

Psychosocial Safety Climate and Burnout among Penang Hoteliers: The Mediating Role of Job Demands

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Abstract

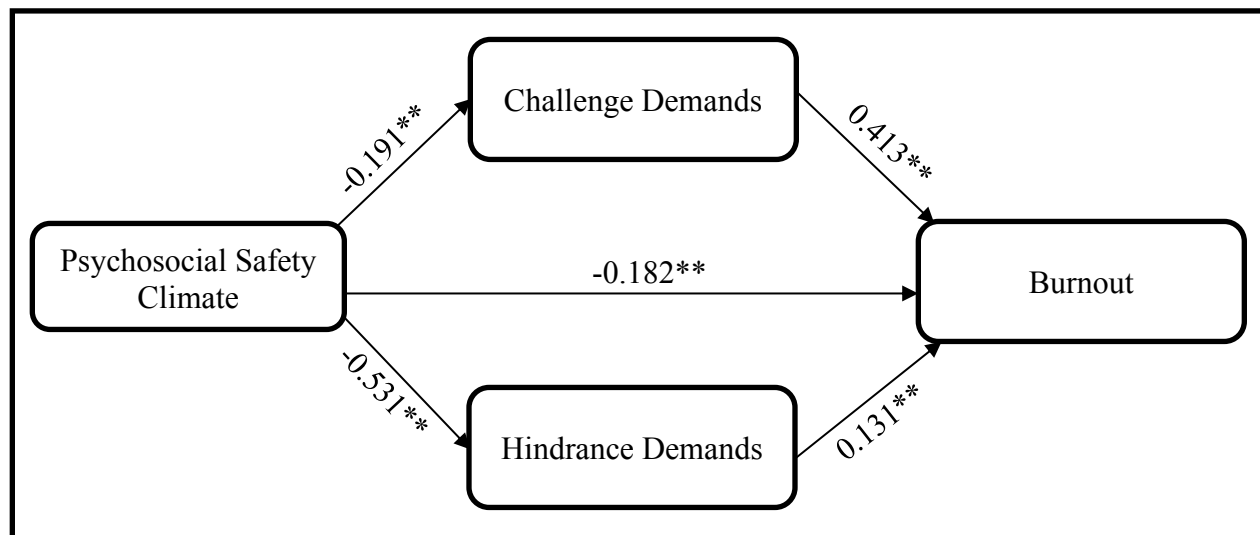
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia's economy has been greatly affected, particularly in the hospitality industry. According to Malaysian Association of Hotel (MAH) (2020), most of the hotels in Malaysia experienced an estimated loss of RM3.3 billion due to the number of booking cancellations. This scenario posted a challenging problem to the Malaysian government as the hospitality industry contributes approximately 50 percent of the Malaysia's real gross domestic product (GDP) (Awang et al, 2008). Furthermore, the hospitality industry plays its significant role via complementing tourism by supplying accommodation to tourists and travelers. Indirectly, the hospitality industry has had assisted tourism to contribute MYR61 billion (USD18.65 billion) to Malaysia's GDP in 2014, and it is estimated to rise by 4.1% per annum from 2015 to 2025, where a total contribution of MYR95.90 billion (USD29.30 billion) to Malaysia's GDP in 2025 is anticipated (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2025). Nonetheless, some hotels in Penang Island were forced to shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic (FreeMalaysiaToday News, 2020). The affected Penang Island hotels included Jazz Hotel, Penaga Hotel, Mercure Penang Beach, The Gurney Resort Hotel and Residences, etc. This situation is even obvious when the chief executive officer the MAH, Yap Lip Seng, claimed that 30 percent of Malaysia hotels are predicted to shut down either temporarily or permanently (The AseanPost, 2020). On the other hand, 84 Penang Island hoteliers faced the possibility of being laid off, 240 Penang Island hoteliers experienced reduced salaries, and 430 Penang Island hoteliers were forced to take unpaid leave (MAH, 2020). Consequently, the job demands among the existing Penang Island hoteliers are increasing and becoming more and more challenging. In conjunction with that, hoteliers from Penang Island hotel industry encounter greater levels of burnout owing to their high levels of job demands and low extents of job resources (Teoh & Kee, 2020; Teoh & Kee, 2019). Therefore, the mechanisms to improve hoteliers' burnout levels are urgently needed during or after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Burnout is referred as a phenomenon that is characterized by feelings of (emotional, physical and cognitive) exhaustion due to the demands of work among employees (Demerouti et al., 2003). In view to manage the burnout levels among Penang Island hoteliers, psychosocial safety climate (PSC) is adopted in the present study since it acts as a leading indicator of a better working environment via supplying feasible job demands and a high level of job resources to cope with challenging job demands at work (Dollard & Bakker 2010). Furthermore, Teoh and Kee (2020) also suggested that PSC is useful in the burnout context because it is a shared viewpoint among employees relating to policies, practices, and procedures insides their organizations that emphasize to psychological health and well-being. As a result, the work settings in Penang Island hotels can be realigned by PSC, which directly and indirectly bring the positive implications on job demands and burnout levels of Penang Island hoteliers. However, job demands need to be further separated since they are not necessarily negative. Cavanaugh et al. (2000) recommended that job demands should be differentiated into challenge demands and hindrance demands so that the effects of these

two jobs demands on work outcomes can be studied accurately. According to Cavanaugh et al. (2000), challenge demands are the job demands that are viewed by employees as rewarding work experiences which create an opportunity for personal growth whereas hindrance demands are the job demands that are viewed as obstacles to personal growth or demands that hinder or interfere with one's ability to attain valued goals. In relation to both challenge demands, and hindrance demands, the present researcher intend to investigate if PSC creates more challenging demands and reduces further hindrance demands to manage the burnout levels among Penang Island hoteliers. Moreover, it is also interesting to examine if both challenge demands, and hindrance demands play as the significant mediators between PSC and burnout.

A quantitative approach was used in the present study. All data were collected from the hotels located in Penang Island. The study employed purposive sampling. The sample was drawn based on three criteria. First, the respondents must be full-time hoteliers. Second, the respondents were hoteliers who have worked in their current hotels for at least one year. Lastly, the respondents must work in the hotels located in Penang Island, Malaysia. The present researcher considered full-time Penang Island hoteliers with at least one year of employment because hoteliers might not encounter burnout during their first year of service (Teoh & Kee, 2019). The present researcher approached the hotel managers and informed them of the purpose of study. After having the approval from the hotel managers, the questionnaire was put in an envelope, and the hotel managers help to distribute the questionnaire to their hoteliers who met the criteria. A total of 313 hoteliers from Penang Island hotels participated in the study.

Partial Least Square (PLS) modeling using the SmartPLS 3.2.8 version was used as the statistical tool to examine the measurement and structural model since it does not need the normality assumption. The results of the present study are illustrated as follows:



In the present study, it was found that PSC was in significant negative relationship with both challenge demands ($\beta = -0.191$, $p < 0.01$), hindrance demands ($\beta = -0.531$, $p < 0.01$) and burnout ($\beta = -0.182$, $p < 0.01$). These findings imply that PSC in the hotel industry could reduce the negative implications of both types of job demands, as well as the burnout levels among Penang Island hoteliers. Meanwhile, it is also noted that both challenge demands ($\beta = 0.413$, $p < 0.01$) and hindrance demands ($\beta = 0.131$, $p < 0.01$) were in a significant positive relationship with burnout.

These findings indicate that both types of job demands could lead Penang Island hoteliers to experience burnout during work. On the other hand, it is realized in the present study that challenge demands ($\beta = -0.114$, $p < 0.01$) and hindrance demands ($\beta = -0.161$, $p < 0.01$) play a significant negative mediator between PSC and burnout. Hence, these findings denote that PSC reduces the negative implications of challenge demands and hindrance demands, which in turn to decrease the burnout levels among Penang Island hoteliers. The findings of the present study are beneficial to both practitioners and academics. Firstly, the hotel management who wish to manage the burnout levels among hoteliers could apply PSC in their work settings. As a consequence, the job demands among hoteliers are ensured to be manageable, and this could help to reduce their burnout levels. Secondly, the hotel management could sort out the job demands into challenge demands and hindrance demands. This initiative could prevent hoteliers from experiencing high levels of burnout since challenge demands are emphasized while hindrance demands are kept to minimum. For academics, the present study contributes to the literature of burnout among hoteliers. Also, it could serve as a reference for the future research to use the existing model in a wider range of population.

Keywords: psychosocial safety climate, burnout, hoteliers

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