

LINKING SOCIAL SUPPORT, WORK ENGAGEMENT AND JOB PERFORMANCE IN NURSING

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to first, explore the differential effects of three forms of social support (perceived organizational support, perceived supervisory support, and perceived peer support) on nurses' job performance, and second, test the mediating role of work engagement in the social support-job performance relationship. Survey data was gathered from 639 staff nurses from nine private hospitals in Malaysia. Partial least squares technique was used to test the research hypotheses. Results showed that of the three forms of social support, peer support alone has a direct and positive effect on job performance. Further, the results supported the role of work engagement as a mediator in the relationships between the three forms of social support and performance.

Keywords: Job performance; Work engagement; Perceived organizational support; Perceived supervisor support; Perceived peer support; Nurses

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Healthcare Scenario in Malaysia

The healthcare sector is one of the world's largest, costly and fastest-growing industry as it constitutes a substantial portion of a country's economy (Kocakulah & Austill, 2007). In Malaysia, the healthcare sector is categorized into two, namely the government healthcare system and the private healthcare system (Ujan, Abdullah, Haider & Suhaimi, 2017). The government healthcare services are tax-funded, subsidized and centrally administered by the Ministry of Health Malaysia (Kenny, Omar, Kanavathi & Madhavan, 2017). Meanwhile, the private sector's healthcare services are either paid out-of-pocket by the patients themselves, covered by their employers or paid through their personal health insurance scheme (Kenny et al., 2017). Over the years, Malaysia's healthcare delivery system has progresses considerably and currently provides a wide-ranging health services to its residents in an effective and efficient manner (Hassali, Alrasheedy, Ab Razak, Al-Tamimi, Saleem, Ul Haq, & Aljadhey, 2014). Given the prime role played by the healthcare sector in

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Malaysia, this sector has been identified as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) that deserves greater attention. This recognition undoubtedly demonstrates the Malaysian government's commitment in providing quality healthcare services to its citizens (PEMANDU, 2013). Services provided by the Ministry of Health Malaysia comprise illness prevention, health promotion, as well as curative and rehabilitative care (Shazali, Habidin, Ali, Khaidir, & Jamaludin, 2013). Despite the dominance of the public healthcare system, the provision of a well-integrated healthcare services requires the involvement of the private sector. In fact, the overall economic policy and lack of regulatory barriers offered a congenial environment for the rapid growth of the private healthcare sector in the 1980s and 1990s (Chee, 2010). For instance, in 1980, there were only 10 private hospitals, with private beds constituting 5.8% of the total number of acute hospital beds. By 2003, the total number of hospitals had grown to 128, and private beds constituted 26.7% of total acute hospital beds (Chee, 2008). During the last two decades after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the private healthcare sector continue to expand in tandem with the growth in private consumption of health services arising from an increase in the number of medical tourists (Chee, 2010).

1.2. The Importance of Social Support in Nursing

The importance of social support in our society is apparent by its role in our everyday life. Workers with multiple roles and numerous expectations seem to find refuge in one form of support or another through various individuals in their social networks. The healthcare sector, especially the nursing profession is known as a stressful profession (Schroeder & Worrall-Carter, 2002). Since stress is harmful to performance, a better understanding of social support which serves as a buffer to stress is highly valuable. This is more so for nurses who are required to exhibit performance at a desired level. Within the work environment, social support can be derived from other entities apart from the organization namely the supervisor and peers (Dawley, Andrews, & Bucklew, 2008; Simosi, 2012).

Nurses are important players in attaining quality care and positive patient outcomes (McHugh & Stimpfel, 2012). According to researchers (Dubois, D'Amor, Pomey, Girard, & Brault, 2013, Greenslade & Jimmieson, 2007), nurses constitute the largest workforce component in healthcare organizations. As such, their performance have a great influence on the quality of care and patient outcomes. In fact, Greenslade and Jimmieson (2007) affirmed that the performance of nurses is central in the provision of quality healthcare.

According to Rich, Lepine, and Crawford (2010), a majority of studies on job performance have focused on employees' selves particularly their attitudes which include job involvement, job satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation. The authors argued that despite the various streams of research on the subject, investments of cognitive, emotional, and physical energy as embodied in Kahn's (1990) work engagement concept provides a more holistic manner and more comprehensive explanation for job performance. Kahn (1990) described engagement as an important motivational construct which refers to the harnessing of an employee's full self in terms of physical, cognitive, and emotional energies to work role performance. However, a significant and growing body of research is based on the work of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) who viewed work engagement as a motivational construct which refers to one's "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 72). According to Bakker & Demerouti (2008), engaged employees (1) experience pleasure, joy, and enthusiasm, (2)

enjoy good physical and psychological health, (3) exhibit higher job performance, (4) have greater ability to create job and personal resources, and (5) have the capability to transfer their engagement to others. To sum up, it can be argued that engaged employees possess high level of energy and they are eager to carry out their job responsibilities, which in turn, will lead to functional work outcomes such as superior performance. Research has found that work engagement is predictive of job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). In the nursing context, Bargagliotti (2012) asserted that work engagement is highly valuable due to its potential to elicit positive work behaviors that can create safe and effective patient care.

Previous studies (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009) have consistently demonstrated that job resources can cultivate work engagement. Examples of job resources include social support, autonomy, performance feedback, and opportunities to learn (Schaufeli et al., 2009). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), job resources refer to those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may: (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, (2) be functional for accomplishing work goals, or (3) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. In nursing, social support is regarded as an important form of job resource. For example, the availability of social support from colleagues will not only reduce strain by reducing the negative effects of occupational stressors (Lysaght et al., 2012) but also ensure that task will be completed successfully and work goals will be attained. Furthermore, social support from peers may also fulfill the individual's basic need such as the need for belongingness (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Hence, social support is likely to encourage work engagement through this motivational process. In addition, based on the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), when employees perceived support from either the organization, immediate supervisors, and co-workers are high, which reflects a high level of appreciation on the contributions and caring that each of these entities have towards the later, employees may feel compelled to reciprocate through functional work attitudes (for instance, greater work engagement) and behaviors (such as improved job performance). A review of the literature indicates that perceptions of social support positively affect engagement (Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2005; Saks, 2006). Despite the afore-mentioned evidences showing the existence of relationships between social support, work engagement, and job performance, research into the specific types of support, engagement, and performance are limited and more so within the nursing environment.

In Malaysia, interest has been escalating on issues related to social support, work engagement and job performance of nurses in the healthcare sector due to the growing concern on the provision of quality healthcare services. This is further intensified by the realization of the economic potential of medical tourism. The inauguration of the Economic Transformation Program (ETP) with special emphasis on medical tourism as a segment of the healthcare NKEA, was intended to expedite the growth of the trade. According to PEMANDU (2010), medical tourism is targeted to generate MYR 9.6 billion in revenue and MYR 4.3 billion in gross national income and to create 5,300 job opportunities for medical professionals by 2020. However, excellent healthcare service quality at more affordable prices by hospitals especially the private ones that probably serve as key determinants that attract international patients to seek for treatment in developing countries (Herrick, 2007). In fact, some empirical studies in Malaysia (Haque, Sarwar, Yasmin, & Anwar, 2012; Hee, Kamaludin & Ping, 2016; Manaf, Hussin, Kassim, Alavi, & Dahari, 2015) provided evidences on the importance of quality medical services in influencing patients' satisfaction and subsequently their retention. In addition, Sarwar (2013) stressed the need for healthcare professionals to be able to deliver high quality healthcare services in order to attract more foreign

patients. Since patients were able to discern the performance in caring and curing provided by the healthcare service providers as discovered by Lam (1997) and given that nurses provide round-the-clock service to patients (Wright, 2007), the need for nurses to exhibit desirable workplace attitudes (such as work engagement) and behaviors (such as job performance) becomes more acute. Hence, in view of the fact that the future success of medical tourism is dependent upon the ability of nurses to adopt a positive work attitude and deliver superior performance to their patients, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of the three types of social support (perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support, and perceived peer support) on nurses' job performance within the private healthcare sector in Malaysia. In addition, work engagement is positioned as the mediating mechanism linking various forms of social support and job performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Job Performance

Job performance refers to the behaviors that are relevant to the organizational goals and under the control of the individual employees (Ellinger et al., 2008). Murphy (1989) defined job performance as a function of the individual's performance of specific tasks that encompasses standard job descriptions. The core of job performance depends on the demands of the job, goals and the missions of the organization as well as the beliefs of the organization about which behavior are mostly valued (Befort & Hatstrup, 2003). Sullivan and Decker (2009) asserted that performance-related behavior is directly associated with job tasks that need to be accomplished in order to achieve the objectives of an employee's job. In other words, job performance relates to performance of its associated tasks. This conceptualization of performance is consistent with Borman and Motowidlo's (1993) definition of task performance which refers to activities that are formally recognized as part of the job and that contribute to the organization's technical core. On the basis of these ideas, it can be surmised that job performance includes task-related behaviors that are under the control of the individual. For the purpose of the current study, job performance relates to task performance.

In nursing, several scholars have examined the performance of nurses. For instance, AbuAlrub (2004) in her study using web-based survey of 303 staff nurses who hailed from the United States, Britain, Canada and other countries discovered that perceived social support from coworkers enhanced job performance and reduced job stress. Mrayyan and Al-Faouri (2008) examined the relationship between nurses' career commitment and job performance. Based on a sample of 640 Jordanian nurses, the researchers found that nurses' career commitment had a positive correlation with job performance. Amarneh, Al-Rub and Al-Rub (2009) in their study on 365 Jordanian nurses found that coworker support has a positive effect on job performance. The findings by Greenslade and Jimmieson (2011) using a sample of 156 nurses in Australia revealed that service climate affect nurses' effort for task performance. In turn, the effort that they exerted lead to greater task performance. In their study, task performance was a significant predictor of patient satisfaction. In his exploratory study on 831 nurses in Turkey, Top (2013) found that of the 28 organizational factors that may potentially affect job performance, workload emerged as most influential. Sharma and Dhar (2016) examined the effects of organizational support, procedural justice, and burnout on job performance and their subsequent impact on job performance among 349 nursing staff in

India. Their results provided support for the hypothesized model whereby affective commitment mediated the relationships between the three independent variables and performance. Despite these investigations which focuses on samples from Australia, Jordan, Turkey, India, and other Western countries, little is known about the subject among Malaysian nurses.

2.2. Social Support

Social support refers to the type of assistance that individuals receive or expect to receive from those who come into contact with them in any way (Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulus, 2009). Based on the conceptualization of job resources by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), social support is a form of job resources. In the workplace, support may be derived from several sources, notably the organization itself, supervisors, coworkers, and key players outside the workplace, such as family and friends (Lysaght & Larmout-Trode, 2008). Apart from the organization, other entities contributing to social support that have been studied are the supervisor and peers (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Simosi, 2012). As suggested by researchers (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Simosi, 2012), given that organizational support has been often examined as a broad construct that encompasses various support sources, there is a need to further distinguish among these sources. Hence, by simultaneously investigating the effects of these three sources of support, one will have a better understanding of how each form of social support can actually influence employees' attitudes and behaviors. Next, a brief conceptualization of the constructs and a review of the literature on the direct relationships between the three types of support and the study variables (ie. task performance and work engagement) are provided. Following this, a review of the literature on the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between the three forms of social support and performance is presented.

2.3. Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and Job Performance

Perceived organizational support (POS) reflects employees "general belief that their work organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 68). Beliefs about the organization's support acts as assurances that help will come from the organization whenever it is needed for the employees to be able to carry out their jobs effectively (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This signal may subsequently trigger employees to reciprocate with positive job attitudes and behaviors. In addition, Stamper and Johlke (2003) asserted that organizations that care about their employees' welfare are more likely to reduce unnecessary work complications for their workers such as conflicting job requirements. As such, these organizations are more inclined to specify and clarify work assignments through various organizational policies and practices. Under such conditions, employees' level of stress would be reduced leading to better performance.

Empirical findings have shown that POS was positively related to task performance (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008; Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Miao, 2011), citizenship behaviors (Miao, 2011), job satisfaction (Miao, 2011), affective commitment (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Stamper and Johlke (2003) reported that POS promotes clarity, thus allowing employees to focus on their task performance. The results obtained from a more recent meta-analysis by Ahmed and Nawaz (2015) indicate that POS has a strong and positive relationships with employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In the

nursing context, a recent study by Sharma and Dhar (2016) demonstrated that POS has a positive relationship with affective commitment. Based on the preceding information, it is posited that:

H1: Perceived organizational support (POS) will be positively related to job performance.

2.4. Perceived Supervisory Support (PSS) and Job Performance

Perceived supervisory support (PSS) is defined as the degree to which employees' form impressions that their superiors care about their well-being, value their contributions, and are generally supportive (Eisenberger et al., 2002). In the workplace, immediate supervisors are the ones who have direct and frequent interactions with employees. Hence, the behaviors of supervisors are indispensable determinants of employee attitudes (Yadav & Rangnekar, 2015). According to Bhanthumnavian (2003), supervisory support in the workplace include emotional support (such as showing empathy, acceptance and care), informative support (e.g., giving feedback or guidance in work), and material support (e.g., preparing budget, aids, resources and tangible assistance that are related to work to improve the subordinate's motivation, performance and effectiveness). These supportive actions by the supervisor are expected to induce strong and positive feelings of employees' well-being and have a favorable impact on their work attitudes (Ng & Sorensen, 2008).

Employees who have a high perception of supervisory support are capable of performing according to the organization's expectations and producing performance beyond job execution (Hochwarter et al., 2003). The findings by Gagnon and Michael (2004) using a sample of 577 blue-collar workers attached to furniture manufacturers in North America revealed that PSS was positively related to self-rated performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and desirable work attitudes such as affective commitment, job satisfaction, trust, and intention to quit. In their study of 493 Egyptian managerial employees, El-Kot and Burke (2011) found that PSS has a positive influence on loyalty. In the field of nursing, Chu, Lee, and Hsu (2006) in their study of public health nurses in Taiwan discovered that social support from supervisor indirectly influenced citizenship behaviors through the mediating role of organizational commitment. A relatively recent study by Yadav and Rangnekar (2015) on a sample of 198 Indian business executives indicates that PSS promotes organizational citizenship behaviors through the mediating role of participative decision-making. Thus, there is sufficient empirical evidence to justify the following hypothesis that:

H2: Perceived supervisory support (PSS) will be positively related to job performance.

2.5. Perceived Peer Support (PPS) and Job Performance

Peer support relates to the extent to which employees believe their peers are willing to provide them with work-related aid to assist in performing their duties (Susskind, Kacmar & Borchgrevink, 2003). A more recent definition was proposed by Menguc and Boichuk (2012) where perceived peer support (PPS) alludes to the degree to which the person's peers are helpful, can be relied upon in times of need, and are receptive to work-related problems. Peers can provide social support by acting as friends and giving advice about stressful work conditions. Rousseau et al. (2009) states that PPS not only encompasses the provision of task-related information and helping but socio-emotional support such as providing care, empathy, and love.

In terms of empirical evidence, AbuAlRub (2004) reported that PPS enhanced nurses' job performance and lowered their job stress level. Drawing from a sample of 677 service-sector employees in the United States, Basford and Offermann (2012) found proof for the hypotheses that peer support independently increase employee motivation and intent to stay above and beyond support derived from immediate supervisor and senior managers. Ghosh, Rai, Singh, and Ragini (2016) using a sample of 218 employees of public sector banks in India also discovered that PPS was able to predict work engagement. Hence, our next hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Perceived peer support (PPS) will be positively related to job performance.

2.6. Relationship between Social Support and Work Engagement

According to the job demands and resources model (hereafter labeled as JD-R), job resources can be either intrinsically motivating by fostering personal learning and growth or extrinsically motivating by facilitating goal accomplishment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). As mentioned earlier, job resources may serve as an important driver of work engagement due to its intrinsically and/or extrinsically motivational nature. Studies have recognized that job resources including social support promote work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Further, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that when employees feel supported by their organization, supervisors, or peers, they tend to reciprocate through feeling of engagement in their work.

2.7. Perceived Organizational Support and Work Engagement

Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011) proposed that perceived organizational support (POS) has a positive influence on work engagement by reinforcing employees' intrinsic interest in their tasks. Employees with high POS have positive expectations regarding their organization's possible reaction to their contributions and mistakes. Thus, they have less reason to fear incurring damaging consequences for their self-images, statuses, or careers as a result of investing themselves fully into their work roles (Edmondson, 1999). This reasoning is consistent with research showing positive relationships between perceptions of numerous forms of support in an organization and conceptualizations of engagement (Bakker et al., 2005; Saks, 2006).

Some studies provided empirical evidence on the positive relationship between POS and employees' work engagement. For example, Kinnunen, Feldt and Makikangas (2008) in their study discovered the existence of significant positive correlations between POS and the three-dimensional construct of work engagement. In a study conducted in Romania, Sulea et al. (2012) found that POS was positively related to work engagement. In addition, Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014) showed that POS fostered work engagement among Belgian employees. Hence, in the present study, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Perceived organizational support (POS) will be positively related to work engagement.

2.8. Perceived Supervisory Support and Work Engagement

Supervisor support is expected to be an essential work-related resource, as it aids an employee's accomplishment of his/her work goals and, at the same time, buffer the pressure and stress of job

demands, which, in turn, lead to greater work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Several studies have highlighted the importance of supervisor support on work engagement. For instance, a research done by Demerouti et al. (2001) found that supervisory support predicted work engagement. Similarly, Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006) in their study on a sample of 2038 Finnish teachers discovered that teachers who could draw on resources such as supervisory support were more engaged in their work. Bakker et al. (2007) in their study of 805 teachers in Finland also reported that supervisor support was significantly related to the three dimensions of work engagement (i.e. vigor, dedication and absorption). In a study conducted among middle managers and executives of a Dutch telecom company, a positive relationship emerged between supervisor support and the three-dimensional construct of work engagement (Schaufeli, Taris & Van Rhenen, 2008). Within the Malaysian context, a study by Othman and Nasurdin (2013) using data collected from 402 staff nurses attached to public hospitals revealed that supervisor support has a positive impact on work engagement. Hence, the following hypothesis is forwarded:

H5: Perceived supervisory support (PSS) will be positively related to work engagement.

2.9. Perceived Peer Support and Work Engagement

As asserted by Bakker and Demerouti (2007, 2008), job resources including coworker support, have motivational potential and should enhance employees' feelings of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Specifically, support from peers not only eases employees' goal realization but provide emotional support as well, which will trigger a motivational process through which employees may feel energetic, dedicated, and engrossed in their work. In a cross-sectional study undertaken by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), peer support was found to be positively related to work engagement dimensions of vigor and dedication. Likewise, another study revealed that relationship among peers not only causes them to respond similarly to their shared work environment, but also influences their experience of engagement (Bakker, Van Emmerik, & Euwema, 2006). Xanthopoulou et al. (2008) also reported that peers' support enhanced flights attendants' feelings of work engagement. Hence, it is proposed that:

H6: Perceived peer support (PPS) will be positively related to work engagement.

2.10. Work Engagement and Job Performance

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by three dimensions, explicitly vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor refers to having high energy levels, resilience regarding work activities, investing effort in one's work and persistence in difficult circumstances. Dedication includes a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. Finally, absorption is characterized by full concentration on and engrossment in one's work, and finding it difficult to detach oneself from work. According to Bakker (2009), four reasons may account for why engaged employees perform better than non-engaged employees. First, employees who are engaged in their work would experience positive emotions such as joy and enthusiasm and this may explain why they are more productive. Second, engaged employees would have more physical resources, hence making them healthier. Therefore, they would be able to work better by devoting their resources, energy and skills to their job. Third, engaged employees are more productive because they have the ability to create and mobilize their own resources. Fourth, engaged employees will transfer their engagement

to their peers, leading to better performance for the whole team. Several studies have shown that work engagement resulted in elevated job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Salanova, Agut & Peiro, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Evidence also indicated that employees who are engaged in their job perform better than those who are not engaged while working (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Moreover, engaged employees are known to invest their energy to their work roles which means that they work with greater intensity and are more focused on their responsibilities, thereby, resulting in enhanced performance (Rich et al., 2010). From the preceding discussion, it is posited that:

H7: Work engagement will be positively related to job performance.

2.11. The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Relationship Between Social Support and Job Performance

Since social support which can emanate from either the organization, supervisor or peers is able to stimulate work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2008), and given that work engagement can lead to functional work behaviors such as higher job performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), it would be reasonable to explore work engagement as the mediator in the relationship between the three forms of social support (POS, PSS and PPS) and job performance.

2.12. The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Relationship Between POS and Job Performance

Based on the JD-R model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), POS which represents a form of social support, can act as either an intrinsic motivator by fostering personal learning and growth or extrinsic motivator by aiding goal achievement. High POS suggests that employees believe the organization as capable of meeting their socioemotional needs (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In such situation, employees are likely to become motivated either by becoming more engaged in their work or through elevated task performance. This line of reasoning is consistent with that of Edmondson (1999) who stated that employees who perceive that they are supported by their organization will have positive and secured expectations concerning their contributions, leading them to invest themselves in their work roles, which in turn, lead to increased performance. As previously discussed, there has been some empirical support on POS as a predictor of work engagement (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2014; Kinnunen et al., 2008; Sulea et al., 2012) as well as task performance (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Miao, 2011). Hence, our next hypothesis states that:

H8: Perceived organizational support will be positively related to job performance through the mediating role of work engagement.

2.13. The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Relationship Between PSS and Job Performance

Supervisors who are judged to be supportive have been found to affect employees' work outcomes. PSS assists employees in accomplishing their work goals and, at the same time, buffer the negative effects of job stress, which, in turn, lead to desirable work attitudes (such as greater work engagement and higher job performance). As mentioned above, research has shown that

employees' perception of their supervisors' support for them induces them to become engaged in their work (Bakker et al., 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Hakanen et al., 2006; Othman & Nasuridin, 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2008) and performed better in their jobs (Gagnon & Michael, 2004; Hochwarter et al., 2003; Yadav & Rangnekar, 2015). Since work engagement is an affective-motivational construct (Salanova et al., 2005), it is reasonable to assume that work engagement may mediate the PSS-job performance relationship. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered.

H9: Perceived supervisory support will be positively related to job performance through the mediating role of work engagement.

2.14. The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Relationship Between PPS and Job Performance

Rousseau et al. (2009) asserted that PPS not only includes the provision of task-related information and assistance but socio-emotional support such as providing care, empathy, and love as well. Hence, in line with Coetzer and Rothmann (2007), support from peers increases an individual's likelihood of attaining work goals, thereby motivating them to become more engrossed in their work activities, which in turn, lead to greater success in performing their daily tasks. As remarked earlier, there is some empirical evidence in the literature suggesting that PPS can be regarded as a predictor of work engagement (Bakker et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou et al. 2008) and job performance (AbuAlRub, 2004; Basford & Offermann, 2012; Ghosh et al., 2016). Based on research grounded on the JD-R model, as a motivational construct, it is plausible for work engagement to mediate the PPS-job performance linkage. Hence, our final hypothesis is:

H10: Perceived peer support will be positively related to job performance through the mediating role of work engagement.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Data Collection Procedure

Private hospitals with more than 100 beds located in Peninsular Malaysia were chosen as the population of this study. A total of 44 private hospitals were identified from the website (APHM, 2016). Emails were sent to the Human Resource Department of these hospitals to seek their involvement. After several follow-ups, only 9 hospitals agreed to participate in our survey. The locations of these nine hospitals are as follows: Penang (3 hospitals), Kedah (2 hospitals), Melaka (3 hospitals) and Kuala Lumpur (1 hospital). In total, 770 questionnaires were distributed in proportion to the number of staff nurses at each hospital. Questionnaires were given to the matron of each hospital, who is responsible in the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. A period of 2 weeks was given to answer the questionnaire. In all, 639 useable questionnaires were collected and subsequently analyzed.

3.2. Measures and Analysis

Perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisory support (PSS), and perceived peer support (PPS) were measured using 4 items each adapted from Rhoades et al. (2001). The items

for POS are “This hospital really cares about my well-being”, “This hospital strongly considers my goals and values”, “This hospital shows high concern for me” and “This hospital really cares about my opinions”. PSS and PPS was measured with the same items with only slight amendments where the word “This hospital” was changed to “My supervisor” for PSS and “My peer” for PPS. Meanwhile, work engagement was measured using 9 items taken from Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova’s (2006) shortened Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. Some sampled items include “At my work, I feel like I am bursting with energy”, “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous” and “When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work”. The dependent variable, job performance (in the form of task performance) was measured using 7 items taken from Williams and Anderson (1991). Some sampled items include “I always adequately complete assigned duties”, “I fulfil the responsibilities specified in my job description”, and “I perform tasks that are expected of me”. The response format was based on a five-point Likert Scale (“1” = “strongly disagree” to “5” = “strongly agree”).

All hypotheses were tested with Partial Least Squares (PLS) software developed by Ringle, Wende, and Will (2005). Evaluation of the PLS model entails: (1) the measurement model, and (2) the structural model (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The measurement model examines the relations between the observed variables and latent variables. The measurement model is tested on its reliability (item reliability and internal consistency) and validity (convergent validity and discriminant validity). The structural model specifies the relationship between latent variables using the bootstrapping approach and it is gauged based on the significance of the path coefficients and R^2 measures.

4. RESULTS

4.1. *Sample Profile*

The sample were predominantly females (91%). Of those who completed the survey, 44.5% were Chinese, followed by Malays (36.7%), Indians (12.9%), and “others” (5%). More than half of the sampled respondents were single (58.3%). Regarding education, a majority of them (82.3%) were diploma holders. Respondents age ranged from 21 to 65 years with an average of 29.5 years ($SD = 7.4$). In addition, the average job tenure and organizational tenure for the sample were 4.9 years ($SD = 4.8$) and 5.3 years ($SD = 5.1$) respectively. The mean scores for the study variables are as follows: 2.91 for POS ($SD=0.82$), 3.19 for PSS ($SD=0.82$), 3.50 for PPS ($SD=0.72$), 3.51 for work engagement, ($SD=0.57$), and 3.85 for task performance ($SD=0.57$).

4.2. *Measurement Model Results*

Factor loadings of each item, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR) were assessed for each construct. Items with loadings less than 0.5 were deleted to ensure the AVE values achieve at least 0.5 and CR values meet the minimum cut-off point at 0.7 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Based on this rule, one item of work engagement (WE1) with the value of 0.432 was deleted. Consequently, all latent constructs exhibited in this study revealed adequate convergent validity that ranges from 0.552 to 0.835 (see Table 1). Work engagement has the lowest correlation among indicators (AVE=0.552), while perceived peer support has the highest correlation among indicators (AVE=0.835). As exhibited in Table 1, the latent construct ranges from 0.907 to 0.953. This finding which exceeds Hair et al.’s (2010) 0.7 threshold value showed

significant homogeneity. Thus, it can be assumed that all indicators within the latent construct measures the same latent construct.

Table 1: Items Loadings, Composite Reliability and the Average Variance Extracted for the Measurement Model

| Construct | Items | Loadings | AVE | CR |
|---|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|
| Job Performance | JP1 | 0.768 | 0.666 | 0.933 |
| | JP2 | 0.838 | | |
| | JP3 | 0.849 | | |
| | JP4 | 0.850 | | |
| | JP5 | 0.674 | | |
| | JP6 | 0.850 | | |
| | JP7 | 0.867 | | |
| Perceived Organizational Support | POS1 | 0.870 | 0.809 | 0.944 |
| | POS2 | 0.892 | | |
| | POS3 | 0.891 | | |
| | POS4 | 0.879 | | |
| Perceived Supervisory Support | PSS1 | 0.873 | 0.831 | 0.951 |
| | PSS2 | 0.937 | | |
| | PSS3 | 0.936 | | |
| | PSS4 | 0.907 | | |
| Perceived Peer Support | PPS1 | 0.892 | 0.835 | 0.953 |
| | PPS2 | 0.914 | | |
| | PPS3 | 0.925 | | |
| | PPS4 | 0.913 | | |
| Work Engagement | WE2 | 0.676 | 0.552 | 0.907 |
| | WE3 | 0.660 | | |
| | WE4 | 0.773 | | |
| | WE5 | 0.794 | | |
| | WE6 | 0.748 | | |
| | WE7 | 0.770 | | |
| | WE8 | 0.810 | | |
| | WE9 | 0.669 | | |

Note: POS denotes Perceived Organizational Support; PSS denotes Perceived Supervisory Support, PPS denotes Perceived Peer Support.

Subsequently, the measurement model is tested on its discriminant validity. The discriminant validity of the measures was assessed by observing the correlation between indicators associated in a latent construct and the inter-correlation between latent constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). According to Compeau, Higgins, and Huff (1999), items should load higher on their own constructs instead of others. In addition, following Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square root of AVE must be larger than the correlation between latent construct. Our results as portrayed in Table 2 revealed that the square root of the AVE of the latent variable exceeded the correlations of other constructs.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity of Constructs

| | Job Performance | Perceived Organizational Support | Perceived Peer Support | Perceived Supervisory Support | Work Engagement |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Job Performance | 0.816 | | | | |
| POS | 0.163 | 0.899 | | | |
| PPS | 0.289 | 0.376 | 0.911 | | |
| PSS | 0.165 | 0.678 | 0.458 | 0.914 | |
| Work Engagement | 0.403 | 0.358 | 0.331 | 0.381 | 0.743 |

Note: Diagonals represent the square root of the average variance extracted while the other entries represent the correlations. POS denotes Perceived Organizational Support; PPS denotes Perceived Peer Support; PSS denotes Perceived Supervisory Support.

Table 3 presents the cross-loadings for each item. The results indicate that all items signal sufficient convergent and discriminant validity as the loading of each indicator is greater than all of its cross-loadings (Chin, 1998). Therefore, the measurement model is said to demonstrate adequate discriminant validity.

Table 3: Loadings and Cross Loadings for the Measurement Model

| | Job Performance | Perceived Organizational Support | Perceived Peer Support | Perceived Supervisory Support | Work Engagement |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Job_Performance1 | 0.766 | 0.062 | 0.171 | 0.072 | 0.247 |
| Job_Performance2 | 0.837 | 0.133 | 0.185 | 0.119 | 0.297 |
| Job_Performance3 | 0.849 | 0.115 | 0.270 | 0.130 | 0.311 |
| Job_Performance4 | 0.850 | 0.159 | 0.257 | 0.184 | 0.341 |
| Job_Performance5 | 0.676 | 0.187 | 0.223 | 0.176 | 0.308 |
| Job_Performance6 | 0.851 | 0.129 | 0.265 | 0.147 | 0.373 |
| Job_Performance7 | 0.867 | 0.133 | 0.252 | 0.104 | 0.390 |
| POS1 | 0.162 | 0.887 | 0.323 | 0.571 | 0.288 |
| POS2 | 0.165 | 0.903 | 0.373 | 0.580 | 0.327 |
| POS3 | 0.157 | 0.924 | 0.346 | 0.640 | 0.365 |
| POS4 | 0.095 | 0.882 | 0.303 | 0.651 | 0.300 |
| PPS1 | 0.290 | 0.327 | 0.891 | 0.401 | 0.301 |
| PPS2 | 0.236 | 0.376 | 0.915 | 0.448 | 0.309 |
| PPS3 | 0.266 | 0.330 | 0.926 | 0.412 | 0.297 |
| PPS4 | 0.258 | 0.337 | 0.914 | 0.409 | 0.299 |
| PSS1 | 0.126 | 0.610 | 0.394 | 0.874 | 0.292 |
| PSS2 | 0.144 | 0.646 | 0.444 | 0.937 | 0.383 |
| PSS3 | 0.158 | 0.610 | 0.431 | 0.936 | 0.364 |
| PSS4 | 0.172 | 0.613 | 0.402 | 0.905 | 0.343 |

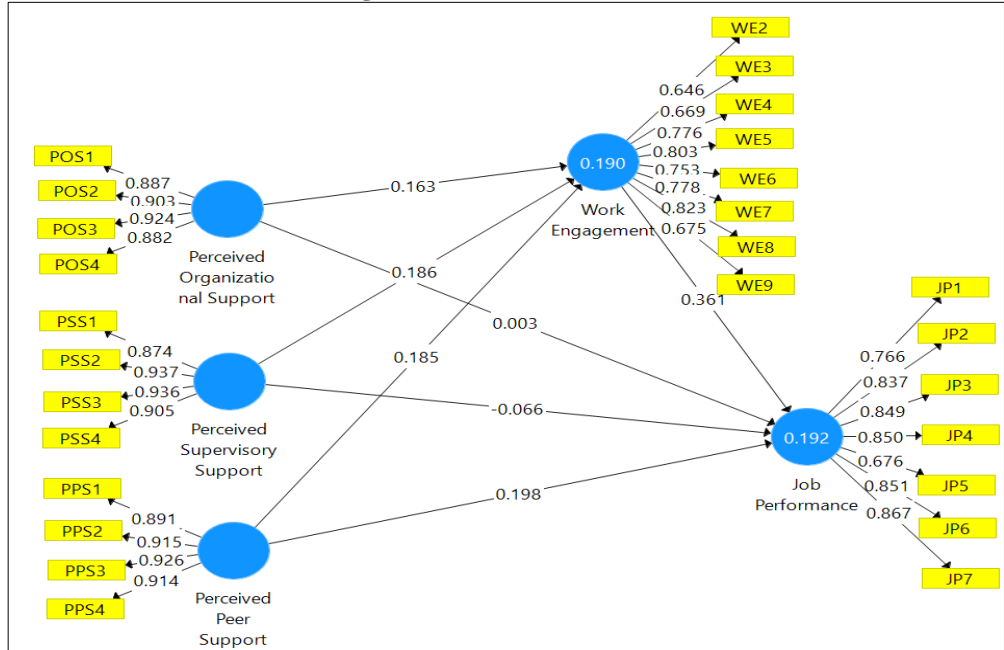
| | | | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Work Engagement2 | 0.342 | 0.215 | 0.263 | 0.184 | 0.646 |
| Work Engagement3 | 0.170 | 0.410 | 0.163 | 0.374 | 0.669 |
| Work Engagement4 | 0.314 | 0.279 | 0.279 | 0.314 | 0.776 |
| Work Engagement5 | 0.329 | 0.213 | 0.273 | 0.306 | 0.803 |
| Work Engagement6 | 0.352 | 0.220 | 0.297 | 0.281 | 0.753 |
| Work Engagement7 | 0.302 | 0.272 | 0.232 | 0.257 | 0.778 |
| Work Engagement8 | 0.294 | 0.275 | 0.242 | 0.318 | 0.823 |
| Work Engagement9 | 0.272 | 0.267 | 0.199 | 0.229 | 0.675 |

Note: POS denotes Perceived Organizational Support; PSS denotes Perceived Peer Support; PSS denotes Perceived Supervisory Support.

4.3. Structural Model Results

A bootstrapping analysis of 5000 subsamples was undertaken to test the structural model in order to examine the path coefficients for direct and indirect effects. The results of bootstrapping were presented in Table 4 and Table 5. Figure 1 illustrates the research model conceptualized in this study. As shown, the R² values for job performance and work engagement were 0.192 and 0.190 respectively, suggesting that 19.2% of the variance in job performance and 19.0% of the variance in work engagement can be explained by POS, PSS, and PPS.

Figure 1: Measurement Model



As indicated in Table 4, our results showed that perceived peer support ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($\beta = 0.361$, $p < 0.01$) were positively related to job performance. On the contrary, perceived peer support ($\beta = 0.003$, $p > 0.01$), and perceived peer support ($\beta = -0.066$, $p > 0.01$) were found to be unrelated to job performance. In addition, POS ($\beta = 0.163$, $p < 0.01$), PPS ($\beta = 0.185$, $p < 0.01$), and PSS ($\beta = 0.186$, $p < 0.01$) were also found to be positively related to work engagement. Therefore, hypotheses H3, H4, H5, and H6 were supported.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing (Direct Effect)

| Hypothesis | | Beta (β) | Standard Error | T-Value | Decision |
|------------|---|------------------|----------------|---------|-------------|
| H1 | Perceived Organizational Support -> Job Performance | 0.003 | 0.049 | 0.069 | Unsupported |
| H2 | Perceived Supervisory Support -> Job Performance | -0.066 | 0.054 | 1.210 | Unsupported |
| H3 | Perceived Peer Support -> Job Performance | 0.198** | 0.049 | 4.048 | Supported |
| H4 | Perceived Organizational Support -> Work Engagement | 0.163** | 0.053 | 3.085 | Supported |
| H5 | Perceived Peer Support -> Work Engagement | 0.185** | 0.049 | 3.744 | Supported |
| H6 | Perceived Supervisory Support -> Work Engagement | 0.186** | 0.058 | 3.187 | Supported |
| H7 | Work Engagement -> Job Performance | 0.361** | 0.050 | 7.205 | Supported |

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Finally, three hypotheses were tested on the mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between POS (H8), PSS (H9), and PPS (H10), and job performance. As depicted in Table 5, all mediation hypotheses were supported. Specifically, work engagement demonstrates significant mediation effect on the relationship between POS and job performance ($\beta = 0.059$, $p < 0.01$); PSS and job performance ($\beta = 0.067$, $p < 0.01$); and PPS and job performance ($\beta = 0.067$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 5: Hypotheses Testing (Indirect Effect)

| Hypothesis | Relationship | Beta (β) | Standard Error | T-value | Decision |
|------------|--|------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|
| H8 | Perceived Organizational Support - > Work Engagement -> Job Performance | 0.059** | 0.022 | 2.719 | Supported |
| H9 | Perceived Peer Support -> Work Engagement -> Job Performance | 0.067** | 0.021 | 3.242 | Supported |
| H10 | Perceived Supervisory Support -> Work Engagement -> Job Performance | 0.067** | 0.023 | 2.907 | Supported |

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

The blindfolding technique was performed to check the predictive relevance of the proposed model via the Q^2 statistic. Q^2 value greater than zero means that the model has predictive relevance whereas Q^2 value less than zero means that the model lacks predictive relevance (Fornell & Cha, 1994). Table 6 which shows the results of blindfolding revealed that the proposed model had good predictive relevance. Specifically, the Q^2 value for work engagement and job performance were 0.092 and 0.129 respectively. Following Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013), since the endogenous latent constructs' Q^2 value are larger than zero, it can be concluded that our model has predictive relevance.

Table 6: Predictive Relevance of the Model

| Exogenous Variable | Endogenous Variable | Q^2 | Predictive Relevance |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|-------|----------------------|
| Perceived organizational support | Work Engagement | 0.092 | Yes |
| Perceived supervisory support | | | |
| Perceived peer support | | | |
| Work Engagement | Job Performance | 0.129 | Yes |

Note: Blindfolding Omission Distance = 7

5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The aim of the present study was to examine the direct effects of the three types of social support (POS, PSS and PPS) on staff nurses' job performance attached to private hospitals in Malaysia. In addition, the research aims to further test the mediating role of work engagement in the relationships between the three types of social support and job performance. In general, the statistical results provided support for almost all our hypothesized relationships. Our results on direct effects revealed PPS to be positively related to nurses' job performance. This finding concurs with AbuAlRub's (2004) finding where supportive peers are instrumental in ensuring that employees are able to carry out their work activities effectively as well as help buffer the negative

effects of work stress. However, we found no significant relationships between two other forms of social support (ie. POS and PSS) and job performance. One possible explanation may relate to the sampled nurses who are relatively experienced whereby on average, they have been in their jobs and the said hospital for approximately 5 years. As such, these nurses may have been acclimatized not only to the particular hospital's work environment and culture but to the nursing job as well. Moreover, POS and PSS were judged to be mediocre by the nurses as illustrated by the mean scores. Thus, POS and PSS may not be able to have any predictive effect on job performance.

In addition, all three types of social support were found to have positive effects on work engagement. The positive impact of POS on work engagement is consistent with findings from previous studies (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2014; Kinnunen et al., 2008; Sulea et al., 2012). High POS seems to suggest that the organization cares about their employees' wellbeing and are more likely to reduce unnecessary work complications, which in turn help buffer job stress. Such organizations tend to clarify job expectations enabling their workers to accomplish their work goals effectively. Likewise, the positive effect of PSS on work engagement is in harmony with other scholars (Bakker et al., 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Hakanen et al., 2006; Othman and Nasurdin, 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2008). According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), supervisor support is a critical resource that can be instrumental in ensuring the successful attainment of work goals and help buffer the stress associated with high job demands, which, in turn, prompts higher work engagement. Meanwhile, PPS demonstrated a positive relationship with work engagement. Our finding echo earlier researchers (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2008; Bakker et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). Peer support not only makes it easier for employees to achieve their work goals but also provide emotional support to them particularly in times of stress, which in turn, motivate employees to become more engaged in their work. Finally, work engagement was discovered to be positively related to job performance which conforms to earlier findings by scholars (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Salanova et al., 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). As remarked by Bakker (2009), engaged employees tend to experience positive affect which makes them more productive, thereby, enabling them to perform better by devoting their resources, energy and skills to their job. In the present study, work engagement was found to mediate the relationships between the three forms of support and job performance. These results are in concordance with that of earlier researchers (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008) who argued that support received from the organization, supervisors, and peers may serve as resources that activate motivation in the form of work engagement, which in turn, lead to elevated job performance.

In terms of practical implications, the present results are important in informing hospital administrators on the need to enhance workplace support to nurses. As advocated by Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997), organizational support in terms of cultivating favourable work experiences (such as training and promotion opportunities) and reward expectations may be crucial in inducing work engagement and alleviating nurses' job performance. Moreover, since nurses are continually faced with workplace adversity, in line with the suggestion made by Gorji, Etemadi, and Hoseini (2014), the mechanisms by which hospital authorities can increase nurses' perception of their hospitals' support include welfare and motivational programs, and communicating career development prospects to nurses. On a similar note, following Shanock and Eisenberger (2006), supportive acts by supervisors (such as inclusion in decision-making, positive feedback, and coaching) may lead to increased work engagement and eventually job performance among nursing staff. In addition,

as recommended by Gorji, Etemadi, and Hoseini (2014), verbal praises, interest shown, and respect accorded to nurses by their nursing supervisors may be beneficial in heightening nurses' level of work engagement and performance. Finally, as suggested by Amarneh et al. (2009), hospital administrators could develop social programs for nurses on the need for to maintain good working relations particularly within their own teams. During such sessions, nurses should be made to understand their work roles and the need for them to support one another in ensuring quality healthcare service delivery. Besides, nurses need to be informed that they need to create a friendly and collaborative atmosphere at work instead of a competitive one for the betterment of the overall healthcare services in line with the agenda identified in the Economic Transformation Program (ETP) on growth of healthcare services for the country as well as boosting the attractiveness of Malaysia as the regional hub for medical tourism. Our findings are consistent with Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) conceptualization of social support as job resources that are able to serve as intrinsic and extrinsic motivator that will lead to greater work engagement and improved performance. Furthermore, our results provided support for the validity of social exchange (Blau, 1964) as the underlying mechanism in the relationship between support, engagement and performance within a non-Western setting.

The current study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of this research imposed a constraint on causal interpretations. Work engagement and job performance may vary across time. Thus, a longitudinal approach may be a better option to examine the causal relationships among the study variables. Second, reliance on self-report measures of job performance may raise concerns regarding common-method variance because the predictor measures were collected from the same source. As such, we call for future researchers to consider collecting data from multiple sources (such as from the supervisors as well as peers) as a preventive measure to address this problem. Third, our participants were confined to staff nurses employed in private hospitals operating in Malaysia. Therefore, future studies may be extended to the public health setting in order to generalize the findings.

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