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**EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
WORK-RELATED FACTORS AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING
AMONG LOW-INCOME
WORKING MOTHERS**

SYARA SHAZANNA BINTI ZULKIFLI



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**DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTER OF SCIENCE
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**FACULTY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

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11 March 2025

Date



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hazalifah binti Hamzah
Department of Psychology
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ABSTRACT

Working mothers in Malaysia face poor psychological well-being due to stress, work-life balance issues, and workplace bullying. Meanwhile, the presence of supervisor support could improve employees' psychological well-being and mitigate work-related effects. However, studies regarding supervisor support and psychological well-being among low-income working mothers in Malaysia are scarce. Thus, this study investigated the relationship between work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and psychological well-being, the moderating role of supervisor support in these relationships, explored the experience of working mothers on supervisor support received in the workplace and identified essential supervisor support required. Employing mixed methodology and purposive sampling, 269 Malaysian working mothers ($M_{age} = 38.15$, $SD_{age} = 8.14$) completed a survey, and 9 participants partook in a semi-structured interview. Accordingly, work stress was reported as the largest contributor to psychological well-being ($\beta = -.41$, $p = .004$), followed by workplace bullying ($\beta = -.23$, $p = .048$), while work-life balance reported a nonsignificant relationship. Moreover, supervisor support weakened the impact of work stress and psychological well-being ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .045$). Next, qualitative analysis results showed the complex nature of supervisor support experiences which includes supervisor-instigated incivility and supervisor-employee disputes, as well as psychological reassurance and work optimisation and management. Further, participants require support whereby the supervisor acts as the medium for discussion for tangible support, a transformational leadership style, and emotional salary. Following these, supervisors should be trained with adequate psychological knowledge to ensure the satisfactory psychological well-being of low-income working mothers. These findings guide supervisors and upper management on strategies to empower psychological well-being through effective supervisor support, stress management techniques, as well as work-life balance and workplace bullying policies.





PENEROKAAN HUBUNGAN ANTARA FAKTOR-FAKTOR BERKAITAN KERJA DAN KESEJAHTERAAN PSIKOLOGI DALAM KALANGAN IBU BEKERJA BERPENDAPATAN RENDAH

ABSTRAK

Ibu-ibu bekerja di Malaysia mengalami tahap kesejahteraan psikologi yang rendah akibat tekanan, isu keseimbangan antara kehidupan dengan kerja serta buli di tempat kerja. Sementara itu, kehadiran sokongan penyelia pula boleh meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikologi pekerja dan mengurangkan kesan negatif berkaitan kerja. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian berkaitan sokongan penyelia terhadap kesejahteraan psikologi untuk ibu bekerja berpendapatan rendah di Malaysia masih terhad. Oleh itu, kajian ini menilai hubungan antara tekanan kerja, keseimbangan antara kehidupan dengan kerja, buli di tempat kerja dan kesejahteraan psikologi, peranan sokongan penyelia sebagai faktor penyederhana dalam hubungan tersebut, serta meneroka pengalaman ibu bekerja terhadap sokongan penyelia yang diterima di tempat kerja dan bentuk-bentuk sokongan penyelia yang diperlukan. Dengan menggunakan metodologi kaedah campuran dan persampelan bertujuan, 269 orang ibu bekerja ($M_{\text{umur}} = 38.15$, $SD_{\text{umur}} = 8.14$) melengkapkan soal-selidik dan 9 orang peserta telah mengambil bahagian dalam temu bual separa berstruktur. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahawa tekanan kerja merupakan penyumbang terbesar kepada kesejahteraan psikologi ($\beta = -.41$, $p = .004$), diikuti oleh buli di tempat kerja ($\beta = -.23$, $p = .048$), manakala keseimbangan antara kehidupan dengan kerja menunjukkan hubungan yang tidak signifikan. Selain itu, sokongan penyelia melemahkan impak negatif tekanan kerja ke atas kesejahteraan psikologi ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .045$). Seterusnya, hasil analisis kualitatif menunjukkan sifat kompleks pengalaman sokongan penyelia yang merangkumi ketidaksopanan penyelia dan pertikaian penyelia-pekerja, serta jaminan psikologi dan pengoptimuman dan pengurusan kerja. Selanjutnya, ibu bekerja memerlukan sokongan penyelia untuk mengambil bahagian dalam perbincangan bagi mendapatkan sokongan sumber-bahan, gaya kepimpinan transformasi, dan gaji emosi. Oleh itu, penyelia harus terlatih dalam pengetahuan psikologi bagi menjamin kesejahteraan psikologi ibu bekerja berpendapatan rendah. Penemuan ini memberi bimbingan kepada penyelia dan pengurusan atasan akan strategi untuk memperkasakan kesejahteraan psikologi melalui sokongan penyelia, teknik pengurusan tekanan, serta polisi-polisi keseimbangan antara kehidupan dengan kerja dan buli di tempat kerja.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structure
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
B40	Bottom 40
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMIN/df	Chi-Square/Degree of Freedom
CR	Composite Reliability
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait
MaxR	Maximal Reliability
MeSH	Medical Subject Headings
NFI	Normed Fit Index
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
Q-SSP	Quality Assessment Checklist for Survey Studies in Psychology
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
WHO	World Health Organisation



**LIST OF SYMBOL**

χ^2	Chi-square
R^2	Coefficient of determination (proportion of variance that can be explained by the independent variable)
CI	Confidence interval
α	Cronbach alpha value
df	Degrees of freedom
f^2	Effect Size
e	Error term
F	F-statistic
f	Frequency
M	Mean
%	Percentage
$1-\beta$	Power
p	Probability value
n	Sample size
SD	Standard deviation
β	Standardized path coefficient (beta)
t	T-statistic





APPENDIX LIST

- A Quantitative Findings for Work Outcomes and Well-Being
- B Qualitative Findings for Work Outcomes and Well-Being
- C Survey Instruments
- D Appointment Letter for Back-To-Back Translation Expert
- E Interview Protocol
- F Appointment Letter for Expert Assessment
- G Certification of Participation for Human Research Ethics Workshop
- H Findings for Common Method Bias
- I Appointment Letter for Research Finding Validation





CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the study before describing its background. Then, the researcher tackles the issue description and research gap to create study objectives and questions. Next, the researcher explains the study's relevance. After that, conceptual and operational definitions are given, and the theories, frameworks, and models that underpin this study explain the variables' explanations, linkages, and predictions. Hypotheses and a conceptual framework are derived from theories and aims. The conceptual framework and hypotheses guide data gathering and analysis throughout the investigation.





1.2 Background of Study

“There is no experience in a woman’s life that is more impactful, all-encompassing, and life-altering than becoming a mother” (Babetin, 2020, p. 1). Universally known, mothers cater for the well-being and growth of the family. It has been commonly understood for decades that being a mother is a full-time stay-at-home job. Mothers are responsible for managing the household, which includes house cleaning, cooking, washing the laundry, and ensuring that the house is in a respectable state. Not only that, mothers are also responsible for caring for and educating the children, promoting a healthy and nurturing environment which guarantees an optimum space for growth and development.



Due to the rise in the cost of living, mothers nowadays are also prevalent in the working sector. This is evident from the Malaysian statistics report showing a rise in working women from 47.7% in 2002 to 56.2% in 2021 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). In Malaysia, the lower-income community are known as the Bottom 40 or B40 category, as they encompass the lowest 40% of the total population in terms of socioeconomic status. Household monthly income rates differ across the 14 states in Malaysia; however, this study follows the definition of B40 according to the national standards, which defines those with incomes of less than RM4849 (equivalent to \$1086.18) in 2018 and RM4850 (equivalent to \$1,086.40) in 2019 as the cut-offs for the category (Khazanah Research Institute, 2018). However, the lower-income communities in Kuala Lumpur have been reported to obtain a monthly household income of less than RM9,150 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020).





A study by Md Nor (2022) using a sample of low-income single mothers in Malaysia has reported an association between low-income wages and education level, noting that better pay was attributed to higher education levels among the participants. Among the low-income working mothers, those with lower education levels obtained employment as cleaners, while those with higher education levels obtained employment as nurses, a lab assistant, an account clerks. According to the findings, the majority of the low-income working mothers worked in precarious employment with the vulnerability of income, such as selling food, being involved in childcare, clean houses, and working at food outlets with daily pay. Because of that, they have limited access to social protection, employment contracts which include pensions and other benefits, and stable salaries, which contribute to financial and psychological distress.



are experienced by these low-income working mothers. In general, low-income working mothers enter the workforce either voluntarily or due to being forced to work. Thus, the difficulties and intensity of the outcomes that they experience may be different depending on the reasons for working. For mothers working voluntarily, working helps them improve financial security and the living standard of the family (Poduval & Poduval, 2009). However, some mothers may be forced to work due to several unavoidable issues, especially low-income working mothers who may face financial issues. These low-income working mothers are facing basic needs barriers, as a recent report by the University of Phoenix (2023) documented that financial issues were the top stressors faced by 74% of low-income working mothers as compared to 54% of high-income working mothers, citing the inability to save emergency funds and paying utilities.





According to the report, low-income working mothers are experiencing the biggest challenges to juggle between low-income jobs with little career attachment, finding affordable childcare services, and progressing their careers. The report further documented that low-income working mothers work to survive, while high-income working mothers work to thrive, as low-income working mothers face worse challenges than working mothers with a higher income, whereby they were unable to obtain a role model in their career journey to help them achieve career progression, and more frequently switched between jobs in the past year due to necessity (University of Phoenix, 2023).

Such mothers may experience work-related challenges which impact their psychological well-being, a multifaceted construct that seeks to provide a holistic view of psychological functioning and human experience (Tang et al., 2019). A happy life, according to the six-factor model of psychological well-being, can be derived from feelings of autonomy (i.e., being self-determined and independent), environmental mastery (i.e., being competent in managing tasks and activities), personal growth (i.e., continuously improving oneself and realizes one's potential), positive relations with others (i.e., engages in a meaningful and satisfying relationship with other people), purpose in life (i.e., perceiving life as meaningful and having clear life goals and directions), and self-acceptance (i.e., acknowledging one's weaknesses and strengths, and view oneself positively) (Ryff & Singer, 1996). These aspects of psychological well-being reflect virtue, excellence, and the growth of an individual's full potential (Huta & Waterman, 2014).





Although having good psychological well-being leads to better outcomes in other aspects of life, attaining and maintaining a good level of psychological well-being is not easy. Working mothers experience role conflicts between being a worker and a primary caretaker, often receiving poor support systems, and having difficulties with childcare, and these have been one of the biggest sources of stress (Zambrana et al., 1979). Particularly for low-income working mothers, financial burdens worsen work-family conflict (Ibrahim & Zaimah, 2021). With both mothers and fathers working, these working mothers require support from others to help with household care and child-rearing (Sano et al., 2021), increasing the level of stress in the workplace and difficulties in balancing between work and family domains (Woodward, 2022).

In recent years, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, well-being issues have been extensively highlighted as a result of the stress brought about by the pandemic. This has impacted low-income individuals as well. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated stress levels across different income groups, with the B40 income category, which includes low-income individuals, experiencing higher stress levels than higher-income groups (Ridzuan et al., 2022). Parents earning lower incomes and working longer hours have reported experiencing high levels of parental burnout (Manja et al., 2020), which may also include low-income working mothers. Specifically for low-income working mothers, this stress is compounded by the challenges of achieving work-life balance, as working mothers strive to meet employer expectations while fulfilling family demands (Omar et al., 2022).





Furthermore, Malaysian low-income working mothers indeed experience significant work-life balance issues, as evidenced by various studies. The struggle to meet employer expectations while fulfilling family needs is a common theme, with stress management, work culture, and employer roles being significant factors affecting work-life balance (Omar et al., 2022). Financial needs and household responsibilities further contribute to work-life conflicts, as the rising costs of raising a family add pressure to balance work and home duties (Arham et al., 2019). The dual roles of work and family create conflicts that manifest as time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflicts, impacting physical health, concentration, and psychological well-being (Hidayat & Tohari, 2023). Additionally, cultural expectations and gender equality issues in the employment sector further complicate the balance between careers and household responsibilities for Malay women, as highlighted in literary analyses (Shahul Hamid et al., 2023). For these reasons, the need for employer support to enhance women's well-being and advancement in the workplace is urgently required (Chauhan et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Malaysian low-income working mothers, like many employees of various socioeconomic backgrounds, are not immune to workplace bullying, which is a significant issue in Malaysia. Workplace bullying is a pervasive problem globally, and Malaysia is no exception, with studies indicating a high prevalence of bullying across different sectors, including low-wage environments (Chan et al., 2019; Tindell & Padavic, 2022). In Malaysia, workplace bullying is linked to stress-related health issues and socioeconomic consequences, such as absenteeism and unemployment, which can be particularly detrimental to low-income working mothers who may already face financial instability (Chan et al., 2019). Gender discrimination, which is prevalent





in Malaysian workplaces, can compound the issue of bullying for low-income working mothers, as they may face additional challenges related to gender stereotypes and inequality (Hoi & Xuan, 2023). Overall, the evidence suggests that Malaysian low-income working mothers do experience workplace bullying, and this issue is intertwined with cultural, socioeconomic, and gender-related factors, necessitating comprehensive strategies to address and mitigate its impact on this vulnerable group.

As such, in the work sector, supervisor support has been identified as a crucial factor in empowering working mothers to achieve better work-life balance, highlighting the importance of supportive workplace environments (Hamzah et al., 2024). Supervisor support plays an essential role in enhancing the psychological well-being of Malaysian low-income working mothers in the workplace. Supervisor support is instrumental in reducing emotional exhaustion and perceived uncertainties, which are often exacerbated by high job stress and workplace bullying (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020; Fukui et al., 2019), and cause significant psychological distress (Tsuno, 2022). This support can be manifested through practical strategies such as promoting work-life flexibility and offering emotional support, which is essential for managing work-life balance issues (Kossek et al., 2024). Training supervisors to create a work-life supportive context can reduce burnout and enhance engagement, even for those with limited work-life flexibility (Kossek et al., 2024). In the context of work stress, supervisor support can alleviate stress by enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions, as seen in studies involving healthcare professionals and other high-stress occupations (Fukui et al., 2019; Modaresnezhad et al., 2021). Overall, adequate supervisor support may enhance Malaysian low-income working mothers' psychological well-being, leading to better personal and work-related outcomes that not





only benefit the mothers personally but also help the companies to improve retention rate and workplace productivity.

While previous research has explored the impact of supervisor support on psychological well-being, there is a dearth of studies which examine the moderating relationship between supervisor support and work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying with regard to psychological well-being in Malaysia. Moreover, there is currently little research on psychological well-being among low-income working mothers in Malaysia (Malek & Yusof, 2022). This lack of research was supported by a systematic review (Zulkifli & Hamzah, 2024) which reported a limited number of studies in Malaysia which incorporated all the variables discussed above. This review fails to find studies which focused on supervisor support as a moderator between work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying and psychological well-being among working mothers in Malaysia. Furthermore, the review reported a dearth of qualitative studies on the experience of support among working women in Malaysia. From this review, studies on supervisor support, work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and psychological well-being among Malaysian working mothers are very limited, suggesting a knowledge gap in this area that urgently needs to be filled.

In addition to the lack of research surrounding supervisor support, work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying, and psychological well-being among Malaysian low-income working mothers, a significant portion of employees across socioeconomic strata, including low-income groups, reporting experiences of workplace bullying, which is associated with greater psychological distress (Chan et al., 2019). Importantly,





research outside of Malaysia has shown that women have a higher predisposition to become victims of workplace bullying, with one study stating that 81% of women tend to be victimised when compared to 35% of men (Balch Samora et al., 2020).

The stress and strain from such experiences are compounded by inadequate supervisor support, which is crucial for mitigating work-related stress and promoting well-being (Ornek et al., 2020). Furthermore, the overall psychological distress among Malaysians, particularly during the pandemic, influenced by financial impacts and fear of COVID-19, highlights the need for targeted support for vulnerable groups, including low-income working mothers in this post-pandemic times (Moni et al., 2021). These findings suggest that improving work conditions and enhancing supervisor support, are essential for addressing the challenges faced by Malaysian low-income working mothers, ultimately promoting their psychological well-being.

Accordingly, a supervisor is an individual who shoulders the responsibility for the employees' behaviours and work outputs, as well as resolving employees' issues while providing appropriate and adequate support (Herrity, 2023; Lessing, 2011). Thereupon, supervisors play an imperative role in empowering working mothers' psychological well-being at work. Generally, past research has reported that support obtained from supervisors was shown to improve employee well-being (Larson et al., 2005; Liang et al., 2021; Moen et al., 2016; O'Driscoll et al., 2004). Furthermore, when comparing supervisor and co-worker support, a study presented that supervisor support reported significant effects for emotional and instrumental support, while co-worker support is only significant for emotional support, highlighting the profound effects of supervisor support on female employees (Uddin et al., 2021).





Finally, a supervisor is a leader who has the capabilities to control the working environment by managing the negative impacts of work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying on psychological well-being, as evidenced by the substantial impact of supervisor support as a moderator between work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying and well-being in several studies outside of Malaysia (Geldart et al., 2018; Lucia-Casademunt et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2022). As such, supervisor support is an essential need for working mothers to ensure a harmonious and conducive workplace.

Moreover, due to the limited findings for quantitative and qualitative research regarding supervisor support as a moderator for work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying on psychological well-being among Malaysian low-income working mothers as well as limited findings on the supervisor support experiences in the workplace, a mixed-method research approach is indeed necessary to fill in the research gap. The role of supervisor support is important in understanding diverse cultural and personal contexts, which can be effectively captured through mixed methods (Vo & Canty, 2022). In Malaysia, work-life balance issues are particularly pronounced due to societal expectations and gender norms, as seen in studies focusing on nurses and women doctors, where dual responsibilities disrupt balance, and collegiality at work is an informal mechanism to facilitate it (Dousin et al., 2021). Additionally, workplace bullying is a significant issue in Malaysia, with a high prevalence of psychological distress among employees, especially women, which necessitates further exploration of personal experiences and systemic factors (Chan et al., 2019). Therefore, a mixed-method research approach is essential to holistically address the interrelated issues faced by Malaysian low-income working mothers,





providing a deeper understanding that can inform targeted interventions and policy changes.

1.3 Problem Statement

Working mothers reported poor psychological well-being due to having dual responsibilities, being stressed at work, poor work-life balance, and workplace bullying (Mazumdar et al., 2022; Arabi et al., 2022; Reid et al., 2020; Rosander et al., 2020). This is evident as shown in the rise of mental health and well-being issues among low-income working adults, affecting more females than males (Institute for Public Health, 2019). Malaysian women, in particular, were pressured into quitting due to work-family conflict, childcare issues, discrimination, and sexual harassment while receiving poor empathy from the management (Kee et al., 2020; Women's Aid Organisation, 2020).

Dealing with poor support in the workplace has left employees with poor well-being (Hämmig, 2017; McIlroy et al., 2021). These unending issues, if not tackled urgently, may further damage the psychological well-being and negatively impact the working mothers, their families, and the working organisation as a whole. Hence, the presence of a supportive supervisor, a person with higher authority in the workplace is essential to aid in these unresolved conflicts and maintain a healthy state of psychological well-being.





In particular, supervisor support may mitigate the negative impact of work-related factors on psychological well-being while directly strengthening their well-being at the same time (Evanoff et al., 2020; Zakaria et al., 2020). While prior research has explored the impact of supervisor support on psychological well-being, there is a dearth of studies examining the moderating association between supervisor support and work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying in relation to psychological well-being in Malaysia. Apart from this, research on psychological well-being among low-income working mothers in Malaysia is currently understudied (Malek & Yusof, 2022). Similarly, research on the moderating factors of social support at work is currently underexplored (Jolly et al., 2021).

Unquestionably, the lack of studies was further supported by the systematic review conducted in Chapter 2, with limited studies found incorporating all the mentioned variables in Malaysia. Not only this review did not find studies using supervisor support as a moderator between work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying and psychological well-being among working mothers in Malaysia, but, only five out of 23 included studies recruited working mothers as their research sample, of which all are studies outside of Malaysia. Furthermore, this review reported limited qualitative studies on the issues with obtaining supervisor support among working women in Malaysia, suggesting the need for qualitative research to further understand the phenomena surrounding supervisor support and the psychological well-being of Malaysian low-income working mothers, which can be explored in terms of the experience of receiving supervisor support, issues with supervisor support, the impact of adequate and inadequate supervisor support on psychological well-being, and proposed needed supervisor support for Malaysian low-income working mothers.





Although other studies on these variables that were not included in this review might be available in other databases and by using other keywords, the lack of findings for this particular review suggests a knowledge gap in this area that urgently needs to be filled. For this reason, it is equally important to address these issues using a mixed-method approach by combining both quantitative and qualitative research design, following the specific research objectives. This is in order to provide a comprehensive understanding surrounding supervisor support, work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and psychological well-being constructs within the context of Malaysian low-income working mothers. Importantly, a mixed-method approach contributes to the soundness of the findings through the process of triangulation, strengthening the overall significance of the study to the respective target stakeholders (i.e., management, supervisors, and working mothers).



Addressing the needs of Malaysian low-income working mothers facing work stress, work-life balance issues, and workplace bullying is crucial due to the challenges they encounter, which have significant implications for their well-being and that of their families. These mothers often juggle multiple roles, balancing paid work with family responsibilities, which can lead to heightened stress levels and well-being-related issues such as depression and anxiety, particularly in low-income communities where resources are scarce (Lugova et al., 2021). Furthermore, the precarious nature of employment for low-income mothers, often characterized by informal work without benefits or job security, adds another layer of stress and vulnerability, threatening the financial stability and overall well-being of their families (Md Nor, 2022).





Workplace culture and the role of employers are also critical factors, as supportive work environments can mitigate stress and improve work-life balance, whereas negative experiences such as workplace bullying can exacerbate stress and mental health issues (Omar et al., 2022). The prevalence of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress is notably high among low-income communities, highlighting the urgent need for support systems to address these inequalities (Lugova et al., 2021) through strategies that involve employer policies and supervisor support to create more inclusive and supportive environments for these low-income working mothers (Md Nor, 2022). With this in mind, this study addresses these gaps in the literature by identifying the role of the supervisor support on working mothers' psychological well-being, from the perspective of low-income working mothers using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.



1.4 Research Objective

This research focuses on four objectives, two objectives which are measured using the quantitative approach, and another two objectives using the qualitative approach.

The objectives measured using the quantitative approach are:

1. To investigate the direct relationship between work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and the psychological well-being of Malaysian low-income working mothers.



2. To investigate the role of supervisor support as a moderator in the relationship between work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and the psychological well-being of Malaysian low-income working mothers.

The objectives measured using the qualitative approach are:

3. To explore the experiences of low-income working mothers on supervisor support received in the workplace in relation to psychological well-being.
4. To identify the supervisor support needed in the workplace from the perspectives of Malaysian low-income working mothers.

1.5 Research Question

This study addresses a total of four research questions, two of which are satisfied using the quantitative approach, and another two using the qualitative approach.

The research questions measured using the quantitative approach are:

1. Is there any significant relationship between work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and the psychological well-being of Malaysian low-income working mothers?
2. Is supervisor support a significant moderator for the relationship between work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and the psychological well-being of Malaysian low-income working mothers?



The research questions measured using the qualitative approach are:

3. What are the experiences of Malaysian low-income working mothers on supervisor support in the workplace in relation to psychological well-being?
4. What is the supervisor support needed by Malaysian low-income working mothers in the workplace in relation to psychological well-being?

1.6 Significance of Study

This study will provide two significances to the psychological research field, namely theoretical, and practical significances. Theoretically, this study will add to the body of literature on work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and psychological well-being among the working mother population as well as a deeper understanding of the mechanism of support from the supervisor that would enhance the subordinate's psychological well-being, and in due course, advancing knowledge in the areas of organisational psychology in Malaysia. Whereas, the findings from the qualitative approach will aid in a deeper and better understanding of the phenomenon and hence, aid in knowledge improvement in the Southeast Asian context. The findings of this study will also aid in the areas of employee retention and engagement by widening the existing knowledge on the impact of work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying, and supervisor support on psychological well-being, precisely, in the context of low-income working mothers.





Practically, the findings of this research are expected to raise awareness and educate working mothers on the importance of maintaining and improving psychological well-being by focusing on work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying. By identifying the most significant contributor to psychological well-being, working mothers are anticipated to become more aware of the negative exertion of working, and feel encouraged to find effective solutions to maintain their psychological well-being. Along the same lines, working mothers are hoped to be empowered by participating in this study, as they are able to play an active role in advocating for their well-being through the sharing of ideas and insights on developing policies and programmes that are best suited to improve their well-being at work.



This section conceptually and operationally defines all variables in this study, which are low income, psychological well-being, work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying, and supervisor support.

1.7.1 Conceptual and Operational Definition of Low Income

In Malaysia, the lower-income community are known as the Bottom 40 or B40 category, as they encompass the lowest 40% of the total population in terms of socioeconomic status. Household monthly income rates differ across the 14 states in Malaysia; however, this study follows the definition of B40 according to the national





standards, which defines those with incomes of less than RM4849 in 2018 and RM4850 in 2019 as the cut-offs for the category (Khazanah Research Institute, 2018). However, the lower-income communities in Kuala Lumpur have been reported to obtain a monthly household income of less than RM9,150 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). In consideration for an easier calculation for the participants in this study which are the low-income working mothers, this research has rounded up the minimum household monthly income to less than RM 9000 for working mothers from Kuala Lumpur, and less than RM 5000 for other states.

Low income is included as one question asked in the demographic section of the survey, which includes two questions, as follows:

1. Monthly Household Income:

- a) Less than RM 2,500
- b) RM 2500 – RM 3000
- c) RM 3001 – RM 4000
- d) RM 4001 – RM 5000
- e) More than RM5000

2. State of Residence:_____.

The participants were screened for inclusion following the definition of low income in Malaysia as stated above, which is a monthly household income of less than RM 9000 for the state of Kuala Lumpur, and less than RM 5000 for other states in Malaysia.





1.7.2 Conceptual and Operational Definition of Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is a term derived from two related but distinctly different paradigms of well-being, namely hedonism and eudaimonism. The hedonic approach to psychological well-being states that well-being is the product of life satisfaction and the presence of positive emotions in the absence of negative emotions. This approach is well-known for promoting subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). On the other hand, the eudemonic perspective of well-being concerns self-actualization that fosters human development, such as mastery, autonomy, meaning in life, and relationships with others (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

This study follows the definition of psychological well-being introduced by Carol Ryff and Corey Lee Keyes, of which psychological well-being can be defined as having a sense of control in one's life and environment, meaningful relationships with others, continuously developing and growing with a clear view of life goals, and accepting oneself as they are. (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In more detail, psychological well-being can be categorised into six aspects, which include autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, personal growth, and self-acceptance.

Specifically, individuals with autonomy refer to having independence, self-determination, and an unwavering principle that does not bend to influence from others. While individuals having environmental mastery refers to being in charge and having the ability to overcome adversities in the surroundings, positive relations with others involve engaging in meaningful relationships that strengthen and inspire one's life.





Individuals with personal growth have a continuation of improvement and advancement while understanding that life is meaningful with clear goals and missions in life. Lastly, those with self-acceptance acknowledge and recognize their drawbacks and strengths while having a positive outlook on life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

In this study, psychological well-being is operationally defined as the total score obtained from the 18-item Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The scale includes several statements regarding psychological well-being, such as achievements, satisfaction, life demands, responsibilities, growth, and relationships with other people. A higher score indicates a better psychological well-being level.



1.7.3 Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Work Stress



Stress is as defined as an external burden or demand that occurs on a physiological, interpersonal, or psychological system which produces outputs such as meltdown, tension, and distortion (Lazarus, 1993). This study focuses on stress that emerges from the work environment and work-related factors and defines work stress according to the definition provided by the framework of occupational stress (Israel et al., 1989). As such, work stress is defined as a complex process that involves various factors such as environmental stressors, individual perception, biological, cognitive, and behavioural reactions, as well as modifying elements that alter the relationships among these variables (Israel et al., 1989).





For this study, work stress is operationally defined as the total score from the Workplace Stress Scale, developed by The Marlin Company and the American Institute of Stress (2011). The scale measures the frequency and intensity of stressors that individuals experience in the workplace. The scale includes a list of common stressors in the workplace, such as workload, job security, time pressure, and interpersonal conflict. Higher scores indicate a higher stress level in the workplace.

1.7.4 Conceptual and Operational Definition of Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance can be described as the extent of an employee's evaluation regarding work and non-work roles depending on their beliefs and values placed on the roles (Casper et al., 2018). It is a concept that refers to the distribution of an individual's time, commitments, and energy between their work and non-work roles and responsibilities and that seeks to reduce conflicts or interference between work and family responsibilities (Frone, 2003). Clark (2000) posits that work and family are different domains separated by a border that constantly affects one another and that individuals strive to achieve a balance between these domains through having minimal role conflict. Thus, following Clark (2000), work-life balance is conceptually defined as the act of an individual constantly finding equilibrium between the family and work domains and reducing role conflict that arises with the imbalance of either domain, influenced by external parties in each domain such as family members, co-workers, and supervisors.





Work-life balance is operationally defined as the total score obtained from the total score of the Work-Life Balance Checklist (Daniels & McCarragher, 2000). The checklist measures work-life balance through a list of common work and personal roles and responsibilities, such as work demands, household responsibilities, family time, relationships, leisure, and health. Higher scores indicate better work-life balance.

1.7.5 Conceptual and Operational Definition of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying occurs when one or more individuals are repeatedly subjected to a variety of unfavourable activities by one or more individuals, particularly when the target is powerless to defend himself and the behaviour is detrimental to both the employees and the organisation (Chirilă & Constantin, 2013). Following Leymann's model of the development of workplace bullying, this study conceptually defines bullying as a cycle of aggressive and immoral actions eliciting psychological, physical, and social harm targeted at an employee by one or more individuals which occur persistently for at least six months (Leymann, 1990).

This study operationally defines workplace bullying as the overall score acquired from the Malaysian Workplace Bullying Index (Kwan et al., 2020). The index evaluates the prevalence and severity of workplace bullying in Malaysian workplaces. The index measures bullying acts targeted at the individual, such as taking advantage, making false charges, being mocked, and being admonished without justification, and work-related bullying assesses bullying behaviours, such as excessive workloads, being





pressured to meet deadlines, and performing duties beyond the employee's skills and job scope. Higher scores imply a greater incidence of workplace bullying.

1.7.6 Conceptual and Operational Definition of Supervisor Support

In the workplace, supervisors are responsible for eliciting social support from their subordinates. Hence, advice, supervision, and encouragement a supervisor provides to subordinates are known as supervisor support (Eisenberger et al., 2002). In this study, supervisor support is conceptually defined as an individual's feeling of being physically, and psychologically acknowledged, appreciated and assisted by their immediate supervisor in the organisation.



Supervisor support is operationally defined as the sum of all 12 items on the Supervisor support Scale (Baloyi et al., 2014). The supervisor support scale measures trust, self-growth, employee fairness, helpfulness, comfortability, and supervisory expertise according to the perspective of the employees. Higher scores imply greater supervisor support at work.

1.8 Theoretical Framework of Study

This study draws on several theories, models, and frameworks that support this study. The first section explains the theory relating to well-being, beginning with Ryff's six-factor model of psychological well-being. Next, section two focuses on the combination





of theories, models, and frameworks relating to work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying, specifically, the framework of occupational stress, the work-family border theory, Leymann's model of the development of workplace bullying, and the organisational support theory. All concepts will be discussed in terms of their linkage to psychological well-being in the context of low-income working mothers.

1.8.1 Ryff's Six-Factor Model of Psychological Well-Being

The well-being paradigm consists mainly of two approaches, the hedonic approach, and the eudemonic approach (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The first approach suggests that well-being primarily revolves around satisfaction and pleasure, and includes measures of life satisfaction as well as the presence of positive emotions and the absence of negative emotions. This approach refers to well-being as subjective well-being. On the flip side, the latter defines well-being as a more complex construct, emphasising the meaning of life and the fact that individuals strive to achieve self-actualization. This approach is also known as psychological well-being, as it focuses more on the psychological aspects of well-being. One of the most prominent theories or models that follow the eudemonic approach is Ryff's six-factor model of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1996).

The six-factor model is a pioneer in the psychological aspects of well-being and relates to psychological well-being closely, hence, it is the most suited foundation to this study when compared to other theories, such as the subjective well-being theory by Diener and colleagues (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1985) which focuses on well-being





aspects in terms of emotions and life satisfaction. The main difference between the two paradigms is in the sense that the state of subjective well-being is transitory, but the states of psychological well-being are persistent.

On the other hand, the social well-being theory by Keyes (1998) focuses more on social well-being is used to study an individual's ability to change and fit into society, and is better suited for cases like migration, refugees, or people looking for asylum. Similarly, the nested model of well-being (Henriques et al., 2014) and PERMA (positive emotion; engagement; relationships; meaning; accomplishments) model (Seligman, 2012) incorporate both subjective and psychological well-being paradigms, which do not capture solely only on psychological well-being.



Notably, the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) emphasizes Ryff and Keyes's approach to developing their theory, arguing that while Ryff defines psychological well-being based on the six dimensions, the theory posits that psychological well-being is fostered by the factors of well-being, and not defined (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Although both self-determination theory and Ryff's models are important to measure psychological well-being, Ryff argued that her model is a multidimensional model that emerges from various schools of theories and philosophies. Some examples of these philosophies include Maslow's notion of self-actualization, Roger's perspective on the fully functioning person, Jung's theory of individuation, the concept of maturity from Allport, Erikson's psychosocial stage model, Buhler's fulfilment of life concept, and Neugarten's views of personality development.





A combination of these different schools of thought and philosophies has identified six different facets of psychological well-being. Instead of focusing on the absence of mental illness, the model was first developed to quantify the good characteristics of mental health (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Besides that, the model has developed a specific instrument to measure psychological well-being, termed Ryff's psychological well-being scale which has been empirically tested over the past decades across various contexts. Hence, this study employs the six-factor model of psychological well-being due to its suitability to measure, explain, and predict the psychological well-being of low-income working mothers.

Ryff's six-factor model describes six dimensions of well-being. The six dimensions are: (1) autonomy: feeling in control of one's own life and making independent choices; (2) personal growth: a sense of ongoing personal development and growth; (3) positive relations with others: having supportive and meaningful relationships with others; (4) purpose in life: having a clear sense of purpose and meaning in life; (5) environmental mastery: feeling in control of one's environment and being able to effectively cope with challenges; and (6) self-acceptance: a positive view of oneself and acceptance of one's strengths and weaknesses (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

These six dimensions are interrelated and contribute to an individual's overall well-being and satisfaction with life. For these low-income working mothers who are restricted from freely choosing their life path due to financial issues, a healthy state of psychological well-being is cost-effective and easily achievable. Psychological well-being focuses on having a meaningful life and achieving self-actualization. By satisfying all six dimensions of psychological well-being, working mothers might feel





independent at work, capable of making sound decisions using the environmental opportunities, engaging in a satisfying and meaningful work relationship that helps in career growth and development, which enhances their career-related purpose in their work life, and finally, accepting their faults and strengths in work-related matters.

The model with its dimensions is also an important aspect that guides working mothers to showcase skills and behaviours that improve career development (Strauser & Lustig, 2008). This model is used to support the need for further investigations on the psychological well-being of low-income working mothers and guides towards the development of the research hypothesis with psychological well-being as the dependent variable.



1.8.2 Framework of Occupational Stress

The framework of occupational stress was introduced by Israel, Schurman, and House (1989). This framework exceeds other theories relating to work stress, such as the demand-control support theory, and the transactional theory of work-related stress, by introducing the modifying variables, which are characteristics of the individuals or the situation that affect the process of occupational stress, in the framework.

The transactional theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provides a similar foundation as the framework of occupational stress, however, it was criticised as being too simplistic and lacking consideration regarding the individual's upbringing, future, life goals, and identities (Briner et al., 2004). The criticism is addressed in the





framework of occupational stress with the presence of modifying variables that may influence any aspect of the framework.

On the other hand, the demand-control support (Karasek, 1979) theory postulates that social support may operate as a buffer in high-demand conditions at the workplace. It is a modified and extended version of the prior job demand-control theory that was criticised as being excessively simple and failing to consider the moderating effects of social support on the variables. As popular and refined as the model is, it fails to explain other aspects of stressors besides work demands that may negatively impact the perceptions of stress among low-income working mothers (Briner et al., 2004). Due to the limitations of other theories and owing to the framework's comprehensiveness and appropriateness in the context of low-income working mothers, the framework is deemed most suitable to explain work stress mechanisms among low-income working mothers in this study.

This framework characterises occupational stress as a process that encompasses the environmental stressors and the employee's experiences, immediate and long-term physiological, psychological, and behavioural reactions, as well as a variety of moderating factors that affect the interactions between the variables in the stress process. According to the framework, stressors are the physical and psychological circumstances that are perceived as harmful, damaging, threatening, or irritating and induce a physiological adaptational response.

This framework is based on the considerable empirical data that has supported this conceptual framework, wherein multiple workplace stresses have been attributed





to diverse physiological, psychological, and behavioural outcomes. This framework proposes that psychosocial elements, such as social support, moderate the relationship between workplace stress, health, and working life, as evidenced by earlier studies (Israel et al., 1989). It is relevant to every working adult, especially working mothers, who have greater commitments and responsibilities when compared to other single working adults, and working fathers. This is generally due to mothers being the primary caregivers in the family, the head of household chores, and in the workplace, a worker with expectations and endless work commitments.

The framework of occupational stress suits working mothers well; they usually experience little daily hassles that keep building up, worsening their stress levels. For example, being a mother and a worker at the same time causes role conflict (stressor), and having too many workloads (stressor) may push these mothers to work overtime (stressor) to compensate for the lack of money. A combination of all three types of stress influences them to perceive stress negatively, affecting their psychological well-being. The presence of supervisor support as a modifying variable, then, can influence either aspect of the framework, such as reducing role conflict by providing tangible and emotional support, equally delegating workloads to reduce the mothers' burden, or allowing flexible work options to minimize work overtime. The presence of supervisor support as a moderating variable, then, will reduce work stress, and in return, improve the low-income working mothers' psychological well-being at work.

As denoted by past research and the stress process formulated by this framework, this study hypothesised that high work stress significantly influences poor psychological well-being and that the presence of support from the supervisor





moderates these relationships in such a way that high supervisor support maintains the psychological well-being of the working mothers experiencing high levels of work stress. This framework is used to support the need for further investigations on the relationship between work stress and psychological well-being among low-income working mothers and guides towards the development of the proposed hypothesis 1a and hypothesis 2a.

1.8.3 Work-Family Border Theory

Numerous theories are seeking to explain the relationship between work and family and its concept. Earlier theories and pioneer theories include the spillover theory and the compensation theory (Staines, 1980). These theories are interdependent, but they do not explain, predict, or provide any solutions to the issues of work-life balance; hence, the usefulness of these theories is limited (Clark, 2000). Criticisms of these theories also revolve around the fact that spillover and compensation occur simultaneously, with no explanation of how individuals choose to act according to one theory over the other (Champoux, 1978; Lambert, 1990). Clark (2000) criticises these theories for placing extra emphasis on the emotional aspect of balancing work and family with a lack of focus on other areas, including social and behavioural linkages between work-family balance, and considers individuals as reactive and unable to shape their environment.

Besides that, a more recent theory appears trying to view work-life domains in a positive light. The role accumulation theory (Marks, 1977; Sieber, 1974) emphasises work-family enrichment and posits that having numerous responsibilities is more





fulfilling than burdensome, as responsibilities allow access to more resources and possibilities. However, this theory received the biggest criticism for the lack of acknowledgement of the adverse impacts of work-life enrichment that should be paid attention to as most individuals wrestle to manage both work and family commitments (Field & Chan, 2018).

Another theory that describes work-life balance is the boundary theory, which focuses on individuals' attribution to different parts of their lives, and the simplicity and frequency of switching between identities (Ashforth et al., 2000). The boundary theory is similar to the work-family border theory (Clark, 2000) in terms of meanings and the constitution of work-life balance. Although similar to the boundary theory, the work-family border theory only focuses on the work and family domains and takes into account both intangible limits such as time, space, and people in the workplace when defining borders (Field & Chan, 2018). As this research only focuses on the work-life balance between work and family domains of the low-income working mothers (as supported also by the work-life balance instrument used in section 3.4.5), the work-family border theory is best suited as the foundation of the work-life balance variable in this research.

This theory posits that work and family fall into different domains that influence each other and include a border between work and family to ensure a balance between the two domains. This theory defines balance as having good functioning and satisfaction in both domains with minimal role conflict. Individuals create and revise their borders between work and home lives according to their needs, which gives them





satisfaction, hence making them proactive and enactive instead of reactive, as mentioned in the earlier theories.

The work-family border theory comprises four elements: (1) work and home domains, (2) borders that exist between work and home, (3) border-crosser (i.e., working mothers), and (4) other important domain members (i.e., border-keepers). The border that exists between work and home domains is penetrable and flexible, allowing the border-crosser to easily transport between both domains. Due to the state of the borders, an area that combines both work and home domains emerged, known as blending. Blending occurs when work and home tasks occur simultaneously and are not distinct to each domain. In the context of working mothers, few of the working mothers work from home, while taking care of their children's welfare at the same time. Hence, she is inside both domains at the same time, which equates to 'blending' in this theory. This theory asserts that similar domains are preferable to very distinct domains, as the integration of the domains allows for the feeling of completeness.

People constantly travel between their professional and personal lives through borders. Borders can be either highly integrated or highly segmented (Ashforth et al., 2000). The goals, behaviours, and thinking patterns are similar when the work and home domains are comparable. When domains are separated, the work and private selves are considered distinct. Both strong and weak borders separate these domains, whereby a border is strong when it is rendered inflexible by fixed working hours, a separate geographically distant location of employment, and different regulations for the individual's chosen habits of thinking, feeling, and behaving for each domain. Weak





borders allow for work-life balance when domains are similar, whereas strong borders keep the balance when domains are far apart (Oksanen et al., 2021).

Another central element in this theory is the border-keepers. Border-keepers are individuals with higher authority to determine the ability of the border-crossers to maintain the balance for both domains. Border-keepers are usually spouses/partners and supervisors. For the context of this study, the border-keepers only focus on the workplace supervisors. This theory argues the importance of supervisors (border-keepers) in helping working mothers (border-crossers) maintain a balance between work and home domains.

Within the low-income working mothers' context, mothers may experience issues with their work-life balance to satisfy the responsibilities of a mother and a worker at the same time. When both domains are not satisfied, work-life balance becomes poor, and mothers are forced to constantly try to balance both domains, affecting their psychological well-being. On the contrary, when mothers are able to maintain the equilibrium between both domains with the help of the domain-keepers (i.e., supervisors in the workplace), the work-life balance becomes higher. Therefore, work-life balance is positively associated with the psychological well-being of these low-income working mothers, and supervisor support moderates this relationship, in such a way that the impact of work-life balance on psychological well-being is strengthened.

This theory has been seen as capable of encompassing a broader conception of life by expanding the junction between work and a wider variety of non-work activities,





including hobbies, religious obligations, and volunteer work (Kellher et al., 2019). In addition, recent studies are still using this theory as their theoretical foundation (Adisa et al., 2022; Daraba et al., 2021; Johari et al., 2018; Schieman et al., 2022), indicating its relevance in current research on work-life balance. This theory is used to support the need for further investigations on the relationship between work-life balance and psychological well-being among low-income working mothers and guides towards the development of the proposed hypothesis 1b and hypothesis 2b.

1.8.4 Leymann's Model of the Development of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying is an issue that has been widely touched upon by researchers from various fields. Therefore, abundant theories and models have appeared, seeking to explain the causes of workplace bullying and its consequences. Among the widely known theories and models are the conflict escalation theory (Glasl, 1982), the three-process model (Salin, 2003), and the model of the development of workplace bullying (Leymann, 1990). This research uses Leymann's model as the foundation to explain the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological well-being among Malaysian low-income mothers.

Firstly, the conflict escalation theory (Glasl, 1982) occurs through three distinct phases as it describes the development of and responses to psychological aggressiveness. In the first phase, individuals try to rationalise and attempt to resolve existing disagreements, using reasonable dialogues and problem-solving approaches. The second phase of a conflict is characterized by a breakdown in social relationships





as tensions rise. At this point, disdain for the aggressor has begun to surface. In the third phase, the aggressor makes his or her aggressive behaviour more apparent, raising the stakes so that the victim feels compelled to leave his or her existing position.

Although this theory has been widely used to explain bullying, the theory itself does not directly point out that bullying occurs and it is unclear in which of the three main stages bullying occurs. A conflict, as compared to bullying, can occur at one time and not be repeated, and overcome once the misunderstanding has been resolved or it could also last a longer period of time, yet, bullying happens over a period of repeated harmful acts toward the victim. In this sense, bullying is termed when harmful or damaging consequences are imposed on the victim, while conflict may or may not involve harmful acts and focuses more on the incompatibility between individuals



(Keashly & Nowell, 2003).



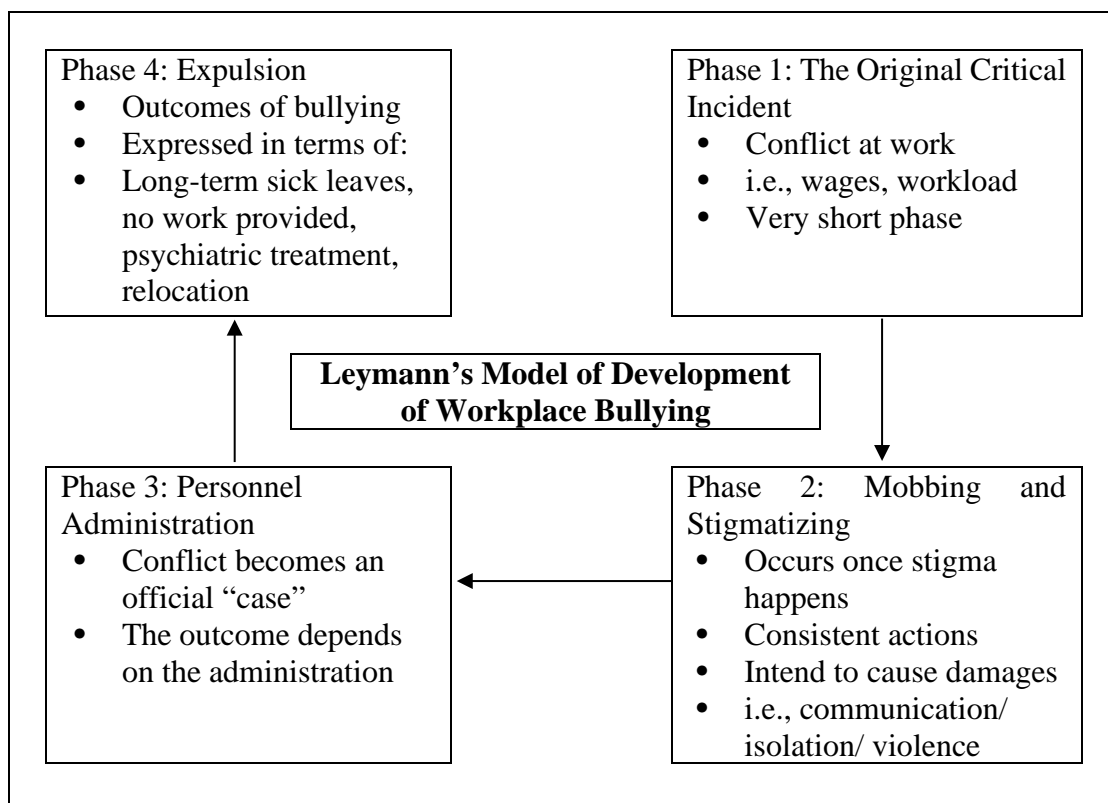
One of the more specific models explaining workplace bullying from organizational antecedents is the three-process model from Salin (Salin, 2003) which states that bullying occurs when the perpetrator perceives an atmosphere of hostility at work, an impression of a power disparity between the perpetrator with any potential victims, and perceived little risk of punishment. Besides that, organizational restructuring also adds to the development of bullying. The model from Salin emphasises more on organizational shifts as antecedents of bullying and does not consider the role of the organization in influencing the intensity and outcomes of bullying.



On the other hand, Leymann's model of the development of workplace bullying has been debated in the literature as the explanation of workplace bullying antecedents (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, 2000). The model was first introduced by Leymann (1990), where he defined bullying as mobbing, a pattern of aggressive and immoral communication directed primarily at one individual by one or more individuals for at least six months, producing psychological, physical, and social distress. This model emphasises the role of supervisors and organisations in eliminating bullying in the workplace. Noteworthy, this model is one of the two leading explanations of workplace bullying predictors (Schneider et al., 2010). Figure 1.1 shows the cycle of workplace bullying from Leymann's model.

Figure 1.1

Cycle of Workplace Bullying. Adaptation from Leymann, 1990





Besides that, when compared to other existing theories and models, the biggest highlight of Leymann's model includes personnel administration and argues the importance of management in effectively handling the bullying situation at work. Wrong supervision of the bullying cases, such as ignoring bullying events or belittling the victim's concern intensifies the bullying behaviours and forces the victim to quit or increases counterproductive work behaviours. In a more positive light, the right type of supervision reduces bullying behaviours empowers the victim to feel supported and enhances the victim's psychological well-being. Hence, the administration of personnel (in this case, the supervisor) in controlling workplace bullying behaviours is vital to ensure and maintain a peaceful, positive, and conducive workplace for all employees.

Furthermore, it is generally agreed upon by academics (i.e., Forssell, 2016; Francioli et al., 2018; Samnani & Singh, 2012) that Heinz Leymann's studies on mobbing marked the beginning of scientific knowledge of bullying in the workplace. The foundation of this model emphasises the negative psychosocial environment that leads to bullying behaviours that cause stress and poor psychological well-being and intensifies when the management fails to control the bullying situation (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). From Leymann's work, other researchers have also investigated similar work bullying-related models (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, 2000).

The model posits that bullying usually occurs in four phases: (1) the original critical incident; (2) mobbing and stigmatising; (3) personnel administration; and (4) expulsion. Generally, phase one refers to the triggering situation that leads to bullying, such as a conflict between co-workers or miscommunication in the workplace. Then, bullying occurs in the second phase, where frequent harmful negative acts are targeted





towards the victim. Examples of bullying include spreading rumours, excluding the victim from any workplace event, verbal criticism, being ostracised, giving meaningless work tasks, and committing direct physical violence.

The third phase started when the management stepped in to resolve the bullying case. Depending on the administration, rumours that are spreading may influence the decision of the management towards the victim, such as being replaced at another workplace branch or being transferred to another department. The expulsion phase, which is the final phase, occurs when the bullying and after-effects of bullying, as well as the management's actions, have impacted the victim's working life, resulting in poor psychological well-being, absenteeism, psychosomatic complaints, and psychiatric treatments.



According to Leymann's model of the development of workplace bullying, these factors can create a work environment that is conducive to bullying, which can negatively impact the well-being of employees and the organisation. To prevent bullying in the workplace, it is important to create a supportive work environment with clear policies, procedures, and norms that discourage bullying behaviour. To adopt this model in the low-income working mothers' context, in one situation, the dual responsibilities and constant struggle to fulfil both roles at maximum capacity may be the triggering factor to conflicts in the workplace, whether between co-workers, team members or with the supervisor/management. The inability of low-income working mothers to reduce such responsibilities escalated the conflicts and led to the presence of bullying behaviours. In this sense, working mothers are harmless and defenceless as they are unable to produce an effective solution to resolve the endless conflicts between





home and family, allowing for consistent bullying behaviours placed upon them by the perpetrators.

The supervisor/management has the authority to directly stop the bullying cycle through their effective administration. Depending on the performance of the management in controlling the cycle, the bullying cycle may or may not enter the final phase, expulsion or quitting. Although quitting may be the outcome of unresolved bullying, in the context of low-income working mothers, quitting employment is not an option due to the extreme need for financial security. Hence, low-income working mothers may presumably be forced to face workplace bullying in a hostile work environment every day, resulting in poor psychological well-being, or worse, being wrongly expelled, further damaging their already poor psychological well-being.



Overall, the model highlights the importance of creating a supportive work environment that promotes well-being and discourages bullying to protect the mental health and well-being of employees. This model is also one of the foundations for the formulation of the Malaysian Workplace Bullying Index (Kwan et al., 2020), a newly developed instrument designed specifically to measure workplace bullying in the Malaysian working population (Kwan et al., 2014). This model is used to support the need for further investigations on the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological well-being among low-income working mothers and guides towards the development of the proposed hypothesis 1c and hypothesis 2c.





1.8.5 Organisational Support Theory

Pioneer theories in social support include the social exchange theory, social comparison theory, the social competence theory, the stress-buffering model of social support, and the organisational support theory. The first three theories explain social support in a universal view (Penny et al., 1997). Although may be applied as the basis of this research, they are almost too general and not as relevant in the context of low-income working mothers to further be used as support in this study. This research employs the widely known and applicable Organisational Support Theory (OST) by Eisenberger et al. (1986).

To start, the stress-buffering model of social support (Cohen, 2004) posits that social bonds promote health by providing the psychological and material resources necessary for stress management. The model predicts that social support is advantageous for those enduring adversity, but has minimal impact on the health of those who are not experiencing significant stress (Cohen, 2004). The usefulness of the model lies in the perceptions of heavy exposure to stressors and poor support received (Moskowitz et al., 2013), with a longer duration of perceived stress when compared to a lesser time of stress exposure (Szkody et al., 2021). In the context of low-income working mothers, some may face stressors in both domains, while others may only face stressors in the workplace or at home. Hence, the time of exposure to stress varies. In that sense, the model is not particularly suitable to be used for this research, alongside its general assumptions.





It is worth noting that this research focuses on the specificity of stressors that the population of interest are experiencing is only in the work setting. The OST defines organisational support as the extent to which personnel perceive concerns about their welfare from their employers (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The theory is based on the assumption that the relationship between employees and the organisation is reciprocal, whereby support from the organisation in return increases the employee's commitment to the organisation. The effort put into working depends on their viewpoint on the importance of work effort in exchange for monetary and metaphorical advantages. These working mothers are highly motivated to obtain monetary benefits due to being in a low socioeconomic situation, and receiving this support encourages them to become committed to the organisation in order to continuously obtain these benefits.



To enlighten, this study employs supervisor support, which is regarded as a

connotation to organisational support, as the supervisor's evaluation and support is either from the organisation or will be conveyed to the organisation. Therefore, poor supervisor support is an indication that the organisation as a whole does not support the worker and vice versa (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Better support from supervisors suggests that the organisation support the employees, and in return, produces positive outcomes for the organisation. The relationship between organisational support and supervisor support goes hand in hand with the positive relationship found across different contexts (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Lamprinou et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019; Tuzun & Kalemci, 2012).





This theory has been expansively studied in the past and present, indicating the relevance and importance of this theory in the research field. Furthermore, findings showed better outcomes of organisational support in the Eastern countries (a collectivist culture) when compared to the Western countries (individualistic culture), making this theory suitable to be tested in the context of Malaysian culture (for a review, see Eisenberger et al., 2020).

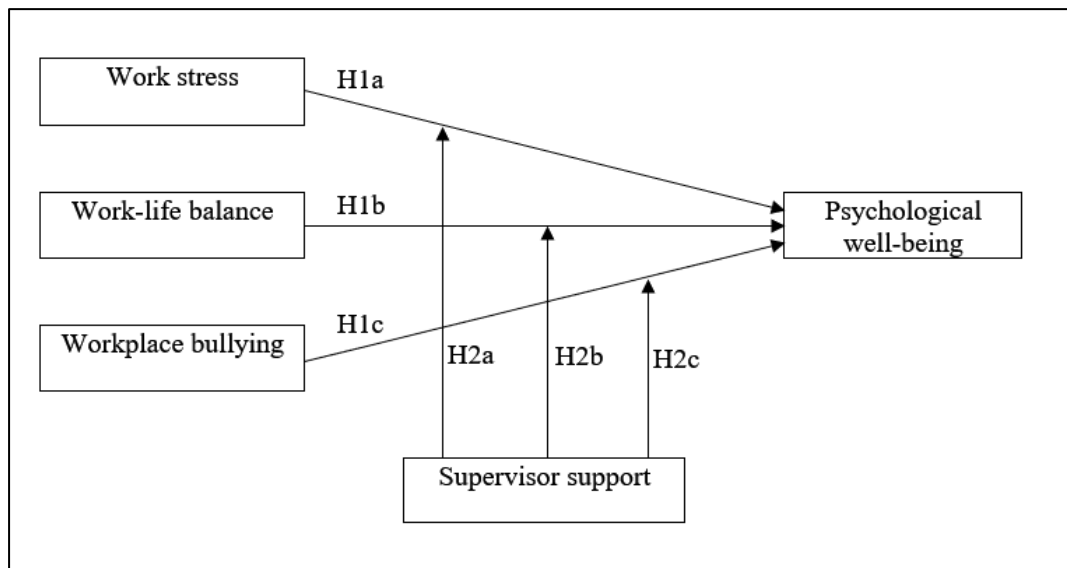
This model serves as fundamental to the development of two hypotheses of this research, hypothesis 1d and hypothesis 2 with supervisor support as the moderating variable. Accordingly, the researcher has chosen to test the model in the context of Malaysian low-income working mothers and between the relationship between work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and psychological well-being to add



1.9 Conceptual Framework

Following the objectives of the study, the researcher has developed a conceptual framework that outlines the relationships between the hypothesised variables, as shown in Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2*Conceptual Framework.***1.10 Hypothesis**

Based on the findings provided in section 2.2.3 - Result of systematic literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated to be tested in the study. To start, the review reported a negative relationship between work stress and psychological well-being among working women (Kapoor et al., 2021; Kim, 2022; Mensah, 2021; Prasad & Vaidya, 2021). Thus, this study hypothesises that work stress will negatively influence the psychological well-being of working mothers as well. From the review as well, six articles found a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and well-being among working women; whereby higher levels of work-life balance are associated with better well-being status (Akram & Hussain, 2020; Cuéllar-Molina et al., 2018; Dirfa & Prasetya, 2019; Lucia-Casademunt et al., 2018; Prasad & Vaidya, 2021; Shui et al., 2020). As such, within the context of working mothers, this study



hypothesises that work-life balance will have a positive impact on psychological well-being.

Finally, two studies included in the review reported negative associations between workplace bullying and psychological well-being (Alrawadieh et al., 2022; Jabeen et al., 2021). With that being said, this study proposes that among low-income working mothers, workplace bullying will negatively impact their psychological well-being. Thus, for this research, one main hypothesis regarding the direct relationship between work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying and psychological well-being with three sub-hypotheses was developed, as follows.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and psychological well-being.

H1a: There is a negative significant relationship between work stress and psychological well-being.

H1b: There is a positive significant relationship between work-life balance and psychological well-being.

H1c: There is a negative significant relationship between workplace bullying and psychological well-being.

Next, the findings from the systematic literature review are coupled with the theories that were used to support this study. In detail, the findings regarding work stress and psychological well-being from the systematic review were examined and





synthesised together with the framework of occupational stress (Israel et al., 1989), allowing the researcher to hypothesise the presence of a modifying variable, which is supervisor support to moderate the relationship between work stress and psychological well-being.

Similarly, the positive relationships between work-life balance and psychological well-being obtained from the review were examined using the work-family border theory (Clark, 2000), whereby the existence of a supervisor in the work domain influences the capabilities of the mothers to balance between home and work matter. With that, this study proposes that supervisor support moderates the relationship between work-life balance and psychological well-being among low-income working mothers.



Lastly, the negative findings between workplace bullying and psychological well-being among working women reported in the systematic review were examined using Leymann's workplace bullying model (Leyman, 1990). The theory asserts the importance of personnel administration (in this case, the supervisor) in handling workplace bullying issues, whereby poor management by the supervisor further harms psychological well-being and vice versa. For this reason, this study hypothesises that supervisor support moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological well-being among Malaysian low-income working mothers. Thus, for this research, one main hypothesis regarding the moderation effect of supervisor support on the relationship between work stress, work-life balance, and workplace bullying and psychological well-being with three sub-hypotheses was developed, as follows.





Hypothesis 2: Supervisor support is a significant moderator between work stress, work-life balance, workplace bullying and psychological well-being.

H2a: Supervisor support moderates the relationship between work stress and psychological well-being, in such a way that the impact of stress on psychological well-being is reduced with the presence of supervisor support.

H2b: Supervisor support moderates the relationship between work-life balance and psychological well-being, in such a way that the impact of work-life balance on psychological well-being is strengthened with the presence of supervisor support.

H2c: Supervisor support moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological well-being, in such a way that the impact of workplace bullying on psychological well-being is reduced with the presence of supervisor support.

1.11 Conclusion

This study assesses the moderating effect of supervisor support on the association between work outcome components and psychological well-being among low-income working mothers in Malaysia. In a similar vein, this study aims to understand how supervisor support at work impacts the psychological well-being of low-income working mothers.





Ryff's six-factor model of psychological well-being, the framework of occupational stress, the work-family border theory, Leymann's model of the development of workplace bullying, and the organisational support theory were the foundations that structure the evaluations of the hypotheses. This chapter also provides the conceptual framework for easier comprehension of the scope of the study.

