 69 per cent of employees participating in an Employee Assistance Programme, felt that it improved their performance. (Employee Assistance Professional Association: EAP Consumer Satisfaction Survey, 2001).

8. Stress at work is one of the biggest causes of ill health in the workplace.

**Competencies of Workplace Counsellors**

Workplace counsellors should have the following qualities. These may be considered as the demand specific competencies.

- Workplace counsellors should not involve themselves in services without preparation and training. Counsellors should have a wide range of professional background and theoretical orientation because they are expected to use problem management and solution-focused therapies (i.e., short-term counselling).

- Workplace counsellors are expected to play multiple or mixed roles. That is, they may be required to familiarize themselves with the welfare benefit system, company policies, stress management techniques, etc. They may help to the employees in getting medical assistance, early retirement due to genuine matters by negotiating to the employers. There is no doubt that all these kinds of services
may be more stressful, time-consuming, daily hassles for the counsellors but employee need such help.

• Counsellors need to work within the employing organization’s own policies and code in ethics. In addition, counsellor should familiarize himself with the aims of the organization, organizational culture and structures in order to better understand individual employee’s work related problems. In the organizational context, workplace counsellors may become involved in staff development, conflict resolution exercises and in managing the resources of the workers.

• Counsellors should not assume that their familiar professional and ethical expectations will carry over automatically and unproblematically into counselling at workplace. Confidentiality may be affected. Counsellor may need additional skills in professional assertiveness in order to clarify their contracts with clients, protect their own boundaries, judiciously limit or control their visibility within the organization and so on.

• Workplace counsellors may expect sometimes to be involved in auditing and evaluating their work so that the service they provide is not aimed solely at stress management programs. The individual employee’s reactions to stressful circumstances and sources of stress inherent in the organizational culture and structure may also be recorded.

Main targets or goals

1. Workplace counselling services may be offered to the employees and their immediate family members.

2. Clients can self-refer and enjoy a normal confidential service and sometimes referral by supervisors or managers or employers.

3. A variety of services may be offered to the employees. These may include: supportive therapy, stress management
techniques, crisis intervention, post-traumatic stress debriefing, bereavement counselling, redundancy counselling, personal-money management, conflict with the workmates or superiors, advice and information on legal issues relating to housing, divorce, childcare etc. Individual training and the human resource development of other staff may also be part of such services.

What is the benefit to employees?

- Provides information, support and advice for individuals to achieve a healthy balance between the demands of work and fulfilling personal life.
- Offers immediate, easy access to professional support and advice.
- Employees feel valued by an employer who is seen to care for their welfare, health and well-being.
- Helps alleviate the symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.
- Over 90 per cent of employees who have used EAP’s are highly satisfied.
- Levels of job commitment, work functioning and satisfaction rise.
- Levels of substance abuse are reduced.

What is the benefit to employers?

- Improves productivity and workplace efficiency.
- Aids recruitment and retention.
- Improves staff morale and motivation.
- Reduces symptoms of work-related stress and sickness absence.
- Provides a management tool for performance analysis and improvement.
• Assists managers to resolve staff problems.

Counselling Services in Malaysia

Counselling services are very important in Malaysia nowadays. Modernization and the lifestyle of individual may change their attitude and behaviour. Thus the role of counsellor is to help people maintain their life to become a good person. In Malaysia, there are few workplace which are having counselling services. Among the workplace are the Public Service Department, the Department For Women’s Development under The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development of Malaysia, also the Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

Counselling at the Public Services Department

The objective of counselling in the Public Services Department is to ensure that individuals in the public services are able to increase their productivity by using self-potential positively and proactively through psychological services. Among the functions are:

1. Formulate policies and provide guideline on psychological and counselling services in the public service.
2. Plan, formulate, implement and supervise the use of psychological instruments in the public service.
3. Provide consultancy services to ministries, departments and other government agencies with regards to psychological and counselling services (http://www.jpa.gov.my)

Counselling at the Department for Women’s Development

The Ministry of Women, Family and community Development of Malaysia through its Department for Women’s Development provides counselling services for individuals and family in need. The services of the Counselling Unit in Department for Women’s
Development is always ready to help women who are facing problems especially domestic violence, ill-treatment, divorce, sexual harassment, rape, running away from home, discrimination of employees towards female workers and single mother who need help and have marital problems (www.kpwkm.gov.my <http://www.kpwkm.gov.my>)

**Counselling at the Kuala Lumpur City Hall**

The objective of the counselling services at Kuala Lumpur City Hall (KLCH) is to help people deal with their personal problem like marital problem, family problem, problem at the workplace and psychological problem. Counselling at the KLCH has 3 kinds of services. Among the services are Individual Counselling, E-Counselling and Tele-Counselling.

Individual Counselling is the Counselling session conducted between the counsellor and the client. The client can meet with his or her counsellors who are working 24 hours per day on shift. E-Counselling may use the interactive module like chatting and forum. While by using the Tele-Counselling the client can just talk with the counsellor by using the telephone. This service is suitable to those clients who are hesitating and shy to meet the counsellor personally (<http://www.dbkl.govi.my/working/>).

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Workplace counselling may be one of the most effective organizational remedies if it is properly targeted at workplace. Counselling helps people respond differently and quickly. “Counselling has a role to play as a part of the bigger strategy to deal with workplace stress. But it provides treatment not prevention. It helps people who are stressed to cope better but does not prevent or identify the structural sources of workplace stress, which can only be dealt with systematic audit” (Cooper, 1997). The present authors view that the workplace counselling
should be adopted in Malaysia as one of the developmental task for the organizational health and development. In this regard the following steps may be considered as important.

- The task of the counsellor is to persuade every working person because stress actually kills and affect quality of work life.
- Provision of counselling services can form part of an organization’s policy to tackle work-related stress.
- It should be short-term or time limited ranging from three to ten sessions. Knowledge of and access to alternative referral sources (e.g., private practice, hospitals etc.) is therefore also very important for workplace counsellors.
- Face-to-face counselling services should be provided to the clients.
- Counselling services should be available on working hours, 5 or 6 days a week basis. Employee counselling has had a significant impact on counselling practice, particularly relating to effective short-term models.
- All styles of counselling turn out to be helpful. It’s important for the organization to appoint a well trained counsellor for counselling in the workplace.

REFERENCES
