

THE EFFECTS OF SUPERVISOR SUPPORT ON PRESENTEEISM AMONG GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES IN PUTRAJAYA

Mastura Mohamad¹
Sharifah Norhuda Syed Wahid²
Hazlin Hasan³

¹ Faculty of Business and Management Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pahang, Pahang, Malaysia
Email: masturamohdd@uitm.edu.my

² Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pahang, Pahang, Malaysia

Email: sha_norhuda@uitm.edu.my

³ Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pahang, Pahang, Malaysia
Email: hazlin665@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of supervisor support on presenteeism among the government employees as previous research has shown mixed findings on the notion that supervisor support is crucial in motivating and inspiring employees. Meanwhile, presenteeism has become a worldwide phenomenon and linked to the loss of productivity among employees more so than absenteeism, thus the need for the investigation. The regression analysis approach using IBM-SPSS AMOS 24 software was used to determine the effects of supervisor support on presenteeism of government employees. 108 respondents were selected using stratified sampling technique answered a set of questionnaires. The study found positive significant effect of supervisor support on presenteeism ($\beta = 0.45$, $p = < 0.001$) whereby presenteeism of employees has been expected to increase when supervisor's support was increased. The study concluded that the role of employer in an organization is very significant, thus, a better understanding on supervisor support would assist the organization in tackling issues that contribute further to presenteeism. By understanding these core management issues, the organization is expected to provide efficient service to the public, hence improved productivity of the public sector.*

Keywords: *Supervisor Support, Presenteeism, Regression Analysis*

Introduction

Presenteeism refers to the lost productivity that occurs when employees are not fully functioning in the workplace because of an illness, injury, or other condition. Even though the employee may be physically at work, they may not be able to fully perform their duties and are more likely to make mistakes on the job (Collins & Cartwright, 2012), (Ferreira et al., 2015). It is impossible for an employee who is engaged in this phenomenon to contribute a higher level of productivity as research has shown that presenteeism is linked to productivity loss (Ferreira et al., 2015). In another study, (Linna et al., 2010) indicated that the issues of presenteeism were found higher amongst service sector employees especially to the groups whose everyday tasks are to provide care or welfare services or teach or instruct. Due to the difficulty in finding a replacement and their sense of responsibility to clients as a result of the industry they worked in, these employees have a significantly higher risk of being at work when sick.

A survey conducted by (AIA Malaysia., 2017) found that an organization lost a total of 73.1% days per employee caused by employees who come to work despite of being sick, costing each organization RM2.27 million per year. Productivity development is critical for the country to keep on track toward its objective of becoming a developed nation (Malaysian Productivity Corporation., 2018). Hence, as suggested by (Luo et al., 2013), supervisor support plays an important role in motivating, encouraging and inspiring employees in an organization. Therefore, in relation to the above situation, the researchers found it interesting to investigate the effects of supervisor support on presenteeism among the government employees. The differences in previous research findings on the effects of supervisor support on presenteeism have also made it more significant for the researchers to test and observe the accuracy of the results. The managers in the public sector agencies should take appropriate steps in ensuring that these service providers who are directly linked to the productivity of the organization perform their services efficiently as it has a huge impact on the economic performance of the country, thus the result of the study would provide a clearer picture on the issues.

Literature Review

Supervisor Support

The degree to which a manager or leader in an organization values the contributions of their employees and care about their well-being is defined as supervisor support (Toolib & M. N. R., 2020), (Zhou et al., 2016), (Mohamed & M., 2016). As confirmed by (Luo et al., 2013), supervisor support may also increase the level of employee satisfaction in terms of their need to belong, to be cared for and valued that will help them to cope with the challenges in an organization. In this context, a supervisor plays an important role in making sure that all the employees' needs are fulfilled accordingly, besides providing appropriate assistance and appreciating the contributions given by the employees to the organization. The extent to which a supervisor values the contributions made by the employees give a huge impact towards the employee's performance. As proposed by (Lack, 2011), a supervisor might show support by hosting a wellness program for their staff to improve their job performance and health, which in turn, could lead to a reduction of presenteeism in the workplace. This statement is closely linked to the findings of (Mohamed & M., 2016) that stressed on the responsibility of supervisors in guiding and assessing the worker's work performance in an organization.

According to (Shimabuku & H., 2018), social support refers to the help that a worker can get from his or her supervisor, coworkers, family, and friends. In this situation, the support is provided in the form of encouragement from the supervisor and is defined by amicable

connections and collaborative activities. Other than that, a supervisor is someone who can deal with employee grievances and help them receive the resources that they need to meet the organization's objectives (Boz et al., 2009). Meanwhile (Zhang et al., 2020) in their study stated that an employee's demands for belonging may be nourished by supervisory assistance, motivating them to effectively deal with challenges like physical interruption of work. In addition, employees who work while ill, typically require more attention and may request extra resources to perform their task efficiently. As a result, supervisor support can reduce the link between presenteeism and emotional strain.

Besides that, (Lack, 2011) also stated that an employer could create an environment that supports employee-friendly strategies that will discourage unnecessary absence and decrease presenteeism. The establishment of organizational policies is important in an organization, but the content like encouraging the employees to stay at home while they are sick is an essential step in the process to decrease presenteeism (Lack, 2011). It is necessary for the supervisor to provide strong support that can help improve work environments by reducing employees stress, which will also improve job satisfaction and performance and, as a result, lowers presenteeism in an organization (Yang et al., 2016). This finding was revealed since the supervisors are in the position to resolve the employee's problem and assist them in obtaining the needed resources and at the same time could reduce the issue of presenteeism. Besides that, (Toolib & M. N. R., 2020) also reported that presenteeism is less likely to occur when employees receive the appropriate support and value from their boss. When workers are satisfied and feel such support, their trust in the organization is enhanced and they develop positive feelings toward the organization and supervisor (Gale et al., 2018), (Yang et al., 2019). The findings were further supported by (Tianan et al., 2016) who explained that increased attention to employees' wellbeing at the workplace and greater support by supervisor, other than colleagues and employer, at work are essential in reducing presenteeism among the employees. Similarly, (Yang et al., 2019) confirmed that supervisor and coworker assistance is the only intervention that has shown to minimize presenteeism which can be achieved by enhancing employee satisfaction and assisting employees in fulfilling job requirements.

According to (Prater & K., 2011), failure of a manager or supervisor to develop an effective procedure can lead to other serious issues of long working hours, lack of life balance as well as fear of job loss among the employees in the organization. It can be concluded that these issues are strictly related to presenteeism among the employees in the organization. Other than that, a manager or supervisor could also help their employees by motivating them to perform better as well as inspire other employees to work as a team in doing a task or project so that they feel less burdened even when they turn up to the office in an unhealthy condition. In addition, (Reuver & Woerkom, 2010) mentioned that the ability of a manager or supervisor to motivate their employees to be more involved in their work will result in higher levels of organizational commitment.

These assertions were linked to the Social Information Processing Theory proposed by Joseph Walther in 1992 and the Social Exchange Theory proposed by American Sociologist George C. Homans in 1958, both of which emphasized the importance of supervisor's support on employee performance (Zhou et al., 2016). According to both theories, employees rely on key people, such as their supervisor, concerning their job requirements. This is especially critical for employees who are ill yet must report to work. Employees with health issues will have to rely on external resources such as supervisor support to complete their jobs and maintain their limited resources (Zhou et al., 2016). As a result of the foregoing arguments, it is possible to

conclude that supervisor support has a substantial influence on issues of presenteeism among employees in an organization.

Presenteeism

Previous research suggested that issues of presenteeism have become a worldwide phenomenon since it was first introduced in 1996 (Cooper & Lu, 2016), (Al Nuhait et al., 2017). Generally, presenteeism happens when an employee insists on going to work despite being unhealthy, psychologically or physically, and it occurs when the employees are functionally absent despite of turning up to the office on time (Collins & Cartwright, 2012), (Ferreira et al., 2015), (Johns, 2010). Working while sick is often considered as an act of organizational citizenship and a sign of commitment and loyalty to employers and colleagues (Gíver et al., 2016). Though absenteeism has been known to directly affects organizational performance due to productivity loss, recent research findings suggested that the cost of presenteeism exceeds the cost of absenteeism (Evans-Lacko & Knapp, 2016). With regard to effects of presenteeism for the organization, there were empirical evidences for uncovered costs caused by productivity loss (Evans-Lacko & Knapp, 2016). This phenomenon has alerted organizations and (Johns, 2010) confirmed that absenteeism and presenteeism are the causes for productivity loss and either one can be the indirect costs for organizations. Though work-related demand was also identified as one of the dimensions that lead to presenteeism (Aronsson & K., 2005), (Collins & Cartwright, 2012), (Leineweber et al., 2011), but as proposed by (Collins & Cartwright, 2012), the dimensions of personal factors and organizational policies were specifically focused on in this study as they are more relevant and significant to the issue investigated.

Personal factors are related to financial problems faced by the employees and it was identified that employees still come to the office despite being unwell since they really needed the money. Employees facing financial stress were found to be experiencing a low motivation in their work, thus diverting their attention from work. Besides that (Karageorge, 2016) asserted that when the financial pressure is strong enough, people are more likely to still come to work despite of being sick but would likely to stay home if firms provide sick workers with paid leave. Personal factors are also related to the attitude of an employee known as individual boundarylessness which refers to the difficulty in saying no that leads to presenteeism. A close bonding between the colleagues which exist due to a strong sense of teamwork highly affected presenteeism as those who were sick would still come to work as not to let their colleagues be burdened by their work. Another study found that personal factors dimension encompasses attitudes, behaviours, aspects of the individual situation and personality as well as lifestyle and self-efficacy (Miraglia & Johns, 2016). Health locus of control, perceived legitimacy of absence, and the tendency for the sick role were also found to have influenced the choice between presenteeism and absenteeism (Miraglia & Johns, 2016), (Rahim et al., 2020), (Sasmita & P., 2013). In addition, an individual's behaviour and lifestyle as well as self-efficacy and lifestyle which included regular physical activity and other health-related behaviours were discovered to have a favourable influence on employee presenteeism (Lohaus & W., 2019), (Rahim et al., 2020).

Rules, regulations, and policies on matters pertaining to employees' conduct and performance commonly existed in organizations to guide the employees in doing their work and assist the organization to operate smoothly. As pointed out, to reduce the level of absenteeism, an organization should have a policy to flag any employees that reach a maximum amount of absenteeism and call them for an interview (Collins & Cartwright, 2012). Expectedly, in such a situation, some employees tend to come to work despite being sick to avoid the scenario. In order to increase the level of presenteeism among the employees, there were organizations

which introduced a policy of reducing sick pay and attendance control to ensure that the employees constantly come to the office without fail (Collins & Cartwright, 2012), (Johns, 2010). As confirmed by (Aronsson & K., 2005), (Karageorge, 2016), (Miraglia & Johns, 2016), presenteeism did not only affect certain employee but it was infectious, and the problem increased since employees were subject to a fixed system where they were required to attend an interview if they were to take sick leaves too frequently.

Organizational variables which included an organization's restructuring and downsizing, usually go along with job insecurity (Aronsson et al., 2000), (Johns, 2010), the organizational culture and climate, HR policies, reward systems, health-related offers for employees, and organizational justice (Cho et al., 2016). Research into employment contract is inconclusive with some research showing that employees who have permanent employment contract are more likely to come to work whilst ill than temporary staff (Aronsson et al., 2000). Strongly implicated in presenteeism were also formal organizational policies and management practices, such as the existence of flexible work policies to create flexibility at work and adjustment of the work patterns of employees that were unwell so that they could have a more manageable workload (Krohne & L. H., 2011) and sick pay policies that allow employees paid sick days (Irvine, 2011).

Methodology

The sampling frame for this study was obtained from the Human Resource Department of the four selected government sectors in Putrajaya; 128 employees of Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam (JPA), 278 of Kementerian Dalam Negeri (KDN), 165 of Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM) and 255 of Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia (KPTM). The samples have been selected using stratified sampling technique whereby at least 90 respondents ($JPA \geq 14$, $KDN \geq 30$, $KKM \geq 18$ and $KPTM \geq 28$) represented the best of the population of interest (Osborne & Costello, 2004).

The instrument used in this study was developed and adapted from previous studies (Leineweber et al., 2011), (Aronsson & K., 2005). The instrument was divided into Section A: Demographic Background, Section B: Supervisor Support (six items) and Section C: Presenteeism (11 items) which included Personal Factors (six items) and Organizational Policies (five items). The items of Section C are based on conclusion from previous studies (Aronsson & K., 2005), (Collins & Cartwright, 2012), (Leineweber et al., 2011). A 5-point interval scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) format was used for Part B and C. The instrument was pre-tested on selected respondents and the Cronbach Alpha's value from reliability analysis (Supervisor Support = 0.764, Personal Factors = 0.717 and Organizational Policies = 0.760) shows all the variables of interest exceeded the minimum acceptance level of 0.7 (George & P., 2006). Therefore, the instrument is valid and reliable to be used for real study.

The objective of the study was to test the claim which stated that supervisor support has a significant effect on presenteeism of government employees. Therefore, the data was analyzed using IBM-SPSS AMOS 24 software which included the frequency analysis, descriptive statistics, and regression analysis (Salkind, 2012). The supervisor support will have a significant effect on presenteeism of government employees if the significance value obtained is at least less than 5% level of significance.

Findings and Discussion

In total, 32 males (29.6%) and 76 females (70.4%) aged more than 18 years old were involved in this study and majority of 89 (82.4%) had been working for at most 15 years in their current departments. Table 1 shows the frequency of the respondents according to their medical leave status for the previous 12 months. By looking at the result obtained, 46 (42.60%) of the respondents took the medical leave at least twice due to their health status. The result reveals that the respondents faced health problems that surely needed the attention and support from their supervisor as well as the organization. Therefore, this study focused on the issues related to the supervisor support and the presenteeism status among the staff which was measured by the dimensions of personal factors and organizational policies. The normality assumption was tested and the result shows that the data was approximately normally distributed based on the skewness value for each of the variables of interest (Supervisor Support = -0.603, Personal Factors = 0.323 and Organizational Policies = 0.245) which was between the accepted range (Leech et al., 2005).

Table 1: The Frequency Table

Number of Medical Leave Taken	Frequency	Percentage
Never	36	33.33%
One	26	24.07%
2-5	35	32.41%
More than 5	11	10.19%

The following Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis for each of the variable of interest whereby it was found that personal factors become a more agreeing factor among government employees compared to organizational policies as both are classified as the dimensions of presenteeism of the government employees in the context of current study. Meanwhile, their supervisor's support in work indicates that they agreed towards their current working style.

Table 2: The Descriptive Analysis

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Supervisor Support (SS)	3.65	0.723
Personal Factors (PF)	3.87	0.413
Organizational Policies (OP)	3.63	0.469

The following Figure 1 shows that the coefficient of determination value of the model is 0.20 which indicated that 20% of the total variation of the presenteeism of government employees were explained by the supervisor support, while the other 80% was explained by other factors. Furthermore, the result of the regression analysis found that there existed a significant effect of supervisor support on presenteeism of government employees in Putrajaya ($\beta^{\wedge} = 0.45$, $p = < 0.001$). Therefore, the supervisor support becomes a significant predictor towards presenteeism of the government employees as proposed by (Mohamed & M., 2016), (Lack, 2011).

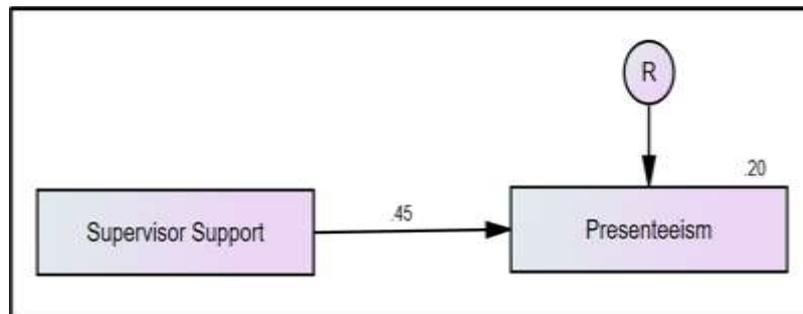


Figure 1: The Standardized Regression Path Coefficient

Furthermore, the standardized estimated value of supervisor support of this study is 0.45 which indicates that the presenteeism of government employees was expected to increase by 0.45 point when the supervisor support scale increased by 1 point. The positive value shows that presenteeism which is measured by the dimensions of personal factors and organizational policies, both were positively affected by supervisor support. Previous findings also supported the current findings which revealed that supervisor support ensures better job performance through presenteeism among staff in an organization (Mohamed & M., 2016), (Lack, 2011). In addition, the significant result was also supported by (Yang et al., 2016) that clarified the responsibility of a supervisor to support staff in many ways such as helping them to get their needed resources which lead to a higher satisfaction level towards the supervisor and the organization (Gale et al., 2018), (Yang et al., 2019), (Toolib & M. N. R., 2020). Great support received from the supervisor ensures fewer personal problems and well-organized organizational policies brought more happiness to staff in the workplace as stated by (Tianan et al., 2016) and other studies (Lack, 2011), (Mohamed & M., 2016), (Toolib & M. N. R., 2020) with at least 95% confidence level.

Conclusion

This study focused on the effects of supervisor support on presenteeism among government employees in Putrajaya. The findings suggested that presenteeism is reduced by necessary support received at work from the supervisor as well as colleagues and employers, and by the presence of comfortable interpersonal relationships between the supervisors and employees. The findings are in tandem with (Zhang et al., 2020) who proposed that a strong supervisor support would reduce the negative impact of presenteeism. Thus, it is of utmost importance for the administrators of the organization to create a supportive working environment for their employees as unattended issues of presenteeism could create a domino effect to their services to the public.

The study concluded that the role of employer in an organization is very crucial, therefore, a better understanding on the elements of supervisor support would assist the organization in tackling issues that contribute further to presenteeism, hence better and efficient services rendered to the public and improved productivity of the public sector. In conclusion, the researchers feel that future research could also be conducted to investigate other human resources issues that might have certain effects on presenteeism such as the Work-From-Home (WFH) initiatives proposed by the government due to the Covid19 pandemic as such issues might have some interesting and unexpected effects on presenteeism.

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