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**Headline: Here's what can help middle managers avoid burnout, says study by SMU and partners**

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An office crowd in Singapore's central business district. PHOTO: ST FILE

SINGAPORE - Mindfulness training programmes can be beneficial for the well-being of middle managers, a new research has found.

In particular, such training can help middle managers cope with the stress and emotional exhaustion commonly associated with their jobs, say researchers in a study published in the Academy of Management Proceedings.

Titled "Overworked and Under-Resourced: A Mindfulness Intervention for Middle Manager Well-Being", the study was carried out by an international team of researchers from the Singapore Management University (SMU), the Hanken School of Economics in Finland, and three other universities in the US. The three US universities are Providence College, Virginia Commonwealth University and Pepperdine University.

Middle managers are leaders who serve as an important connection between senior executives and frontline employees, yet are often "sandwiched" between these two groups, experiencing demands and pressures from both sides, the researchers noted. As a result, high stress levels and subsequent burnout are normal among middle managers.

To determine if mindfulness training can help improve the well-being of middle managers, an intervention study was carried out with 130 middle managers across four large organisations in Finland. Participants were randomly assigned to either an adapted eight-week programme in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), or to a wait-listed control group.

Compared to the control group, middle managers who completed the mindfulness training programme reported substantial reductions in stress levels and emotional exhaustion, which are precursors to burnout, the researchers found.

Participants also reported increased levels of psychological detachment, suggesting that mindfulness training may improve well-being by helping employees maintain a distance from challenging or upsetting work events, the study noted.

Jochen Reb, associate professor of SMU's Lee Kong Chian School of Business, and director of the Mindfulness Initiative at SMU, who co-authored the research said: "Work detachment has been found to be an important facilitator of recovery, and recovery from work is important in avoiding chronic stress and burnout."

Added Prof Reb: "The direct recommendation coming out of this research is that organisations should offer mindfulness training programmes such as MBSR for their middle managers to prevent them from

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suffering from chronic stress and burnout, which can impose huge costs on individuals, organisations and society."

Current findings of the study show that a relatively short mindfulness training programme can benefit middle management leaders, and potentially other categories of employees as well.

The researchers intend to expand their study to other countries, and are also interested in exploring the impact of mindfulness interventions on other qualities that are important in the workplace, including decision making and leadership.