

Discrimination Based Factors Influencing Mental Health Amongst Women in The Manufacturing Industry in Klang Valley Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine selected factors that influence the mental health of women employed in the manufacturing industry at the Klang Valley, situated in the state of Selangor, Malaysia.

Theoretical Framework: The study draws on the principles of Feminist Theory because it is suitable for addressing women's mental health issues in the manufacturing industry in Malaysia. This study examines the impact of four major variables: First, pay disparity; second, sexual harassment; third, pregnancy discrimination and finally lack of equal opportunity on women's mental health in the manufacturing industry.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Utilizing a quantitative research methodology, the current study collects data through the distribution of questionnaires. The study employs a research approach that entails the collection of data from employees from the manufacturing industry in Klang Valley Malaysia. 386 questionnaires were distributed and subjected to analysis.

Expected Findings: The study's conclusions are expected to show that four elements selected have an impact on work satisfaction: First, pay disparity; second, sexual harassment; third, pregnancy discrimination and finally lack of equal opportunity. The findings are expected to yield meaningful insights that could potentially affect mental health of women in the manufacturing industry.

Research, Practical and Social Implication: The study's conclusions have effects on both practice and research. Organizations can choose to execute more successful initiatives if they have an unambiguous comprehension of the relationships between the different forms of discrimination. Manufacturing is a well-known industry with high labour costs, a diverse workforce, and supervisors with different working styles. There is widespread prejudice against women in the manufacturing industry. Women's contributions to the manufacturing industry are essential to increasing

productivity and elevating the standard of work that the company produces. The purpose of this study is to show how different types of workplace discrimination affect women's mental health in the manufacturing industry. In today's world, women persist in exhibiting remarkable fortitude and self-reliance by defying gender-biased norms and embracing many opportunities and career paths. Despite the fact that women encounter challenges when attempting to assume managerial roles, many of these are brought on by persistent cultural preconceptions. Additionally, these are more common than most individuals realize in corporate management roles.

Originality/Value: In view of the increasing number of women in the workforce, this research adds value by examining their mental health in the manufacturing industry in Malaysia and provides a fascinating area of research where numerous management elements come together. Studies in this field can contribute towards a deeper understanding of mental health within the particular societal setting of Malaysia and offer beneficial knowledge for both men and women by studying how these variables impact women's mental health.

KEYWORDS: Manufacturing Industry, Mental Health, Discrimination, Malaysia.

Introduction

The term "mental health illness" describes a range of mental health issues that affect behaviour, emotions, and thought processes. A quarter of the global population suffers from mental illness, making it one of the primary causes of disease burden in the present fast developing world. There are serious detrimental effects of mental illness on the community, the economy, and one's physical well-being. Through the implementation of appropriate preventive measures, including adopting a health-conscious lifestyle, effectively managing stressors, and seeking support from social networks, individuals can effectively mitigate the challenges posed by mental health disorders (Cheah et al., 2020). The problems associated with mental illness are comparable in industrialized and developing nations. Despite varying levels of social and economic phases these nations share similar problems such as discrimination, poor treatment accessibility and a lack of funding for mental health services. Considering these problems are ubiquitous, it is important to address mental health issues globally and to emphasize the vitality of teamwork in promoting mental well-being globally.

The existence of a wide range of distinct components within a group or system is referred to as diversity. This can include variations in terms of abilities, viewpoints, socioeconomic situation, religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and more. Furthermore, in this notion of diversity, variation extends to include differences in background, experiences, and ways of thinking. Diversity needs to be embraced and flourishes better in a climate of inclusive settings that celebrates differences, respects distinctive contributions and creates space for individuals to share their expertise in the growth process (Cohen, 2021). We are better positioned to attain comprehensive and thorough results when we include diversity in questionnaire responses analysis. The results will help to identify more objectively experiences, address disparities, enhance decision-making, and promote cultural

competence. This multi-faceted analysis with the inclusion of diversity provides insights that are less prone to biased views thereby helping to formulate policies and services that addressed the needs of a wide range of users (Puhl, 2020).

1.1 Research Objective

This research aims to determine the key factors that affect mental health in women's roles in the manufacturing industry on disparities related to pay, harassment of a sexual nature, discrimination based on pregnancy and unequal opportunities. The five research objectives are outlined as follows:

RO1: To examine the influence of pay disparity on women's mental health in the manufacturing industry in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

RO2: To examine the influence of sexual harassment on women's mental health of women in the manufacturing industry in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

RO3: To examine the influence of pregnancy discrimination on women's mental health in the manufacturing industry in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

RO4: To examine the influence of lack of equal opportunity on women's mental health in the manufacturing industry in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

RO5: To examine the influence of the four independents on women's mental health in the manufacturing industry in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Literature Review

2.1 Global Perspective on Mental Health of Women in the Manufacturing Industry

To properly address the mental health needs of individuals who may be more adversely affected by the pandemic, it is vital to examine disparities between male and female workers regarding SCOVID stress or disruption and mental health. For example, the pandemic's particular effects on women and manufacturing workers have already been discussed. The relationship between worker role and sex may show significant trends that can guide programs and policies to meet the demands of male and female employees, respectively. In the end, this might contribute to ensuring sufficient access to gender-based health and social services as well as preventing the growth of mental health inequities. (Wade et al., 2021)

Women have been greatly affected by COVID-19 for a number of reasons. Compared to men, women tend to fulfill more than one key duty, such as those related to employment, family, the home, and caring for others. While these obligations are balanced, the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly upset this. Due to the pandemic-related closure of day care centres and schools, children are staying at home with their parents, which means that women are carrying more household tasks than males. Working from home can be stressful for women since it can be difficult to balance work and family obligations. Because women are paid less than men, they could decide to prioritize other responsibilities, such as parenting and education, over their professional obligations. This is especially true given the gender pay gap. Social distancing can have a substantial impact on women employed in the manufacturing sector. Crucial worker women encounter additional difficulties

since they might have to go back to work even in situations when there is insufficient assistance with childcare at home. Women might be under a lot more stress than they were before to the epidemic due to work requirements, societal standards, pay gaps between men and women, and an increase in domestic duties quickly. (Kaye et al., 2021)

2.2 Relationship Between Discrimination and Mental Health Amongst Women in the Manufacturing Industry

Due to physically demanding tasks, long work hours, and strict output targets, women in the manufacturing industry face increased workplace stress. These kinds of stressors are strong indicators of mental health issues including sadness and anxiety. The strain is increased when navigating these stressors in a setting that has historically been dominated by men. The problem is made worse by discrimination based on gender and restricted access to resources which would be pivotal for upward mobility. As such, the combination of high-stakes employment, gender roles in society, and weak support networks highlights the need for focused interventions to protect women's mental health in manufacturing. Because of the historical male predominance in the industrial sector, women may encounter harassment, discrimination, or unfair treatment at work based on their gender. These difficulties may increase stress and have a detrimental effect on mental health. (Sharma & Srivastava, 2020)

2.2.1 Pay Disparity

The gender wage gap, often known as the "pay disparity," refers to the difference in income that exists between males and females in the labour market. It is a statistic for comparing men's and women's median salaries across industries, occupations, and career stages. The term "pay discrepancy" refers to the percentage that represents the difference between the median earnings of men and women. Typically, this percentage is displayed. A multitude of factors, which may differ between organizations and geographical locations, might contribute to pay discrepancies. (West et al., 2019)

2.2.2 Sexual Harassment

Regardless of the industry, sexual harassment of any kind in the workplace is a common occurrence and is regarded as a serious offense that jeopardizes a person's honour. The experiences of female perpetrators of sexual harassment are no longer the only ones discussed in modern discourse; male perpetrators have now come forward to discuss instances of sexual harassment in their professional careers. Any inappropriate sexual activity, whether overt or covert, graphic, expressive, or physical, that develops during an employee's employment and is offensive, embarrassing, or dangerous to their mental well-being. Sexual harassment is a complex issue with numerous underlying causes. It is important to understand that these components consistently interact and that, contingent upon the situation, how they interplay may vary. (Cortina & Areguin, 2021)

2.2.3 Pregnancy Discrimination

Every year hundreds of women face discrimination from their employers due to their

pregnancy, despite laws that are intended to end this kind of discrimination. This is true for women who work in manual labour-intensive jobs that pay well, lower-paying jobs, and even jobs where the primary responsibility is to care for women. Though argued matters are important for setting precedent and assisting tribunals in understanding how to apply the regulations, examining argued scenarios does not offer a comprehensive understanding of the extent of pregnancy discrimination and the options available to women who make accusations against the business in question. (Hackney et al.,2021)

2.2.4 Lack of Equal Opportunity

Inequality of opportunities give rise to situations where individuals are not afforded the same opportunities to pursue and benefit from opportunities in many areas of life, particularly in areas such as education, employment, and development. Specific traits like age, gender, race, or ethnic background typically cause this. In the context of employment, the lack of equal opportunities refers to the barriers or discrimination that some individuals must face in order to succeed against others on an equal footing. Differential treatment based on certain attributes, unequal access to employment opportunities, disparities in hiring and advancement practices, and limited opportunities for professional development or education are just a few examples of how this can manifest. (Rudhumbu et al., 2020)

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the independent variables identified in this research: First, pay disparity; second, sexual harassment; third, pregnancy discrimination; and lastly equal opportunity. The dependent variable is the mental health of women employed in the manufacturing sector. This study investigates the impact of women's mental health, particularly in the Malaysian setting, so that disparities can be identified and addressed.

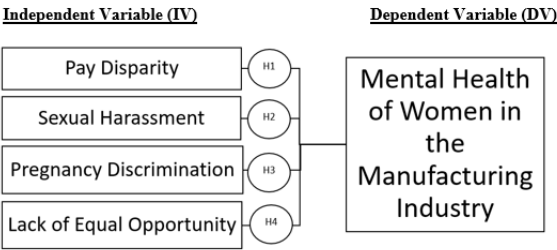


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.4 Hypotheses Development

H1: Pay disparity has a negative and significant relationship with women’s mental health in the manufacturing industry.

H2: Sexual harassment has a negative and significant relationship with women’s mental health in the manufacturing industry.

H3: Pregnancy discrimination has a negative and significant relationship with

women's mental health in the manufacturing industry.

H4: Lack of equal opportunity has a negative and significant relationship with women's mental health in the manufacturing industry.

H5: These combined selections of independent variables have a negative and significant relationship with the women's mental health in the manufacturing industry.

Research Methodology

Similar to the most common method used in previous research, this study draws on the strengths of the quantitative methodology which were effective for the purposes of this study (Jiang et al., 2023, Wider, 2023). The regression study methodology is being employed to ascertain whether there is an association or not between dependent variables (DV), which are related to mental health, and four independent variables (IV): first, pay disparity; second, sexual harassment; third, pregnancy discrimination; and finally lack of equal opportunity. The study will examine the degree to which discrimination against women in the manufacturing sector affects their mental health. The Krejcie and Morgan table helps determine appropriate sample sizes for survey research. It was created in 1970 and provides suggested sample sizes to guarantee dependability and representation. A sample size of 384 would be necessary to achieve a sufficient proportion in an overall population of about 2,241,048 persons, pursuant to the recommended sample size range and determination chart by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). A survey form was sent via email to women working in the manufacturing industry in Klang Valley Malaysia in order to gather the information needed for the present research. The main tool for gathering information is going to be a survey using a questionnaire. Correlation analysis and reliability tests will be used in the evaluation to test the hypothesis and assess the findings in accordance to the theoretical structure.

Results and Findings

4.1 Results of Pilot Test

A pilot study with 39 employees was conducted prior to the primary study project to assess the procedures, gathering information techniques, and analytical apparatus (Table 1). Several studies suggest that a pilot test comprising 39 employees would be justified (Pearson et al., 2020). For each factor examined in the present investigation, the Cronbach's Alpha was higher than 0.6, confirming that the instrument used in this study (a survey or questionnaire, for example) was assessing the constructs it was designed to measure and therefore suitable for collecting information on a larger scale (Shrestha, 2020).

Table 1 Results of Pilot Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Women's mental health (DV)	0.909
Pay Disparity (IV1)	0.953
Sexual Harassment (IV2)	0.943
Pregnancy Discrimination (IV3)	0.953

Lack of Equal Opportunity (IV4)	0.971
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4.2 Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency measures based on Cronbach's alpha evaluates how well elements in a set correspond with one another. For research purposes, a Cronbach's alpha value of more than 0.7 is typically regarded as appropriate; values nearer 1 denote higher internal consistency. All variables in this instance have Cronbach's alpha values that are significantly higher than 0.7, with most above 0.97, indicating exceptionally strong internal consistency (Table 2). This shows that there is a good correlation between the items in each variable (DV and IVs), showing measurement reliability. (Tabandeh et al., 2022).

Table 2 Reliability Analysis Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Women's Mental Health (DV)	0.973	Good
Pay Disparity (IV1)	0.971	Good
Sexual Harassment (IV2)	0.968	Good
Pregnancy Discrimination (IV3)	0.974	Good
Lack of Equal Opportunity (IV4)	0.972	Good

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

The findings of the regression analysis (Table 3), show a significant correlation between the dependent variable and the predictors: First, pay disparity; second, sexual harassment; third, pregnancy discrimination and finally lack of equal opportunity. The model's correlation coefficient R, which stands at 0.862, indicates a significant correlation between the expected and actual results. The predictor components account for a remarkably large portion of the variation in the dependent variable (R² and Modified R² coefficients of 0.743 and 0.740, correspondingly). Even with these positive findings, the framework is still unable to explain among 36.8% and 37.9% of the discrepancies in the dependent variable. This could be because of other variables that the present research did not consider. The determinants' significance in influencing the dependent variable is emphasized by the statistical framework.

Table 3 Model Summary of Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.862	0.743	0.740		3.30535

a. Predictors: (Constant), Pay Disparity, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Lack of Equal Opportunity

Based on Table 4, "Pay Disparity" and "Pregnancy Discrimination" both variables significant impacts on women's mental health. Women's mental health increases by 0.401 units per unit increase in Pay Disparity ($\beta=0.364$, $t >1.645$, $p<0.05$). Operational Performance is increased by 0.267 units because of Pregnancy Discrimination ($\beta=0.262$, $t >1.645$, $p<0.05$).

Table 4 Coefficients of Multiple Regression

Model		Unstandardize d B	Coefficien t Std.Error	Standardize d Coefficients Beta	t	Sig. (p value)
1	(Constant)	1.015	0.522		1.943	0.053
	Pay Disparity	0.401	0.075	0.364	5.347	<0.001
	Sexual Harassment	0.096	0.048	0.094	1.990	0.047
	Pregnancy Discrimination	0.267	0.065	0.262	4.087	<0.001
	Lack of Equal Opportunity	0.214	0.077	0.195	2.793	0.005

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Before this section finishes, the researcher has provided evidence to support the conclusions drawn from the prior assumptions. Table 5 presents the findings.

Table 5 Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Std Beta (B)	t-value	p-value	Decision	R ²	VIF
Hypothesis 1 (H1): Pay disparity has a positive as well as significant impact on women's mental health	0.364	5.347	<0.05	Supported	0.743	6.842
Hypothesis 2 (H2): Sexual harassment has a positive as well as significant impact on women's mental health	0.094	1.990	<0.05	Supported		3.326
Hypothesis 3 (H3): Pregnancy discrimination has a positive as well as significant impact on women's mental health	0.262	4.087	<0.05	Supported		6.084
Hypothesis 4 (H4): Lack of equal opportunity has a positive and significant impact on women's mental health	0.195	2.793	<0.05	Supported		7.217

Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Overview

An overview of the study method is given in the final section of the paper, which also highlights the most significant findings, the implications, and any difficulties encountered. It offers suggestions for additional studies to broaden our understanding of the problem.

5.2 Research Question 1

What is the impact of pay disparity on women's mental health in the manufacturing industry?

H1: Pay disparity has a positive and significant impact on women's mental health.

Women who find employment in the manufacturing sector may have serious mental health effects as a result of pay inequality. Paying female employees less than their male colleagues for equivalent labour can cause stress, irritation, and a sense of unworthiness. This may be a factor in diminished mental health in general, increased anxiety and depression, and less job fulfillment. Furthermore, an awareness of wrongdoing and a decline in workplace trust can result from pay disparity, which exacerbates mental health problems. In order to advance gender equality and create an enjoyable place to work for women in manufacturing, it is imperative that pay disparities be addressed (Wilkinson, 1999). This study (with a β coefficient of 0.364, t-value more than 1.645, and a significance level of $p < 0.05$) demonstrating the pay disparity has the most detrimental influence on women's mental health in the manufacturing business.

5.3 Research Question 2

What is the impact of sexual harassment on women's mental health in the manufacturing industry?

H2: Sexual harassment has a positive and significant impact on women's mental health.

Women in the manufacturing sector may experience serious negative consequences on their mental health because of sexual harassment. Suffering harassment might make you feel anxious, depressed, afraid, or ashamed. Women could feel more stressed out, have trouble focusing, and be less satisfied with their jobs. Continuous harassing exposure can cause psychological trauma that lasts a lifetime and lowers self-assurance and self-worth. Furthermore, it may foster a hostile work atmosphere, which raises attrition and attendance. To protect the mental health and wellbeing of women working in manufacturing, it is imperative that workplace environments be encouraging, regulations be strong, and instructional material be provided (Rothman et al., 2019). With a β coefficient of 0.094, t-value more than 1.645, and a significance level of $p > 0.05$, sexual harassment did not significantly affect the women's mental health working in the industrial sector.

5.4 Research Question 3

What is the impact of pregnancy discrimination on the women's mental health in the manufacturing industry?

H3: Pregnancy discrimination has a positive and significant impact on women's mental health.

Pregnancy discrimination has a not so significant negative consequences on women's mental health in the industrial sector. Pregnancy-related discrimination can cause tension, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. It's common for women to feel underappreciated, disproportionately treated, and uneasy about their potential careers

and opportunities. These unfavourable feelings might be made worse by fear of reprisals or dismissal, which increases mental anguish. Pregnancy discrimination can also sour interpersonal connections with managers and colleagues, which worsens mental health. Safeguarding women's mental health in manufacturing requires tackling pregnant discrimination through rules that support equitable treatment, education about the issue, and encouraging work conditions (Hackney et al., 2021). With a β coefficient of 0.262, t-value larger than 1.645, and a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$, pregnancy discrimination has the second-highest major influence on women's mental health in the manufacturing business.

5.5 Research Question 4

What is the impact of lack of equal opportunity on women's mental health in the manufacturing industry?

H4: Lack of equal opportunity has a positive and significant impact on women's mental health.

Women's mental health in the manufacturing sector can be greatly impacted by the absence of equal opportunity. Experiencing sentiments of dissatisfaction and despair might result from not being given adequate chances for training, management duties, or job promotion. Women's perceptions of being ostracized and underappreciated at work can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. In a working environment lacking recognition and opportunities for career advancement, women's self-worth and trust could be affected. There could be further impact in their general well-being and mental health when they encounter prejudice and unfair treatment, leading to further gender disparities. Women's mental health will be better addressed with female empowerment in manufacturing by providing more equal opportunities, promoting diversity and establishing more comprehensive regulations. Such measures will help to create a more just and supportive work environment (World Health Organization, 2024). The research shows that women's mental health in the manufacturing industry is significantly impacted by unequal opportunity (t-value greater than 1.645, β coefficient of 0.195, and significance level of $p < 0.05$).

5.6 Limitation of the Study

Any generalisation of the findings in this study on women working in the industrial sector needs to consider the sample size, location, and particular circumstances within the organization. Thus, caution needs to be exercised when extrapolating the findings to other demographics or economic sectors. The research uses self-reported data based on the survey measures, but this method is prone to limitations such as inaccurate recollections or social-desirability bias. Since the research uses a cross-sectional approach, it is more challenging to prove the link between discrimination-based characteristics and consequences related to mental health. A stronger indication of the chronological link between these factors would come from longitudinal studies. There may be issues with the veracity and accuracy of the study's assessments of discrimination, mental health, and other pertinent variables. For instance, it's possible that the tools used to evaluate feelings of discrimination do not fully account for the variety of discriminatory actions or the varying internal impacts on people's mental health.

5.7 Recommendation for Future Study

Future research could focus on diverse populations of women from different socioeconomic origins, workplace settings, and geographical regions. Studies on a broader scale will provide richer data on various populations that will help understand how discrimination affects mental health in varied contexts. A mixed method approach could also help to better understand women's perceptions of prejudice and its impact on mental health. Qualitative methods such as interviews will give in-depth information on areas such as cultural aspects, societal norms, and deeply embedded customs that might not be so easily understood with survey instruments. In comparison to a cross-sectional study, a longitudinal design has the potential to determine causal linkages, and monitor developments in personal experiences with discrimination, and evaluate the long-term impacts on mental health.

5.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the manufacturing industry's salary gap, sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, and lack of equal opportunity have a negative impact on women's mental health. These factors combined are detrimental to self-esteem, create an unhealthy work environment, and lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and victimisation. These problems are evident from the findings and several measures can be taken to reduce them. Women working in this field are prone to mental health issues such as higher levels of anxiety and depression. Thus, policies must be in place to ensure fairness, equal compensation, and to close the gender wage gap. Highly regulated anti-harassment measures and methodical efforts to create awareness on sexual misconduct will help reduce offences of a sexual nature. Strictly implemented laws and legal compliance will protect expectant employees from discrimination and offer support during their pregnancy. Discrimination is not easily avoided, especially for the more vulnerable sections of workers, but can be reduced by promoting diversity. A more conscious effort towards inclusiveness and valuing contributions free of gender bias will create a conducive working environment for all. This will boost the performance of workers and will be good for the larger interest of all stakeholders in the factory, industry, company or business establishment. Eventually, these measures will lead to a workforce that is more efficient and healthier. Efficient and satisfied workers help in the country's economic growth.

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