

Does Psychological Capital Influence Employees' Burnout? A Review Paper

Jen Ling Gan¹, and Halimah M. Yusof²

^{1,2} Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, School of Human Resources Development and Psychology, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Johor, Malaysia,

Abstract: In this globalization era, burnout has been known as one of the critical issues in organizations. Overlooking the issue of burnout could lead to negative consequences, such as negatively affecting the overall organizational performance, and poor mental health among employees. It is crucial to know the factors that can help to improve burnout. One of the factors that can reduce burnout is psychological capital. Psychological capital is known as one of the elements that could help to reduce negative emotions. However, it was claimed that the influence of psychological capital is remained unexplored. Hence, this article reviewed the past studies that were conducted in the past decade (2008-2018) on the linkage between psychological capital and employees' burnout. From the findings, it was revealed that there are inconsistency of the findings in the past studies. Hence, this has triggered a need for further exploration on the linkage between psychological capital and employees' burnout. It is suggested that more empirical researches to be conducted in the future to provide a more concrete evidences on the linkage between psychological capital and employees' burnout.

Key words: *Psychological Capital, Employees' Burnout, Review Paper*

INTRODUCTION

In modern organizations, burnout has been known as one of the severe issues among employees [1]. According to the official website of [2], a finding revealed that 95 percent of the Human Resource leaders mentioned that, employees' burnout is one of the main factor that affects employees' retention. It can be seen that employees' burnout is a serious issue in Human Resource field, as well as negatively influencing organizations' performance. In organizations, there are many stressful situations that might be faced by employees, which these continuing negative pressures could lead to negative outcomes, such as employees' burnout [3]. Hence, it is crucial to understand the factors that might improve employees' burnout, such as psychological capital.

Since a decade ago, psychological capital has been gaining attention in the literature of employees' performance [4]. This can be seen when scholars have started their research in examining the connection between psychological capital and employees' behavior, performance, and attitudes

[5]. Although there are numbers of scholars that had examined the effect of psychological capital, there are debates about how it influences individual-level in the literature [6]. In addition, the scholars claimed that the linkage between psychological capital and its outcomes is remained unexplored [7]. With these problem statements as the rationale to study the linkage between psychological capital and burnout, this review paper intends to review the previous studies that examined the linkage between the variables. This is because we attempt to contribute to the particular field in understanding how psychological capital affects employees' burnout, where burnout is known as one of the critical issues in human resource field. Instead of focusing on employees' traits that affect burnout, this paper focused on psychological capital because altering states (employees' psychological capital) needs less effort and time as compared to altering employees' traits [8]. In keeping with best practice, we used significant databases to look for articles that are related to psychological capital and employees' burnout. Specific methodology is mentioned in another section in this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Psychological Capital

Psychological capital is perceived as “what are you”, where it is a process of one’s development and growth via positive psychological situations [9, 10]. It is claimed that effective psychological capital growth is beneficial for an individual because it helps to improve competitive advantage and enhance the performance of organizations [11]. According to [10], psychological capital consists of four positive psychological capitals that enhance the growth of psychology, namely optimism, resilience, hope, and self-efficacy. Firstly, optimism is defined as one’s positive beliefs to positive results [12], where an individual with optimism tends to develop positive beliefs in order to have self-motivation to reach goals [13]. Secondly, resilience is defined as one’s capability to recover from failure, risks, pressures, adversity, and adaptive to changes [14]. With high level of resilience, and individual tends to have higher ability to overcome negative incidents [15]. Thirdly, hope consists of two aspects, namely pathways, and agency (goal-directed) [16]. Pathways is described as the approach of accomplishing tasks; while agency is known as one’s motivation to accomplish a task in particular settings [17]. Individuals with hope will look for ways to reach their goals, and be motivated to accomplish their tasks [18]. Lastly, self-efficacy is defined as one’s confidence in organizing their cognitive resources, steps of actions, and motivation to achieve excellent performance [19]. A person with high self-efficacy is prone to have stronger faith in their capability to control result and to overcome obstacles [19].

Burnout

Burnout is described as a condition which a person experiences exhaustion in one’s [20]. Burnout tends to happen consistently in several occupations such as human service [21]. Several definitions had been developed to theorize burnout, where some scholars mentioned that burnout is categorized as cognitive and affective, while some scholars categorized burnout as behavioral and physical symptoms [22]. Among the proposed conceptualization of burnout, the most commonly used definition is developed by [23]. According to [23], burnout is defined as a disorder that involves exhaustion in mental, decreased personal achievement, and depersonalization. Burnout can happen over time due to several factors, where it is a process that can negatively influence an individual’s achievement [22]. Burnout is also described as the occurrence of withdrawal in job among employees due to excessive pressures in their jobs [24]. Besides, burnout is also defined as an unbearable process that

might reduce employees’ optimistic, decreased motivation and creativity, as well as denuding psychological capability in organizations [25]. Burnout always happens among professional employees because over demands on their abilities always happened among them and receiving limited resources [26]. Burnout tends to happen when an employee is under long-term of pressures which could lead to exhaustion in one’s emotional and psychological [11]. There are three dimensions that commonly operationalize burnout, namely cynicism, exhaustion, and reduced personal efficacy [27]. Cynicism is described as unenthusiastic attitude, exhaustion is known as the feeling of reduced resources in emotion, and reduced personal efficacy is described as the feeling of being incompetent [27].

METHODOLOGY

The variables of psychological capital and employees’ burnout were searched comprehensively through journal databases. Since we focused on the articles between the years of 2008 to 2018, we had targeted to look for the previous studies in the past decade. We had looked for several journal databases such as Scopus and Emerald. We have focused on five exclusions when we conducted the searching of previous studies. Firstly, we excluded those studies which are non-empirical. We included only empirical studies. Next, we excluded the studies which were not conducted among the samples of company employees due to this paper focused only on the connection between the variables among company employees. We did not include students sample because the result from students sample is significantly different from the samples of company employees. Besides, we excluded the variables that are irrelevant to our review. Since psychological capital is commonly abbreviated as PsyCap, we have included PsyCap as one of keywords during the process of searching. Moreover, we excluded those studies that their variable of psychological capital was being rated by other parties, such as superiors, instead of self-rated. This is due to we focused only on psychological capital that was self-rated by the samples. Lastly, we excluded those studies which did not inform the result of validity and reliability of their instruments because failing to inform might affect the validity of the results of studies.

RESULT

For the purpose to understand the linkage between psychological capital and employees’ burnout, literature was constructive for this paper. The past studies assisted to indicate the findings on the connection between psychological capital and employees’ burnout. Psychological capital has been

known as an important element that can facilitate to enhance positive organizational behavior, as well as alleviating negative behavior or attitude [28]. It can be seen that, if employees have psychological capital, the tendency of facing employees' burnout could be decreased. Through the process of reviewing, it was found that psychological capital is able to influence employees' burnout, where it was revealed that psychological capital has significant negative linkage with employees' burnout [29]. The finding is consistent with another study that was conducted by [30]. When employees have psychological capital, such as being optimistic to results, the employees' burnout will be reduced with the positive attitude. Besides, it was revealed that psychological capital is significantly related to employees' burnout [31]. [32] has yielded the similar findings with [31]. This indicates that psychological capital plays crucial role in affecting employees' burnout. The result is consistent with previous study that was conducted by [33]. [33] mentioned that psychological capital is able to help the employees in reducing negative emotions such as stress, which in turn reducing the level of burnout in organizations.

Followed by the study of [33], another study that was conducted by [34] revealed that, psychological capital acts as positive resources in alleviating employees stress, therefore reducing the level of burnout. The result is similar with a study that was conducted by [35], where there is a significant negative relationship between the variables. Besides that, it was revealed that, psychological capital has low but significant and negative relationship with employees' burnout [36]. This indicated that when employees have high self-efficacy, which is known as one of the dimensions of psychological capital, the employees tend to have less probability in facing job burnout. When employees are able to develop positive beliefs among themselves, the employee is prone to have lower level of burnout [36]. While, another study showed that there is a high significant linkage between psychological capital and employees' burnout [37]. It was different with the previous study, [37] measured employees' burnout as 'exhaustion and disengagement', while [36] measured employees' burnout as 'emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment'. The difference of results above indicates that, the intensity of connection could be dissimilar when the scholars measured in different dimensions.

Apart from that, it was claimed that psychological capital has high relationship with employees' burnout. The result was consistent with [38] study, where it was mentioned that there is significant and negative relationship between psychological capital

and employees' burnout. Different from [38] study, [28] measured employees' burnout as unidimensional, when the relationship between the psychological capital and employees' burnout was examined. On the other hand, [38] measured the relationship between the psychological capital and employees' burnout from one dimension to another. It was indicated that all the burnout dimensions is significantly influenced by psychological capital, namely emotional exhaustion, and cynicism [38].

In addition, it was showed that there is a moderate association between psychological capital and employees' burnout [39]. In the study, the scholars measured employees' burnout as unidimensional factor. Another study mentioned that there is very low but significant relationship between psychological capital and employees' burnout [40]. Different from [39], [40] measured employees' burnout with dimensions of 'emotional exhaustion, cynicism and professional efficacy'. This brings a meaning that, when the researchers used different measurement techniques, the results could be inconsistent and different.

Nevertheless, although most of the researchers agreed that there is a significant connection between psychological capital and employees' burnout, it was found that there is non-significant relationship between the variables [41]. Contradictory with previous studies, psychological capital has no significant influence on employees' burnout in the study. On the other hand, significant relationship was found between psychological capital and employees' burnout [42]. The dimensions of psychological capital such as 'resilience' has significant relationship with employees' burnout. [42] finding was consistent with [43], as well as the study of [44]. This could be due to different professions, where [41] respondents were doctors, while [43] as well as [44] respondents were nurses. From the previous studies, it can be clearly seen that the relationship between psychological capital and employees' burnout are remained uncertain due to the findings of linkages are inconsistent among the researchers.

To summarize, the association between psychological capital and employees' burnout remained uncertain in the previous studies. It revealed that some of the researchers claimed that there is significant linkage between the variables, while some researchers claimed that there is no significant linkage between psychological capital and employees' burnout. Furthermore, it is suggested that more studies are required in future to verify the relationship between the variables. Below is the table that summarized the findings of review.

Table 1: Summary of Findings

No.	Author	Year	Respondents	Research Design	Results
1.	Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans [33]	2008	132 employees from a broad cross-section of organizations	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
2.	Avey, Luthans, & Jensen [34]	2009	416 working adults from a wide variety of jobs and industries	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
3.	Zhao & Zhangch [29]	2010	493 employees in a communication company	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
4.	Cheung, Tang, & Tang [31]	2011	264 full-time Chinese school teachers in China	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
5.	Wang, Liu, Wang, & Wang [41]	2012	1,011 doctors in Liaoning Province, China	Cross-sectional; Survey	Not Significant
6.	Wang, Chang, Fu, & Wang [40]	2012	1,332 nurses in Liaoning province, China	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
7.	Lin [36]	2013	352 full-time employees with more than three months of working experience in international tourist hotels in Taiwan	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
8.	Peng, Jiang, Zhang, Xiao, Song, Feng, & Miao [42]	2013	473 female nurses from four large general hospitals in Xi'an City of China	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
9.	Laschinger & Fida [42]	2014	907 nurses in Ontario	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
10.	Ali & Ali [43]	2014	219 female nurses working in government hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
11.	Bitmiş & Ergeneli [44]	2015	161 nurses from the hospitals of foundation universities	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
12.	Hansen, Buitendach, & Kanengoni [37]	2015	103 educators across four selected educational institutions in the Umlazi region of KwaZulu-Natal	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
13.	Ding, Yang, Yang, Zhang, Qiu, He, & Sui [30]	2015	1,496 nurses from two hospitals in Daqing City, China	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
14.	Li, Kan, Liu, Shi, Wang, Yang, & Wu [35]	2015	1,239 employees from Liaoning Province banks	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
15.	Leon-Perez, Antino, & Leon-Rubio [39]	2016	798 workers from Spanish vehicle safety and emissions inspection company	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
16.	Jun [32]	2017	274 nurses from two hospitals in the D city, Korea	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant
17.	Zhun, Schooler, Yong, & Mingda [28]	2018	304 employees from large state-owned enterprises in Beijing	Cross-sectional; Survey	Significant

CONCLUSION

To summarize, it was generally revealed that most of the studies were found significant relationship between psychological capital and employees' burnout. However, the findings are not consistent throughout the years. Although several authors revealed significant connection between the variables, there are scholars who found insignificant relationship between the two variables as well. Burnout is known as one of the challenging problems among employees in organizations. In this review paper, it has been summarized that psychological capital is one of the possible antecedents that can reduce employees' burnout. Hence, it is recommended that organizations should focus on the approaches that can help to improve employees' psychological capital. Meanwhile, due to the inconsistency of findings among previous studies, future researchers should conduct more investigations in order to provide more concrete and consistent results. Furthermore, since most of the previous studies were cross-sectional studies and were conducted through survey approach, the long-term effect changes could not be captured. Hence, in future studies, it is encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies in order to capture the pattern of relationship between the variables.

REFERENCES

- [1] Malekitabar, M., Riahi, M., & Malekitabar, A. R. (2017). The role of psychological capital in psychological well-being and job burnout of high schools principals in Saveh, Iran. *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences*, 11(1).
- [2] Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM). (2017). 'Workplace Burnout at 'Epidemic Proportions'', Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/employee-burnout.aspx>
- [3] Khdour, N. J., Durrah, O., & Harris, M. (2015). The Effect of Job Burnout on Employees' Satisfaction: A Comparison Study between Public Universities and Private Universities in Jordan. *Journal of Management Research*, 7(4), 54-81.
- [4] Ardichvili, A. (2011). Invited reaction: Meta-analysis of the impact of psychological capital on employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 22(2), 153-156.
- [5] Avey, J. B., Luthans, F., & Youssef, C. M. (2010). The additive value of positive psychological capital in predicting work attitudes and behaviours. *Journal of management*, 36(2), 430-452.
- [6] Newman, A., Ucbasaran, D., Zhu, F. E. I., & Hirst, G. (2014). Psychological capital: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(S1), S120-S138.
- [7] Luthans, F., & Youssef-Morgan, C. M. (2017). Psychological capital: An evidence-based positive approach. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4, 339-366.
- [8] Luthans, F., & Church, A. H. (2002). Positive organizational behavior: Developing and managing psychological strengths. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 16(1), 57-72.
- [9] Luthans, F., Youssef, C. M., & Avolio, B. J. (2007). *Psychological capital: Developing the human competitive edge* (Vol. 198). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zhao, J., & Zhang, X. C. (2010). Work stress and job burnout: the moderating effects of psychological capital. *Journal of Henan Normal University (Natural Science)*, 38(3), 139-143.
- [10] Luthans, F., Luthans, K. W., & Luthans, B. C. (2004). Positive psychological capital: Beyond human and social capital.
- [11] Chang, C. M., Chen, L. S., Lin, H. Y., Huang, H. C. (2013). The relationship between psychological capital and job satisfaction of university physical education teachers in Taiwan: Job stress and job burnout as mediators. *Energy Education Science and Technology Part B. Social and Educational Studies*, 5(3), 1-9.
- [12] Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (2001). Optimism, pessimism, and psychological well-being. *Optimism and pessimism: Implications for theory, research, and practice*, 1, 189-216.
- [13] Seligman, M. E. (1998). *Learned optimism*. Vintage.
- [14] Tugade, M. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). Resilient individuals use positive emotions to bounce back from negative emotional experiences. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 86(2), 320.
- [15] Luthans, F., Vogelgesang, G. R., & Lester, P. B. (2006). Developing the psychological capital of resiliency. *Human Resource Development Review*, 5(1), 25-44.

- [16] Snyder, C. R., Simpson, S. C., Ybasco, F. C., Borders, T. F., Babyak, M. A., & Higgins, R. L. (1996). Development and validation of the State Hope Scale. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 70*(2), 321.
- [17] Luthans, F., Norman, S. M., Avolio, B. J., & Avey, J. B. (2008). The mediating role of psychological capital in the supportive organizational climate—employee performance relationship. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior, 29*(2), 219-238.
- [18] Stajkovic, A. D., & Luthans, F. (1998). Self-efficacy and work-related performance: A meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin, 124*(2), 240.
- [19] Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Macmillan.
- [20] Schaufeli, W. B. (2003). Past performance and future perspectives of burnout research. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 29*(4), 1-15.
- [21] Rothmann, S., & Barkhuizen, N. (2008). Burnout of academic staff in South African higher education institutions. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 22*(2), 439-456.
- [22] Van Tonder, C. L., & Williams, C. (2009). Exploring the origins of burnout among secondary educators. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 35*(1), 204-218.
- [23] Maslach, C., & Jackson, S.E. (1986). *Maslach Burnout Inventory manual*. (2nd edn.).
- [24] Cherniss, C. (1980). *Professional burnout in human service organizations*. Praeger Publishers.
- [25] Stevenson, J. G. (1994). Employee burnout and perceived social support. *Journal of Health and Human Resources Administration, 35*0-367.
- [26] Lee, R. T., & Ashforth, B. E. (1996). A meta-analytic examination of the correlates of the three dimensions of job burnout. *Journal of applied Psychology, 81*(2), 123.
- [27] Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual review of psychology, 52*(1), 397-422.
- [28] Zhun, G., Schooler, J. W., Yong, W., & Mingda, T. (2018). Research on the Relationship between Positive Emotions, Psychological Capital and Job Burnout in Enterprises' Employees: Based on the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions. *Canadian Social Science, 14*(5), 42-48.
- [29] Zhao, J., & Zhang, X. C. (2010). Work stress and job burnout: the moderating effects of psychological capital. *Journal of Henan Normal University (Natural Science), 38*(3), 139-143.
- [30] Ding, Y., Yang, Y., Yang, X., Zhang, T., Qiu, X., He, X., & Sui, H. (2015). The mediating role of coping style in the relationship between psychological capital and burnout among Chinese nurses. *PloS one, 10*(4), e0122128.
- [31] Cheung, F., Tang, C. S. K., & Tang, S. (2011). Psychological capital as a moderator between emotional labor, burnout, and job satisfaction among school teachers in China. *International Journal of Stress Management, 18*(4), 348.
- [32] Jun, S. Y. (2017). Influences of burnout, emotional labor, and positive psychological capital on job satisfaction of nurses. *Journal of Korean Academy of Nursing Administration, 23*(2), 201-210.
- [33] Avey, J. B., Wernsing, T. S., & Luthans, F. (2008). Can positive employees help positive organizational change? Impact of psychological capital and emotions on relevant attitudes and behaviors. *The journal of applied behavioral science, 44*(1), 48-70.
- [34] Avey, J. B., Luthans, F., & Jensen, S. M. (2009). Psychological capital: A positive resource for combating employee stress and turnover. *Human resource management, 48*(5), 677-693.
- [35] Li, X., Kan, D., Liu, L., Shi, M., Wang, Y., Yang, X., & Wu, H. (2015). The mediating role of psychological capital on the association between occupational stress and job burnout among bank employees in China. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 12*(3), 2984-3001.
- [36] fidahdi, T. L. (2013). The relationships among perceived organization support, psychological capital and Employees' Job burnout in international tourist hotels. *Life Sci J, 10*(3), 2104-2112.
- [37] Hansen, A., Buitendach, J. H., & Kanengoni, H. (2015). Psychological capital, subjective well-being, burnout and job satisfaction amongst educators in the Umlazi region in South Africa. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management, 13*(1), 1-9.
- [38] Laschinger, H. K. S., & Fida, R. (2014). New nurses burnout and workplace wellbeing: The influence of authentic leadership and psychological capital. *Burnout Research, 1*(1), 19-28.
- [39] Leon-Perez, J. M., Antino, M., & Leon-Rubio, J. M. (2016). The role of psychological capital and intragroup conflict on employees' burnout and quality of service: a multilevel approach. *Frontiers in psychology, 7*, 1755.

- [40] Wang, Y., Chang, Y., Fu, J., & Wang, L. (2012). Work-family conflict and burnout among Chinese female nurses: the mediating effect of psychological capital. *BMC public health*, 12(1), 915.
- [41] Wang, Y., Liu, L., Wang, J., & Wang, L. (2012). Work-family conflict and burnout among Chinese doctors: the mediating role of psychological capital. *Journal of occupational health*, 54(3), 232-240.
- [42] Peng, J., Jiang, X., Zhang, J., Xiao, R., Song, Y., Feng, X., & Miao, D. (2013). The impact of psychological capital on job burnout of Chinese nurses: the mediator role of organizational commitment. *PloS one*, 8(12), e84193.
- [43] Ali, N., & Ali, A. (2014). The mediating effect of job satisfaction between psychological capital and job burnout of pakistani nurses. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, 8(2), 399.
- [44] Bitmiş, M. G., & Ergeneli, A. (2015). How psychological capital influences burnout: the mediating role of job insecurity. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 207, 363-368.