

# An Exploratory Study on the Relationship between the Personal Factors of the Perpetrator and Workplace Bullying

*(Kajian Penerokaan Hubung-kait Antara Faktor-faktor Peribadi Pembuli dan Buli di Tempat Kerja)*

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## ABSTRACT

*Many countries worldwide have considered workplace bullying as an important national agenda. This issue has been extensively discussed by scholars who have determined that bullying severely affects an organization. However, discussions on workplace bullying in the perspective of the perpetrators still remain inadequate. This study aims to examine the relationship between the personal factors and job insecurity of the perpetrator with workplace bullying. It intends to understand the factors that contribute to workplace bullying among Malaysian workers. This research applied the quantitative method of data collection and used SmartPLS M2 version 2.0 to analyse data. The regression analysis showed that personal factors positively affected workplace bullying. In contrast, no significant relationship was found between job insecurity and workplace bullying.*

*Keywords: Workplace bullying; personal factors; job insecurity*

## ABSTRAK

*Banyak negara di seluruh dunia telah menganggap perbuatan buli di tempat kerja ini sebagai salah satu agenda penting negara. Isu ini telah banyak dibincangkan oleh penyelidik-penyelidik yang membuktikan bahawa perbuatan buli di tempat kerja ini menjejaskan organisasi dengan teruk. Walau bagaimanapun, perbincangan mengenai buli di tempat kerja melalui perspektif pelaku masih tidak mencukupi. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara faktor-faktor peribadi dan ketiadaan jaminan pekerjaan si pelaku dengan buli di tempat kerja. Ia bertujuan untuk memahami faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada buli di tempat kerja di kalangan pekerja-pekerja di Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah pengumpulan data kuantitatif dan menggunakan SmartPLS M2 versi 2.0 untuk menganalisis data. Analisis regresi menunjukkan faktor-faktor peribadi mempunyai kesan yang positif dengan buli di tempat kerja. Sebaliknya, tiada keputusan signifikan didapati antara ketiadaan jaminan pekerjaan dan buli di tempat kerja.*

*Kata kunci: Buli di tempat kerja; faktor personal; ketiadaan jaminan pekerjaan*

## INTRODUCTION

Bullying has been increasingly recognized as a serious problem in the working environment (Francioli et al. 2016). Bullying and harassment are reported to happen regularly in many work organizations. For example, the bullying rate among the workforce in Europe was estimated at 5% to 10% (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper 2011), whereas in the United States it was reported to be close to 10% (Lipscomb et al. 2015). Kassem (2015) claimed that bullying was a universal problem in most organizations with a prevalence rate of 3% to 4%; they added that bullying had inflicted serious health damages to its victims and in severe cases, it may cause an adult to commit suicide (LaMontagne & Milner 2016).

Scandinavian countries are actively researching on bullying issues (Reknes, Einarsen, Knardahl & Lau 2013; Salin 2015; Van den Brande et al. 2016). In the business field, evidence in literature has been unable to pinpoint a

reliable source of bullying. In the field of social science, most studies that are pertained to bullying have focused on the victim aspect of workplace bullying (Nielsen & Knardahl 2015; Henle & Gross 2014; Leon Perez et al. 2013). Workplace bullying has serious implications on the psychological safety and well-being of victims as well as on an organization's function. Hence, investigating factors that contribute to workplace bullying can enhance the understanding of the concept (Bond, Tuckey & Dollard 2010).

Most previous studies have focused on work environment variables as antecedents of workplace bullying (Samnani & Singh 2016). However, several studies have provided empirical support for the assumption that certain psychosocial factors at work may foster bullying in the workplace (Francioli et al. 2016; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen 2009). Aquino and Thau (2009) asserted that research on personality factors at the individual level remained inconclusive. An intensive literature review

indicated that minimal attention was given directly to the topic of perpetrators of workplace bullying. Rayner and Cooper (2003) describes it as a 'black hole' in the field. Samnani and Singh (2012) also highlighted the lack of research on perpetrator-related antecedents of bullying as well as bullying effects in different countries. Thus, research focusing on perpetrator characteristics is necessary to increase understanding on the reasons some people behave as bullies (Zapf & Einarsen 2011).

In Malaysia, the International Labour Organization reported that workplace bullying has not reached a critical level yet. Affandi (2009) stated in his review that minimal attention had been given to the subject of workplace bullying. However, concern for this issue has been increasing in the mass media. On February 16, 2010, a newspaper, *Utusan Malaysia* (2010) reported the occurrence of workplace bullying. According to its report, a victim asserted that 'I was always overburdened with work even though my colleagues have the same responsibilities. They would deliberately swamp me with files although other colleagues were doing nothing at that time. I also had difficulty applying for leaves.' Most of the studies conducted in Malaysia was at the school level, which focused on children rather than adults in workplaces. There are a few studies that were conducted among school children such as Uba, Yaacob, Juhari and Talib (2010), Saibon, Rashid, Ali and Abdullah (2012), and Noh and Rahman (2013). Nevertheless, starting from the year 2014, a few scholars have started to focus on workplace bullying. For example, Yuzana, Dempster and Stevenson (2014) reported that about 42.6% of employees from the Malaysian healthcare industry are exposed to inappropriate behaviour in their workplace. In the public and private sectors, Al Bir and Hassan (2014) reported that 39% of respondents have agreed to have experienced a negative behaviour in their workplace. Meanwhile, in another study Omar, Mokhtar and Hamzah (2015) identified that 83.2% of respondents from a public service agency were exposed to at least two bullying behaviours on a weekly or daily basis for six months. These results show that there is a high prevalence towards bullying in the workplace. Although some Malaysian workplaces might be aware of bullying issues, research on perpetrator characteristics, particularly on personal factors and job variables, remains lacking. Therefore, the present study intended to fill in this gap by focusing on these two predictor variables. By studying these two variables, this research can expand the knowledge on factors that influence the behaviour of workplace bullies. Accordingly, this research aimed to explore the following objectives:

1. To investigate the relationship between personal factors and workplace bullying that influence the perpetrators to commit bullying, and
2. To investigate the relationship between job insecurity and workplace bullying that contributes to bullying.

#### WORKPLACE BULLYING

According to Forsyth (2006: 206), 'bullying can be considered as a form of coercive interpersonal influence, bringing injury or discomfort on another person repeatedly through physical contact, verbal abuse, exclusion, or other negative actions.' To distinguish workplace bullying is quite troublesome but Nielsen, Nielsen, Notelaer and Einarsen (2015) have mentioned that there are several characteristics of workplace bullying to consider. First, it must be a negative act that can be in terms of work-related harassment, personal harassment, managerial harassment, and intimidation. Second, the frequency of the negative act must be frequent and not a one-off incident. The third characteristic is the duration of the negative act whereby such acts have been done for quite some time. Lastly is the reactions from the victims, which is the victim must feel victimized or intimidated by such acts. Thus, these four elements must be present to conclude whether a certain behaviour is a form of workplace bullying or not.

Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers (2009) concluded that bullying has three major types, namely, work-related bullying, person-related bullying, and physical bullying. Previous studies on the types of bullying have proven that a high correlation exists among the different bullying categories, including cyberbullying (Modecki et al. 2014). This finding indicates that if people are bullied, they tend to experience a large number of bullying behaviours from different behavioural categories as well. The findings by O'Donnell and MacIntosh (2016) suggest that workplace bullying is gender specific whereby bullying occurs more frequently between the same gender than between gender. Spence Laschinger and Nosko (2015) reported that men are generally bullied by their male supervisors, while women are bullied by both men and women with an approximately equal proportion of male and female among the perpetrators.

A work-related bullying comprises of behaviours such as giving unreasonable deadlines or unmanageable workloads, excessive monitoring of work, assigning meaningless tasks, or even not assigning any tasks (Reknes et al. 2014). Previous researches have applied the general factor identified by Einarsen et al. (2009). In addition to that, Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2011) have suggested other categories, such as control and manipulation of information as well as control and abuse of working conditions.

Person-related bullying is another type of workplace bullying. It can be in terms of verbal attack (Spector, Zhou & Che 2014), isolation or social exclusion (Scott et al. 2014), emotional abuse (Pilch & Turska 2015) and humiliation, which may involve attacks on self-esteem (Loerbroks et al. 2015). Furthermore, Loerbroks et al. (2015) reported that perpetrators of this type of bullying do not return communications such as phone calls, memos, and emails, further isolating individuals. Additional methods of person-related bullying involve spreading gossips, lies, false accusations, and undermining an

employee (Reknes et al. 2014). Escartin et al. (2013) also argued that co-workers used social isolation and attacks on the private sphere more often than supervisors or managers. Moreover, they concluded that if supervisors were the only ones bullying in an organization, then bullying tactics such as social isolation, attack on the private sphere, and spreading of rumours would occur less frequently.

Lastly, workplace bullying can include physically intimidating behaviours in extreme cases (Bartlett 2016). Physical intimidation bullying may include sexual harassment, physical violence, and threats of violence, manipulation, and threats in general (Boyle & Wallis 2016). Watters and Hillis (2015) have mentioned that in general, sexual harassment is usually experienced by females and is perpetrated by males.

#### PERSONAL FACTORS AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

According to Griffin and Gross (2004), bullying is recognized as a subset of the overall concept of aggression. Personal factors have been suggested to influence incidents of bullying in the workplace (Tuckey & Neall 2014). Researchers have suggested that factors like self-esteem (Fanti & Henrich 2015), learned behaviour (Rivers, Potteat, Noret & Ashurst 2009), and social rejection and lack of social competency (Zapf & Einarsen 2011) can contribute to aggressive behaviours like workplace bullying.

Kunchandy (2007) suggested that high self-esteem is always associated with aggressive behaviour and by contrast, low self-esteem is associated with depressive reaction. Yun and Kang (2014) claimed that people with low self-esteem would seldom be aggressive because they fear of losing an encounter. A high self-esteem is characterized by either a stable or an unstable self-evaluation (Matthiesen & Einarsen 2007). A person with an unstable but high self-esteem may become aggressive even with trivial threats to his or her self-esteem (Pilch & Turska 2015). Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007) claimed that bullying could be considered as a more external reaction directed toward colleagues. Therefore, a high level of self-esteem can be a factor of external reactions such as treating others with cruel behaviours. A high self-esteem is found to be associated with perfectionism, arrogance, and narcissism (Pilch & Turska 2015). In addition to that, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007) have highlighted that violent perpetrators would have an elevated but unstable self-esteem.

A learned behaviour can also be a factor for workplace bullying. Based on the Social Learning Theory, a learned behaviour is a behaviour that is acquired by observing the behaviour and attitude of others (Fryling, Johnston & Hayes 2011). Denmark and Williams (2013) mentioned that the cycle of violence can continue from generation to generation despite the conspicuous amount of pain that it causes the victims. Relating to workplace bullying, Rivers et al. (2009) claimed that most perpetrators have experienced being victims, and thus, the disappointments

they suffered from being harmed, demeaned, and controlled by their perpetrators had bred anger and a desire for revenge. Later on, this ill behaviour served as a justification to their actions as a perpetrator.

Zapf and Einarsen (2011) stated that social rejection and lack of social competency appeared to be the prevailing factors among a huge number of bullying perpetrators. Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007) highlighted that limited self-reflection and perspective might be significant antecedent conditions to workplace bullying, and were powerful factors that caused individuals to become bullies. Based on previous studies, perpetrators have repeatedly reported that they were not aware of the consequences of their behaviour (Jenkins et al. 2010). Besides that, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007) found that social rejection was positively associated with anxiety or insecurity. Chaplin (2010) reported that perpetrators usually claimed to have low levels of anxiety or insecurity, or approximately average levels of such dimensions. The preceding discussion led to our first hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub> The personal factors of perpetrators are positively related to workplace bullying

#### JOB INSECURITY AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

Job insecurity is a job stressor and defined as the insecure feeling of an individual about his or her future persistence in a job (De Witte, Vander Elst & De Cuyper 2015). Job insecurity does not only negatively affect the psychological and physical health (Heymans 2016), but also leads to negative job-related reactions. According to the Theory of Job Adaptation (Rosse & Saturay 2004), employees will attempt to alleviate job dissatisfaction through various job adaptation responses. For example, employees may withdraw from the stressor by being unsatisfied with their job, not committed to the organization, and exhibiting a strong intention to leave the organization. Glambek et al. (2014) also commented that job insecurity might trigger workplace bullying. A person who is insecure with his or her job might find a scapegoat or victim just to vent out his or her tension on (Escartin et al. 2013).

Regarding the relationship between job insecurity and workplace bullying, Smet et al. (2016) asserted that job insecurity would be prevalent in a workplace with a high rate of gossip or rumour. In addition to that, Baillien et al. (2011) proposed that a climate of gossip or rumour would induce workplace bullying. Moreover, Samnani and Singh (2014) claimed that job insecurity bred an environment of rivalry when employees regarded co-workers as serious competitors for jobs, which led to suspicious feelings associated with workplace bullying. Rayner, Hoel, and Cooper (2002) stated that job insecurity might develop in an environment in which agreement to anti-bullying policies was not preferred. The preceding discussion led to our second hypothesis:

H<sub>2</sub> Job insecurity among perpetrators is positively related to workplace bullying



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The preceding discussion supports the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1.

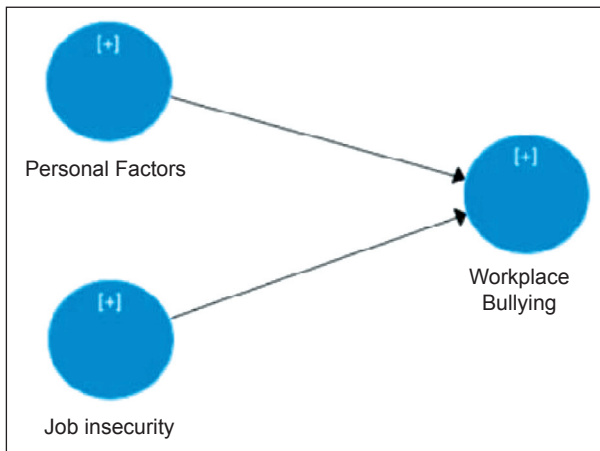


FIGURE 1. Conceptual framework

## SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

This study is an exploratory study of workplace bullying in Malaysian public organizations. According to The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI 2007), the public administration sector is among sectors that recorded the highest rate of bullying, which is between 12%–14%. The respondents consisted of students who had registered for their degree at the School of Distance Education, at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in January 2014. The reasons for the selection are because the respondents were attached to various public organizations in Malaysia and it was the most practical way to get responses on workplace bullying. The justification for using this approach is also based on our argument that this study can be used to gauge workplace bullying from a different perspective of the public sector organizations in their working environment. The respondents had to answer a specific question to indicate whether they are from a public or private sector organization. The final selection was done based on respondents' attachment with public organizations. The questionnaire was distributed during the respondents' intensive course period where they attend classes physically in USM's main campus for four weeks. A total of 500 sets of questionnaires were randomly distributed regardless of the respondent's age, position, years of experience, and type of profession. A hundred and eighty (36%) questionnaires were returned. However, after removing incomplete questionnaires, only 102 or 20.4% were available to be used. The percentage was quite satisfactory in comparison to the research done by Seigne, Coyne, Randall and Parker (2007), which had a total response rate of 19.7%. Furthermore, Moreno-

Jiménez et al. (2009) mentioned that a small sample size is considered normal in research on workplace bullying due to the sensitive questions asked.

## MEASURES

Workplace bullying was measured based on the scale developed by Einarsen and Rakness (1997). This scale, known as the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ), was used to measure the prevalence of workplace bullying within a range of 22 potential negative behaviours. The NAQ was empirically developed and validated, and has been extensively used in many countries. However, the set of questionnaire was modified and a new type of bullying, namely, racial-based bullying, was added.

In this research, job insecurity was measured using a seven-item scale adopted from Hellgren, Sverke and Isaksson (1999). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The descriptive analysis indicated that the majority of the respondents were 31–35 years old (40.2%), followed by 26–30 years old (37.3%), 36–40 years old (14.7%), 41–50 years old (2.9%), 21–25 years old (2.9%), and 51–60 years old (2.0%). Most of the respondents were female (64.7%), with males comprising of 35.3%. The majority of the respondents were Malays (89.2%), followed by Indians (3.9%), others (3.9%), and Chinese (2.9%). The majority of the respondents belonged to other positions (34.3%), followed by clerk (33.3%), junior executive (12.7%), supervisor (11.8%), manager (2.9%), intern (2.9%), and senior executive (2.0%). Most of the respondents had 5–10 years of experience (68.6%), followed by 11–16 years (15.7%), 1–4 years (8.8%), 17–22 years (3.9%), and 23 years and above (2.9%).

## HYPOTHESIS TESTING

This study used the partial least squares (PLS) method to test the hypotheses. PLS is a component-based structural equation modelling (Vinzi et al. 2010) that has been widely used in management research (Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics 2009). PLS excludes assumptions of homogeneity in the variance and covariance of dependent variables. In addition to that, PLS can simultaneously test structural and measurement models, and thus, provide a complete analysis of interrelationships (Chin 2010).

The PLS analysis was performed by considering the composite reliability (CR), average extracted variance (AVE),  $R^2$  value, and bootstrap of the  $t$  values (Chin 2010; Henseler et al. 2009). This study regarded workplace bullying as the second-order construct of work-based bullying, physical bullying, and person-related bullying.

SmartPLS M2 version 2.0 and a two-step analysis approach were used to analyse the collected data. A bootstrapping method (200 resamples) was used to determine the significance levels of the loadings, weights, path coefficients, and positive relationships of personal factors and job insecurity on workplace bullying.

TESTING THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

To operationalize the second-order factor, PLS was adopted to estimate the two-stage model by repeatedly using a manifest variable (Tenenhaus et al. 2005). During the first stage, we used both convergent and discriminant validities for all the first-order factors (work-based bullying, person-related bullying, and physical bullying). During the second stage, the scores of the lower-order latent variables were used as manifest variables for the higher-order construct (e.g., workplace bullying) (Akter, D'Ambra & Ray 2011).

The analysis started with an assessment of the reflective measures using both convergent and discriminant validity tests. Factor loadings, CR, and AVE were used to assess convergence validity. The loadings of all the reflective items exceeded the recommended value of 0.5. CR values (Table 1), which exhibited the degree to which the items indicated the latent construct, ranged from 0.823 to 0.953 and exceeded the recommended value of 0.7. AVE was within the range of 0.555 to 0.742, which exceeded the recommended value of 0.5.

A discriminant validity test was conducted by comparing the AVE from each construct with its communal variances shared with the other constructs. Table 2 presents the inter-construct correlations (below the diagonal) and square roots of the AVE (on the diagonal) of the first-order constructs. This table indicates that the square root of the AVE for all the first-order factors was higher than their shared variances. This finding reaffirmed the discriminant validity of the model constructs.

TABLE 1. Factor loading and reliability of the first-order constructs

Construct	Item	Scale type	Loading	AVE <sup>b</sup>	CR <sup>b</sup>				
Personal factors	Sec 6	Reflective	0.809	0.555	0.823				
	Sec 7		0.771						
	Sec 33		0.937						
	Sec 34		0.937						
Job insecurity	Sec 11	Reflective	0.807	0.653	0.849				
	Sec 12		0.857						
	Sec 13		0.758						
Person-related bullying	Sec B18	Reflective	0.776	0.706	0.935				
	Sec B19		0.822						
	Sec B20		0.796						
	Sec B21		0.888						
	Sec B22		0.922						
	Sec B23		0.827						
Physical bullying	Sec B26	Reflective	0.867	0.742	0.953				
	Sec B27		0.821						
	Sec B28		0.860						
	Sec B29		0.915						
	Sec B30		0.867						
	Sec B31		0.796						
	Sec B32		0.891						
	Work-based bullying		Sec B11			Reflective	0.734	0.589	0.909
			Sec B12				0.735		
			Sec B02				0.737		
Sec B03		0.767							
Sec B04		0.827							
Sec B06		0.834							
Sec B09		0.731							

ASSESSMENT OF THE TWO-STAGE WORKPLACE BULLYING MODEL

This study specified workplace bullying as a second-order hierarchical reflective construct with three first-order reflective constructs (work-based bullying, person-related bullying, and physical bullying), which represented a total

TABLE 2. Inter-construct correlation for the first-order constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Job insecurity	Person-related bullying	Personal factors	Physical bullying	Work-based bullying
Job insecurity	2.08	0.87	<b>0.8616</b>				
Person-related bullying	1.77	0.85	0.2459	<b>0.8083</b>			
Personal factors	2.26	0.74	0.7742	0.2265	<b>0.8399</b>		
Physical bullying	1.42	0.72	0.2015	0.4161	0.277	<b>0.7767</b>	
Work-based bullying	2.19	0.86	0.6418	0.0962	0.7666	0.2425	<b>0.7674</b>

of 16 items. Thus, the degree of explained variance of this hierarchical construct was reflected on its components, namely, work-based bullying (88%), physical bullying (79%), and person-related bullying (87%). The entire path coefficient from workplace bullying to its components was significant at  $p < 0.01$ . In this case, the CR and AVE of workplace bullying were above the cut-off values of 0.96 and 0.54, respectively.

TABLE 3. Workplace bullying (CR = 0.96, AVE = 0.54)

Physical bullying	Person-related bullying	Work-based bullying
$R^2 = 0.79$	$R^2 = 0.87$	$R^2 = 0.88$
$\beta = 0.889$	$\beta = 0.937$	$B = 0.885$
$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$

#### TESTING THE STRUCTURAL MODEL

Table 4 summarizes the structural model produced via PLS analysis. This table provides the standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and the  $t$  values observed with the significance level achieved. We calculated the direct effect of job insecurity and personal factors on workplace bullying using the bootstrapping approach recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), which was more suitable than the Sobel test and the causal steps approach (MacKinnon, Lockwood & Williams 2004). We applied the  $t$  statistic, which was significant at  $p < 0.05$ . If the  $t$  value exceeded 1.96 ( $p < 0.05$ ), then we could accept  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  (Fairchild & McQuillin 2010), that is, job insecurity and personal factors directly affected workplace bullying. Table 4 shows that the direct effect of job insecurity on workplace bullying is insignificant, whereas that of personal factors is significant ( $\beta = 0.354$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the result supports  $H_1$  and shows that personal factors affect workplace bullying.

TABLE 4. Summary of the structured model

Path coefficient	Beta	SE	t value	Result
Job insecurity → workplace bullying	0.075	0.097	0.774	Not supported
Personal factors → workplace bullying	0.354	0.088	3.95	Supported

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Most prior research on workplace bullying was focused on organizational and situational factors as predictors of bullying (Moreno-Jiménez et al. 2009). In addition to that, although some previous studies have referred to

personal factors and job insecurity as the most significant causes of workplace bullying, only a few empirical studies have explicitly focused on this relationship and from the perspective of perpetrators, particularly in Malaysia. The current study aimed to fill in this gap by exploring the relationship between personal factors and workplace bullying. Moreover, this study investigated the relationship between job insecurity and workplace bullying. Based on the literature on bullying and personal factors, we hypothesized that personal factors would elicit various negative emotions and would directly encourage workplace bullying. However, job insecurity was not related to workplace bullying and could not be regarded as an antecedent of this phenomenon.

The result of this study indicated that personal factors positively affected workplace bullying. This finding supported previous research on workplace bullying, such as Zapf and Einarsen (2011) and Ferris et al. (2012). In regards to self-esteem, the current study determined that the low self-esteem of Malaysian workers was associated with workplace bullying. This result was supported by Falkenbach, Howe and Falki (2013), who found a significant relationship between low self-esteem and aggression. Donellan et al. (2007) argued that low self-esteem was the root of violence and other destructive social behaviours. Moreover, Ferris et al. (2012) found that perpetrators had low self-esteem. However, this result contradicted with the findings of several previous studies, which asserted that perpetrators generally had high self-esteem (Olweus 2003). Besides that, O'Moore and Kirkham (2001) found that approximately 8,000 schoolchildren, both perpetrators and victims, had lower global self-esteem compared to those who were neither perpetrators nor victims.

Based on the results of the current study, learned behaviour was also associated with workplace bullying. This result supported Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen (2009) who claimed that most perpetrators had first learned bullying through their experience being a targeted victim for bullying. According to Samnani (2013), workers who thought of revenge exhibited a behaviour that contradicted their culture and religion. The offer they received from those who were socially and physically powerful to seek revenge might motivate them to become perpetrators. Neuman and Baron (2011) also noted that human behaviour is learned through observation, and Malaysian workers might be aware that repeating violent acts would motivate their colleagues to imitate their behaviour. A similar situation also happens worldwide. For example, Fryling et al. (2011) asserted that certain violent acts can be learned through a role model, i.e. via observation. A study by Agervold (2009) shows that a negative workplace environment may induce emergence of higher incidences of bullying, where the employees perceive that it is 'okay' to do a certain act of bullying. This negative environment continuously persists due to no action being taken by employers from prior to previous bullying cases (Batur & Wistrom 2012).

Regarding social rejection, this study determined that the lack of social competency was associated with workplace bullying. The importance of social competency in relation to bullying was also demonstrated by Coyne et al. (2003) in their study on an Irish workplace. The results of the current study supported Vartia and Hyyti (2002), who reported that a negative working condition and a lack of social competency were significant predictors of workplace bullying in a sample of 896 Finnish workers. In contrast, Zapf (1999) showed that victims might comprise of several subgroups, in which some, but not all victims, lacked social competency. In the study of Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen and Hellesøy (1994), both perpetrators and victims appeared to lack social competency. Perpetrators exhibited high social anxiety and low social competence, but high aggressiveness. Moreover, the current study showed that learning disability was associated with workplace bullying. This result was supported by Bourke and Burgman (2010), who found a positive relationship between learning disability and workplace bullying.

One unexpected outcome from this study was the lack of support for the relationship between job insecurity and workplace bullying. The result indicated that job insecurity was not considered an antecedent of workplace bullying for public sector workers in Malaysia. This finding could be explained by the gender composition of the Malaysian workforce. Based on the demographic data, most of the respondents were female (64.7%). Awan and Salam (2014) mentioned that gender plays an important role in creating job insecurity. It is evident from past studies that men tend to face more job insecurity than women (Awan & Salam 2014). Konrad et al.'s (2000) meta-analysis of gender-related studies showed men to be more concerned about earnings and responsibilities. Another important point to note is the study was conducted on public service organization workers in Malaysia. Having the majority of them (almost 70%) to have served 5–10 years in public organizations, there is a tendency for them to be perpetrators. Having a quite senior post associated with a permanent job makes the respondents less concerned about job insecurity. This result is in line with a study by Gardner et al. (2013), which asserted that seniority in an organization plays a role in the occurrence of workplace bullying. Furthermore, Tepper (2007) mentioned that workplace bullying usually occurs when there is a clear imbalance of power between the victim and perpetrator. Jenkins (2011) also provided a clear evidence of bullying by senior managers or higher level management staff.

In conclusion, this study has contributed significant implications to workplace bullying research worldwide. Our empirical results partly confirm those of previous studies, which asserted that personal factors positively affect workplace bullying while the hypothesis on the relationship between job insecurity and workplace bullying was rejected. This research provides an important reference for future studies on workplace bullying in the Malaysian public sector.

#### MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Research about workplace bullying is important to prevent certain ill behaviours from happening. For sustainability, organizations cannot afford to tolerate with any level of workplace bullying. By exploring the antecedents of workplace bullying, particularly in relation to the perpetrator, this study will certainly benefit organizations. Understanding the personal factors of the workplace bully will help the top management to create a healthy environment among employees. For example, the findings can assist policy makers or human resource managers in an organization to create an incivility-free workplace. It could be relevant if the employer can apply an additional analysis or interview concerning the personality traits of new employees in the recruitment system policy. For school children, Tani et al. (2003) used a Big Five Model Theory instrument to assess the personalities of students in relation to school bullying. However, an instrument used particularly to assess the personality traits of perpetrators of workplace bullying is yet to be developed. Thus, this can be an interesting subject to note for future research and studies. Furthermore, an occasional assessment is encouraged to examine the psychological wellbeing of employees. Lastly, understanding the personal factors of the perpetrators will shed some light on the employees because sometimes one has not realized that he or she has committed an act of bullying.

#### LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses only on two 'causal' aspects of workplace bullying. This study did not intend to argue that personality and job insecurity are the only two factors that affect bullying in the workplace. Zapf (1999) indicated that multiple causes of bullying should be considered. A multi-causal approach may extend the knowledge further. For example, strained and competitive work environments have also been found to promote bullying. Second, the sample size used in this study is sufficient but limited. This research managed to include 101 respondents. Future studies can use a larger sample size to make the findings generalizable. In addition to that, the majority of the respondents in the current study were Muslims. In future studies, data can be obtained from employees with different positions and religious affiliations. Identifying the different approaches in workplace bullying between Islamic organizations and non-Islamic organizations will also be interesting.

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