

## FACTORS INFLUENCING SAFETY PERFORMANCE OF BUMIPUTERA SMES IN MALAYSIA

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**Abstract:** *Small and medium enterprise (SME) plays an important role in the underpinning of a country's economy. This study is aimed at getting a clearer view of the level of safety performance in various SME companies. The main concerns are the relative importance and need of different safety management practices and how they contribute to the overall safety performance of Bumiputera SMEs. The results deduced represent safety rules and procedures, safety communication, and entrepreneur commitment as the most important factors influencing safety performance. While safety promotion, worker involvement and safety training are not useful to the prediction of safety performance. Data was quantitatively collected through close-ended questionnaires with a sample size of 272 Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs. Data was analysed through correlation and multiple regression using SPSS software. This paper presents a comprehensive diagnosis of safety performance indices of SME sector, the factors that reflect the insignificant relationship to safety performance suggestions to improve them. This enables practitioners and scholars to comprehend and make appropriate decisions that can enhance safety performance among Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** *health and safety management, Bumiputera, SME, safety performance*

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## Introduction

SMEs are the backbone of the Malaysian economy, accounting for 97.2 percent of total business establishments and 7.25 million jobs in 2020. SMEs' labour productivity in 2020, as measured by the ratio of value added per employment, was RM70,706 per employee (DOSM, 2020). To stimulate the economic growth of Bumiputera SMEs, the government increased the budget for Bumiputera development programmes from RM8bil to RM11.1bil, with various efforts made to empower Bumiputera entrepreneurs, such as financial assistance, professional development and other capacity building programmes, Bank Pembangunan Malaysia and SME Bank capacity building programmes (The Star, 2020). The government's Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV, 2030) aims to reduce inequality, shape the economy, and prepare Malaysia for a more competitive era in the coming decades (PMO, 2019). Yet, both business competitiveness and worker protection must be strengthened because safety management improves not only safety but also competitiveness and economic-financial performance (Fernández-Muiz, Montes-Peón, and Vázquez-Ordás, 2009).

Realizing this, Malaysia has launched the Occupational Safety and Health Master Plan 2021-2025 (OSHMP2025), which consists of seven strategies in total. 51 programmes are highlighted, including SME, advanced technology, R&D, and new sectors. Strategy 5 focuses on improving OHS compliance in the SME sector (DOSH, 2021). The plan shall provide Bumiputera SMEs with appropriate guidance, training, and financial support to meet their Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) obligations. As Bumiputera is the critical subject to be addressed and has become the government's main agenda, it is necessary to conduct a study to determine the extent that Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs adhere to health and safety management practices in order to meet the emerging challenges of creating better working environments.

There has been a dearth of studies conducted in Malaysia to assess the safety performance of Bumiputera SMEs. In fact, previous research has paid less attention to the demand for statistical evidence, which has hampered the advancement of OHS management in SMEs (Ramos, Afonso & Rodrigues, 2020). Therefore, a study is warranted to learn what the inclination of Bumiputera OHS management practices is, and whether these factors influence safety performance. The answers to these questions are significant because they provide greater insight into Bumiputera SME OHS from both a theoretical and practical perspective.

This study will look specifically at the impact of health and safety management practices (entrepreneur commitment, safety training, worker involvement in safety, safety communication, safety rules and procedures, and safety promotion policies) on safety performance (safety compliance and participation) among Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs. Furthermore, a model of Bumiputera SME safety performance is developed by taking into account OHS management practices in order to provide better guidance to Bumiputera entrepreneurs to achieve the same level of safety success. To accomplish this, the study looks to the Resource-based View (RBV) Theory.

By emphasising the importance of human capital in strategic planning and safety management procedures, the RBV benefits health and safety management. The RBV promotes safety management methods and the impact they have on firm resources (Wright, Dunford & Snell, 2001). According to the RBV theory, a firm's ability to achieve its goals is determined by the capabilities it possesses and how well it uses and maintains them (Wernerfelt, 1984). In this

study, the concept of safety management capabilities is used to assess the firm's safety performance success.

### **Problem Statement**

Occupational injuries are more common in small and medium-sized businesses than in large corporations (Dugolli, 2021; Nowrouzi-Kia, Nadesar, & Casole, 2019). 90% of SMEs justify their lack of OHS management (Caldarescu, Tanasievici, Bejinariu, & Bernevig, 2021). The management of OHS and the organisational environment in SMEs is likely to be informal and ambiguous, as it is not well documented. In contrast, the safety management system in SMEs is not as complex as that found in large organisations. It is highly unlikely that proper safety management exists in SMEs (Al Mawli et al., 2021), particularly in Bumiputera SMEs. The Social Security Organization (SOCISO) report (2010-2012) stated that 80-90 percent of work-related accidents reported were from SMEs (Aziz, et al., 2015). According to Surlenty (2012), despite their significant contribution to workplace accident statistics, OHS in SMEs is still lacking. SMEs frequently lack the knowledge, time, and resources needed to address occupational health and safety issues (Kelloway, Kelloway, & Cooper, 2011). Some of these potential hazards have the potential to completely devastate a company. As a result, it is critical to implement safety practices through crisis management (Iqbal, Ahmad, Waqas & Abrar, 2021). Small businesses in general are vulnerable to operating without consistent work practices or administrative support (Breslin et al., 2010). (Eakin & Mykhalovskiy, 2003). As a result, because SMEs tend to operate in more hazardous environments, the risks of workplace accidents and injuries are much higher. Manu et al. (2018) discovered that Malaysia is one of the countries where OHS management is not commonly practised and could only worsen if appropriate actions and preventive measures were not taken.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

- To determine the relationship between entrepreneur commitment and safety performance.
- To examine the relationship between safety training and safety performance.
- To ascertain the relationship between worker involvement and safety performance.
- To verify the relationship between safety communication and safety performance.
- To determine the relationship between safety rules and procedures, and safety performance.
- To examine the relationship between safety promotion policies and safety performance.

### **Literature Review**

The rates of fatal accidents associated with SMEs are up to eight times higher than for large corporations (Mendeloff et al., 2017). Non-fatal accidents are also more common, up to 50% more so (Fabiano et al., 2004). Only by establishing preventive activities that lead to reductions in work-related injuries in the short to medium term can OHS performance be improved. Enterprises that developed a higher level of OHS consistently met the legal requirements in the area of OHS. In particular, enterprises that had their own OHS department and implemented OHSAS 18001 provided better working conditions and achieved higher economic performance (Pavlič, Živković & Pavlič, 2022).

Safety performance influences employee safety activities at various organisational levels (Zohar & Erev, 2007). The leadership style of a small business owner has a big impact on safety performance (Asad et al. 2021). Employees should also consider occupational hazards that affect their psychological well-being at work in order to improve safety performance (Naji et al., 2021). According to Griffin and Neal (2000), there are two types of safety behaviours: safety

participation and safety compliance. The goal of safety participation is to create an environment that encourages safety. Whereas the goal of safety compliance is to ensure that employees follow the safety procedures and regulations of the organisation (Griffin & Hu, 2013). As a result, this study has established that the leadership of Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs plays a critical role in influencing organizational safety performance, in terms of safety participation and safety compliance.

Management commitment, safety training, worker participation, safety communication and feedback, safety rules and procedures, and safety promotion policies are the six mechanisms of safety management practices (Subramaniam et al., 2016). Improved managerial commitment to safety, such as concerns about workers' safety participation activities and participation in safety activities, will motivate workers to participate in safety (Su, 2021). Employee work involvement also has a positive relationship with safety performance (Ünal et al., 2019). The workgroup's safety performance is determined by safety communication, which is in the second cluster of factors (Newaz et al. (2021). In order to achieve positive safety outcomes, safety rules and procedures provide critical guidelines for safety management practices (Wachter & Yorio, 2014). Furthermore, Holte et al. (2021) asserted that new perspectives were required to enable a more systematic understanding of management and OHS promotion.

### Relationship between Safety Management Practices and Safety Performance

Founded on the literature review, a research model (Figure 1.0) has been developed. Safety management practices are regarded as independent variables and safety performance is treated as a dependant variable.



**Figure 1: Conceptualization of the relationship between safety management practices and safety performance**

The following hypotheses are posited in Figure 1.

- H1: There is a positive relationship between entrepreneur's commitment and safety performance.
- H2: There is a positive relationship between safety training and safety performance.
- H3: There is a positive relationship between worker's involvement in safety and safety performance.
- H4: There is a positive relationship between safety communication and safety performance.
- H5: There is a positive relationship between safety rules and procedures and safety performance.
- H6: There is a positive relationship between safety promotion policies and safety performance.

### Methodology

A quantitative approach is used in the design of a cross-sectional survey. Based on a review of the literature, all components of safety management are chosen. The Vinodkumar and Bhasi (2010) questionnaire was adopted with some modifications and converted into an online survey instrument. Adopting the self-report survey method in a Malaysian setting not only broadens the adaptability of a method that has previously been validated in India, but it also increases the versatility of this approach. The contents of the draft questionnaire are endorsed by a panel of practitioners and expert interviews to ensure face validity. Following careful consideration of each item, necessary changes were made, including the simplification, rewording, removal, and replacement of some of them.

The survey questionnaire was created with Google Forms (<https://www.google.com/forms>). It comprised 29 questions to assess Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs' perceptions of safety management practises, as well as 8 questions to assess self-rated safety compliance and safety participation. This was created based on a review of related literature and theory, and it included questions about the entrepreneur's commitment (8 items), safety training (5 items), workers' involvement in safety (4 items), safety communication (4 items), safety rules and procedures (4 items), safety compliance and safety participation (8 items).

Before administering the survey questionnaire for full-scale data collection, pilot testing should be carried out (Rajar, Khoso & Qureshi, 2022). For this study, a pilot survey of 30 entrepreneurs was conducted to gather feedback on the clarity of the items. The instrument's reliability is further tested to determine its measurement consistency with the study variables on the scales used (Nunnally, 1978). Cronbach alpha coefficients for all variables are greater than 0.7, indicating acceptable reliability.

The majority of today's Internet research studies are carried out using low-cost, widely available, and nonprobability convenience sampling methods (Lehdonvirta et al., 2021). For this study, a convenience sampling method is used by simply sending the link to the questionnaires to Malaysia Co-operative Societies Commission (SKM) Bumiputera entrepreneurs in Kelantan via WhatsApp. The main disadvantage of convenience sampling is that the results of the study are not generalizable due to sample bias. As a result, a convenience sampling study falls somewhere between a single-subject approach and a randomised control group approach (Emerson, 2021). This study, on the other hand, employs a large sample rather than a single-subject approach. As a result, it allows for slightly more generalisation. As a result, the study's convenience sampling procedure severely limits generalizability.

Based on feedback from the entrepreneurs, it was decided to ask the questions in Malay. Each item was graded on a 1–7 Likert scale, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 7 being "strongly agree." 272 SKM Bumiputera entrepreneurs in Kelantan were selected for the research sample, which exceeds the minimum of 269 sample size determined by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

The response rate of this research is 69% which according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), is adequate for analysis and publication. According to the scholars, a response rate of 50% is justifiable for analysis and publishing, 60% is considered good, and 70% and above is considered very good. Holtom, et al., (2022) discovered a significant increase in average response rates from 48% in 2005 to 53% in 2010, 56% in 2015, and 68% in 2020.

### Descriptive Analysis

According to the findings of this study, 58.1 percent of SKM entrepreneurs are between the ages of 29 and 48, and thus fall into generation Y (born after 1980), generation X (1970 to 1980), and generation Z. (born 1996 to 2010) (refer to table 1). This implies that their age is most likely influencing their safety management practises and safety performance. Entrepreneurs from generations X, Y, and Z are technologically savvy, team-oriented, and adaptable (Berkup (2014), risk-takers with exceptional leadership abilities (Yazici & Ayazlar, 2021). Generation Z associates challenges with retention and providing high-quality work (Singh Ghura, 2017). As a result, such discrete features have a significant impact on safety management practices.

**Table 1. Age and Education of The Entrepreneurs**

		Total	Percent
<b>Age</b>	19-28 years old	30	11.0
	29-38 years old	77	28.3
	39-48 years old	81	29.8
	49-58 years old	57	21.0
	59-68 years old	27	9.9
	Total	272	100.0
<b>Education</b>	PhD	1	0.4
	Master	15	5.5
	Bachelor	57	21.0
	Diploma	74	27.2
	SPM/STPM	100	36.8
	Others	25	9.2
	Total	272	100.0

In terms of education, 36.8 percent of entrepreneurs have completed secondary school, 27.2 percent have a diploma, and 21 percent have a bachelor's degree. 5.9 percent have a master's degree or a PhD. Clearly, there is a sizable proportion of them who have a tertiary education. Entrepreneurs emphasised the significance of education, noting that there are numerous avenues for an entrepreneur to obtain an education (Dumitraşciuc, 2019). SPM/STPM qualifications are required for management positions, and 90.8 percent of SKM entrepreneurs have them. They demonstrate a level of knowledge in the areas of safety performance within the firms. As this study attempts to integrate OHS management practices into safety performance, more educated entrepreneurs are needed to align these two issues in order to achieve long-term profitability.

## Results and Discussion

Correlation analysis is used to determine the value of a variable and the degree of relationship (positive or negative) between the variables. The importance of correlation in establishing a causal relationship cannot be overstated. Pallant (2013) discovered that a correlation of 0 denotes no correlation and a correlation of 1.0 denotes a perfect positive correlation. Correlation -1.0, on the other hand, denotes a completely inverse relationship. Table 2 displays the results of correlations between variables such as safety performance (dependent variable) and entrepreneur commitment, safety training, worker involvement, safety communication, safety rules and procedures, and safety promotion policies (independent variables).

**Table 2: Correlations Among the Variables**

	Safety_ performance	Safety_ promotion	Safety_ rules_ procedures	Safety_ communication	Worker_ involvement	Safety_ training	Entrepreneur _ commitment
Safety_ performance	1						
Safety_ promotion	.607**	1					
Safety_ rules_ procedures	.867**	.698**	1				
Safety_ communication	.807**	.621**	.843**	1			
Worker_ involvement	.742**	.765**	.817**	.803**	1		
Safety_ training	.768**	.682**	.795**	.766**	.835**	1	
Entrepreneur_ commitment	.735**	.513**	.707**	.683**	.672**	.745**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows correlation analysis results using Pearson correlation based on a statistically significant one-tailed test at 99 percent. Overall, the results showed that all variables were significant and positive. The strongest correlation was found between safety rules and procedures and safety performance ( $r=0.867$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), followed by a correlation between safety rules and procedures and safety communication ( $r=0.843$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Safety promotion and safety performance had the weakest relationship ( $r=0.607$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Even so, all correlation values were rated as significant (Cohen et. al., 2003). Further, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between safety management practices and safety performance.

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Results for Safety Performance**

Model	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)		2.350	.020
Safety_promotion	-.016	-.352	.725
Safety_rules_procedures	.550	8.946	<.001
Safety_communication	.199	3.504	<.001
Worker_involvement	-.072	-1.122	.263
Safety_training	.112	1.914	.057
Entrepreneur_commitment	.184	4.168	<.001

Safety rules and procedures ( $\beta = 0.550$ ,  $t = 8.946$ ), safety communication ( $\beta = 0.199$ ,  $t = 3.504$ ), and entrepreneur commitment ( $\beta = 0.184$ ,  $t = 4.168$ ) are all shown in Table 3. Because their corresponding p-values are 0.05, all three t-values are statistically significant. As a result, safety rules and procedures, safety communication, and entrepreneur commitment can all be used to predict safety performance. Safety promotion, worker involvement, and safety training, on the other hand, do not. This study's findings are similar to those of Subramaniam et al., (2016), who found that management commitment and safety rules and procedures were significantly related to safety compliance. Committed SKM entrepreneurs must summarise the company's safety rules in a concise, clear list before posting them in several visible locations as a reminder and precaution for all employees.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study emphasises the importance of employees' voluntary behaviour in promoting a safe work environment. Because the result for safety training is insignificant, it demonstrates that SKM Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs train their employees inadequately. A poorly trained employee may be unable to meet basic OHS standards at work, resulting in a serious accident in which many employees are injured (Suha, Al-Aghbari & Sana, 2019). As a result, employers are encouraged to provide safety training courses so that employees recognise their critical role in safety and can use this knowledge to train and persuade them to work safely (Subramaniam et al., 2016).

SMEs should recognise the value of safety performance in order to generate higher returns by lowering compensation costs. The country's economic competitiveness will eventually improve if workplace safety and health risks are reduced. More importantly, this study highlights the importance of safety management practises in promoting a safe workplace. Because SMEs typically lack the resources to implement comprehensive OHS systems, employing employees as safety agents at work can be an effective way to improve safety performance. In contrast to most other aspects of a company's operations, the safety effort should be incorporated into virtually every programme, activity, and department.

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