

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**ASSESSING THE MODERATING
EFFECT OF AGE ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
WORKABILITY AND INDIVIDUAL
WORK PERFORMANCE: A STUDY
ON MALAYSIAN FIREFIGHTERS**

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ABSTRACT

The ageing workforce phenomenon in most countries, including Malaysia, reflects the high lifespans and rising number of older workers, causing them to live and work longer. In response, the Malaysian government announced the new retirement age in 2012, which has garnered various reactions, as the revision might instigate future complexities involving ageing workers' health, workability (WA), and individual work performance (IWP), specifically for professions requiring physical exertion, like firefighting. Hence, this study aimed to determine the moderating effect of age on the IWP-WA relationship among Malaysian firefighters through systematic and reliable measurement tools, as the impact of age on the relationship remains unaddressed. Based on a pragmatic research philosophy, this cross-sectional study used a mixed-method approach via concurrent triangulation and examined age as a moderator. The results demonstrate a significant relationship between WA-IWP and show that age affects the firefighters' WA in their later age. However, the triangulation result using the permutation test with PLS-MGA analysis and parametric and Welch-Satterthwait tests indicates age does not significantly moderate the WA-IWP relationship, as all the p-values for each test are above 0.05. The findings demonstrate an inverted U-shape relationship between age and job performance among the respondents. In addition, the results are supported and complemented by the qualitative findings. The essence of the transcendental phenomenology approach acknowledges that age affects WA but not IWP. Still, the decline is compensated by individual attributes and factors such as skills, knowledge, and attitude to ensure optimal work quality among firefighters. However, due to the ageing process, the WA is declining, especially in health and function, and may eventually affect the firefighters' IWP in later years. This study has contributed to the theoretical part with perspectives of the practice area using the triangulated finding from both methods and different unit analyses, giving insight and a better understanding of the phenomenon based on academic and human resource perspectives. Hence, The Fire and Rescue Department of Malaysia (FRDM) must acknowledge the cohort's strengths and weaknesses and strategies for a long and short-term programme to promote health, individual resources, skills, and working conditions that could increase or restore individual competence of their personnel or face future risk challenges. To conclude, the relevance of the Government's intervention remains the most necessary factor that could ensure formulation and adaptation of adequate policies are in place to curb the ageing workforce of firefighters and other workers in Malaysia, to be more resourceful, competitive, and sustainable in her human capital in the coming year.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study background by exploring issues on an ageing workforce, discussing the problem statement, research questions (RQs), objectives (ROs), scope, significance, and the list of terminologies used. An overview of subsequent chapters is also presented in the chapter.

1.2 Research Background

The worldwide population growth has parallelly reflected the rapid rise of ageing adults globally owing to a low birth rate and a longer lifespan. A report on the ‘*World Population Prospect: 2015 projections*’ by the United Nations (UN) implied the global transition to an ageing population where 15% of the population worldwide constitute older people, with 901 million or 12% of the global population aged 60 or above. These numbers are projected to reach 1.4 billion and 2.1 billion people in 2030 and 2050, respectively (UN, 2015; 2017; 2019). The elderly population in some rapidly-ageing European countries, such as Germany, Spain, and Italy, is forecasted to exceed 35% of the national population. Whereas the ageing population in Japan, Korea, and Singapore could reach 40% and spread to other emerging nations (UN, 2015).

An ageing population mirrors the rising percentage of older workers in the global labour force (Kulik et al., 2014; Phillips & Sui, 2012; UN, 2013; Zacher & Griffin, 2015) in line with the Economist Intelligence Unit. Workers between 45 and 64 years old have contributed to the working-age population rate worldwide since the 1990s, with the percentage assumably rising to 41.2% between 2010 and 2030 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015). The mandatory increase in the retirement age has contributed to the rise of older workers in the labour segment other than the low birth rate and improved life expectancy and presented a novel challenge for most nations (Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Martin & Xiang, 2015; UN, 2019).

The rising number of ageing workers in labour segments has inevitably caused employers much anxiety. Rhodes’s (1983) review of the age-performance link disclosed