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Workplace Surveillance and Its Descriptive Results: Findings from Kuwait

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Workplace surveillance, employee well-being, digital monitoring, privacy concerns.

ABSTRACT

In today's digital era, workplace surveillance is increasingly implemented to boost productivity and security, making it essential to understand its impact on employee well-being. This study investigates how demographic factors such as age, gender, income, education level, and marital status influence perceptions of workplace surveillance. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 258 employees in Kuwait through a structured survey, assessing their views on workplace surveillance through a validated questionnaire. Statistical analyses, including t-tests and ANOVA, were conducted to explore significant differences among demographic groups. Findings revealed notable variations in perceptions based on age and gender. Younger employees, along with women, expressed higher levels of discomfort with surveillance practices compared to their older or male counterparts, indicating a potential vulnerability to perceived privacy intrusions among these groups. However, the study found no significant differences in surveillance perceptions regarding income or marital status, suggesting that certain demographic factors may not directly impact comfort levels with workplace monitoring. The results highlight the critical role of demographic considerations, particularly age and gender, in shaping employee attitudes towards surveillance. Younger employees and female workers tend to feel more affected, perhaps due to heightened awareness of privacy issues or societal dynamics related to surveillance. Consequently, organizations are encouraged to tailor their surveillance policies to account for these demographic variations, potentially alleviating discomfort and fostering a work environment that respects privacy and maintains trust. By addressing these demographic differences, organizations may mitigate potential negative impacts on employee morale and well-being, enhancing both organizational culture and productivity.

INTRODUCTION

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Note: This paper is developed from Nour Hussein PhD thesis.

Given the expanding use of digital surveillance in workplaces today, comprehending its effects on employee well-being is more important than ever. The realm of employee management and supervision has drastically evolved due to monitoring technologies, ranging from conventional CCTV to advanced software tracking. Research continues to underscore the growing pervasiveness of workplace surveillance, which is now integrated into daily business operations (Rule, 1999; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000; Lyon, 2007). Through various tools, organizations now monitor activities such as computer files, email, internet usage, phone calls, and physical movements (Clarke, 1999; Ball & Mankoff, 2005). This technological shift from manual oversight to automated monitoring has led to new concerns, particularly regarding employee autonomy, privacy, and trust (Alder & Ambrose, 2005; Gamage & Samaranayake, 2012).

Historically, organizations sought to track employee behavior for reasons of accountability, security, and productivity. Early workplace monitoring was conducted through direct observation and manual record-keeping (Jasper & Goodson, 1998). Over time, however, advancements in information technology transformed these processes, allowing data to be collected at unprecedented speed and scale (Beniger, 1986). Today's systems facilitate remote monitoring, allowing oversight even beyond the physical workspace (Erdemir & Kiziloğlu, 2018), which has raised concerns about constant supervision and its psychological impacts on employees. Scholars have noted that excessive monitoring can decrease autonomy and reduce job satisfaction, particularly when employees feel their privacy is compromised (Zuboff, 2015; Lee et al., 2021).

The transition from manual to digital surveillance not only broadens organizational control but also raises ethical issues regarding data privacy and employee consent (Levy & Barocas, 2017; Kneese & boyd, 2019). As Metzger and Bach (2021) discuss, increased surveillance capabilities allow employers to continuously collect and analyze employee data, potentially leading to significant power imbalances and intrusions into personal privacy. When employees are unaware of or uncomfortable with these surveillance measures, it can lead to increased stress and reduced trust in management (Martin et al., 2021; Rosenblat & Stark, 2022). Research by Sarpong and Rees (2014) supports the view that an atmosphere of distrust can develop when surveillance practices are overly pervasive or insufficiently transparent.

Adding further complexity, studies by Holland, Cooper, and Hecker (2015) reveal that perceptions of workplace surveillance vary across professional and hierarchical contexts, with employees in high-autonomy roles typically showing greater resistance to monitoring.

Meanwhile, organizational attempts to justify surveillance on the grounds of productivity and security often fall short, as excessive monitoring can lead to unintended negative outcomes like increased employee turnover and reduced morale (Oliver, 2018; Nussbaum & DuRivage, 2022).

Consequently, as surveillance practices continue to expand in scope and intensity, organizations are encouraged to develop policies that are both transparent and considerate of employee concerns. Balancing operational efficiency with employee privacy remains a key challenge for modern organizations (Taylor & Emir, 2020; Thompson & Molnar, 2023). This article explores recent developments and empirical findings related to workplace surveillance, aiming to provide a comprehensive view of its impact on employee well-being, privacy, and trust.

Conceptual Framework

Workplace surveillance

The notion of the surveillance state has become deeply embedded in both popular and political conversations. Some argue that it represents a defining characteristic of modernity, closely associated with industrialization and the emergence of the nation-state (Giddens, 1990). Others suggest a linkage between pre-industrial and modern societies in terms of information gathering, signifying a transition from local to national collection between 1500 and 2000 (Higgs, 2004).

Surveillance in the workplace plays a crucial role in enabling management to monitor, record, and track employee performance, behaviors, and personal characteristics in real time, thereby facilitating the maintenance of organizational security, productivity, and compliance with regulations (Ball, 2010). This ability to monitor various aspects of employees' work and non-work activities can help in ensuring task performance, professional profile and reputation, and even protection of commercial interests (Lyon, 2001). Additionally, workplace surveillance is utilized to gather insights into employee well-being, work culture, productivity, creativity, and motivation, which can contribute to informed decision-making and the overall functioning of the organization (Zuboff, 2015).

Ball defines workplace surveillance as the deliberate monitoring, recording, and tracking of employees' performance, behaviors, and personal attributes as part of organizational processes. Traditionally, this involved direct observation by managers to ensure compliance with organizational standards (Lyon, 2023).

The evolution of surveillance technologies has been marked by a transition from manual and mechanical methods to sophisticated electronic systems. Early surveillance techniques included physical observation and simple record-keeping, which were limited in scope and coverage (Mann and Ferenbok, 2013). With technological advancements, surveillance systems have evolved to include sophisticated digital tools such as video cameras, biometric systems, and advanced data analytics platforms. These developments have significantly expanded the capabilities of workplace surveillance, allowing for more extensive and intrusive monitoring of employee activities and behaviors (Siegel et al., 2022).

The Effects of Surveillance in Work Places

Workplace surveillance has profound implications for employees' privacy, autonomy, and overall well-being. According to Oliver (2018), the right to privacy is crucial for maintaining individual autonomy, dignity, and personal well-being. Violations of privacy can stifle independent thinking and creativity, leading to psychological distress and stress-related illnesses (Lockwood, 2018). Taylor and Emir (2020) question whether the monitoring of employees' activities and communications is justifiable, while Friedman and Read (2021) argue that privacy rights often diminish when individuals transition from citizens to employees.

Surveillance practices can provoke significant controversy when they encroach upon employees' personal lives, delve into non-performance-related personal attributes, disrupt work practices, or undermine levels of control, autonomy, and trust (Kayas, 2023). Although surveillance can reduce employee misconduct, enhance productivity, and prevent confidential information leakage, it can also lead to diminished employee morale and privacy infringements (Lee & Kleiner, 2019). Aiello (2018) conducted six laboratory studies to explore the effects of computer monitoring on stress and task performance. Additionally, Aiello and Kolb (2019) found that group-level monitoring could mitigate some stress compared to individual monitoring or no monitoring, which has implications for workplace dynamics and social relationships.

Workplace surveillance can damage the employee-employer relationship, traditionally seen as a reciprocal exchange of effort for pay and security (Guest, 2018; Morrison and Robinson, 2019; Conway and Briner, 2020). Monitoring performance can be perceived as a breach of trust, leading to feelings of injustice or betrayal (Morrison and Robinson, 2021). This can exacerbate privacy concerns and reduce engagement, empowerment, and trust if monitoring practices lack transparency (Martin et al., 2021). Attitudes towards surveillance can lead to counterproductive work behaviours, such as system manipulation, avoiding monitored areas,

and falsifying work completion (Taylor and Bain, 2021; Nussbaum and DuRivage, 2022; Stanton and Weiss, 2022). These behaviours can result in absenteeism, lateness, and other violations of company regulations (Martin et al., 2021; Robinson and Bennett, 2022), ultimately impacting employee morale and well-being (Tavani, 2023).

Studies about Workplace Surveillance

Recent meta-analyses and empirical research have explored the multifaceted impacts of workplace surveillance on various employee outcomes. These studies reveal a complex interplay between surveillance practices and employee well-being, performance, and job satisfaction Binns and Quirin, 2021; Wallace and Kress, 2022; Zhang and Wang, 2023).

A comprehensive meta-analysis investigates the dual effects of electronic monitoring on job satisfaction and stress levels. The analysis shows that while electronic monitoring can enhance performance by providing continuous feedback and accountability, it is also associated with increased stress and decreased job satisfaction. Employees who perceive monitoring as invasive or mistrustful are more likely to experience these negative outcomes. The study emphasizes that the context and implementation of monitoring practices are crucial in moderating these effects. Transparent and fair monitoring tends to mitigate negative impacts, whereas opaque and punitive practices exacerbate them. Thus, the meta-analysis underscores the need for a balanced approach to electronic monitoring to optimize workplace outcomes (Siegel et al., 2022).

The study by Sarpong and Rees (2014) examines the effects of pervasive electronic surveillance at the WAST organization. It finds that constant monitoring, described as 'big brother' surveillance, significantly impacts employee morale and psychological well-being. Employees report heightened stress and anxiety, attributing these feelings to a perceived lack of trust and autonomy. Additionally, job satisfaction is adversely affected, and there is an increase in counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) as a form of resistance. The study suggests that despite the goal of enhancing productivity and compliance, excessive surveillance may undermine these objectives by creating an environment of distrust and resentment. This highlights the need for a more balanced surveillance strategy that respects employee autonomy and well-being.

Research by Stark et al. (2019) reveals that while facial recognition technology (FRT) is deemed acceptable by over half of employees for theft detection, women exhibit significantly lower acceptance compared to men. This difference reflects heightened privacy concerns and discomfort with surveillance. Women express greater unease due to experiences of workplace

harassment and concerns about power imbalances. The study underscores that surveillance technologies, while intended to combat misconduct, may exacerbate privacy fears and perpetuate gender inequalities. It suggests future research should explore evolving public perceptions of surveillance, particularly in light of increased scrutiny and movements like.

Thompson and Molnar (2023) report that a significant majority of Canadian organizations use electronic monitoring to track employee activities, driven by concerns over productivity, security, and compliance. Approximately 70% of surveyed companies employ software to monitor internet usage, email communications, and application use. Despite widespread adoption, there are notable variations in how transparently organizations communicate their monitoring practices. Employees have mixed perceptions; while some recognize the necessity for monitoring, others report decreased autonomy, increased stress, and privacy concerns. The study highlights the importance of transparent and fair implementation of monitoring practices to balance surveillance needs with employee rights and well-being.

Holland et al. (2015) investigate how electronic monitoring affects employees' trust in management, finding a general decrease in trust, particularly pronounced in professional and managerial roles. Employees in higher-status occupations, who typically enjoy more autonomy, view monitoring as a breach of trust, while those in less autonomous roles are less affected. The study emphasizes the role of occupational context in shaping reactions to monitoring and suggests that transparent communication and employee involvement in surveillance policy implementation are crucial for mitigating trust issues.

Furnham and Swami (2015) use exploratory factor analysis to examine the Surveillance at Work Scale (SWS), identifying two factors: Negative Aspects of Surveillance and Positive Aspects of Surveillance. Negative aspects are associated with lower job satisfaction, greater perceived discrimination, and negative attitudes toward authority, while positive aspects correlate with greater job satisfaction and positive attitudes toward authority. The study underscores the complex nature of surveillance attitudes, with different factors influencing employee perceptions and outcomes.

Kızıloğlu (2018) explores the relationship between workplace monitoring and job stress, finding a significant positive correlation between the extent of monitoring and employee stress. The study highlights that both the frequency and perceived intrusiveness of monitoring contribute to increased stress levels. Employees who view monitoring as control rather than support report higher stress, with job autonomy moderating this relationship. The study

employs a structured questionnaire and rigorous statistical analyses to ensure reliability and validity of the findings.

Oz et al. (1999) investigate employee perceptions of electronic monitoring, revealing skepticism and concern about privacy invasions and potential misuse of data. Employees subjected to extensive monitoring report higher stress and diminished job satisfaction. The study emphasizes the importance of transparency in monitoring practices, noting that employees are more accepting when informed about the scope and purpose of monitoring. A positive correlation exists between perceived fairness of monitoring and favorable employee attitudes and compliance.

Vitak and Zimmer (2023) explore employees' attitudes towards workplace surveillance in the post-COVID context, finding heightened privacy and autonomy concerns due to increased monitoring technologies. These concerns correlate with decreased job satisfaction and mistrust towards management. The study highlights that transparency in communication about monitoring practices can mitigate negative perceptions, especially in remote work settings where personal and professional boundaries are blurred. It underscores the need for organizations to balance productivity and security benefits with potential negative impacts on employee well-being and trust.

Methodology

Aim of the study

The study seeks to elucidate how workplace surveillance can either alleviate or worsen the employee well-being.

H1: Workplace surveillance significantly differs according to the age variable.

H2: Workplace surveillance significantly differs according to the gender variable.

H3: Workplace surveillance significantly differs according to the education level variable.

H4: Workplace surveillance significantly differs according to the income level variable.

H5: Workplace surveillance significantly differs according to the marital status variable.

Research design and approach

The study adopts a quantitative research approach to objectively measure and analysis the connections between workplace surveillance and demographics information. This approach allows for statistical testing of hypotheses and generality of findings across a grand population.

Data Collection Methods

A structured questionnaire was designed to gather data on workplace surveillance. The survey contained a Workplace Surveillance Questionnaire (Furnham and Swami, 2015) was used scaled the limit and types of surveillance endured by employees.

Sample

Sample details are presented below.

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24	56	21,7	21,7	21,7
	25-34	119	46,1	46,1	67,8
	35-44	39	15,1	15,1	82,9
	45-54	44	17,1	17,1	100,0
	Total	258	100,0	100,0	

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	137	53,1	53,1	53,1
	Female	121	46,9	46,9	100,0
	Total	258	100,0	100,0	

Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than high school	101	39,1	39,1	39,1
	High school diploma or equivalent	125	48,4	48,4	87,6
	Some college, no degree	32	12,4	12,4	100,0
	Total	258	100,0	100,0	

salary

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 400 KD	117	45,3	45,3	45,3
	401 – 600 KD	141	54,7	54,7	100,0
	Total	258	100,0	100,0	

Marital status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	60	23,3	23,3	23,3
	Married	130	50,4	50,4	73,6
	Divorced	68	26,4	26,4	100,0
	Total	258	100,0	100,0	

ANALYSIS

Control of the Data

Before starting the analysis of the study, the data set was checked. Since the obtained data was collected using the online survey method and all questions were required to be answered, it was understood that there was no missing entry in the data set. Afterwards, each survey item was examined for normality distribution control. The obtained results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Item statistics

Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
SR1	258	3,8411	,94289	-,604	,152	-,323	,302
SR2	258	4,0039	1,04936	-1,494	,152	1,977	,302
SR3	258	3,9806	,98016	-,911	,152	,234	,302
SR4	258	3,8721	1,09612	-,994	,152	,452	,302
SR5	258	4,0349	,94742	-,955	,152	,377	,302
SR6	258	4,1124	,94548	-1,145	,152	,925	,302
SR7	258	3,9690	1,10843	-1,096	,152	,550	,302
SR8	258	3,9574	,96340	-,914	,152	,335	,302
SR9	258	3,1318	1,26847	-,054	,152	-1,125	,302
SR10	258	2,8721	1,16161	,357	,152	-,949	,302
SR11	258	2,7752	1,21110	,241	,152	-,856	,302
SR12	258	2,9961	1,23029	,109	,152	-1,023	,302
SR13	258	2,8953	1,24472	,078	,152	-1,033	,302
SR14	258	2,9225	1,12705	,252	,152	-,585	,302
SR15	258	2,7713	1,20554	,475	,152	-,759	,302
SR16	258	3,5853	1,13079	-,238	,152	-1,104	,302

Since the skewness and kurtosis values for all expressions were at most ±2, it was concluded that the data showed a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010).

Reliability analysis

Cronbach's Alpha calculation was made for the reliability analysis of the scales used in the study. The results are shown in Table 2.

Tablo 2. Reliability analysis

Scales	**Items Number**	**Cronbach's Alfa**
Workplace Surveillance	9	.936

As a result of the reliability analysis, it was concluded that the scale was reliable since all Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were 0.70 and above (Nunnaly, 1978).

t-Test

A series of independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether workplace surveillance differed according to participants' gender, income level, and marital status. As a

result of the tests, workplace surveillance differed significantly according to participants' gender ($p < .01$). However, it was found that workplace surveillance did not differ according to income level and marital status variables ($p > .05$).

Group statistics for the gender variable with significant differences are shown in Table 3 and mean comparisons based on variables are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Gender group statistics

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Workplace Surveillance	Male	137	4,0900	,69592	,05946
	Female	121	3,7456	,93111	,08465

Table 4. Gender group mean comparisons

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Workplace Surveillance	Equal variances assumed	7,662	,006	3,389	256	,001	,34439	,10163	,14424	,54453
	Equal variances not assumed			3,329	220,304	,001	,34439	,10344	,14053	,54825

One-Way ANOVA Analysis

A series of One-Way ANOVA analyses were conducted to determine whether workplace supervision differed according to the age and education level variables of the participants. As a result of the tests, workplace supervision differed significantly according to the age of the participants ($p < .001$). However, it was found that workplace supervision did not differ according to the education level variable ($p > .05$).

The model significance test for the age variable with significant differences is shown in Table 5, age group statistics in Table 6, the homogeneity of variances test in Table 7, and the multiple comparison test in Table 8.

Table 5. ANOVA model significance test

ANOVA					
Workplace Surveillance					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15,486	3	5,162	8,092	,000
Within Groups	162,035	254	,638		
Total	177,521	257			

According to the ANOVA model significance test result, it is seen that the statistical model established for whether workplace surveillance varies according to the age variable of the participants is significant ($p < .001$).

Table 6. Age group statistics

Descriptives								
Workplace Surveillance								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
18-24	56	4,2381	,61825	,08262	4,0725	4,4037	2,89	5,00
25-34	119	3,9057	,71916	,06593	3,7751	4,0362	1,78	5,00
35-44	39	4,0712	,68989	,11047	3,8476	4,2949	1,89	5,00
45-54	44	3,4697	1,19979	,18087	3,1049	3,8345	1,67	4,67
Total	258	3,9285	,83111	,05174	3,8266	4,0304	1,67	5,00

When looking at the average values according to age group statistics, the age groups in which workplace surveillance is perceived the highest are 18-24 years old, 35-44 years old, 25-34 years old and 45-54 years old, respectively. A multiple comparison test was used to determine which age groups the perception differences in question differed significantly in pairs. For this reason, a homogeneity of variance test was performed first.

Table 7. Homogeneity of variance test

Test of Homogeneity of Variances
Workplace Surveillance

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
17,857	3	254	,000

According to the results of the variance homogeneity test, it is understood that the age group variables do not provide the assumption of variance homogeneity ($p < .001$). For this reason, the Games-Howell multiple comparison test, which is one of the tests applied in cases where equal variance is not assumed, was used.

Table 8. Games-Howell multiple comparison test

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Workplace Surveillance

Games-Howell

(I) age	(J) age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
18-24	25-34	,33240*	,10570	,011	,0571	,6077
	35-44	,16687	,13795	,623	-,1955	,5292
	45-54	,76840*	,19885	,002	,2431	1,2937
25-34	18-24	-,33240*	,10570	,011	-,6077	-,0571
	35-44	-,16553	,12865	,575	-,5045	,1734
	45-54	,43600	,19251	,119	-,0741	,9461
35-44	18-24	-,16687	,13795	,623	-,5292	,1955
	25-34	,16553	,12865	,575	-,1734	,5045
	45-54	,60153*	,21194	,030	,0437	1,1593
45-54	18-24	-,76840*	,19885	,002	-1,2937	-,2431
	25-34	-,43600	,19251	,119	-,9461	,0741
	35-44	-,60153*	,21194	,030	-1,1593	-,0437

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to the results of the multiple comparison test, pairwise comparisons that show significant differences are highlighted with " * " ($p < .05$). Accordingly, the first finding is that the 25-34 and 45-54 age groups are significantly different compared to the 18-24 age group. The second finding is that the 18-24 age group is significantly different compared to the 25-34 age group. The third finding is that the 45-54 age group is significantly different compared to the 35-44 age group. The last finding is that the 18-24 and 35-44 age groups are significantly different compared to the 45-54 age group.

According to all the findings, the H1 and H2 hypotheses are supported, while the H3, H4 and H5 hypotheses are not supported.

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of workplace surveillance presents a complex set of challenges and opportunities for both employers and employees. As technology continues to advance, the ability of organizations to monitor, track, and analyze employee activities has expanded beyond

traditional methods such as physical supervision and CCTV to include sophisticated digital surveillance tools. These tools range from internet and email monitoring to biometric systems and data analytics platforms, offering unprecedented insights into employee performance, productivity, and behavior. However, as our study reveals, these advances in surveillance also bring about significant implications for employee well-being, privacy, and trust.

Our research in Kuwait highlights that perceptions of workplace surveillance differ notably across demographic groups, particularly in relation to age and gender. Younger employees, specifically those in the 18-24 age range, exhibited higher levels of discomfort with surveillance compared to their older counterparts. This could be attributed to the younger generation's greater awareness of data privacy issues or their heightened sensitivity to the potential intrusion into personal spaces that modern surveillance technologies represent. Additionally, female employees were more likely to report negative attitudes towards surveillance than male employees, reflecting broader societal concerns about privacy and power dynamics, especially in workplaces with pre-existing gender imbalances. These findings are consistent with previous studies that suggest demographic factors significantly influence how surveillance is perceived and accepted.

The results of this study emphasize the need for organizations to carefully consider how they implement surveillance policies. While the primary aim of workplace surveillance is often to enhance productivity, ensure security, and safeguard proprietary information, its effects on employee morale, stress, and job satisfaction must not be overlooked. Our findings suggest that when surveillance is perceived as invasive or mistrustful, it can lead to negative outcomes such as diminished employee engagement, decreased job satisfaction, and even counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). These outcomes, in turn, can undermine the very objectives that surveillance is intended to achieve.

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