A MULTI-LEVEL STUDY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SAFETY CLIMATE ON WORKPLACE BULLYING AND JOB CHARACTERISTICS COMMUNITY COLLEGES STAFF IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Psychological hazards are one of the relevant areas in occupational health with many studies done on occupational stress. However, the end of mental health, which is burnout that has a more serious impact, has not been much explored. The previous study has shown that 10 to 15% of the working population in the Netherlands suffer from the burnout that has a more detrimental effect compared to occupational stress. Therefore, in this study, it was proposed that the Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) act as a precursor to working conditions and its effects on employees’ psychological well-being. Furthermore, PSC decreases emotional exhaustion, particularly through job demands (workplace bullying), and job resources (i.e social support). A cross-sectional survey was conducted and respondents were sampled through multistage sampling based on the number of community colleges in Peninsular Malaysia. Approximately 50 colleges were first randomly chosen and later staff from each selected colleges were further sampled through simple random sampling. In the end, a total of 425 employees from 45 organizations agreed to participate in the study. For statistical analysis, Hierarchical Linear Modeling software was used, as it was able to test the multilevel relationship. It was found that PSC was negatively associated with workplace bullying ($\gamma = -.13, SE = .03, P<.001$) it was positively associated with social support ($\gamma = .16, SE = .02, P<.001$). Besides, the relationship between PSC with burnout was mediated by workplace bullying ($z=-3.61, SE=.01, p<.001$), and social support ($z=-6.86, SE=.01, p<.001$). In conclusion, these finding on PSC provided community colleges staff better guidance and understanding about the concepts of PSC and the significant factors that contribute to PSC to improve the psychological health especially concerning about burnout.

Keywords: Psychosocial Safety Climate, burnout
1. Introduction

In tandem with rapid technology development and the era of internet, organization climate has been fundamentally fabricated as having communal perceptions among the organizational community; as per aspects of the organizational climate that inform the role of behaviour, which certain facets are rewarded and supported in any organization by the members that reinforce the same philosophy (Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Schneider, Bowen, Ehrhart, & Holcombe, 2000).

Consequently, ongoing researchers have coined and presented the Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) as an element of organizational climate that braces well-being of workers in terms of psychosocial aspect and play an essential role in developing work environments, work cultures, as well working conditions. Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) is coined as to have shared perceptions of “policies, practices, and procedures for the perception of workers’ psychological health and safety” (Dollard & Bakker, 2010) that relates to psychosocial factors at work. The word "shared perceptions" is one of the defining characteristics of organizational climate research, empirically analyzed by aggregating information collected from many employees into a different group level (i.e., organisation, team, unit) (Neal & Griffin, 2006).

According to Law et. al 2011, have pointed out that PSC at the organizational level demonstrates that organizational PSC lead marker of psychosocial hazards at work. Furthermore, work-related to hazards such as harassment and bullying shows average that 24% are accepted mental stress claims in Australia (2007-2008). Psychosocial safety denotes to being free from psychosocial and social risk or harm. Many studies have been carried out to look at the aftermaths of workplace bullying towards psychological health problems, for instance; the post-traumatic stress, depression, burnout, physical health, and others. Besides, (Thompson, Ph, Mazumdar, & Monk in 2009) and (Vartia, 2001) reported that bullying may cause stress and apprehension that could lead to sleep disturbance and ultimately sleep deprivation.

Likewise, studies have been carried out that organizational PSC and bullying was negative significant (Law et al., 2011). Organizational PSC has a negative connection with job demands such as work pressure, workload, emotional demand and workplace bullying (Dollard & Bakker, 2010).

The relationship between PSC and workplace bullying can be explained by Salin, 2003 model of enabling, motivating and precipitating factors. Generally, an organization with a powerful PSC (i.e., where employees share the perception that their psychological health is valued and protected) is likely to encourage employee participation in decision-making, especially concerning psychological well-being choices. Managers would also have a powerful commitment to take action to avoid bullying and to deal quickly and efficiently with bullying behaviours that occurred before the continuing trend escalated. Furthermore, considering the importance placed on psychological health, employees should feel more comfortable talking about threats well being and there would be mechanisms in place to deal with the problems occur. As such, energy imbalances can be minimized and it is unlikely that staff will be unhappy with the climate or leadership group as they may have a high degree of participation and work control/latitude. Therefore, it is unlikely that powerful PSC organizations will provide fertile soil to allow bullying.

In the relation of motivating factors, high levels of competition or rewards systems for bullying behaviour are unlikely to exist within a strong PSC organization as these factors threaten employees’ psychological safety and wellbeing. In other words, when PSC is high the perceived returns of engaging in bullying are likely to be quite low. Finally, when precipitating factors (i.e. organisational changes) are present, enhanced internal competition and typical emotions of reduced job security, enhanced inner competition, threat, powerlessness and frustration (Salin, 2003) are likely to be reduced as employees
stay aware of changes and are allowed to express their issues and contribute to decision-making. Overall, a strong PSC is predicted to decrease the incidence of workplace bullying by minimizing and/or removing the enabling, motivating and precipitating factors needed for workplace bullying to happen together.

2. Problem Statement

One psychological factor that is associated with burnout is workplace bullying where many researchers have argued that there is a significant association between exposure to workplace bullying and health as well as well-being. The incidence of bullying is a global phenomenon, heartrending all countries, professions, and employees: 83% of European respondents reported that they had been emotionally or physically oppressed; 65% in the Americas; and 55% in Asia. Psychological health problems such as psychological dissatisfaction, depression, burnout, anxiety, aggression, psychosomatic and musculoskeletal health complaints have been reported in many studies. Bullying or mobbing is related to situations where someone is subjected to chronic, recurrent, ad serious negative or hostile acts and behaviour that are annoying and oppressive and by this definition, being bullied at work can be a valid source of social stress at work like this in a way, denotes that individuals fail to defend themselves mentally. Example forms of bullying in a negative way which may be subtle yet obvious are being ignored or the other end of being targeted constantly, being refused to talk or listen and belittling of the target’s work. A local study has shown that physical and mental stress was closely associated with workplace bullying that causes a plunge in job satisfaction and decreased productivity (Yahaya et al., 2009)

Apart from that, a study was carried out in comparing between the psychosocial safety climate of public sectors and private sectors into occupationally related psychological ill-health (Zapf, 1999) where it showed that public sectors were riskier than the private sectors. In his study, it was reported that high bullying prevalence within the health sector, educational sector whereas teachers to be a low-risk group. Some researchers have justified in their research where it stated that targets of bullying often lack social support from co-workers and supervisors as well as family members.

3. Objectives

To determine the relationship between organizational climate (i.e Psychosocial Safety Climate) towards workplace bullying, emotional demand, social support and burnout among the staff of Community College in Peninsular Malaysia.

4. Literature Review

Psychosocial Safety Climate, workplace bullying and burnout

A guiding principle for intervention in occupational health and security is the control hierarchy, which states that determining the root cause will result in a more effective and effective control (or intervention) approach by identifying more distal causes. PSC is a distal cause, a workplace bullying “cause of the causes,” exposure that will eventually cause health issues. The method of transmission by which PSC impacts bullying is based on how PSC is implemented. Espoused PSC relates to what executives say they will do; in comparison, implemented PSC relates to what is accomplished. While reflecting PSC, psychological health and safety strategies are more distal, whereas processes or processes for applying the policy in day-to-day organizational life (PSC) are closer to the site of change and are therefore the focus of our studies. The connection between Psychosocial Safety climate adoption and workplace bullying can be understood through 3 psychosocial processes;
1. Climate of mistreatment
2. Work design; and
3. Escalation of the conflict

The first mechanism, the climate of mistreatment is related to a mistreatment specific workplace climate. The researcher proposed that the way executives approach the problem of intimidation and organizations to take future action might be influenced by the climate of safety itself (Salin, 2008).

Building on this concept, we suggest that PSC is generative as a particular type of climate of safety, giving rise to a particular climate of bullying mistreatment. In other words, PSC is a wide notion of bandwidth linked to maltreatment that can lead to other limited environments of maltreatment (Einarsen, Skogstad, Rørvik, Lande, & Nielsen, 2016).

The prevailing climate of mistreatment provides staff with data about behaviour-outcome expectations and required mistreatment-related role behaviour. Employees thus know the likely effects of (in) congruence between climate and the role behaviour. In the case of climate mistreatment, the staff creates judgments as to whether bullying is tolerated, recompensed or punished.

Work design is a second psychosocial mechanism that explains the connection between PSC and intimidation. PSC is mainly affected by senior executives and represents how senior leadership appreciates employee psychological health; these same values guide the way work is intended and the quality of work accessible—merely put, PSC predicts job design.

PSC is mainly affected by senior managers and reflects how senior management appreciates employee psychological health; these equivalent values control how works are structured and the nature of work accessible. According to (Van den Brande, Baillien, De Witte, Vander Elst, & Godderis, 2016) mentioned that role conflict, workload, role ambiguity, job insecurity, and cognitive demands as the most significant work design antecedents to bullying. With this senior managers who prioritize productivity over employee health can generate and encourage bullying by middle executives and first-line supervisors through enhanced works stress and workload for their subordinates to get the job done.

Workplace bullying relates to the systematic display of aggressive behaviours towards one or more employees at the job. Bullied employees are continually exposed to adverse and aggressive behaviours regularly derive health issues such as stress, burnout, depression and work satisfaction are decreased. Bullying is related to employee turnover from an organizational engagement, decreasing motivation and organizational commitment, decreased creativity and loss of productivity (Vagharseyyedin, 2016). Some of the largest incidents of bullying are in the health industry (Zapf, Escartín, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2010) and its highly prevalent among nurses (Roberts, 2015). The increasing frequency of bullying, associated with its negative effects, it is a specific concern to recognize how it affects the wellbeing of staff and decreasing of this harmful effect.

In modern living lives, workplace bullying has been acknowledged as a significant stressor (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Its stressful nature arises from its potential to adversely impact physical, psychological or behavior elements among those exposed to it (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). The ongoing assault by managers or employees leads to uncertainty and anxiety, as employees suspect that it will continue and how it will impact their wellbeing and their role in the organization (Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001). Bullying in the workplace creates high job demand and low job resources which produce an unsafe working environment (Law et al., 2011) and was conceptualized as a job demands in the previous studies (Spence Laschinger, Grau, Finegan, & Wilk, 2012; McGregor, Magee, Caputi, & Iverson,
2016). Thus, as a type of going aggressive behavior at work involving repeated and systematic negative acts, workplace bullying could become expressing job demand for the targeted individuals leading to excessive effort investment, and subsequently burnout.

Burnout is a psychological syndrome caused by extended involvement in an emotionally challenging job circumstance (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter 2001). Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are two aspects of burnout. Emotional exhaustion relates to a deep sensation of tiredness and absence of emotional and mental energy needed to satisfy work requirements and is regarded as the most evident manifestation of burnout.

Depersonalization, “and the related dimension if cynicism,” reflects a cynical and in different attitude to other individuals, particularly clients or patients, resulting from an effort to distance themselves from job emotionally. The burnout of healthcare workers plays a significant detrimental role in the quality of patient care because it decreases their capacity to participate completely with patients and increases the likelihood of errors (Montgomery et. al 2011).

**Psychosocial Safety Climate, Social Support and burnout**

PSC was related to performance and productivity aims. By achieving organizational goals, employees should provide appropriate physical and psychological resources as mentioned by (Hobfoll, 1989). Within the scope of the JD-R model, the resources on interest supervisor support. Supervisors support refers to the perceived social support of staff from supervisors, including instrumental and emotional support. In the context of PSC, managers will be aware that workers need adequate resources to complete job tasks and will be conversant that not having enough resources leads to reduces levels of positive work emotions. With the high PSC organizations, social support will be greater because of the organizations value the positive wellbeing of its workforce, for example, level of satisfaction and engagement. With this, it will create optimum working environments. Similarly, managers will understand that inadequate resourcing may lead to negative reactions and counterproductive consequences. In other words, PSC should be an indicator of appropriate work resources within organizations and related to motivational procedures at the individual level that promotes positive well-being outcomes.

Social support is a network of links with other people that can provide help, support assistance to an individual. Social support as providing psychological or mental support, personal interest, advice, assistance, data, feedback, assessment or motivation. Lack of social support can leave an individual in the service feeling isolated, which can improve the likelihood of succumbing to stressors in the workplace, eventually leading to burnout from the job (Iliffe & Steed, 2000). Similarly, social support was suggested as a means of helping employees dealing with workplace stress and job burnout contended that to combat job burnout, correctional staff needed social support. As Shamir & Drory, 1982, speculate strong social support should be instrumental in reacting to burnout forces. In reality, increasing social support was one of the ways that correctional employees suggested to cope with burnout (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007).

Direct, buffering or insulating, and reducing stressors are the 3 main reasons social support that linked with burnout (Dignam, Manuel Barrera, & West, 1986. Lack of social support can be seen as a form of resources depletion for correctional staff and this lack of resources can lead to stress, which in turn can result in burnout from the job (Neveu, 2007) It may not be stress alone that is linked to burnout. The literature indicates that employees need to feel their jobs are essential and make a difference in others’ life otherwise risk tragedy to become burned out are at the high level (Pines & Keinan, 2005).
Support is a mechanism through which employees can find significance in their work and their lives while discovering methods to cope with stressors in the workplace. The moderating view is that social support enables employees to cope with excessive work demands, thereby decreasing burnout opportunities. Employees who lack social support are more susceptible to burnout related work demands.

5. Methods

Multi-Stage random sampling was used in the study. For the Organization level, a list of community college in Peninsular Malaysia is obtained from the Department of Community College, Ministry of Higher Education. A list of community colleges was numbered and selected by using Online Random Selection tools.

At the individual level, a numbered list of academic staff will be obtained from the Department of Administrator in Community College. The same method was used at the organizational level to select the participants to participate in this study by using Online Random Selection tools.

6. Analysis

Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Windows version 21.0. Frequency, mean and standard deviation were used for data description and comparison.

Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) Student Version 7 was used to analyze the multi-level structure data. Data for hierarchical linear modelling were aggregated the psychosocial safety climate to be measured. We assessed the psychosocial safety climate at the individual level (Level 1) and aggregated to organizations level (Level 2).

Sobel test was used to test whether a mediator carries the influence of independent variables (IV) to a dependent variable (DV).

7. Results

Statistical Analysis

Firstly, we conducted a descriptive analysis to examine the inter-correlations between variables. In table 1 show the means, standard deviations and correlations between the study variables. The objective of using the Pearson Correlation in the analysis is to determine the correlation among variables in the study. The above diagonal shows the aggregate organizations and the below represents the aggregate individuals where it consists of 425 individuals and 45 organizations.

From the below diagonal aggregate individual shows statistically significant where majority shows p<0.01 among the variables (PSC, workplace bullying, social support and burnout).

In the above diagonal aggregate organizations, the majority shows significantly correlated among variables. For PSC variable shows statistically significant correlated with variables (workplace bullying, social support and burnout).
Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, F values, ICC (I) and Correlations between the study variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>ICC (I)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC)</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.57**</td>
<td>-.37*</td>
<td>.75**</td>
<td>-.59**</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>3.39***</td>
<td>.2056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Workplace Bullying</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>-.68**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>1.79**</td>
<td>.1073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social Support</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>-.46**</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.56**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>2.92***</td>
<td>.1841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Burnout</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.36**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td>2.46***</td>
<td>.1121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note : ***p<.001, **p<.01, * p<.05, significant two-tailed. Above diagonal aggregate organizations, below diagonal aggregate individual. (N = 425 respondent, 45 organizations)
8. Summary

As the result shows by using Hierarchical Linear Modeling software, we found that Psychosocial Safety Climate negatively associated with workplace bullying and emotional demands and positively associated with social support. We discovered the relationship between Psychosocial Safety Climate with burnout were mediated by workplace bullying ($z=-3.61, SE=.01, p<.001$), and social support ($z=-6.86, SE=.01, p<.001$). Hence, we conclude that Psychosocial Safety Climate able to predict burnout via mediate by workplace bullying and social support. The study showed workplace bullying and social support. The result revealed a significant negative relationship between Psychosocial Safety Climate and burnout.

This study provided an insight into the overall prevalence of burnout and some of its associated factors among Community College staff at Community College thru-out Peninsular Malaysia. The prevalence of burnout was found to be moderate in comparison with other similar studies. The factors that were found to be significantly associated with burnout in this study include gender, years of teaching experience and job satisfaction.

References


