

# Prevalence and Role Stressors as Antecedents to Workplace Bullying in Multinational Corporations Human Resource Shared Service Centers in Malaysia

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## Abstract

Workplace bullying has shown a steep rise globally in the last three decades, reporting its pervasiveness among various sectors and industries. It is universally recognized as a significant work stressor causing severe health, well-being, and psychosocial problems for

employees, the economy, and society. The claim comes as no surprise with the contemporary debate among organizations, especially MNCs HRSSC, striving to succeed globally and stay competitive through cost savings and increased productivity. However, SSC formation has swayed the HRD professions' to strategic HR roles to focus on the organization's profit-making goal, eventually at the expense of employees' well-being by indirectly condoning workplace bullying. For these reasons, the present study investigates the prevalence of workplace bullying at MNC HRSSC in Malaysia to find out how the Western countries that pioneered the studies reveal the severity of workplace bullying manages organizations in Asian countries that are still at the early stage comparatively of recognizing the phenomenon. The study will examine the prevalence, the experience level of role stressors, namely role ambiguity and role conflict, which are relatable to the MNC HRSSC setup, and their consequent representation as antecedents to workplace bullying. A cross-sectional study was adopted to conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analysis with  $n=460$ . The descriptive statistical analysis used IBM SPSS (v24.0) to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying by adopting a two-step cluster analysis and the strict operational definition criterion and the role stressors experiences level. At the same time, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to determine the correlation and influence between the predetermined organizational antecedents (role ambiguity and role conflict) and workplace bullying. Data were collected using a 14-items Role Questionnaire (RQ) and 22-item Negative Act Questionnaires-Revised (22-items NAQ-R). Findings show a high prevalence rate of workplace bullying (66.7%), a high level of role ambiguity (72.6%), and role conflict (70.2%), resulting in a positive & significant relationship with workplace bullying. Thus, these results autonomously conclude that workplace bullying is prevalent among MNC HRSSC with a high level of role ambiguity and role conflict experience, which are significant antecedents based on the General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) underpinning theory. Therefore, the study recommends that local HRD professionals and policymakers review employees' job descriptions to determine one's role and set KPI accordingly. Global Business Services representing the MNC and the local HRSSC management team must develop and implement robust anti-bullying policies and programs and sustain them in practice to curtail the negative consequences.

**Keywords:** Multinational Corporations Human Resource Shared Service Centers, prevalence, role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace bullying

## 1. Introduction

In the eminently challenging progressive work environment today, emphasis on knowledge and skills of human capital became the firm foundation of competitive advantage for any result-oriented organization to succeed (Balducci et al., 2021; Nieves & Quintana, 2018; Becker & Huselid, 2006), especially among Multinational Corporations (MNCs) (Clarke & Gholamshahi, 2018; Bjorkman et al., 2017; Gubbins & Garavan, 2009). As a result, these organizations make expeditious and unplanned organizational changes (Salin & Hoel, 2011) to maximize investments and generate profits. The unexpected deviations involve changing tactics, restructuring, culture, technology, work methods (Spagnoli & Balducci, 2017, Anand, 2007), budget cuts, short contractual obligations (Zabrodska et al., 2016), downsizing and

altering the status quo (Bailey et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2015) which are also common strategies used in MNCs (Richter & Bruhl, 2017; Ezzamel et al., 2008). These strategies are prevalent among organizations, compelling by setting objectives for managers to focus on sustainable organizational growth (Kodden & Groenveld, 2019; Bailey et al., 2017). Inevitably, the circumstances and business demands force employees to multitask, adjust, and adapt to new and unfamiliar roles, which puts them under constant pressure to meet business expectations at any cost, causing increasing insecurity among employees (Reknes et al., 2018; Zabrodska et al., 2016; Salin & Hoel, 2011; Ezzamel et al., 2008). Many studies also postulated that inappropriate management style and poor business practice in an organization are found to be prevalent, causing severe social problems for employees and corporations, and triggering workplace bullying (Samnani, 2021; Rodriguez, 2017; Membere et al., 2015; Vartia, 2013; Einarsen et al., 2011; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Moreover, as suggested by the work environment hypothesis by Leymann (1996), poor psychosocial conditions such as role ambiguity and role conflict, elicit destructive outcomes such as workplace bullying (Li et al., 2019; Bowling et al., 2017; Spagnoli et al., 2017; Spagnoli & Balducci, 2017; Zabrodska et al., 2016; Van Sell et al., 1981) which has not received much deliberation (Balducci et al., 2018) especially, in the context of MNC HRSSC. For the past three decades, workplace bullying has been given serious attention for its effect on work and organizational psychology (Rodriguez, 2017; Chirila & Constantin, 2016) and is recognized as an organizational problem instead of an individual's (Cowan, 2018; Einarsen et al., 2011). However, the phenomenon has not been researched as a side effect of HRSSCs implementation striving to stay competitive, cost savings, and increase productivity (Chapman et al., 2018) by implementing continuous change strategies (Richter & Bruhl, 2017) through economies of scale, enhanced performance management, and prompt service deliverance (Richter & Bruhl, 2017; Hofman & Meijerink, 2015; Uijlenberg, 2015). In line with the above claims, this study aims to understand and reveal if the MNC HRSSC formation and business objectives demand to stay competitive through cost savings and increase productivity while complying with short contractual obligations to internal customers through a continuous change of operational strategies and tactics causes fertile grounds for workplace bullying. Accordingly, the present study will confirm if employees experience role ambiguity and role conflict and if these stressors are antecedents to workplace bullying, given the business nature of MNC HRSSC. Hence, the present study presents its objectives as follows: (a) to describe the prevalence of workplace bullying in MNC HRSSC; (b) to describe the experience levels of role ambiguity and role conflict; (c) to find out the relationship between role ambiguity and workplace bullying; (d) to find out the relationship between role conflict and workplace bullying.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Workplace Bullying*

Workplace bullying has been investigated for more than three decades and is still a relevant, valid topic and leading issue of the 21st century (Einarsen et al., 2019; Ryan, 2016, Samnani & Singh, 2012; Harvey et al., 2009) as a significant work stressor (Kwan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, despite three decades of research, there is no universal definition of the

phenomenon, expanding the theoretical and conceptual findings of this phenomenon. In most research, workplace bullying is conceptualized according to the research setting. Often described as an “ongoing harmful act of ill-treatment, intimidating behaviour towards employees, ranging from the extremely delicate, even unconscious, lack of respect to the utmost blatant, intentional emotional abuse, the act of harassing, offending, socially isolating someone by one or more people directly or indirectly creating an agitated situation for the victim to be characterized by lack of control (Hansen et al., 2021; Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996), or destructively affecting their work assignments in a hostile work environment” (Hansen et al., 2021; Kwan et al., 2020; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Some studies claim that bullying has to be acted upon repeatedly and is a regular activity, process and behaviour that negatively impact the victims (Einarsen et al., 2020). It is the most common form of adverse workplace behaviour and harassment (Omar et al., 2015) that has obtained a crucial part of research attention compared to sexual harassment, physical aggression, workplace violence, or racial discrimination (Salin et al., 2014). The phenomenon is a ubiquitous problem in modern working life (Hurley et al., 2016; Nielsen et al., 2010) and rising in all parts of the world, including Asia (Kwan et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2019; Ryan, 2016; Branch et al., 2013). Moreover, its pervasiveness spans all countries, industries, and sectors, affecting individuals across job positions and educational levels (Glambek et al., 2014; Samnani, 2013; Harvey et al., 2009). Therefore, no organization can claim it is bully-proof (Hoel & Einarsen, 1999) which is a fact to date. The phenomenon has received substantial attention among researchers and scholars (Valentine et al., 2018; Bergbom et al., 2015; Devonish, 2013) for the theoretical and empirical literature review process, especially in social sciences. These studies focus on reiterating the growth of interpersonal bullying, investigating its source, manifestation, antecedents, causes, and effects, and creating a well-developed understanding of the phenomenon (Feijo et al., 2019; D’Cruz, 2014). This phenomenon is agreed to be a “more crippling and devastating problem for employees compared to all other kinds of work-related stress out together” (Hogh et al., 2021; Ryan, 2016; Pilch & Turska, 2015; Einarsen et al., 2011), causing a severe array of adverse effects (Hogh et al., 2021; Dollard, 2018; Kwan et al., 2014; Finne et al., 2011).

Workplace bullying shows a positive association with employee health problems which include psychological distress, physical, and mental health troubles, depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), stress, sleep, depression, suicide, and psychosomatic well-being complaints (Hansen et al., 2021; Hogh et al., 2021; Fang et al., 2020; Rajalingam et al., 2019; Rai & Agarwal, 2018; Attell et al., 2017; Verkuil et al., 2015; Nielsen et al., 2014, Strandmark, 2013; Finne et al., 2011; Tsuno et al., 2010; Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2011). These studies show that the phenomenon’s impact has been ongoing, as concluded in a qualitative study when victims confessed as “marked for life” due to the traumatic and long-standing phenomenon’s adverse mental health impact (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006). In addition, it results in a range of destructive effects (Dollard, 2018; Kwan et al., 2014) on team performance, employee’s mood, behavioural intentions, job satisfaction, attitudes, work-related behaviours, organizational commitment, absenteeism, loss of productivity, and intention to leave (Sugala et al., 2021; Olsen et al., 2017; Devonish, 2013; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Ramsay et al., 2011). These adverse acts are undeniably the most perverse

because of constant human interactions or specific interfaces among factors that affect the individual, organization, or working environment (Cowan, 2018).

Given the adverse consequences of workplace bullying on employees' well-being and the organization, it is imperative to understand the causes of this phenomenon's occurrence and development, nature, and effects (Hogh et al., 2021; Chaplin, 2017; Keashley & Neuman, 2010). As exposed by previous researchers, workplace bullying results from deprived psychosocial health and safety versus productivity (Salin, 2015; Idris & Dollard, 2011; Salin & Hoel, 2011). Furthermore, the conditions allow corporate bullying to occur in pursuing competitive advantage (Berlingieri & D'Cruz, 2021; Sugala et al., 2021; Hogh et al., 2021; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2015), resorting to employing abuse, hostility, intimidation, and hostility to ensure the organizational agenda is conformed (Berlingieri & D'Cruz, 2021; D'Cruz, 2014; Beale & Hoel, 2011; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2011). These depersonalized bullying acts warrant more studies to reveal its prevalence in organizations (Salin, 2021; D'Cruz, 2015; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2015; Samnani et al., 2013) in the context of this study, among MNC HRSSC while extending to find out the experiences level of selected role stressors (role ambiguity and role conflict) and their relationship with workplace bullying.

## *2.2 Workplace Bullying in Malaysia*

Workplace bullying has been the focus of research worldwide, especially among Western nations (Kwan et al., 2020; O'Driscoll et al., 2011), contributing approximately 95% to the phenomenon (Neall & Tuckey, 2014) compared to Eastern countries. Recently, studies in Asian countries contributed to verifying the severity and existence of workplace bullying. Unfortunately, workplace bullying literature in Malaysia provides inadequate information to understand this phenomenon's severity and prevalence. Almost all Western studies extensively confirmed its prevalence and the detrimental consequences to individuals, organizations, and society; however, this is not the situation in Malaysia. Workplace bullying is a prolonged, problematic escalating negative conflict with a higher rate of resemblances worldwide under many extreme conditions in an organization. However, there is the likelihood that cultural factors could lead to a debate giving different views and understanding to the identified negative or hostile act (Kwan et al., 2020; Kwan et al., 2014; Vartia-Vaananen, 2013), resulting in individuals accepting and tolerating the bullying actions. Furthermore, the perception of workplace bullying differs between Malaysian and Western employees, concluding that this is unacceptable. In contrast, the former finds it a symbolic act and is part of the organizational culture (Kwan et al., 2014, 2020).

Accepting bullying as a mere act could be due to no specific law enactment in Malaysia that governs workplace bullying other than sexual harassment (Omar et al., 2015). Under the Malaysian Employment Law, the employer must ensure a secure, proper, and appropriate working atmosphere for employees to work with dignity, self-respect, and esteem and guarantee that the workers are not subjected to unwarranted oppression, harassment, and hostility. A failure in which companies are as good as to have violated the implied term of shared trust and confidence between employer and employee. The Industrial Relations Act 1967 (Act 177) and the Occupational Safety and Health Act (1994) stated these legal avenues. However, Malaysian labour laws presently do not adequately protect the phenomenon in this



given situation. An article on bullying at the workplace was published in one of the leading newspapers in Malaysia acts confirms that bullying is dealt with as misconduct, resulting in disciplinary actions (The Star, October 22, 2013). In another national newspaper, statements were given that when organizations disregard workplace bullying, victims may leave the organization and bring a claim for constructive dismissal where the situations surrounding the acts of bullying are equivalent to a breach of the employment agreement (The News Straits Times, August 12, 2014).

The study findings are expected to back the notion of the rest of the Eastern countries' researchers, particularly the Malaysian researchers, that workplace bullying is still showing an upward trend, despite being presented with proposals and recommendations to combat this phenomenon in each study. Furthermore, the present study initiative is in line with the Malaysian government and Malaysian Trades Union Congress's (MTUC) consent to approve the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (C190) convention commitment to protect the interest and safety of all employees, regardless of their background (The News Straits Times, June 30, 2019). However, no finalized documentation exists to develop Malaysia's workplace bullying prevention act. Hence, these study findings anticipate contributing to workplace bullying in Malaysia, emphasizing that MNCs from Western countries take workplace bullying seriously but instigate the phenomenon in Asian countries, especially Malaysia, for its competitive advantage gain. Therefore, this revelation is foreseen to be a prospect to promote the need for robust Anti-bullying acts in Malaysia.

### *2.3 Prevalence of Workplace bullying*

The seriousness of workplace bullying is relatively high and reported to be prevalent in Western countries and is now emerging in other parts of the world, including Asian nations (D'Cruz et al., 2021; Kwan et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2019; Branch et al., 2013). However, though there is consistent recognition of research on workplace bullying, receiving attention in the local mass media highlighting its increased severity yet, very few sectors in Malaysia have researched to substantiate the presence, gravity, and prevalence of this phenomenon (Omar et al., 2015; Yusop et al., 2014; Subramaniam et al., 2011; Abdullah & Ali, 2011; Patah et al., 2010; Khoo, 2010). Researchers claimed that the limited exploration is due to cultural differences suggesting that Eastern countries are not ready to report the phenomenon (Leon et al., 2021, Kwan et al., 2020; Omar et al., 2015; Kwan et al., 2014). Another possible reason for the lack of prevalence report is that Malaysians are due to the unequal acceptance distribution of power and potentially accept it as part of organizational culture (Awai et al., 2021; Kwan et al., 2020; Omar et al., 2015; Kwan et al., 2014; Power et al., 2013). These acceptances are mostly undetected due to the unpreparedness to report the experience of workplace bullying, impacting the recognition and understanding of the phenomenon and resulting in little revelation.

Furthermore, the lack of knowledge on the severity of the phenomenon could also be attributed to the absence of workplace bullying definition in Malaysia, resulting in limited literature on prevalence reports of workplace bullying in Malaysia, which the study aims to contribute in the context of MNC HRSSCs. Worldwide studies suggest a high prevalence rate of this phenomenon globally (Leon, 2021; Kwan, 2020), without any exception for Malaysia.

For example, a recent study among 47 companies in Malaysia reported that almost 39.1% of 5,235 participants reported being workplace bullying victims (Chan et al., 2019). Another investigation revealed that 14% of 231 public and private sector employees experienced workplace bullying either weekly or as frequently as daily (Hassan et al., 2015). A higher prevalence rate was reported in a study conducted in the public sector, reporting that 83.2% of the total employees were victims of bullying (Omar et al., 2015). A different study exposed the inappropriate behaviour among 108 healthcare employees from different designations in clinical and non-clinical environments at Kuala Lumpur Hospital in Malaysia, reporting that 46.2% of the participating employees experienced incivility behaviour (Yusop et al., 2014). Although employees were from different professional levels, the experience did not show the difference (Yusop et al., 2014). Finally, a study in four religious schools revealed a prevalence rate of 27% (Yahaya et al., 2012).

Among these claims another study proclaimed contradicting results reporting 72.1% of a total of 300 denied being exposed to the phenomenon, whereas only 27.9% of respondents of a selected statutory organization reported being victims of workplace bullying (Omar et al., 2015). In line with these findings, another new study among 178 hospital workers reported a low prevalence rate of 11.2% (Awai et al., 2021). A low prevalence rate is potentially due to higher power distance culture practices (Awai et al., 2021; Kwan et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2019; Omar et al., 2015) or a statutory body that rationally abides by ethical rules (Omar et al., 2015). The above claims explain that Malaysians comply with the power distance environment. As a result, employees are inclined to condone the unequal distribution of authority and accept the hierarchical level of asymmetrical power among themselves (D'ruz et al., 2021; Kwan et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2019; Vidyarthi et al., 2014). Therefore, this study seeks to show the prevalence rate of workplace bullying among MNC HRSSCs, a Western and Eastern combined management located in Malaysia typecast as a country at the top of the list representing the highest index rating (104/112) in the power distance dimension report (Hofstede, 2010, 2001).

#### *2.4 Role Stressors*

Role stressors exemplify the pressure of high demands and expectations from role senders that are almost efficacious and reasonably conveyed to an individual in a critical position (Sim et al., 2021; Beehr, 2014). These role senders are usually in power and authority to communicate work expectations and demands comprising vague and contradictory messages, creating role stress to the focal person (Sim et al., 2021; Hauge et al., 2011). In some other situations, role stress translates to aggressive reactions that employees experience due to excessive workload deliverance expectations, which likely urges individuals to act destructively towards each other leading to social aggression. Empirical studies have consistently reported that role stressors, namely role ambiguity and role conflict, lead to a stressful working environment, thus, confirming them as critical antecedents of work-related bullying (Reknes et al., 2019; Van Den Brande et al., 2016; Notelaers & Einarsen, 2010; Leymann, 1996; Einarsen et al., 1994). These researches implied that these variables have different trigger origins and require different organizational interventions. Therefore, the present study will investigate both role stressors separately to determine their relationship

with workplace bullying.

Role ambiguity is “conflicting demands from multiple roles, inconsistent work expectations, lack of clarity or deviating from their role anticipations” (Beehr et al., 2014; Rizzo et al., 1970; Kahn et al., 1964). Furthermore, it is experienced when one is subjected to insufficient information (Tubre & Collins, 2000) or conflicting messages (Showail et al., 2013). In addition, when workers perceive their work objectives as unpredictable and unclear due to changes in the task, obtaining insufficient job-related feedback creates strain and conflicts, intensifying fertile ground for workplace bullying (Hoel et al., 2021, 2002; Zapf, 1999; Einarsen et al., 1994), as they create strain and dispute regarding the situation and privileges among employees.

Role conflict is the “concurrent occurrence of two or more sets of work pressures demand that compliance with one would lead to a complicated compliance with the other” (Rizzo et al., 1970; Kahn et al., 1964). These researchers introduced two types of role conflict: interned role conflict and role pressure incompatibility. The former exists when performing one role is made more challenging by the involvement in another role demand. The latter is a role that actualizes when stresses in one role are incompatible with those in another. The most common definition of role conflict referred to by scholars and academicians is the mismatch of obligations and expectations for the said role. The compatibility is evaluated based on a set of circumstances that affect the job performance of that individual (Rizzo et al., 1970). Individuals will experience pressures within one function and, at the same time, adjust to the pressures that come with another role (Balducci et al., 2021). For example, employees will not do all that is expected due to conflicting information (Feiji et al., 2019; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Subsequent studies supported the notion concluding it to be a significant antecedent of workplace bullying (Homayuni et al., 2021; Notelaers et al., 2010; Hauge et al., 2007) due to the experience of strain and frustration among work teams (Feiji et al., 2019

These role stressors add to the conception and prominence of environmental clarity in explaining workplace bullying (Balducci et al., 2021; Notelaers et al., 2010). Workplace bullying arises when employees perceive and understand different expectations of the role, intensification of work demands, work overload, and approximate values in their position due to unclear and unpredictable goals (Salin & Hoel, 2011). The unclarity affects career opportunity, reassignment of the job from a higher salary to a lower salary, creating unhappiness and drop-in productivity. Furthermore, the issues could lead them to aggress against other colleagues, subordinates, or even those with authority (Feiji et al., 2019; Salin & Hoel, 2011). Besides, when roles for any position are indefinite, uncertain, and poorly designed, the circumstance encourages adverse outcomes among the employees, causing anxiety, confusion, and depression and becoming an easy target of bullying (Hauge et al., 2011; Feijo et al., 2019).

Notwithstanding the long-standing association between role stressors and workplace bullying, less is revealed to understand in which condition role ambiguity and role conflict may cause workplace bullying, especially in MNC Shared Service Centers, aiming to reduce overall overhead costs by increasing productivity. Therefore, identifying the potential root cause and situation is crucial as it may yield valuable insights to diagnose the problem and prevent



workplace bullying (Balducci et al., 2021; Neilsen & Einarsen, 2012). Therefore, this study seeks to comprehensively understand how the increasing productivity process upsurges the experience level of these role stressors in MNC HRSSCs. In addition, the study further extends current literature by showing the relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict and workplace bullying.

### *2.5 Theoretical Framework & Hypothesis Development*

Employees have been experiencing different expectations from their surroundings and within themselves to perform their roles efficiently. This study finds that MNCs legitimize HRSSC to be restructured (Ezzamel et al., 2008), striving to maximize its investment (Raudla & Tammel, 2015). The restructuring is to strategize the corporate direction for MNC HRSSC from service-oriented centres to profit-making, giving less attention to employees' development (Ezzamel et al., 2008; Fligstein & Shin, 2007). In addition, the work pressures aiming for fast improved performance complicate employees' coping roles and processes (Van den Brande et al., 2020; Salin & Hoel, 2011). The present study will employ role ambiguity and conflict, commonly observed and experienced in the workplace. First, when organizations strive for high productivity, the increased workload among employees becomes complicated to manage and deliver. As a result, task interdependence confuses, especially without proper job delegation or assignment, leading to role stress.

For this study, General Strain Theory (Agnew 1992) will be applied as the underpinning theory to explain the relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict and workplace bullying. Relating strain caused by the removal of positively valued stimulus by an organization clarifies that a poor psychosocial work environment may trigger exposure to bullying because it depletes employees' energies, causing strain in the form of work stress and becoming vulnerable to bullying acts (Hinduja, 2007; Agnew, 1992). Inferential statistics are applied in response to the study's third and fourth objectives to determine the relationship between role ambiguity, role conflict, and workplace bullying using SEM AMOS 24.0. Two hypotheses were tested using simple regression analysis.

*Hypothesis 1:* Role ambiguity positively and significantly influences workplace bullying among employees in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia.

*Hypothesis 2:* Role conflict positively and significantly influences workplace bullying among employees in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia.

### *2.6 Multinational Corporation Human Resource Shared Service Centers (MNC HRSSC)*

Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and international organizations allot strategic investments in Human Resource Development (HRD), intending to bring to the success equation by value creation, strive for efficiency, improving the human assets and organizational performances achievement (Chapman et al. 2018; Swanson et al., 2001) through the formation of Human resource shared service centres (HRSSC). HRSSC is a hybrid organizational unit that functions as an internal outsourcing semi-autonomous business unit within the organizational boundaries (Maatman & Bondarouk, 2014, 2010;

Farndale et al., 2010, 2009, 2006; Jansen & Joha, 2007, 2006; Cooke, 2006). In the context of this study, it is an outsourcing human resource management (HRM) business unit to perform consolidated HR services (Richter & Bruhl, 2017; Farndale et al., 2010, 2009, 2006) determined by the internal business unit of the SSC (Maatman et al., 2014) and stipulated in a service-level agreement (SLA) against the service provided transfer prices (Strikwerda, 2014). More than 75% of Fortune 500 companies have opted to form shared services to acquire superior performance through cost savings, continuous service improvements (Richter & Bruhl, 2017), and innovations. However, the ambitious objective of SSC formation is to benefit from significant economies of scale, enhanced performance management and measurement, and service deliverance efficiency (Richter & Bruhl, 2017; Hofman & Meijerink, 2015; Uijlenberg, 2015; Gubbins & Garavan, 2009; Hodges et al., 2007). The results are possible due to organizational consolidation (Hodges et al., 2007) by bundling resources such as human capital, information technology, and business processes (Richter & Bruhl, 2017; Meijerink et al., 2013; Hodges et al., 2007) which allows lowering the cost of coordination and duplication of support functions that are not centralized in SSCs (Strikwerda, 2014) and HRSSC (Cooke, 2006). In this effort, MNCs optimized HRSSC implementation that went far beyond the actual intention to exploit the advantage and benefited at least 25-30% of cost savings in global markets. However, to materialize the goals, the HR processes are frequently restructured. These include cutting in the staff, increasing productivity, rearranging employees' work, reorganizing, or even adding job functions that might be challenging and unfavourable to employees (Uijlenberg, 2015; Gubbins & Garavan, 2009; Cooke, 2006), confusing employees to understand the roles and responsibilities, creating insecurities and breeding an environment prone to adverse behaviours (Zabrodska et al., 2016). Under these conditions, to attain a competitive advantage, organizations tend to condone corporate bullying (D'Cruz, 2021, 2015, 2014; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2015, 2009), resorting to abuse, hostility, intimidation, and hostility to ensure the organizational agenda has complied. An extensive literature review on the formation, advantages and disadvantages of HRSSCs showed limited attention was given to revealing the side-effects of its formation and implemented strategy and actions to stay competitive, especially in workplace bullying. Therefore, this study aims to determine if the changing objectives and strategies to stay competitive at the expense of employees' well-being encourage and lead to workplace bullying, either overtly or covertly. Concerning the execution of cost savings and increased productivity strategies, the study will ascertain if this implementation causes employees to experience role ambiguity and conflict and determine if these stressors contribute to workplace bullying.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

This study applied a cross-sectional research design comprising descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The key objective of the present study is to analyze the correlation than causation, although the design depicts a cause-and-effect association. Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) (v24) was used for descriptive analysis to ascertain workplace bullying prevalence and describe the experience level of role ambiguity and conflict. As for inferential

statistical analysis, Structural Equation Modelling (AMOS – v24) was used to determine the magnitude of relations and influence between role ambiguity, role conflict, and workplace bullying.

### 3.2 Sampling Technique and Procedures

Since there is no specific record available for this setting which deters from obtaining a list of headcounts of the population, a compilation of 42 actively operating MNC HRSSCs in Malaysia was compiled from the Shared Service Centers and Outsourcing Malaysia (SSOM) website (<https://www.ssonetwork.com>). Given that there are no accessible lists of all population employees, as proposed by Cohen et al. (2008), this study applied a cluster sampling method, probability sampling. First, the overall unknown group population from the 42 MNC HRSSC was separated into clusters (a natural population aggregation). After that, a random sampling of the study population was selected to determine the study sample. After that, a random sampling of the study population was selected to determine the study sample. Finally, the study sample was selected using a step-by-step random sampling using Microsoft Excel, RANDBETWEEN () function. This random selection process continued to rearrange all the 42 identified HRSSCs.

### 3.3 Participants and Sample

A total of 502 employees below the senior managerial level from eight MNC HRSSC in Malaysia participated. Since the present study used a one-stage cluster sample, all employees were included in the study sample. As a result, 466 duly completed questionnaires with a response rate of 92.8%. Inclusion criteria require employees working tenure to be with at least one year in the organization; therefore, in the process of keying in the data, six questionnaires were omitted for not meeting the tenure criteria, leaving a total of 460 respondents data for the study's further analysis. Table1 depicts a summary of the total number of respondents of each HRSSC.

MNC HRSSC	Distributed Questionnaires	Non-Response	Less than One Year	Return Rate	Valid Response
HRSSC 1	68	1	0	67	67
HRSSC 2	60	3	1	58	57
HRSSC 3	66	6	0	60	60
HRSSC 4	64	5	1	60	59
HRSSC 5	70	5	0	65	65
HRSSC 6	61	10	4	55	51
HRSSC 7	55	8	0	47	47
HRSSC 8	58	4	0	54	54
Total	502	42	6	466	460

Note: Employees are below Senior Managerial Level.

### 3.4 Study Instruments

Based on an extensive literature review of the present study, a self-administered questionnaire comprising two established, tested, reliable, and validated instruments developed by western researchers deemed relevant and applicable to measure the variables in this study. The first

tool is the 14-item Role Questionnaire (RQ), developed by Rizzo et al. (1970), to measure role ambiguity and conflict. The second tool is the 22-item Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) developed by Einarsen et al. (2009), which measures a wide range of bullying behaviours and experiences with no direct mention of the term bullying. The questionnaire comprises two sections, where Section I encompasses three parts for different instruments representing each variable. For this study, the 14-item RQ was divided into two parts representing role stressors, i.e., role ambiguity (6 items) and role conflict (8 items). Hence, Part A measures role ambiguity. Part B measures role conflict, and Part C measures harmful acts of workplace bullying. All the parts in Section I will be measured using a Likert-scale type. Section II consists of demographic items such as age, gender, designation level, supervisor, and tenure of employment. Translation of the questionnaire to Bahasa Malaysia was not required as employees in MNC HRSSC generally must be conversant in English.

### *3.5 Measures*

Role stressors for the present study are represented by role ambiguity, and role conflict generally explains HRSSC employees' conflicting perceptions and unclear work demands, expectations, and objectives of their respective roles. Since role ambiguity and role conflict appear in various work environments and conditions, each needs different interventions to curb them from occurring. For these reasons, this study values the concepts as two distinct variables and runs the analyses separately.

#### *3.5.1 Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict*

Role ambiguity is described as “the lack of precision and unavoidability of HRSSCs' employee's behaviour due to unclear demands and role expectations.” Therefore, respondents to report views on the degree of inconsistency and incompatibility of expectations correlated to their roles. For this, they must respond to the 6-items of the Role Questionnaire to substantiate their experience of role ambiguity. Role Conflict is “a degree of mismatch or incompatibility of expectations of the HRSSC employees role, opposing work anticipation. Respondents report that their responsiveness to the lack of clarity and predictability affects one's behaviour and confirms the presence and experience of role conflict. For this, they must respond to the 8-items of the Role Questionnaire to substantiate the experience of role conflict. The responses to this questionnaire were acquired using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Somewhat Disagree), 3 (Disagree), 4 (Neutral), 5 (Agree), 6 (Somewhat Agree), and 7 (Strongly Agree). These responses determine the employees' experience of role ambiguity and conflict and their correlation with workplace bullying.

#### *3.5.2 Workplace Bullying*

For the present study, workplace bullying is explained as “the understanding and experience of all employees below senior managerial level involving managers, team leaders, executives, and officers in MNC HRSSC on different conceptualizations of mistreatment and intimidating behaviour towards them at work.” These employees are expected to reveal any

disintegration of their original self resulting from their organization, immediate superiors, or subordinates, which is perceived as deliberate, ongoing cruel treatment. The definition also states that they must have repeatedly experienced the incivility behaviour (e.g., weekly) over at least six months.” The phenomenon is measured using the 22-item Negative Acts Questionnaires-Revised (NAQ-R) that describes bullying acts in four dimensions, namely, person-related bullying (10 items), work-related bullying (8 items), and physical or psychological intimidation (2 items), and occupation devaluation act (2 items). In addition, the employees (respondents) were required to rate how frequently they had experienced workplace bullying over the last six months. Their responses were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never), 2 (now and then), 3 (about monthly), 4 (about weekly), and 5 (daily) as proposed by the developer.

### *3.6 Data Collection and Procedure Consideration*

Data collection was carried out using the drop and collect method. The data collection process began upon appointments with the respective Human Resource (HR) Managers to get permission to conduct the survey. In addition, a one-page research proposal summary detailing the purpose and objective of the survey with a sample questionnaire was given to the person in charge of each MNC HRSSC to facilitate the survey approval process. Upon receiving approval via email confirmation, questionnaires in sealable envelopes were handed over to the authorized contact person for the total headcount. A cover letter was attached to the questionnaires, providing the research details and the significance of their participation and emphasizing the anonymity and confidentiality of the employees’ responses. They were given a week to complete the questionnaires to get a reasonable return rate.

#### *3.6.1 Instruments Validity and Reliability*

The 14-item Role Questionnaire has been broadly used to measure role ambiguity and role conflict with original acceptable reliability and construct validity at a Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.78 and 0.82, respectively (Rizzo et al., 1970). Whereas for the 22-item NAQ-R, the original reliability also reported a good Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.87. The identified instruments are developed for Western countries’ data collection purposes; therefore, a pilot assessment was deemed appropriate before the actual data collection to ensure the validity claimed holds for Malaysia. For this reason, a pilot study was conducted with 30 employees as proposed by (Hertzog 2008) from the MNC HRSSC, who were excluded from the actual study population. The pilot study reported a Cronbach  $\alpha$  score of 0.863, 0.889, and 0.967 for role ambiguity, role conflict, and workplace bullying, respectively, exceeding the recommended acceptable Cronbach  $\alpha$  > 0.7 (Nunnally & Benstein 1994; George & Mallery, 2009). The same test was carried out in the actual study that recorded good Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.893, 0.901, and 0.965. Table 2 summarises the reliability coefficient test results for the variables.



Table 2. Original, Pilot, and Actual Study: Reliability Coefficient of Variables

Sec	Variable	Original Cronbach $\alpha$	Pilot Study Cronbach $\alpha$	Actual Study Cronbach $\alpha$
A	Role Ambiguity	0.78	0.863	0.893
B	Role Conflict	0.82	0.889	0.901
C	Workplace Bullying	0.87	0.967	0.965

Besides, all general assumptions of data normality using Skewness and Kurtosis symmetry measurements were verified, confirming the data normality as shown in Table 3. The normality test showed that the skewness ranged from -0.106 to 1.489, within the proposed criteria of +2.0 to - 2.0 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Whereas the results for kurtosis ranged from -0.800 to 1.075, also within the recommended range of +7.0 to - 7.0 (Bryne, 2016). Thus, this study's data set's normality tests are well-modelled within the recommended normal distribution representation.

Table 3. Summary of Normality Test Results

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Workplace Bullying	-0.847	-0.800
Role Conflict	-0.106	0.904
Role Ambiguity	-1.489	1.075

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Prevalence of Workplace Bullying (WB) in MNC HRSSC

In response to the first research objective to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying among MNC HRSSCs in Malaysia, the present study conducted statistical analysis with IBM SPSS 24.0. The study used two methods to investigate workplace bullying experience among the representative sample of 460 participants. The first method was a two-step cluster analysis, prompting two clusters segregation: occasional and severe bullying, as depicted in Table 4. Out of the 460 employees, 153 (33.3%) fall into the occasional workplace bullying experiences segregation. In contrast, the balance of 307 employees (66.7%) was in the harrowing experience of workplace bullying segregation. The second method was adapting the strict operational definition criterion. This method proposes daily, or weekly exposure to at least two bullying acts in a week in the last six months of the employee's tenure. The NAQ-R's frequency statistical analysis results reported that 65.5% or 323 employees acknowledged being victims of daily or at least two bullying acts in a week during the last six months.

Table 4. Cluster Distribution for WB (N=460)

Cluster	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Occasional Bullying	153	33.3
Severe Bullying	307	66.7

The analysis also revealed that the most frequent harmful act is “being exposed to an unmanageable workload,” reporting the highest mean ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ). On the other hand, most employees perceive “intimidating behaviour such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way” as the least experienced, reporting the lowest mean ( $\bar{x} = 2.73$ ). Results from both descriptive statistical analysis methods corresponding to the first research objective explain that most employees reported bullying in one incident within the last six months. Therefore, both applied methods confirm a high prevalence of workplace bullying, with a reported rate of 65.5% and 66.7% in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Workplace Bullying

Predictors	Percentage (%)					Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	2.4	1.1	26.3	37.0	33.3	3.98	0.93
2. Having your opinions ignored	0.4	1.1	28.7	50.4	19.3	3.87	0.74
3. Being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines	1.7	9.6	21.3	50	17.4	3.72	0.92
4. Excessive monitoring of your work	1.1	1.7	30.9	62.0	4.3	3.67	0.64
5. Spreading of gossip and rumours about you	8.7	17.0	4.3	45.7	24.3	3.60	1.26
6. Persistent criticism of your work and effort	0.4	18.7	17.8	47.2	15.9	3.59	0.98
7. Someone withholding information which affects your work performance	1.3	18.9	21.1	50.2	8.5	3.46	0.94
8. Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	10.7	2.0	42.6	44.8	0.00	3.46	0.92
9. Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	0.2	18.5	28	45.7	7.6	3.42	0.88
10. Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	2.2	9.3	48.7	35.2	4.6	3.31	0.79

#### 4.2 Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict Experience Level

The study used descriptive analysis to understand and describe the employees’ insight experience and perception of role ambiguity and role conflict in the MNC HRSSC setting by classifying their responses into three levels (low, moderate, and high). Table 6 describes the employee’s experience of role ambiguity with a mean of 5.140 and a standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of 0.936. The analysis reported that 334 employees (72.6%) are experiencing high-level role ambiguity, revealing its seriousness in the organization. On the other hand, 107 employees

(23.3%) found themselves at a moderate level, whereas 19 (4.1%) claim to be least affected by role ambiguity. The findings revealed that almost all employees claim role ambiguity to be an inescapable experience in MNC HRSSC organization setup.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Level of Role Ambiguity

Level of RA		Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Low	(1.00 – 3.00)	19	4.1	5.140	0.936
Moderate	(3.01 – 5.00)	107	23.3		
High	(5.01 – 7.00)	334	72.6		
Total		460	100.00		

Table 7 describes the employee's experience level of role conflict with a mean of 5.438 and a standard deviation of 0.720. The analysis reported role conflict experience to have a profound effect on employees. Most employees totalling 323 (70.2%), reported experiencing high-level role conflict. While 134 employees (29.1%) face role conflict at a moderate level, only three (0.7%) claim to be experiencing role conflict. These findings also explain the severity of employees experiencing role conflict in MNC HRSSC organization setup.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Level of RC

Level of RC		Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Low	(1.00 – 3.00)	3	0.7	5.438	0.720
Moderate	(3.01 – 5.00)	134	29.1		
High	(5.01 – 7.00)	323	70.2		
Total		460	100.00		

### 4.3 Hypotheses Testing

This Section will report the results of the two tested hypotheses to determine the magnitude of the relationship between role ambiguity, role conflict, and workplace bullying among employees in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia.

*Hypothesis 1:* Role ambiguity positively and significantly influences workplace bullying among employees in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia.

*Hypothesis 2:* Role conflict positively and significantly influences workplace bullying among employees in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia.

As illustrated in Table 8, role ambiguity (RA), the independent variable of this study, has a positive and statistically significant impact on workplace bullying ( $\beta = 0.411$ , CR 5.370,  $p=0.000$ ). Likewise, role conflict (RC), the second independent variable of this study, also shows a positive and statistically significant influence on workplace bullying ( $\beta = 0.631$ , CR 10.234,  $p=0.000$ ). Therefore,  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  support the claim that role ambiguity and role conflict are antecedents for workplace bullying among MNC HRSSCs in Malaysia.

Table 8. The Regression Weights between Role Stress and WB

	Path	B	Beta ( $\beta$ )	SE.	CR.	<i>p</i>
	RA → WB	0.432	0.411	0.080	5.370	0.000
	RC → WB	0.784	0.631	0.077	10.234	0.000

## 5. Discussions

The present study has four main objectives, which are (a) to describe how prevalent workplace bullying is, the find out the level of role ambiguity and role conflict, and lastly, to test the two proposed hypotheses, i.e., to determine the relationship between role ambiguity, role conflict, and workplace bullying among employees in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia. The findings of this study are discussed below:

### 5.1 The Prevalence of Workplace Bullying in MNC HRSSC

The study found that workplace bullying is highly prevalent among MNC HRSSC, based on the results obtained from two methods confirming consistent and reliable findings that most employees frequently experience workplace bullying. First, the cluster distribution reported severe workplace bullying experiences where most employees experienced unmanageable workload. Second, as shown in Table 5, the second method using the operational definition listing the most frequently experienced act describes those eight questions are work-related bullying, one person-related bullying, and one from occupation devaluation bullying. Therefore, most of the employees experience work-related bullying in the pursuit of contributing to the organizational goal while influencing the prevalence rate of the phenomenon in MNC HRSSC. The findings support a wide range of prevalence percentages reports from previous studies affirming that workplace bullying is widespread worldwide (Leon-Perez et al., 2021; Ng & Chan, 2021; Reknes et al., 2019; Jacobson et al., 2014; Giorgi, 2012), reported 14% of the world workforce since a decade ago (Nielsen et al., 2010). In addition, a recent study among 2657 workers in Hong Kong revealed that the phenomenon's annual and lifetime prevalence rate was 39.1% and 58.9%, respectively (Ng & Chan, 2021). Another recent study among 47 Malaysian companies comprising 5,235 participants reported that 39.1% were victims of workplace bullying (Chan et al., 2019). These scholars asserted that the phenomenon is a ubiquitous problem in modern working life (Salin, 2021; Hurley et al., 2016; Nielsen et al., 2010), rising in all parts of the world, including Asia (Kwan et al., 2020, Pham et al., 2019; Ryan, 2016; Branch et al., 2013) identified approximately over the last ten years (D'Cruz et al., 2021). Furthermore, its pervasiveness spans all countries, industries, and sectors, affecting individuals across job positions and educational levels (Giorgi et al., 2015; Glambek et al., 2014; Samnani, 2013; Harvey et al., 2009). Therefore, no organization can claim it is a zero bully (Einarsen & Hoel, 2020).

The outcome of the present study stresses that when there is an aim to be a successful organization, be it a situation in a highly abiding to high power distance culture or low; organizations condone workplace bullying, which is prevailed among MNC HRSSC. This study's results will contribute to Malaysia's current inadequately reported workplace bullying prevalence statistics to recognize its detrimental effects on individuals and organizations

(Chan et al., 2019; Yusop et al., 2014), particularly for MNC HRSSC.

### *5.2 Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict Experience Level*

In response to the second research objective, the descriptive statistical analysis reported that employees are experiencing a high level of role ambiguity and conflict in MNC HRSSC. These findings are expected based on the nature, structure, and ultimate objective of MNC HRSSC thriving to stay competitive, reduce overhead costs through restructuring, continuous process improvements, system innovations, reduce workforce, and impose employees to multitask (Marciniak & Koval, 2016; Knol & Sol, 2011). These conditions warrant employees to experience role conflict, confusion (Balducci et al., 2018), and role ambiguity (Ahmad et al., 2021). The results suggest that employees' are unclear of the instructions and expectations of their superior, have insufficient job-related guidance and clearly defined job descriptions and objectives, creating situations of uncertainty or predictability regarding the assigned roles, causing stress and frustration. The study revelation is in line with the past study findings claiming that employees who lack clarity of job due to poor communication on to training individuals on their assigned role and the failure to make clear work responsibilities lead to role ambiguity (Reknes et al., 2019, Samnani & Singh, 2016). The findings also support the previous research postulating that employees encounter role clashes with the demands of other role work functions, obstructing them from effectively fulfilling either role, causing role conflict (Reknes et al., 2019; Varpio et al., 2018). In addition, other studies are reporting similar results justifying that superiors tend to use unethical and incivility behaviours to counteract the organizations' best interest, leaving the adverse consequences affecting the employees' well-being (Tepper et al., 2017; Marciniak & Koval, 2016; Krasikova et al., 2013). These conditions force them to be overworked by multitasking, supporting different countries' HR tasks with inadequate resources or materials, requiring different expertise, guidance, and knowledge to complete the assignment, and affecting time management to work on other equally important tasks.

Therefore, with the descriptive results confirming the high prevalence of workplace bullying, the high-level experience of role ambiguity, and role conflict, the study extends to analyze if the two role stressors (role ambiguity and role conflict) are antecedents to workplace bullying in MNC HRSSC.

### *5.3 Hypothesis Testing*

#### *5.3.1 Relationship between Role Ambiguity and Workplace Bullying (H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>)*

*Hypothesis 1:* Role ambiguity positively and significantly influences workplace bullying among employees in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia.

*Hypothesis 2:* Role conflict positively and significantly influences workplace bullying among employees in MNC HRSSC in Malaysia.

The findings of the third research objective comprising two hypotheses showed that role ambiguity and role conflict are significantly linear in predicting the occurrence of workplace bullying, which is empirically aligned and backed by previous studies, which consensually



reported that RA and RC are positive and significantly correlated to WB (Reknes et al., 2019; Van Den Brande et al., 2017; Van Den Brande et al., 2020; Ballien & De-Witte, 2009; Reknes et al., 2014; Hauge et al., 2011). Employees who lack precision about their roles and responsibilities or face differing role demands will often be subjected to bullying behaviours (Reknes et al., 2019; Notelaers et al., 2010). MNC HRSSC aims to stay competitive globally and to be cost-effective by expanding the quality of services provided through innovation and improvisation to achieve more substantial organizational efficiencies (Knol & Sol, 2011). However, both unplanned processes often lead to restructuring departments and process deliverance, which involves workforce reduction, reorganizing tasks, and job functions, and creating conflict and confusion among employees (Balducci et al., 2018). This situation leads to employees' perception of job insecurity and doubts about their confidence level, which draws perpetrators who perceive the individual as unable to protect him or herself (Samnani & Singh, 2016; Einarsen et al., 2011; Notelaers et al., 2010). In such situations, team members or managers will take advantage of the employee's uncertainty of their role, translating it into bullying acts (Notelaers et al., 2010), which closely relates to the work environment in HRSSC. Different methodological studies consistently reported that role ambiguity and role conflict have a positive and significant relationship with workplace bullying, be it a cross-sectional study conducted for three years (Van Den Brande et al., 2017; Van Den Brande et al., 2020; Notelaers et al., 2010), a longitudinal study (Reknes et al., 2014; Balducci et al., 2012) or a meta-analysis and systematic review (Van Den Brande et al., 2016).

Theoretically, the predictive effects of role ambiguity and role conflict and workplace bullying are justified by General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992), asserting that the victims who experience these role stressors may cause the exposure to bullying acts because it depletes employees' energies, initiating strain on the form of work-stress and become susceptible to bullying action (Hinduja, 2007; Agnew, 1992). This strain results when employees experience a negative affective state or stress, doubting the appointed role's fairness and losing their expertise's confidence leading to job insecurity. As a result, employees will show less commitment to the organization and tends to engage in incivility behaviour or allow themselves to be bullied. Applying this underpinning theory validates the empirical testing of the research outcomes to help researchers, practitioners, and organizations better understand the severity of the phenomenon and its consequences on employees' behaviour and behavioural intention.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study outcomes for the first research objective indicated that workplace bullying is highly prevalent among MNC HRSSCs in Malaysia, reporting that employees are bullied daily and weekly and exposed to at least one harmful act. In line with the previous studies confirming that the phenomenon is widespread in public and private sectors, the present study concludes the same among MNC HRSSCs. Furthermore, the findings show that despite the combination of Western management that practices individualistic culture and emphasizes zero-tolerance on workplace bullying, operating in Eastern countries that believe in long-term relationships and more practising collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1973) are prone to the

phenomenon. The logical conclusion is that workplace bullying is indisputable and severe across all sectors worldwide, especially when organizations ultimately strive for profit-making. The findings of the second objective also attested that employees face a high experience level of role ambiguity and conflict. The results are commensurate with MNC HRSSC's business, work structure, and quest for competitive advantage through consistent venturing into cost savings while increasing productivity at all costs.

Consequently, the motive is embedded in organizational strategy assigning employees to support several countries simultaneously, without specific, organized goals and objectives, with unclear work expectations, causing deliverance priorities confusion and forcing employees to multitask in areas non-expertise. Thus, giving rise to the role stressors (role ambiguity and role conflict) experienced among the employees in MNC HRSSCs in response to the third objective of this study. The study justifies that employees opt to bully subordinates when they face increased disagreement, frustration, and strain due to inadequate resources, materials, and knowledge to execute or complete their assigned tasks. Furthermore, the study has proven the explanatory force of the underpinning, i.e. General Strain Theory (GST) (Agnew, 1992), substantiating the positive & significant relationship between the role stressors (role ambiguity and role conflict) and workplace bullying. With this, the hypotheses are validated, confirming that role ambiguity and role conflict are significant predictors of workplace bullying.

## **6. Implications of the Study**

### *6.1 Implication of Theory*

The study results further support empirical validation of the contention that workplace bullying is prevalent worldwide, not limited to public or private organizations within a country but also among organizations like MNCs that combine management from collectivist and individualistic cultures countries with different severity acceptance of workplace bullying. Furthermore, this study contributes to Malaysia's limited workplace bullying prevalence report to facilitate future research. Secondly, the study has strengthened and expanded the knowledge repository of the existing depersonalized or organizational bullying conceptual model by validating role ambiguity and role conflict as potent organizational antecedents to workplace bullying in MNC HRSSC. Besides, the study promotes the body of organizational studies by creating awareness of the severe consequences of disregarding role ambiguity and role conflict, leading to workplace bullying, and the significance of addressing these role stressors to ascertain a healthy work environment. Finally, the finding is consistent with General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) explains that employees who experience role ambiguity and role conflict trigger exposure to bullying because their situation exhausts their energy, causing strain on work stress to become vulnerable to workplace bullying.

### *6.2 Implication of Practice*

The study's findings emphasize the criticality of introducing appropriate workplace bullying management, which to date lacks effective interventions (Ametz et al., 2019). However, some study suggests that the workplace's prevalence could positively influence country-level legal

context by identifying stringent policies and compulsory practices (Dhanani et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it is equally crucial that organizations deal with the phenomenon with appropriate measures and actions, with strict and specific policies adherence and complaint procedures (Burr & Wyatt, 2021) with a practical and fair escalation process to relieve stress and strain to protect employees' well-being. Furthermore, MNC HRSSC integrates two countries adopting cultures that perceive workplace bullying severity differently. Therefore, it is imperative for Global Business Services, MNCs, and HRSSC to agree on developing comprehensive policies and preventive interventions covering all types of workplace bullying. The study also proposes that local authorities, the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR), and Malaysian Employee Federations (MEF) introduce a well-explained & broadly defined workplace bullying act, not only for foreign investment organizations but also for other local organizations to use as a base to develop policies and procedures to manage the phenomenon. Furthermore, the effort is prolonged due to aligning with the Global Plan of Action (2015-2025), initiated by the World Health Organization (WHO), aiming to shield and promote health in the workplace by preventing and controlling psychosocial risks.

Secondly, the other findings brought attention to the fact that employees in MNC HRSSC experience a high level of role ambiguity and role conflict. Therefore, the study's findings emphasize crucial practical relevance for HRD to revisit job design and description and re-engineer the work processes to create openness, setting work, role, responsibilities and expectations. In addition, a clear organizational and reporting structure will help employees avert confusion about appointed roles while excelling in work performance, increasing efficiency and productivity. Finally, the study concluded that role ambiguity and role conflict positively correlate with workplace bullying. A compelling message from this study is that unpredictable and unfair treatment is a far more important predictor of bullying. The results demonstrate the importance of HRD awareness of how employees experiencing role ambiguity and role conflict are vulnerable to bullying. The failure to manage work organizations for employees will potentially lead to workplace bullying; therefore, the study provides a practical value for HRD professionals and MNC policymakers to grasp and implement anti-bullying policies, bullying awareness programs, and sustained practices. These efforts will curtail the negative consequences of a positive and cooperative work environment, aiming for zero tolerance for workplace bullying. The unattended or unresolved issues might immediately affect employees but eventually impact the overall organizational performance in the long run. On this note, this study also urges Global Business Services, which manages MNC and HRSSC performance, to be interested to know the organizational issues at HRSSCs that require participation for effective joint decision-making with the process experts and management before implementing significant changes, e.g., restructuring, proposing KPI, and SLA.

## **7. Limitation & Future Research Prospects**

The present study also put forward the potential social desirability bias responses due to a study of adverse nature. First, the respondents might be untruthful by not admitting to being victimized, resulting in over-reporting desirable behaviour, and underreporting unfavourable. Thus, the different understanding and evasive answers can affect how they respond to the

questionnaire items that affect the research results. However, the present study tried to reduce this by emphasizing voluntary participation and convincing the anonymity of the participant's responses. Secondly, the data were collected from MNC HRSSC, limiting the study's generalizability of the research findings to other MNC shared service centres due to the nature of job functions which are more expertise oriented. Therefore, the present study suggests that further investigations should expand the scope to other Multinational Corporations and Shared Service Centers to allow broader generalizations of the findings while contributing to the limited workplace bullying prevalence report among MNCs in Malaysia. Thirdly, the study also finds the usage of NAQ-R, developed mainly to identify if the respondents have experienced a series of negative behaviours and characteristics in the context of western perspective and culture. Almost all studies on workplace bullying worldwide, including in Asian countries, use this instrument; however, the suggested items might not directly relate to the Malaysian perspective and culture. Therefore, developing a questionnaire is necessary to accommodate Malaysian culture and perspective to draw on the actual severity of the situation.

Besides, this study revealed both role ambiguity and role conflict deemed critical work-related bullying factors to HRSSC setup. However, it is proposed that more investigations on other work-related factors such as role autonomy, job demands, workforce allocation, decision authority, and promotion prospects' relationship with workplace bullying among MNCs. In addition, these research findings will provide a comprehensive empirical-based explanation of factors contributing to workplace bullying to strengthen the body of knowledge of the phenomenon in Malaysia. Finally, applying a cross-sectional survey design to collect the data may limit causal inferences between the constructs investigated (Clusgston, 2000). Therefore, the study proposed a longitudinal study adapted to establish the cause and effect and the constructed relationship.

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