

Toxic Staffrooms: Investigating Workplace Bullying and Job Satisfaction among Secondary School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in the Gombak District. A total of 261 teachers participated in the study, which employed a quantitative research design using structured questionnaires to collect data. Inferential statistical analyses, including the Independent Sample T-Test and Pearson correlation, were conducted to examine the relationship between the variables. The results of the Independent Sample T-Test indicated no statistically significant difference in workplace bullying ($t(259) = 1.212, p = 0.226$) or job satisfaction ($t(136.78) = -1.350, p = 0.179$) between the two groups, suggesting that group differences were minimal. However, the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong and significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction ($r = -0.854, p < 0.001$). This finding implies that as experiences of workplace bullying increase, levels of job satisfaction among teachers significantly decrease. The results underscore the detrimental impact of workplace bullying on teachers' morale and professional well-being. Therefore, it is essential for school administrators and policymakers to foster a supportive and respectful work environment to enhance job satisfaction and overall teacher performance within the district.

Keywords: Workplace Bullying, Job Satisfaction, Secondary School Teachers, Gombak District, Work Environment

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' job satisfaction plays a vital role in maintaining a positive school environment and achieving educational goals. However, workplace bullying has become a growing concern in schools, affecting teachers' emotional well-being and performance (Abdullah et al., 2021). Workplace bullying involves repeated and intentional behaviors such as verbal abuse, exclusion, and unfair treatment that cause psychological harm (Ng et al., 2021). These behaviors may come from administrators, colleagues, or even students, creating a stressful and hostile work environment (Ismail & Mahmood, 2023). Job satisfaction refers to how content individuals feel about their work and is strongly linked to motivation, performance, and teacher retention (Rahman et al., 2020). When teachers experience bullying, their job satisfaction decreases, often leading to emotional exhaustion, absenteeism, and intentions to leave the profession (Lee et al., 2022; Yusuf et al., 2023). This situation not only affects teachers' well-being but can also influence students' learning outcomes and the overall school climate. In Malaysia, workplace bullying among educators has gained attention, yet limited research focuses on its direct impact on teachers' job satisfaction, especially in specific areas such as the Gombak District (Abdullah et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in Gombak. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for school leaders and policymakers in creating a healthier and more supportive work environment for teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace bullying has become a serious concern in the education sector as it negatively affects teachers' well-being and job performance. It is defined as repeated mistreatment that causes psychological harm, including verbal abuse, social exclusion, and unfair criticism (Salin & Notelaers, 2020). In schools, bullying can occur between administrators, colleagues, students, or parents, often taking subtle forms such as professional isolation, excessive workload, or denial of responsibilities (Shamsudin & Rahmat, 2020). Ahmad et al. (2023) found that bullying is common in Malaysian secondary schools but often underreported due to fear of retaliation. Teachers who experience such treatment tend to face emotional distress, helplessness, and reduced motivation.

Similarly, Ismail et al. (2022) discovered that teachers in urban areas such as Gombak often experience psychological bullying, including exclusion from decision-making and public humiliation, which lowers their self-esteem and professional performance. According to Tan and Abdullah (2023), inadequate administrative intervention and unclear reporting procedures allow bullying to continue, emphasizing the need for stronger leadership and effective support systems. Lee et al. (2024) further explained that workplace bullying should be viewed as an organizational issue that influences school culture, teacher retention, and student learning outcomes.

Job satisfaction refers to the positive emotional state that individuals experience toward their job and is essential for teachers' motivation and performance (Ahmad & Omar, 2021). Teachers who feel appreciated, respected, and supported are more likely to show higher engagement and professional commitment. Ali and Jamal (2020) identified factors such as leadership support, work-life balance, and professional development as key contributors to job satisfaction among Malaysian teachers. On the other hand, Ismail et al. (2022) reported that lack of recognition, heavy workloads, and poor communication significantly reduce satisfaction levels, leading to emotional exhaustion and low morale. In Gombak, differences in school leadership and resources create variations in how teachers experience job satisfaction. Lee et al. (2024) found that supportive and collaborative school environments enhance teachers' sense of belonging and fulfillment. Similarly, Tan and Abdullah (2023) observed that wellness programs such as counseling and mental health awareness initiatives contribute to higher satisfaction levels among teachers by promoting emotional stability and a sense of security.

Research consistently shows a negative relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. Teachers who experience bullying tend to lose confidence, motivation, and emotional balance (Jung & Yoon, 2021). Ahmad and Jantan (2022) found that emotional bullying, such as sarcasm, exclusion, and harsh feedback, leads to dissatisfaction and increased intentions to resign among Malaysian teachers. Turan and Koçak (2021) also reported that bullying contributes to stress, absenteeism, and emotional detachment, which weaken teachers' professional identity. Shamsudin and Rahmat (2020) noted that younger teachers are more vulnerable to bullying, and its effects on their job satisfaction are often more severe than those of experienced educators. However, positive collegial relationships can help reduce these negative effects. Lee et al. (2024) emphasized that strong peer support and mentorship programs help maintain teachers' job satisfaction even in challenging environments. In the context of Gombak, understanding the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction is crucial for developing effective strategies and policies to ensure teachers' well-being and a healthy school environment.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in the Gombak District. Quantitative research allows the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify trends and test hypotheses objectively (Apuke, 2017). A correlational approach was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables without any manipulation (Bryman, 2016). Data were collected through a standardized questionnaire adapted from previous validated instruments to ensure accuracy and reliability. Regression analysis was applied to determine whether workplace bullying significantly influences job satisfaction (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2014). This design was chosen as it provides measurable and evidence-based findings relevant to educational settings.

Convenience sampling was used to select participants due to its cost-effectiveness and accessibility to the target group, namely secondary school teachers in Gombak. This method is widely accepted in educational research when the entire population is difficult to access (Yao et al., 2014). Although this technique may not fully represent the entire population, it offers meaningful insights within the study's time and resource limitations (Golzar et al., 2022). The inclusion criteria required participants to be full-time secondary school teachers currently employed in Gombak. A pilot test involving 30 teachers was conducted to ensure the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire items before the main data collection.

According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE, 2020), Gombak District has approximately 30 secondary schools with an estimated total of 2,210 teachers. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, a population of over 2,000 requires about 322 respondents for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. However, considering time, accessibility, and resource limitations, a target sample size of 250 respondents was determined to be adequate and statistically acceptable for this study.

The research process began after approval from the academic supervisor. A comprehensive review of literature related to workplace bullying and job satisfaction was conducted to establish the theoretical foundation. The questionnaire was then developed and underwent back-to-back translation between English and Bahasa Melayu to ensure linguistic and conceptual accuracy (Brislin, 1970). A pilot test involving 15 teachers was carried out to test the instrument's reliability and clarity before the main survey distribution.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections: Section A (Demographic Information), Section B (Workplace Bullying), and Section C (Job Satisfaction). Sections B and C used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Section B was adapted from the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) developed by Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009), while Section C included established measures of teacher job satisfaction. The pilot test confirmed that the instrument was reliable and suitable for use in the Malaysian context.

RESULTS

Inferential statistics were used to examine the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in the Gombak District. Inferential analysis allows conclusions to be drawn about a population based on sample data, primarily through hypothesis testing to determine whether relationships between variables are statistically significant (Bhandari, 2020).

Independent Sample T-Test Analysis

An Independent Sample T-Test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences between the two groups in terms of workplace bullying and job satisfaction. For workplace bullying, Levene's test indicated that equal variances could be assumed ($F = 3.072$, $p = 0.081$). The results showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t(259) = 1.212$, $p = 0.226$). The 95% confidence interval (-1.53 to 6.43) included zero, confirming that the difference was not statistically significant despite the mean difference of 2.45.

For job satisfaction, Levene's test showed a significant difference in variances ($F = 8.473$, $p = 0.004$); therefore, equal variances were not assumed. The t-test results indicated no statistically significant difference between the groups ($t(136.78) = -1.350$, $p = 0.179$). The mean difference was -1.87, with a 95% confidence interval (-4.60 to 0.87), which also contained zero, confirming the absence of a meaningful difference in satisfaction levels. These findings suggest that workplace bullying and job satisfaction levels did not differ significantly between the groups studied.

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Bullying	Equal variances assumed	3.072	.081	1.212	259	.226
Satisfaction	Equal variances assumed	8.473	.004	-1.423	259	.156

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. The results revealed a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.854$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a significant inverse relationship between the two variables. This means that as experiences of workplace bullying increase, teachers' job satisfaction decreases significantly. The strong correlation demonstrates that workplace bullying has a substantial negative impact on teachers' morale and professional well-being.

		Bullying	Satisfaction
Bullying	Pearson Correlation	1	-.854
	Sig.(2-tailed)		<.001
	N	261	261
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	-.854	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	261	261

The analysis confirmed that workplace bullying is strongly and negatively associated with job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in the Gombak District. Although the Independent Sample T-Test results did not show significant group differences, the correlation analysis provided clear evidence of the negative link between bullying and job satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of addressing workplace bullying in schools to enhance teachers' motivation, emotional well-being, and overall job satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine whether workplace bullying experiences differed by gender among secondary school teachers in the Gombak District. The results showed that female teachers reported slightly higher bullying scores than male teachers; however, the difference was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). This indicates that workplace bullying is not influenced by gender.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that workplace bullying affects both genders and is more strongly associated with organizational culture and power dynamics rather than gender differences (Salin & Hoel, 2020). Although some research suggested that women may be more vulnerable to bullying due to gender stereotypes and social expectations (Escartín, 2016), other studies found no meaningful gender differences (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Since both male and female teachers share similar work environments and responsibilities, the absence of significant gender differences in bullying experiences is understandable.

Supporting evidence from Khairallah et al. (2023) indicated that while female teachers experienced greater emotional exhaustion as a result of bullying, the gender effect varied across contexts. Likewise, reported no significant relationship between gender and bullying once other variables such as age and employment status were controlled. These findings suggest that bullying in educational settings is more closely related to workplace dynamics and leadership practices than to gender itself.

The analysis of job satisfaction also revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that both genders experience similar levels of satisfaction in their profession. The finding aligns with earlier research emphasizing that job satisfaction depends largely on factors such as leadership support, working conditions, and school climate, rather than on gender (Buitendach & De Witte, 2005; Judge & Klinger, 2008).

Although some studies observed slightly lower satisfaction among female teachers due to heavier workloads or limited promotion opportunities (Perera et al., 2014), others found that job satisfaction varies depending on contextual factors such as collegial relationships, administrative support, and work-life balance (Rahman & Parveen, 2021). Research also indicated that school type and teaching experience could influence satisfaction levels, with teachers in supportive environments particularly in private institutions reporting higher satisfaction. Nevertheless, when teachers face demanding workloads and limited opportunities for growth, satisfaction tends to decline for both genders (Lee et al., 2024). This reinforces that institutional and organizational factor play a more dominant role than gender in shaping teachers' job satisfaction.

Correlation analysis revealed a strong and significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction ($r = -0.854$, $p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that increased experiences of workplace bullying are associated with decreased job satisfaction among teachers. The result supports existing literature emphasizing the harmful impact of bullying on employee morale, well-being, and productivity (Rayner et al., 2021; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Within the teaching profession, bullying undermines motivation and emotional resilience, which can affect both teachers' performance and the overall learning environment (Escartín, 2016).

Similar findings were reported in studies conducted across different countries. Jabeen et al. (2023) found that workplace bullying significantly reduced teachers' job satisfaction and performance in Pakistan. Iheka (2025) also observed a significant negative relationship between administrative bullying and teachers' satisfaction in Nigeria, highlighting the emotional strain caused by such behaviors. Likewise, Mousa Awer (2023) reported that administrative bullying had a significant negative impact on job satisfaction among teachers in Palestine. Across these studies, bullying consistently emerged as a major predictor of reduced satisfaction and increased psychological distress among educators.

Collectively, these findings indicate that workplace bullying significantly decreases job satisfaction among teachers, regardless of gender or cultural context. Addressing bullying through effective school leadership, clear reporting mechanisms, and supportive policies is therefore essential to improve teachers' well-being, motivation, and commitment to their profession.

Overall, the study found that gender does not significantly influence workplace bullying or job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in the Gombak District. However, workplace bullying has a strong negative effect on job satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of fostering a positive school climate and implementing anti-bullying measures to enhance teacher morale, job satisfaction, and retention.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in the Gombak District, Malaysia. Using a quantitative, correlational research design, data were collected through a standardized questionnaire distributed to teachers across selected schools. The analysis focused on identifying whether gender differences influenced experiences of workplace bullying and job satisfaction, and whether workplace bullying significantly affected teachers' job satisfaction levels.

The findings revealed no significant gender differences in the experience of workplace bullying or in job satisfaction levels. This suggests that both male and female teachers face similar workplace challenges and derive comparable levels of satisfaction from their profession. These results align with existing literature, indicating that factors such as organizational climate, leadership style, and work environment exert a stronger influence on teachers' workplace experiences than gender differences.

However, a strong and statistically significant negative relationship was found between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. This means that as instances of bullying increase, teachers' satisfaction with their jobs decreases. The findings are consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the detrimental effects of workplace bullying on employees' psychological well-being, motivation, and professional performance. In the educational context, bullying undermines the school climate, lowers morale, and can contribute to teacher burnout and turnover.

The results of this study underscore the need for educational leaders and policymakers to address workplace bullying as a serious organizational issue. Implementing effective anti-bullying policies, promoting respectful communication, and providing emotional support for teachers can contribute to a more positive and productive work environment. School administrators play a crucial role in shaping the school culture by fostering mutual respect, fairness, and psychological safety among staff members.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that while gender does not significantly influence workplace bullying or job satisfaction, bullying itself remains a critical factor affecting teachers' overall well-being and professional fulfillment. Reducing workplace bullying is essential for enhancing job satisfaction, improving teacher retention, and ultimately ensuring a healthier and more supportive educational environment for both teachers and students.

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