WORKPLACE BULLYING AND JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES

OMAR, Z.[1] – JAILANI, S. F. A. K.[2*] – ALI, S. A. M.[2] – YUNUS, N. M.[2] – SAID, N. A.[2]

[1] *Menara FELDA Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.*

[2] *Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia.*

**Corresponding author*
e-mail: fatiany[at]uitm.edu.my

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Abstract. Workplace bullying has become a critical organisational issue that negatively affects employee well-being and job performance. In organisations, maintaining a healthy and supportive work environment is essential to ensure effective service delivery and organisational productivity. This study examines the influence of workplace bullying on job performance among public sector employees in Malaysia. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to employees in a public sector organisation. A total of 237 valid responses were obtained. Prior to data collection, content validity was conducted to ensure the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and multiple regression analysis. The findings indicate that workplace bullying exists at a moderate level, with workplace exclusion identified as the most common form experienced by employees. Multiple regression analysis further identified belittlement as the strongest predictor of job performance, suggesting that behaviours that undermine employees' confidence, self-worth, and professional value have the greatest negative impact on their work performance. The findings contribute to the understanding of workplace bullying in the Malaysian public sector and provide practical implications for managers and policymakers to develop effective interventions, promote a supportive work environment, enhance employee well-being, and improve organisational performance.
Keywords: *workplace bullying, job performance, public sector, employees*

Introduction

For the past decade, workplace bullying has become a major organisational concern due to its adverse effects on employee well-being and organisational performance. Workplace bullying involves repeated negative behaviours, including harassment, intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse, and workplace exclusion, often characterised by an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim (Einarsen et al., 2020). Such behaviours can negatively affect employees' psychological well-being, job satisfaction, work performance, and interpersonal relationships, ultimately reducing teamwork and organisational effectiveness (Özer and Escartín, 2023; Samnani and Singh, 2016). In Malaysia, workplace bullying has become an increasingly prevalent issue. A nationwide study involving 5,235 employees found that 39.1% of Malaysian workers had experienced workplace bullying, highlighting its significance as an occupational concern (Chan et al., 2019). Previous studies have reported that workplace bullying contributes to stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, absenteeism, turnover intention, and reduced job performance, thereby weakening organisational productivity (Özer and Escartín, 2023). Despite these findings, empirical evidence on workplace bullying among Malaysian public sector employees remains limited, as most studies have focused on private organisations or healthcare settings. Therefore, this study

examines the influence of workplace bullying on job performance among public sector employees in Malaysia. Specifically, it investigates the effects of four workplace bullying dimensions, namely, belittlement, work undermined, verbal abuse, and workplace exclusion, on job performance and identifies the strongest predictor. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for organisations and policymakers in developing effective strategies to prevent workplace bullying, enhance employee well-being, and improve organisational performance.

Literature review

Employees spend a considerable amount of time in the workplace, making workplace interactions an important factor influencing employee well-being and job performance (Einarsen et al., 2020). While a positive work environment enhances motivation, productivity, and job satisfaction, negative workplace behaviours such as bullying may lead to stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced work performance (Özer and Escartín, 2023). Workplace bullying has become a significant organisational concern because of its detrimental effects on employees' psychological well-being and professional functioning (Samnani and Singh, 2016). This study examines workplace bullying through four dimensions: belittlement, work undermined, verbal abuse, and workplace exclusion. These behaviours may undermine employees' confidence, emotional well-being, and ability to perform effectively at work (Özer and Escartín, 2023; Einarsen et al., 2020). Accordingly, this study proposes that workplace bullying negatively influences job performance among public sector employees, consistent with previous research linking bullying to lower performance, motivation, and organisational commitment (Özer and Escartín, 2023).

Workplace bullying elements

Workplace bullying refers to repeated negative behaviours directed towards employees that create a hostile and psychologically unsafe work environment (Einarsen et al., 2020). Such behaviours have become a significant organisational concern because they adversely affect employees' psychological well-being, motivation, job satisfaction, and work performance (Özer and Escartín, 2023; Samnani and Singh, 2016). In addition, workplace bullying may weaken teamwork, communication, and trust, resulting in lower organisational performance and higher turnover intentions. In this study, workplace bullying is conceptualised through four dimensions: belittlement, work undermined, verbal abuse, and workplace exclusion. Belittlement involves behaviours that humiliate employees and diminish their confidence and self-worth, while work undermined refers to actions that interfere with employees' tasks and responsibilities (Duffy and Ganster, 2002). Verbal abuse includes insulting remarks and offensive communication, whereas workplace exclusion refers to the deliberate isolation or exclusion of employees from workplace interactions (Ferris et al., 2016). Collectively, these behaviours may create an unhealthy work environment that reduces employees' ability to perform effectively.

Belittlement

Belittlement refers to behaviours that humiliate, ridicule, or demean employees through sarcastic remarks, dismissive attitudes, and condescending communication. Such behaviours may reduce employees' confidence, self-esteem, and sense of

professional value, leading to emotional distress, lower motivation, and reduced work engagement. Continuous exposure to belittlement has been associated with poorer psychological well-being, lower job satisfaction, and decreased job performance (Einarsen et al., 2020). It may also weaken trust, communication, and collaboration within the workplace, thereby reducing employees' willingness to contribute effectively to organisational goals. Consequently, belittlement is considered a critical dimension of workplace bullying because of its adverse effects on both employee well-being and organisational performance.

Work undermined

Work undermined refers to behaviours that intentionally obstruct or interfere with employees' work activities, such as withholding important information, taking credit for others' work, or creating obstacles that hinder task completion (Duffy and Ganster, 2002). These behaviours may reduce employees' confidence, motivation, and commitment, making it more difficult for them to perform their responsibilities effectively. Previous studies have shown that work undermining is associated with lower job satisfaction, reduced work performance, and decreased organisational commitment because employees receive inadequate support and perceive unfair treatment in the workplace (Einarsen et al., 2020). In public sector organisations, hierarchical structures and organisational politics may further contribute to employees' perceptions of work undermining. Therefore, work undermined is considered an important dimension of workplace bullying because it may negatively affect employee well-being and job performance.

Verbal abuse

Verbal abuse refers to negative verbal behaviours such as insults, threats, humiliation, sarcasm, and demeaning remarks directed towards employees in the workplace. These behaviours may create a hostile work environment, leading to increased psychological stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced work motivation (Einarsen et al., 2020). Employees who experience verbal abuse often have difficulty concentrating, making decisions, and maintaining their work performance because their confidence and morale are adversely affected (Özer and Escartín, 2023). Continuous exposure to verbal abuse has also been associated with lower job satisfaction, reduced organisational commitment, and decreased productivity. Therefore, verbal abuse is considered an important dimension of workplace bullying because it may negatively influence employee well-being and job performance.

Workplace exclusion

Workplace exclusion refers to situations in which employees are ignored, marginalised, or intentionally excluded from social interactions, decision-making processes, or access to important work-related information (Ferris et al., 2016). Such behaviours may reduce employees' sense of belonging, recognition, and involvement in the organisation, leading to emotional distress, lower work engagement, and reduced job performance. Social exclusion threatens employees' fundamental psychological needs, including belongingness, acceptance, and self-esteem, resulting in withdrawal behaviours and decreased work effort. Previous studies have also shown that workplace exclusion is associated with lower job satisfaction, weaker organisational commitment,

and poorer employee performance (Özer and Escartín, 2023; Einarsen et al., 2020). Therefore, workplace exclusion is considered an important dimension of workplace bullying because it negatively affects employee well-being and job performance (*Figure 1*).

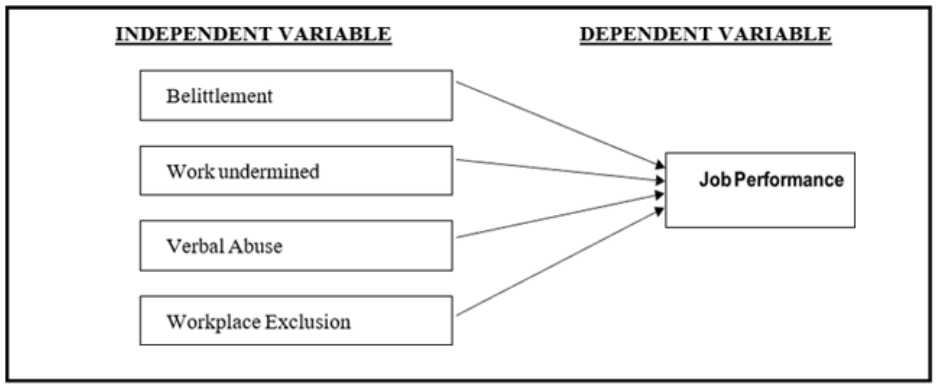

Figure 1. *Proposed research framework.*

Materials and Methods

This study examined the influence of workplace bullying on job performance among public sector employees in Malaysia using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Workplace bullying was measured through four dimensions: belittlement, work undermined, verbal abuse, and workplace exclusion. The study population consisted of 611 employees, and a sample of 237 respondents was determined using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed due to accessibility and organisational constraints (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020). Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Business and Management. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised three sections: demographic information, workplace bullying dimensions, and job performance. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Likert, 1932). Content validity was established through expert review to ensure the clarity, relevance, and suitability of the measurement items (Yusoff, 2019). The data were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to describe respondents' profiles and the study variables, while multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of workplace bullying dimensions on job performance (Pallant, 2020; Hair et al., 2019).

Results and Discussion

A total of 237 questionnaires were distributed for the study, and all were successfully completed and returned by respondents, resulting in a 100% response rate. A high response rate indicates strong participation from respondents and enhances the reliability and consistency of the collected data (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020). Therefore, the findings of this study are considered suitable and reliable for further statistical analysis. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0. Multiple

regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of workplace bullying dimensions on job performance. Respondents were also required to provide demographic information to describe their background characteristics. The results of the demographic analysis are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. *Demographic profile of the respondents (n=237).*

Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	100	42.2
Female	137	57.8
Age		
20 - 30	27	11.4
31 - 35	73	30.8
36 - 40	61	25.7
41 - 50	56	23.6
51 and above	20	8.4
Level of Education		
SPM	53	22.4
Diploma	67	28.3
Bachelor's Degree	82	34.6
Master's Degree	35	14.8
PhD	0	0
Others	0	0
Years of Work Experience		
Less than 1 year	4	1.7
1 - 3 years	31	13.1
4 - 7 years	51	21.5
8 - 10 years	75	31.6
More than 10 years	76	32.1
Service Group		
Top Management	0	0
Management and Professional	78	32.9
Executive	159	67.1
Others	0	0

Reliability analysis was conducted by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each study variable. As shown in *Table 2*, all variables achieved Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2019). Among the workplace bullying dimensions, workplace exclusion recorded the highest Cronbach's alpha value ($\alpha = 0.972$), followed by verbal abuse ($\alpha = 0.962$), work undermined ($\alpha = 0.955$), and belittlement ($\alpha = 0.950$). The job performance construct also demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.891 (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020). These findings indicate that all measurement scales were internally consistent and reliable for measuring their respective constructs. Therefore, the instruments were considered appropriate for subsequent statistical analyses, including multiple regression analysis (Pallant, 2020). *Table 3* presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the influence of workplace bullying dimensions on job performance. The analysis yielded a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = 0.702$ and a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.493$, indicating that workplace bullying dimensions collectively explained 49.3% of the variance in job performance. The remaining 50.7% of the variance may be attributed to other factors not included in this study. This finding demonstrates that workplace bullying is a substantial determinant of job performance, highlighting the importance of addressing bullying behaviours to maintain organisational effectiveness. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.485 was close to the R^2 value, indicating that the regression model was stable and not substantially affected by the number of predictors included. The standard error of the estimate (0.476) further

suggests that the model provides reasonably accurate predictions of job performance (Pallant, 2020; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. *Cronbach's Alpha.*

Category	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Strength of Association
Belittlement	.950	5	Good
Work Undermined	.955	5	Good
Verbal Abuse	.962	5	Good
Workplace Exclusion	.972	5	Good
Job Performance	.891	5	Good

Table 3. *Model summary.*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.702a	.493	.485	.476

Note: a.Predictors: (Constant), Workplace_Exclusion, Verbal_Abuse, Work_Undermined, Belittlement

Meanwhile, *Table 4* presents the ANOVA results for the regression model. The findings indicate that the overall model was statistically significant, $F(4, 232) = 56.487$, $p < .001$, confirming that the four workplace bullying dimensions collectively have a significant influence on job performance. The significant F statistic demonstrates that the regression model provides a significantly better explanation of job performance than a model without predictor variables. These findings support previous research showing that workplace bullying is a significant organisational stressor that adversely affects employee behaviour and performance (Einarsen et al., 2020). Furthermore, *Table 5* presents the regression coefficients for each workplace bullying dimension. All four dimensions significantly and negatively influenced job performance ($p < .001$). Among the predictors, belittlement emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = -0.381$, $t = -8.136$), followed by verbal abuse ($\beta = -0.377$, $t = -8.062$), workplace exclusion ($\beta = -0.329$, $t = -7.035$), and work undermined ($\beta = -0.283$, $t = -6.065$). The negative beta coefficients indicate that greater exposure to workplace bullying is associated with lower job performance. The finding that belittlement had the strongest influence suggests that behaviours which undermine employees' dignity, confidence, and professional identity have the greatest detrimental impact on work performance. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting that repeated humiliation and disrespect reduce employees' self-esteem, motivation, and work engagement, ultimately lowering their performance and productivity (Özer and Escartín, 2023; Einarsen et al., 2020). Similarly, the significant effects of verbal abuse, workplace exclusion, and work undermined indicate that both direct and indirect bullying behaviours contribute to poorer job performance by increasing psychological distress and reducing employees' commitment to their work. Collectively, these findings confirm that workplace bullying is a critical organisational issue that requires proactive intervention to promote employee well-being and organisational performance.

Table 4. *ANOVA.*

Category	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	51.173	4	12.793	56.487	<.001b
	Residual	52.544	232	.226		
	Total	103.717	236			

Note: a.Dependent Variable: Job_Performance. b.Predictors: (Constant), Workplace_Exclusion, Verbal_Abuse, Work_Undermined, Belittlement

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***Table 5**. Multiple regression coefficients.*

Category	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Belittlement	-.414	.051	-.381	-8.136	<.001
Work Undermined	-.281	.046	-.283	-6.065	<.001
Verbal Abuse	-.403	.050	-.377	-8.062	<.001
Workplace Exclusion	-.344	.049	-.329	-7.035	<.001

Note: a.Dependent Variable: Job_Performance

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of workplace bullying on job performance among public sector employees in Malaysia. The findings provide empirical evidence that workplace bullying remains a significant organisational issue that adversely affects job performance. Descriptive analysis showed that workplace exclusion was the most frequently experienced form of bullying, suggesting that behaviours such as social isolation and exclusion from workplace activities remain common. Such behaviours may reduce employees' sense of belonging, engagement, and organisational commitment, particularly in collectivist workplace cultures where interpersonal relationships are highly valued (Ferris et al., 2016). Multiple regression analysis revealed that all workplace bullying dimensions namely belittlement, work undermined, verbal abuse, and workplace exclusion had significant negative effects on job performance. Among these, belittlement emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by verbal abuse, workplace exclusion, and work undermined. These findings indicate that behaviours that undermine employees' dignity, confidence, and professional identity have the greatest detrimental effect on work performance. The results are consistent with previous studies showing that workplace bullying reduces motivation, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment while increasing psychological distress, burnout, absenteeism, and turnover intention (Özer and Escartín, 2023; Einarsen et al., 2020). Overall, this study confirms that workplace bullying is a serious organisational issue rather than merely interpersonal conflict. Organisations should therefore implement comprehensive anti-bullying policies, strengthen supportive leadership, provide awareness and intervention programmes, and establish effective reporting mechanisms to foster a respectful and psychologically safe work environment. These initiatives are essential for improving employee well-being, enhancing job performance, and promoting long-term organisational effectiveness (Özer and Escartín, 2023).

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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