

# **The Perception of Mental Health Issues That Affect Workplace Productivity in Klang Valley, Malaysia**

Kyra Law Ley Sy<sup>a\*</sup>, Benjamin Tiah Joo Wei<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *University of Cyberjaya, Selangor, MALAYSIA*

<sup>b</sup> *Taylor's University, Selangor, MALAYSIA*

\*Corresponding Author: [kyralaw@cyberjaya.edu.my](mailto:kyralaw@cyberjaya.edu.my)

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## **Abstract**

The businesses have been converging on ways to enhance their employees' productivity and motivations for their shaken productivity. With this knowledge, businesses conduct various types of research to find solutions to improve employee's productivity. The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between mental health status and employee's productivity. The primary data was collected by using a quantitative approach among working individuals in Klang Valley, Malaysia. A total of 161 respondents in Klang Valley was gathered, and the results show that depression and anxiety disorder have a significant relationship with employees' workplace productivity, whereas job stress and post-traumatic stress disorder do not have a significant relationship with employees' workplace productivity. This research also found out that anxiety disorder is the most significant variable that affects employees' workplace productivity. Mental health issues are currently arising and hardly acknowledged by organisation; thus, the results of this research focussed on the field of mental health issue affecting employee's productivity.

## **Keywords:**

Stress, Anxiety, Depression, PTSD, Mental Health, Awareness, Sustainability, Productivity

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many corporations and businesses are competitive to achieve success and constantly strive for continuous progress. Nonetheless, the continuous changes in the business environment have made it difficult for firms to survive in the marketplace due to unpredictable circumstances. Companies must achieve a level of standard through continuous improvement in productivity to meet a greater demand from consumers as well as to achieve corporate objectives. The employees' productivity has been deemed to be an important role for firms to achieve success (Manzoor, 2012; Adnan Bataineh, 2019). Studies have shown that human resources are among the most determining factors for a firm to achieve organisations' objectives, gain competitive advantage, increase production with a minimal cost and increase the firms' profitability (Muda, Rafiki and Harahap, 2014; Hanaysha, 2016; Patil, 2018).

Businesses that fail to consider the importance to improve an employee's productivity would ultimately be deemed competitively weak in the marketplace and would outshine by competitors (Raziq and Maulabakhsh, 2015). As employees' productivity level increases, it brings a vast advantage to both organisations and employees. Like country with a higher productivity level would lead to a favourable economic growth, higher profitability, and better social progress (Sharma and Sharma, 2014; Adnan Bataineh, 2019). In a simpler term, as there are an ever-evolving business environment and continuous changes in consumers demands, businesses would try different approaches to increase employee's productivity to ensure long-term success in organisations.

One in six adults would face a common mental health issue (i.e, anxiety, depression, or stress) (Mental Health Foundation, 2016; Lee and Lai, 2017). In countries with a high-income economy, research suggests that sick days lost to employees who suffer from mental health issues have significantly increased in recent years and affect employee's productivity (Henderson and Madan, 2013). Due to a significant change in today's workforce (among millennials), prior methods might not be as effective due to the attitude shift in the workforce (Jerome et al, 2014). Employees who suffer from mental health issues have resulted in lower work performance causing their organisation to lose productivity and profitability (Patil, 2018).

According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (2017), it is shown that mental health issues have been ranked as the top 10 disability affecting individuals in Malaysia, such as, depression and anxiety have increased by 24.9 per cent and 12.7 per cent respectively since 2007. This situation is worrying as individuals who suffer from mental health issue may bring devastating impacts to self and workplace productivity (Bin Hassan, Hassan, Kassim and Hamzah, 2018). According to Lee and Lai (2017), mental health is expected to be one of the major forms of health issues after heart diseases in the country, as the workplace is one of the key settings that influence individual's mental well being and health. Therefore, there is a need to explore into the individuality of mental health issues which affect employees' work productivity, as there is lacked information on employee awareness and organisation recognition on mental health issues.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Mental health issues have become a global challenge to affect an estimate of 46.6 million individuals in the United States and it is considered as one of the leading causes of global disability (National Institution of Mental Health, 2017). Comprehensively, the common mental health issues have affected more than 300 million people, though, a majority (70 per cent) individuals are employed (Ritchie and Roser, 2018). Epidemiologic research on mental health issues is gathered from various developed countries on the frequency rate in society shows that one in five working individuals suffers from mental health issues and it has increased to one in three individuals over a lifetime (Attridge, 2019). Employees who are affected by mental health issues have a significantly higher risk to become disengaged from job, less productive, experiences health problems and a higher chance of being involved in an accident (Lee et al,

2014; Chan et al., 2021). There are several risk factors related to an employee's working environment that may cause mental health issues, whereby these risks are related to a formation and managerial environment of an organisation, types of support for employees to carry out their tasks and interactions within the workplace (WHO, 2019). Past years, organisations' interventions to address employees' mental health issues have heightened swiftly to determine any purpose to effectively prevent, reduce and manage mental health issues faced by employees (Henderson and Madan, 2013; LaMontagne et al, 2014; Ritchie and Roser, 2018). Therefore, most of the economic cost of mental health issues arise as workers are less productive at a workplace when they face mental health issues.

### **Employee's workplace productivity**

In recent years, the issues of employee productivity have emerged in most literature as one of the foremost significant challenges for organisations to manage their workforce. Employees' productivity is a measurement of the unit number of services or products that an employee can cope with per task (Kuranchie-Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2016; Kanapathipillai and Azam, 2020). In a general term, an employee's productivity is measured according to the capability of an employee or a team of staff to complete a task within a designated time to maximise corporate efficiency. The productivity of an employee may refer to the total time an employee is physically present at his or her job, in addition to the extent to which he or she is "*mentally present*" or working efficiently during their presence at the job (Hanaysha, 2016). As such, employees' workplace productivity has become highly significant for businesses as they mainly rely on staff's productivity achieve success (Sharma and Sharma, 2014). For a firm to achieve its organizational performance, it is vital to take measures that boost employee's productivity at workplace.

### **Job stress**

Stress is one of the common and serious mental health issues faced that affect an individual mentally and physically. Odor (2019) defines stress as an unfavourable reaction a person experiences in connection with an overloaded pressure or demand placed upon them within an internal or external environment. Commonly, stress is categorised as a positive emotion or challenge, however, if it reaches an amount that one is not able to handle, both mental and physical health may be affected (George and Zakkariya, 2015). Stress is a natural experience that may be beneficial or destructive towards a person, depending on the severity. It is a universal experience that exists in every firm and stage of an organisation hierarchy, affecting executives, managers, and individuals (Mawanza, 2017). In a simple term, job stress is a combination of high demand in the workplace and minimal control over the event that leads an employee to *feel* stress. It is critical for the organizations to look in the support programmes to engage employees at risk of stress related health issues (Street, Lacey and Somoray, 2019) Job stress may occur when an employee's role requirements are conflicting with other employees, causing the individual to face conflict with one another (Goswami, 2015). This would eventually create a bitter and upsetting working environment among employees. The previous

study shows that organizations effort to decrease stress in the workplace is beneficial to employees' workplace productivity (Bui et al., 2021).

**H1:** There is a positive relationship between job stress and employees' workplace productivity.

### **Depressive disorder**

According to the Global Burden of Disease, depression has ranked as the top cause of disability globally, affecting an estimate of 350 million individuals (Evans-Lacko and Knapp, 2016). Depression is a predominant mental disability among the working populations, affecting at least 7 per cent of working individuals, whereby 10.1 per cent being women and 4.7 per cent being men (Woo et al, 2011). Consequently, there is an increase in awareness of the social and economic cost depression in a country, along with its heavy burden in the workplace. An employee's weak mental health can be toxic and impact severely on productivity, career prospects or organizational development (Rasool et al., 2019). As most researchers suggest that depression is ranked as the top mental health issues that have the greatest negative impact on a person's ability to perform their daily activities to affect a person's time management and productivity (Hysenbegasi, Hass and Rowland, 2005; Dewa et al, 2018). A percentage of productivity lost in the workplace is caused by an increase of employees' absenteeism at work. Otherwise, the levels of function for employees can be very low or lacked involvement in a workplace (Rasool et al., 2019). In Malaysia, depressive disorder is ranked as the fourth health problem that causes the most disability and loss in the country, having an increase of 24.9 per cent since the year 2007 (IHME, 2017). The country is no exceptional with mental health issues as it is a known global health burdens that affect productivity and socio-economics settings (Mat and Applanaidu, 2021).

**H2:** There is a positive relationship between depressive disorder and employees' workplace productivity.

### **Anxiety disorder**

Comparably, anxiety disorder is a psychiatric disorder involving extreme worry or fear, including panic disorder, social anxiety, and generalized anxiety disorder (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2021). Anxiety is either sparked by a stimulus or born in nature which can be seen in different aspects, such as constant worrying, phobic reactions, or panic attack (Villagrasa et al, 2018). The World Health Organisation (2019) has estimated that more than 260 million people around the world are currently affected by an anxiety disorder. However, one common form of anxiety faced by working individuals is Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). GAD is defined as an inappropriate and excessive form of worrying that is frequent and not sequestered to a specific circumstance, such as, issues with finances, health, family, or work for a longer period (Yu et al, 2018). Job anxiety is associated with exposure to stimulus-related types of anxiety, such as relating to and occurring in a workplace (De Clercq, Haq and Azeem, 2017). The relationship between an environment of a workplace and mental health or general health have been studied numerously in past research (Battams et al, 2014;

Rasoulzadeh et al, 2015; Heath, 2018) as a workplace may provoke most individual's anxiety. Constant worrying, phobic reactions and other symptoms cause difficulty for people with GAD to carry out daily tasks and responsibilities; whereas job anxiety may result in avoidance behaviour towards stimulus-related anxiety (toxic working environment) and higher absenteeism at a workplace (Muschalla, Linden and Olbrich, 2010; Yu et al, 2018).

**H3:** There is a positive relationship between anxiety disorder and employees' workplace productivity.

### **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**

The diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) includes exposure to a long history of traumatic events including actual or threatened deaths, serious injuries or violent experiences that may lead to respond to intense fear, constant feeling of helplessness or recollections and flashbacks of a traumatic episode (Wilson, Guliani and Boichev, 2016). PTSD is a form of anxiety disorder that is characterised by three symptom groups, avoidances, hypervigilance, and re-experiencing (Karsen, Watts and Holtzheimer, 2014). A working individual with the symptoms of PTSD may deliberately disrupt the profitability of a firm, causing a low productivity and performances rate for the firm. Although it lacked comprehensive research on the cost of PTSD in many countries, many scholars find that majority of PTSD related losses are due to indirect cost (i.e losses due to unproductivity) (Wilson, Guliani and Boichev, 2016; Lee et al, 2019). However, an effective discussion or communication between managers and employees about mental health issues at a workplace would increase in confidence and improvements about mental health knowledge, non-stigmatizing attitudes and beliefs (Brooks, Rubin and Greenberg, 2019).

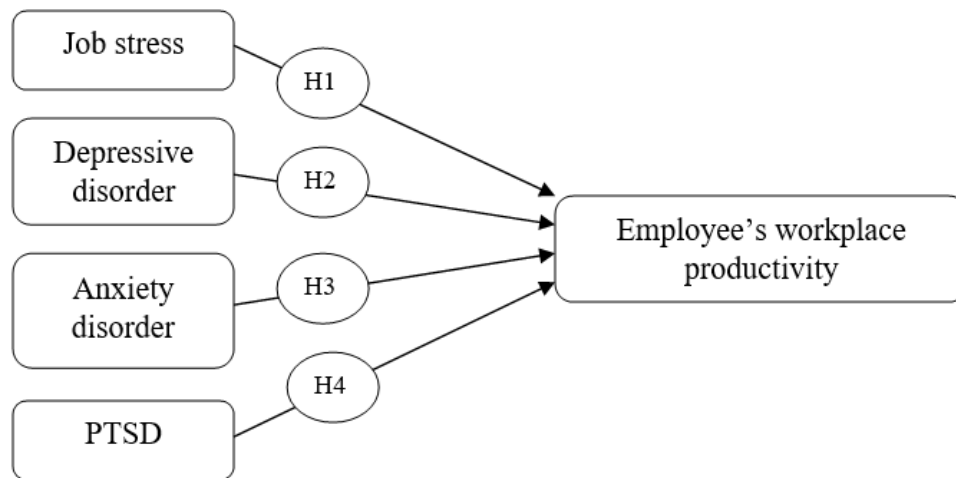
**H4:** There is a positive relationship between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and employees' workplace productivity.

Hence, there is an urgency for the country and organizations to seek out opportunities to improve efficiency and to maximise profitability, especially Malaysia as an emerging and developing country. Mental health issues are on the hike in recent years; thus, it is beneficial for businesses in the country to gain more knowledge on this subject matter to battle mental health issues in the workplace as well as to prevent future losses. Absenteeism, one of the extreme cases of unproductivity and time lost due to unplanned absences is critical for organizations to deal with (Bortoluzzi et al., 2018).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The relationship of mental health issues and employees' workplace productivity have used various types of frameworks to identify the effects it has on an individual's productivity. Based on past studies, mental health issues such as acute stress behaviour, anxiety disorder, depressive disorder and PTSD been found to influence a person's workplace productivity. In this research,

a quantitative application was applied along with the use of the primary data collection method to retrieve suitable results.



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework for this research**

**Adapted from:** Davidson et al (1997); Oginska-Bulik (2005); Hass and Rowland (2005); Halkos and Bousinakis (2010); Hysenbegasi, Muschalla, Linden and Olbrich (2010)

The questionnaire derived was referenced to past research that has carried out similar studies to the perception on mental health issue towards employees' workplace productivity. To measure stress, five items are used and adapted from Oginska-Bulik (2005) and Halkos and Bousinakis (2010) and four items were used and adapted from Hysenbegasi, Hass and Rowland (2005). Meanwhile, five items are adapted by Muschalla, Linden and Olbrich (2010) and Davidson et al (1997) respectively to measure anxiety disorder and PTSD. A set of statistical measures questionnaires was then sent out to 161 working individuals across Klang Valley, Malaysia using the snowball sampling method. According to Handcock and Gile (2011), snowball sampling or referral sampling is the process in which research participants recruit other participants for research. It is a set of survey questionnaires that is sent to a small sample of participants, to begin with, and that small sample of participants would then use their social network to distribute the survey to other participants that meet the eligibility to contribute data to specific research. The questionnaire used a 1 to 5 Likert scale (where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) for the items measuring job stress, depressive disorder, anxiety disorder and PTSD.

## **FINDINGS**

Table 1 sets out the descriptive statistics regarding the respondents in this research, showing that the respondent in this research is female with a total of 113 people responding and 70.2 per cent of the total respondent. The male respondent makes up the minority of the research respondent with 48 people responding and 29.8 per cent of the total respondents. Most respondents in this research are between the age of 25 to 34 years old with 31.1 per cent and the second-largest age group of respondents are between the ages of 45 to 54 years old 20.5

per cent. Furthermore, individual between the age of 35 to 44 years old and 55 to 64 years old make up 18 per cent and 16.1 per cent, respectively.

The majority of the respondents have an education level of a Bachelor Degree (53.4 per cent). Besides, 20.5 per cent of the respondents have a Master Degree and 12.4 per cent of the respondents have an education level of either Foundation, Diploma or A-levels. Respondents with a PhD consists of 8.7 per cent in this research. Lastly, the lowest percentage of respondents are those with high school level education (5 per cent).

**Table 1. Summary of demographic characteristics of the respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (per cent)</b>
Male	48	29.8
Female	113	70.2
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 24	20	12.4
25 – 34	50	31.1
35 – 44	29	18.0
45 – 54	33	20.5
55 – 64	26	16.1
65 and above	3	1.9
<b>Education Level</b>		
High School (SPM, IGCSC, UEC)	8	5.0
Foundation/Diploma/A-levels	20	12.4
Bachelor Degree	86	53.4
Master Degree	33	20.5
PhD	14	8.7
<b>Total respondents</b>	<b>161</b>	

**Validity of the measures**

Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is used to measure the internal consistency of a test or questionnaires with multiple Likert questions; the reliability coefficient is expressed as a number between 0 to 1 (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). It is noted that an  $\alpha$  value of 0.8 is widely recognised by many researchers as a reasonable goal (Bonett and Wright, 2015). The reliability results in Table 2 shows that depressive disorder has a moderate value of 0.784 that indicates the internal consistency of this variable is acceptable. Both job stress and anxiety disorder have a value of 0.835 and 0.881, respectively to indicate that the internal consistency is good. Post-traumatic stress disorder is at 0.958 which shows strong reliability.

**Table 2. Summary of Cronbach alpha**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Cronbach Alpha (<math>\alpha</math>) (N = 161)</b>
Job stress	0.835
Depressive disorder	0.784
Anxiety Disorder	0.881
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	0.958

With regards to the variability of the findings, we can conclude that 40.8 per cent ( $R^2=0.408$ ) of the variation in workplace productivity is explained by mental health issues (Table 3). This shows that 40 per cent of the population in the sample is correlated between mental health issues and workplace productivity. However, the adjusted  $R^2$  shows a revised estimate that 39.2 per cent of the variability in workplace productivity is explained by the four independent variables which are job stress, depressive disorder, anxiety disorder and PTSD. Lastly, the standard error of the estimate is 0.986, which is considered small. Thus, the accuracy of the estimate is considered strong.

**Table 3. Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.638 <sup>a</sup>	0.408	0.392	0.986

The F-statistic in Table 4 is used to determine if there are a cause and effect between two given variables: the dependent and independent variable. The F-value from the table is 26.834 and the degree of freedom are 4 and 156. The p-value is less than 0.001 ( $p\text{-value}<0.05$ ) which concluded that job stress, depressive disorder, anxiety disorder and PTSD reflect significant relation with employees’ workplace productivity.

**Table 4. ANOVA**

ANOVA						
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	<b>Regression</b>	104.397	4	26.099	26.834	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	<b>Residual</b>	151.727	156	.973		
	<b>Total</b>	256.124	160			
a. Dependent Variable: WP1						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Stress, Depression, Anxiety, PTSD						

Table 5 shows that job stress has a  $p\text{-value} > 0.05$  and  $t\text{-value} < 1.98$  ( $p\text{-value}>0.326$ ,  $t\text{-value}=0.986$ ). This analysis proves that there is no relationship between job stress and employees’ workplace productivity. Similar results as PTSD and employees’ workplace productivity with the  $p\text{-value} > 0.05$  and a  $t\text{-value}$  above the critical value 1.98 ( $p\text{-value}>0.393$ ,  $t\text{-value}=0.856$ ). There is a positive relationship between depressive disorder and employees’ workplace productivity as depressive disorder have a  $p\text{-value}$  that is lower than 0.05 and a  $t\text{-value}$  above the critical value of 1.98 ( $p\text{-value}<0.007$ ,  $t\text{-value}=2.754$ ). Comparably, anxiety disorders have a  $p\text{-value}$  that is less than 0.05 and a  $t\text{-value}$  above the critical value of 1.98 ( $p\text{-value}<0.007$ ,  $t\text{-value}=2.730$ ). These results show that there is a significantly positive relationship between anxiety or depressive disorder that affect employees’ workplace productivity.



**Table 5. The summary of the hypotheses and test results**

	<b>Standard beta, <math>\beta</math></b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>T value</b>	<b>Decision</b>
H1: Job stress $\rightarrow$ work productivity	0.089	0.326	0.986	Not supported
H2: Depressive disorder $\rightarrow$ work productivity	0.256	0.007	2.754	Supported
H3: Anxiety $\rightarrow$ work productivity	0.304	0.007	2.730	Supported
H4: PTSD $\rightarrow$ work productivity	0.076	0.393	0.856	Not supported

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This research explores the perception of mental health issues towards employees' workplace productivity in Klang Valley, Malaysia. A conceptual framework is employed to demonstrate how the variables correlate with one another. This research mainly focuses on the current workforce; hence, the data is collected from 161 respondents who are currently working around the Klang Valley in Malaysia. This research found that the most determining mental health issue is anxiety disorder as it has the highest standardized coefficients value ( $\beta=0.304$ ) and a p-value of 0.07, similarly as stated by the World Health Organisation (2019) estimation of more than 260 million people worldwide are currently affected by an anxiety disorder. The finding of this research shows that only depressive and anxiety disorders have a direct effect on employees' workplace productivity. From the data, the depressive disorder has a significant value for all t-value (2.754), p-value (0.007) and standardized coefficients value (0.256). Anxiety disorder has significant results of t-value (2.730), p-value (0.007) and standardized coefficients value (0.304). Other variables such as job stress and post-traumatic stress disorder do not have a significant relationship with employees' workplace productivity.

The aim of this research is to investigate the correlation of mental health issues that affect the employee's workplace productivity. The findings show that depressive and anxiety disorder have shown significant results that affect employee's workplace productivity. The respondents may constantly feel restless, which is the greatest factor for depressive disorder. An overloaded workload is a potential factor that causes the respondents to feel anxiety disorder. The results are consistent with Evans-Lacko and Knapp (2018) that manager responses to employees who are facing depressive disorder can reflect broad cultural and organizational features, which would directly affect employee's workplace productivity. With this information, managers would be able to have a better direction to determine solutions that can aid and reduce anxiety disorder among employees. Managers could have a better insight on mental health issues that spark or cause their employees to experience anxiety disorder to prevent future conflicts (Evans-Lacko and Knapp, 2018). By doing so, managers would be able to reduce the anxiety disorder level among employees to minimise the potential loss in profitability.

The respondents agree that some are facing some sort of mental health issue and it has affected their workplace productivity. By understanding that mental health issues do affect the productivity of Malaysian, managers can better strategize their management policies to prevent and minimise the various forms of mental health issues that may be faced by employees, which is accordance to the previous studies (Bortoluzzi et al., 2018; Brooks, Rubin and Greenberg, 2019). When the mental health issues are identified and accessed, it would allow the managers to better understand the employees in a workplace which led to workplace productivity (Corbiere et l., 2019). Similarly, employees would excel better in maximising their corporate efficiency and reduce potential losses. As such, the objectives of this research is to contribute to the understanding of mental health, individuals and organizational foundations that predict workplace productivity.

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