

UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

MEDIATING ROLE OF WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND ANTECEDENTS OF WORK ENGAGEMENT AMONG CANCER SURVIVORS IN MALAYSIA

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy

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January 2021

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The increased number of cancer survivors in the workforce warrants immediate intervention by organisations to boost work engagement and ensure that employees who are cancer survivors stay focused at the workplace. Unfortunately, employers often have the perception that the work performance of such employees might be adversely affected due to their medical condition and treatment. It is, therefore, important to investigate the antecedents of work engagement of cancer survivors. Hence, this study was conducted to examine three selected antecedents (viz. employee resilience, social support, and quality of working life) of work engagement and the mediating role of workplace spirituality among cancer survivors in Malaysia. The framework of the study was underpinned by the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).

A quantitative research paradigm was adopted in this study, with a cross-sectional design using data collected from respondents who were cancer survivors registered at the General Hospital, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A total of 270 participants in this study were randomly selected by inclusive criteria sampling. A validated instrument was tested in a pilot study. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM).

The results revealed high readings in the measurements of all the variables (work engagement, workplace spirituality employee resilience, social support and quality of working life) among cancer survivors. Employee resilience, workplace social support and workplace spirituality had significant relationships with work engagement (p<0.05). However, the quality of working life (QWL) revealed a non-significant association with work engagement. The results also

showed a direct relationship of work engagement with workplace spirituality. Both employee resilience and workplace social support significantly contributed to workplace spirituality of cancer survivors in Malaysia, although a non-significant relationship was found between QWL and workplace spirituality. Nevertheless, workplace spirituality mediated the relationship between employee resilience and workplace social support towards work engagement.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge in terms of developing a research framework in the context of work engagement in relation to cancer survivors in Malaysia. It also enriches the literature on workplace spirituality as a mediator, thus providing useful insight to academics and HRD practitioners. This study supports the SCT by showing that it is important to ensure high levels of work engagement among employed cancer survivors in Malaysia. With respect to practice, this study suggests that HRD practitioners should implement a diversity of pragmatic interventions to help train employees, especially cancer survivors, to tackle challenges in a manner that promotes resilience. Furthermore, organisations should provide adequate training to supervisors of cancer survivors to enable them to develop mentoring programmes to render support to cancer survivors.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Doktor Falsafah

PERANAN PENGANTARA SPIRITUAL DI TEMPAT KERJA DAN ANTESEDEN KEPADA KETERLIBATAN KERJA DALAM KALANGAN PEMANDIRI KANSER DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

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Peningkatan bilangan pemandiri kanser dalam tenaga kerja memerlukan campur tangan segera oleh organisasi untuk meningkatkan penglibatan kerja dan memastikan bahawa pekerja yang merupakan mangsa kanser tetap focus di tempat kerja. Malangnya, majikan sering mempunyai persepsi bahawa prestasi kerja pekerja tersebut mungkin terjejas kerana keadaan dan rawatan perubatan mereka. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk mengkaji anteseden penglibatan kerja bagi pemandiri kanser. Oleh itu, kajian ini dijalankan untuk meneliti tiga anteseden terpilih iaitu (ketahanan pekerja, sokongan sosial, dan kualiti kehidupan kerja) terhadap penglibatan kerja dan peranan pengantara kerohanian di tempat kerja di kalangan mangsa kanser di Malaysia. Kerangka kajian ini disokong oleh Teori Kognitif Sosial (TKS).

Kajian ini menerima pakai paradigma penyelidikan kuantitatif, dengan reka bentuk keratan rentas menggunakan data yang dikumpulkan dari responden pemandiri kanser yang didaftarkan di Hospital Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Sebanyak 270 peserta dalam kajian ini dipilih secara rawak dengan pengambilan sampel kriteria inklusif. Instrumen yang disahkan diuji dalam kajian rintis. Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan Model Persamaan Struktur-Separa Terkecil (PLS-SEM).

Hasil kajian menunjukkan semua pemboleh ubah (penglibatan kerja, ketahanan pekerja kerohanian di tempat kerja, sokongan sosial dan kualiti kehidupan kerja) di tahap yang tinggi dalam kalangan pemandiri kanser. Ketahanan pekerja, sokongan sosial di tempat kerja dan kerohanian di tempat

kerja mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dengan penglibatan kerja (p <0.05). Walau bagaimanapun, kualiti kehidupan bekerja (QWL) menunjukkan hubungan yang tidak signifikan dengan penglibatan kerja. Hasilnya juga menunjukkan hubungan langsung penglibatan kerja dengan kerohanian di tempat kerja. Ketahanan pekerja dan sokongan sosial di tempat kerja banyak menyumbang kepada kerohanian tempat kerja pemandiri kanser di Malaysia, walaupun hubungan tidak signifikan antara QWL dan kerohanian di tempat kerja. Walaubagaimanapun, kerohanian di tempat kerja memantapkan hubungan antara ketahanan pekerja dan sokongan sosial di tempat kerja terhadap penglibatan kerja.

Kajian ini menyumbang kepada disiplin ilmu dalam membangunkan satu kerangka kerja penyelidikan dari konteks konteks penglibatan kerja pemandiri kanser di Malaysia. Kajian ini juga boleh diperluaskan bagi memperkaya literatur mengenai kerohanian di tempat kerja sebagai pengantara yang penting kepada ahli akademik dan pengamal dalam pembangunan sumber manusia (PSM). Kajian ini menyokong SCT dengan menunjukkan bahawa penting untuk memastikan tahap penglibatan kerja yang tinggi di kalangan mangsa kanser yang bekerja di Malaysia. Sehubungan dengan amalan, kajian ini mencadangkan pengamal PSM untuk melaksanakan kepelbagaian intervensi yang pragmatik supaya pekerja dapat dilatih dalam menangani cabaran dan kesukaran dengan cara yang dapat meningkatkan daya tahan pekerja. Tambahan pula, organisasi juga perlu merangka latihan yang lebih komprehensif kepada penyelia pemandiri kanser untuk membolehkan mereka mengembangkan program bimbingan untuk memberi sokongan kepada pemandiri kanser di tempat kerja.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE Average of Variance Extracted CFA Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CR Construct Reliability
HKL Hospital Kuala Lumpur
QWL Quality of Working Life
EMPRESS Employee Resilience

GTP Government Transformation Programme

OD Organizational Development HRD Human Resource Development

SCT Social Cognitive Theory

UWES Ultrich Work Engagement Scale

WPS Workplace Spirituality

CHAPTER 1

TITLE OF CHAPTER

This chapter presents the background of the study that includes the antecedents of work engagement, statement of the problem, research objectives, significance, scope, limitations and assumptions in this study, together with operational definitions of the terms used.

1.1 Background of the Study

If a country wants to be economically competitive, organisations should consider employees as primary contributors and as a backbone to their success. Given the time and effort spent at work, there are occasions when employees need to be able to cope with unexpected and challenging circumstances at the workplace. Such employees need to have a high level of work engagement in order to contribute to the success of the organization's performance. It is very challenging for employees to be fully engaged in their work when they have to adapt to a challenging economic landscape. In this respect, having a highly engaged workforce is fundamental to the success of the organization. Work engagement is one of the critical factors of an organization's achievement because it enables the successful implementation of distinct effective changes and fosters positive employee attitudes (Diedericks, Cilliers & Bezuidenhout, 2019; Matthysen & Harris, 2018; Mone & London, 2018). According to Albrecht et al. (2020), the positive impact of work engagement on individual and organizational outcomes is becoming an increasingly salient topic in the context of the changing workplace. Therefore, it is not surprising to observe the abundance of studies on work engagement in the past two decades (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Work engagement has become a popular topic among organizations interested in maximizing human capital performance and employee wellbeing at work (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004).

There are various aspects of work engagement. Generally, work engagement is viewed as a vital benchmark that denotes an organizational sustainability (Schaltegger & Burritt, 2018), organizational productivity (Loerzel, 2019), and organizational commitment (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). Moreover, work engagement has been linked to positive individual outcomes (Musa et al., 2020), with engaged employees often recording low absenteeism and turnover, with engaged employees often recording low absenteeism and turnover (Karatepe et al., 2020). Work engagement also instils creativity in employees (Asif et al., 2019) and promotes employee wellbeing (Robledo et al., 2020). Next, work engagement is negatively correlated to outcomes such as turnover intentions, and burnout (Memon, Salleh, & Baharom, 2015). According to Crawford, LePine & Rich (2010), work engagement refers to a motivational

state, characterized by exerting oneself in a work role. In other words, when employees have high work engagement, they give all of themselves to their work, and this behaviour includes cognitive and emotional aspects (Kahn, 1990).

Work engagement is linked to other positive individual outcomes. Organisations with employees who have high work engagement will improve quality of work (Hamzah et al., 2020). Work engagement also has been positively associated with job satisfaction at the individual level (Saks, 2006) and employee wellbeing (Shuck & Reio Jr, 2014). Such correlations are not surprising as work engagement itself is posited as a positive and fulfilling state of mind, making work enjoyable for employees (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Sonnentag (2003) offers further support for this perspective, suggesting that engagement is related to positive work effect. In other words, employees with high work engagement generally exude good vibes at the workplace. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2008), engaged employees perform better than their disengaged counterparts as they are more likely to experience positive emotions and enjoy better physical health while performing their role at the workplace and using personal resources. The emotions of others can have an impact on the team as a whole; this phenomenon is known as emotional contagion. Hence, engaged employees collectively contribute to the organisation's success by their positive attitude and behaviour.

The main aim in this study was to examine work engagement behaviour, particularly that of cancer survivors in the Malaysian context. There have been numerous studies conducted with professionals to demonstrate the importance of work engagement in successful employment. Various concepts of work engagement have been discussed by scholars; employee activities, behaviours, and psychological states; commitment, motivation, and satisfaction have been identified as core components of work engagement. Work engagement behaviour is generally understood as increased levels of effort directed towards organisational goals (Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Macey & Scheneider, 2008). In other words, work engagement behaviour is the broadening of employees' available resources that are displayed overtly, and is often reflected in their behaviours and actions at the workplace.

Individual and work-related factors foster work engagement behaviour. Engaged employees often go the extra the mile. Thus, it is important for practitioners to identify factors that promote work engagement behaviour. Previous researchers have also embarked on the exploration of the role of personal factors (especially resilience) that can enhance work engagement behaviours (Malik & Garg, 2020; Pramanik et al., 2020; Dai, Zhuang & Huan, 2019; Oshio et al., 2018; Kašpárková et al., 2018; Cooke et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2015; Lee, Vargo, & Seville, 2013). Resilient employees exhibit positive emotions and are quick in adapting to adversities and uncertainties especially in the business environment.

While it is important to inculcate work engagement, there must be strong workplace social support from within the organizational. As stated by Glen (2006), employees show higher levels of work engagement when they are provided with continuous opportunities to grow and develop within the organization. Thus, the present study would investigate workplace social support as one of antecedents for work engagement. Another work-related factor that contributes to work engagement behaviour is quality of working life (QWL). Geisler et al. (2019), in their study on the contribution of QWL to fostering work engagement, points out that QWL incorporates work-based satisfaction of a variety of needs through resources, activities, and outcomes stemming from participation in the workplace. Thus, employees feel satisfied with their work performance when their needs are fulfilled; they experience higher QWL as well as work engagement.

Based on the above discussion, it is possible that the influence of potential factors is likely not a simple direct relationship. In response to calls in the literature for an examination of potential antecedents and mediators of work engagement (Albrecht, 2013), this study was conducted to investigate whether individual and work-related factors might have a positive relationship with work engagement. One plausible mechanism through which individual and workrelated may exert these positive effects on work engagement is the involvement of psychological processes. The first to coin the work engagement concept, Khan (1990) postulates that an employee will be engaged when he or she is psychologically attuned to conditions at the workplace, i.e., when psychological meaningfulness acts as a mediator on work engagement. Work that is meaningful and purposeful has also been identified as the most important dimension of workplace spirituality (Ashmos and Duchon 2000). Albrecht (2013) suggests that psychological mechanisms (workplace spirituality) can explain how and why the provision or experience of either individual or personal factor (employee resilience) and work-related factors (workplace social support and QWL) results in increased engagement.

An important mechanism to bolster engagement at the workplace is through workplace spirituality (Singh & Chopra, 2018) that focuses on the humanistic aspect of work. Indeed, workplace spirituality has emerged as a positive organisational scholarship field (Lavine, Bright, Powley, & Cameron, 2014). Workplace spirituality creates wholeness and contentment (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005) such that employees can find purpose and meaning in their work; they can express their complete selves at work and feel connected with others at the workplace (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004). Workplace spirituality is postulated to enhance work engagement (Benefiel et al., 2014). In addition, it is recommended that organisations create an environment that is conducive for employees to experience spirituality so that the level of work engagement can be raised (Breytenbach, 2016). When employees' hearts and minds are captured at the workplace, the organisation can be assured of totally engaged employees (Murray & Evers, 2011).

The present study is motivated by recent findings on workplace spirituality and work engagement by Milliman et al. (2018), who called for more studies to identify and explain the underlying human intrinsic motivation that spurs employees to be more engaged at the workplace. The fulfilment of employees' inner needs (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006) and the experience of satisfaction that work provides (Jung & Yoon, 2016) have been found to lead to higher levels of work engagement.

1.1.1 Overview of work engagement in Malaysia

According to a Qualtrics study (2020) entitled "Employee Experience Trends: Malaysia," Malaysia was placed 7th among countries having the most engaged employees in the world, with a score of 54% which is above the average score of 53%. This finding should encourage Malaysian human resource professionals, team leaders, and managers to further improve employee experience at the workplace so as to reinforce work engagement, a crucial factor that attracts and retains not only local talents but also those from abroad. For instance, Lin and Ping (2016) found that one out of two Malaysian employers deemed people issues as the top business challenge, thus emphasizing the need for employee engagement in order to propel Malaysia's economic development to greater heights.

However, another study by Hewitt (2018) found there were still several countries, including Malaysia, with employee engagement below the global average score of 65%. In 2017, Malaysia recorded 59% for the employee engagement score, lower than that of other countries such as India (69%), China (67%), Thailand (65%), Philippines (65%), and Indonesia (61%). In 2018, the score increased from 59% to 63%, but this was still below the global average score of 65%, and lower than that of other countries such as Indonesia (76%), India (71%), China (67%) and Philippines (71%). A totally engaged employee should be 100% psychologically committed to his or her work (Gallup, 2017).

With respect to this concern, the Malaysian government plays a significant role in attempts to foster greater work engagement. For example, the Malaysian government has introduced the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) that is aimed at improving performance of public servants in Malaysia (Government Transformation Programme, 2011). The programme provides incentives, such as salary increment and attractive remuneration to ensure that Malaysian employees, especially public servants, stay engaged and motivated. In addition, various statutes and legislation have been drawn up to protect Malaysian workers' rights and interests, as well as their wellbeing, health and safety at the workplace. The current laws and labour statutes enforced in Malaysia are the Employment Act 1955, the Industrial Relations Act 1967, the Employees Provident Fund Act 1951, the Employees Social Security Act 1969, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1994 (Ashgar Ali Ali Mohamed, 2014; Marilyn Aminuddin, 1990).

The existing laws, policies, and initiatives formulated by the Malaysian government focus on making Malaysian employees contented to perform their jobs effectively and contribute to their organisation's profit and productivity. This objective is prioritised by the government as it is parallel with the national aspiration towards sustainable economic growth as targeted in the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (WKB2030). With a recent shift from a labour-intensive market to one that is knowledge-based, there are efforts to implement work-life policies and practices that are deemed attractive so as to retain skilled and qualified employees.

At present, the Ministry of Human Resources is the central agency responsible for labour market matters. The Ministry plays a crucial role in shaping human resources management policies and practices in Malaysia. It is responsible for developing labour administration policy, promoting employees' welfare, and fostering good relations between employees and employers. Hence, it is obvious that the Malaysian government takes great effort to protect the welfare of Malaysian employees.

That being said, some individuals and employees need additional policies, initiatives, and support in working life. Within the spectrum of employment arrangements, including full-time (government and private employee), selfemployed or own account worker, part-time, contract, and salaried or hourly workers, there exists a hierarchy of vulnerabilities and protections (Bradley et al., 2018). Some workers are at more risk than others, have fewer legal protections and benefits, and may experience self-care barriers in the workplace. Concerns of individuals with a critical illness (such as cancer) require immediate intervention by the government and employer. The impact of critical illnesses on the country's workforce is significant in terms of loss of productivity, especially when cancer affects the working-age population. resulting in premature death, morbidity, disability, and failure to resume work (Ferlay et al., 2015). For the more fortunate ones who have undergone treatments successfully, they face new challenges during transition to the recovery phase of survivorship as they gradually resume their roles as employees (Feurstein et al., 2010). While the workplace may accommodate workers' abilities to participate in the workforce, there has been little in-depth investigation of the types of accommodations reported to have been provided to cancer survivors (Stergiou-Kita et al., 2016).

Employers have a central role in protecting employees' well-being and promoting better health outcomes. In the absence of comprehensive policies to protect all employed cancer survivors, employers are the key to developing and implementing more equitable solutions that mitigate problems that cancer survivors might face in the workplace (Hannon & Harris, 2018). Efforts to ensure cancer survivors resume their employment are of paramount importance to the productivity of the country. Hence, research that integrates the needs of cancer survivors, employers, the changing workforce and changing treatment approaches is required so that steps can be taken to support cancer survivors and their employers (Bradley et al., 2018).

1.1.2 Work engagement of cancer survivors

Cancer survivors are often disconnected from the labour market or not engaged in productive activities owing to adverse physical and psychological health-related outcomes (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004). While having disabilities related to health may exert little influence on the work engagement of some individuals, in contrast, others may find the same disabilities hampering their career, self-esteem, and life experiences in general. Being seriously ill impacts the cancer survivor's work-life in numerous ways. Cancer is a life-threatening disease, but with improvements in screening, diagnosis, and treatment, the number of persons surviving cancer and staying at or returning to work is increasing (Hoffman, 2005). The overarching aim of cancer treatment is not only to ensure cure, but also to allow cancer survivors to have normal lives in order to realize their full potential as productive and healthy adults who can focus more on developing their careers. However, initial experiences during cancer treatment might change the outlook of the patients altogether. The impact can be so negatively powerful that it alters not only the physical appearance of the individual but the inner self as well. Hence, cancer survivors are faced with a unique set of challenges after the diagnosis, including uncertainties about the ability to return to work and their general wellbeing during the transitional period (Curtin, Galvin, & Robinson, 2019).

Understanding the effects of cancer and treatment for long-term survivors has become increasingly important (Firkins et al., 2020; Kenzik, 2019; Ahles and Root, 2018). Among the long-term outcomes, the issue of cancer survivors' employment is one of the core areas of cancer survivorship research (Arndt et al., 2019; Fillon, 2019; de Moor et al., 2018; Mehnert, 2011). Despite the increase in the number of cancer survivors returning to work, it has been reported that cancer survivors are at risk of experiencing discrimination at work owing to their condition that is presumed to adversely affect their ability to work. (Strauser et al., 2020; Leslie et al., 2020) or because of misinformation or negative attitudes of co-workers and employers (Grunfeld, Low & Cooper, 2010). Employers' negative perceptions of people with disabilities, such as cancer survivors, have adversely impacted the employment and retention of employees with chronic illnesses (Amir, Strauser & Chan, 2009). Organisations often hold negative beliefs about the impact of cancer on work and have concerns about the ability of cancer survivors to meet the demands of the workplace (Stergiou-Kita et al., 2016; Grunfield et al., 2010). This could potentially be detrimental to the smooth transition of cancer survivors who return to work because a non-supportive work environment has been shown to affect cancer survivors negatively at the workplace (Mak et al., 2014).

In countries like the USA and Australia, cancer survivors who return to work benefit from legal protection under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1992 and Disability Discrimination Act 1992, respectively. Such legal protection is aimed at preventing employers from discriminating against workers with disabilities in the workplace. The legal protection covers all employment practices, including termination, advancement, compensation, training, leave, as well as all other privileges related to employment. Cancer is considered as a

disability condition under the Act whereby its treatment or side effects could significantly limit one or more of the individual's current major life activities. It is clearly stated in the ADA that it is illegal for employers to discriminate against any worker with disability but is otherwise qualified for a job (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

Unfortunately, not all cancer survivors around the world enjoy such legal protection. In Malaysia, there is no legal provision that offers protection against the discrimination of cancer survivors at the workplace. Thus, the prevalence of unemployment or loss of job as a result of workplace discrimination due to cancer is not unknown in Malaysia. As such, issues regarding challenges faced by cancer survivors needs to be explored. Civil servants in Malaysia enjoy full paid leave up to not more than 24 months upon being diagnosed with cancer. As for individuals working in the private sector, paid sick leave is dependent on the length of their service. If hospitalisation is deemed necessary, then – irrespective of the length of service – an employee is entitled to 60 days paid leave. Apart from workplace discrimination, there are multiple factors affecting the decision to resume work following successful cancer treatment (Feuerstein, 2007).

Given that cancer is a potentially life-threatening illness that is often associated with demanding treatments such as radiation and chemotherapy, it is not surprising that cancer survivors experience cognitive, physical, and affective challenges when they resume work. The challenges that survivors face mirror Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of distractions to psychological availability in work engagement. Kahn suggests that the most salient distractions for psychological availability include depleted physical energy (exhaustion or inability to take on tasks physically), depleted emotional energy (emotional and cognitive exhaustion), work insecurity and anxiety (lack of self-confidence and heightened self-consciousness), and outside life (preoccupation with non-work events). These distractions are, undoubtedly, similar to cancer-related and cancer treatment-related symptoms such as fatigue, physical limitations, cognitive limitations, emotional strain, job insecurity, and anxiety, all of which prevent optimal performance and work engagement among cancer survivors.

Hakanen and Lindbohlm (2008) conducted a study to determine the role of job resources (organisational climate, social support, and avoidance behaviour) and personal resources (optimism vs. pessimism) on employee engagement among cancer survivors in comparison to a referent group of non-cancer survivors. Their results suggested that, compared to the referent group, cancer survivors were slightly less engaged. However, studies have shed some light regarding levels of engagement among survivors. Gubergesson et al. (2008) found that despite having significantly lower vigour (level of work energy and willingness and ability to invest energy into work) than the non-cancer survivor referents in the study, cancer survivors maintained overall work engagement. Similarly, a study by Omar (2014) found that cancer survivors were no less engaged in their work than those without cancer despite facing additional challenges.

Research that integrates the needs of survivors, employers, and the workforce is required so that measures can be taken to support employed cancer survivors (Popa et al., 2020; Greidanus et al., 2020; Bradley et al., 2018). Moreover, such studies hint at the potential for individuals and organisations to help dispel possible misconceptions that cancer survivors are less engaged in their work. Thus, it is important to study the antecedents of work engagement of cancer survivors in Malaysia.

1.1.3 Landscape of cancer survivors in Malaysia

Cancer is a major morbidity and mortality concern in Malaysia. Based on the National Cancer Registry in the period of 2012–2016, Malaysia recorded an 11.3% increase in new cancer cases from 103,507 in 2007-2011 to 115,238 in the 2012-2016 period, with 44.7% of the patients being males and 55.3% females. The Age-standardised incidence rates (ASR) were 86.1 for males and 101.6 for females per 100,000 population. Cancer imposes a tremendous economic burden on patients, families, and the society in which they live. Apart from hefty medical expenses, cancer has a serious psychosocial effect on patients and their families owing to work-related issues (De Souza et al., 2017; Dusetzina et al., 2014). Employment is important for the individual's wellbeing; it is necessary for economic, socialisation, and accomplishment reasons, besides contributing to society. Being prevented from full participation at the workplace is a challenge that cancer survivors often have to face (Chow et al., 2015).

As improvements in early detection and effective treatments of cancer lead to higher survival rates, the survival rate of cancer has also been increasing in Malaysia. The first population-based cancer survival study in Malaysia, conducted in 2018 by the National Cancer Registry Department, National Cancer Institute, reported a five-year relative survival (RS) rate involving 15 types of cancer in Malaysia. The survival rate was higher in women and the younger patients aged 15-44 years who comprised 21% of the sample. The top five overall 5-year RS rates were for patients with thyroid (82.3%), prostate (73.0%), corpus uteri (70.6%), female breast (66.8%), and colon (56.8%) cancers. The lowest RS rate (11.0%) was for lung, trachea & bronchus cancers. The study also revealed that the cancer survival estimate in Malaysia was comparable to that of other Asian countries, and the pattern was also not very different from that of other studies for similar types of cancers. Nevertheless, the survival rate in Malaysia is still lower compared to that in Australia, New Zealand, the USA and most European countries. In Malaysia, survivors of haematological malignancies were higher in children as compared to adults. As a result, the population of young cancer survivors is steadily increasing. This has led to a growing number of studies on cancer survivors and the consideration of survivorship as a major factor in the continuum of care (Miller et al., 2019; Nekhlyudov et al., 2019; Poon et al., 2018). The growing number of young cancer survivors in Malaysia has led to their increasing number in workforce participation. Hence, it is important to design interventions to facilitate cancer survivors' return to the workplace.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the current proliferation of work engagement research, the application of work engagement theory is a particularly underexplored topic in HRD research (Kwon & Park, 2019). The scarcity of empirical evidence on issues concerning work engagement has circumscribed ways to assess, boost, and sustain work engagement in real-world contexts (Knight, Patterson, & Dawson are, 2017). Ongoing research on work engagement is needed to refine and develop current knowledge; there should be specific demographic focus on people with disabilities to enable framing the most ecologically valid interventions that would have the be most likely chance to be effective (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Given the potential importance of employees' engagement in achieving organizational objectives, more studies should be conducted on work engagement issues among cancer survivors in Malaysia.

Previously, most work engagement studies were underpinned by the Job Demand Resource (JDR) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), which focused on the provision of resources such as job-related resources, personal resources, and demands in raising work engagement. However, the JDR model has been criticized for its limited generalizability as a descriptive model that specifies the relationship between classes of variables without providing any particular psychological explanation of the relationship (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). In fact, additional explanatory theoretical frameworks are usually needed to argue why particular demands interact with particular resources. Hence, in the present study, the Social Cognitive theory (SCT) is used to explain the antecedents of work engagement, with emphasis on the proactive and intentional role of the individual and the work environment. In addition, the efficacy expectation resulting from efficacious beliefs (Bandura, 1986) to successfully experience a greater sense of purpose and expression of inner life In this study, psychological desires may reinforce work engagement. processes involve workplace spirituality that acts as the efficacious belief in explaining how the provision of the individual factor (employee resilience) and environment factors (workplace social support and QWL) can affect cancer survivors' experiences of work engagement. The SCT is often employed to help understand and predict human behaviours in various contexts, and to investigate workplace-related behaviours and organisational applications (Rana, & Dwivedi, 2015). However, there have been limited reports on the application of SCT to workplace spirituality (Otaye-Ebede et al., 2019).

Examining the determinants of work engagement is essential for both practical and theoretical reasons. Little has been published on the impact of personal and environmental factors on employment quality of cancer survivors (Newman et al., 2019; Verbeek, 2006; Verbeek & Spelten, 2007). According to relational theory, resilience and workplace spirituality (individual factor), workplace social support and quality of working life (environment factor) are related to cultivating work engagement among cancer survivors. As such, an investigation of these variables and their relationships will contribute to a better understanding of the concept of work engagement and help build a robust theory that is related to work engagement in organisational development. Resilience of employees is

vital to functioning in the 'chaotic practice world' (Duchek, 2020; Winwood et al., 2013). Hence, resilience of cancer survivors can be viewed as the ability to maintain or restore relatively stable psychological and physical functioning when confronted with stressful life events and adversity (Seiler & Jenewein, 2019). Although marked variations exist in how cancer patients cope with cancer as a disease, there is growing recognition that the resilience of cancer survivors is crucial to work engagement. Hence, employee resilience was identified as a factor to be investigated in this study on work engagement.

Next, a scant but continuously growing body of literature has been probing into workplace support for cancer survivors (Poulsen et al., 2016). The critical elements for social support include the creation of a culture where concerns can be shared in a safe (i.e., confidential) and trustworthy relationship (Poulsen et al., 2016). Engaged workers who experience social support are more likely to report positive emotions, experience better health, create their own job and personal resources, and transfer their engagement to others (Fredrickson, 2001). The exploration of the association between social support by either coworkers or supervisors and work engagement, which is sometimes regarded as the antithesis of burnout, is even more limited (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Clear communication and support from employer and organisation would be helpful in supporting an employee with cancer (Greidanus et al., 2018). Hence, research is needed from the perspective of the individual employer or employers' associations to engender bidirectional sharing of information and expertise to optimize work outcomes among cancer survivors. The paucity of knowledge in this regard (de Moor et al., 2018) has prompted the current investigation. Thus, in this study, social support from supervisor and coworkers is categorized as an individual related factor.

To date, study on work engagement in Malaysia has been done extensively across various sectors such as the automotive industry (Basheer et al., 2019), Information Technology (IT) industry (Alias, Noor, & Hassan, 2014), and manufacturing industry (Yahya et al., 2018). There have been only few studies on work limitation for cancer survivors (van Maarschalkerweerd et al., 2019; Chow, Loh & Su, 2015; Mehnert, de Boer & Feurstein, 2013). Previous research has found that cancer survivors experience (chronic) fatique and cognitive problems at work (Becker, Henneghan & Mikan, 2015). In addition, people with disabilities report decreased employment quality (Margues et al., 2019; Lustig, Strauser, & Donnell, 2003), as indicated by decreased job satisfaction, increased turnover intention, increased absenteeism, decreased job performance, and decreased organizational commitment (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Saks, 2005). Such findings would only reinforce misconceptions of employers towards cancer survivors' ability to work as before, as well as confirm their negative perceptions of the impact of cancer and its treatments on work performance (Fitch & Nicoll, 2019; Grunfeld et al., 2010). Little is known about cancer survivors' well-being, engagement, their daily activities, and their work ability at the workplace (Hakanen et al., 2019; Bradley et al., 2018; Mehnert, 2011; Hakanen & Lindbohm, 2008). As suggested by Klaver et al. (2020), it is increasingly important to lend support to cancer survivors so that they can return to work. Work engagement contributes to the sustainability in

work for cancer survivors (Von Ah & Crouch, 2021) because work engagement is an indicator of productivity and well-being (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). There should be more research on the unique needs of cancer survivors as engaged employees (Von Ah & Crouch, 2021). However, to date, not much research has been conducted to examine work engagement of cancer survivors (Von Ah & Crouch, 2021; Airila, 2012; Crist, 2013; Hakanen & Lindbohm, 2008; Gudbergsson et al., 2008). Work engagement of cancer survivors in Malaysia remains scanty (Hamzah et al., 2020; Omar, 2014). Are cancer survivors less engaged at work? This question warrants an answer and thus this study would attempt to bridge the research gap by investigating the antecedents of work engagement of cancer survivors in Malaysia, with workplace spirituality as a mediator.

Workplace spirituality is expected to influence the relationships of resilience, workplace social support, and quality of working life with work engagement. According to van der Walt and de Klerk (2014), workplace spirituality is a predictor of several positive organisational outcomes. It can play a corrective or boosting action role on job satisfaction (Gupta, Kumar, & Singh, 2014), organisational citizenship behaviour (Genty et al., 2017), and performance (De Carlo et al., 2016; Do, 2018; Rahman et al., 2019). In this connection, it can provide new insight on employee attitude (Benefiel et al., 2014). Therefore, workplace spirituality is crucial to strengthening and sustaining work engagement. There are very few studies that examine workplace spirituality independently (e.g., Ghadi, 2017; Chawla, 2014). Considering the importance of workplace spirituality among cancer survivors, this study seeks to bridge the gap in the literature regarding the relationships of resilience, workplace social support and quality of working life with work engagement of cancer survivors, as mediated by workplace spirituality in the Malaysian context. Therefore, in this study, the researcher has sought to examine in a single study how an individual factor (resilience), and work-related factors (social support and quality of working life) predict work engagement among cancer survivors in Malaysia, and to examine the possible mediating effect of workplace spirituality on these relationships.

Therefore, taking into consideration the above discussion, the research questions for this study are formulated as follows:

- 1) What are the levels of employee resilience, workplace social support and quality of working life, workplace spirituality and work engagement experienced among cancer survivors?
- 2) Do employee resilience, workplace social support and quality of working life predict work engagement and workplace spirituality?
- 3) Does workplace spirituality of cancer survivors predict work engagement?
- 4) Does workplace spirituality have a mediating effect on the relationships of employee resilience, workplace social support, and quality of working life with work engagement among cancer survivors?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate selected antecedents of work engagement of Malaysian cancer survivors and the mediating effect of workplace spirituality.

Specifically, this study aimed to:

- i. determine the level of work engagement workplace spirituality, employee resilience, workplace social support and quality of working life of cancer survivors in Malaysia.
- ii. examine the relationships of resilience, workplace social support, and quality of working life with work engagement of cancer survivors in Malaysia.
- iii. examine the relationship of resilience, workplace social support and quality of working life with workplace spirituality among cancer survivors in Malaysia.
- iv. examine the mediating effect of workplace spirituality on the relationships of employee resilience, workplace social support and quality of working life with work engagement of cancer survivors in Malaysia.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is aimed at making a number of related contributions to the discipline theory and research on HRD in general, and work engagement specifically. First, it responds to the call for broadening the scope of engagement studies (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013) to include societal and relational contexts (Truss et al., 2013) through the investigation of the mediating role of workplace spirituality on the influence of an individual factor (employee resilience) and two environmental factors (workplace social support and QWL) on work engagement of employed cancer survivors. The role of workplace spirituality as a mediator will provide new insight into understanding the antecedents of workplace engagement. Second, this study contributes to research on the work engagement of employed cancer survivors through bridging the gap in the engagement literature by conducting a more inclusive empirical study that emphasizes a specific demographic group. Bakker and Albrecht (2018) are of the view that more empirical research is needed to enrich the knowledge of work engagement in the effort to have more ecological interventions. Third, underpinned by the SCT, this study contributes to research on the application of the SCT as an explanatory theory to explicate the relationships between the variables of work engagement that highlight the core element of "Triadic Reciprocity", which represents the co-interaction of individual, environmental and behavioural factors (Bandura, 1986). Crane et al. (2016) suggest that the contribution to a theory in terms of its application can be made by providing knowledge on how an existing theory can be applied in a particular field of empirical study. Hence, the present study aims to contribute significantly to HRD and the engagement theory by providing empirical evidence using the SCT to underpin the findings.

This study also contributes to the literature by elucidating the need for greater attention to the practical applications of work engagement by HRD scholars, managers and practitioners who need to have a better understanding of work engagement. The findings of the study will identify which research constructs are important and relevant in the study of work engagement. Such information will assist HRD practitioners in appreciating the nature of inclusivity from the employee's perspective Moreover, this study involves practices in HRD development which can be implemented to clarify the need to increase HRD interferences and practices in the broader context of staff development, especially where employed cancer survivors are involved.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study is confined to an understanding of work engagement of Malaysian cancer survivors who had registered for follow-up sessions at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital. The study sample comprised respondents who had childhood cancer. The reason for this selection was owing to the fact that the Paediatric Institute in Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL) is a primary treatment centre for childhood cancer in Malaysia, and the patients come from all over Malaysia. HKL is also the largest hospital in Malaysia under the Ministry of Health Malaysia. This study focused on cancer survivors who were 18-40 years of age and had been diagnosed with cancer (all types of cancer); they were employed at the time of participation in the study.

Issues surrounding the employee's behaviour at the workplace are sensitive as they may affect the employee's reputation and self-esteem. Employees may not be entirely willing to share or disclose their experiences truthfully regarding their level of work engagement. The same challenge has been widely recognised by other researchers (Jensen, 2020; Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007) who had concerns with self-reported behavioural studies as the honesty of responses might be an issue. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that surveys using self-reported data are generally precise (Lines et al., 2020), including data on undesirable behaviours. Thus, self-administered questionnaires were used in this study for data collection.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

One obvious limitation of this study concerns the participants' interpretations of work engagement. What one participant identifies as work engagement may be different from that of another participant. Therefore, the responses to the questionnaire regarding work engagement items might not truly reflect the concept of work engagement as envisaged by the researcher. To minimize this limitation, the definition of work engagement was explained beforehand to the respondents. In addition, care was taken to ensure appropriateness of the design of the questionnaire, correct word usage, standardization along with precise and unambiguous phrasing (Dykema et al., 2020); the scale used was checked by the researchers and supervisory committee members.

As this study adopted a quantitative research design, other important variables that might affect the outcome of the study were not included in questionnaire. Unlike the qualitative approach that involves interviewing the participants, this study did not give the participants the opportunity to express their views directly to the researcher.

Another limitation of the study is social desirability which is seen as a potential source of common method bias. Criticisms of self-reported data often focus on social desirability bias (Caputo, 2017). The participants tend to provide socially desirable responses in studies of this nature (Vesely & Klockner, 2020). The participants may not be willing to disclose their responses to the items in the questionnaire. Reducing social desirability and maintaining participants' anonymity have been proposed to ensure greater confidence in the results (Findley et al., 2017).

The population of this study comprised cancer survivors who were employees from various sectors in Malaysia. As such, the results would therefore not focus on a specific working sector, and may not be applicable to any particular sector.

1.7 Assumptions of the Study

This study takes into account several primary assumptions. Based on extensive literature reviews of articles, reports as well as verbal resources from the Malaysian Ministry of Health, the researcher is fully aware of the existence of work engagement among cancer survivors and is of the view that it deserves adequate attention.

The independent variables used in this study were identified as important antecedents of work engagement based on the literature review. Thus, the study assumes that the examination of the relationships of the selected independent variables, with workplace spirituality as the mediating variable, would help in understanding work engagement of cancer survivors.

All cancer survivors in this study were employed by organizations in various sectors. This study assumes that the cancer survivors have full volitional control over their work engagement. The workplace is presumed to be a learning organisation which supports and allows workers, including cancer survivors, to unleash their potential by engaging in organisation activities to promote and enhance work engagement.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

In this study, work engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et

al. (2002). The level of work engagement is measured using these three dimensions.

Employee resilience refers to employee capability that is facilitated and supported by the organisation to utilize resources, to continually adapt and flourish at work even if/when faced with challenging circumstances. Employee resilience in the present study was measured on an Employee Resilience scale (EmPres) (Naswall et al., 2015).

In this study, QWL refers to the individual's perception of work-based satisfaction factors as well as life satisfaction and general feelings of wellbeing. The present study used the scale from de Jong, (2016) to measure QWL among cancer survivors. It consists of five dimensions, namely perception of the work situation, atmosphere in the work environment, meaning of work, understanding and recognition in the organization, as well as his or her health situation.

Workplace social support is defined as "continuing social aggregates that provide individuals with opportunities for feedback about themselves and validations of their expectations of others." (Caplan, 1974). Workplace social support in this study refers to cancer survivors' perception that their supervisor and co-workers value their contributions, compliment them, and genuinely care about their well-being.

In this study, workplace spirituality is defined as "a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that brings feelings of completeness and joy" (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, p. 13). This study operationalized workplace spirituality as the recognition by employers that cancer survivors have an inner life that is nourished by meaningful work and a sense of community and alignment with the organisation's values.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents an overview of the research. It begins with the introduction and background of the study that highlight work engagement among cancer survivors. Then, it continues with the explanation of the statement of the problem, research objectives and significance of the study. This is followed by the scope and limitations of the study. This chapter ends with a brief statement about the conceptual and operational definitions of terms used in this study. In the next chapter, a review of literature on the selected variables will be discussed in detail.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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