

Loneliness at Work: Gender and Hierarchical Level Differences of Employees at Thai Government Bank

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore the gender and hierarchical level differences in loneliness at work. A sample of 143 employees who worked at the Thai government bank headquarters was gathered by using proportional stratified sampling technique. Loneliness at Work Scale (LWS) was modified to use as the instrument for data collection. Results of independent samples t-test analysis revealed that there was a significant difference in males and females with respect to loneliness at work ($t = 3.079, p < 0.002$). This suggested that males were experiencing loneliness at work more than females. Results also showed a significant difference in employees and employers with respect to loneliness at work ($t = -3.458, p < 0.001$). This suggested that employees were experiencing loneliness at work less than employers. This present study suggested that the further study should compare mean differences of loneliness in the workplace in other socio-demographic variables.

Keywords: Loneliness at work, Gender differences, Hierarchical level, Thai government bank.

INTRODUCTION

The banking industry has presently been threatened by various business environment forces. The emergence of new technology such as Fintech and retail banking automation viewed as digital disruption is a major force that eradicates many of traditional banking jobs nowadays.

Some reports estimated that bank job would be lost about 30% within the next 10 years [1]. In addition, The banking industry has also been perceived as a high turnover rate industry, which causes a negative impact on the organizational performance. Various factors are described as key elements that originate workforce turnover in banking industry such as compensation, job requirements, policies change, goals, and loneliness [2, 3]. Among these factors, loneliness has been recognized as the key trigger that can destroy not only individual emotions, but also employees' performance and organization's productivity and effectiveness [3-6]. In general, loneliness is found to be more serious to health than smoking 15 cigarettes a day [7] and associated with a greater risk of various diseases [8]. At work, a feeling of loneliness can cause an employee's emotional withdrawal from the organization leading to job resignation. Losing hundreds of employees who experienced loneliness at work demonstrates an inability of a manager to effectively manage workforce in the organization. The proliferation of loneliness in the workplace is triggered by the misunderstanding of a manager to treat this unpleasant emotional condition as a personal problem rather than the cause that influences the organization [4]. Therefore, to lessen the loneliness

in the workplace, a manager needs to understand the root causes and the impacts of this problem, and to be able to address loneliness in the workplace.

The study of loneliness in the workplace has been paid more attention by the scholars in the past decades. Numerous studies reported the negative impact of loneliness in the workplace on employee well-being, commitment, and performance [9, 10, 6]. Despite the impact of loneliness at work in the banking industry, little attention on investigation of loneliness at work in the banking industry has been paid. Additionally, past studies attempted to examine socio-demographic differences such as gender, age, marital status, and educational level in loneliness as an unpleasant emotion of an individual in a broad term [11-13]. The emphasis on exploring socio-demographic differences in loneliness at work has been overlooked and should be conducted to help the organization in particular the government bank better understand its employees' loneliness at work. Therefore, this present study aimed to examine the gender and hierarchical level differences in loneliness at work of Thai government bank employees since these two variables had not been extensively reviewed in the past studies.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

There are misunderstandings and confusions between loneliness and isolation or lack of social support. In fact, isolation and lack of social support concepts mainly depict objective properties of social situation whereas loneliness is based on an individual’s perception of rare social relationships [14]. Loneliness is experienced when an individual subjectively feels an inadequate social interaction with others [8]. Weiss [15] believed that “...loneliness is caused not by being alone but by being without some definite needed relationships or set of relationships.” An increase of loneliness nowadays is caused by the geographical and technological reasons. The change in working systems and styles minimizes the traditional ways of working in which people can have interpersonal relationships regularly. Job independence and autonomy separates an employee from the human interaction leading to the feeling of loneliness. Wright, Burt, and Strongman [16] identified loneliness at work as the depression and unhappiness that ascends when individual perceives the lack of qualitative social relations. This implied that the level of loneliness in the workplace was demonstrated by the level of difference between expected and actual relations. Even though the loneliness generally has been broadly investigated in the past decades, loneliness in the workplace has not been paid much emphasis due to the lack of valid scale measurement. As a consequence, Wright *et al.* [16] created the loneliness at work scale, which encompassed two dimensions including emotional deprivation and social companionship to measure the perception of loneliness in the workplace. Emotional deprivation refers to the quality of interpersonal relationships at work, which involves key words such as ‘feel’, ‘isolated’, ‘alienated’, and ‘disconnected’. Social companionship pertains to the scope of the adequacy of social interaction in the workplace, which includes key words such as ‘sharing’, ‘spending time’, and ‘part of the group’.

Although numerous studies found relationships between loneliness in the workplace and employee well-being and performance, and organizational commitment [4, 9, 10], past studies reported the contradictory results relating to socio-demographic variables differences particularly gender differences [11-13]. Furthermore, the investigations on socio-demographic differences and loneliness in previous studies have been performed in a broad term rather than

specifically focusing on loneliness in the workplace. Also, there was no evidence relating to the exploration of hierarchical level difference in loneliness at work. Thus, based on the literature reviews, the research hypotheses were proposed as the following:

Hypothesis #1: There are significant gender differences in loneliness at work.

Hypothesis #2: There are significant hierarchical level differences in loneliness at work.

METHODOLOGY

This section was divided into three parts including participants, measures, and procedures as the following:

Participants

This study gathered data from respondents who currently served as an employee at the government bank headquarters. A total number of 143 employees agreed to participate in this study by returning a completed questionnaire. Nearly 70% of them were women and 30.8% were men.

Measures

Data were collected through the questionnaire which included two parts: socio-demographic characteristics part and loneliness at work. For the first part, participants were asked to fill out their personal information regarding gender, age, education, hierarchical level, and working experience in year. All questions in this part were check-lists, which the respondents were asked to choose only the answer that best described them. For the second part, the Loneliness at Work Scale (LWS) originally developed by Wright *et al.* [16] was used to measure loneliness in the workplace of employees. The loneliness at work contained 16-item of a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). This scale encompassed the combination of two dimensions of loneliness at work: emotional deprivation (9 –item) and social companionship (7-item). However, this study modified this scale from a 7-point Likert scale to a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). To ensure internal consistency of this scale measurement, reliability coefficients with Cronbach’s alpha test was calculated. Table 1 demonstrated that alpha score of loneliness at work was acceptable [17].

Table-1: Reliability Coefficients of Loneliness at Work Scale

Dimensions	No. of Items	Alpha Score
Emotional Deprivation	9	.840
Social Companionship	7	.656
Loneliness at Work	16	.771

Procedures

The researcher officially contacted HR department of the government bank headquarters for data collection permission. The list of employee

numbers in each department was proposed in order to calculate the proper sample size. Proportional stratified sampling technique was used to determine the number of samples for each department based on the total

number of population. Data collection was performed with the assistance of the RMUTP MBA alumnus who worked as the employee of this government bank. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to employees in all departments of government bank headquarters, of which 143 were returned as usable ones. These questionnaires were inputted in the SPSS for statistical analysis. To test research hypotheses, independent samples t-test was used to examine mean differences of loneliness at work in gender and hierarchical level.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics were analyzed by frequency distribution as shown in Table 2. Results found that the majority of participants in this study were female (69.2%). More than a half of them aged between 31-40 years (56.6%). Almost a half of them hold a bachelor's degree (58.7%). For hierarchical level, more than a half of respondents who participated in this study were employers (52.4%). The most frequently reported working experience of employees at this government bank was more than 15 years (45.5%).

Table-2: Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Thai Government Bank Employees' Socio-Demographic Characteristics (n=143)

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	44	30.8
Female	99	69.2
Total	143	100
Age		
20-30 years	27	18.9
31-40 years	81	56.6
41-50 years	27	18.9
More than 50 years	8	5.6
Total	143	100
Education		
Bachelor's Degree	84	58.7
Master's Degree	43	30.1
Doctorate's Degree	7	4.9
Others	9	6.3
Total	143	100
Hierarchical Level		
Employee	68	47.6
Employer	75	52.4
Total	143	100
Working Experience in Year		
Less than 5 years	21	14.7
5-10 years	42	29.4
11-15 years	15	10.5
More than 15 years	65	45.5
Total	143	100

Table 3 showed the total mean scores of loneliness at work and each dimension. Finding exhibited that loneliness at work had the mean score in a low level score (M = 2.62, S.D. = .587). The descriptive analysis for each dimension of loneliness at work showed that social companionship had the highest

mean score (M = 3.22, S.D. = .820) following by emotional deprivation (M = 2.16, S.D. = .702). This meant that government bank employees experienced social companionship in a high level whereas emotional deprivation was felt in a low level.

Table-3: Descriptive Statistics for Loneliness at Work Variables (n =143)

Variables	Mean	S.D.
Emotional Deprivation	2.16	.702
Social Companionship	3.22	.820
Loneliness at Work	2.62	.587

Table 4 demonstrated results of Independent samples t-test related to gender and hierarchical levels. Findings indicated that there was a significant

difference in males and females with respect to loneliness at work (t = 3.079, p < 0.002). The mean score of loneliness at work in males was 2.84 and in

females were 2.52. This meant that males were experiencing loneliness at work more than females. Results also revealed that there was a significant difference in males and females with respect to emotional deprivation ($t = 3.670, p < 0.0001$). The mean score of emotional deprivation in males was 2.47 and in females was 2.02. This suggested that males were experiencing emotional deprivation more than females. However, there was no significant difference found on social companionship in males and females. In addition, there was a significant difference in employees and employers with respect to loneliness at work ($t = -3.458, p < 0.001$). The mean score of loneliness at work in employees was 2.45 and in employers was 2.78. This suggested that employees were experiencing loneliness at work less than

employers. In addition, results also exhibited that there was a significant difference in employees and employers with respect to emotional deprivation ($t = -3.760, p < 0.0001$). The mean score of emotional deprivation in employees was 1.93 and in employers was 2.36. This finding demonstrated that employees significantly experienced emotional deprivation in the workplace less than employers. Nevertheless, this study found no significant difference between employees and employers on social companionship.

As the significant level achieved for loneliness at work for gender and hierarchical level was lower than 0.01, research hypothesis #1 and #2; therefore, were confirmed.

Table-4: Results of the Independent samples t-test of Loneliness at Work related to Gender and Hierarchical Level

Variables	Male(n =44)		Female(n=99)		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Emotional Deprivation	2.47	.690	2.02	.664	141	3.670	.0001**
Social Companionship	3.32	.946	3.18	.759		.970	.334
Loneliness at Work	2.84	.587	2.52	.563		3.079	.002**
	Employee(n=68)		Employer(n=75)		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Emotional Deprivation	1.93	.632	2.36	.705	141	-3.760	.0001**
Social Companionship	3.16	.770	3.32	.857		-1.522	.130
Loneliness at Work	2.45	.480	2.78	.634		-3.458	.001**

**Significant Level at .01

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this present study was to examine gender and hierarchical level differences in loneliness at work of 143 employees who worked at the Thai government bank headquarters. Loneliness at Work Scale (LWS) was modified to use as the instrument for data collection. Findings exhibited that Thai government bank employee’s experienced loneliness at work in a low level, which means that employees felt adequacy of social interaction while working at the bank. To be more specific, results also discovered that Thai government bank employees experienced social companionship in a high level whereas emotional deprivation was felt in a low level. This means that they highly perceived the quantifiable social aspects of their relationship at work, and lowly viewed the emotional quality of their relationship in the workplace. These findings demonstrated that Thai government bank employees did not have difficulty in building relationships with others and realized that they had someone to talk to, and take care of them. This implies that employees at this bank have had sufficiently an emotional reinforcement by others in the workplace. Moreover, this can be concluded that just a few employees, who felt ignored, abandoned, neglected, and emotionally rejected by their co-workers and supervisors in this bank. On the other hand, many of

them felt pleasant and enjoyable because of good camaraderie in the bank. In short, these findings can at least reflect the culture of team working in the workplace.

Results of Independent samples t-test analysis revealed that there was a significant difference in males and females with respect to loneliness in the workplace in which males were experiencing loneliness at work more than females. This means that male employees felt more difficulty in forming relationships with others than females, and did not have enough emotional support by their co-workers and supervisors compared to females. A recent study confirms this finding as described that females are more comfortable in giving and receiving emotional strengthening than males [18]. This present study’s finding also confirmed the past study of Dickens and Perlman [19]. In this sense, the reason that males scored higher than females or felt lonelier than females is based on the ignorance of loneliness problem in males. In addition, there was also a significant difference in employees and employers with respect to loneliness at work in which employees significantly experienced loneliness in the workplace less than employers. As an employer, they are required to handle and solve numerous problems on each day. It is quite obvious to understand that they sometimes need to deal with some sensitive issues or confidential

information, which cannot be shared to the others. Moreover, they need to play a role of supporter for their employees by listening to them and providing some advices as needed. Consequently, they need to develop their strong sense of self-reliance as they work in the higher level and need to keep some distances from employees to balance their managerial competence and personal matters. These duties and responsibilities can be root causes of employers' loneliness in the workplace.

Like other studies, this present study has some limitations. Firstly, the sample was confined to employees who worked at the headquarters solely. Thus, the further study should extend the sample to employees in different branches of this government bank. Also, the comparison between employees in different branches and departments should be conducted in the future study. Secondly, the socio-demographic variables used for data analysis in this current study were limited to gender and hierarchical level. Hence, the other socio-demographic variables such as age, marital status, educational level, personal income, and working experience should be investigated in the further research. Lastly, as this present study merely focuses on socio-demographic variables, other independent variables that are associated with loneliness in the workplace should be explored in the future. For the research implication, the management of this government bank should provide appropriate trainings that can help maximize employees' ability to build relationships with others, particularly male employees, in an effective way. Also, the government bank should create social interaction atmosphere in the workplace in order to reduce loneliness at work. Employee assistance program (EAP) should be established in this government bank headquarters to provide some supports to employees and employers who extremely experienced loneliness at work.

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