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The Relationship between Job Stress, Toxic Environment Workplace and Job Performance

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Abstract

Workplace stress and toxic environments are serious issues that can negatively impact employee performance and organisational productivity. However, the extent to which these factors influence job performance in Malaysia's private sector remains underexplored. This study addresses the need to understand how job stress and toxic workplace environments affect employee performance in the private sector of Johor. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 224 respondents through structured questionnaires. The study employed reliability testing, descriptive analysis, and Spearman correlation to analyse relationships among job stress, toxic environments, and job performance. Reliability assessments demonstrated acceptable internal consistency for the job stress questionnaire, toxic environment workplace questionnaire, and job performance questionnaire, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.74, 0.86, and 0.74, respectively. The findings revealed a weak positive correlation between job stress and job performance, suggesting that moderate levels of stress can stimulate productivity. Similarly, a minimal positive relationship between toxic workplace environments and job performance indicates that employees may adapt to adverse conditions to maintain productivity. Nonetheless, these effects are limited, underscoring the importance of addressing workplace stressors and environmental toxicity. This study highlights the critical need for organisations to implement measures that reduce stress and toxicity, ensuring employee well-being and sustained productivity. It also emphasises the potential of organisational culture and leadership as additional factors influencing job performance. Future research should explore these dimensions to provide a holistic understanding of workplace dynamics.

1. Introduction

Common toxic boss complaints include micro aggressive feedback, blatant double standards and making colleagues feel isolated. At its most extreme, this means bullying, harassment and workplace misconduct either perpetrated by managers or badly mishandled by bosses (News.com.au, 2024). According to Nini (2019), job performance describes the contribution of an individual to the overall success of an organization. On a more specific and measurable level, job performance can be broken down into different factors. Employees with different positions might experience different levels of organisational culture, although they are in the same

company. For instance, there might be new employees who feel less attached to the company than the senior employees (Hanisham *et al*., 2023).

In Malaysia, about half of the employees surveyed (51%) said that the pandemic has negatively impacted their career progression, and 67% are stressed about their finances. At the same time, there are a few employees who feel burnt out and feel that their productivity is low, and employees with poor productivity are more likely to feel a poor sense of work-life balance (Sunil, 2022). A survey on employee experience has found that Malaysian employees have become less engaged at work over the last 12 months. The Qualtrics' 2024 employee experience trends report has revealed that indicators of an optimal employee experience in Malaysia have fallen over the last 12 months as hybrid work arrangements evolve (Jamil, 2023). In the United States, 32 per cent of workers say they personally find their work stressful often or always. Instead, most workers report feeling stressed at work sometimes or less. Thus, 70 per cent of American workers think most other American workers "often" or "always" feel stressed on the job. Meanwhile, 39 per cent of Canadians say they "often" or "always" experience their own work as stressful, 72 per cent think most other Canadian workers experience a high level of stress at work (Shieman & Glavin, 2024). A toxic workplace environment is a description of the relationship between workers and the workplace (Azuma *et al*., 2014). According to Rasool *et al*. (2021), the results of their study confirmed that a toxic workplace environment has a negative connection with employee engagement, which reduces the individual worker's productivity. It is also noted that the workers' health is affected by high job demands and work pressures; as a result, effects such as headaches, personality disorders, anxiety disorders, insomnia, burnout and depression occur. Toxic emotions at work are a critical mediating variable between abusive supervision and both counterproductive work behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviour.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Job Performance

Job performance can be described as an employee's contribution to the success of the organisation (Koopmans *et al*., 2011). Maintain work motivation oriented to improving employee performance. It supports the leadership style to continuously improve employee performance and improve the development of innovative-oriented competencies and the use of technology to maintain and improve employee performance (Hajiali *et al*., 2022). According to Kahya (2009), task performance has been recognised by many researchers as the most important aspect of work behaviours and is synonymous with overall job performance. Employees' voluntary behaviours increase the organisation's ability to solve unanticipated problems and adapt to change, and these behaviours should serve to improve organisational effectiveness in most work settings. Job performance consists of specific job behaviours which include core job responsibilities. The employees use their technical skills and knowledge to produce goods or services through the organisation's core technical process, or when they accomplish specific tasks that support these core functions, they are engaging in task performance (Van Scooter, 2000).

2.2 Job Stress

Job stress or work-related conditions, whereas physical and emotional responses happen if the job's requirements do not match the employee's capabilities, which can even lead to poor health. It can be even worse if the employees do not receive enough support from their supervisors and colleagues (WHO, 2020). Each person has their own characteristics, and not everyone can accept the same job conditions and stress, which means what is stressful for this person may not be a problem for the other person. Job stress not only affects the employees but also the organisation. This means that it will also affect their performance, and this will show that the organisation is in a stressful condition (Atlindag, 2020).

2.2.1 The relationship between job stress and job performance

A previous study has shown that job stress relates positively to turnover intention, showing a significant relationship between job stress and job performance. Also, job stress in the work environment influences the job satisfaction of employees, which in turn leads to the intention to leave the job. Stress in the workplace will decrease job satisfaction and increase turnover. Also mentioned in this research. It is highly recommended that organisations invest time and resources toward discovering how job stressors might be managed for better performance, as well as for retaining employees in their jobs (Arshadi & Damiri, 2013).

2.3 Toxic Environment Workplace

Previous research concluded that the working environment factor is the most important factor, followed by working relationships and career development, that affected job stress among office workers (Khuong & Yen,

2016). Their job performance can be predicted by working factors as well as their job stress. The higher the unsatisfied with working factors and the higher the level of job stress, the lower the employee's performance. This researcher finds that the working relationship factor is the most important factor that affects employee job performance (Khuong & Yen, 2016).

2.3.1 The Relationship Between Toxic Environment Workplace and Job Performance

According to Al-Omari and Okasheh (2017), to increase employee job performance, employers should take the initiative to improve the working environment, and motivating employees will help them to increase their job performance. This will help them to achieve their goals and desired outcomes. Previous research has shown that toxic leadership will reduce employees' motivation, creativity, satisfaction, productivity, commitment, health problems, and stress, which will not only impact employees' performance but also the organisational performance. Becoming a better leader will lead to a better working environment, which indirectly will increase the employees' job performance (Rizani *et al*., 2022).

2.4 Job Stress, Toxic Environment Workplace and Job Performance

According to Sari and Dudija (2024), this elevated stress adversely affects job performance, resulting in reduced productivity, increased errors, and absenteeism. Furthermore, a toxic workplace environment has a negative relationship with project success, as it contributes to workplace stress, which makes employees unmotivated to work and reduces their productivity (Madhavi Avr & Rao, 2024). In addition, organisational support can mitigate these negative effects, enhancing employee commitment and performance (Wang *et al*., 2020).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

According to Gibson & Brown (2014), the essentials of action research design follow a characteristic cycle whereby initially an exploratory stance is adopted, where an understanding of a problem is developed, and plans are made for some form of interventional strategy. The design for this research is based on the quantitative approach in data collection. It is collecting quantitative data among the respondents. The target population of respondents for this study is employees from the private sector in Johor. This research aims to define the correlation between job stress, toxic workplace environment and job performance, and the results from the questionnaire will also provide information regarding the topic. Based on the report from SOCSO (Social Security Organisation), the number of population employees working in the private sector in Johor is 1,880,000.

3.2 Research Population and Sample

In this study, the target population in this study will be employees from the private sector in Malaysia. The number of population employees working in the private sector in Johor is 1,880,000. The size of the sample is sufficient to include the right components from the population, such that a study of the sample and comprehension of its properties or characteristics allows us to generalise those properties or characteristics to the population elements, which is known as the sample size. The total number of respondents will be collected based on Krejcie and Morgan's Table 1, which states that there will be 384 people who work in the private sector in Johor.

Table 1 *Determining sample size method*

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N	*S*	*N*	*S*	*N*	*S*
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	1000000	384

Note.—*N* is population size. *S* is sample size.
Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection is the procedure of collecting, measuring, and evaluating correct insights for a study using established, approved procedures. Usually, data collection will be the first and most significant phase during the research process. Once the data is collected, the researcher will evaluate their hypothesis. Data collection will be carried out by distributing questionnaires to the employees from the private sector in Malaysia. Likert scale will be used to measure respondent's perceptions. The data will be evaluated by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in terms of validity, reliability, correlation, and regression.

3.4 Pilot Study

According to (2017), a pilot study was performed reflecting all the procedures of the main study and validating the feasibility of the study. It provides necessary information not only for calculating the sample size but also for the assessment of all other aspects of the main study, minimising unnecessary effort from the researchers and participants, as well as the dissipation of research resources. Valuable information, not only for the researcher's main study but also for other similar studies.

3.5 Research Instrument

A research instrument is a type of equipment used to gather, quantify, and examine information about a topic. Scales, questionnaires, checklists, assessments, and surveys are a few types of research instruments. It is commonly known that researchers utilise questionnaires as a means of data collection to acquire information for their studies. In this chapter, 384 respondents complete an online survey that collects data using Google Forms and other similar methods. The questionnaire will use a five-point Likert scale in Sections B and C.

3.6 Reliability Analysis

A technique for assessing stability and consistency in any concept under analysis is called reliability analysis. A reliability analysis is conducted by the researcher, and the Cronbach's alpha method will be used for this study piece. Reliability test analysis is based on Koo and Li (2016) is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Reliability Analysis*

Cronbach's alpha	Internal Consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Moderate
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

3.7 Normality Test

The normality test is to determine whether the data is normally distributed or not. A normal distribution will be shown in a bell curve in the middle of the graph. This test was invented by Anderson and Darling in the year of 1954. Based on the normality test, if the data is showing a normally distributed, researchers can use parametric statistics, and the same goes for the other way. Table 3 shows the readiness level according to the mean interpretation.

Table 3 *Readiness level according to mean interpretation*

Score	Readiness Level
1.00 – 2.33	Weak
2.34 – 3.67	Moderate
3.68 – 5.00	High

4. Dana Analysis and Findings

4.1 Response Rate

The number of population employees working in the private sector in Johor is 1,880,000. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, 384 people who work in the private sector in Johor will be needed to answer questions. Distributions of the questionnaire have been made by the researcher through social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp, and based on it, a total of 224 respondents were received by the researcher out of the targeted 384 respondents. The response rate is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 *Survey return rate*

Items	Total
Sample Size	384
Questionnaire Distributed	384
Return Questionnaire	224
Questionnaire Rejected	0
Percentage Return	58.3%

The response rate is 58.3% which is below the 70%. There are several factors that could be a possible cause of the lower response rate. One of the factors is the lack of incentives; the questionnaire was distributed without offering any benefits or rewards to the employees. Other factors are company culture, which is a culture that does not emphasise open feedback and communication, and might result in lower engagement with surveys. In the future, other researchers can focus on a certain group of targeted respondents in order to get a better response rate.

4.2 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Based on Table 5, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the pilot study is job stress, toxic environment, workplace and job performance. Based on the data stated in the table. The value for Cronbach's Alpha is good and acceptable. After the pilot study has been conducted, the researcher proceeds with the data for the actual study, which shows a slight increase in the Cronbach's alpha value.

Table 5 *Reliability test for pilot study and actual study*

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha value for the pilot study (10 respondents)	Cronbach's Alpha value for the actual study (224 respondents)	No of items
Job Stress	0.74	0.74	3
Toxic Environment Workplace	0.76	0.86	6
Job Performance	0.61		7

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Profile

Table 6 shows the demographic profile of 224 respondents. The majority were female (58.5%), aged between 20–29 years (38.4%), with 3–10 years of working experience (50.4%). Most respondents held a degree (24.1%), followed by STPM (21.4%) and diploma (20.1%).

Table 6 *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Demographic Profile	Category	N = 224	Percent
Gender	Male	93	41.5%
	Female	131	58.5%
Age (Years)	Less than 20	20	8.9%
	20 – 29	86	38.4%
	30 – 39	58	25.9%
	40 – 49	30	13.4%
	Above than 49	30	14.3%
Working Experience	Less than 2 years	51	22.8%
	3 – 10 years	113	50.4%
	11 – 20 years	42	18.8%
	21 years and above	18	8%
Highest Education Level	SPM	31	13.8%
	STPM	48	21.4%
	Diploma	45	20.1%
	Degree	54	24.1%
	Master	28	12.5%
		18	18%

4.4 Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Table 7 presents the descriptive analysis for three main variables: Job Stress, Toxic Work Environment, and Job Performance, based on 224 respondents. Among the three items, task suitability (M=4.27, SD=1.21) and rest time availability (M=3.83, SD=1.59) were rated as high, while irregular working hours (M=3.57, SD=0.96) were rated as moderate. This indicates that stress is mainly linked to task demands and rest availability. Respondents highlighted insecurity (M=4.72, SD=0.86) and poor tools (M=4.65, SD=1.12) as the strongest toxic factors, both rated high. Noise level (M=2.44, SD=1.48) and poor communication (M=3.64, SD=1.18) were rated moderate, suggesting they are less dominant compared to other workplace stressors. All items under job performance were rated high, with increasing productivity (M=4.63, SD=0.57) and helping coworkers (M=4.48, SD=0.59) standing out. This shows that despite challenges in stress and toxic environment, employees generally maintain strong job performance.

Table 7 *Descriptive analysis of variables*

Variables	Item	N	Mean	SD	Level of Tendency
Job Stress	Task suitability	224	4.27	1.21	High
	Rest time availability		3.83	1.59	High
	Irregular working hour		3.57	0.96	Moderate
Toxic Environment Workplace	Poor tools	224	4.65	1.12	High
	Noise level		2.44	1.48	Moderate
	Insecurity		4.72	0.86	High
	Subjective supervisors		3.70	0.91	High
	Lack of rewards		3.85	0.52	High
	Poor communication		3.64	1.18	Moderate

Job Performance	Quality standards	224	4.41	0.63	High
	Maximizing results		4.38	0.59	High
	On-time completion		4.33	0.72	High
	Attendance except illness		4.50	0.63	High
	Timely arrival		4.37	0.71	High
	Helping coworkers		4.48	0.59	High
	Increasing productivity		4.63	0.57	High

4.5 Normality Test

The findings show that each variable's value does not follow a normal distribution. Based on Table 8, the results of the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests indicate that none of the variables are typically distributed. Therefore, the non-parametric test, which is Spearman Correlation, should be used.

Table 8 *Normality Test*

	Kolmogorov Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Job Stress	0.423	219	<.001	0.620	219	0.000
Toxic Environment Workplace	0.412	224	<.001	0.659	224	0.000
Job Performance	0.466	223	<.001	0.500	223	0.000

4.6 Spearman Correlation

Based on Table 9, Spearman correlation shows that job stress correlation is 0.328, slightly higher than the toxic environment workplace, which is 0.308. Variables are showing a weak to moderate relationship. Variables showing that there is a relationship between the variables and job performance, but the relationship is not strong. Hence, hypothesis 3 was accepted in this research. Meanwhile, a toxic workplace environment is showing a weak positive relationship with job performance. This shows the possibility that employees push themselves harder even though they are stressed and facing toxicity, but it is unsustainable because they only meet the target to avoid any conflict from happening.

Table 9 *Spearman correlation*

Variable		JS	TEW
JP	Correlation Coefficient	0.328	0.308
	Sig.(2tailed)	0.000	0.000

5. Conclusion

The job stress questionnaire revealed that job stress can be caused by unsuitable tasks, insufficient rest and irregular working hours, with a mean score range of 3.57 – 4.27. Thus, Spearman's correlation analysis showed a relationship between job stress and job performance. It shows that if job stress is slightly increased, job performance can still be controlled, most probably caused by moderate stress levels motivating employees to do better in the future by increasing their job performance.

Based on the reliability test for pilot study, the Cronbach's Alpha value for toxic environment workplace is 0.76 ad from the actual study there is a increased of the value which is resulting 0.86 showing a high reliability. From the descriptive analysis, researchers can see that all toxic environment factors listed in the questionnaire were rated at moderate and high with the mean scores between 2.44 – 4.72. Thus, from the Spearman analysis revealed that there is relationship between the toxic environment and job performance. From this result, we can conclude that even when employees work in a toxic environment workplace employees might be able to adapt with the situation and slowly maintains their performance levels even though they are facing a toxic environment workplace.

It can be proven that job stress and a toxic workplace environment do affect employees' job performance. However, the effects are based on their level of stress and toxicity. Therefore, precautionary measures should be taken by the organisations to ensure that those structures are put in place to manage stress and enhance the conditions of the workplace for ensured well-being and productivity of employees. Future studies should also consider other factors beyond job stress and working environment, such as the culture of an organisation, leadership, or employee engagement, that may play a role in the overall performance of the employees.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: ***study conception and design:*** *Nurul Aliah Nadia Suwito, Juzaimi Nasuredin;* ***data collection:*** *Nurul Aliah Nadia Suwito;* ***analysis and interpretation of results:*** *Nurul Aliah Nadia Suwito;* ***draft manuscript preparation:*** *Nurul Aliah Nadia Suwito, Juzaimi Nasuredin. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.*

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