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Effect of *Ta'awun* (Mutual Cooperation) among Private School Teachers in Sustaining *Sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health Environment

Kesan Ta'awun (Kerjasama Bersaling) kalangan Guru-guru Sekolah Swasta bagi Mengekalkan Persekitaran Sejahtera Keselamatan Pekerjaan dan Kesihatan

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ABSTRACT

Sejahtera occupational safety and health environment are essential for schools. Sejahtera denotes peace, balanced, and harmony. The violation of sejahtera occupational safety and health environment leads to job stress, job dissatisfaction, lack of co-worker support, and inadequate supervisory support. This situation contributed to severe work-life imbalance, mental health illness, and physical unwell among school teachers. The non-sejahtera situation has also led to turnover among tenured private school teachers. Ta'awun (mutual cooperation) among school administrators and teachers would be able to sustain sejahtera occupational safety and health environment. Sejahtera environment will reduce turnover among experienced teachers. This study explores the influence of ta'awun (mutual cooperation) among school administrators and teachers in creating sejahtera health and safety environment. It used a personal interview method with private Islamic school teachers. The feedback from the informants emphasizes that ta'awun (mutual cooperation) infused with spiritual value unites the teachers and the administrators with ukhuwwah (good bonding). The informants said that ta'awun with ukhuwwah will reduce job stress and increase the sharing of excessive workload. The informants hoped that their workload would be reduced if their schools provide teaching assistants to further enhance ta'awun with ukhuwwah.

Keywords: *Mutual Cooperation, Sejahtera, Occupational Safety and Health, Private Schools*

ABSTRAK

Persekitaran sejahtera keselamatan pekerjaan dan kesihatan amat penting bagi sekolah. Sejahtera bermakna amal, seimbang dan harmoni. Perlanggaran persekitaran sejahtera keselamatan pekerjaan dan kesihatan membawa kepada tekanan pekerjaan, ketidakpuasan kerja, kurang sokongan rakan sekerja, dan kurang sokongan penyeliaan. Keadaan ini menyumbang kepada ketidak seimbangan penerusan kehidupan kerja, penyakit kesihatan mental, dan kesihatan fizikal kalangan guru sekolah. Keadaan tidak sejahtera ini juga membawa kepada kadar pusing ganti pekerjaan yang tinggi dalam kalangan guru sekolah swasta yang sudah lama berkhidmat. Ta'awun (kerjasama bersaling) dalam kalangan pentadbir sekolah dan para guru berupaya mengekalkan persekitaran sejahtera keselamatan pekerjaan dan kesihatan. Persekitaran sejahtera mengurangkan kadar ganti pekerjaan yang tinggi dalam kalangan guru berpengalaman. Kajian ini meneroka kesan ta'awun (kerjasama bersaling) dalam kalangan pentadbir sekolah dan para guru bagi membina persekitaran sejahtera keselamatan pekerjaan dan kesihatan. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah temu bual

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persendirian dengan para pentadbir dan guru. Maklumbalas dari para pemberi maklumat menekankan ta'awun (kerjasama bersaling) yang merangkumi nilai kerohanian menyatukan para pentadbir dan guru melalui ikatan ukhuwwah (ikatan persaudaraan). Pemberi maklumat juga menyatakan bahawa ta'awun (kerjasama bersaling) melalui ukhuwwah (ikatan persaudaraan) membantu mengurangkan tekanan kerja dan meningkatkan perkongsiaan bebanan kerja berlebihan. Pemberi maklumat berharap agar bebanan kerja dapat dikurangkan sekiranya pihak sekolah menyediakan pembantu pengajar yang diperkukuhkan lagi melalui ta'awun (kerjasama bersaling) yang berteraskan ukhuwwah (ikatan persaudaraan).

Kata Kunci: *Kerjasama Saling, Sejahtera, Keselamatan Pekerjaan dan Kesihatan, Sekolah Swasta*

Introduction

Occupational safety and health (OSH) environment are essential for wellbeing and productivity of employees. Occupational safety and health (OSH) refers to a situation that is free from any threat to the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual (Abdulaziz, A., Bashir, M., & Alfalih, A. A., 2022; Arismunandar, Nurhikmah, Wahed, Wijaya & Haris, 2021; Rosli & Bakar, 2021; Zakaria, Maamor & Abdul Wahab, 2021). Any harm to physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual will result in compromising occupational safety (Abdulaziz et al., 2022; Arismunandar et al., 2021 & Zakaria et al., 2021). This is a legal responsibility of organizations to assure occupational safety.

In recent years, occupational safety and health has been compromised. This situation worsened during the pandemic. The unprecedented situation was not being taken care despite the reminders from the health authority about SOP to avoid being infected (Hundani & Toquero, 2021).

The education sector is not spared from this situation. School teachers had to conduct classes virtually despite the lack of preparation for the teachers and the students (Qin, 2022; Al Ayubi, Manshor & Saad, 2021; Amzat, Ismail & Al-Ani, 2021). For private schools, the pandemic means no school operation. Parents do not want to pay tuition fee. Some parents transferred children to public school. This means a salary cut to the teachers as well. While facing the online class and assessments, school teachers had to earn a lower salary. More challenges to access food during the pandemic.

In the meantime, school teachers had to do administrative and clerical work. In addition, teachers had to deal with digital teaching (Abdulaziz et al., 2022; Zakaria et al., 2021). No more manual teaching plans, updates and reporting. All had to be done with a strong Internet access.

In general, human interactions and transactions are bounded by reasoned action, social exchange, and advantages. Eventually, the spiritual and intellectual dimensions shape *ta'awun* as mutual cooperation with spiritual experience and religious duty for the sake of al-Soleh (good and useful), *al-Itqan* (steady and perfect), and *al-Ihsan* (doing better) (Purnamasari, Harahap et al., 2020; Duasa, Mhd Sarif & Abdul Sabian, 2020). This concept is beyond the resource advantage theory, social exchange theory, and theory of reasoned action (Harahap et al., 2020; Mhd. Sarif & Ismail, 2016; Duasa et al., 2020).

The legal provision for occupational safety and health in Malaysia is under Act 514 or Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994. There are 67 sections in Act 514. Act 514 has four objectives: (a) to secure the safety, health, and welfare of persons (can be an employee and self-employed) at work against risks to safety or health arising out of the activities of persons at work; (b) to protect persons at a place of work (premises where persons work or premises

used for the storage of plant or substance) other than persons at work against risks to safety or health arising out of the activities of persons at work; (c) to promote an occupational environment for persons at work which is adapted to their physiological and psychological needs; and (d) to provide the means whereby the associated occupational safety and health legislations may be progressively replaced by a system of regulations and approved industry codes of practice operating in combination with the provisions of this Act designed to maintain or improve the standards of safety and health.

Another point in Act 514 is the provision in Section 16 about the legal duty to formulate safety and health policy. Employers have the obligation to assure the workplace is safe and not detrimental to health and human well-being. Indeed, the provision of Section 16 of Act 514 said:

“Except in such cases as may be prescribed, it be the duty of every employer and every self-employed person to prepare and as often as may be appropriate revise a written statement of his general policy with respect to the safety and health at work of his employees and the organisation and arrangements for the time being in force for carrying out that policy, and to bring the statement and any revision of it to the notice of all of his employees.”

Problem Statement

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is mandatory for all registered organizations in Malaysia. However, owners and managers of organizations do not have adequate knowledge, skills, and attitude about Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) (Abd Rahman & Kamil, 2022; Subramaniam, Baharudin, Abdul Rahman & Saliluddin, 2022). Thus, they do not give adequate attention to create, maintain and sustain the awareness, training and practices of OSH at workplaces.

Apart from the obligation of the owners and managers of organizations to assure the awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitude of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), individual employees could make sense of their non-safe and non-healthy working condition. Thus, the employees could work on *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) to assure knowledge, skills and attitude on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH).

The underpinning theories of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) are resource advantage theory, social exchange theory, and theory of reasoned action. *Ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) will galvanise all the underpinning theories in sustaining Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). In addition, *sejahtera* enhances the understanding, practice and policy on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH).

Research Objectives

The main objective of the research is to explore the influence of *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) among school administrators and teachers in creating *sejahtera* health and safety environment.

The specific objectives are to investigate:

1. The strategies, plans, and actions taken by owners and managers of organizations to assure adequate knowledge, skills and attitude to create, maintain and sustain Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) practices at workplace;
2. The methods to apply *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) in sustaining *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH).

Significance of the Research

This research has a significant contribution to theory, practice, and policy on *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). Theoretically, this study provides an insight into the underpinned theories of *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). Practically, this study offers *ta'awun* and *sejahtera* concepts into the policy of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH).

Related Literature Review

The research uses the systematic literature review (SLR) method in the critical review (MacKenzie et al., 2012; Brunton & Thomas, 2012).

Ta'awun

There is no exact translation for the Arabic word *ta'awun* in other languages. The approximate translation for *ta'awun* is mutual cooperation based on the literary of the term. In essence, *ta'awun* is a spiritual experience and religious duty for the sake of *al-Soleh* (good and useful), *al-Itqan* (steady and perfect), and *al-Ihsan* (doing better) (Purnamasari, Harahap et al., 2020; Duasa, Mhd Sarif & Abdul Sabian, 2020). This concept is beyond the resource advantage theory, social exchange theory, and theory of reasoned action (Harahap et al., 2020; Mhd. Sarif & Ismail, 2016; Duasa et al., 2020).

Ta'awun is a religious duty with humanistic approach. The religious and humanistic elements are in line with the *Tawhidic* roles of human as servants and viceregents of Allah (Harahap et al., 2020; Purnamasari, 2020; Mhd Sarif & Ismail, 2016). The foundation of *ta'awun* is humanity with specific duties, in the forms *al-birr* (righteousness) and *al-taqwa* (piety).

Teaching Reality

There is low awareness of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) despite it being mandatory for all specified organizations in Malaysia. In reality, owners and managers of organizations do not have adequate knowledge, skills, and attitude about Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). Likewise, administrators and school teachers are not spared (Abd Rahman & Kamil, 2022; Subramaniam, Baharudin, Abdul Rahman & Saliluddin, 2022). Thus, they do not give adequate attention to create, maintain and sustain the awareness, training and practices of OSH at workplaces (Subramaniam, Baharudin, Abdul Rahman & Saliluddin, 2022).

There is significant low awareness in the public sector. There are many reasons for the existence of lower awareness. (Abd Rahman & Kamil, 2022; Subramaniam, Baharudin, Abdul Rahman & Saliluddin, 2022). Apparently, there is lack of training, lack of managerial support and lack of commitment from key managers (Abd Rahman & Kamil, 2022; Subramaniam et al., 2022).

Teachers are experiencing a deficit in emotional intelligence due to excessive workload that leads to serious burnout (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017; Leroux, & Théorêt, 2014; Arora, 2013). A lot of teaching related paperwork requires clerical administration passion to perform the tasks (Hundani & Toquero, 2021; Othman & Sivasubramaniam, 2019).

The work environment is in inferior state of safety and health. Mentally is disturbed with the lack of protection from threats (Al-Ayubi, Manshor & Saad, 2021; Tee & Samuel, 2017). Subramaniam et al. (2022) found out that safety coordinators do not have full grasp of knowledge on occupational safety legislation due to fewer courses attended. While schools may conduct fire safety drill but majority teachers are still confused. In addition, the schools

do not adequate fire extinguishers (if exist, already expired), no fire exit signage, no first aider, no personnel protective equipment for students.

The state of mental health is at stake too. Before covid-19 already serious stress and burnout among teachers (Merida-Lopez & Extremera, 2017). The stress and job burnout are added with a lot of clerical work (Hundani & Toquero, 2021). These become more serious during the pandemic (Ong & Sulaiman Khan, 2022).

Teachers could not cope with the stress and burnout. Early retirement is an option to get back to normal life. Teachers are suffering from non-teaching duties that led for early retirement (Krishnan & Gan, 2022; Qin, 2022).

A good career life sustains good physical, intellect, spiritual and emotion. Excessive of workload without managerial and co-workers' support is detrimental to work-life balance (Abdulaziz, Bashir & Alfalih, 2022; Arismunandar *et al.*, 2022). Leadership and organizational support are essential to sustain job satisfaction (Halim *et al.*, 2021; Zumrah, Ali & Mokhtar, 2022). This situation is no longer a secret. Students eye-witnessed the situation as putting teaching career out of career choice (Amzat, Ismail & Al-Ani, 2021; Mahzan & Nordin, 2021).

Teaching jobs can be exposed to danger. This is similar to a high-risk job (Amzat, Ismail & Al-Ani, 2021). A noble teaching job can be dangerous, hazardous and detrimental to safety and health in the absence of good leadership to give job satisfaction (Mahzan & Nordin, 2021).

An exit to job burnout and job dissatisfaction will be job turnover through resignation and early retirement. Qin (2022) argued that the macro and micro factors influence teacher turnover intention. Abdulaziz, Bashir & Alfalih (2022) argued that inadequate work-life balance and overburden of work lead to teachers' turnover.

Job satisfaction is another factor to sustain and retain employees. Zumrah, Ali & Mokhtar (2022) argued that job satisfaction is key to teacher turnover intention. Emotional exhaustion can lead to mental health (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). If no attention is given to mental health, there will be more job burnout and job turnover (Rosli & Bakar, 2021). Mental health can be related to a deficit in physical health (Zakaria, Maamor & Abdul Wahat, 2021; Zakaria, Don & Yaakob, 2021).

There are six sources of work stress, namely (1) welfare; (2) teaching; (3) students; (4) relationships and conflicts; (5) organizational climate; and (6) the time dimension with the dominant or general source (Arismunandar, Nurhikmah, Wahed, Wijaya & Haris, 2021). Stress led to physical and emotional illness (Zhang, Cui, Wang, Mu & Wang, 2022) as well as mental health deficiency (Rosli & Bakar, 2021; Zakaria, Maamor & Abdul Wahab, 2021). There is a need to revisit school occupational safety, health and environment (OSHE) (Ahmad & Hamid, 2022) because teachers' well-being is not being adequately addressed (Zakaria, Don & Yaakob, 2021)

Sejahtera

Sejahtera is peace in the mind, soul and action of reasonable human (Lim Kim Hui, 2003; Husin, 2010). The essence of *sejahtera* is the manifestation of '*aql* (intellect), *dakar* (staunch), *amanah* (trust), and *bestari* (intelligent) (ADAB) framework (Dzul kifli Abdul Razak, 2021). The operative tools are *shura* (mutual consensus) and *gotong royong* (communal work).

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), a public university in Malaysia that specializes in pure science and engineering uses "Kampus Sejahtera" concept to reflect a holistic, humanistic, and sustainable higher education environment (Akib, *et al.*, 2017). International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) incorporates *sejahtera* into its curriculum known as "Sejahtera Academic Framework" (Borhan *et al.*, 2021). An engineering school uses "sejahtera" as humanizing education approach to its engineering curriculum added value (Sariffuddin *et al.*, 2021). Qualitative research uses "sejahtera" to reflect the scholarly level of research philosophy

(Mhd. Sarif, Zainudin & Ismail, 2020). *Sejahtera* has been added as insight to the ethical paradigm (Ahmad *et al.*, 2021).

There are approximate meanings of *sejahtera* in other languages. According to Dzulkifli Abdul Razak (2021), the Japanese uses *ikigai* as the highest attainment of psychological well-being (Yamamoto-Mitani & Wallhagen, 2002; Schnell, 2020). The Swedish uses *lagom* as a life philosophy to achieve balanced living (Dunne, 2017). The African's *ubuntu* in Zulu and Xhosa languages reflects the humanity towards others. Thus, a person with *sejahtera*, *ikigai*, *lagom* and *ubuntu* indicates that the person has good physical and virtuous psychological elements.

Research Method

This study uses personal interview with five teachers from Islamic private schools. The selection of the informants was based on the researchers' contacts. Prior to the actual interview, the researchers approached the informants to secure informed consent (Anderson, 2019; Silverman, 2015; Cohn & Larson, 2007). The researchers explained to the informants about the objectives, nature, and significance of the research to the academics, policy and practices of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in schools. The informants were asked the following questions:

1. How could owners and managers of Islamic private schools to assure adequate knowledge, skills and attitude to create, maintain and sustain Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) practices at workplace?
2. How could *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) sustain *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in Islamic private schools?
3. How could *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) contribute to a theory of sustaining *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)?

The researchers used a note-taking approach. Each interview took 30-40 minutes. The researchers used triangulation to validate the interview results (Anderson, 2007; Flick, 2018). Immediately after the interview, the researchers transcribed the interview notes into readable transcripts. The informants were asked to validate the interview transcripts (Silverman, 2020; Anderson, 2019). The researchers corrected the interview transcripts as pointed out by the informants. Next, the researchers approached two independent qualitative researchers who are familiar with the context of the research to verify the validated interview transcripts (Flick, 2004; Silverman, 2015).

The researchers used thematic content analysis to analyse the validated interview transcripts. The use of themes allowed the researchers to ground themes from the feedback of the informants.

Main Results and Discussion

The results are presented along three major concerns, namely (a) Islamic private schools are to assure adequate knowledge, skills, and attitude to create, maintain and sustain Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) practices at the workplace; (b) Islamic private schools are to assure *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) among staff and teachers to sustain *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) at Islamic private schools; and (c) to sustain *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) sustain *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in Islamic private schools.

In terms of *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) contributing to the theory of sustaining *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), the majority of the informants argued that the administrators as leaders should provide support to the staff and teachers.

Informant 1 said:

"I observed that young teachers are reluctant to help their colleagues. Everyone pointed at their workload. No time to help."

Echoing Informant 1, Informant 2 mentioned:

"I was shocked when my junior shouted at me for something that she has not verified with me. After discovering the truth, as if nothing happened. Not even to ask for apologies."

As for Islamic private schools to assure adequate knowledge, skills, and attitude to create, maintain and sustain Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) practices in workplace, the informants argued that schools must invest in human development. If not ready to invest, then the administrators should search for alternatives.

Informant 3 said:

"Madam, my kids said some teachers scolded them in the morning assembly through the loud. I could not accept this. A teacher is supposed to show good manners to our kids."

In another situation, Informant 4 mentioned:

"I do not know why the younger teachers do not want to mingle with us. I myself was a young teacher 20 years ago. My senior welcomed me to mingle with them. A few senior teachers and I attempted to mingle with them, but they refused to converse."

As for *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) to sustain *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in Islamic private schools, the informants argued that leadership has very essential role to make *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) as theoretical insights to the theory of sustaining *sejahtera* Occupational Safety and Health (OSH).

Informant 5 said:

"I have expressed my concerns about the relationships among the teachers, especially between the senior and junior. The senior did not create the barrier or gap. It was the junior who refused to interact."

The informants' feedback suggests that a good career life is about having good physical, intellect, spiritual, and emotion. On the contrary, a bad career life occurs when teachers have to work with excessive of workload without managerial and co-workers' support. This is detrimental to work-life balance (Abdulaziz, Bashir & Alfalih, 2022; Arismunandar *et al.*, 2022). Leadership and organizational support are essential to sustain job satisfaction (Halim *et al.*, 2021; Zumrah, Ali & Mokhtar, 2022).

In fact, the informants argued that occupational safety and health is important in teaching job. In other words, a teaching job also has its occupational safety and health risk. This is similar to the high-risk job (Amzat, Ismail & Al-Ani, 2021). A noble teaching job can dangerous, hazardous and detrimental to safety and health in the absence of good leadership to give job satisfaction (Mahzan & Nordin, 2021).

Recommendation

Occupational safety and health environment is always a top priority in any organization. It is mandatory for owners and managers of organizations to assure workplaces are safe and healthy for operations. There is no relaxation on the occupational safety and health environment regardless of the nature of workplace. For this reason, organizations must establish a regular and permanent task force to assure occupational safety and health environment at all times. The critical point in this task force is the get full support and *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) for all members. A *sejahtera* workplace contributes to *sejahtera* mind.

Theoretically, occupational safety and health environment is in the *sejahtera* mind and in the *ta'awun* action of people. This can be translated into practice of *sejahtera* and *ta'awun* through formal and informal interactions among teachers. The presence of managerial support is very motivating and encouraging to the teachers.

Practically, *sejahtera* mind and *ta'awun* in action can be enhanced with continuous training, a code of practice, and reinforcement. Budget allocation inadequacy should not be an excuse. When every member has a fiduciary duty to assure *sejahtera* workplace.

Conclusion

Occupational safety and health environment is essential in the workplace. There is no compromise on this issue. Members of organizations should cooperate to assuring the workplace is always safe and healthy. Legally, the owners of the organizations are obliged to provide a safe and healthy workplace. Instead of pointing at the owners, members could work together with the spirit of *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) to establish, maintain and sustain *sejahtera* workplace that adhered to occupational safety and health environment standards.

The feedback from the informants' raises the importance of *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) infused with spiritual value that has the power to unite the teachers and the administrators with *ukhuwwah* (good bonding). The maintenance of *ta'awun* and *ukhuwwah* can be done through daily routines at workplace.

The willpower of members at any workplace can overcome any difficulties at the workplace. *Ta'awun* with *ukhuwwah* will reduce job stress and increase the sharing of excessive workload. The workload of teachers can be reduced if the schools provide teaching assistants to further enhance *ta'awun* with *ukhuwwah*.

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