

**MEDIATING EFFECT OF SUBCONTRACTOR  
BULLYING ON FACTORS INFLUENCING  
INTENTION TO QUIT**

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INTENTION TO QUIT**

by

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average variance extracted
CB-SEM	Co-variance Based Structured Equation Modeling
CIDB	Construction Industry Development Board
CR	Composite reliability
F2	Cross validated redundancy
GoF	Goodness of fit
H2	Cross validated communality
M&E	Mechanical and Electrical
$p$	Path coefficient
PC Sum	Prime cost sum
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling
POS	Perceived organisational support
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
PV Sum	Provisional sum
Q2	Predictive relevance
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SPSS	Statistical Packages for Social Sciences
VAF	Variance accounted for

**PEMBULIAN DI KALANGAN SUBKONTRAKTOR SEBAGAI  
PENGANTARA PADA FAKTOR-FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI NIAT  
UNTUK BERHENTI**

**ABSTRAK**

Buli di tempat kerja semakin dikenal pasti sebagai satu masalah serius. Menyedari masalah ini, banyak kajian telah dilakukan. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian-kajian tersebut hanya tertumpu pada bidang dan industri tertentu sahaja. Hanya beberapa kajian yang menumpukan kepada buli di projek pembinaan. Namun begitu, penyelidikan mengenai buli di projek pembinaan masih terhad terutamanya dari perspektif subkontraktor. Terdapat tiga objektif dalam kajian ini. Pertama, untuk mengkaji hubungan antara faktor membuli (kepimpinan kontraktor utama, organisasi kerja dan jenispekerjaan, dan budaya pembinaan) dan buli dalam kalangan subkontraktor (buli berasaskan kerja dan buli berasaskan fizikal) di projek pembinaan. Kedua, untuk menganalisis hubungan faktor membuli (kepimpinan kontraktor utama, organisasi kerja dan jenis kerja dan budaya pembinaan) dan buli dalam kalangan subkontraktor (buli berasaskan kerja dan buli berasaskan fizikal) terhadap niat subkontraktor untuk berhenti dari projek pembinaan. Ketiga, untuk menyiasat hubungan pengantara buli dalam subkontraktor (buli berdasarkan kerja dan buli yang berasaskan fizikal) dan faktor buli (kepimpinan kontraktor utama, organisasi kerja dan jenis pekerjaan dan budaya pembinaan) dengan niat untuk berhenti. Tinjauan soal selidik telah dilaksanakan pada kontraktor G6 dan G7 (n = 210) di Semenanjung Malaysia. Untuk analisis data, Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) telah dipilih dengan menggunakan perisian Smart PLS. Hasil kajian menunjukkan terdapat hubungan yang signifikan di antara



kepemimpinan kontraktor utama, organisasi projek dan reka bentuk pekerjaan dan budaya pembinaan dengan buli berasaskan kerja. Semua faktor buli subkontraktor menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan dengan buli berteraskan fizikal, kecuali untuk organisasi projek dan jenis pekerjaan. Penyelidikan ini juga mendapati hanya buli berasaskan fizikal yang didapati berkait rapat dengan niat untuk berhenti oleh subkontraktor. Untuk kesan pengantaraan pula, hanya buli berasaskan fizikal yang mempunyai kesan mediasi dalam hubungan budaya pembinaan dan niat untuk berhenti.

# **MEDIATING EFFECT OF SUBCONTRACTOR BULLYING ON FACTORS INFLUENCING INTENTION TO QUIT**

## **ABSTRACT**

Workplace bullying is gradually being identified as a serious problem in the work environment. Acknowledging this problem, a number of studies has been conducted to overcome this problem. However, the previous studies were focussing on different fields and industries. Only a few studies were focussing on workplace bullying in a construction project. However, studies on workplace bullying in construction projects remain scarce, particularly from the subcontractors' perspectives. There are three objectives in this study. First, to examine the relationship of bullying factors (main contractors' leadership, work organisation and job design and construction culture) and bullying among the subcontractors (work-based bullying and physical-based bullying) in construction projects. Second, to analyse the relationship between bullying factors (main contractors' leadership, work organisation and work design and construction culture) and bullying among the subcontractors (work-based bullying and physical-based bullying) towards the subcontractors' intention to quit from the construction projects. Third, to examine the relationship of bullying mediation among the subcontractors (work-based bullying and physical-based bullying) and bullying factors (main contractor leadership, work organisation and job design and construction culture) and the intention to quit. A questionnaire survey was administered to collect data among the contractors G6 and G7 (n=210) across Peninsular Malaysia. For the data analysis, Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used by using the Smart PLS software. The results of the study show that there is a significant relationship

between the main contractors' leadership, work organisation and job design and construction culture to the work-based bullying. Similarly, all subcontractors' bullying factors showed significant relationship to the physical-based bullying, except for work organisation and job design. This study also found that only physical-based bullying was found to be significantly associated with the intention to quit. For mediating effect, only the physical-based bullying has a mediating effect in the relationship between the construction culture and intention to quit.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

The very first official study pertaining to workplace bullying encounters was undertaken by Leymann (1990). He gathered the concept of bullying through a number of case studies amongst nurses who had committed or tried to commit suicide due to unfortunate events that befell upon them at their workplace (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). This concept of workplace bullying later evolved through time and has been classified into three genres: work-based bullying, personal-based bullying, and physical intimidating bullying. Ever since, vast studies pertaining to workplace bullying have been carried out across the globe and varied industries, for instance, healthcare industry (Khalib & Ngan, 2006; Hoosen & Callaghan, 2004; Merllie & Paoli, 2001), hospitality and tourism (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel, 2003; Liu, 2014; Ariza-Montez et al., 2017), and higher learning institutions (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Kircher, Stilwell, Talbot, & Chesborough, 2011). Such substantial studies have probed into various aspects of workplace bullying. Many researchers have focused on the types of bullying (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Akella, 2016), factors of workplace bullying (Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2007), impacts on victims and organisations (van Schalkwyk, Els & Rothmann., 2011; Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2008), as well as various correlations related to workplace bullying inclusive of essential variables such as role stressors, stress, and social climate (Baillien & De Witte, 2009; Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

Recent times have witnessed the expansion of studies concerning workplace bullying, particularly the impacts of bullying, such as burnout, intention to quit (Laschinger & Fida, 2014), job insecurity (Glambek, Matthiesen, Hetland & Einarsen, 2014), job satisfaction (Trépanier, Fernet & Austin, 2015), and job productivity (Samnani & Singh, 2014). As such, many studies have constructed models and frameworks to further depict the notion of workplace bullying, for example, studies on factors that elaborate the antecedents of workplace bullying (Hoel & Salin, 2003), and workplace bullying that leads to the intention to quit (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2004).

The construction arena is heavily based on projects; some on temporary basis, while others with a definite ending period (Turner, 2003). In temporary scenarios, professionals from different companies work together as an organisational setting to meet construction objectives. Hence, one can relate a construction project to a workplace for these groups of diverse professionals at a certain period of stipulated time. These parties normally consist of the main contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, consultants, and the owner of the project (Khan & Burn, 2013), wherein each has a major determinant role in determining the success of the project (Salleh, 2009). Each construction project is composed of two stages: pre-contract and post-contract. The pre-contract stage is when the client begins to realise his project, while the post-contract stage is when the construction project is awarded to the main contractor. Prior to that, the main contractor has the right to start work and at this stage, a subcontractor can be appointed for assistance at the construction site.

Ideally, the relationship between the main contractor and the subcontractor begins when the construction project is awarded to the subcontractor and work is

executed until completion (Zwick & Miller, 2004). Nevertheless, this particular relationship has its ups and downs; strengths and drawbacks (Chong, 2006). The subcontractor and the main contractor often have differing opinions and views regarding construction-related aspects. From the start, subcontractors would always suggest to stick to the lowest price (Reeves, 2002). In many cases, subcontractors have always insisted on reducing the price for the work due to the greed of the main contractor in gaining high profits (Zwick & Miller, 2004). As a result, subcontractors are often left with small percentages in profit margins (Wong, Teo & Cheung, 2010). In fact, a number of cases have highlighted the unjust side of the subcontractors. Based on an article published in The Telegraph entitled 'Construction Giants Bullying Small Businesses' (2012), a number of small subcontractors complained about the dismal practices of main contractors towards them. The survey findings indicated that 97% of 250 subcontracting firms had reported unfair treatments from main contractors, while only 5% received their payment within the stipulated date. In a worst-case scenario, the subcontractor even failed to pay wages to the employees and general workers, which halted the execution of the project. Unfortunately, this scenario appears to be a normal phenomenon practiced in Malaysia (Sunday Star, 2010).

Apart from financial matters, some other issues have also been raised related to the relationship between the main contractor and subcontractors. One refers to conflicting clauses found in the contracts. Instances of such conflicting clauses in subcontracts are typically associated to flow through, payment, indemnity, additional insurance, no damage for delay, partial lien waiver, and termination clauses (Thomas, 2014; Thomas & Flynn, 2011; Uher & Brand, 2008). In addition to those,

subcontractors would often directly proceed with the job before signing the actual contract, with a mere and simple issuance of 'letter of intent' by the main contractor (Thomas, 2014; Uher & Brand, 2008; Hidzir, Jaafar & Dahalan, 2015). If the subcontractor fails to comply with the clause stipulated in the contract, he would bear the risk of late payments, unfair compensation or non-payment of monthly interim payments, and even worse, being blacklisted from future projects with the same main contractors. Thus, the subcontractor does not have the power to refuse or to decline the direction set by the main contractor in matters related to construction and ultimately, the main contractors are bound to take advantage of their weaknesses (Arditi & Chotibhongs, 2005; Uher & Brand, 2008; Hidzir et al., 2015).

Additionally, the nature of the construction project can also be a ground for bullying to occur. One common example is the nature of working for long hours in a construction project. Sutherland & Davidson (1993) mentioned that most construction employees (including subcontractors) are forced to work for long hours to meet deadlines and handle excessive workloads. Gunning & Cooke (1996) found that construction employees are exposed to working with impossible deadlines, unrealistic demands from clients, lack of staff, working on multiple projects, and conflicts within the organization, and thus, suffer undue stress. Excessive workload causes stress and anxiety due to the intensive working hours within a limited time period (Cooper & Marshall, 1978). For instance, the United Kingdom (UK) construction team is always under increasing pressure from clients, both in the private and public sectors, to deliver projects faster, for better quality and lower cost (Egan, 1998; Carrillo, Ruikar & Fuller, 2013).

As for the case in Malaysia, a report published by Construction Industry Development Board (2017) showed that 229.0 billion of construction projects were awarded in 2016. It is a common practice in Malaysia that for each contract awarded; many subcontractors will be employed by the main contractor. A subcontractor is an individual hired by the main contractor to construct a part of the building works based on their expertise (Chamara, Waidyasekara & Mallawaarachchi, 2015). The use of subcontractors assists the main contractor in transferring risks, maximising quality, and ensuring a close relationship between parties, as well as reducing a contractor's overheads, money dependence, and workforce (Sozen & Kucuk, 1999; Mohamed & Terek, 2014). Subcontractors are expected to complete their tasks according to the due date stipulated in the contract. It is important for them to develop a good work plan and to strictly adhere to the implementation of the work plan in order to catch up with the deadline (Lu, Shen & Yam, 2008).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Unlike several prior studies pertaining to workplace bullying that suggest fixated and standard organisational setting (Hoosen & Callaghan, 2004; Khalib & Ngan, 2006; Merllie & Paoli, 2001, Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Ismail, 2009), the term 'workplace bullying' may be perceived differently within the construction organisation setting where the construction project is only a temporary organisation that involves various types of people/organisations with different roles. Interestingly, construction phases are very important as both contractors and subcontractors normally play a significant role in meeting project objectives within certain time frames (El-Karim, El-Nawawy & Abdel Alim, 2015). Therefore, a good relationship between the main contractor and the subcontractor is



essential to execute a project smoothly without any uprising issue (Kale & Ardit, 2001). Nevertheless, ample of evidence displays subcontractor bullying in construction projects. For instance, a delayed and non-payment by the main contractor to subcontractors forces them to take the blame if something unfortunate happens, work for extra hours to complete a construction project, troublesome clauses in the subcontract, and non-usage of subcontract in a project. Some case studies also showed evidence of verbal and hostile threats in construction project (White, 2006). Hence, in order to understand this problem, three main possible factors of occurrence have been identified: leadership style of the main contractor, work organisation and job design, as well as construction cultures.

In terms of main contractor leadership, numerous studies have proven the unjust treatment towards subcontractors. For example, Hinze & Tracey (1994) investigated 28 subcontractors, who claimed that they were treated unfairly as they had to accept the risk and take the responsibility for all bad things that happened during the construction. Most subcontractors are frightened to object as they dread losing the chance to secure the next tender with the same main contractor in the future (Kennedy, Morrison & Milne, 1997). According to Akintan and Morledge (2013), subcontractors are also blamed by the main contractor if any unfortunate event occurs on site. This is likely due to the claim by main contractors that it is the duty of the subcontractors to maintain safety at the construction site (Thomas, 2014). However, it must be known that these are shared duties between the main contractor and subcontractors.

In regard to work organisation and job design, the nature of construction projects themselves, which are constant and dynamic, plays an important role in

contributing to subcontractor bullying. Examples of bad work organisation and job design can be in terms of the lack of clear goals concerning the work, bad flow of information in workplace, lack of mutual conversation about work tasks, organisational constraints, lack of control over their work, and aggressive or unethical work environment (Hauge et al., 2007). In every construction stage, there will be many changes made based on client's requirements towards the building design (Alinaitwe, Widen, Mwakali & Hansson, 2007). Due to this, a construction project is often confronted with uncertainties. This job ambiguity may lead subcontractors to feel burdened and vulnerable, which may later encourage the occurrence of bullying (Huang, Huang, Lin & Ku, 2008).

A negative construction culture is also a factor to subcontractor bullying. The culture of a construction project is widely known as the industry of the three Ds: dull, dirty, and dangerous. Thus, it is expected that the prevalence of bullying in a construction project is high. Dainty, Bagilhole & Neale (2000) mentioned that most construction team players always find themselves in an extremely hostile environment. A hostile environment refers to multiple work sites issues that may include safety and discrimination amongst its workers (White, 2006). Furthermore, Transparency International (2005) described the construction industry as the most deceitful industry across nations. Falls Management Institute (FMI) (2004) stated that a construction project is a perfect setting for ethical dilemmas, with its low-price mentality, intense competition, and paper-thin margins.

Due to the issues mentioned above, it is expected that subcontractors may develop the intention to quit their workplace and the project altogether. The intention to quit is a voluntary decision made by employees to leave their organisation

(Appollis, 2010). Vilnius (2008) asserted that the construction industry is characterised by its constant increase of turnover rate. This was agreed by Pitt (2014) who cited that 6.6% of subcontractors did have intention to quit the construction industry. A few past studies had evaluated the relationship between workplace bullying and the intention to quit in an organisational setting (van Schalkwyk et al., 2011; Djurkovic et al., 2008; Nishii & Mayer, 2009). In the aspect of construction projects, many studies have looked into the intention to quit with other job stressors, except workplace bullying (Bowen, Cattell, Distiller & Edwards, 2008; Huang, Yang & Ou, 2007; Sun, 2011). Thus, the question arises if a relationship exists between bullying and intention to quit within this construction organisational setting.

Within the context of Malaysia, studies concerning workplace bullying are in scarcity. Studies carried out by local researchers appear to be more fixated on discovering the prevalence of workplace bullying in other industries, such as health care (Khalib & Ngan, 2006; Yuzana, Dempster & Stevenson, 2014), banking (Thamarakshan, 2015), as well as public and private services (Ismail, 2009; Nor Azimah & Anizan, 2012; Al Bir & Hassan, 2014; Omar, Mokhtar & Hamzah, 2015). For example, Azizi, Tan, Goh, Noordin, Yusof, Shahrin & Suhaila (2012) discussed the impact of workplace bullying on work performance, while Aisan (2011) investigated organisational factors amidst Malaysian public services.

Their study outcomes signified a high prevalence towards bullying at workplaces in Malaysia. Nonetheless, researches on workplace bullying in construction projects, particularly from the stance of subcontractors, seem inadequate for both Malaysia and the international contexts. As for the international context, most studies related to workplace bullying within the construction industry placed

their focus on the predominance of bullying (Loper, 2001; Loosemore & Chau, 2002; McCormack, Djurkovic & Casimir, 2013) and preventive measures (McKay, 2015). The Census and Statistic Department of Hong Kong (2004) reported that about 55,318 workers had informed that they were not paid by the subcontractors and main contractors. Similar situations occur in Malaysian construction projects, wherein subcontractors do not receive payments for their work (Sunday Star, 2010). Therefore, with the abovementioned issues of ‘bullying’ within the construction industry, this research developed a model by examining the factors of bullying occurrences in construction projects from the stance of subcontractors with the hope that this study can serve as guidance to subcontractors in knowing their rights and altogether eliminate unjust treatments within the industry.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Based on the issues discussed above, a total of eight research questions have been identified in this study, namely:

**R1:** Do the factors of bullying (main contractor leadership, work organisation and job design, and construction culture) have positive relationships with subcontractor bullying (work-based bullying and physical intimidating bullying) in construction projects?

**R2:** Does subcontractor bullying (work-based bullying and physical intimidating bullying) have positive relationship with subcontractor’s intention to quit in construction projects?

**R3:** Does subcontractor bullying (work-based bullying and physical intimidating bullying) play a mediating role in the relationships between factors of bullying (main contractor leadership, work organisation and job design, and construction culture) and the intention to quit?

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This research outlines a total of eight objectives, as listed below:

1. To examine the relationship between factors of bullying (main contractor leadership, work organisation and job design, and construction culture) and subcontractor bullying (work-based bullying and physical intimidating bullying) in construction projects.
2. To analyse the relationships between factors of bullying (main contractor leadership, work organisation and job design, and construction culture) and subcontractor bullying (work-based bullying and physical intimidating bullying) towards subcontractor's intention to quit construction projects.
3. To investigate the mediating role of subcontractor bullying (work-based bullying and physical intimidating bullying) for relationships between factors of bullying (main contractor leadership, work organisation and job design, and construction culture) and the intention to quit.

## **1.5 Significance of this Research**

The concept of workplace bullying has been explored in varied industries by placing focus on standard workplace organisation settings. This study examined the perspective of work organisation based on the viewpoints of subcontractors. In Malaysia, about 80% to 90% of project implementations are executed by subcontractors. As such, numerous issues have surfaced concerning bullying in construction projects. By looking into their problems, this research significantly contributes to the construction industry. Upon determining the factors related to subcontractor bullying in construction projects, this study is able to enlighten better environment on site, as well as better performance of construction projects.

This study examined the relationship between workplace bullying and the intention to quit. Hauge et al. (2007) mentioned that workplace bullying resulted in approximately 1% increase in the intention to quit. Even though the percentage is low, the figure may soar in the upcoming years. Furthermore, high percentage of turnover rate reflects the bad reputation of a company (Sinniah & Mohammed Kamil, 2017). Besides, a consultancy report highlighted 6% of involuntary turnover and 13% of voluntary turnover recorded amongst Malaysia workers, which appears to be the second highest in the South-East Asia (Hewitt, 2017). Previous studies have focused on the relationship between workplace bullying and the intention to quit with potential mediators (Hoel, Einarsen, & Cooper, 2003). The studies mainly concentrated on the standard organisation setting. However, none has directly assessed workplace bullying with the intention to quit, particularly from the perspective of subcontractors.

## **1.6 Scope of the Research**

The scope of this research had been limited to the perspective of G6 and G7 contractors in the Malaysian construction industry. G6 and G7 contractors were chosen because they represent conglomerates with projects worth exceeding RM 10 million. This research was conducted across Peninsular Malaysia.

## **1.7 Definitions of Key Terms**

The list of definition of key terms adopted in this research is as defined by previous scholars who investigated the subject matter in the related construction field of work. However, in some cases, an operation definition is used by the researcher with a specific objective to ensure that accurate definitions are applied within the context of the research.

*Workplace bullying:* Harassing, offending, socially excluding someone, or negatively affecting someone's work. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months) (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003, p. 15).

*Target:* A person or a particular group of people that something is directed at, or that something is intended for (Cambridge University Press, 2018). In this research context, a target is a person being bullied.

*Perpetrator:* The person who carries out a harmful, illegal, or immoral act (Cambridge University Press, 2018). In this research context, a perpetrator is a person who commits the act of bullying.

*Construction project:* A temporary multi-organisation that comprises of different project participants who are its peripheral employees (Fellows & Liu, 2008).

*Subcontractor:* An individual hired by the main contractor to construct any part of building works based on his skill in the area (Chamara et al., 2015).

*Subcontractor bullying:* Intentional and recurrent actions that occur repeatedly over an extended period of time by the main contractor/client against a subcontractor. It can be in the form of verbal abuse, or behaviour that degrades, threatens, and/or disrupts the subcontractor's work productivity or status.

*Main contractor leadership:* The ability of the main contractor to lead his construction workers or underlings in a construction site.

*Work organisation and job design:* A clear definition of job scope in a construction project and the requirements/methods to complete a set of job tasks.

*Construction culture:* The characteristics of the construction industry (Ankrah, Proverbs & Debrah, 2009).



*Intention to quit:* The level to which an individual considers leaving the relationship with the current community or employer (Kim, Price, Muller & Watson, 1996).

## **1.8 Research Methodology**

This research employed the deductive approach to address the research objectives and the research questions. Deductive research is frequently applied in quantitative survey. Hence, this research adopted the quantitative survey method through the use of questionnaires. As such, a questionnaire was developed from the literature and other related established questionnaires, which consisted of four categories: demographic, factors of occurrence, types of subcontractor bullying, and the intention to quit. A population survey was conducted amongst G6 and G7 contractors across Peninsular Malaysia. The collected data were analysed by using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Partial Least Square – Square Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method. SPSS was used for basic statistical analysis to determine frequencies, mean values, outliers, and T-test analysis, while PLS-SEM was applied to assess measurement model and structural model. A comprehensive discussion on the research methodology is specified in Chapter Four.

## **1.9 Overview of the Chapters**

Chapter One provides a general introduction of the research by presenting the background research, the issues brought to the research, as well as its aims and objectives. It also provides the significance of the research, the scope of the research, its research methodology, and an outline of the chapters.

Chapter Two presents a comprehensive review of the existing literature regarding the topic studied; workplace bullying, from a wide range of disciplines. Its purpose is to assess how bullying was studied in the literature, as well as how it suits the context of construction industry.

Chapter Three focuses on the literature review pertaining to the construction industry. It covers the definition of the construction industry, all related details, and its first impression. It further examines subcontractors and the issues related to bullying. The findings from the literature review aid in developing the conceptual framework of subcontractor bullying within the construction industry.

Chapter Four elaborates the methodology employed in this research. This chapter includes a depiction of the research methods, the design of the questionnaires, sampling frame, and selection of the respondents. This chapter provides the necessary information regarding data collection, processing, and analyses.

Chapter Five presents the results and the analysis of the findings based on the qualitative approach, as outlined in Chapter Four.

Chapter Six discusses the final conclusions drawn from the findings presented in Chapter Five regarding subcontractor bullying within the construction industry. This chapter also includes the study limitations and several recommendations for future studies.

## **1.10 Summary of the Chapter**

Overall, this chapter presents an overview on why, what, and how this research had been conducted. The next chapters, Chapters Two and Three, depict the literature review concerning workplace bullying and construction projects. The literature review is essential for developing the framework model of subcontractor bullying in construction projects.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **WORKPLACE BULLYING**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The literature review performed in this chapter identifies the meaning of workplace bullying as perceived by a wide range of disciplines. The chapter begins with an introduction to the ecological system theory that serves as an important role in studying workplace bullying as a whole concept. Later, an extensive review of literature pertaining to the earlier concept of workplace bullying, its related definitions and dimensions, the types of workplace bullying, antecedents or factors of occurrence of workplace bullying, and the impact of workplace bullying is presented. Next, the second part of this chapter generally describes the occurrence of workplace bullying associated to the construction industry.

#### **2.2 Ecological System Theory**

Initially, the ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was developed to provide a framework for human development. This theory highlights that human development occurs within a series of interconnected systems that coexists between each other. Five basic systems are embedded in the ecological theory, namely, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Table 2.1 presents the summary of systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner.

Table 2.1 Summary of Ecological System Theory

<b>System</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Microsystem</b>	The immediate contexts where individual participates and direct contact occurs between them
<b>Mesosystem</b>	Influences between members of the microsystems, e.g. school and family relationships
<b>Exosystem</b>	External influences on the individual from systems that is not directly related to the microsystem, e.g. policy and legislation
<b>Macrosystem</b>	Larger cultural and social influences to the microsystem, e.g. social and economic status
<b>Chronosystem</b>	Changes in all systems across time

Source: Brofenbrenner (1979)

At the microsystem level, Brofenbrenner (2002) describes microsystem as the central counterparts in the human development. It is a positive relationship that is influenced by family and peers. Rogoff (2003) believed that the influences in this microsystem level possess the greatest impact upon human development, even though other strong interactions by other levels can still affect the central counterparts. As for this level, it is important to investigate the target and the perpetrator of workplace bullying as the central part of the circle. Under this frame, the personality of both the target and the perpetrator should be studied in order to determine their characters that may or may not induce the occurrence of bullying at workplace. The discussion of the target and the perpetrator is further elaborated in Section 2.6.1 of this chapter.

The second level; mesosystem, describes the layer that is linked between the microsystems (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Mesosystem consists of social relationship between participants of the system. In the case of this research, the mesosystem deals

with the relationship between the target and the perpetrator at the workplace. In relation to workplace bullying, this setting can be seen under the organisational context, where it can happen amongst supervisor-supervisee, manager-employee, and employer-employee.

The third level refers to exosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) called this the setting transition as it provides the relations and the processes that take place between two or more settings containing the developing child. Berk (2000) described the exosystem as a larger social system that is not directly related to the child in the microsystem. However, this structure in this system will directly affect the child's development. Galinsky (1999) mentioned that exosystem can work in both positive and negative ways. A good implementation of it empowers the development of the child, while negative implementation degrades the child. As for this research, the exosystem level in workplace bullying can be related in the organisation of the workplace. For example, poor work organization reflects bad policies or negative leadership by the manager or employers. These problems are not directly under the power of the target or the perpetrator, but the implementation of this might exert an impact, i.e. workplace bullying to occur. Section 2.6.2 specifically depicts this subject matter.

Fourth, the macrosystem refers to *“a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context”* (Harkonen, 2007, p. 12). Berk (2000) mentioned that a macrosystem is constituted of cultural standards, customs, and rules that serve as an outer layer of the child. A macrosystem resembles a flowing authority throughout the interactions of all systems (Belgrave & Brevard, 2015). In this case, a good macrosystem provides positive impact upon microsystem

and vice versa. At this level, the culture of an organisation may play an important role in workplace bullying.

The last system in the ecological system theory is chronosystem. Chronosystem is the progression or stream of development of the external systems that occurs in a timely manner. The chronosystem models cover either a short or long period of time (Bronfenbrenner 1989, 201-202).

Many early childhood researchers have integrated the ecological system theory into their studies. For instance, some focused on community violence and child maltreatment (Chiccheti & Lynch, 1993), childhood education (Penn, 2005), obesity among children (Oplainski, 2006), social resilience among children (Tidball & Krasny, 2011) and early child development (Krishnan, 2010). Within the bullying context, Hong & Esplage (2012) used ecological system theory to study the factors and the outcomes of peer bullying among school children. In their study, the ecological system theory was employed to investigate the factors and the outcomes of peer bullying in various systems among the children.

Although the ecological system theory has been used widely in early childhood researches, not many have been used to study adults. In fact, only two social studies have adapted the ecological system theory for management studies; job satisfaction, home satisfaction, and spousal support for dual-earner families (Kulik & Rayyan, 2006), as well as corporate social responsibility (Musgrave & Woodward, 2016). As for the workplace bullying context, Johnson (2011) adopted the ecological system theory to study workplace bullying among nurses. The study concluded that work

environment within the healthcare industries is in an interconnected series and plays a huge role in inducing bullying at every level of the system.

Workplace bullying is a nested problem as it does not happen in isolation. Ideally, there will be many contributing factors of occurrence and outcomes within the context of workplace bullying in this interconnected relationship. Peterson (2002) suggested that workplace bullying occurs in a combination of personal characteristic and organisational characteristics. Thus, factors of occurrence and outcomes of workplace bullying can be determined from the ecological perspective. This is agreed by Johnson (2011), who suggested that ecological system theory can be used as guidance in formulating questions for an empirical research associated to bullying. Therefore, every element at each of these system levels may serve as factors of occurrence and outcomes of bullying.

### **2.3 The History Concept of Bullying**

Within the research field, the initial concept of bullying was introduced by Burk (1897). Only after a long gap, Heinemann (1972) reintroduced the concept of bullying (which he termed as mobbing) into the research field. Heinemann (1972) referred bullying as a definite type of aggression among high school students in Scandinavia. He specifically viewed bullying as violent behaviour projected by a group of people as perpetrator towards one single victim, or target.

Olweus (1978) later found that bullying does not always happen in a group of people, but also as an individual perpetrator. His research further explored a new concept of bullying, in which he studied the trait of facial expression and other forms



of indirect behaviour of the perpetrators. This discovery served that bullying does not only happen in the form of physical threats, but also in psychological and verbal threats towards the targets, and purposely made by one or more individuals.

Later, studies on bullying have been expanded and more traits have been discovered to add up to the concept of bullying. For instance, gossiping and spreading rumours (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992), indirect bullying (social exclusions or ostracism) (Bjorkqvist, 1994), unkind gestures and facial expressions (Olweus, 1999), and the modern type of bullying called cyber bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

This concept of bullying was later adopted to signify a similar type of negative behaviour among adults at workplace and termed as workplace bullying. The research related to workplace bullying was initially carried out by a Swedish therapist named Heinz Leymann (1990). To date, many researches about workplace bullying have been conducted across the globe to investigate the prevalence of workplace bullying in their countries (US Workplace Bullying Survey: September 2007; Ministry of Health and Welfare in Canada, 2013; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan, 2013). Such studies were conducted across various fields, such as healthcare industries (Khalib & Ngan, 2006; Hoosen & Callaghan, 2004; Merllie & Paoli, 2001), hospitality and tourism Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Liu, 2014; Ariza-Montez et al., 2017), and higher learning education (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Kircher et al., 2011). Many researchers also have contributed to different sets of knowledge that are particularly linked with workplace bullying, for instance, the studies on organisational antecedents of workplace bullying Tambur & Vadi, 2012;

Hoel & Salin, 2003; Azizi et al., 2012) and outcomes of workplace bullying (Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2010; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003).

In Malaysia, several studies have been conducted in various sectors of workplace. For example, in medical-based profession, Ruth, Samsiah, Hamidah & Santhna (2009) found that 3.7% of the nursing staffs were bullied every month with the average of 1.2% being bullied every day. Yuzana et al., (2014) described that almost 50% of employees in the healthcare industry were exposed to bullying at their workplace. In the research combining public and private sectors, Al bir & Hassan (2014) described that 39% of employees experienced negative behaviour at their workplace. Meanwhile, Omar et al. (2015) revealed a high percentage of workplace bullying occurrence in the public sector agency. Their study indicated more than 80% of public sector employees were exposed to workplace bullying in a weekly or daily basis for duration of six months.

From these high percentages, bullying does occur at Malaysian workplaces and the escalating percentages are rather alarming. Although studies related to workplace bullying seem to gain attention by researchers in Malaysia, not all industries are involved, except for the healthcare industry and the public sector. Furthermore, certain industries perceive different kind of bullying, when compared to the given definition of bullying. As such, the next section peels off what constitutes workplace bullying by understanding the very conception of workplace bullying through its definition.

## 2.4 Workplace Bullying and its Dimensions

There is no exact one definition of workplace bullying that fits all scenarios. Various researchers and non-practitioners describe workplace bullying differently based on their respectful contexts of their fields (Koo, 2007). Even in an organisation, the acceptance of what is bullying is dissimilar among individuals. According to Batur & Wistrom (2012), an employer and an employee may not share the same idea or mutual understanding regarding workplace bullying. Thus, it is crucial to apprehend the main criteria of workplace bullying in deciding the definition of workplace bullying.

Overall, there have been numerous discussions on the diverse definitions of workplace bullying. Table 2.2 lists the definitions made by past scholars. From these definitions, workplace bullying can be characterised into four main dimensions (Cowie, Jennifer, Neto, Angula, Peteira, Barrio & Ananiadou, 2000):

- 1) negative acts in nature
- 2) the frequency and the duration of negative acts
- 3) the negative impact to the target
- 4) imbalance power between the perpetrator and target

Table 2.2 Definitions by Scholars and Its Dimension of Workplace Bullying

Source	Definition	Negative Nature	Frequency and Duration	Reaction by the Target	Imbalance of Power
Leymann (1990)	<i>'Hostile and unethical communication that is directed in a systematic way by one or more persons, mainly towards one targeted individual who, due to bullying, is pushed into a helpless and defenceless position.'</i>	√			√
The Swedish National Board of Occupational Health and Safety (1994)	<i>'A recurrent reprehensible or distinctly negative actions which are directed against individual employees in an offensive manner and can result in those employees being placed outside the workplace community.'</i>	√			
Einarsen (1999)	<i>'The repeated actions and practices (of a perpetrator) that are directed to one or more workers, which are unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately, or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offense, distress, may interfere with job performance, and/or cause an unpleasant working environment.'</i>	√		√	
Namie & Namie (2003)	<i>'The deliberate, hurtful and repeated mistreatment of a target by a bully that is driven by the bully's desire to control the target.'</i>	√			√