

# Increasing Well-being in the Workplace: The Role of Job Autonomy

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## ABSTRACT

Detrimental behavior in the workplace such as turnover, absenteeism, and loss of productivity is a sign that employees have low well-being in the workplace. Employee well-being plays a crucial role in the company's sustainability. One of the factors that can affect workplace well-being is job autonomy. This study aimed to determine the effect of job autonomy on workplace well-being. This study used a quantitative regression analysis. Respondents were 322 employees with accidental sampling technique. The results of this study indicated that there was a positive and significant effect of job autonomy on workplace well-being. The higher the job autonomy, the higher the well-being in the workplace. This study proves that job autonomy can increase the well-being of employees in the workplace. Companies are advised to give autonomy at work to increase well-being in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Employee, job autonomy, workplace well-being

## INTRODUCTION

As a metropolitan city, Makassar in eastern Indonesia has various industrial activities in private and government companies. In a rapidly developing era, competition between industries is increasing, thus encouraging companies to make relentless efforts to build unique advantages (Azizah & Ratnaningsih, 2018). Human resources play an essential role as valuable assets for companies in the face of this increasingly fierce competition (Woo & Chelladurai, 2012). Effective human resource management is integral to a company's success. That makes company leaders aware of the value of human resources as a crucial part of the company (Maulana, 2018).

Company goals can be achieved if employees have excellent and optimal performance (Huang et al., 2016). Conversely, company goals can only be met if employee performance exceeds expectations. If the company wants better-performing employees, the leader must go beyond just assigning tasks to workers by providing motivation, gratitude, and support (Huda & Bahri, 2017). Companies can uphold and increase employee morale and motivation by implementing welfare programs (Hariandja, 2002). Therefore, companies need to prioritize the well-being of their employees, especially in the workplace. Employee well-being in the work environment is also often called workplace well-being.

Workplace well-being refers to the positive state of well-being experienced by employees with their overall emotions and personal and external values related to their work (Page, 2005). Bartels et al. (2019) state that this sense of well-being involves a subjective assessment of employees' capacity to grow and work effectively. The significance of workplace well-being lies in its contribution to the company's success and facilitating desired outcomes such as improved job performance and employee retention (Harter et al., 2002). Research conducted by Huang et al. (2016) found that employee well-being also has a role in fostering employee motivation to maximize company performance.

Today, employees' expectations of the workplace are growing. Many seek a job providing personal development, fulfillment, and well-being opportunities. Employees are increasingly looking to derive meaning, happiness, and social connections from a job and opportunities for professional learning and

personal growth (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020). Therefore, companies can benefit by taking a proactive approach to occupational health by supporting psychological functioning and individual mental health to improve employee productivity and quality of work (Sebastiano et al., 2017). On the other hand, some studies find that employees with a low level of well-being at work are more likely to leave the company, known as turnover (Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2020). Employees with low well-being will make poor decisions at work, be less productive, are more likely to lose their jobs, and continuously contribute less to the organization or company (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Thus, it can be concluded that employees low welfare at work can potentially cause adverse impacts that can harm the company.

Workplace well-being or employee well-being in the workplace is influenced by various things. Harahap (2021) suggests that five factors affect workplace well-being: meaningful work, capacity management, job crafting, job demands-resources, and job autonomy. One of the various factors that affect workplace well-being is job autonomy.

Job autonomy or work autonomy, according to Breugh (1985), is when employees are given the opportunity to be able to work freely and independently, schedule work, and determine the procedures they want to use in work or in carrying out work. Another opinion defines *job autonomy* as an opportunity an organization or company gives to provide freedom in work and flexibility to employees in completing work by selected work procedures (Huda & Bahri, 2017). Job autonomy means allowing employees to work in a way that suits them. With autonomy in the workplace, employees can decide how and when a job should be done (Taipale et al., 2011).

Promoting autonomy in the workplace means empowering employees to decide when to start work, providing oversight over work and the employee environment, and providing support rather than control. Employees tend to do their best work when they feel trusted (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020). When given a satisfactory level of job autonomy, employees can carry out tasks by efficiently applying knowledge, skills, and abilities. The results indicate that when employees gain independence and autonomy in the workplace, they will use their creativity and authority to cope with a job and have more opportunities to handle stress due to work situations (Petrou et al., 2012; Yang & Zhao, 2018). Granting work autonomy to employees can increase job satisfaction, organizational engagement, and mental health and reduce stress levels (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020; Petrou et al., 2012; Yang & Zhao, 2018).

Low autonomy in the workplace can lead to a variety of problems. Several studies have presented evidence indicating a variety of problems. Among them is a clear relationship between low job autonomy and an increased risk of mental health problems (Madsen et al., 2017; Theorell et al., 2015), somatic health problems (Ferrie et al., 2016; Theorell et al., 2016), absent due to illness (Clausen et al., 2014), substitution (Clausen & Borg, 2010; Hayes et al., 2012) and early retirement (Clausen et al., 2014; Knardahl et al., 2017).

In Indonesian context, the level of employee welfare seems to be relatively low. A survey conducted by Jobstreet in 2021 involving 17,623 employees as respondents revealed that 73% of employees in Indonesia expressed dissatisfaction with their current jobs. The top reasons cited by respondents for their dissatisfaction included inadequate pay, insufficient facilities, inadequate rewards, limited career advancement opportunities, job dissatisfaction, and differences in workload and bonus distribution. In addition, factors such as positive relationships with colleagues and superiors and hierarchical leadership styles that limit employee autonomy and stifle creativity also contribute to this problem (Jobstreet, 2022). In an international context, a study conducted by Gallup and Accenture in Melinda (2020) revealed that Indonesian employees ranked lowest regarding workplace well-being among the 30 countries surveyed, with only 18% reporting a sense of well-being at work.

Problems related to workplace well-being were also found in Makassar City, Indonesia. The authors of this article conducted preliminary data collection through interviews involving seven employees in Makassar City. The interview results indicate that there needs to be more workplace well-being given to employees in

Makassar City. Data collected from the interview were strengthened with preliminary data collected through a survey involving 62 employees in Makassar. The survey asked about the factors that encouraged and hindered employee workplace well-being. The preliminary data results indicate that autonomy still needs to be considered and granted.

In connection with the aforementioned initial data collection, it can be stated that when the employee has autonomy at work, his level of well-being may increase. This is supported by various studies that find that the higher the autonomy given at work, the higher the well-being of employees (Park & Searcy, 2012; Slemp et al., 2015; Thompson & Prottas, 2006; Wheatley, 2017; Yang & Zhao, 2018). Based on previous research, it was concluded that job autonomy can improve well-being in the workplace.

Various studies have examined job autonomy on well-being both domestically and abroad. However, based on a literature search, research related to workplace well-being and job autonomy in the context of Makassar City has yet to be widely studied. Therefore, researchers are interested in examining the effect of job autonomy on workplace well-being in the context of employees in the city of Makassar.

## METHOD

This study used a quantitative research design aimed to determine the effect of job autonomy on workplace well-being among employees in the city of Makassar, Indonesia. The data was collected using scales in a questionnaire. Job autonomy was measured by using a scale adopted from Breugh (1985), while workplace well-being was measured by using a scale adopted from Kun, Balogh, and Krasz (2017). Quantitative data were gathered from 322 employees. The employees were collected using the accidental sampling method, and the data were analyzed through descriptive analysis and quantitative regression approach. Before the data collection, the researcher obtained permission from all the employees involved through informed consent in the questionnaire.

## FINDINGS

Respondents in this study amounted to 322 employees, consisting of men and women with an age range of 20-65 years with a workplace domicile in the city of Makassar.

Table I. Demographic Data

Demographic Data		N	(%)
Gender	Male	151	47
	Female	171	53
Age	20 – 30 years old	143	44
	31 – 40 years old	100	31
	41 – 50 years old	40	13
	51 – 65 years old	39	12
Education	S3	1	0,3
	S2	54	17
	S1 / D – IV	174	54
	Diploma	24	7,5
	SMA / SMK	69	21,5
Workplace	BUMN	54	17
	Educational Institutions	106	33
	Office/government service	91	28
	National/multinational companies	20	6
	Small and medium scale companies	51	16
Years of Service	< 1 years	14	4
	1 – 3 years	93	29
	4 – 9 years	108	34
	> 10 years	107	33

Table I depicts the demographic data of this study. The majority of respondents were female (53%), aged around 20-30 years old (44%), having S1/bachelors as the educational background (54%), working in educational institutions (33%) and having tenure from 4 to 9 years (34%). The levels of job autonomy and workplace well-being were categorized in the moderate level.

Table II. Regression Analysis

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	SE	t	p
Constant	0,257	0,066	3,177	0,160	19,884	0,000
Job Autonomy			0,204	0,043	4,752	0,000

The following are the results of the regression analysis, which can be seen in the following table. Table II indicates that job autonomy had a positive and significant effect on workplace well-being ( $R = 0.257$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with 6.6% of the job autonomy variable contributing to explaining the variance in workplace well-being ( $R^2 = 0.066$ ). Furthermore, the beta value (estimate) was positive, which means that the higher the job autonomy, the higher the workplace well-being of the employee.

In addition, the results of the analysis also indicate that the beta value on the constant ( $\alpha$ ) was 3.177 with a significance value of 0.000. Then, the estimated value / beta ( $\beta$ ) in the job autonomy variable was 0.204 with a significance value of 0.000. Based on the estimated / beta value, the results of the regression line equation are obtained as follows:

$$Y = 3,177 + 0,204 X$$

Based on the results of the equation, it is known that job autonomy has a positive influence on workplace well-being. A positive influence means that the higher the job autonomy, the higher the workplace well-being of employees. So, if the job autonomy score increases by 1 point, then workplace well-being will also increase by 0.204 points. The line graph of the regression equation can be seen in figure 1 below.

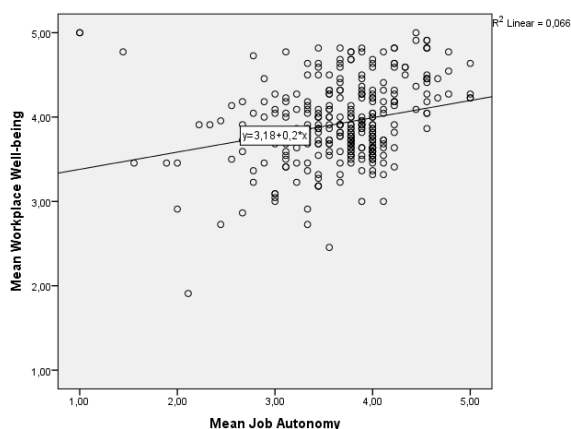


Fig.1 Regression equation line graph

## DISCUSSIONS

The results of the descriptive analysis indicate that most employees in Makassar City have job autonomy in the moderate category. When employees are given job autonomy, they can effectively perform jobs such as production and service activities more efficiently using their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Park & Searcy, 2012). Thompson and Prottas (2006) suggest that employees with higher levels of job autonomy are more likely to feel satisfied with their work, family, and life in general, experience a more positive spillover between work and home, less likely to think about finding a new job, and less likely to feel stressed or

experience any form of work-family conflict. Job autonomy has also been characterized as a resource in the workplace that can play a role in attaining and maintaining outcomes pertinent to work performance, employee well-being, and the sustainability of work-life balance (Nielsen et al., 2017).

The results of the descriptive analysis indicate that most employees in Makassar City have workplace well-being in the moderate category. Well-being in the workplace is recognized as a fundamental element of a successful organization and contributes to desired outcomes (Slemp et al., 2015). Improved well-being correlates with positive changes in work-related outcomes. Taken together, the body of literature signals a positive relationship between individual-level well-being variables and the value of organizational outcomes in the workplace (Harter et al., 2002; Podsakoff et al., 2009; Sears et al., 2013). As a result, encouraging practices that enable well-being in the workplace is not only a valuable initiative for employees, but can also improve organizational-level performance (Slemp et al., 2015).

The results of the regression analysis indicate that there is a positive influence between job autonomy and employee workplace well-being. The results of this study are in line with similar studies that found that the higher the autonomy given at work, the higher the well-being in employees (Clausen et al., 2022; Park & Searcy, 2012; Slemp et al., 2015; Wheatley, 2017; Yang & Zhao, 2018). Granting autonomy in work is considered to be one of the best practices for employees to achieve better results (Park & Searcy, 2012). Furthermore, it has been found that the positive correlation between job autonomy and well-being is consistent across various job types, suggesting that these recommendations are relevant and can be granted to diverse job categories (Clausen et al., 2022). When autonomy is granted, employees gain a sense of trust and a sense of security. The trust given to employees will improve the psychological well-being of employees and provide the best work results (Yang & Zhao, 2018).

Initiatives aimed at increasing job autonomy can be implemented as interventions both at the organizational level and within work groups. Insights from prior research suggest that involving workers in job redesign through participative approaches can lead to positive outcomes in the relevance and sustainability of the redesign measures in the workplace (Meng et al., 2019; Nielsen & Randall, 2012). Additionally, it is reasonable to anticipate that a participative approach to job redesign could inherently elevate levels of job autonomy, as it grants workers influence over their psychosocial work environment, potentially contributing to improved worker well-being (Clausen et al., 2022).

Self Determination Theory (SDT) can provide insight into job autonomy and well-being in the workplace. Self Determination Theory is a widely recognized psychological theory that focuses on intrinsic motivation, psychological needs, and personal growth (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self Determination Theory emphasizes three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the desire to have control over one's own actions and decisions, competence involves feeling effective and capable in one's work, and relatedness refers to the need for meaningful social and rapport (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for autonomy in Self Determination Theory goes hand in hand with job autonomy. In the context of job autonomy and workplace well-being, Self Determination Theory signifies that providing a sense of autonomy to employees can produce significant positive effects. When employees have the freedom to make decisions and are in control of their work, it satisfies their need for autonomy. This, in turn, leads to increased motivation, engagement, job satisfaction, and higher well-being (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2017).

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study, researchers concluded that there is a positive influence of job autonomy on workplace well-being in employees in Makassar City. The positive influence of this study is that if the job autonomy score is high, the workplace well-being score is also high, and vice versa. It was also found that most employees in Makassar City have a moderate level of job autonomy and workplace well-being. This

research can become a basis for company or organization leaders to implement the granting of autonomy as a practice in improving the welfare of employees. Future researchers are advised to use other possible variables such as organizational culture, leadership style, and individual differences. Improvements to the scale items also need to be made so that they are adapted to the work culture of companies in Indonesia.

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