

MEASURING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER AND JOB PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to determine the prevalence of generalised anxiety disorder among female employees and the relationship between generalised anxiety disorder and job performance. A quantitative survey was conducted from three different institutions in Kuala Lumpur, with a sample size of 128 using the instrument adopted from GAD-7 questionnaire. It was found that 56% of female employee's job performance are affected by generalised anxiety disorder and it has negative impacts on relationship with their co-workers and supervisors. Participating in this research would provide an opportunity for the employees to screen themselves for symptoms and severity of GAD. Following this, employees with a mild, moderate and severe generalised anxiety disorder may seek medical assistance and get treated accordingly. As for the employer, data collected is particularly important to offer accommodation strategies that can be implemented to help employees cope with symptoms of anxiety such as flexibility in job schedule and duties, training, modification of environmental factors and self-supervision opportunities. These strategies help to reduce absenteeism among employees, which are by far, the most common problem occurring in organizations with employees suffering from anxiety disorders. The outcome of this research would also benefit the government. With early intervention of generalised anxiety disorder, women employees would be able to sustain their productivity and job performance, which indirectly would contribute towards the economic growth of the country.

Keywords: *GAD-7, Generalised Anxiety disorder, Job Performance, Leadership Skills, Time Management, Productivity*

1.0 Research Background

Anxiety is the most common mental health disorder. It is characterised by feelings of tension and worrying thoughts (Maideen et al., 2015). Anxiety is considered a normal process in life. However, it can be categorised as a disorder or illness when it becomes severe or starts to impair one's life functioning (Nutt et al., 2008). Anxiety has been associated with a number of negative outcomes,

including decreased work productivity (Kessler & Frank, 1997), impaired work, family, and social functioning (Olfson et al., 2000), physical disability (Brenes et al., 2005) and even mortality (Brenes et al., 2007).

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is a type of anxiety disorder that involves excessive worry and nervousness over a variety of matter/things, including family, school/work, relationships, routine tasks, health, money and self-image. Symptoms of GAD differ from one individual to another, but the most common ones include nervousness, palpitations, insomnia, diarrhoea, dyspnea, abdominal pain, headache and chest pain (Gliatto, 2000). It is generally difficult to detect GAD as it often exists together with other medical and psychiatric conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome and hypertension, diabetes and cardiac diseases (Kartal, 2011). A person with GAD may have a high level of fear, dread and concern. As the name implies, anxiety is not focused on one particular thing. More interestingly, no specific factor(s) had been linked to the prevalence of this condition. GAD develops gradually, can begin at any point of life and manifest either as mild, moderate, or severe. According to Kennart (2017), the severity will impact how well a person can function and it may affect anyone. However, it was suggested that women have a higher prevalence of GAD than men (Howell et al., 2001), as women are more sensitive to lifetime adversity and onset of symptoms at certain phases of the menstrual cycle. Additionally, it was also found that female with low education level, poor health, and exposure to life stressors have a higher chance of experiencing this condition (Wolitzsky-Taylor et al., 2010).

In Malaysia, women make up 55.5% of the labour force participation (World Bank, 2019) compared to 54% of participation in the year 2015 (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 2015). Women's active participation in socio-economic fields is deemed essential to increase the global competitiveness and sustainable development of the country. Women had been acknowledged as an important economic resource and the key to a productive and prosperous society (Noor & Mahudin, 2016). Working women are often associated with a high level of stress, depression and anxiety (Kermene, 2016) as they find it hard to cope with the various responsibilities expected of themselves. Noor & Mahudin (2016) reported that women "tend to drop out of the labour force after childbirth" as they are challenged to balance a successful career with their role as wives and mothers.

1.1 Problem Statement

GAD had been linked to many aspects of life, including employees' job performance. Employees' job performance directly affects organizational effectiveness (Cheng et al., 2007). Job performance refers to work-related activities expected of an employee and how well those activities were executed. It is the work outcomes achieved for a job function during a specified period of time (Deadrick & Gardner, 2000). Adaptive performance had been accepted as a component of overall employees' job performance, referring to the ability to change his/her behaviour to meet the demands of an environment. It is the ability to adapt to dynamic work situations (Hesketh & Neal, 1999) and readiness to change behaviours according to new events in the organization (Pulakos et al., 2000). Eight dimensions of adaptive performance had been reported, including "dealing with

uncertain or unpredictable work situations; handling emergencies or crises; solving problems creatively; handling work stress; learning new tasks, technologies and procedures; demonstrating interpersonal adaptability; demonstrating cultural adaptability; and demonstrating physically oriented adaptability". Successful adaptive performance implies that employees can cope with uncertainty and changes in organizations (Edwards & Morrison, 1994; Goodman, 1994).

Failure to adapt to job requirements and ambiguous situations in the workplace may result in employees feeling helpless and stressed, which eventually may lead to anxiety and panic disorders. Most of the occupations in the world require employees to be efficient and more importantly, flexible to support the achievement of organizational goals. Thus, it is common to measure their job performance based on adaptive behaviours; in which Adaptive Performance Scale is used as a tool to determine the performance of employees in the eight dimensions of adaptive behaviour.

Unfortunately, not much literature is available on adaptive behaviour, job performance and anxiety disorders among female employees in Malaysia. As such, it is of great importance for having more researches on these variables in the Malaysian context, with special attention to GAD and job performance of female employees. GAD had been reported to affect employment in various ways. Although it is not a physical sickness per se, yet the symptoms may affect employees' capabilities to perform their task performance and contextual performance (Bullock, 2013). Task performance typically refers to actions stated in job descriptions whereas contextual performance are behaviours that contribute to the overall success of an organisation, such as team spirit and avoidance of conflict (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Anxiety can make performing at work stressful as it reduces employees' confidence about their abilities. When there is a lack of confidence, even routine tasks would appear difficult to accomplish. This exaggerates anxiety symptoms and as a result, activity impairment and absenteeism of the employees may occur.

According to Plaisier *et al.*, (2010), employees with depressive or anxiety disorders have high absenteeism and perform poorly in their job. They often associate common situations with uncontrolled worry and panic; believing that the common situations are unsafe for them. When anxiety and other subsequent responses occur, they tend to flee the scene, at least temporarily. As a result, low productivity at work accounting for multi-billion dollars loss may occur (Plaisier, *et al.*, 2012). Thoganian *et al.* (2014) also reported that employees with GAD often face an additional burden of living cost. This may arise due to a loss of productivity at work that might result in decreased salary and other monetary benefits. Employees with GAD also frequently experience 'accompanying' physical disorders such as peptic ulcer, diabetes, and irritable bowel syndrome as well as cardiac and other symptoms that often have no identifiable physiologic cause (Goodwin & Stein, 2002; Grigsby *et al.*, 2002). Failure to treat these disorders may lead to chronic attacks of anxiety (Ballenger *et al.*, 2001). As such, employees may have an endless visit to medical care providers and are at risk of recurrent hospitalisation. Apart from these, choosing a career or changing a job can be extremely difficult for people with GAD, as the symptoms may hinder them from coordinating with their new colleagues and management. As a result, they seldom remain in one place for a long period. This indeed could be unfavourable for career progress and future employment of an employee.

It was reported that people with GAD may have suffered from its symptoms for 5 to 10 years before the actual diagnosis is made (Wiernik et al., 2012). More importantly, the negative effects that GAD can have on job performance of an employee urgently call for an effort to describe this condition among female employees in Malaysia. Therefore, a research to address the relationship between the prevalence of GAD in women employees and their job performance is necessary. As such, this study has two main objectives. First is to assess the prevalence and of GAD among female employees and secondly, to determine the relationship between the prevalence of GAD and job performance of female employees.

2.0 Literature Review

GAD is characterised by inappropriate, excessive and continuous worrying and not limited to any particular circumstance or situation. A person suffering from GAD may have physical anxiety symptoms such as tremors and tachycardia, as well as psychological symptoms that include fatigue, restlessness, irritability, disturbed sleep and difficulty focusing. As disabling the disorder as it may be, it is very common (Lader, 2015). It has been found that up to one in five people may have GAD at some point in their lives but less than half of the people have full remission after six years (Gale and Millichamp, 2011). In theory, uncontrollable and persistent anxiety and worry that lasts for at least six months can be characterised as anxiety (Stein, 2015).

One in three adults in the country is grappling with mental health issues, whether they realise it or not. Startling and worrying findings shared by the Health Ministry have also revealed an increase in the number of women suffering from poor mental health (Arumugam, 2016). According to research, women are harmed the most from anxiety disorders, especially at the ages 25-29. The annual years of healthy life lost per 100,000 people from anxiety disorder in Malaysia increased 12.8% since the year 1990, which is an average of 0.6% a year (Healthgrove, 2017). In some researches done previously, it has been found that anxiety does take a toll on every aspect of a person's life, including work. 56% of surveyed employees state that anxiety affects their job performance, half of whom report negative impacts on relationships with co-workers and supervisors (Jones, 2017). GAD at the workplace may eventually take the wrong turn on the entire business operations and some of the effects are missing deadlines, high employee turnover and damage to company image.

Forty million Americans are affected by anxiety at the workplace and research done by Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) showed that it can decrease job performance. And one of those worst outcomes is missing out on deadlines (Jones, 2017). Other studies were done in the Journal of Applied Psychology how that the major thing that drives job performance is interpersonal relationships. Unfortunately, an employee suffering from GAD may end up avoiding co-workers, in hopes to avoid interpersonal conflicts. And because work is a collaborative environment, the effects of anxiety is very easily shown since, it may have a direct effect on a company's bottom line (Jones, 2017). To add, people who suffer from GAD may experience less job satisfaction and once an employee feels unfulfilled or dissatisfied with their work, they may

end up leaving the job. This will lead to high employee turnover and wasted money on efforts of recruitment.

2.1 Linking GAD and Work Performance

Work performance can be defined as whether a person manages to fulfil their job duties and responsibilities well enough. Companies tend to assess their employee's performance on a quarterly or sometimes annual basis to clarify areas that may require improvement. Work performance is an important factor in organisational success. (Litmos, 2017) Job performance is the way an employee would perform at work and it is determined during job performance reviews with an employer, who takes into consideration factors such as leadership skills, time management, organisational skills and productivity to analyse an employee (Hose, 2017). In other words, whether an employee has been doing their job well or not. It is important to take into account that individual job performance and should not be confused with measuring the outcome of their work. Job performance is very simple, the measurement of an employee's behaviour and attitudes. This is because the outcome of an individual employee's role depends on a variety of factors such as employee background, the mental condition of the employee, economy etc. (Culture IQ, 2018). Activity impairment represents the degree to which health problems affect regular activities, whereas absenteeism refers to the level of productivity lost due to health problems (Thoganian et al., 2014). Symptoms of GAD at the workplace could be translated into difficulty working with colleagues and clients, trouble concentrating and turning down assignments due to fear of failure (Thoganian et al., 2014). People who had experienced anxiety attacks had difficulties performing their tasks with precision and perfection. This is especially true for jobs that require manual labour. Employees who suffer from anxiety disorders often have muscle pains, which makes it difficult for them to do physical work. Besides, employees who handle sharp tools, hazardous equipment and poisonous substances are at risk of are harming themselves during episodes of anxiety attacks. These are common predictors of absenteeism in many employees with GAD. (Nash-Wright, 2011).

2.2 Research Framework

The theory that has been used in this research is Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which implies how certain uncomfortable situations may give rise to conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviours (McLeod, 2018). This theory was proposed by Leon Festinger, who observed that those situations involving conflicting attitudes or beliefs may lead to alteration of a person's behaviour to reduce the discomfort or restore balance.

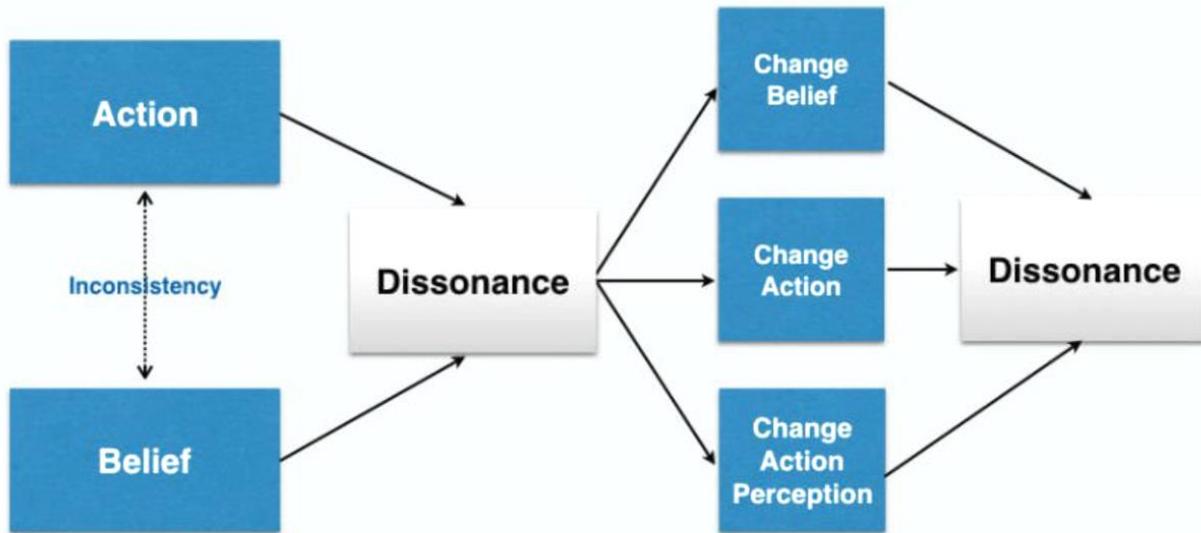


Figure 1: Cognitive Dissonance Theory (McLeod, 2018)

The main purpose of this theory was to investigate how anxiety can contribute to the existence of dissonance. The implications pointed out that an individual constantly strives to be consistent within oneself. A person's attitudes and opinions, for instance, tend to exist in clusters that are internally consistent (Festinger, 2017). For example, if a person believes anxiety disorder is not normal are very likely to ignore symptoms of anxiety no matter how bad it may get. Dissonance is thought to exist when cognitions, knowledge, or information pertaining to oneself or one's surrounding environment was in contradiction with one another. Therefore, one's lack of participation or actions will be dissonant. For example, people who are aware that they suffer from GAD may behave differently than other employees in a workplace. They may have an inner drive to hold all their attitudes or behaviours accordingly to restore harmony, in other words, they will be in a state of cognitive dissonance (McLeod, 2018). The existence of dissonance can be psychologically uncomfortable and eventually give rise to pressures to reduce or change the dissonance (Suinn, 1964). Therefore, based on this theory, the framework of this research is described in the figure below:

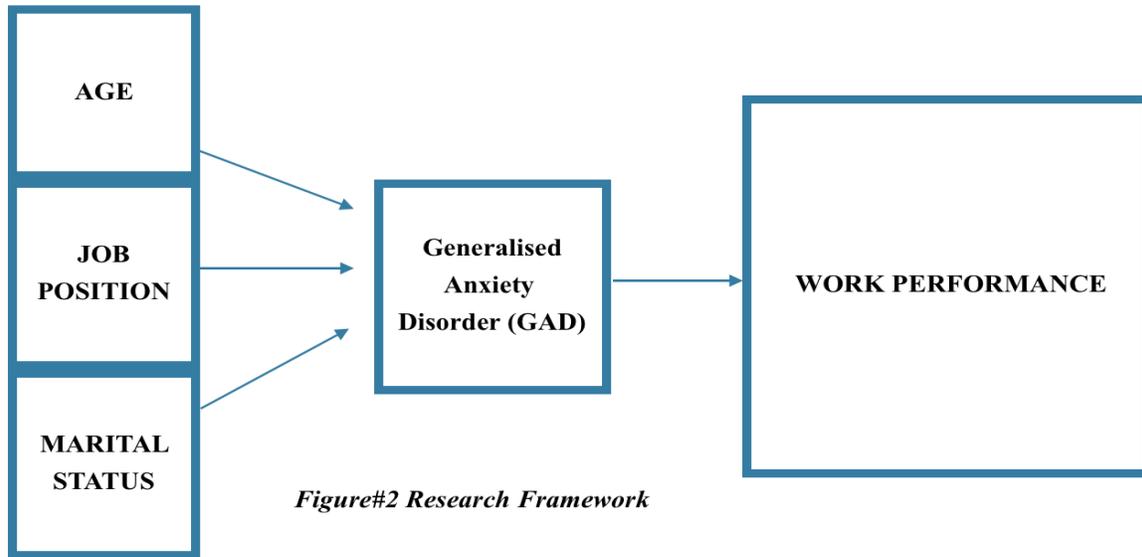


Figure 2: Research Framework (Source: developed for the research)

Hypothesis 1: There are mild, moderate and severe cases of generalised anxiety disorder cases among female employees in Kuala Lumpur

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between the prevalence of generalised anxiety disorder and job performance of female employees in Kuala Lumpur

3.0 Research Methodology

This paper seeks to explore the prevalence of GAD among female employees in Kuala Lumpur. This study adopts a quantitative method using primary data gathered using a self-administered questionnaire. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2017), the population of female in Kuala Lumpur in the year 2016 was marked at 0.87 million, with the labour force participation rate recorded at 57%. Due to limitation in resources, data was gathered from a total of 128 female employees in three different organisations in Kuala Lumpur. As such, the limited size of the sample used for this study may produce inadequate data to represent the actual population of female employees in Kuala Lumpur.

A questionnaire built upon GAD-7 (developed by Spitzer et al., 2006) and Adaptive Performance Scale (developed by Pulakos et al., 2000) is used as research instrumentation of this study. Although, a questionnaire is relatively a fast and cheap method to obtain data (Hurry, 2014), there is an increased risk of getting incomplete and bias responses from the sample due to their readiness and integrity while participating in the study. Various internal and external factors (such as physical health, stress and environment) in which the researcher has no direct control, may

influence the responses provided by samples, As such, data collected may not indicate the actual prevalence of GAD among the female employees studied, and also their job performance.

4.0. Data Analysis

4.1 Demographic Analysis

A total of 128 responses were collected from female employees working in Kuala Lumpur and the demographics findings are summarised as below:

Table 1: Summary of Demographics

Demographics		Frequency	Total %
Age	18-30	51	39.8
	31-40	37	28.9
	41 above	40	31.3
Marital Status	Single or Never Married	55	42.9
	Married	63	49.2
	Divorced/Widowed/Separated	10	7.9
Education Level	Up to Bachelor's Degree	55	42.4
	Master's Degree	59	46.4
	PhD	14	11.2
Job Position	Entry Level – Intermediate	22	16.8
	First Level Management	27	20.8
	Mid-Level Management	42	32.8
	Senior/Top Level Management	37	29.6

4.2 Prevalence of GAD among female employees

According to Figure 3 below, about 87.2% of the respondents answered with a ‘Yes’ when they were asked if they suffered from symptoms of GAD such as frequent anxiety attacks, headaches, sleeplessness, indigestion, continual tiredness, et cetera. That makes up the majority of the respondents with a total of 111 of them agreeing that they do suffer from anxiety. Only about 12.8% said they do not suffer from any of the mentioned symptoms.

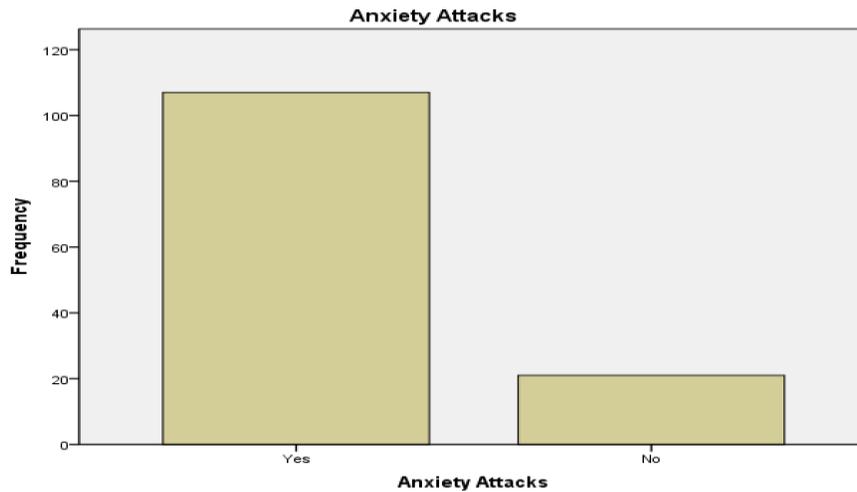


Figure 3: Prevalence of GAD (Developed for Research)

The next part of the questionnaire focused on some of the major symptoms of GAD, which people suffering from and experience most frequently. The questions were scaled from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all and 5 being nearly every day.

Table 2: Summary of Prevalence of GAD

Frequency in Percentage (%)	Not at all	Several days	Neutral	More than half the days	Nearly everyday
Statement					
Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	2.4	12	16	46.6	23.3
Worry too much about different things	3.2	7.2	18.4	37.6	33.6
Trouble relaxing	3.2	12	18.4	40	26.4
Easily annoyed or irritated	5.6	8.1	21.8	41.1	23.4

4.3 GAD and Job Performance

Once the prevalence of GAD was sorted out, the next part of the questionnaire sought out to find whether the symptoms of GAD affected basic tasks of those female employees carried out at work every day and the severity of it. The next questions are based on severely female employees in Kuala Lumpur with GAD and how much control they have over their job performance. The questions are designed as linear scales of 1 to 5, where 1 represented not at all and 5 represented very severely.

Table 3: Summary of GAD and Job Performance

Frequency in Percentage (%)	Not at all	Sometimes	Neutral	Severe	Very Severely
Statement					
GAD affect planning out of daily tasks	5.6	12.9	23.4	32.3	25
GAD affect decision-making in job	6.5	6.5	18.5	42.7	25
GAD affect relationship with co-workers	4	12.1	22.6	35.5	25
GAD affect relationship with supervisors	4.8	11.3	25	32.3	25.8
GAD affect communication at work	4	7.3	16.9	43.5	27.4
GAD affect ability to concentrate	5.6	12.9	14.5	41.9	24.2

4.4 Correlation between GAD and job performance

The correlation coefficient, in this case, is 0.584, meaning that there is a significant positive relationship between GAD and Job Performance.

Correlations

		GAD	Job Performance
GAD	Pearson Correlation	1	.584**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	128	127
JobPerformance	Pearson Correlation	.584**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	127	127

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 4: Correlation between GAD and Job Performance

4.5 Regression Analysis

Regression is the process of entering all the independent variables in a model so that the results show exactly how well the set of variables may predict the relationship between the dependant variables and the three independent variables (Pallant, 2013). Therefore, to test the hypothesis, a significant level of 5% is used. According to the table above, R represents the correlation efficient and it indicates the strength of the relationship between the dependant variable, i.e. Job Performance and the independent variables such as age, marital status, job position and GAD. The value of R, in this case, is 0.682 which proves that there is a strong relationship amongst the dependant and independent variables. R Square shows a value of 0.465, which implies that 47% of the variance in job performance is explained by the independent variables. This can be considered a reliable result.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.682 ^a	.465	.448	.59406

a. Predictors: (Constant), Job Position, Age, GAD, Marital Status

b. Dependent Variable: JobPerformance

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27.463	1	27.463	64.705	.000 ^a
	Residual	53.054	125	.424		
	Total	80.517	126			

a. Predictors: (Constant), GAD

b. Dependent Variable: JobPerformance

Figure 5: Summary of Regression

5.0 Summary of Findings

The objective of this section was to examine if female employees experienced symptoms of GAD at work. To do so, there were 3 questions asked related to this including, what were the factors that triggered their anxieties every day. This followed by a question that also asked what helped them keep their anxiety attacks in check, which will be further used as recommendations. Out of all the

respondents, 87.2% agreed that they indeed suffer from symptoms of GAD. Thus verifying previous research done on the issue where National Health and Morbidity Survey (2011) indicated a 2.2% prevalence of GAD for a population of 206,651 Malaysian female aged 16 and above. Maideen et al. (2015) revealed that 77% of 1455 females aged 18 and above that were studied had GAD. Therefore, proving that anxiety is the most common mental health disorder among people. It is characterised by feelings of tension and worrying thoughts (Maideen et al., 2015). In addition, women are harmed the most from anxiety disorders, especially at the ages 25-29. The annual years of healthy life lost per 100,000 people from anxiety disorder in Malaysia increased 12.8% since the year 1990, which is an average of 0.6% a year (Healthgrove, 2017).

Hypothesis 1: There are mild, moderate and severe cases of generalised anxiety disorder among female employees in Kuala Lumpur

The goal of this section was to find out how frequently female employees suffered from symptoms of GAD at work to shed light on the fact that it is indeed difficult to carry out work tasks at work with the frequent feeling of nervousness, excessive worrying, irritable et cetera. Results revealed that the majority of the female employees did feel nervousness, annoyed and excessive worry nearly every day at the workplace. Hence, based on the findings hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between the prevalence of generalised anxiety disorder and job performance of female employees in Kuala Lumpur.

The final section of the questionnaire focused on finding out how GAD some basic functions at work that included decision making, communications, relationship with co-workers as well as supervisors, et cetera. The majority of the respondents agreed that they found it severely difficult to communicate at the workplace follow by some who expressed that they also felt severe difficulty in planning out tasks or making a decision or even concentrating on a particular task. Also, the respondents agreed that it did affect their relationship with co-workers and supervisors severely every day. Thus proving the fact that anxiety has been associated with a number of negative outcomes, including decreased work productivity (Kessler & Frank, 1997), impaired work, family, and social functioning (Olfson et al., 2000), physical disability (Brenes et al., 2005) and even mortality (Brenes et al., 2007). The correlation coefficient between GAD and Job performance is 0.584, meaning there is somewhat a relationship between the two factors. In addition, the overall regression value showed a significant value of 0.682. Therefore hypothesis 2 is accepted.

6.0 Conclusion

Anxiety is often overlooked, even though it is a common problem. Thousands of Malaysians deal with GAD or maybe some severe symptoms of it daily, yet very few have an actual anxiety disorder diagnosis. The general objective of this study was to determine whether GAD does affect job performance of female individuals in Kuala Lumpur. The study found that about 87% of female employees did suffer symptoms of GAD that interfered with their performance at work and almost all of them agreed that they had anxiety or panic attacks frequently. Unfortunately, employees may oftentimes feel uncomfortable or even afraid to speak up. While many of the ones who suffer from

anxiety had shared with their employers about their condition, there remains a lot who did not fear their chances of promotion would be in jeopardy (Jones, 2017). Therefore, some recommendations include, to keep lines of communication open, and encourage employees to take advantage of employee benefits. This may include a company offering exercise or psychotherapy programs as these are one of the best ways to decrease anxiety. In recent studies, it has been found that companies that offered either telephone or in-person psychotherapy resulted in increased job satisfaction and employee retention (Jones, 2017). Employees, especially females who received therapy improved productivity by 2.6 hours each week and were more likely to remain in their jobs. This shows that if a company spends towards mental health, their investment will pay off (Bizjournals, 2017).

The research is focused on investigating the relationship between GAD and job performance among female employees in Kuala Lumpur. Sampling is confined to three selected employers due to time and resource constraint. Therefore, the research does not involve a population of female employees from all organisations in Kuala Lumpur. The objective of the research is measured by GAD-7 questionnaire and assessment of their job performance. GAD-7 is a self-administered screening tool and on the measure of GAD, based on the presence of several symptoms that are experienced by the female employee within the two weeks before the study. However, a more reliable diagnosis of GAD must be done by a mental health consultant or physician based on examinations of the employees' physical and mental state that accompany the symptoms which persist for more than six months. As the research undertaken is not a clinical observational study, self-screening rather than the clinical diagnosis of GAD is preferred. Participating in this research would provide an opportunity for the employees to screen themselves for symptoms and severity of GAD. Following this, employees with mild, moderate and severe GAD may seek medical assistance and get treated accordingly.

Besides, factors contributing to GAD among the employees are not studied in this research, as it may involve a complex interaction of various biological and environmental aspects. Thus, it is difficult to determine the specific factor(s) that lead to anxiety in the female employees per se. Furthermore, the researcher is more inclined in investigating the consequences of GAD, rather than identifying its causes.

As for the employer, data collected from the Job Adaptability Scale is particularly important to identify employees that need support from the management to overcome the effects of GAD on their job performance. Many accommodation strategies can be implemented by management to help employees cope with symptoms of anxiety disorders such as flexibility in job schedule and duties, training, modification of environmental factors and self-supervision opportunities. These strategies help to reduce absenteeism and presenteeism among employees, which are by far, the most common problem occurring in organizations with employees suffering from anxiety disorders (Harder et al., 2016).

Apart from employers and employees, the outcome of this research would also benefit the government. With early intervention of GAD, women employees would be able to sustain their productivity, which contributes towards the economic growth of the country, indirectly. Future researchers, on the other hand, shall find the outcome of this research useful as a reference for

further investigations on GAD among Malaysians, particularly women. They can utilise the findings of this research to extrapolate similar researches in the field.

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