BEHAVIOURAL INTEGRITY AND INTEGRITY PRACTICES TOWARDS CHILD MALTREATMENT AT CHILD CARE CENTRES

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Abstract*: This research investigates the correlations between Welfare Officers' job satisfaction in the Malaysian childcare sector as well as Behavioral Integrity and Integrity Practices and Emotional Intelligence. Both Ethical Development Theory and Social Learning Theory serve as theoretical frameworks for this study because they explain how individuals learn ethics through their decision-making process and by observing social behaviours. The study conducted data collection from 172 Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Terengganu officers by distributing structure questionnaires then analysed data through descriptive statistics together with correlation and regression methods. Job satisfaction had positive relationships with all three constructs and emotional intelligence provided the most substantial contribution (β = 0.537, p < 0.001) to job satisfaction ratings. Research showed that behavioural integrity and integrity practices have positive relationships yet failed to demonstrate statistical importance for predicting satisfaction at work. The study results indicate emotional intelligence stands as a superior factor compared to ethical alignment when measuring professional fulfilment within welfare services. The research explains the Job Integrity Model (JIM) which serves as a conceptual base to show how emotional intelligence training should be used with ethics-based programs during workforce development. The implications point toward institutional strategies that prioritize emotional competencies to enhance service delivery and well-being among welfare officers. This study contributes to the field of organizational ethics and social welfare by offering practical insights for policy-makers and training institutions focused on improving the quality of care in child-centered environments.*

Introduction

A society requires effective welfare services that function both ethically to progress towards being just and resilient. Jabatan Kebajikan Malaysia stands as Malaysia's primary welfare institution which protects socially exposed groups including children. Recent years have witnessed mounting concern about child maltreatment and inconsistent ethical conduct practices among welfare officers which exposed the workforce's emotional competence and ethical integrity (Ahmad et al., 2020; Suryawan et al., 2022). Alarm has risen in recent years about child maltreatment and unethical actions from welfare officers which highlighted the importance of emotional awareness and moral conduct for those working in the field (Ahmad et al., 2020; Suryawan et al., 2022). However, official state-level data for Terengganu is not shared, but internal comments suggest these states are still among the most concerning. On a national scale, reported cases of child maltreatment have sharply increased, from 310 cases in 2022 to 964 cases in 2023 and then to 4,424 cases during the first eight months of 2024 (Patah, 2023; Misrani, 2023; Muzamir, 2024). This data highlights the significance of swift, well-supported studies on the ethical and psychological elements of providing welfare services.

Social work has become more intricate, thus requiring research that explores psychological along with behavioral elements affecting performance and accountability levels. This research investigates behavioral integrity (BI), integrity practices (IP), and emotional intelligence (EI) to comprehend their association with job satisfaction (JS) among welfare officers. Personnel holding consistent values that match their actions are considered to possess behavioral integrity, according to Simons (2002). Moreover, Amoadu et al. (2024) identify institutionalized ethical conduct practices as integrity practices. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence describes the professional capability to control emotions and effectively express them at work (Eyal & Rubin, 2003).

This study uses both Ethical Development Theory (Kohlberg, 1994) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1974) because they study how cognitive ability and role modeling influence ethical behavior. According to Ethical Development Theory, our growing sense of morality can be guided by what society values, whereas Social Learning Theory shows that ethical conduct is often learned by copying the choices of others and experiencing rewards (Nabavi, 2012; Bowen, 1978).

According to the findings through quantitative approach, which analyze 172 Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat officers in Terengganu. The findings reveal that the relationship between behavioral integrity and integrity practices and job satisfaction shows strong positive correlations (r = 0.454 and 0.442). But emotional intelligence turns out to be a much better predictor, accounting for the highest percentage in the regression model ($\beta = 0.537$, $p < 0.001$). By including emotions in our study, we have added a new angle not explored in earlier integrity studies as it plays a more important role in welfare officers' performance and wellbeing (Goleman, 1995; Cohen et al., 2021).

Workforce development demands the strategic use of three constructs which this research presents as the Job Integrity Model (JIM). These results create a base for institutional modifications which focus on training professionals to incorporate ethical resistance alongside

emotional capabilities across welfare systems. The integrative model helps Jabatan Kebajikan Malaysia and similar institutions to better position their operational systems according to their core values of integrity and accountability and care excellence.

Literature Review

Ethical Development Theory

In Ethical Development Theory, Kohlberg outlines that growth in moral reasoning happens over specific steps and depends on the environment and culture. The theory points out that moral development can be divided into three stages: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. While at the pre-conventional stage, people prefer what benefits themselves and try to prevent facing punishment. At the conventional level, social expectations and a wish to uphold order influence a person's behavior. At this stage, people see justice, equity and human rights as common ethical rules that apply everywhere. Kohlberg highlighted that the way we grow morally depends on our thoughts and on the interactions, we have (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Experts in this field have confirmed that understanding professional ethics should start with these stages, especially in workplaces such as social work and welfare programs (Wang, 2021). This theory helps shape how welfare officers handle ethical issues at work by considering their level of moral reasoning.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura, suggests that we learn how to act by watching and copying the behaviors of others. The model holds that individuals pick up behaviors by observing others, mostly influential people or peers and are affected by their thinking, the society around them and reinforcement. Bandura developed the idea of reciprocal determinism, showing that personal factors, behavior and surroundings all interact all the time. In such settings, employees could learn to act ethically or unethically by copying the actions of those who lead them. It has also been used to show that some dangerous behaviors are passed down from one generation to another such as when children exposed to abuse grow up to act in aggressive or deviant ways (Fantuzzo et al., 1991; Abbasi & Aslinia, 2020). Evidence from recent studies indicates that social learning is crucial for molding ethical and emotional behavior among welfare professionals (Wang, 2021), highlighting the role of this theory in supporting the learning of professional ethics by welfare officers.

Behavioral Integrity and Child Maltreatment

Behavioural integrity refers to the consistency of a person's words and deeds in keeping word or upholding moral principles (Simons, 2002). This paper believes that there is a direct relationship between behavioural integrity and the occurrence of child maltreatment. This assumption is based on the idea that if parents consistently align their behaviour with their stated beliefs and values, they will be less likely to act in ways that negatively affect their kids (Grusec, 2002). Parents must provide a stable home and care for children, to create strong behavioural integrity. Behavioural integrity fosters secure surroundings, which is necessary for a child's healthy growth (Suryawan et al., 2022). On the other hand, children who have a lack of behavioural integrity may undergo feelings of hesitancy, anxiety, or insecurity, which could potentially increase the likelihood of maltreatment (Suryawan et al., 2022). These assumptions are supported by previous study whereby parental behavioural integrity decreased incidence of emotional and physical abuse on children (Ahmad et al., 2020). This means inconsistency in parents' actions and words create an unstable atmosphere that puts kids at risk for abuse in

future. This suggests that children's healthy atmosphere creates good behavioural integrity. The first hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Behavioural integrity has a positive relationship with child maltreatment.

Integrity Practices and Child Maltreatment

This paper believes that there is a negative relationship between integrity practices and the occurrence of child maltreatment. Integrity practices, which include honesty, responsibility, and commitment to moral principles, are a subset of the larger range of ethical behaviours and practices that take place in a household or community. The social and emotional environment in which children are nurtured is influenced by these activities. Children that grow up in a safe atmosphere with high integrity standards within the family, reduce the possibility of abuse (Suryawan et al., 2022). However, in a family with lack of integrity practices, including dishonesty, disrespectful, unethical, lead children to be exploited. This is supported by previous research whereby integrity practices such as communicating openly, settling disagreement amicably, and asking for assistance, when necessary, creates healthy parenting and protects the children's wellbeing (Amoadu et al., 2024). This is because psychological growth of children is affected positively when they have greater emotional control (Rydell et al., 2003). The second hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Integrity practices have a negative relationship with child maltreatment.

Research Methodology

According to National Child Development Research Center NCDRC (2021), there are 77948 children enrolled in 5448 child care centres throughout the country. The population of this study comprised all workforces engaged in child care centres in Terengganu. Reports of recent child maltreatment cases from Terengganu prompted the decision to choose the state. Recently, there were cases in which two caretakers from a registered centre in Kampung Raja were arrested in September 2024 for allegedly abusing two children under their care (Astro Awani, 2024), while another child from a centre in Batu Buruk was seriously abused and has submitted a civil suit for RM1.2 million in March 2025 (BERNAMA, 2025). This serves to highlight the need for more research in this state about the reasons behind institutional maltreatment.

Using official government lists, the study finds child care centres that are registered with the Social Welfare Department (JKM) and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. Those who participate were selected by random sampling from among all employees working in the registered child care centres who meet the study's requirements. The sampling process involved generating a list of registered centres from JKM and using a random number generator to select centres, ensuring unbiased representation.

Following Roscoe's (1975) set of guidelines for determining sample size, this study will examine 50 caretakers operating in child care centres in Terengganu. As such caretaker from each child care centre will be surveyed. Child caretaker is the appropriate person to provide the required data because they are the one who directly involve with children at child care centres and ideally have knowledge about the studied topic. Caretaker operating in child care centers in Selangor and have first-hand experience attending children for a minimal of 3 months. The survey question will be set in dual language of Bahasa Malaysia and English. The study will collect data in two approaches of onsite and offsite to convenience of respondents. For offsite

approach, the survey question will be distributed to respondents. Data collected form this study will be analyzed by using SMARTPLS 4.0.

This study used a structured questionnaire that included a five-point Likert scale to gauge respondents' agreement with different assertions. The scale, which went from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used consistently for all variables, including job satisfaction, emotional intelligence, integrity practices, and behavioral integrity.

Data Analysis

Demographic Analysis

A questionnaire is a written set of questions in which respondents record their answers (Sekaran, 2013). The questionnaires will be distributed to the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyrakat officer at Kuala Terengganu. Demographic analysis is analyzed by using the frequency analysis which shows the frequency of the data collected from the questionnaire distributed to the respondent. As shown in the Table 1

Table 1: Demographic Analysis

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	76	44.2	44.2
Female	96	55.8	100
Age			
18 – 24 years old	1	.6	.6
25 – 34 years old	33	19.2	19.8
35 – 44 years old	80	46.5	66.3
45 – 54 years old	48	27.9	94.2
55 – 59 years old	10	5.8	100.0
Race			
Malay	170	98.8	98.8
Chinese	0	0	0
Indian	0	0	0
Others	2	0	100

The number of respondents in this research is 172 people. Based on the table, can be computed that most of the respondents were female with a percentage of 55.8%. Meanwhile, 76 respondents who answered the questionnaires were male. From the table, it can be derived that only 19.2% of the respondents are those whose age is between 25 - 34 years old. Most of the respondents were aged between 35 to 44 years old, which represents 46.5% of respondents. The percentages of respondents from the age of 45 to 54 years old were 27.9% and 5.8% are respondents from the age of 55 to 59 years old. The minority respondents were represented by the age of above 18 – 24 years old which only 0.6%. Most of the respondents were Malay, about 98.8%. While only 2 respondents were from other races.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability is used to test the reliability of the variables in research. This method was also used to test the reliability of the researcher's questions. It will determine whether the question fits with the research or not. The data for reliability is computed as the Table 2:

<div align="center">Table 2: Reliability Analysis</div>

Variables	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Number of Items (N)	Strength of Association
Job Satisfaction (DV)	0.944	23	Excellent
Behavioral Integrity	0.931	8	Excellent
Integrity Practices	0.946	13	Excellent
Emotional Intelligence	0.933	16	Excellent

Table 2 illustrates the result of the reliability analysis for all variables including dependent and independent variables. Based on the table, the researcher can state that all variables are reliable as the number of Cronbach Alpha for all variables is higher than 0.6. The value of alpha must be 0.6 above to be considered reliable and accepted in this research (Hair et al, 2003).

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

<div align="center">Table 3: Descriptive Statistics Analysis</div>

Variables	Min	Max.	M.	SD.	Skew.	Kurt.
Behavioral Integrity	1.38	5.00	4.2515	.58082	-.956	3.062
Integrity Practice	1.23	5.00	4.3283	.57635	-1.331	4.341
Emotional Intelligence	2.19	5.00	4.1443	.51616	-.566	1.058
Job Satisfaction	2.14	5.00	4.1213	.62069	-.696	.738

*Scale 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.

Correlation Analysis

<div align="center">Table 4: Correlation Analysis</div>

		BI	IP	EI	JS
Sex	Pearson Correlation	1	.781**	.689**	.454**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	172	172	172	172
Educ.	Pearson Correlation	.781**	1	.645**	.442**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	172	172	172	172
Emotion Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	.689**	.645**	1	.603**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	172	172	172	172
Job Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.454**	.442**	.603**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	172	172	172	172

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above shows the correlation between dependent variable with independent variable. In the Schindler theory, it indicates the relationship as table 5.

Table 5: Interpretive Scale for Pearson's Correlation Coefficients

R value	Strength of relationship
0	No relationship
±0.01 – 0.30	Weak, almost negligible relationship
±0.31 – 0.50	Moderate; substantial relationship
±0.51 – 0.99	Strong; marked relationship
1.00	Perfect relationship

Based from the tables on the previous page, the Pearson correlation between Job Satisfaction (dependent variable) and independent variables are moderate and substantial relationship and strong and marked relationship as the correlation value are within 0.4 to 0.7.

Regression Analysis
Regression analysis is a statistical method to determine whether a variable is affected by another variable.

Table 5: Interpretive Scale for Pearson's Correlation Coefficients

Variables	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficient Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	.979	.330		2.964	.003
Behavioral Integrity	.025	.114	.023	.218	.828
Integrity Practice	.083	.109	.077	.765	.446
Emotional Intelligence	.646	.105	.537	6.170	.000
R-Square	0.607				
Adjusted R-Square	0.368				

The regression equation can be constructed from the SPSS output as follows.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta1X1 + \beta2X2 + \beta3X3 + \beta4X4 + e$$

Where
Y = Dependent variable (Job satisfaction)
X1= Behavioral integrity
X2= Integrity Practice
X3= Emotional Intelligence
e = Error term

Change to:
Preference = 0.979 + 0.025BI + 0.083IP + 0.646EI + e

Where,
S= Behavioral Integrity
A=Integrity Practice
P= Emotional Intelligence

Based on the equation, the coefficient of the independent variable can be interpreted that if 1% increase in behavioral integrity then job satisfaction will increase by 0.025%. behavioral integrity had positive relationship with job satisfaction. Integrity practice also had a positive

relationship with job satisfaction as the 1% increase in integrity practice and job satisfaction will also increase by 0.83%. Emotional intelligence also had a positive relationship with job satisfaction as a 1% increase in emotional intelligence; job satisfaction will increase 0.64%. Based from the statistical table above the value R2 can be defined as 60.7% variation which are integrity practice, behavioral integrity, and emotional intelligence explained the job satisfaction among the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat worker while 37.1% is explained by the other factors. The result can be concluded as per tabulated below.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Summary Table

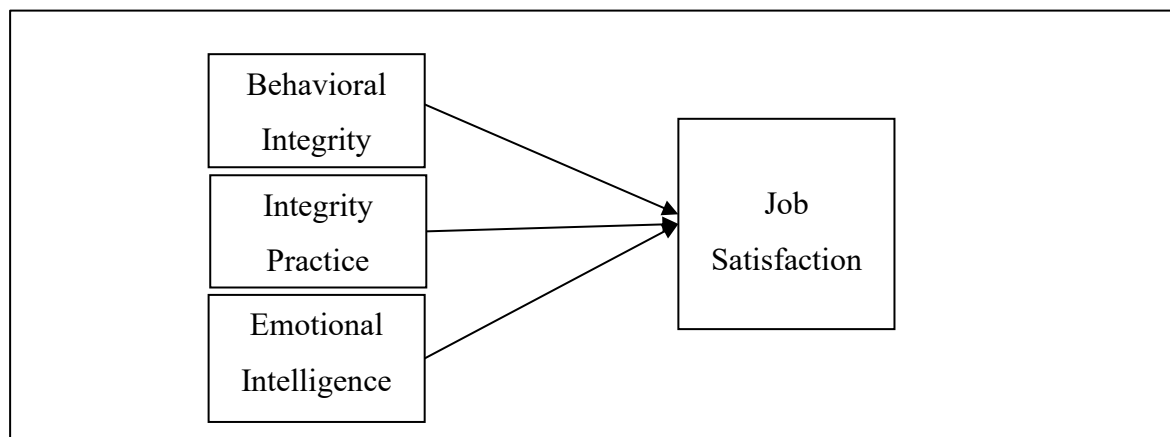| Variables	P-value	Sign	A	Relationship	Decision
Behavioral Integrity	0.828	>	0.05	Insignificant	Failed to reject H_0
Integrity Practice	0.446	<	0.05	Insignificant	Failed to reject H_0
Emotional Intelligence	0.000	<	0.05	Significant	Reject H_0

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Conclusion
The study examined the relationship between behavioural integrity with integrity practices and emotional intelligence and their impact on job satisfaction among welfare officers. The study demonstrated positive correlations between all three constructs with job satisfaction, yet emotional intelligence was the only factor which predicted job satisfaction. Job satisfaction stems primarily from emotional and empathic abilities rather than ethical consistency when it comes to professional fulfilment.

The study demonstrates the requirement for both ethical awareness development together with emotional competence training in welfare work. Staff development programs at the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat should include emotional intelligence training to benefit from its implementation. The outcome of this approach creates both more durable staff and superior service quality which benefits children under welfare supervision.

Acknowledgements

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