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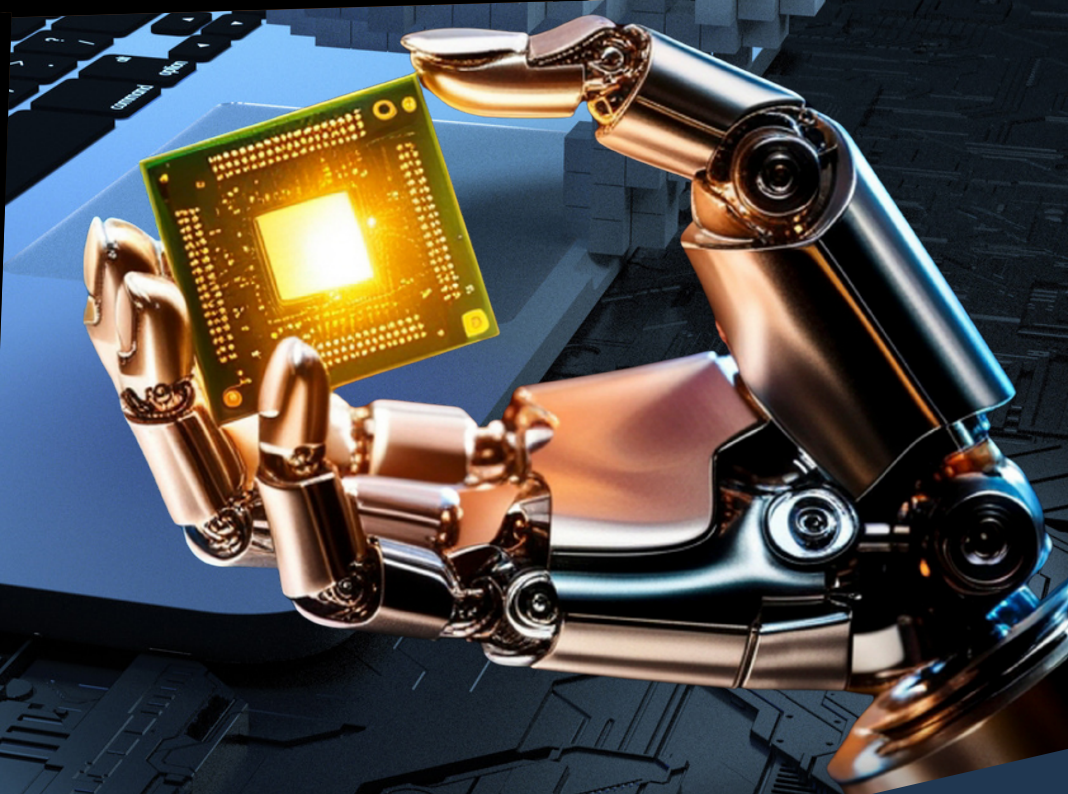


FBM

FACULTY OF BUSINESS
AND MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA,
CAWANGAN KEDAH

2026
VOLUME 13

Insights



e-ISSN 2716-599X



e-ISSN 2716-599X

FBM INSIGHTS

Faculty of Business and Management

Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

e-ISSN 2716-599X

The editorial board would like to express their heartfelt appreciation for the contributions made by the authors, co-authors and all who were involved in the publication of this bulletin.

Published by : Faculty of Business and Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Published date : 17 May 2026

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BEHIND CLOSED OFFICE DOORS: UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BULLYING IN MALAYSIA

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WORKPLACE BULLYING IN MALAYSIA

Workplace bullying is an increasingly recognized issue in Malaysia, affecting employees across diverse sectors and organizational hierarchies, with both psychological and professional consequences. Manifestations range from verbal abuse, ridicule, and social exclusion to harassment and physical aggression, with sector-specific dynamics observed in industries such as construction and healthcare (Awai et al., 2021; Hidzir et al., 2019). Cultural factors, including collectivist values and religious coping mechanisms like *redha*, further shape the perception and management of bullying in Malaysia, highlighting differences from Western contexts (Kwan et al., 2014; Mokhtar & Kamaluddin, 2021). Workplace bullying has been linked to elevated psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, reduced job performance, absenteeism, and turnover, with stress serving as a mediating factor (Arshad et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2015; Jalali et al., 2020). Organizational climate, leadership support, and workplace policies play a critical role in mitigating bullying, yet Malaysia currently lacks specific legislation addressing the issue, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive interventions and structured support systems (Mokhtar & Kamaluddin, 2021; Samsudin et al., 2020; Zulkifli & Hamzah, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore the prevalence, forms, and consequences of workplace bullying in Malaysia. It will also examine the influence of cultural and organizational factors, with the goal of informing effective interventions and policy recommendations to improve employee well-being and organizational outcomes.

Research shows that workplace bullying is a common issue in Malaysia and affects employees across different occupational settings. A large study found that 39.1% of Malaysian employees had experienced workplace bullying at least once, while 14% reported occasional bullying, which was linked to higher psychological distress (Chan et al., 2019). In healthcare settings, about 11.2% of hospital workers reported experiencing bullying, often from supervisors or colleagues (Awai et al., 2021). Workplace bullying can involve behaviors such as verbal abuse, social exclusion, and repeated mistreatment, which are associated with negative outcomes including poor mental health, job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, turnover intentions, and reduced job performance (Awai et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2019). Organizational and cultural

factors also influence bullying experiences. Supportive leadership and positive organizational climates can reduce bullying, while poor workplace environments may discourage employees from reporting such behavior (Samsudin et al., 2020).

THEORY-BASED INFLUENCING FACTORS AND INTERVENTION

Figure 1 explains workplace bullying by examining psychological, organizational, and cultural influences. This study applies the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model and Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory to understand bullying experiences in Malaysia (Hofstede, 2011). The JD-R model suggests that workplace stress occurs when job demands, such as heavy workload, interpersonal conflict, and workplace pressure, exceed available resources like supportive leadership, clear policies, and a positive work climate. When resources are insufficient, employees are more vulnerable to stress and negative behaviors such as bullying. In addition, Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory explains how Malaysian cultural values influence workplace interactions. High power distance may discourage employees from challenging authority or reporting bullying, while collectivist values may encourage individuals to maintain group harmony rather than raise personal complaints (Kwan et al., 2014; Mokhtar & Kamaluddin, 2021). By integrating these theories, the study highlights how organizational resources and cultural context shape bullying experiences and outcomes. The framework also suggests that supportive leadership, clear anti-bullying policies, and psychologically safe workplaces are important strategies for reducing bullying and improving employee well-being in Malaysian organizations (Awai et al., 2021; Zulkifli & Hamzah, 2024).

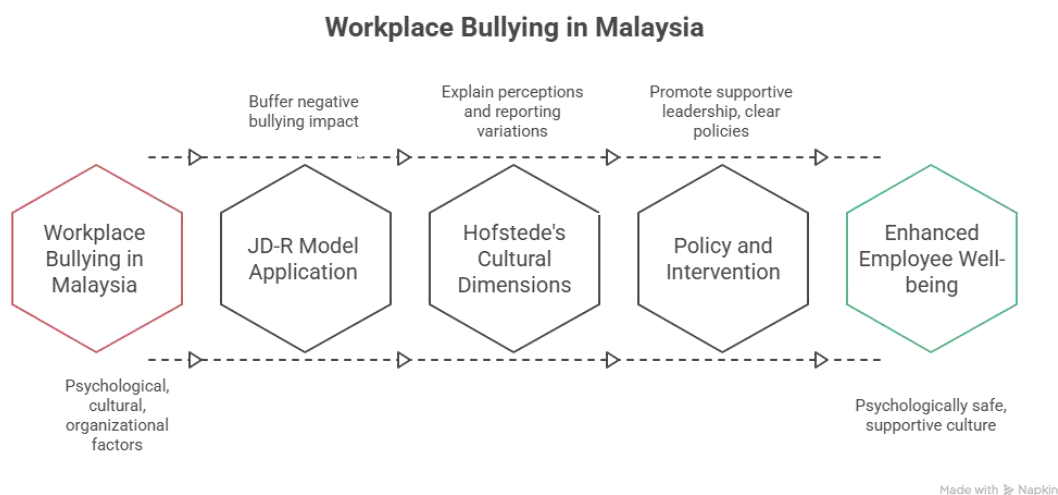


Figure 1: Theory-Based Influencing Factors and Interventions

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights that workplace bullying in Malaysia is a prevalent and complex issue, influenced by organizational, cultural, and individual factors. It has significant psychological and professional consequences such as distress, emotional exhaustion, reduced job performance, and turnover intentions. Theoretically, integrating the Job Demands-Resources Model with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions provides a robust framework for understanding the interaction between job demands, organizational support, and cultural norms in shaping bullying experiences and coping mechanisms. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of promoting supportive leadership, establishing clear anti-bullying policies, fostering a psychologically safe organizational climate, and considering cultural sensitivities in interventions to enhance employee well-being and organizational outcomes. However, the study is limited by reliance on cross-sectional data and self-reported measures, which may not fully capture the latest trends or the influence of unmeasured variables. Future research should explore various designs, sector-specific analyses, and the effectiveness of culturally tailored interventions, as well as the development of legal frameworks and policy initiatives to prevent and address workplace bullying systematically in Malaysian organizations.

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