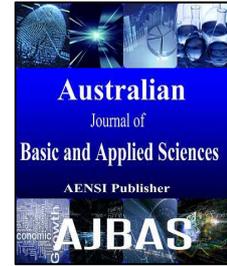




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### The Prediction of Employee's Absence in Malaysian Organization

<sup>1</sup>Mazni Alias, <sup>2</sup>Tengku Shahranaiza Tengku Abdul Jalal and <sup>3</sup>Al-Mansor Abu Said

<sup>1</sup> Multimedia University, Faculty of Management, 63100,, Cyberjaya, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> Multimedia University, Human Resource Management, Faculty of Business, 75450, Melaka, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup> Multimedia University, English Department, Learning Institute for Empowerment, 75450, Melaka, Malaysia

#### Address For Correspondence:

Mazni Alias, Multimedia University, Faculty of Management, 63100,, Cyberjaya, Malaysia

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#### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Employee's absence has remained elusive in the modern organization nowadays. It implicates the stability and development of the organization which resulted in loss of productivity. **Objective:** The objectives of this research paper are to identify the relationship between employee's absence with work satisfaction, job stress and well-being level of employee. **Results:** The sampling method used is cross-sectional correlation design. A total of 150 self-administered questionnaires were distributed randomly to employees in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The hypotheses were supported by the research findings. Results indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between job stress and employee absence. The findings also highlighted that well-being level of the employee is significantly and negatively correlated with employee's absence. **Conclusion:** The impact of employee's absence to organizations is obviously heedful and hence requires vigilant employer surveillance.

#### INTRODUCTION

Employee's absence has been a major phenomenon, and the causes are poorly understood by the organization. Therefore, the management in the organization has difficulty in solving this issue. The issue implicates organization development and human performance. Employee's absence should be resolved since it is detrimental to organization (Duff, Podolsky, Biron & Chan, 2014). To eradicate this issue, it is of importance for organization to understand the factors that have lead to absence. Many organizations do not have an appropriate and comprehensive absence policy to be followed. Management team of an organization is nevertheless aware of the impact and effect of absence towards efficiency, revenue, philosophy as well as morale implications. Obasan (2011) defined employee's absence as irregularity of employee in workplace, unmotivated to attend work and work dissatisfaction. Employee's absence could be conceptualized as non-attendance that cannot be avoided, habitual and unprepared in nature. It is also a common and normal behavior by an employee as he or she acts base on self-interest behavior especially due to frustration (Rogers & Hertin, 1993). This challenging issue has been well recognized by organization. However, the real cost of absenteeism remain unanswered as the hidden costs are still difficult to compute (Duff, Podolsky, Biron & Chan, 2014)

Obasan (2011) mentioned that employee's absence can be very expensive. Due to the decline in number of employee in an organization on that particular day, this requires other employees to work overtime or to replace the workload of other workers. This causes loss in productivity. Overall, the cost associated with employee's absence issue has a direct implication to organization performance (Muhammad, 2013), and meeting the organization target (Silpa and Masthanamma (2013). Absent employees has been frequently identified also as poor job performers and are inclined to leave the organization (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000)

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Nevertheless, employee's absence has appeared to be an unavoidable problem and challenging issue in today's workplace across all industries. Absence from duty can be ignited by various reasons. Regardless of the reasons, this issue has been highly concerned by companies throughout the world as it impacts the growth especially on the production costs of an organization which contributes to loss of total work hours and output. It is not surprising that Canada Newswire claimed that employees' absence contributes to \$16 billion of losses in terms of salary expenses (Mehmet, Ann, Krystal & Margaret 2009). Employee's absence slows down the development of an organization which eventually leads to additional expenditures in temporary staff employment and low self-esteem among the employees (Shivam & Vijay 2013). The most critical occurred by an organization due to employee absence is financial losses. A major airline revealed that they had lost almost \$1 million per day due to merely unplanned employee absences (Mehmet, 2009).

According to Stewart (2013), the absence cost incurred accumulated to an average of 2.4 per cent of a payroll. This may seem to be an insignificant figure in the first glance; however, it caused extensive damage to the Canadian economy, amounting up to \$16.6 billion when the total wages for Canadian employees were \$691.7 billion in year 2012. Employers are also unaware of the indirect costs incurred due to employee's absence. Indirect costs require organization to train new staff and to find substitute for staffs that are on sick leave (Pecello, 2013). In today's modern and challenging business world, organizations started to emphasize on issues which affect organization's productivity and performance in order to continuously sustain in the industry. It is estimated that over 12 million working days are lost every year, which is equivalent to approximately 350 million euro per annum in deficit due to employee's absence issue alone (Farrell, 2005). It is also no longer a surprise when the annual cost of absenteeism has been estimated at \$46 billion in the United States, \$10 billion in Canada, and 11.5 billion pound in the United Kingdom (Parboteeach, Addae, & Cullen 2005). Hence, employee's absence has indirect influence on the success of an organization regardless of its geographical location and industry background. This study is significant to individuals and organization due to its expensive consequences for both employers and employees. It is also expected to help the managers in organizations to play a more effective role to curb employee's absence. Methods and solutions to eradicate employee's absence are proposed in this study. Therefore, employee's absence employing in a non-western context is worth to be investigated.

The objective of this study is to develop a model in predicting the factors that contribute to employee's absence in the Malaysian organization. This study focus on the following variables i.e., work satisfaction, well-being level and job stress of an employee.

#### **Objectives:**

To determine the relationship between work satisfaction and employee's absence

To determine the relationship between employee's well-being and employee's absence

To determine the relationship between job stress and employee's absence

#### **Literature Review:**

##### **Concept of Absence:**

The definition of employee's absence itself cannot be ignored as it has been a destructive issue in the modern organization. One of the challenges with employee absenteeism research is the definition of absenteeism. Gajda (2015) conceptualized employee's absence as a situation when an employee does not show up for work or leaves his existing workplace. Employee's absence could also be defined as a fail attempt to present at work. It could also be absence at work without good justification. Tiwari (2014) defined absenteeism when employees are away at work without prior permission from their superiors. There are various reasons which caused employee's absence. Blau, Tatum, and Cook (2001) included examples of absences as due to personal reasons, sickness, or accidents. The phrase absence itself could also generally be defined as the failure to attend to work.

According to Shivam and Vijay (2013), employee absence means the incapability of an employee to present him or herself which constitutes a single day of missed work. Absence means that the particular employees do not show up physically at a stated place and time as there is an expectation for him or her to be there socially. Absence can be considered as non-attendance of individual during work scheduled (John 1978). Based on the previous research of Vijay and Shivam (2013), employees absence were due to several causes including well-being issues or sickness, family emergencies, overload of work, job stress and dissatisfaction with the given work task. Australasian Faculty of Occupational Medicine (1999) quoted that absence can be defined as unplanned absence that includes nonexistence at work where work attendance is scheduled. Besides, the institute also mentioned that sickness absence can be defined as non-presence due to illness for which to access to medical certification.

Pierre (2006) identified that there are many classifications, that can be used to differentiate employee absence, such as periods (short term versus long term), absence behavior (scheduled versus unscheduled) and legitimate condition (legitimate versus non-legitimate). Absence in workplace can also be sorted into two

categories: approved and unapproved. Approved leave means that the employee's absence is allowed and covered under organization policy where unapproved leave is the time that is not covered by the firm of the employee (Mona, Christa & Robert, 1996). Rajshree and Harish (2013) defines employee absence as job stress that leads to work exhaustion, the subunit absence from regular work task when he or she should be normally scheduled to work. In other words, absence is the act and habit of being an absentee (Rajshree & Harish, 2013). Absence can also be defined as habitual failure to appear for regular duty or work task.

Dabboussy, Maria and Sharanjit (2012) in their survey found that there are rising trends in employee's absence. The absences are due to personal reasons such as illness, disability, personal and family responsibilities. The total work time missed increased 0.3% of scheduled week from year 2001 to year 2011. From the investigation throughout the years, the absence days also rose from 8.5 days per worker in 2001 to 9.3 days in 2011. In the fourteenth edition of Absence Management Survey that were conducted by Chartered Institutes of Personal and Development (CIPD) and Simply Well-being (2013), the overall average absence level per employee increased from 7.7 days in 2012 to 8.6 days in 2013, and it is due to the absence occurrence in both the private service sector and public sector in the United Kingdom (UK). Absence Management Survey (2013) by Chartered Institutes of Personal and Development (CIPD) mentioned that the average annual cost of absence each employee each year is between £50 and £240,000. Barkha (2013) advocated that employer also faces implication due to shortage of employees which they have to recruit temporary workers at the last minute or pay extra to their current employee for overtime.

#### ***Relationship between Employee's Absence and Work Satisfaction:***

There is limited research on the impact of work satisfaction on employee's absence (Obasan, 2011). Organizational psychologists, human resource professionals, and sociologists have paid considerable attention on the issue of work satisfaction for the past fifty years (Vangel, 2011).

A study by Swarnalata and Sureshkrisna (2013) involving employees in India industry indicated that there is a relationship between employee's absence and work satisfaction. In November 2012, Forbes had reported on a Mercer survey. The survey involved 30,000 workers around the globe. The survey revealed that between 28% - 56% of employees in 17 places around the globe intended to leave their position due to work dissatisfaction. In addition, 32% of the respondents mentioned that they have the intention to find a new job. Hence, this issue has captured the interest of practitioners and researchers which is vital for organization to continuously identify the main reasons of employee's turnover, increase job retention as well as to know absence as the consequences of job dissatisfaction (Bakan & Buyukbese, 2013). Research has also shown that employees who were satisfied with their job were 83 times less likely to miss work compared to those who were dissatisfied with their job (Dionne & Dostie, 2007).

#### ***Based on the above discussion, this study proposes:***

*Ha1: Work satisfaction has significant influence on employee's absence in Malaysian organization.*

#### ***Relationship between Employee's Absence and Well-being:***

One of the determinants of employee's absence is due to employee's well-being status (Obasan, 2011, Farrell, 2005). Employee's well-being has been identified as an important factor that influenced organizational performance and development. Sorup and Jacobsen (2013) defined employee's absence as due to sickness such as physically incapable of attending to work. Gorman et al. (2010) defined sickness absence as paid time-off from workplace, which is due to well-being reason. Illness is one of the involuntary reasons for employee's absence from the workplace, whereby involuntary absence is the situation where the employees are unable to attend to work (Sorup & Jacobsen, 2013). Well-being issue has always been associated with absence from sickness (Lund et al., 2006). Hence, this study identified that an employee's well-being is an important factor towards employee's absence.

*Ha2: Well-being has significant influence on employee's absence in the Malaysian organization.*

#### ***Relationship between Employee's Absence and Job Stress:***

The problem of job stress is inevitable in today's competitive business world. Occupational stress is not something new in the workplace; however, the concern of the issue is on the widespread growing rate in all organizations (Beheshtifar & Modaber, 2013). Its seriousness is growing exponentially since a decade ago. A survey done in Dublin indicated that there is a negative association between job stress and absence rate with a statistical fact showing 300% increased on stress-related absence since year 2005. Glynn (2013) identified that job stress cause stress-related illness, which indirectly affect work performance, absence as well as turnover rate. Job stress has appeared to be one of the main causes of employee's absence issue. According to a survey done by a renowned recruitment firm, Reed, indicated that more than 75% of human resource professionals from the firm have noticed an increase in the number of employees taking work leave due to stress-related illnesses for the past 5 years record (Glynn, 2013). Towers Watson, a research based company did a survey in

2014 also found similar results and revealed that employees who suffered from high stress levels are more likely to have lower employee engagement and high absenteeism levels. Based on the above discussions, this study hypothesizes:

*Ha3: Job stress has significant influence on employee's absence in the Malaysian organization.*

### **Research Methodology:**

#### **Instruments:**

The questionnaire comprised of three (3) parts including nine (9) main questionnaire and thirty-one (31) sub-questions in multiple choice question form and Likert scale form. Likert scale was used in the measurement of the independent variables and dependent variable. According to Pierre (2006), Likert scale form of questionnaire design is used for this research in order to assess the respondents' level of agreement and disagreement. It can assist the respondents to answer and only focus in one adjective (description) for each question. The survey questions were divided into two parts. The first part consists questions related to the demographic details of the respondents. The second part focuses on items relating to employee's absence, work satisfaction, well being, and job stress. Employee's absence instrument was adopted from Hrvoje et al (2012) which was known as Rijeka Absence Scale. Work satisfaction was measured using the items from Hincapie et al., (2012). The instrument for employee well-being was adopted from the Short Form-36 Health Survey of SF.36 and to measure job stress, this study used an established instrument from Cohen (1994).

#### **Sample and Data Collection:**

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors that influence employee's absence in Malaysian organization. Respondents are employees working in Kuala Lumpur mainly in the private organizations. This study involved permanent and full time employees from various private organization situated in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The sample size required is at least 150 (based on G\*power analysis); hence, a total of 250 of survey forms were sent to various types of industry. Cross sectional survey method was employed in this study. This survey was chosen as it is more practical to be implemented to a large number of populations at a minimal cost and time. Probability sampling was used in this study which anyone who is currently working in any private organization could be chosen for this study. Target respondents are required to complete the self-administered questionnaires which consist of instruments of dependent variable and independent variables. Uma and Roger (2012) highlighted that self-administrated questionnaire requires much less time and less cost in data collection. Prior to the data collection, the manager of each private organization were contacted. The objectives of the research were explained to them in a cover letter given to them two week before the date of the data collection. The cover letter also highlighted the anonymity and confidentiality of this research. A total of 150 completed questionnaires were collected by the researchers within a week.

#### **Results:**

Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis were used to analyze the result of this study. The socio-demographic profile of this study involved descriptive statistics and frequency. The socio demographic result of the study indicated that there were 76 male respondents (52.7%) and 71 female respondents (47.3%). The age of the respondents ranged from below 21 years old to above 50 years old. Most of the respondents were between 21-30 years old (51.3%), with the second largest age group consisted of respondents between 31-40 years old (18.0%).

Majority of the respondents in this study were Malaysians (94.7%), and only 5.3% of the respondents were non-Malaysian. Most of the respondents' are single (53.3%) while the other 45.3% were married. As of the respondents' educational background, their educational level varied from less than high school level to doctoral degree. Most of the respondents (61.3%) hold a college degree level, followed by 22% of the respondents with high school level. Another 9.3% of the respondents hold a master degree level, and 5.3% of the respondents had less than high school level. About 2% of the respondents have a doctoral degree.

The internal consistency for the dependent and independent variables was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha. All of the variables used in this study are above .7 which indicates the reliability of the variables. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for employee absence.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics for employee's absence.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I take leave only if really unable to work.	150	3.99	1.071
I take leave to get a little rest.	150	2.64	1.119
I take leave only if it is related to work injury, though it is not necessary.	150	2.51	1.116
I was justifiably on leave due to health problem only.	150	3.79	1.025
If I am entitled to a leave, I will cancel my leave early if I'm fit for work.	150	3.51	1.110

Table 1 indicated that the first item "I take leave only if really unable to work" has the greatest value of mean, which is 3.99. This verifies that employees are absent from work due to valid reasons such as well-being problem. Employees are not absent from work without a valid reason. The last item "I take leave only if it is related to work injury, though it is not necessary" has the lowest mean, which is 2.51. This result identified that employee's absence from work happened only if it is necessary.

**Table 2:** Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Absence	Work Satisfaction	Well being
Absence	9.19	3.166			
Work Satisfaction	42.14	7.851	-0.132		
Well being	24.25	5.386	-0.458**	0.168*	
Job Stress	28.45	5.269	0.345**	-0.092	-0.362**
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)					
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)					

Table 2 shows the correlation analysis, mean and standard deviations that were used to determine the associations between absence and the three independent variables used in this study (i.e., Work satisfaction, Well-being and Job stress). The result revealed that work satisfaction does not have a significant negative relationship with employee's absence. Well-being was found to have a moderate negative relationship ( $r = -0.458$ ) which indicates that the lower the well-being of the employee, the lower the employee's tendency to be absent. The result also indicated that there is weak positive relationship ( $r=0.345$ ) between job stress and absence. In other words, the higher the level of job stress among the employee, the more likely that he or she will be absent from work.

**Table 3:** Multiple stepwise linear regression on Employee's Absence.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	<i>B</i>		
(Constant)	2.949	0.521		5.657	0.000
Work Satisfaction	0.041	0.06	-0.050	-0.681	0.497
Well being	0.351	0.073	-0.376	-4.837	0.000
Job Stress	0.279	0.105	0.205	2.659	0.009

Multiple regression analysis was used in the hypothesis testing to determine the relationship between the independent variable (i.e., work satisfaction, well-being and job stress) on employee's absence.

Employee's absence played a role as the dependent variable in this study, whereas work satisfaction, well-being and job stress are the independent variables in the regression analysis. Based on the multiple regression analysis results shown in Table 3, well-being and job stress are the factors predictors of employee's absence. Work satisfaction is the only independent variable that was found to have no significant relationship with employee's absence. This signifies that work satisfaction level is unable to predict and explain employee's absence. Well-being is considered as the best predictor of absence among all the stated independent variables, because well-being had contributed to the highest variation in absence ( $\beta = -0.376$ ,  $t = -4.837$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). Besides that, well-being has high  $\beta$ -coefficient ( $\beta = -0.376$ ) which indicates that the variable (well-being) has moderate predictive value for absence. Furthermore, there is significant contribution from job stress to the variation in absence ( $\beta = 0.205$ ,  $t = 2.659$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). In addition, job stress has the second highest  $\beta$ -coefficient ( $\beta = 0.205$ ) among the independent variables. It indicates that job stress has a certain impact in predicting absence. This study concludes that the higher the level of employee well-being, the less likely that the employee will be absent from work. Additionally, job stresses also influences employee's absence.

The multiple regression analysis result indicated that 25% of the variation in employee's absence were explained by the independent variables at ( $R^2 = 0.250$ ). In conclusion, well-being and job stress have significant contribution to the absence.

### Discussion:

This study was conducted to determine whether work satisfaction, well-being and job stress predict employee's absence. Absence of employees may be influenced by various factors, such as personal or individual factors, and environmental factors. In this study, well-being and job stress were the factors studied to predict employee's absence. The results revealed that employee's absence could be predicted by the factors such as employee's well-being and job stress. Work satisfaction was determined to have insignificant contribution to the employee absence.

In this study, employee's well-being issue has the largest contribution in predicting absence, and the results showed that it is consistent with those researches of Sorup and Jacobsen (2013), MacLean (2008) and Gorman et al. (2010). One of the involuntary reasons for employee to be absent from work is illness, and this leads to

their involuntary absent from work. Well-being issue has always been associated with absence from sickness, and global well-being measures have been used to predict sickness absence (Lund *et al.*, 2006).

Job stress has negative relationship with absence, but it is not a significant factor in predicting employee's absence (Awan & Bangwar, 2013). The results gained from this study showed a totally opposite result compared to the research conducted by Awan and Bangwar (2013); thus, this study proved that job stress has a positive relationship with absence, and it is a significant factor in predicting absence in workplace. In contrast, the results of this study are consistent with the empirical studies that were conducted by Brun and Lamarche (2006) and Evans (2011). Job stress is a significant cause that will positively correlate with absence in workplace.

From the results, it showed that work satisfaction has no significant contribution in predicting absence, although empirical studies conducted by Swarnalatha and Sureshkrishna (2013), Drakopoulos and Grimani (2011) and Thirulogasundaram and Sahu (2014) supported that work satisfaction is able to predict absence in workplace; For example, the study of Thirulogasundaram and Sahu (2014) revealed that work satisfaction is regarded as one of the instrumental factors that influence worker's behavior as well as the intention to present for work. In contrast, a study done by Goldberg and Waldman (2000) showed that work satisfaction is not a predictor of absence. They explained that employees may not be absent from work even though they are dissatisfied with the job. This is because the employees need the job in order to survive. Employees who are absent frequently put themselves at the risk of job loss. The research results suggested that employees are concerned more on the wages received in compared to their satisfaction level towards the job. Hence, this may explain the inconsistency of our findings on work satisfaction with the hypothesis.

#### ***Research Implications:***

Efforts and mechanism has to be provided to eradicate employee's absence. High degree of absenteeism contributes to significant problems for organizational success and competency. This study indicated that job stress and employee's wellbeing predicted employee's absence. Therefore, reasonable measures have to be taken by the management or human resource manager to lower the level of employee's absence in organization by improving the employee's wellbeing and work stress. Management of the organization could provide corporate wellness program to employees. In addition, the management could also provide counselling program to assist employees to improve their psychological health. Organization could also look into redesigning jobs to enhance employee's autonomy and provide feedback to reduce their work stress. The managers should consider increasing their subordinate's involvement in decision making. Evidence has clearly identified that by empowering employee specifically in their job roles it will reduce employee's absence and psychological strain. Organization should also play a significant role to eradicate employee's absence. The management should communicate to the employee clear rules and procedures. For example, strong messages can be sent to employees who are absent from work, and disciplinary action can be taken accordingly. Updated procedures related to employee's absence should also be implemented to curb employee's absence.

#### ***Limitations:***

The restriction of this study is that the findings cannot be generalized to the whole population as the time, scope and sample size is small in number. The small sample size of this study that had been obtained randomly cannot be considered genuine and accurate. The sample size might not represent the whole population on the work force. In other words, the findings of the sample taken cannot be generalized to the whole work force. Besides, this study solely relied upon the respondents' perception and estimation on scale, the reliability could be improved by obtaining the official number of absence report from the human resource department. As a result, the authenticity of the result varied and solely depended on the respondents' integrity and truthfulness when filling up the questionnaires.

Other than that, the respondents might not want to reveal the true answer when answering the survey as they were concerned about the confidentiality of the survey. Despite the cross-sectional design being used in this study and being considered appropriate, a longitudinal study would be better to understand and enhance the accuracy of the nature and relationships between absence and work satisfaction, well-being and job stress level as it uses the same sample over a period of time. Hence, a further and deeper investigation is needed in this matter.

#### ***Conclusion:***

This study is conducted to investigate the factors leading to employee's absence. This was done by examining the relationship between absence and a number of variables such as work satisfaction, well-being status and job stress of employees. Results showed negative relationship between well-being status and employee's absence. Job stress is found to be significantly related with employee's absence. Findings suggested that the higher the job stress level of an employee, the more likely that he or she will be absent from work. In conclusion, the impact of employee's absence to organizations is well recognized, and so does the importance of this study. This study is meaningful to all organizations dealing with the absence issue as the findings suggested

that well-being status and job stress can influence employees' absence level. Future studies are recommended to investigate other variables that may cause employee's absence. More factors needed to be explored in order to explain employee's absence in a variety of perspectives and to enhance the completeness of study regarding employee absence. Other factors including transportation, financial conditions and work related attitudes (e.g organization commitment and sense of responsibility) of employees are worth investigating because these variables are potential predictors of employee's absence. It is also recommended that different approaches are to be used in the future researches. For instance, the adoption of qualitative study may lead to the discovery of more causes that could have contributed to the employee's absence.

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