

**THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF WORK ENGAGEMENT IN THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE BULLYING AND  
TURNOVER INTENTION AMONG EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC  
SERVICE AGENCIES**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF WORK ENGAGEMENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE BULLYING AND TURNOVER INTENTION AMONG EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES.**

**VANISHREE D/O KANAKA SUNDAR**

The main objective of this research was to examine the mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies. Workplace bullying is associated with negative consequences on the victims such as turnover intention. This is because the victim who is exposed to workplace bullying might decide to quit the job due to physical and emotional damage. Studies have shown that workplace bullying is prevalent in public agencies of Malaysia. Hence, this study focuses on employees from public service agencies since research has found that the rate of bullying is high in public sector. Little is known about the possible mechanism which can mediate this association even though numerous studies have examined the association between workplace bullying and turnover intention. It has been further added that research on the association between bullying-turnover and work engagement is sparse even though the association between workplace bullying and turnover intention is clear from the literature. This study used a cross-sectional survey design and online questionnaires to collect data from 400 participants with ages ranging from 25 to 60. This research used one of the non-probability sampling methods known as purposive sampling to recruit sample size. Linear regression was used as a statistical analysis method to find the effect between the main study variables. Besides, this study also used

PROCESS macro developed by Andrew Hayes to study further on the mediation effect. As hypothesized, work engagement partially mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies. The findings of this study will be helpful for the managing body of the public sectors who create strategies to discover a better means of managing bullying behaviours within the organisation so that the employees will remain longer in the organisation. The study also suggests that managing body can focus on increasing the employees' work engagement to retain the employees since highly engaged employees tend to remain longer in an organisation.

*Keywords: workplace bullying, turnover intention, work engagement, public service agencies*

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## APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation/thesis entitled “**THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF WORK ENGAGEMENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE BULLYING AND TURNOVER INTENTION AMONG EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES**” was prepared by VANISHREE D/O KANAKA SUNDAR and submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Psychology in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

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**SUBMISSION SHEET**

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**SUBMISSION OF DISSERTATION**

It is hereby certified that Vanishree D/O Kanaka Sundar (ID No: 19AAM06518) has completed this dissertation entitled “The Mediating Effect of Work Engagement in the Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Turnover Intention among Employees in Public Service Agencies” under the supervision of Dr. Nurul Iman Binti Abdul Jalil from the Department of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science and Dr. Gan Su Wan from the Department of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science.

I understand that the University will upload a softcopy of my dissertation in PDF format into UTAR Institutional Repository, which may be made accessible to the UTAR community and the public.

Yours truly,

Vanishree

(Vanishree)

## DECLARATION

I, Vanishree, hereby declare that the dissertation is based on my original work except for citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UTAR or other institutions.

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Date: 29 August 2021

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| COR   | Conservation of Resources Theory       |
| SPSS  | Statistical Program for Social Science |
| NAQ-R | Negative Act Questionnaire- Revised    |
| TIS   | Turnover Intention Scale               |
| UWES  | Utrecht Work Engagement Scale          |

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## **CHAPTER 1.0**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the outline of the study on The Mediating Effect of Work Engagement in the Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Turnover Intention among Employees in Public Service Agencies. This chapter explains the background of the research, problem statement, significance of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, hypotheses and operational as well as conceptual definition of the study.

#### **1.2 Background of Research**

In this competitive business world, employees are becoming significant resources in the organisation. The commitment of the employees determines survival and organisational performance. Employees are expected to fulfil the needs and the objectives of the organisations hence, many organisations are placing high expectations on the capabilities of the employees (Arokiasamy et al., 2010). Moreover, van Dyk (2016) claimed that it is important to retain and attract staff with necessary skills and abilities to compete in this fast-paced world. However, turnover has become a persistent issue for most organisations even though there were many measures taken by the organisations to retain their best employees.

A higher rate of turnover can be detrimental to organisations because they are investing a lot of money to prepare and train employees, and this investment is gone when employees leave the job and consequently, organisations need to invest again to develop and train employees (Alaarj et al., 2017). Additionally, Kumar and Dhamodaran (2013) claimed that the lower productivity and engagement of current employees because of increased workload results in perceptions of workplace bullying and occurrences of burnout. Researchers, practitioners and employers continuously attempt to understand the factor which can initiate turnover intentions because of high turnover rate which affects organisational success and growth (van Dyk, 2016).

Rodwell et al. (2014) have claimed that experiencing workplace bullying is one of the factors which can initiate turnover intention. Nowadays, workplace bullying has become a significant matter for the organisations (Rasool et al., 2013). Rayner et al. (2002) stated that workplace bullying includes behaviours such as constant attempts to threaten physical and emotional well-being of individuals, emotional and physical seclusion or passive-aggressive threats to personal or professional position of an individual. Harassment in workplace can be regarded as continuous and recurrent behaviours which are intended to threaten, frighten or cause humiliation to the targeted staff as well as to irritate or torment subordinates or co-workers (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Since, 70% of the participants who participated in a study by Glaso et al. (2011) have reported that they were exposed to bullying behaviours at their workplace,



it can be hypothesized that workplace bullying might be rationally common. Skogstad et al. (2011) found in an earlier study, that bad events such as bullying behaviours affect individuals more than positive events (e.g., receiving positive feedback) do. Moreover, the results of other research have showed that experiencing workplace bullying may impair psychological health of an individual by causing anxiety and depression (Rosario-Hernández et al., 2013 as cited in Rosario-Hernández et al., 2018) as well as impacting the physiological health and causing cardiovascular diseases and sleep disorders (Rosario-Hernández et al., 2018).

Such consequences have severe organisational outcomes as staff who experience workplace bullying might have increased turnover intention and low job satisfaction (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). Besides, it has been stated that the objective of workplace bullying is to remove the targeted employee from the organisation since this fulfil the needs of the bullies to direct their impulses towards the victim (Rosario-Hernández et al., 2018). Subsequently, the victim who is exposed to workplace bullying might decide to quit the job because of the bullying behaviours (Berthelsen et al., 2011). Hence, previous studies suggested that experiencing workplace bullying is related to turnover intention (Bahjat et al., 2017; Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2017).

Moreover, work engagement is proposed as a mediator between workplace bullying and turnover intention in this current research. This is because past study has shown that work engagement influences the turnover intention of

employees (Al-shbiel et al., 2018). Since there was plenty of attention given to work engagement, numerous researchers have claimed that work engagement is an important factor that affects turnover intention of the employees (Paul & Kee, 2019). Likewise, many studies have presented adequate proof to show the influence of work engagement on organisational outcomes, for example, job fulfilment and turnover intention (Agarwal, 2017; Javed et al., 2015).

This research also mainly focuses on the employees of public service agencies. Public service agencies are public organisations that are part of the government and deliver public services, goods and programs to the community (Dube, 2011). Public services are significant for the prosperity and development of our economy as they shelter the vulnerable, extend opportunities and improve a person's quality of life (UNISON, 2012). In addition, public services also keep us together as a society and always support the communities.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Francioli et al. (2016) claimed that in the working environment, bullying has been gradually known as a serious issue because it has been reported to happen regularly at work. For instance, a national survey by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI), revealed that approximately 19% of employees in the United States witness workplace bullying and 19% experience it (WBI, 2017), while in the United Kingdom (UK), it was revealed that 23% of the employees have experienced workplace bullying (Rosling, 2019). LaMontagne and Milner

(2016) added that bullying had imposed health impairment on the victims and in extreme cases, it was also found to cause victims to commit suicide. Studies about the phenomena of bullying have been conducted in many countries such as United States, England, Sweden, Denmark, Mexico, Korea, Japan and many other countries and these studies showed that workplace bullying occurs across all sectors and this includes the public sector as well (Omar et al., 2015). For instance, it has been reported in Australia that nearly half of the employees in the public sector have seen workplace bullying and one-third of them claimed to have experienced bullying at work personally in the last twelve months (People Matter Employee Survey, 2012 as cited in Omar et al., 2015).

This issue especially in the public sector has received minimal attention in Malaysia although workplace bullying was acknowledged as an alarming matter across sectors in many countries. A latest study has found that workplace bullying is more common in the public sector compared to the private sector (Cullinan et al., 2020). However, in Malaysia, a lot of studies focusing on workplace bullying were conducted mostly in the private sector such as retail, construction, banking, manufacturing and healthcare (Chia & Kee, 2018; Jalali et al., 2019; Thamarakshan, 2015; Yahaya et al., 2012; Yusop et al., 2014). It is surprising to see that minimal attention was given to the public sector (Alam & Mohammad, 2010; Harun, 2020; Saraih et al., 2017), although a study has revealed that 83.2% of the participants working in public service agency have experienced workplace bullying (Omar et al., 2015).

This is because in Malaysia, the government has moved towards more performance-driven and strategic plans to improve public service delivery (Omar et al., 2015). Some transformation programs have been commenced in which key performance targets are set and supervised for each of the agencies. For instance, to enhance the service delivery, key performance indicators (KPIs) have been used to rate the performance of public service agencies (Fei et al., 2019). According to Samnani and Singh (2013), this kind of system can produce desirable performance results but it could lead to unwanted outcomes (e.g., bullying behaviours) because these kinds of behaviours might be treated as a method to get things done. Likewise, researches have revealed that when organisational changes occur, there is an increase in workplace bullying (Skogstad et al., 2007). Moving towards performance-driven efforts is a type of organisational change that takes place in the public service and this can cause the occurrences of workplace bullying, thus, a high-power distance culture enhanced with continual performance monitoring system in the public service might lead to an increase in the occurrences of workplace bullying (Omar et al., 2015). In addition, since the literature on the public sector is limited and the researchers have not treated this sector in much detail; this study will focus on the public sector and contribute to the literature.

One of the reasons why findings from private sector less likely be generalized to those in the public sector is because the nature of ownership in private sector encourages managing body to take prompt actions to resolve the occurrences of workplace bullying and create a good working environment in which all workers are inspired to work hard for the success of the organization (Venetoklis &

Kettunen, 2015). Additionally, it has also been found that private sector employees are confident in their organizations' capability to better address bullying incidents compared to public sector organizations (Salin, 2006 as cited in Salin, 2008). On the other hand, personal conflicts in public sector are not easily resolved due to the nature of private ownership which is missing.

Based on the search engines such as Semantic Scholar, Microsoft Academic, Google Scholar and ResearchGate, the turnover rate for Malaysia's public sector is not available but there are a few studies on turnover intention that were carried out among public sector employees. In Malaysia, studies on turnover intention that were carried out among public sector employees mostly focus on academician (Saraih et al., 2017), healthcare workforce (Harun, 2020) and also nurses (Alam & Mohammad, 2010). Other than academician, health workforce and nurses, there is limited research done on turnover intention among employees in public sector. Such public service employees should not be ignored as there also part of the government which provides all kinds of public services to the citizens of Malaysia. Employees of public service agencies must be taken into account since the decrease in numbers of these employees might harm the sustainability of the government services delivered to the Malaysia's citizens. Hence, this study focused on the employees of public service agencies and contribute to the body of knowledge.

Exposure to workplace bullying is one of the factors which can initiate turnover intention (Rodwell et al., 2014). It was stated that being the victim of workplace

bullying will increase the turnover intention because bullying behaviours have a harmful emotional outcome on the victims (Berthelsen et al., 2011). According to Al-Emadi et al. (2012), this turnover intention can be a costly threat for organisations because they would need to reorganize their resources so that they can sustain their business plan (Johari et al., 2012). Ahmad and Sheehan (2017) have argued that workplace bullying is an active process that intensifies as time passes by and leaves its victims in a vulnerable state. Hence, to escape the miserable situation, victims who experienced workplace bullying would begin to develop turnover intentions (Abubakar et al., 2018). As an evidence, it was revealed in a study that employees who endured workplace bullying have changed companies more often compared to those employees who have not experienced any bullying behaviours (Berthelsen et al., 2011). The previous study has shown that workplace bullying is linked to turnover intention (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2017). Thus, it can be theorized that workplace bullying influences turnover intention.

Efforts to understand the process through which workplace bullying influences turnover intentions are limited (Rosario-Hernández et al., 2018), even though the literature on turnover intention has recognized workplace bullying as an important antecedent (Najam et al., 2018). Hence, it is vital to examine more about the potential mediator of the association since it can help to expand our knowledge on how workplace bullying can lead the employees to leave the organization. A research should be conducted to discover the component which makes the employees who experience workplace bullying to have turnover intentions (van Dyk, 2016). Previous research has found that there is a link

between workplace bullying and work engagement (Einarsen et al., 2016; Meriläinen, Kõiv & Honkanen, 2019) and also between work engagement and turnover intention (Park & Johnson, 2019; Tricahyadinata, 2020).

Therefore, this research aims to investigate and determine the mediating effect of employees' work engagement on the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention in public service agencies. Work engagement is a significant factor which can determine whether an employee will remain in their organisations longer (Paul & Kee, 2019). Since many employees experience workplace bullying, it is a concern whether workplace bullying would influence their work engagement, and also if the changes in the work engagement can affect their turnover intention.

Work engagement has proven its mediating role with other antecedents of turnover intention but little is known about the association between workplace bullying and work engagement even though previous study has revealed workplace bullying as the major antecedent of turnover intention (Najam et al., 2018). Furthermore, work engagement was chosen as the mediator in this study because van Dyk (2016) has claimed that research on the relationship between workplace bullying and work engagement is inadequate even though the association between workplace bullying and turnover intention is understandable from the studies and publications. Therefore, to study more about the link between workplace bullying and work engagement as well as the mediating effect of work engagement in the context of workplace bullying-turnover

intention among employees, this research examined the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

A lot of studies focusing on workplace bullying were conducted across various sectors in Malaysia such as retail, construction, banking, manufacturing and healthcare sector (Chia & Kee, 2018; Jalali et al., 2019; Thamarakshan, 2015; Yahaya et al., 2012; Yusop et al., 2014) but it is surprising to see that minimal attention was given to public sector. In reality, the rate of workplace bullying is high in the public sector which is 88% (Hidzir et al., 2017). Workplace bullying increases the intention of the employees to voluntarily exit the job because bullying behaviours has negative emotional impact on the employees and it also reduces their work fulfilment. Hence, the results of this research will deliver several new insights into how work engagement can mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies. The finding is expected to be useful to organisations and human resource managers to enhance their understanding about workplace bullying so that a better working environment free from bullying can be created. It will be helpful to the management of the public sector whom create policies to develop a capable, knowledgeable and dedicated workforce which will exterminate the turnover intention among employees by focusing on the employees' work engagement.



The findings will also add important insights to the literature about retention by contributing evidence which indicates the significance of the employees' work engagement to reduce their turnover intention. Examining the function of work engagement in decreasing the employees' turnover intention is vital for talent retention approaches in the modern era. Understanding this would help organisations to save costs because with this turnover among employees will be prevented or reduced. This study would provide insights into the necessity for supervisors to discover a better means of managing, protecting and handling bullying behaviours within the organisation. Lastly, this study will help to develop our knowledge on how bullying at workplace affects the employees of the public sector to leave the organization in the Malaysian context.

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are:

1. To examine the effect of workplace bullying on the turnover intention among employees in public service agencies.
2. To examine the effect of workplace bullying on the work engagement among employees in public service agencies.
3. To examine the effect of work engagement on the turnover intention among employees in public service agencies.
4. To examine the mediating effect of work engagement on the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies.

## 1.6 Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. Does workplace bullying predict turnover intention among employees in public service agencies?
2. Does workplace bullying predict work engagement among employees in public service agencies?
3. Does work engagement predict turnover intention among employees in public service agencies?
4. Does work engagement mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies?

## 1.7 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study are:

H<sub>1</sub>: Workplace bullying is a significant predictor of turnover intention among employees in public service agencies.

H<sub>2</sub>: Workplace bullying is a significant predictor of work engagement among employees in public service agencies.

H<sub>3</sub>: Work engagement is a significant predictor of turnover intention among employees in public service agencies.

H<sub>4</sub>: Work engagement mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies.

## 1.8 Conceptual Definition

Conceptual definition of the variables in this research are:

**Workplace bullying.** Unwanted negative actions which are directed towards an employee, that are unwanted by the victim but it is done intentionally which causes suffering, offence as well as embarrassment and it may even affect the targeted employee's job performance or it may cause a distressing working atmosphere for them (Einarsen et al., 2011).

**Work engagement.** An optimistic, fulfilling, work-related state of mind categorized by dedication, vigor and absorption (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

**Turnover intention.** The employees' intention to exit their current employing organisation (Tett & Meyer, 1993).

**Public service agency.** Public organisations that are part of the government and deliver public services, goods and programs to the community (Dube, 2011).

## 1.9 Operational Definition

Operational definition of the variables in this study are:

**Workplace bullying.** Workplace bullying was measured by Negative Act Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009), a 3 subscale questionnaire consisting of 22-items measuring the perceptions of work-related bullying, physical intimidation and person-related bullying of the participants. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was found to be highly reliable,  $\alpha = .90$

(Einarsen et al., 2009). A higher score in NAQ-R shows greater exposure to workplace bullying.

**Work engagement.** Work engagement was measured by a shorter version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2006), a 9-items scale with three subscales (dedication, absorption, vigor) measuring the participants' levels of engagement. Cronbach alpha of this scale was found to be highly reliable,  $\alpha = .92$  (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The higher the score in UWES-9, the more the employees are engaged in performing their work.

**Turnover intention.** Turnover intention was measured by Turnover Intention Scale (TIS; Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2010), a 5-items scale measuring the employee's turnover intention. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was found to be highly reliable,  $\alpha = .90$  (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2010). A higher average score in TIS shows a higher level of turnover intention.

**Public service agency.** The participants involve employees who are currently employed in the public service agencies in Malaysia.

## **CHAPTER 2.0**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is developed to enhance the understanding of workplace bullying, work engagement and turnover intention. This chapter has also reviewed the information and previous studies related to the variables. Furthermore, the theoretical and conceptual framework has been discussed in this section too.

#### **2.2 Workplace Bullying**

Workplace bullying is defined as unwanted negative actions which are directed towards an employee, which are unwanted by the victim but it is done intentionally which causes suffering, offence as well as embarrassment and it may even affect the targeted employee's job performance or it may cause an unpleasant working environment for them (Einarsen et al., 2011). Workplace bullying is a process where workers are exposed to these behaviours or actions repeatedly for about a week to a certain period of time which is about six months and this might even result in distress on an emotional, physical and psychological level (Einarsen et al., 2009). Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) claimed that the acts of bullying are different from the usual conflicts that occurs in the workplace because these acts are linked to recurrent negative acts which are focused onto the targeted employee to decrease their confidence or to harm their self-respect.

According to Einarsen et al. (2009), there are 3 types of bullying known as physical intimidation person-related and work-related bullying. The first type of bullying is person-related bullying and this is described as negative acts which are carried out by a bully to target their victim personally. In another word, the bully uses the personal issues of the victim to torment them and they do not focus on the external matters but they focus on the victims themselves. For instance, a staff can be considered as experiencing person-related bullying if their personal matters are being spread around or if their opinions are being ignored. The second type of bullying is work-related bullying and this is described as negative acts which are done by a bully to disrupt the work of the victims. Ignoring the opinions of an employee, providing deadlines which are unreasonable and giving unmanageable workloads are some of the examples of work-related bullying. Physical intimidation is the third type of bullying and this is described as acts of bullying encountered by the victim face to face. Examples of physical intimidations are mistreatment, physical abuse or threats of violence.

According to O'Driscoll et al. (2011), workplace bullying is a common issue in organisations. Namie (2007) stated that workplace bullying is more common compared to racial discrimination, workplace violence or sexual harassment. There are extreme consequences on the physical as well as the mental health of the victims if they were exposed to workplace bullying (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007). Namie (2007) claimed that bullying might affect the career and family life of the victim. Additionally, it has been reported that workplace bullying is a distressing issue for workers compared to stress which is work-related (Einarsen et al., 2003 as cited in Hassan et al., 2015). In New Zealand, a survey was

conducted with 1700 employees from 36 organisations and as a result, it was found that experiencing workplace bullying leads to lower performance at work, lower organisational commitment as well as lower well-being (O'Driscoll et al., 2011). A national survey conducted by Workplace Bullying Alliance (WBA, 2015 as cited in Hassan et al., 2015) revealed that 51.8 % of employees in Puerto Rico have experienced workplace bullying. Whereas, in the United States, it was found in a survey by Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI, 2017), that 19% of Americans have experienced negative behaviours which are associated with workplace bullying. Moreover, research also revealed that workplace bullying does not only involve people from different races or gender; in reality, most of the cases involved individuals of the same race and gender (Hassan et al., 2015).

In Malaysia, minimal attention has been given to workplace bullying (Affandi, 2009 as cited in Hidzir et al., 2017). Majority of the research conducted on bullying were focused on children instead of grown-ups at work (Saibon et al., 2012; Uba et al., 2010). However, from the beginning of 2014, a few researchers have begun to focus on workplace bullying. For instance, it was found that 39% of the participants from private and public sectors have experienced inappropriate behaviours in their workplace (Al Bir & Hassan, 2014). In the Malaysian health care industry, it was found that 42.6% of employees have experienced negative behaviour in their workplace (Yusop et al., 2014). Another study conducted on working adults revealed that 50% of the participants have been exposed to workplace bullying irrespective of their gender (Hong & Tharbe, 2018). In addition, in Malaysia, the victims of workplace bullying are emotionally abused and they are suffering from pain that runs inside them even

though they might not have any injuries that are physical (Yeen, 2012). It was also further added by Yeen (2012) that workplace bullying is comparable to the typical school grounds where children are bullied.

### **2.3 Work Engagement**

According to Schaufeli and Salanova (2007), the meaning of work engagement is an optimistic, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by absorption, dedication and vigor. Staffs who are engaged at work have a tendency to experience a sense of fulfilment as well as pride in what they do (Biggs et al., 2014). Work engagement happens when an individual focus their behaviour, feelings and reasonings to support the organisation to fulfil their objectives and goals (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Additionally, it has been stated by Kahn (1990) that individuals who are highly engaged tend to be cognitively, emotionally and physically involved. Engaged employees tend to perform better than those who are less engaged because they understand positive feelings, they tend to function physically and mentally well and they also have a tendency to craft their own personal resources and career (Gadi & Kee, 2020). Therefore, Den Hartog and Belschak (2012) claimed that individuals who are highly engaged tend to exhibit less counterproductive and more satisfactory behaviours.

Work engagement is grouped into three parts which are known as dedication, vigor and absorption (González-Romá et al., 2006). The first component of engagement is absorption and this is described as being completely engaged and



focused in one's work. Highly engaged individuals might face difficulties in separating themselves from work and they also tend to find that time pass by fast for them (González-Romá et al., 2006). Therefore, individuals who are engaged appear to be completely immersed in their job and seem to focus easily on their work. An individual who is more engrossed in his or her job have a tendency to have confidence in their abilities and they would also find that their ideals and principles are similar to their employers (Mendes & Stander, 2011).

The second component of work engagement is dedication and this is described as being strongly involved in one's job and feel acknowledged for their passion, pride, contribution, challenge and motivation (González-Romá et al., 2006). Hence, it gives the impression that employees who have higher level of dedication might be more passionate and more devoted as well as committed to their profession. It was found that when individuals trust that they are competent enough to complete a task at hand, they tend to experience a sense of importance at work (Mendes & Stander, 2011). The authors also added that individuals tend to feel that they have the ability to influence their work environment and might feel motivated, proud, energised and satisfied. Moreover, research also shows that competence, meaning, authority, role clarity and impact about an individual's job might contribute to a higher level of dedication (van Dyk, 2016). Menders and Stander (2011) stated that employees might experience higher level of passion and excitement to make contributions at work when they feel that they have control over their job. Dedication also was found to influence the intention of employees to leave the organisation. According to Karlowicz and Ternus

(2007), employees might display lower intentions of quitting when they feel motivated and also when they experience their job as challenging.

The third component of work engagement is vigor and this can be explained by increased level of mental resilience and energy that an employee reveals at job, the enthusiasm to be dedicated to one's job through determination and will power even during demanding situations (González-Romá et al., 2006). Hence, it can be stated that during challenging situations, an individual with increased level of vigor would have the necessary energy and high psychological hardiness to endure and settle the task at hand. Additionally, it has also been argued by Mendes and Stander (2011) that highly engaged workers are inclined to have increased level of energy thus they might be more willing and passionate in completing the task that was given to them.

## **2.4 Turnover Intention**

Turnover is a persistent issue for most organisations even though, there were many measures taken by the organisation to retain their best employees. Shull (2010) stated that turnover issues do not only affect the company and the individual who quit the job, but it will also impact the other employees who are currently working at the organisation. This is because the remaining employees will realize that they are facing similar negative aspects and this will influence the job satisfaction of the employees (Shull, 2010). According to Shull (2010), when this issue happens in the organisation, the turnover rate will keep rising to

another higher level. Scholars have claimed that this turnover problem among employees will cause lower organisation productivity and the company has to search for new employees to rise back the productivity level (Chiu & Francesco, 2003). Moreover, the new employees need to spend some time to get familiarized with the job as well as the modern working environment and they need to achieve the goals and objectives of the organisation (Dessler, 2011 as cited in Letchumanan et al., 2017).

Turnover intention is defined as the intention of employees to quit their current jobs and their organisational membership (Meyer & Allen, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993). This behavior is the intention to find a different job and think about leaving their current job. Furthermore, researchers have found that there are 2 types of turnover intentions which are known as voluntary and involuntary turnover (Brown et al., 2015; Ramalho Luz et al., 2018). Voluntary turnover is when an individual chooses to exit the organisation because of a higher salary, better job opportunities, better working conditions or health reasons, while involuntary turnover happens when the organisation decides to dismiss the employee because of their poor performance or the company is going through business reconstruction (Harhara et al., 2015).

Employee turnover is considered as a severe problem for every organisation; therefore, some researchers considered this phenomenon as a continuing loss in the workplace (Ahmad & Omar, 2010). In some industries, turnover rates can reach 50 percent (Brashear et al., 2005). In the opinion of Silverthorne (2004),

"turnover causes significant expenses for an organisation". For example, loss of employee experience, low productivity, and the cost of hiring new employees (Habib et al., 2014). Despite the lack of job opportunities, employees in Malaysia are intended to quit their job and seek employment from other companies. Several aspects influence the decision of an employee to quit their job such as, external compatible job demands, an employee's potential and attitude, job management and stability, job enrichment, job satisfaction as well as workplace bullying.

## **2.5 Workplace Bullying and Turnover Intention**

Yeun and Han (2016) have claimed that one of the factors which leads the employees to develop intention to leave the organisation is workplace bullying. Workplace bullying increases the intention of the employees to voluntarily leave the job because bullying behaviours has negative emotional impact on the employees and it also reduces their work fulfilment (Coetzee & van Dyk, 2017). Ahmad and Sheehan (2017) have argued that workplace bullying is an active process that intensifies as time passes by and leaves its victims in a vulnerable state. Hence, to escape the miserable situation, victims who experienced workplace bullying would begin to develop turnover intentions (Abubakar et al., 2018). Bohle et al. (2017) stated that in organisations, both turnover intention and workplace bullying have been regarded as costly and challenging issues.

Workplace bullying found to occur between employee and their superiors, and recently it has been found to happen between employees and their colleagues as well (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2011). It has been revealed that inappropriate behaviours from colleagues have led one out of five employees to leave the organisation. Even though it has been found that bullying happens between employees and their colleagues, research has revealed that the most common perpetrators of workplace bullying are superiors. For example, a research by Yusop et al. (2014) revealed that 21.3% of reported bullies are superiors. Moreover, another research found that workplace bullying by bosses or managers had a greater influence on the employees' intention to quit the job compared to bullying by colleagues (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2011). In addition, Coetzee and van Dyk (2017) found that work-related and person-related bullying had a higher association with turnover intention out of the 3 types of workplace bullying.

Additionally, Ahmad and Kaleem (2019) have used the Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover (UMVT) by Lee and Mitchell (1994) to enlighten how workplace bullying may trigger employees' turnover intentions. This model provides 5 psychological paths which underpin the decisions of the employees to leave their profession. First path is known as shock which refers to the incident that begins the turnover process. The shock triggers an individual to evaluate the situation of their present job for compatibility and if there is incompatibility, it will result in intention to leave. Second path is script which shows the action plan of the employees. The third path is search which is associated with actions such as looking for other jobs. The fourth path is image violations and this path

denotes a discrepancy between the values of the organisation and the values as well as personal goals of the staffs. The fifth path is lower levels of job satisfaction and this path is related to the feelings and evaluation of staff towards their work, based on their experiences at workplace. Applying UMVT model to workplace bullying allows us to understand how workplace bullying can cause turnover intention of the employees. As stated by Lutgen-Sandvik (2006), exposure to workplace bullying might cause the shock in the employee and prompt their feelings to search for other jobs. Likewise, image violations will develop when an individual notice an incongruity between their experienced social norms at work and their values. For instance, if workplace bullying is overlooked at work, it might lead to image violation of the extensively shared norms of dignity and respect at the workplace and this would trigger the feelings of the employees to quit the job. Consequently, the final path which is lower levels of job satisfaction is expected to evident itself in the bullying situation as previous studies found that workplace bullying is linked with greater level of job dissatisfaction (Arenas et al., 2015; Carroll & Lauzier, 2014; Francis, 2014; Ibañez, 2018; Malik & Bano, 2016). In short, UMVT can be used to explain how workplace bullying can trigger the turnover intentions of the employees.

Moreover, many studies have found that workplace bullying is linked to employees' turnover intention (Ahmad & Kaleem, 2019; Berthelsen et al., 2011; Djurkovic et al., 2008; Hogh et al., 2011; Mathisen et al., 2008; Najam et al., 2018). For instance, a cross-sectional study with 373 employees from diverse backgrounds revealed that workplace bullying was linked to turnover intention of the employees (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2017). In another study by Djurkovic

et al. (2008), it was revealed that experiencing workplace bullying predicts turnover intention and even less severe type of bullying behaviours at workplace were revealed to influence the turnover intention of employees. The positive association between workplace bullying and turnover intention shows that the effect of workplace bullying on the victim can be related to them leaving the workplace. This is because employees who experience workplace bullying would feel threatened and might not want to continue working in such a threatening environment so they would consider to exit the organisation (Djurkovic et al., 2004).

Moreover, the link between workplace bullying and employees' turnover intention is found to exist within various sectors and countries. For instance, a study by Ahmad and Kaleem (2019) revealed a significant relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees from universities in Australia and Pakistan. As an explanation for the finding, it can be claimed that workplace bullying leaves a negative impact on the employees such as discomfort, tiredness and inability to meet the demands which eventually results in turnover intention (Laschinger et al., 2012). Hogh et al. (2011) found among Danish healthcare employees that those who often experienced workplace bullying ended up quitting their job. This finding can be explained by stating that creating turnover intentions might be used as a solution by the victims to protect themselves from bullying actions (Tag-Eldeen et al., 2017). In Pakistan, it was found from a sample of 207 employees from different private universities that workplace bullying accounts for 20.4% variation on employees' turnover intention (Razzaghian & Ghani, 2014). This is because when the environment of

the organisation is filled with negativity, it will make the employees to feel miserable which would eventually lead to higher level of turnover intention (Neuman & Baron, 1997 as cited in Razzaghian & Ghani, 2014).

As hypothesized, it was revealed that workplace bullying can lead to turnover intention among Pakistan employees from the banking sector (Najam et al., 2018). This was further supported by Zapf and Gross (2011) where they claimed that experiencing workplace bullying would trigger thoughts such as turnover intention as a form of escape behaviour so that they can set themselves free from all the distresses from bullying experiences that they are facing. A study by Yun and Kang (2018) which was conducted with 301 nurses in Korea revealed that workplace bullying leads to turnover intentions and this is due to repeated experiences of negative symptoms such as depression, anxiety, headaches, fatigue and anger which affect the victim's psychological and psychical health. Similar results have also been found in a study with nurses which was conducted by Yeun and Han (2016) in Korea. Besides, Houshmand et al. (2012) also corroborated the influence of workplace bullying on turnover intention among 357 nurses from 41 hospitals in Canada. When the nurses are exposed to workplace bullying, it increases the turnover intention due to the overwhelming stress that was build up. This study also revealed that high turnover intention was found among employees who work in a high bullying environment. In another word, this study found that working environment of the organisation predicts the turnover intention of employees.



Furthermore, several research which investigated the long-term influence of workplace bullying on employees' turnover intention. As an example, in a longitudinal study by Glambek et al. (2014) in which they investigated if workplace bullying influences employees' turnover intention and also if these influences continue for a longer duration of time, it was found that workplace bullying influences employees' turnover intention and it was also found that these influences persist for a longer duration of time. Bahjat et al. (2017) have explained the findings by stating that employees who experience workplace bullying might feel insecure about their job and this could lead to turnover intention. In another longitudinal research by Berthelsen et al. (2011) which was carried out over a 2-year duration found that workers who experienced workplace bullying changed their job more frequently compared to those employees who did not experience workplace bullying. As an explanation for the finding, it can be stated that workplace bullying includes actions which worsen the social and professional life of the employees at work so they might begin to doubt about their career in the organisation and when it gets difficult, they will opt to find a new job (Leymann, 1996).

All these studies show that workplace bullying is a challenging problem in various sectors and countries. Furthermore, Glambek et al. (2014) has also claimed that workplace bullying predicts employees' turnover intention despite their gender and age. It has been postulated that constantly experiencing bullying behaviours at the workplace can increase the employees' intention to quit the job (Hogh et al., 2011). Hence, it can be hypothesized from all of the research

reviewed above that bullying in workplace is linked to employees' intention to leave.

While workplace bullying and turnover intention have been studied widely in various sectors (healthcare, banking, academic) and countries (Australia, Pakistan, Denmark, Korea, Canada) these variables have not been examined together in the context of Malaysia's public sector despite the frequency of workplace bullying is high in the public sector. This research addresses a gap in the literature and will also be helpful to the managing body of the public sectors who create strategies to discover a better means of managing, handling and protecting bullying behaviours within the organisation which will exterminate the turnover intention among employees. Moreover, the reason why the findings from other countries cannot be applied in Malaysia because Malaysia scores the highest (100 out of 120) on the Power Distance Index compared to other countries. Power distance as the cultural dimension could explain the high occurrence of workplace bullying in the public sector since societal culture has been considered as a proxy to workplace bullying incidence (Loh et al., 2010).

## **2.6 Workplace Bullying and Work Engagement**

Rodríguez-Muñoz et al. (2009) have claimed that workplace bullying such as mistreatments at work would exhaust the employees and lessen their work engagement. Power et al. (2013) also added that workplace bullying affects work engagement because it indicates to workers that they are not being respected and

appreciated. The effect of workplace bullying on the victim is severe and as victims are not able to protect themselves from the negative acts at workplace, it will result in lower organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Park & Ono, 2016), which would eventually result in low levels of work engagement. Additionally, Houshmand et al. (2012) stated that staffs who were exposed to workplace bullying tend to display withdrawal as a result of mistreatment and it is expected that the employees' work engagement level would decrease as a form of withdrawal. Another study revealed that workplace bullying is linked with problems which are health-related such as poor physical health (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012) and this condition is related to the low level of work engagement (Omar, 2017).

Prior research has revealed that workplace bullying has an association with work engagement (Meriläinen, Kõiv & Honkanen, 2019; Park & Ono, 2016; Rai & Agarwal, 2017; Trépanier et al., 2013). For instance, a study in India with 835 managerial level staff working in various organisations across service as well as manufacturing sectors and as a result, the researchers found that workplace bullying is associated with work engagement (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). This is because workplace bullying causes depletion of resources such as energy, self-respect, dignity, status as well as safety at work and lack of resources can decrease energetic processes which would cause decreased levels of work engagement (Park & Ono, 2016). Another study in Korea revealed that exposure to workplace bullying negatively influenced employees' work engagement (Park & Ono, 2016). As an explanation for the finding, it can be stated that

mistreatments that the employees undergo at workplace would make them feel worn out and reduce their work engagement level (Park & Ono, 2016).

Additionally, Meriläinen et al. (2019) found in their study that workplace bullying decreases the work engagement among Estonian academics and this eventually leads to lowered performance. A similar result was found in a study which was carried out in Norway with 312 participants from various departments in the company (Einarsen et al., 2016). As a result, the researchers found that there was a negative association between workplace bullying and work engagement. This is because when employees experience workplace bullying, they would not be able to defend themselves from the negative acts at work from superiors and colleagues such as persistent criticism, excessive monitoring of their work and being isolated or ignored, will result in lower job satisfaction (Park & Ono, 2016) which would eventually result in less work engagement.

In short, the association between workplace bullying and employees' work engagement can be understood from the literature discussed above (Meriläinen, Kõiv & Honkanen, 2019; Park & Ono, 2016; Rai & Agarwal, 2017; Trépanier et al., 2013). While work engagement has started to receive some attention, far less is known about the association between workplace bullying and work engagement (Trepanier et al., 2013) in the Asian context especially in Malaysian's public sector. This is because when it comes to workplace bullying, the research to date has tended to focus on employee productivity, job performance and job satisfaction rather than work engagement. Therefore, it will

be fascinating to explain the influence of workplace bullying on work engagement as well as to address the gap in the literature. Furthermore, studies examining the association between workplace bullying and employee positive workplace outcomes such as creativity and work engagement is limited (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). This current research aimed to extend previous studies on bullying by examining the negative effect of workplace bullying on one of the classic job-related affective variables which is work engagement in the public sector.

## **2.7 Work Engagement and Turnover Intention**

According to Gadi and Kee (2020), employees' work engagement has a significant impact on employee productivity, organisational consequences and employee retention. Saks (2006) has stated that work engagement is linked to an employee's behaviours, intentions and attitudes. Hence, engaged employees have the tendency to be more devoted and would have lesser inclination to exit the organisation (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In addition, Shuck and Wollard (2010) have also supported the viewpoint of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) by stating that "It is positively true that the more engaged workers are also more liable to remain with an organisation". Meaningful work had been found to develop the three components of work engagement known as absorption, dedication and vigour (Mendes & Stander, 2011). In another word, employees tend to have more excitement, energy and enthusiasm to carry out their job when they consider their work as significant. Mendes and Stander (2011) have also added that employees who are engaged are less liable to exit the organization

because when they are enthusiastic about their work, they are occupied with positive feelings regarding their job and this will lead to lower intention in quitting.

Previous studies showed that work engagement has an impact on turnover intention (Al-shbiel et al., 2018; Gupta & Shaheen, 2017; Mendes & Stander, 2011; Park & Johnson, 2019; Zhao & Zhao, 2017). The effect of work engagement was also confirmed in a research by Al-shbiel et al. (2018) in Jordan. The research revealed that work engagement is negatively associated with the intention of the employees to leave their job. Alias et al. (2018) found in a study that was conducted with 170 employees from a manufacturing company in Malaysia, that work engagement is negatively associated with turnover intention. This finding can be explained by Halbesleben (2010) who has stated that engaged employees will be reluctant to quit their job because they might have invested plenty of effort and time and also because the work would have provided them with numerous resources, for instance, work-related skills (De Lange et al., 2008). Memon et al. (2016) found in a study that was conducted with employees of oil and gas sector in Malaysia, that work engagement has a negative consequence on turnover intention. This is because engagement generates a positive, fulfilling state of mind and work-related experiences which is linked to advanced work efforts and improved well-being (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Eventually, these positive feelings and experiences would result in the staffs exhibiting more positive work-related results and being praised by the employer and this will lead to lower turnover intention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

In another study by Gupta and Shaheen (2017) with 228 employees from various industries in India, revealed that work engagement has a negative association with employees' turnover intention. A negative association was found because disengaged individuals are not attached to their job and this leads to higher intention in quitting (Gupta & Shaheen, 2017). Tricahyadinata et al. (2020) conducted a study with employees from many different business sectors in Indonesia to study the link between work engagement and turnover intention. As a result, a negative association was found between the two variables. As for the explanation, it can be said that when employees are not enthusiastic about their job, it will lead to higher intention of quitting. De Lange et al. (2008) carried out a longitudinal study with 871 Belgian employees to study the association between work engagement and turnover and as a result it was found that employees with less work engagement tend to quit the job and move to another organisation within 16 months.

In summary, it can be derived from all of the studies reviewed above that work engagement is associated with employees' turnover intention (Al-shbiel et al., 2018; Gupta & Shaheen, 2017; Mendes & Stander, 2011; Park & Johnson, 2019; Zhao & Zhao, 2017). Previous studies have undeniably showed a link between work engagement and turnover intention in different countries and sectors but these variables were not examined together in Malaysia's public sector. Hence, it is required to examine the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention in Malaysia's public sector to address the gap in the literature.

## 2.8 The Mediating Effect of Work Engagement

Efforts to understand the mechanism through which workplace bullying influences turnover intentions are limited (Rosario-Hernández et al., 2018) and it is important to examine the mechanism that underlies the link between workplace bullying and turnover intention. Workplace bullying might influence the employees' turnover intention through work engagement as previous study has shown that work engagement is an important factor which affects turnover intention of the employees (Paul & Kee, 2019). Previous research has also revealed that there is a link between workplace bullying and work engagement (Einarsen et al., 2016; Meriläinen, Kõiv & Honkanen, 2019) as well as between work engagement and turnover intention (Park & Johnson, 2019; Tricahyadinata, 2020).

Based on past studies, work engagement was found to play mediating role in some of the research (Shahpouri et al., 2016; Ying et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). For instance, the mediating role of work engagement on the relationship between personal and job resources with turnover intention was supported by Shahpouri et al. (2016). Ying et al. (2017) showed that work engagement plays the mediating role in the relationship between career development and turnover intention. In another research, Zhang et al. (2020) showed work engagement as a mediator for the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. Existing studies have revealed that work engagement has shown its mediating role with other antecedents of turnover intention but little is known about the association between workplace bullying and work engagement even though



previous study has revealed workplace bullying as the major antecedent of turnover intention (Najam et al., 2018).

This study claims that the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention can be mediated by work engagement in line with support for workplace bullying-work engagement (Einarsen et al., 2016; Meriläinen et al., 2019; Park & Ono, 2016) and the work engagement-turnover intention relationship (Al-shbiel et al., 2018). When employees experience workplace bullying such as mistreatments at work (e.g., being given unmanageable tasks or workload with an unreasonable time limit), they would not be able to defend themselves from the negative acts and this will make them feel worn out and decrease their energetic processes which would result in the lower level of engagement at work (Park & Ono, 2016) and when work engagement decreases, it would lead to negative outcome such as turnover intention (De Lange et al., 2008) because employees with less work engagement might decide to quit their job since they are not able to feel excited or find meaning in their job anymore. Hence, it can be hypothesized based on the above arguments that, work engagement will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees.

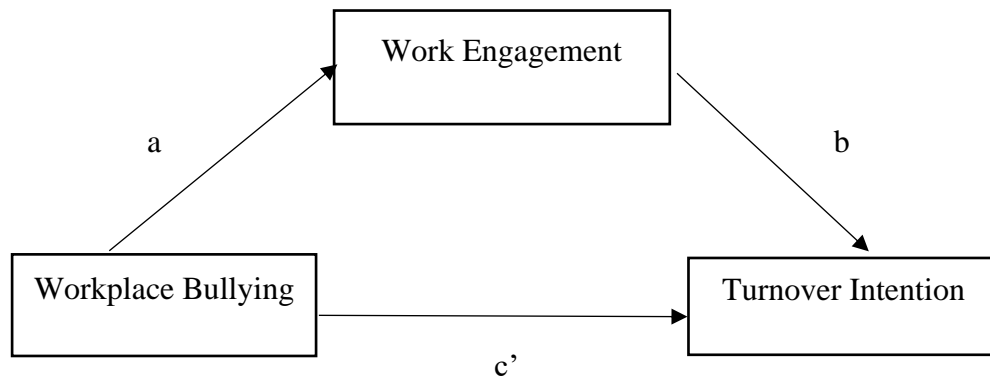
## **2.9 Theory**

Two theoretical perspectives, differentiated job demands-resources (JD-R) model which is an extension of original job demands-resources, JD-R model

(Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Crawford, et al., 2010) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory was applied to describe the relationship between workplace bullying, work engagement and turnover intention (Einarsen et al., 2016; Park & Ono, 2016). COR theory suggests that in the phase of resource loss, people may involve in behaviours that avoid further loss of resources or may assess events as stressful (Hobfoll, 1989). Based on the COR theory, bullying leads to depletion of resources and the resource depletion or absence can lessen the energetic processes which might lead to decreased level of engagement and turnover intention (Park & Ono, 2016). Based on the JD-R model, workplace bullying can be considered as a hindrance demand which results in prolonged mental strain on the affected individual and difficulties in coping with it may lead to low level of engagement (Einarsen et al., 2016). Additionally, May et al., (2004) have also claimed that these cognitive, emotional and/or physical demands might overwhelm a person and results in disengagement from work. Bullying negatively affect the energy level of the employee and to cope with the resulting exhaustion, the employee might mentally withdraw which results in low level of work engagement (Maslach, 1993). When work engagement decreases it would lead to turnover intention because research has found work engagement as a construct which has a substantial influence on the turnover intention of the employees (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). As a support, it was claimed by Mitchell et al. (2001) that employees who display low level of engagement have higher turnover intention, which includes making the final decision to continue with terminating their employment.

## 2.10 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 outlines the relationship between workplace bullying, work engagement and turnover intention. According to the framework, the indirect effect of workplace bullying on turnover intention through work engagement is shown as  $ab$  and the direct effect of workplace bullying on turnover intention is symbolized as  $c'$ . Work engagement is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention.



**Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework**

## 2.11 Summary

This chapter is a thorough examination of previous literatures which supports the current study. Each variable in this study has been discussed in depth to develop a clear understanding. Moreover, the link between workplace bullying and turnover intention, workplace bullying and work engagement as well as work engagement and turnover intention has been discussed in detail to provide a better understanding. Finally, the role of work engagement as a mediator has been discussed too.

## **CHAPTER 3.0**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section of the dissertation discusses the methodology of the current research. The methodology provides detailed information about how this research was conducted. This chapter also discussed the research design, participants, instruments used, procedures, pilot study and statistical analysis.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

Research is a process that initiates with a problem and resolves when the problem is addressed (Brink et al., 2006). Design of the research acts as a foundation which is used to get the answers to the research questions (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). The nature of this study is quantitative and this design will be used to collect and analyze data. Bryman (2012) described quantitative research as, “A research strategy that emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data...”. This approach focuses more on numbers in the data collection and analysis process. With this, the collected data can be calculated by using software such as SPSS which saves energy and resources (Daniel, 2016). This is a cross-sectional study as questionnaires were used to gather the data needed for this research. Questionnaire allow the collection of data directly from individuals involved by using a set of questions. Using questionnaire is

cost-effective and it is an easy approach for data collection and analysis using statistical methods (Queirós, Faria & Almeida, 2017). In this study, the independent variable is workplace bullying, dependent variable is turnover intention whereas mediating variable is work engagement.

### **3.3 Participants**

The participants in this study were employees who work at public agencies in Malaysia such as Institut Sosial Malaysia (ISM), Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA), Malaysian Indian Transformation Unit (MITRA), Public Service Department and Skill Development Fund Corporation (PTPK). The inclusion criteria are that the employees must have at least 1 year full-time working experience in the current organisation. Exclusion criteria are that part-time employees and employees who do not have at least 1 year full-time working experience in the current organisation as well as those who are unable to give informed consent will be excluded from the study. The sample size for this research is 400 participants with ages ranging from 25 to 60, therefore questionnaires were distributed via email to the employees which included both females and males. Yamane (1967)'s table was used to find out the sample size required to be a representative of the population. Yamane (1967)'s equation was chosen because it is claimed to be one of the common tools for sample size calculation for calculating the minimum sample size required for finite population (Sutanapong & Louangrath, 2015). According to the Department of Public Service Malaysia (2020), there is a total of 1,245,779 workforces in the

public sector. Hence, based on the table, if the population size is 100,000 and above means, a sample size of 400 is required for the study.

Table 3.1 shows the descriptive information of the respondents in this research. 400 employees ages ranged from 25 to 60 have participated in this research. There were 243 respondents with ages ranged from 25 to 35 (60.8%), 121 respondents with ages ranged from 36 to 45 (30.3%), 34 respondents with ages ranged from 46 to 55 (8.5%) and 2 respondents ages ranged from 56 to 60 (0.5%). The mean age of the respondents was 34.73 years ( $SD = 6.83$ ). Moreover, there were 214 female (53.5%) and 186 male (46.5%) respondents who participated in this study. In addition, most of the respondents in this study were Malays (94.0%), followed by Indians (4.5%), Chinese (1.0%) and other races (0.5%). As for the marital status, most of them were married (72.5%), followed by single (26.5%) and divorced (1.0%). As for the years of service in the current organisation, the respondents had 1 to 2 years of experience (33.0%), 3 to 4 years (32.8%), 5 to 6 years (17.3%), 7 to 8 years (5.3%) and 9 to 10 years (3.0%) and more than 10 years (8.8%). As for the current basic salary per month, the respondents earned less than RM 2500 (23.0%), RM 2500 to RM 3500 (37.0%), RM 3501 to RM 4000 (13.8%), RM 4001 to RM 5000 (9.5%) and more than RM 5000 (16.8%).

**Table 3.1: Demographic Information of Respondents (N = 400)**

|  | <i>n</i> | %    | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Min | Max |
|--|----------|------|----------|-----------|-----|-----|
| Age  |          |      | 34.73    | 6.83      | 25  | 56  |
| 25 – 35                                      | 243      | 60.8 |          |           |     |     |
| 36 – 45                                      | 121      | 30.3 |          |           |     |     |
| 46 – 55                                      | 34       | 8.5  |          |           |     |     |
| 56 – 60                                      | 2        | 0.5  |          |           |     |     |
| Gender                                       |          |      |          |           |     |     |
| Male   | 186      | 46.5 |          |           |     |     |
| Female                                       | 214      | 53.5 |          |           |     |     |
| Race   |          |      |          |           |     |     |
| Malay  |          | 376  | 94.0     |           |     |     |
| Chinese                                      |          | 4    | 1.0      |           |     |     |
| Indian                                       |          | 18   | 4.5      |           |     |     |
| Others                                       |          | 2    | 0.5      |           |     |     |
| Marital Status                               |          |      |          |           |     |     |
| Single                                       |          | 106  | 26.5     |           |     |     |
| Married                                      |          | 290  | 72.5     |           |     |     |
| Divorced                                     |          | 4    | 1.0      |           |     |     |
| Years of Service in the Current Organisation |          |      |          |           |     |     |
| 1 – 2  |          | 132  | 33.0     |           |     |     |
| 3 – 4  |          | 131  | 32.8     |           |     |     |
| 5 – 6  |          | 69   | 17.3     |           |     |     |
| 7 – 8  |          | 21   | 5.3      |           |     |     |
| 9 – 10                                       |          | 12   | 3.0      |           |     |     |
| > 10   |          | 35   | 8.8      |           |     |     |
| Current Basic Salary per Month               |          |      |          |           |     |     |
| Less than RM 2500                            |          | 92   | 23.0     |           |     |     |
| RM 2500 – RM 3500                            |          | 148  | 37.0     |           |     |     |
| RM 3501 – RM 4000                            |          | 55   | 13.8     |           |     |     |
| RM 4001 – RM 5000                            |          | 38   | 9.5      |           |     |     |
| More than RM 5000                            |          | 67   | 16.8     |           |     |     |

*Note.* *n* = number; % = percentage; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; Min = minimum; Max = maximum.

### **3.4 Measures**

There are four sections in the questionnaire which were utilized to gather information about participants' demographic data, turnover intention, work engagement and workplace bullying. The four sections are - Section A: Demographics, Section B: Negative Act Questionnaire- Revised (NAQ-R), Section C: Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) and Section D: Turnover Intention Scale (TIS). **The questionnaires were all in English.**

#### **3.4.1 Demographic**

As for the demographic information, participants' age, gender, race, marital status, years of service in the organization and current basic salary per month was collected.

#### **3.4.2 Workplace Bullying**

To assess workplace bullying, the Negative Act Questionnaire- Revised (NAQ-R) by Einarsen et al. (2009) was utilized. This questionnaire is consisting of 22 items and the participants were required to respond to what degree of workplace bullying they were exposed to during the past 6 months. The items in the questionnaire were measured by using a 5-point Likert scale as follows: *1 (never); 2 (now and then); 3 (monthly); 4 (weekly); 5 (daily)*. The example of items is "Being exposed to an unmanageable workload" and "Excessive monitoring of your work". Score for NAQ-R was calculated by adding up the scores of the twenty-two items. A higher score shows greater exposure to



bullying. In the Malaysian context, this questionnaire has been used by Halim et al. (2018), Hassan et al. (2015) and Kwan et al. (2020) in their research to examine workplace bullying. The existing work on workplace bullying literature suggests that scholars have used NAQ-R as a single factor scale (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). The creators of NAQ-R have suggested that NAQ-R can be utilized as a single factor scale (Einarsen et al., 2009). Cronbach alpha of this scale was found to be highly reliable,  $\alpha = .90$  (Einarsen et al., 2009). Cronbach alpha of this scale in the current study was found to be,  $\alpha = .93$

### **3.4.3 Work Engagement**

To assess the work engagement of the participants, a shorter version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) by Schaufeli et al. (2006) was utilized. This questionnaire is consisting of 9 items including 3 dimensions of engagement known as vigor which can be explained by increased level of mental resilience and energy that an employee reveals at job, dedication which is described as being strongly involved in one's job and feel acknowledged for their passion, pride, contribution, challenge and motivation as well as absorption which can be described as being completely engaged and focused in one's work. Each of the dimension consists of 3 items and the items were rated by using a 7-point Likert scale as follows: 0 (*never*); 1 (*almost never*); 2 (*rarely*); 3 (*sometimes*); 4 (*often*); 5 (*very often*) and 6 (*always*). The example of items for vigor is "At my job, I feel strong and vigorous", dedication is "I am proud on the work that I do" and absorption is "I get carried away when I'm working". Score for UWES-9 was calculated by adding the scores of items from all of the nine

items from three subscales. The higher the total score, the more the workers are engaged in performing their work. In the Malaysian context, this questionnaire has been used by Chan et al. (2020), Othman and Ghazali (2017) as well as Othman and Nasurdin (2019) in their research to examine work engagement. The authors of UWES-9, have called for using the total composite score as indicator of the overall level of engagement, implying the possibility of the single factor structure of the UWES (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Additionally, previous research has also found that UWES can be utilized as a single factor scale (Nerstad et al., 2010; Kulikowski, 2017). Cronbach alpha for this scale was found to be highly reliable,  $\alpha = .92$  (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The Cronbach alpha for this scale in the current study was found to be,  $\alpha = .78$

#### **3.4.4 Turnover Intention**

Turnover Intention Scale (TIS) was utilized to evaluate the turnover intention of the employees. This scale was developed by Dysvik and Kuvaas (2010) and it is consisting of 5 items. Participants were required to answer the items on a five-point Likert response scale as follows: 1 (*strongly disagree*); 2 (*disagree*); 3 (*neither agree nor disagree*), 4 (*agree*); 5 (*strongly agree*). The example of items is “I do not see many prospects for the future in this organisation” and “I may quit my present job during the next 12 months”. The score for TIS was computed by calculating the average score of all 5 items. Cronbach alpha of this scale was found to be highly reliable,  $\alpha = .90$  (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2010). In this current study, Cronbach alpha for this scale was found,  $\alpha = .78$

### 3.4.5 Control Variable

To control for other variable that the literature has demonstrated to be related to turnover intention, the mediation model included age (Oh & Kim, 2019), marital status (Emiroğlu et al., 2015) and years of services (Wendon et al., 2019) as controlled variables.

### 3.5 Procedure

This research used a non-probability sampling method known as purposive sampling. This sampling was chosen because this research only focuses on employees who work at public agencies in Malaysia. Ethical clearance for this research was obtained from UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee (U/SERC/146/2020). Then, the person in charge for each of the agencies were approached after contacting them via email and phone. The contact list of the employees was not provided to the researcher but instead the person in charge agreed to circulate the email consisting of the questionnaire link, thrice a week to the employees using the agencies' group email address. An online survey platform (Google form) was used to collect data from employees in public agencies. The questionnaires were electronically circulated via e-mail and it takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes to answer the questionnaires. The participation of the employees was voluntary. Respondents were free to withdraw from the study and there was no consequence of withdrawal. More importantly, there was no risk involved by participating in the study. Respondents were also given access to contact the researcher if they had any doubts regarding the questionnaire. All information about the respondents was

kept confidential and remained anonymous to protect the identities of the respondents. Lastly, the data of this research were analysed using version 25 of the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS).

### **3.6 Pilot Study**

To evaluate the reliability of the measures, a pilot study was carried out. This is because Pallant (2011) has stated that the reliability of a scale might differ according to the sample so it is vital to assess the reliability of the scale with the chosen sample. Connelly (2008) claimed that the sample size of a pilot study should consist 10% of the participants for the parent study. Hence, this pilot study was consisting of 40 participants as the sample size of the parent study is 400. The questionnaires were electronically circulated via e-mail to 40 employees from one public service agency. Cronbach's alpha was utilized to determine the reliability of workplace bullying, work engagement and turnover intention scales. Based on the analysis, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of Negative Act Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) was .97. For Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .96. Finally, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of Turnover Intention Scale (TIS) was .90. Pallant (2011) has classified scales which have Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of above .70 as high reliability and based on the results, all the scales are above .70 which shows that they are highly reliable. Therefore, the measurements of this research can be concluded as reliable to be used in the Malaysian context.

### **3.7 Statistical Analysis**

SPSS 23.0 was utilized to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the demographic information of the respondents. Additionally, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to examine the reliability of each instrument. After data has been collected it was tested for normality and the data was found to be normally distributed. Linear regression was used as a statistical analysis method to find the effect between the main study variables (i.e., work engagement, workplace bullying and turnover intention). Besides, this study also used PROCESS macro developed by Andrew Hayes to study further on the mediation effect. PROCESS macro is a tool which can be used in conjunction with statistical software such as SPSS to conduct and interpret complex analysis such as mediation easier (Hayes, 2013).

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter is a thorough examination on how this study was conducted. The research design, data collection method, sample size, information about the instruments used, procedure of the study and the analysis that were used to analyse the data has been discussed in this section.

## CHAPTER 4.0

### RESULT

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents results such as the normality test, results of the linear regression as well as the mediation analysis.

#### 4.2 Normality Test

Skewness and kurtosis were used to evaluate the normality. George and Mallery (2010) have claimed that the variables show a normal univariate distribution when the skewness and kurtosis values are between -2 and 2. Both the skewness and kurtosis values for all the variables in this research are within the range which are between -2 and 2 (refer Table 4.1). Besides, a bell-shaped histogram was attained as it was normally distributed and the normal Q-Q plot showed that the observed value for each score was normally distributed as it was near to the straight line (refer to Appendix F).

**Table 4.1: Skewness and Kurtosis**

| <b>Variables</b>   | <b>Skewness</b> | <b>Kurtosis</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Workplace bullying | -.12            | -1.20           |
| Work engagement    | .22             | -.91            |
| Turnover intention | -.003           | -1.16           |

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Table 4.2 shows the mean and standard deviation for workplace bullying, work engagement and turnover intention.

**Table 4.2: Mean and Standard Deviation**

| Variables          | Mean  | Standard Deviation |
|--------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Workplace bullying | 60.90 | 17.63              |
| Work engagement    | 28.99 | 8.08               |
| Turnover intention | 3.03  | 0.99               |

### 4.4 Mediation Analysis

PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes, 2018) was used to conduct mediation analysis to examine if work engagement mediates the effect of workplace bullying on turnover intention. After controlling for marital status, age and years of service, the results revealed that the regression of workplace bullying on turnover intention was significant,  $B = .03$ ,  $SE = .002$ ,  $t = 13.44$ ,  $p < .001$ . As hypothesized, the results showed that workplace bullying is a significant predictor of turnover intention. The regression of the workplace bullying on work engagement was significant,  $B = -.31$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t = -17.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . As hypothesized, the results showed that workplace bullying is a significant predictor of work engagement. The regression of work engagement on turnover intention was significant,  $B = -.05$ ,  $SE = .006$ ,  $t = -8.10$ ,  $p < .001$ . As hypothesized, the results showed that work engagement is a significant predictor of turnover intention. It was also revealed that the direct effect of workplace bullying on turnover intention was significant,  $B = .02$ ,  $SE = .003$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%

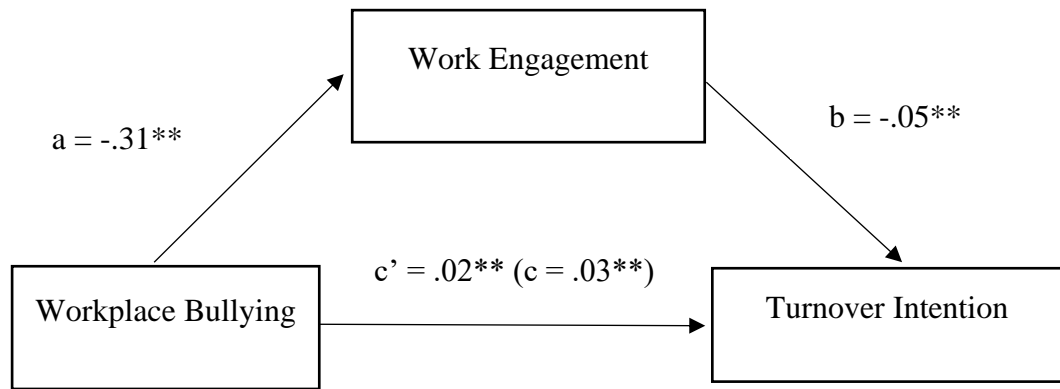
CI [.01, .02]. The indirect effect of workplace bullying on turnover intention was significant,  $B = .01$ ,  $SE = .002$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.01, .02]. The total effect of workplace bullying on turnover intention was significant as well,  $B = .03$ ,  $SE = .002$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.03, .03]. Based on the 95% confidence interval, both the indirect and direct effects are statistically significant since they did not include zero (Hayes, 2018). Thus, this result reveals that a partial mediation occurred in this study since both the indirect and direct effects are significant. This explains that work engagement mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention of employees from public service agencies. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was supported. Table 4.3 shows the mediation results of this study. All the results found to be statistically significant. Figure 4.1 shows the regression coefficients for the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention as mediated by work engagement.

**Table 4.3: Mediation Results**

| <b>Variable</b>        | <b><i>B</i></b> | <b><i>SE</i></b> | <b><i>t</i></b> | <b><i>p</i></b> | <b>95% CI</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>WB → TI</b>         | .03             | .002             | 13.44           | < .001          | [.03, .03]    |
| <b>WB → WE</b>         | -.31            | .02              | -17.52          | < .001          | [-.34, -.27]  |
| <b>WE → TI</b>         | -.05            | .006             | -8.10           | < .001          | [-.06, -.04]  |
| <b>Direct Effect</b>   | .02             | .003             | 5.52            | < .001          | [.01, .02]    |
| <b>Indirect Effect</b> | .01             | .002             |                 | < .001          | [.01, .02]    |
| <b>Total Effect</b>    | .03             | .002             | 13.44           | < .001          | [.03, .03]    |

*Note.* WB=workplace bullying, WE=work engagement, TI=turnover intention





**Figure 4.1: Regression coefficients for the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention as mediated by work engagement.**

*Note.* The regression coefficients of total effect between workplace bullying and turnover intention are in parentheses.  $^{**}p < .001$ , all two-tailed.

#### 4.5 Summary

The descriptive information of the respondents, normality test, results of the linear regression and mediation analysis have been clearly stated in this chapter. As hypothesized, the findings of this research revealed that workplace bullying significantly predicts turnover intention, workplace bullying significantly predicts work engagement and also work engagement significantly predicts turnover intention. Moreover, the mediation analysis revealed that work engagement mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention, in which both the indirect and direct effect of workplace bullying on turnover intention was found to be significant when work engagement was included in the mediation model.

## **CHAPTER 5.0**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the findings of this research are discussed by referring to the hypotheses using the supportive materials from previous literature reviews. Additionally, the suggestions and limitations for future study for researchers and implications of the research have been explained as well.

#### **5.2 Discussion**

The first hypothesis of this research is that workplace bullying can predict turnover intention among employees in public service agencies. As hypothesized, workplace bullying significantly predicted turnover intention. This confirms that when employees experience workplace bullying it would lead them to develop turnover intention (Salin & Notelaers, 2017). According to Razzaghian and Ghani (2014), it has been claimed by researchers that organisational mistreatments such as workplace bullying generally go without being identified. Thus, this research develops the literature on workplace bullying by stating that bullying has the possibility to cause employees to quit their employment in the public sector. The finding of this current study is supported by previous studies.

Workplace bullying occurs in the Malaysia's public sector as the government has moved towards more performance-driven plans in order to improve the public service delivery (Omar et al., 2015). Transformation programs have been undertaken where performance targets are set and observed for each of the agencies. This system can produce desirable performance results but it could lead to bullying behaviours because these kinds of behaviours might be treated as a method to get things done (Samnani & Singh, 2013). Thus, continual performance monitoring system in the public service might lead to an increase in the occurrences of workplace bullying as a research have revealed that employees in public service agency have experienced physical intimidation, person-related and work-related bullying such as given task with unreasonable deadlines or targets, being the target of spontaneous anger and being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with their work (Omar et al., 2015). Experiencing these kinds of negative acts in their workplace would definitely make the employees of the agencies withdraw from the situation to avoid the emotional exhaustion and pain associated with bullying as a form of self-defence (Li et al., 2020). Another study by Kousar (2018) has also revealed that when employees in the public sector experience workplace bullying, it would lead them to have turnover intention as a form of escape behaviour since they are unable to cope with the abusive behaviours and harassments.

In general, Djurkovic (2004) has claimed that employees who experience workplace bullying would feel threatened and would not wish to remain working in such a hostile environment so they would consider quitting their job. Therefore, it can be stated that when employees experience workplace bullying,

it would trigger thoughts such as turnover intention as a form of escape behaviour so that they can set themselves free from all the harassments, emotional exhaustion (Naseem & Ahmed, 2020) and abusive behaviours (Bohle et al., 2017). In addition to that, employees who experience bullying might be exposed to negative feelings (Duru et al., 2018) which is deepened by being intentionally excluded at work and loss of autonomy. Consequently, these negative feelings resulted from workplace bullying would lead to a greater level of turnover intention (Glasø et al., 2011). Thus, it was argued that when the tendency to leave increases, the probability of actual turnover increases as well (Hogh et al., 2011). In summary, victims of workplace bullying may experience unfair treatment and negative acts from superiors and colleagues that can associate with greater turnover intention.

The second hypothesis of this study is that workplace bullying can predict work engagement among employees in public service agencies. As hypothesized, workplace bullying significantly predicted work engagement. This confirms that when employees experience workplace bullying it would lessen their work engagement (Park & Ono, 2016). This is because employees who have experienced workplace bullying tend to exhibit withdrawal because of the mistreatments and it is expected that the individuals' level of work engagement would reduce as a form of withdrawal (Houshmand et al., 2012). Bullying behaviours happen due to work frustration, high internal competition or power imbalances among organisational members with regard to delivering high-quality services (Tybur & Griskevicius 2013). These behaviours lead to the increased level of negative feelings at work because as stated by Power et al.

(2013), the experience of being bullied can lead to the feeling of being disrespected, devalued and rejected.

This view in the public sector context was supported by Omari and Paull (2015), signifying that disrespectful culture in the public sector caused by workplace bullying can result in work disengagement. The finding of the current study is also supported by a previous study as it was found that workplace bullying reduces work engagement among employees of the public sector (Nguyen et al., 2017). Another study has also revealed that workplace bullying cause depletion of resources such as energy, self-respect, dignity, status as well as safety at work (Tucky & Neall, 2014) and lack of resources can reduce energetic processes which would lead to decreased levels of work engagement (Park & Ono, 2016). Additionally, when employees experience workplace bullying, they would not be able to defend themselves from the negative acts at work from superior and colleagues such as spreading of rumours, being shouted at or persistent criticisms will make them feel worn out which would eventually result in the lower level of engagement at work (Park & Ono, 2016). The unreasonable criticism and being the target of spontaneous anger resulted from workplace bullying can relate to the lower level of work engagement as the employees from the public agency may perceive their efforts are not appreciated and pay less commitment to work.

The third hypothesis of this study is that work engagement can predict turnover intention among employees in public service agencies. As hypothesized, work

engagement significantly predicted turnover intention. This confirms that when the work engagement of the employees decreases, it would lead to higher intention in quitting. According to Agyemang and Ofei (2013), employees in the public sector can be less committed and less engaged to their organisations compared to employees in the private sector. Since, engagement is vital for retention (Nowack, 2008), it still remains a significant matter for many leaders in the public sector who try to keep their employees loyal and committed to their work and the mission of the agency so that they can retain their employees (Jin & McDonald, 2016). This is because when employees are disengaged it would lead them to have turnover intentions since disengaged employees might not be able to feel excited or find meaning in their job anymore.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) have stated that only when employees are more engaged in their work, the more they are liable to stay with the organisation. This viewpoint was further supported by Shuck and Wollard too (2010). As an explanation, employees who are engaged are less likely to exit their employment because when they are enthusiastic about their job, they are occupied with positive and optimistic feelings regarding their job and this will lead to lesser intention to quit (Mendes & Stander, 2011). The finding of this current study is supported by previous studies too. For instance, a research has revealed that work engagement is negatively associated with employees' turnover intention (Al-shbiel et al., 2018). This is because employees who are engaged will find it tough and unwilling to disengage themselves from their job because they have invested so much energy as well as time in their job and they are not ready to let it get wasted by quitting the job (Schaufeli, 2014).

The fourth hypothesis of this study is that work engagement mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies. As hypothesized, the result of this study revealed that work engagement mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention. As workplace bullying has been reported to happen regularly at work (Francioli et al., 2016), researchers have examined the impact of workplace bullying on the turnover intention and work engagement of the employees. Studies have shown that workplace bullying is linked to work engagement and turnover intention of the employees (Abubakar et al., 2018; Tricahyadinata, 2020). This study seeks to expand this line of research by examining the mediating mechanisms by which workplace bullying may decrease work engagement of the employees, which in turn leads to greater level of turnover intention among employees in public service agencies.

In addition, the findings revealed that workplace bullying has both indirect and direct effect on turnover intention. This means that work engagement partially mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intentions among the employees. The finding explains that workplace bullying may lead to turnover intentions but these intentions are partially influenced by the work engagement of the employees. The mediation results indicated that victims of workplace bullying intended to quit the current job due to their lack of work engagement caused by unfair workplace treatment, physical intimidation and person-related bullying. The findings of the current research propose that work engagement is a variable through which workplace bullying leads employees to develop turnover intentions and it contributes evidence to the potential

mechanism which can affect the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention.

### **5.3 Limitation and Future Recommendation**

Several limitations should be considered even though the research have revealed some important findings. First, due to time and financial constraints, the study was cross-sectional which may not deliver an in-depth understanding on the relationship between the predictor and outcome. Therefore, future studies can use mixed-method design since this method can help to explore the reasons and provide a more thorough and profound evidence of information to understand the association between the variables.

The second limitation is that the data for this research was collected by using self-reported measures which might have reflected biases such as social desirability. The results might be exposed to social desirability bias due to the subtle nature of the variable that was being assessed such as workplace bullying. Retsubog et al. (2013) have claimed that social desirability might be a serious matter as participants might not have wished to report their affective and cognitive reactions so that they can display a favourable image of their organizations or themselves. We still cannot ignore the possibilities of social desirability biases even though the researcher has informed the participants that their answers will remain confidential and will be utilized for research purposes only to control the chances of these biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However,



the self-report survey was perceived to be more realistic and dependable because people can provide directly what comes into their minds. Furthermore, Bohlet et al. (2017) have stated that before looking into a more complex research, it is feasible to gather preliminary evidence to examine if the relationship between the variables exist. Future studies can consider conducting a qualitative study to further discover and comprehend how work engagement play a role in mediating the relationship between bullying and intention to leave as it can also further enhance the significance of the findings. The researcher can build rapport and establish comfortable interaction with the participants to make sure that the participants are at ease and willing to share more information. McGrath et al. (2019) have claimed that rapport is an important element during the interview process since it allows the participants to provide clear details of their experiences. As stated by Bell (2014), building rapport is one of the ways which can help researcher to approach interviewees with a curious and open attitude, describing specifically why we are interested in their opinions and point of view.

The third limitation is that this study only focuses on employees from the public sector as respondents. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised to the overall organisational context. Future studies can focus on both the public and private sectors to study more on workplace bullying, work engagement, turnover intention and also if there are any differences between the private and public sectors. In the future, this research can be replicated in a context different (Western nations) and similar (Asian nations) than Malaysia to increase the generalizability of findings.

## 5.4 Implication

As for the implications, the present study provides an understanding of the detrimental effects that workplace bullying has on turnover intention and work engagement. As this research has revealed that workplace bullying has harmful effects at both individual and organisational levels, management should respond properly by identifying the negative implications of workplace bullying in the public sector. Thus, it is significant to focus on what can be done to prevent the incidence of workplace bullying in the first place. A common organisational response to workplace bullying is an acceptance that bullying is regarded as normal in organisational culture (Ferris, 2004). Hence, organisations that accept workplace bullying or fail to accept accountability for bullying in their workplace are not only likely to be held legally accountable but they can also suffer from organisational costs of an unhealthy work atmosphere (Blackwood et al., 2013).

The right of an employee to enjoy a healthy and safe work environment in Malaysia is specified in the Malaysian Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 also known as OSHA Act. However, there is limited information about the behaviours, situations and duration that constitute bullying in organizations in Malaysia, even though the Department of Safety and Health has stipulated a guideline for prevention of violence at work. The Industrial court has considered any forms of harassment in the private sector such as bullying as a basic breach in the contract of employment. Nevertheless, in the public sector, the position of law on workplace bullying remains unclear to date (Omar et al., 2015).

From this, it can be observed clearly that employees of public sector need legal protection against workplace bullying. Organisations should also play a vital role in preventing workplace bullying because they might unintentionally encourage bullying through their work structure and practices. Formulating an anti-bullying policy in the organisations is one of the ways to deter workplace bullying in the public sector. It is important for organisations to know the nature of workplace bullying and approaches to intervention and prevention as well as the enforcement of zero-tolerance policy should be formulated so that a bully-free culture and a culture of respect will be created (Blackwood et al., 2013). The anti-bullying policies should be regularly revised to improve the approaches and these policies should also have clear procedures and guidelines to manage workplace bullying (Magee et al., 2014).

Based on the previous studies, it can be stated that well-articulated anti-bullying policies (e.g. managing with respect and zero-tolerance bullying policy at work) as well as protocols and procedures to report bullying are preliminary preventions of workplace bullying (Tuckey & Neall, 2014; Vartia et al., 2011). To raise issues about their bullying colleagues and managers, without such policy will be hard for the employees of public sector. Other than formulation of policy, due diligence process needs to be in place to carry out investigations on the accusations of workplace bullying in the public sector (Harvey et al., 2008). Additionally, one of the needed elements to accompany the zero-tolerance policy in the public sector is training (Blackwood et al., 2013). This training would deliver policy details, how to identify workplace bullying, how to assist colleagues who are victims of bullying and also how to report incidents of

bullying (Rosario-Hernández et al., 2018). In addition, an efficient performance appraisal and feedback system with strict confidentiality can help to stop the bullying behaviours apart from just providing policies on workplace bullying in the public sector (Bentley et al., 2009).

The findings of the current research show the negative influence of workplace bullying on the organizations through turnover intention. Even though the present research did not assess turnover, previous studies has revealed that turnover intention is an important antecedent of actual turnover (e.g., Griffeth & Hom, 2001 as cited in Rosario-Hernández et al., 2018), hence the findings highlights that managing body must be motivated to tackle bullying if they wish to develop their organisational outcomes. This finding is beneficial for public sector because they suggest that any negligence in preventing bullying behaviours will risk the organizations since their valuable employees might leave their job to preserve their well-being (Ahmad & Kaleem, 2019). Thus, management of public sector should make sure that the employees are aware that the managing body will take a serious action against bullying behaviours and also that the employees will be supported when they identify and report bullying behaviours. Therefore, the managing body should educate their employees to take responsibility for the well-being of their colleagues by reprimanding individuals who commit such behaviours.

The findings of the current research reveal that work engagement plays a role in mediating the association between workplace bullying and turnover intention.

Findings of the present research can identify areas that needs to be focused to help organisation that is experiencing a higher rate of turnover intention because of workplace bullying. Hence, for organisations which have taken measures to prevent workplace bullying, they can try to enhance the work engagement of the employees since engaged employees tend to remain longer in an organisation. Thus, organisation can reduce the turnover intention of the employees by increasing their work engagement. For example, organisations can often provide the workers new challenges, in which it can help to decrease turnover intention by promoting work engagement (Langelaan et al., 2006). Moreover, management can offer their staffs more independence when they perform their job which would increase their work engagement and decrease the turnover intention. Managers can also provide constructive feedback on employees' performance as Xiao et al. (2017) have claimed that performance feedback has a positive impact on work engagement. Thus, when employees have higher work engagement, it will lessen their tendency to leave the job.

Moreover, organisations can also increase work engagement of the employees by focusing on the three dimensions of work engagement which are dedication, absorption and vigor. Managers can enhance the dedication aspect of the employees since it can improve their performance and decrease the turnover intention of the employees. It is also important for the management to reward employees who are dedicated by promoting them. As for vigor, it is described by the persistence even when facing difficulties, the willingness of the employees to invest effort in their work and the high level of mental resilience and energy while working (Shekari, 2015); therefore, organisations should

consider establishing conducive working environments for employees in order to keep them feel refreshed and feel happy (Meseret, 2018). As for the case where employees are absorbed, they will be aware of what is expected of them and also how they can support their organisation. Therefore, the management can design the job schedules of the employees in a way where they can find purpose and meaning in the job that they perform. On the other hand, the managers can help the employees by establishing routines, building their confidence and also by setting clear goals for the employees to succeed. By doing this, the functioning and effectiveness of the organisation will improve.

The finding has contributed to the theory by showing that workplace bullying affects work engagement and in return work engagement leads to turnover intention. Based on the JD-R model, workplace bullying can be considered as a hindrance demand which results in prolonged mental strain on the affected individual and difficulties in coping with it may lead to low level of engagement (Einarsen et al., 2016). Consequently, when work engagement decreases it would lead to turnover intention because research has found work engagement as a construct which has a substantial influence on the turnover intention of the employees (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008).

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This study has contributed to the literature by examining the relationship between turnover intention, work engagement and workplace bullying. Besides,

this research has also examined the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention among employees in public service agencies. Responses were obtained from 400 employees via the online survey. The findings revealed that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention, in which both the indirect and direct effect of workplace bullying on turnover intention was found to be significant. It can be deduced that workplace bullying affects the work engagement of the employees and consequently work engagement affects the employees' turnover intention.

The findings of this research indicate that workplace bullying does exist in the public sector of Malaysia since the findings showed that workplace bullying significantly predicts turnover intention. This implies that employees who experience workplace bullying tend to have a greater turnover intention and this can be harmful to organisations because turnover is claimed to be costly (Ahmad & Omar, 2010). Hence, preventive measures need to be taken to handle workplace bullying because Magee et al. (2014) have claimed that organisations can secure their profit by managing and preventing workplace bullying. This can be done by developing anti-bullying policies and also by focusing on the work engagement of the employees since highly engaged employees are more liable to remain in an organisation longer. Additionally, workplace bullying can be harmful to the organisations and the employees since it affects their psychological and physiological health (Rosario-Hernández et al., 2013; Rosario-Hernández et al., 2018) so this topic should be further researched to

increase the understanding of the researcher and also to increase the awareness of individuals.



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# APPENDIX A

## Ethical Approval for Research Project



Re: U/SERC/146/2020  
23 September 2020

Dr Nurul Iman Binti Abdul Jalil  
Department of Psychology and Counselling  
Faculty of Arts and Social Science  
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman  
Jalan Universiti, Bandar Baru Barat  
31900 Kampar, Perak

Dear Dr Nurul Iman,

### Ethical Approval For Research Project/Protocol

We refer to your application for ethical approval for your research project (Master student's project) and are pleased to inform you that your application has been approved under expedited review.

The details of your research project are as follows:

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Research Title</b>      | The Mediating Effect of Work Engagement in the Relationship Between Workplace Bullying and Turnover Intention Among Employees in Public Service Agencies |
| <b>Investigator(s)</b>     | Dr Nurul Iman Binti Abdul Jalil<br>Dr Gan Sa Wan<br>Vanishree a/p Kanaka Sundar (UTAR Postgraduate Student)  |
| <b>Research Area</b>       | Social Sciences  |
| <b>Research Location</b>   | Online Survey  |
| <b>No. of Participants</b> | 354 participants (Age: 25 - 60)  |
| <b>Research Costs</b>      | Self-funded  |
| <b>Approval Validity</b>   | 23 September 2020 - 22 September 2021  |

The conduct of this research is subject to the following:


- (1) The participants' informed consent be obtained prior to the commencement of the research;
- (2) Confidentiality of participants' personal data must be maintained; and
- (3) Compliance with procedures set out in related policies of UTAR such as the UTAR Research Ethics and Code of Conduct, Code of Practice for Research Involving Humans and other related policies/guidelines.

Should you collect personal data of participants in your study, please have the participants sign the attached Personal Data Protection Statement for your records.

The University wishes you all the best in your research.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

  
Professor Ts Dr Faidz bin Abd Rahman  
Chairman  
UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee

c.c. Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Science  
Director, Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research

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## APPENDIX B

### Demographic Question

**Age:**

**Gender:**

Male ( )

Female ( )

**Race:**

Malay ( )

Indian ( )

Chinese ( )

Others ( )

**Marital Status:**

Single ( )

Married ( )

Divorced ( )

Others:

**Years of service in the current organization**

1-2 years ( )

3-4 years ( )

5-6 years ( )

7-8 years ( )

9-10 years ( )

> 10 years ( )

**Current basic salary per month**

Less than RM 2500 ( )

RM 2500 - RM 3500 ( )

RM 3501 - RM 4000 ( )

RM 4001 - RM 5000 ( )

More than RM 5000 ( )

## APPENDIX C

### Negative Acts Questionnaire – Revised (NAQ-R) (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009)

The following behaviours are often seen as examples of negative behaviour in the workplace. Over the last six months, how often have you been subjected to the following negative acts at work?

Please circle the number that best corresponds with your experience over the last six months:

|       |              |         |        |       |
|-------|--------------|---------|--------|-------|
| 1     | 2            | 3       | 4      | 5     |
| Never | Now and then | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Someone withholding information which affects your performance   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2) Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3) Being ordered to do work below your level of competence  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4) Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5) Spreading of gossip and rumours about you  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6) Being ignored or excluded (being ‘sent to Coventry’)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7) Having insulted or offensive remarks made about your person i.e. habits and background), your attitudes or your private life | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8) Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger (or rage)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9) Intimidating behavior such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10) Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11) Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12) Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13) Persistent criticism of your work and effort   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14) Having your opinions and views ignored   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15) Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get on with  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16) Being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17) Having allegations made against you  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18) Excessive monitoring of your work  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19) Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20) Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21) Being exposed to an unmanageable workload  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22) Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## APPENDIX D

### Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006)

The following 9 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job.

Please circle the number that best corresponds with your feelings:

|       |                                     |                            |                           |                |                          |              |
|-------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Never | Almost<br>Never                     | Rarely                     | Sometimes                 | Often          | Very<br>Often            | Always       |
| 0     | 1                                   | 2                          | 3                         | 4              | 5                        | 6            |
| Never | A few<br>times a<br>year or<br>less | Once a<br>month<br>or less | A few<br>times a<br>month | Once a<br>week | A few<br>times a<br>week | Every<br>day |

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 1) At my work, I feel bursting with energy                 | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 2) At my job, I feel strong and vigorous                   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 3) I am enthusiastic about my job                          | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 4) My job inspires me                                      | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 5) When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 6) I feel happy when I am working intensely                | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 7) I am proud on the work that I do                        | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 8) I am immersed in my work                                | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 9) I get carried away when I'm working                     | 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

## APPENDIX E

### Turnover Intention Scale (TIS) (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2010)

The following statement is to measure one's intention to leave.

Please circle the number that indicates your answer.

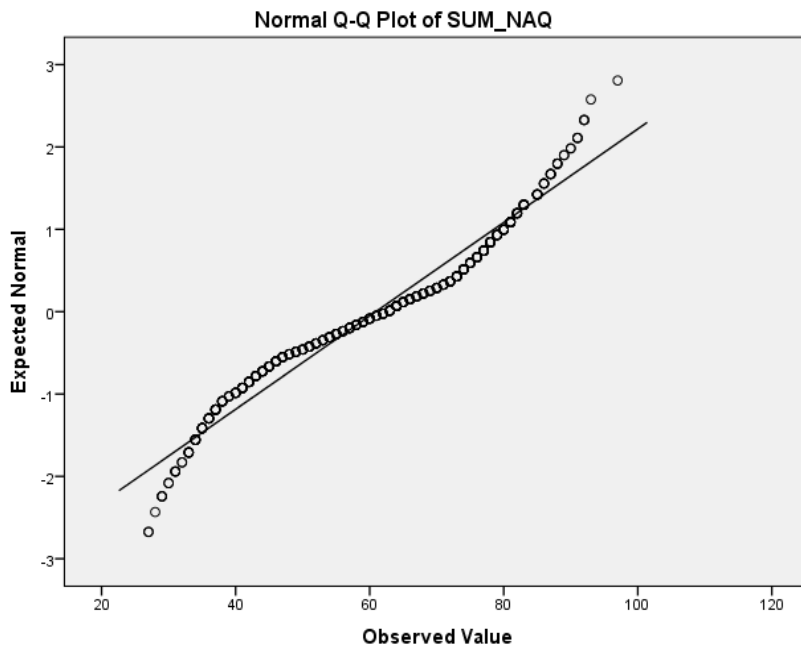
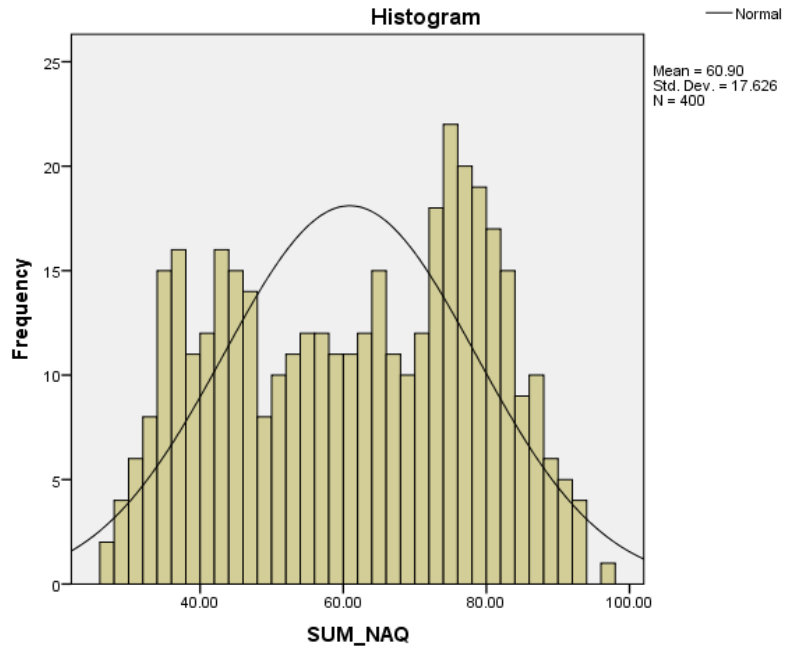
| 1                 | 2        | 3                          | 4     | 5              |
|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I will probably look for a new job in the next year                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I may quit my present job during the next 12 months                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I will likely actively look for a new job within the next three years | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I often think about quitting my present job                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I do not see many prospects for the future in this organisation       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

# APPENDIX F

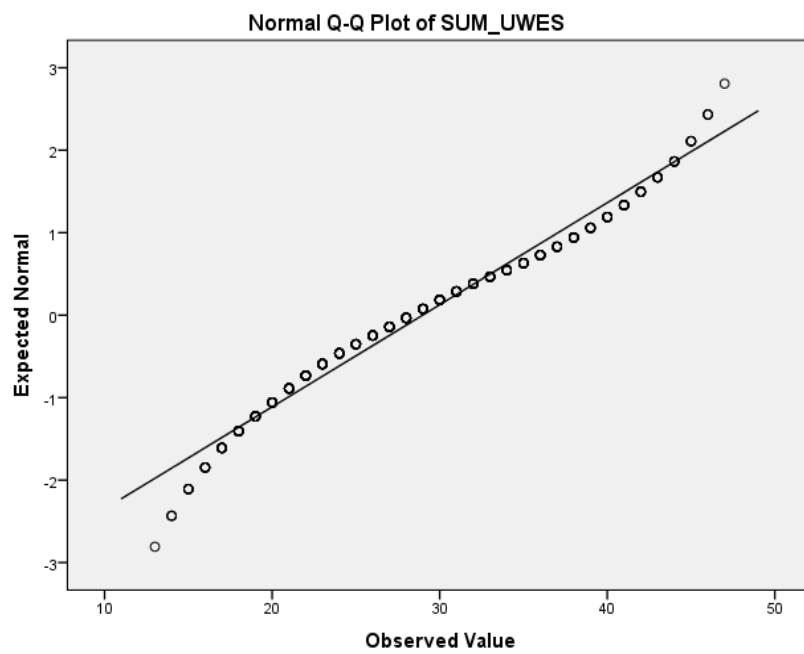
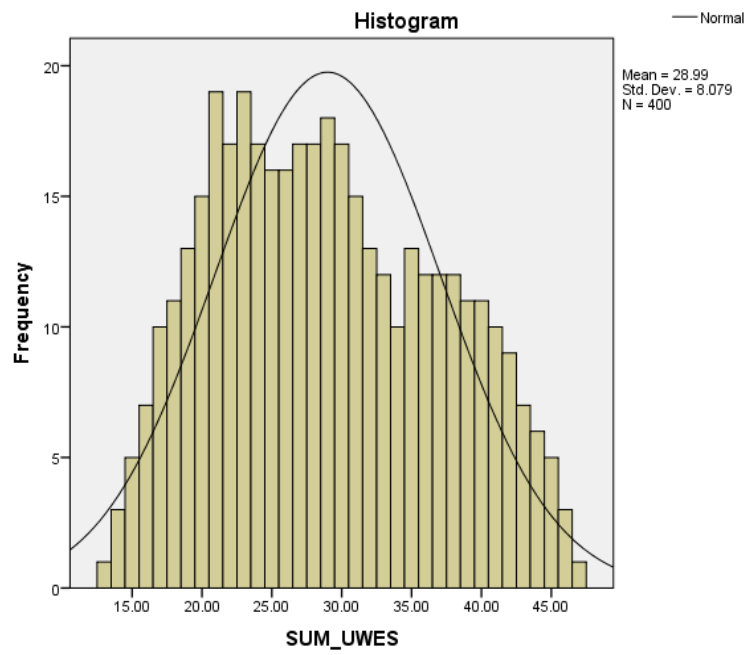
## Histogram and Normal Q-Q Plot

### Workplace Bullying

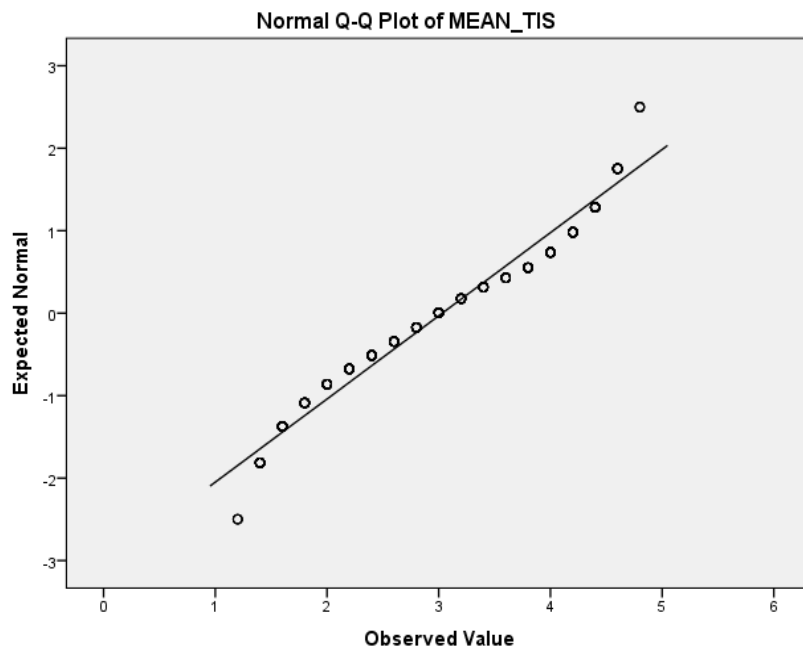
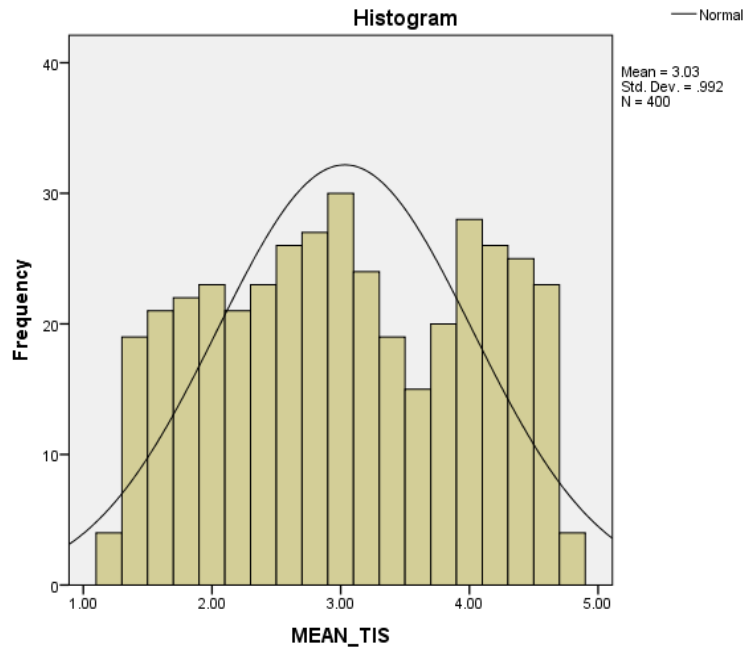




## Work Engagement



# Turnover Intention



## APPENDIX G

### Sample Size Calculation

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

***n*** = sample size

**N** = population size

**e** = level of precision

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{1245779}{1 + 1245779(.05)^2} \\ &= 399.87 \\ &= \mathbf{400 \text{ participants}} \end{aligned}$$

## APPENDIX H

### Process SPSS Output

Run MATRIX procedure:

\*\*\*\*\*  
PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 3.5.3  
\*\*\*\*\*

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com  
Documentation available in Hayes (2018).  
www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Model : 4  
Y : MEAN\_TIS  
X : SUM\_NAQ  
M : SUM\_UWES

Covariates:  
Age Marital Service

Sample  
Size: 400

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

OUTCOME VARIABLE:  
SUM\_UWES

Model Summary

|   | R     | R-sq  | MSE     | F        | df1    | df2      |
|---|-------|-------|---------|----------|--------|----------|
| P | .7160 | .5127 | 32.1248 | 103.8965 | 4.0000 | 395.0000 |
|   | .0000 |       |         |          |        |          |

Model

|          | coeff   | se     | t        | p     | LLCI    |
|----------|---------|--------|----------|-------|---------|
| ULCI     |         |        |          |       |         |
| constant | 45.4477 | 1.8573 | 24.4703  | .0000 | 41.7963 |
| 49.0990  |         |        |          |       |         |
| SUM_NAQ  | -.3086  | .0176  | -17.5209 | .0000 | -.3432  |
| -.2740   |         |        |          |       |         |
| Age      | 1.2216  | .5639  | 2.1665   | .0309 | .1131   |
| 2.3302   |         |        |          |       |         |
| Marital  | .5550   | .6829  | .8128    | .4168 | -.7875  |
| 1.8975   |         |        |          |       |         |
| Service  | -.1906  | .2471  | -.7715   | .4409 | -.6763  |
| .2951    |         |        |          |       |         |

Standardized coefficients

|         | coeff  |
|---------|--------|
| SUM_NAQ | -.6733 |
| Age     | .1016  |
| Marital | .0315  |

Service            -.0353

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

OUTCOME VARIABLE:  
  MEAN\_TIS

Model Summary

|   | R     | R-sq  | MSE   | F       | df1    | df2      |
|---|-------|-------|-------|---------|--------|----------|
| p | .7433 | .5526 | .4457 | 97.3154 | 5.0000 | 394.0000 |
|   | .0000 |       |       |         |        |          |

Model

|          | coeff  | se    | t       | p     | LLCI   |
|----------|--------|-------|---------|-------|--------|
| ULCI     |        |       |         |       |        |
| constant | 4.1956 | .3470 | 12.0912 | .0000 | 3.5134 |
| 4.8778   |        |       |         |       |        |
| SUM_NAQ  | .0153  | .0028 | 5.5197  | .0000 | .0098  |
| .0207    |        |       |         |       |        |
| SUM_UWES | -.0480 | .0059 | -8.0967 | .0000 | -.0596 |
| -.0363   |        |       |         |       |        |
| Age      | -.2529 | .0668 | -3.7846 | .0002 | -.3842 |
| -.1215   |        |       |         |       |        |
| Marital  | -.1443 | .0805 | -1.7932 | .0737 | -.3026 |
| .0139    |        |       |         |       |        |
| Service  | -.0312 | .0291 | -1.0700 | .2853 | -.0884 |
| .0261    |        |       |         |       |        |

Standardized coefficients

|          | coeff  |
|----------|--------|
| SUM_NAQ  | .2713  |
| SUM_UWES | -.3909 |
| Age      | -.1712 |
| Marital  | -.0668 |
| Service  | -.0470 |

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

OUTCOME VARIABLE:  
  MEAN\_TIS

Model Summary

|   | R     | R-sq  | MSE   | F       | df1    | df2      |
|---|-------|-------|-------|---------|--------|----------|
| p | .6915 | .4781 | .5185 | 90.4696 | 4.0000 | 395.0000 |
|   | .0000 |       |       |         |        |          |

Model

|          | coeff  | se    | t       | p     | LLCI   |
|----------|--------|-------|---------|-------|--------|
| ULCI     |        |       |         |       |        |
| constant | 2.0148 | .2360 | 8.5385  | .0000 | 1.5509 |
| 2.4787   |        |       |         |       |        |
| SUM_NAQ  | .0301  | .0022 | 13.4394 | .0000 | .0257  |
| .0345    |        |       |         |       |        |
| Age      | -.3115 | .0716 | -4.3478 | .0000 | -.4523 |
| -.1706   |        |       |         |       |        |
| Marital  | -.1710 | .0868 | -1.9708 | .0494 | -.3415 |
| -.0004   |        |       |         |       |        |
| Service  | -.0220 | .0314 | -.7013  | .4835 | -.0837 |
| .0397    |        |       |         |       |        |

Standardized coefficients

|         | coeff  |
|---------|--------|
| SUM_NAQ | .5344  |
| Age     | -.2109 |
| Marital | -.0791 |
| Service | -.0332 |

\*\*\*\*\* TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y  
\*\*\*\*\*

Total effect of X on Y

| Effect | se    | t       | p     | LLCI  | ULCI  |
|--------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| c_ps   | c_cs  |         |       |       |       |
| .0301  | .0022 | 13.4394 | .0000 | .0257 | .0345 |
| .0303  | .5344 |         |       |       |       |

Direct effect of X on Y

| Effect | se    | t      | p     | LLCI  | ULCI  |
|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| c'_ps  | c'_cs |        |       |       |       |
| .0153  | .0028 | 5.5197 | .0000 | .0098 | .0207 |
| .0154  | .2713 |        |       |       |       |

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

|          | Effect | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|----------|--------|--------|----------|----------|
| SUM_UWES | .0148  | .0019  | .0112    | .0185    |

Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

|          | Effect | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|----------|--------|--------|----------|----------|
| SUM_UWES | .0149  | .0019  | .0114    | .0187    |

Completely standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

|          | Effect | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|----------|--------|--------|----------|----------|
| SUM_UWES | .2631  | .0324  | .2008    | .3279    |

\*\*\*\*\* ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS  
\*\*\*\*\*

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:  
95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:  
10000

----- END MATRIX -----

