

## **The Moderating Role of Cultural Intelligence on the Effect of Ethnic Harassment Experience on Employees' Intention to Leave in Indonesia**

Tria Hanief<sup>a</sup> and Asri Laksmi Riani<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl Ir.Sutami 36A, Surakarta 57126, Indonesia.  
triahaniefa@student.uns.ac.id*

<sup>b</sup> *Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl Ir.Sutami 36A, Surakarta 57126, Indonesia.  
asrilaksmiriani@yahoo.com*

### **ABSTRACT**

Indonesia's huge population and areas are resulting in a high rate of cultural and ethnical diversification. This study examines whether employees from different cultures and ethnicities experience ethnic harassments at work when they are assigned to different regions across Indonesia, and its effect on their intention to leave. Furthermore, this study also investigates whether an employee's cultural intelligence moderates the effect of an ethnic harassment experience on the employee's intention to leave. This study used a sample of 232 employees with various job backgrounds who are assigned across different regions in Indonesia. The result shows that the ethnic harassment experiences affect employees' intention to leave. Cultural intelligence as a whole and two of its dimensions are proven to moderate the effect of ethnic harassment experience on employees' intention to leave.

*JEL Classifications: J63, M5*

*Keywords: ethnic harassment experience; cultural intelligence; intention to leave; Indonesia*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the geographically largest countries and has one of the densest populations in the world. The huge amount of people in Indonesia and its vast area consisting of thousands of islands are resulting in high rate of cultural and ethnical diversification. More than 300 distinct ethnic and linguistic groups exist in Indonesia. Almost each region in Indonesia has its own local language and custom.

Previous studies have yet to investigate the impact of ethnic diversification in Indonesia on the work domain. When an organization distributes their workforce across Indonesia, the difference in ethnical and cultural situation needs to be taken into account. The large area of Indonesia with its high diversification of ethnic and culture may affect whether someone who is assigned into an area differs from their place of origin will work effectively or not.

In this study, ethnicity refers to a group of people with the same cultural background. When people go to another region in Indonesia, they are going to a place with different culture, custom, and usually accent or language, whether the distance from their place of origin is great or not. Even people from a city next door may have different ways of doing things and speaking.

Previous study shows that employees from ethnic minority are prone to be harassed by their co-workers (Creegan, Colgan, Charlesworth, and Robinson, 2003). This implies that when an organization placed someone in a work environment where their ethnicity is not the majority, that employee is more likely to be ethnically harassed. According to Tepper (2000), employees who feel harassed at work often decide that leaving is the solution to that problem. Based on these researches, this study examines the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave on employees who are assigned at different regions across Indonesia.

The moderating role of cultural intelligence on the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave is also investigated in this study. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a multidimensional construct, defined by Early and Ang (2003) as an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings. People with high cultural intelligence will be more easily adapted to a new social situation and function more effectively (House, Javidan, and Dorfman, 2001). This study argues that when employees who are assigned to a new environment score high on cultural intelligence, the effect of ethnic harassment experience on their intention to leave will be weakened. In other words, we argue that cultural intelligence moderates the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave.

Based on this background, this study will examine the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave among employees assigned to different regions in Indonesia, with the moderating role of cultural intelligence. Each of cultural intelligence dimensions covers a different cultural topic and may present different result as a moderator. Therefore, we tested both the moderating role of each dimension of cultural intelligence and cultural intelligence as a whole on the effect of ethnic harassment experience on employee's intention to leave.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Ethnic Harassment

Fox and Stallworth (2005) stated that race and ethnicity from minority group are more often became the target of harassment and mistreatment in their day-to-day lives. Ethnic harassment according to Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) is conceptually similar to racism. According to Schneider, Hitlan, and Radhakrishnan (2000), ethnic harassment in the workplace is a composed of two factors: slurs or derogatory comments about a target's ethnic group and exclusion of the target from work-related or social interactions as a result of his or her ethnicity. In other words, ethnic harassment consists of verbal harassment and exclusion about one's ethnicity.

Verbal harassment is a form of workplace aggression, including bad words and attitudes targeted to certain co-workers with the intention to hurt them (Deery, Walsh, and Guest, 2011). Ashforth (1994) stated that the source of verbal harassment in the workplace usually comes from supervisors and can dangerously affect the employee. Beside supervisors, verbal harassment also comes from co-workers at the same level.

Other than verbal harassment, employees from certain ethnicity are usually excluded at their work place. Research by Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) argues that someone who comes from different ethnicity from the people around him, or minority ethnicity at work place, often experience isolation from his or her group. For example, someone who comes from certain ethnicity often does not get the important information or invited to an important event regarding his or her work.

## **B. Cultural Intelligence**

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is related to someone's ability to effectively interacting with people from different cultural background (Van Dyne, Ang, and Koh, 2008). Early and Ang (2003) developed CQ based on contemporary theories on intelligence. They defined CQ as an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings.

CQ is a multidimensional construct. It targeted at situations that include cross-cultural interactions from different race, ethnicity, and country. The characteristic of CQ is conceptualized by Early and Ang (2003) into four dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral.

Metacognitive CQ refers to one's mental process to learn and understand cultural knowledge. The ability in metacognitive dimension includes planning and controlling cultural norms in a country or a group (Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, Ng, Templer, Tay, and Chandrasekar, 2007). According to Triandis (2006), someone with high metacognitive CQ will realize, assume, and adapt with other culture's preferences.

Cognitive CQ refers to the knowledge regarding norms, practices, and customs in different cultures acquired from personal education and experiences (Ang et al., 2007). This knowledge includes knowledge on economics, laws, and social system in different cultures and sub-cultures (Triandis, 2000). Someone with high cognitive CQ, as stated by Brislin, Worthley, and MacNab (2006), will better understand the similarity and the differences among different cultures.

Motivational CQ reflects one's ability to learn cultural difference and to function in certain cultural situations (Ang et al., 2007). According to Deci and Ryan (1985), someone with high motivational CQ will direct their attention and energy towards cross cultural situation based on their intrinsic interest. In other words, people with high motivational CQ are motivated intrinsically to deal with new cultural situation.

Behavioral CQ is the fourth dimension in Early and Ang (2003) concept. It is defined as one's ability to show appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures. Gudykunst, Ting-Toorney, and Chua (1988) stated that someone with high behavioral CQ level has wider verbal and non-verbal abilities and capable to act accordingly to any situation they face, such as selecting appropriate words, tones, gestures, and facial expressions.

Ang et al. (2007) stated that a form of intelligence that is in line with CQ is general mental ability and emotional intelligence. General mental ability focuses on theoretical ability which is not necessarily specific to a context (Schmidt and Hunter, 2004) while emotional intelligence focuses on general ability to accept and manage emotion (Ang et al., 2007). The difference between CQ and these theories is that both theories do not consider cultural context while CQ does.

### **C. Intention to Leave**

Intention to leave is an indicator of employee turnover (Lee and Mowday, 1987). Mobley, William, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978) stated that intention to leave is a stage in employee's decision-making process, whether to stay in the organization or to leave. It is also defined as individual desire to leave their organization in the near future (Vandenberg and Nelson, 1999). In other words, intention to leave is someone's willingness to quit their job.

According to Lee and Mitchell (1994), employees' intention to leave is resulted from their personal perception and their flexibility to change job. Lee and Mowday (1987) stated that the general causes for an employee's intention to leave the organization are individual's value and expectation. From these researches we can conclude that employees' intention to leave is a personal wish or decision from within themselves.

### **D. The Effect of Ethnic Harassment Experience on Intention to Leave and the Moderating Role of Cultural Intelligence**

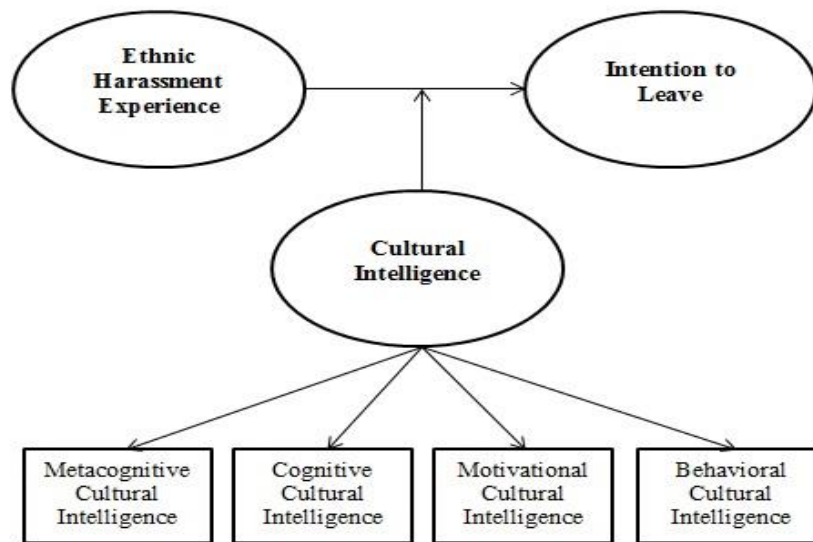
Previous studies have showed the impact of ethnic harassment experience on employee's intention to leave. Employees from minority ethnicity are more often to experience verbal harassment and isolation which leads them to have high intention to leave (Deery *et al.*, 2011; Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986). This is in line with Tepper (2000) who stated that employees who feel that they are harassed often react to it by deciding to quit from the organization. Furthermore, Djurkovic, McCormack, and Casimir (2008) also showed that violence or harassment in workplace is causing the victims to have the desire to quit their job. These researches show that ethnic harassment experience affect employee's intention to leave.

Employees from different ethnicity are prone to cultural misunderstanding. Earley (2002) stated that misunderstanding among cultures often occurs and usually have significant effect on organization. The study also stated that in CQ, it is very important to have analytical ability, in which a situation in a culture can be defined differently by people from different cultural background. Therefore, it is common for misunderstanding to occur. This shows that CQ level in someone will affect how he/she interprets a cultural situation. A harmless situation for someone might be taken as harassment for others with different cultural background.

Study conducted by Loosemore and Chau (2002) on companies in Australia shows how one's ethnicity may affect the treatment they get in the workplace. This study presents that employees from Asia or have Asian ethnicity get racist and discriminative treatment. One of the causes is poorly managed cultural differences and Asian employees tend to have poor adaptability. Whereas, unfriendly treatment in workplace, in this case ethnicity related, will make employees who experience it to develop intention to leave their job (Djurkovic et al., 2004).

Based on these researches, we argue that employees' ability to adapt in new cultural environment or their cultural intelligence may strengthen or weakened the effect of ethnic harassment experience on their intention to leave, in a way that even if they experience ethnic harassment, but their cultural intelligence is high, then their intention to leave will be lower. Therefore, this study argues that CQ moderates the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave. Each dimension of CQ may provide different result because it covers different topic in culture, thus we also tested each dimension of CQ as a moderator.

**Figure 1**  
Conceptual framework



Based on these literatures, we propose the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Ethnic harassment experience affects employee's intention to leave.

**H2:** Cultural intelligence moderates the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave.

**H2a:** Metacognitive cultural intelligence moderates the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave.

**H2b:** Cognitive cultural intelligence moderates the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave.

**H2c:** Motivational cultural intelligence moderates the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave.

**H2d:** Behavioral cultural intelligence moderates the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Population and Sample

In this research, the population we used is employees who are assigned to different region across Indonesia. The region they are assigned to must be different from their place of origin. This study uses snowball sampling method to get the respondents, with the consideration to be able to cover different regions in Indonesia.

We used questionnaire to acquire the data needed for our conceptual model and hypotheses testing. The questionnaire was distributed using web-based platform. A total of 232 questionnaires were collected and used for the analysis. The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Sample characteristics

	Characteristics	Sample (N=232)	%
Gender	Men	113	48.7
	Women	119	51.3
Age	<20	2	1.3
	21-30	222	95.7
	31-40	7	3.0
Education	High School	5	2.2
	D1	8	3.4
	D3	33	14.2
	D4	6	2.6
	Bachelor	175	75.4
Working Experience	Undergraduate	5	2.2
	<1	101	43.5
	1-2	88	37.9
	3-4	16	6.9
	4-5	8	3.4
	>5	19	8.2

#### B. Measurement

##### 1. Ethnic Harassment Experience

Ethnic harassment experience was measured using 7 items scale developed by Schneider *et al.* (2000). The respondents assessed each item by choosing how frequently they experienced each statement from scale 1 (never) to 6 (almost always). Based on the reliability test, the Cronbach's alpha for ethnic harassment experience is 0.9630.

## 2. Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

We measured cultural intelligence using 20 items scale of CQS taken from Ang *et al.* (2007). Respondents assessed each item by choosing the scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for metacognitive CQ is 0.9400, cognitive CQ is 0.9028, motivational CQ is 0.9233, and behavioral CQ is 0.9295.

## 3. Intention to Leave

Intention to leave was measured using 2 items scale developed by Schneider *et al.*, (2000). Each item was assessed from scale 1 (strongly disagree) to scale 6 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for intention to leave is 0.8200.

## 4. Control Variable

Our study used culture novelty as control variable. Culture novelty defined by Black and Stephens (1989) as how similar or different the condition in the new place compared to the place of origin. The cultural differences or similarities between the new place and place of origin may affect the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave, where the more similar the culture, the more likely people are willing to stay. Culture novelty was measured using 8 items statements, assessed with 6point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very similar) to 6 (very different).

## IV. RESULTS

Our hypotheses were tested using hierarchical linear regression. The first hypothesis is testing the effect of independent variable (ethnic harassment experience) on dependent variable (intention to leave). To test Hypothesis 1, we used two models. The first model tested the control variable (culture novelty), and then in the second model we test the direct relationship of ethnic harassment and intention to leave. The control variable is proven to be not significant, while Hypothesis 1 is supported ( $B=0.319$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This means that ethnic harassment experience positively affect intention to leave. The result is shown on Table 2.

**Table 2**  
Regression result for hypothesis 1

	Intention to Leave					
	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	t	P	B	t	P
Culture Novelty (CN)	-0.009	-0.096	0.923	0.017	0.190	0.850
Ethnic Harassment (EH)				0.319**	3.901	0.000
$\Delta R^2$	0.006			0.250		
$R^2$	0.000			0.062		
Adjusted $R^2$	-0.004			0.054		
F	0.009			7.612**		

To test the moderating variable, we used three models. The first model tested the control variable (culture novelty), then in the second model we add the independent variable (ethnic harassment experience) and the moderating variable, and in the last model we tested the interaction between independent variable and moderating variable on the dependent variable.

Table 3.1 shows the moderated hypotheses testing result for hypothesis 2. Based on the result, we can see that hypothesis 2 is supported ( $B=-0.236$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This means that cultural intelligence as a whole negatively moderates the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave.

Among the dimensions tested as moderating variable, only two are proven to be significant, which are hypothesis 2a (as shown in Table 3.2) and hypothesis 2c (as shown in Table 3.4). Hypothesis 2a (metacognitive cultural intelligence) ( $B=-0.124$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and hypothesis 2c (motivational cultural intelligence) ( $B=-0.118$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) are both negatively moderate the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave. Meanwhile, Table 3.3 and Table 3.5 show that hypothesis 2b (cognitive cultural intelligence) ( $B=0.049$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and hypothesis 2d (behavioral cultural intelligence) ( $B=-0.093$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) are not supported, therefore do not moderate the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave.

**Table 3.1**  
Regression result for hypotheses 2

	Intention to Leave								
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	T	P	B	T	P	B	T	P
CN	-0.009	-0.096	0.923	0.022	0.248	0.805	0.009	0.103	0.918
EH				0.303**	3.231	0.001	1.194*	2.932	0.004
CI				-0.054	-0.368	0.713	0.381	1.580	0.116
EH*CI							-0.236*	-2.248	0.026
$\Delta R^2$	0.006			0.251			0.289		
$R^2$	0.000			0.063			0.083		
<i>Adjusted</i> $R^2$	-0.004			0.051			0.067		
F	0.009			5.101**			5.157**		

**Table 3.2**  
Regression result for hypotheses 2a

	Intention to Leave								
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	$\beta$	t	P	$\beta$	t	P	B	T	P
CN	-0.009	-0.096	0.923	0.018	0.203	0.839	-0.001	-0.009	0.993
EH				0.314**	3.380	0.001	0.806**	3.059	0.002
MC				-0.012	-0.120	0.904	0.290	1.617	0.107
EH*MC							-0.124*	-1.993	0.047
$\Delta R^2$	0.006			0.250			0.280		
$R^2$	0.000			0.062			0.079		
<i>Adjusted</i> $R^2$	-0.004			0.050			0.062		
F	0.009			5.058**			4.836**		



**Table 3.3**  
Regression result for hypotheses 2b

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	$\beta$	t	P	B	t	P	B	T	P
CN	-0.009	-0.096	0.923	0.007	0.076	0.940	0.009	0.098	0.922
EH				0.321**	3.917	0.000	0.115	0.277	0.782
COG				0.068	0.673	0.501	-0.017	-0.089	0.929
EH*CO							0.049	0.508	0.612
G									
$\Delta R^2$	0.006			0.253			0.255		
$R^2$	0.000			0.064			0.065		
Adjusted $R^2$	-0.004			0.052			0.049		
$R^2$									
F	0.009			5.214**			3.962*		

**Table 3.4**  
Regression result for hypotheses 2c

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	$\beta$	t	P	B	t	P	$\beta$	T	P
CN	-0.009	-0.096	0.923	0.025	0.293	0.770	0.003	0.033	0.973
EH				0.262**	2.863	0.005	0.694**	2.985	0.003
MOT				-0.139	-1.413	0.159	0.124	0.763	0.446
EH*MO							-0.118*	-2.020	0.045
T									
$\Delta R^2$	0.006			0.265			0.295		
$R^2$	0.000			0.070			0.087		
Adjusted $R^2$	-0.004			0.058			0.071		
$R^2$									
F	0.009			5.763**			5.401**		

**Table 3.5**  
Regression result for hypotheses 2d

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	$\beta$	t	P	B	t	P	B	t	P
CN	-0.009	-0.096	0.923	0.018	0.208	0.836	0.024	0.272	0.786
EH				0.310*	3.411	0.001	0.656*	2.615	0.010
BEH				-0.023	-0.255	0.799	0.179	1.098	0.273
EH*BE							-0.093	-1.480	0.140
H									
$\Delta R^2$	0.006			0.250			0.268		
$R^2$	0.000			0.063			0.072		
Adjusted $R^2$	-0.004			0.050			0.055		
$R^2$									
F	0.009			5.076**			4.374**		

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### A. The Effect of Ethnic Harassment Experience on Intention to Leave

Based on the hypothesis testing result, we can see that ethnic harassment experience positively affects intention to leave. This means that employees who experienced ethnic harassment at workplace will develop the intention to leave. This can be explained by a previous study that showed that employees from minority ethnicity or employees who have different physical appearance or speaking accents are more often to experience unpleasant treatment, including harassment (Berdahl and Moore, 2006). Eirnasen and Raknes (1997) stated that when someone becomes the victim of harassment, it will negatively affect that individual's psychological health and well-being. Hence, it is natural for them to want to go home or go back to their place of origin. This result is in line with Djurkovic *et al.* (2004) who stated violence or harassment in the workplace will cause the employee who gets the treatment has a desire to quit his/her job.

#### **B. The Moderating Role of Cultural Intelligence on the Effect of Ethnic Harassment Experience on Intention to Leave**

Hypothesis testing for the moderation variable showed that cultural intelligence (CQ) as a whole negatively moderates the relationship between ethnic harassment experience and intention to leave. The higher the cultural intelligence, the weaker the effect of ethnic harassment experience and intention to leave will be.

Based on the result, we can say that when an employee scores high on cultural intelligence, even though that individual experience ethnic harassment, his/her intention to leave will be lower. This is because that employee has the capability to function and manage in culturally diverse setting; hence the intention to leave will be low. This result is in line with previous studies that showed that poorly managed cultural differences and poor adaptability by employees are the causes of discriminative treatment, which will make employees who experience it develop more intention to leave their job (Loosemore and Chau, 2002; Djurkovic *et al.*, 2004).

Hypothesis testing for each dimension of cultural intelligence as moderating variables showed various results. Two of the dimensions, which are the cognitive cultural intelligence and behavioral cultural intelligence, are not significant. Both dimensions do not moderate the relationship between ethnic harassment experience and intention to leave.

The other two dimensions, which are the metacognitive cultural intelligence and motivational cultural intelligence, are proven to be negatively moderate the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave. In other words, the higher metacognitive and motivational cultural intelligence, the weaker the effect of ethnic harassment experience on intention to leave will be.

Metacognitive CQ is defined as the ability to learn and understand cultural knowledge (Ang *et al.*, 2007). When employees have high capability to learn and understand the culture in the place they are assigned to, they can manage to deal with ethnic harassment, thus reducing their intention to leave. Meanwhile, someone with high motivational CQ means that the individual is intrinsically motivated to function in different cultural situation (Deci and Ryan, 1985). In other words, that individual enjoys interacting in a different culture, and believes in his/her own ability to conduct it. With high motivational CQ, even if an employee experience ethnic harassment, that individual's intention to leave will be low. Therefore, motivational CQ negatively moderates the relationship between ethnic harassment experience and intention to leave.

## VI. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While we are satisfied with the findings, there are a few limitations in this research that need to be taken into account. First of all, the characteristic of the sample is mostly clustered into one category. Most of the respondents are on the younger side, with little work experience. This is because the methodology we use is the snowball sampling, hence the one recommending the next respondent is most likely from the same age group or the same characteristic group. Using this method, future research can choose more diverse initial respondent so that the final respondents will be more diverse as well.

Second, more control variables can be used in future research, such as marital status and spouse's adjustment. Previous research by Black and Stephens (1989) has studied these variables on repatriation, but no research has ever study its impact on employee's intention to leave when assigned to a different culture or region, much like how expatriate works.

Lastly, the questionnaires are self-assessed. Because of time restriction, we are unable to investigate deeper about each variables. To better understand how ethnic harassment in workplace may occur in different region across Indonesia and its impact on intention to leave, future research can combine the survey method with in-depth interview.

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