

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE BULLYING AND ANXIETY AMONG PRISON OFFICERS

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## Abstract

*The prevalence of workplace bullying and anxiety has increased, little is known about the impact on the organization. The aim of this study was to identify the relationship between workplace bullying and anxiety and the difference between gender and the level of anxiety among prison officers. Moreover, a total of 100 prison officers was selected in this study and data were collected from the respondents using a questionnaire. The result shows that workplace bullying has a connection with anxiety, those who are victims of workplace bullying likely to be diagnosed with anxiety symptom. In fact, gender also plays a major role in determining the level of anxiety. However, the level of anxiety among prison officers is extremely low. Thus, most of the prison officers in Malaysia are healthy in terms of anxiety despite the challenged they faced in the harsh working environment.*

**Keyword:** Workplace bullying, anxiety

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In general, workplace bullying and anxiety are likely to occur in most organizations. It has been recognized as the major problem, especially in the organization. These happen probably because of their profession itself and gender difference. For example the profession as a prison officer is a very challenging profession as many duties and responsibility are so heavy and the prison environment, it is exposed to confrontation, violence and diseases, and this will lead to psychological disturbance such as work stress, depression and anxiety (Bradford, 2006). From this statement, prison officers are likely to expose to workplace bullying and later if there are no prevention, it will develop to anxiety disorders in the future.

According to UNISON (1997) as cited in Khalib & Ngan (2006), workplace bullying is negative vibes that attempts to weaken the individual or group competence that causes them to suffer from job stress. In the past, studies conducted on National Health Services in United Kingdom cited in Quine (2002), revealed that there are two situations when the bullying in the workplace happen, which are experiencing many types of bullying and witnessed their colleagues being bullied by others. Even though, workplace bullying has received greater attention in another country, but in Malaysia this problem was not taken seriously. This happens because of the power distance in Malaysia is quite high compared to other country, this result will make the workplace bullying may be more tolerated and it seems legitimate acts in most organizations in Malaysia (The Star, 2014). Moreover, report from National Workplace Bullying, (2005) showed that managers also involve as a victim in this phenomenon. From this statement, it showed that Workplace Bullying can occur to anyone in the organization in many forms that

can cause the declining in physical and mental health of the employees.

Whereas, anxiety is a kind of emotion that tends to be tense with their emotion like worried thought and physical changes like increased blood pressure. Those people who are suffering from anxiety usually have recurring intrusive thought or concerns and they didn't want to expose to any kind of situation that can make them to be worried (Kazdin, 2000). It is important to note that, 60% women are likely to suffer anxiety disorders compare to men (National Institute of Mental health, 2014). Furthermore, it was predicted 10% of the total population in Malaysia will suffer from any type of anxiety disorders in 2020, even though the percentage looks small but it actually serious and chronic (Malaysian Digest, 2013). The factors contribute to the anxiety were issues related to Caregiving at an older age and fear of loneliness, the welfare and care of their children when they are old and eventually die and also physical changes that occurred in the ageing process (Minhat et al, 2015). Thus, the continuous feeling of worriedness in themselves will take over their minds and caused them to failed from performing their daily life activity that include satisfaction of work, school, social activities and relationships with others.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A previous study on workplace bullying and anxiety often focused in the area of the performance, job satisfaction, PTSD and mental health. As an example, workplace bullying can give adverse effect on job satisfaction. It is also indicated that social support plays a major role in determining the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction (Carroll & Lauzier,

2014). Furthermore, a study on 112 public service employees in Malaysia revealed a high activity of workplace bullying (83.2%) (Zoharah et al, 2015). The most often negative acts experienced were bullied because of given task with unreasonable deadline to submit the task, spreading gossip about them and finally is someone withholding important information that effect their performance (Ahmed & Arif, 2014). It is also important to note that, a workplace bullying is not only can affect the organization, but it also can give adverse effect toward mental health. Comprising research from previous study that investigate the relationship between workplace bullying and mental health showed that there are positive correlation between these two variable and most of the cases reported after the employees are exposed to the workplace bullying (Verkuil et al, 2015).

Whereas, study of anxiety revealed that workers who are diagnosed with mental health problems force the subject to fail from performing their task. Those who are unable to cope with negative perception from other employees make the patience disclose from others and these will worsen their condition because of the lack of social support (Haslam et al, 2005). Meanwhile, in Malaysia, six causes that were associated with anxiety are cancer, serious problem at work, domestic violence, not having a good relationship with family, non-organized religious activity and intrinsic religiosity (Siti et al, 2015).

As a conclusion, those who are involved in this negative acts such as workplace bullying, is not only can affect their performance, but it also can contribute to mental disorders such as anxiety. Then, after employees are diagnosed with anxiety disorders, they will fail from performing their task and later will give adverse effect to the organizations.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### *Population and Sample*

The population in this research consists of 448 prison officers. Only 100 respondents were used in this research. Furthermore, in order for this study to avoid bias in differences between genders and anxiety the researcher has decided to conduct on 50 males and 50 females which are equivalent to our study. Thus, stratified random sampling is appropriate for this study.

#### *Instrument*

For the instrument, workplace bullying was measured using The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) developed Einarsen & Hoel (2001). The internal consistency of this questionnaire is  $\alpha=0.94$  which is very high. Furthermore, each respondent is required to provide the degree of agreement to each statement using a Likert scale, such as never (1), now & then (2), monthly (3), weekly (4) and daily (5). Whereas, Beck Anxiety Inventory developed by Beck & Steer (1990) is used to asses anxiety. In this study, the questionnaire showed internal consistency as high .92 by Cronbach's Alpha. For this questionnaire, it consists 21 items. Each respondent is required to provide the level of agreement to each statement using Likert Scale, such as not at all (0), mildly (1), moderately (2) and severely (3). These

items are arranged from not at all to severely. Moreover, there are three mean range to indicate the level of anxiety which are low (mean range from 0 to 1), moderate (mean range from 2 to 3) and severe (mean indicates at 4).

### 4 RESULT

H1: There is a significant relationship between workplace bullying and anxiety among prison officers.

TABLE 4.1: The Correlation Matrixes between Workplace Bullying and Anxiety

Statistics	Workplace Bullying & Anxiety
Pearson Correlation	0.621**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00
N	100

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table 4.1 above shows that the Pearson Correlation ( $r$ ) = 0.621\*\*. This proves that workplace bullying and anxiety have a moderate positive correlation 0.621. Furthermore, significance level  $p = 0.00$  below than  $\alpha = 0.05$ , which mean that the hypothesis is accepted.

H2: There is a significant difference in anxiety across gender.

TABLE 4.2 Group Statistics for Anxiety among Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety	Male	50	0.45	0.51
	Female	50	0.66	0.39

Table 4.3 Independent T-test of anxieties among gender

Items	T	Df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Anxiety among gender	-2.347	98	.021

Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 show that the independent sample T-test was conducted to compare anxiety between male and female. There was a significant differences in the score for male ( $M=0.45$ ,  $SD=.51$ ) and female ( $M=0.66$ ,  $SD=0.39$ ) condition,  $T(98) = -2.347$ , Sig. (2-tailed)  $p$  value is 0.021 below than value  $\alpha=0.05$ . Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

*H1: There is a significance relationship between workplace bullying and anxiety.*

Based on the finding above, we can conclude that workplace bullying literally related to anxiety, thus the victims of the workplace bullying prone to be diagnosed with symptoms of anxiety. Moreover, this finding also supported by previous studies by Verkuil et al (2015), when the result revealed that there are not only have a relationship between bully and anxiety but it also related to psychological disorder such as PTSD, depression, and etc. Furthermore, comprising research from previous study, that aim to investigate the relationship between workplace bullying and mental health also showed that there are positive correlation between these two variants. Hence, workplace bullying play a major role to determine the level of anxiety among prison officers. This is because the negative act that involve in workplace bullying such as physical, mental and emotional abuse can give adverse effect to an individual's mental health.

*H2: There is a significance difference between gender and anxiety among prison officers.*

The significance value for this hypothesis reveals that male and female officers have different level of anxiety. This is because men and women are reported to have different ways in dealing with anxiety, stress, emotional intelligence and etc. Hence, women appear to be more anxious compared as men. Even though, the level of anxiety male and female indicate at the lowest level. Furthermore, there are slightly difference between male ( $M = 0.45$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) and female ( $M = 0.66$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) which is female appear to be a little bit higher compare to male. This finding also aligns to the National Institute of Mental Health (2014), indicate that women have 60% percent chances to suffer anxiety disorders compare to men. The factors contribute to the anxiety were issues related to Caregiving at an older age and fear of loneliness, the welfare and care of their children when they are old and eventually die and also physical changes that occurred with the ageing process (Minhat et al, 2015). Thus, the continuous feeling of worriedness in themselves will take over their mind and caused them to fall from performing their daily life activity that include satisfaction of work, school, social activities and relationships with others.

Meanwhile, the level of anxiety for both genders of prison officers indicates at the lowest level. This finding is contradicted with the previous study, according to Bradford (2006) the prison environment itself is exposed to confrontation, violence and diseases; this will lead to psychological disturbance such as work stress, depression and anxiety. Hence, the result shows otherwise. Probably, the working environment of prison in Malaysia is different with the foreign prisons. However, there is no evidence that state about the working environment of prison in Malaysia. But, to support this theory the researcher look at the Hofstede theory. According to the Hofstede (2011), he believes that every aspect in our cultural dimension is different for each country. In collectivist versus individualist

perspectives, people with higher levels of collectivist especially in developing country like Malaysia, the relationship between employee and employer are like family, which mean that they tend to seek harmony in the group to avoid any misunderstanding in any issues that may arise between them. Whereas, individualistic people, especially in developed countries like USA, they tend to mind their own business and the relationship between employee and employer because of the mutual advantages. From this statement, it clearly described that probably the working environment of collectivist member is a way better compared to individualistic member, because they know how to maintain their relationship with others and this will help them to reduce workplace bullying and also the level of anxiety among prison officers. So, based on this there must be differences of working environment between westerners and easterner prison.

In summary, Bullying can happen in any workplace. It can have an impact on an individual's health and affect their ability to do their job. It has been proven that workplace bullying also play a major role in determining the level of anxiety in the future. Again, these two variable seem to have a negative impact on individuals physical and mental health, this is why the variable has a positive correlation to each other's. Furthermore, we assume that the work environment of prison in Malaysia which are extremely exposed to danger, confrontation and disease, tend to show the high level of workplace bullying and anxiety. But, based on this study the result shows the level of anxiety among prison officers is extremely low. So, this finding indicates that prison officers who are involved in this study are healthy in term of anxiety.

Moreover, determine the level of anxiety among prison officers is very important because anxiety can affect wellness and wellbeing of the individual life. Those who are associated with anxiety is plagued by a constant state of worry, fear and dread. Eventually, the worry produced by the anxiety disorder, so dominates her thinking that it interferes with daily functioning, including work, school, social activities and relationships. Further, the effect of anxiety also will cost lots of money by the organization or country; this result caused the organization to fail from achieving their desired goals. However, early detection will help the organization to take precautions action to overcome the issues that may arise and later the organization successful to reduce cost claims by the employees.

Hopefully, in future there a research that emphasizes on work environment, especially in prison to see the difference between Malaysia and other country in order to form a better understanding.

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