

WORK STRESSORS AND BURNOUT AMONG WORKERS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Burnout is a chronic exhaustion caused by job demand exceeding worker capacity. It is a phenomenon that people may experience if they cannot handle pressure well. Many workers struggle with workload-induced burnout, unaware of its impact. Workplace stress is one of the most significant hurdles someone can experience on the job. Stress at work manifests itself in various forms across a broader range of professions and sectors. Understanding work stressors and burnout levels is essential as they are crucial for effective management and support. This research aims to determine the work stressors and burnout among workers in a public university in Puncak Alam, Selangor. A cross-sectional study design was employed, and the target was to reach 185 workers aged 18-59 working in the selected public university. Convenience sampling was done. A questionnaire on the job stress scale and level of burnout was distributed to the participants. A total of 168 individuals responded, with a mean age of 30 years. The results indicated that workers in the public university had moderate time stress (28.71 ± 9.06) and job anxiety (18.19 ± 5.47). In addition, for the level of burnout, the workers have a moderate level of disengagement and exhaustion, with both earned mean scores of (20.4 ± 7.74). As for the Pearson correlation, it was proven that there was a weak, negative correlation between the time stress with disengagement ($r = -0.15, p > 0.05$) and exhaustion ($r = -0.17, p > 0.05$). To combat time stress, workers must have good time management skills, such as prioritising important tasks first or learning to say no. To address the disengagement issue, workers can also communicate with the manager to explore the solution or rest and recharge to prevent exhaustion from the workload. Thus, new knowledge of these issues was contributed to provide intervention.

Keywords: Work Stressor(s), Burnout, Worker(s), Public University

INTRODUCTION

Burnout is a condition caused by long-term stress at work, where people feel emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted because their job demands exceed their resources (Diehl et al., 2021). It is different from ordinary tiredness or stress (Koutsimani et al., 2019), and it has become a significant issue affecting many workers today. Symptoms of burnout include exhaustion, detachment from work, negative feelings, and a reduced sense of accomplishment (World Health Organization, 2020). It is often triggered by factors like excessive workload and unfair treatment, which can lead to severe physical and mental health problems. Studies show burnout affects a significant portion of the workforce globally, with higher rates among women (Einhorn et al., 2019). Therefore, the prevalence underscores the need for effective interventions and policies to manage workplace stress and prevent burnout.

Workplace stress is one of the most significant hurdles someone can experience on the job. It refers to the physiological and psychological reaction that arises from an unbalanced work environment compared to an employee's capabilities, resources, or requirements (Rengganis et al., 2020). The causes of workplace stressors are often a big issue since they may negatively affect employees' productivity. There are fewer interactions between employees, which might lessen opportunities for social support and feedback. It might also mean that the task is never finished. These can be observed in a study by Yusuf (2020) on auditor's performance at work, which stated that the impact of five types of workplace stresses is role ambiguity, work overload, time constraints, work or family conflict, and wage and compensation.

The truth is that stress at work manifests itself in various forms across a broader range of professions and sectors. A study by Salama (2022) found that, over a decade, the staff work pressures have captured the attention of those from other fields, such as accounting and sales. A study conducted by Abdul Aziz and Ong (2024) discovered the prevalence of burnout was lowest in Malaysia (58.13%), followed by Singapore (66.84%), and highest in the Philippines (70.71%). In Indonesia, a survey found that the frequency of workers experiencing work-related stress was high (Rengganis et al., 2020). As job requirements increase, they may increase work stressors, which will clarify the impact of stresses on proactive behaviours.

Hence, our study aims to investigate work stressors and burnout levels among workers in a public university. As stated in previous studies, we intend to address gaps in understanding and propose solutions to improve employee well-being (Salama et al., 2022; Tang & Vandenberghe, 2021). Hopefully, this research will benefit the community, government, and employers by helping them understand and mitigate burnout's impact on individuals and organisations. It can guide interventions and policies to support employee welfare and overall organisational health.

METHODS

STUDY DESIGN, STUDY SETTING, AND TARGET POPULATION

This study used a descriptive cross-sectional design, a quantitative approach that examines variables using various research techniques. It anticipated the relationships between the variables from the perspectives of this study, which included work stressors and burnout. Work stressors among public university workers were the independent variables, while burnout was the dependent variable. Reviewing previous study publications was a basis for creating this research framework (Andela, 2021; Saputro, 2020).

The study was conducted in a public university, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Puncak Alam Campus, Selangor. The target population included workers from the Faculty of Accountancy and Faculty of Architecture at UiTM Puncak Alam, of which the total number of workers was 168.

SAMPLE SIZE CALCULATION, INCLUSION, AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Using Raosoft (2004), the required sample size was calculated to be 168 participants, with a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and assuming a population proportion of 50%. To account for potential dropouts, 10% was added to the sample size, making it approximately 186 participants. The eligibility criteria for the respondents must be 18-59 years old, the workers currently in permanent jobs, and have an email account. This study excludes participants who were retired and on sick leave.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The research obtained ethical approval from the Research and Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) with reference number FERC/FSK/MR/2023/000172, valid from 31 August 2023 to 31 July 2024. Participants' privacy was protected by obtaining their consent and ensuring the confidentiality of personal information. Permission was also sought from the original authors before using their surveys.

Data collection began after approval from the UiTM Research Ethics Committee. A questionnaire administered via an online Google form was used to gather data shared on platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. The survey's purpose and consent information were explained upfront, and participants indicated their agreement by clicking a continue button to access the questionnaire.

INSTRUMENT AND PILOT STUDY

Section 1: Demographic Data

This section contains four questions about the participant's characteristics: age, educational level (primary, secondary, and tertiary), marital status, and salary.

Section 2: Job Stress Scale (Parker & Decotiis, 1983)

The Job Stress Scale (JSS) is a self-administered questionnaire to identify job stressors. It consists of 13 items covering two main themes: time stress (8 items) and job anxiety (5 items). The questionnaire items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1="strongly disagree" to 5="strongly agree." The higher the scores, the more the workers agreed with the description.

Section 3: Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti, 1999)

This section consists of 16 items. Permission is not required as they are in a free/public domain. The questionnaire was created as a burnout measurement tool. The 16 items are divided into two subscales: disengagement, which includes eight items, and exhaustion, which includes eight items. The scale used is Likert scale (strongly agree=1, agree=2, disagree=3 and strongly disagree=4). Both subscales contain four positively worded items and four negatively worded items. Responses were recorded in all instances to ensure that high scores indicated extreme degrees of fatigue and disengagement.

Before data collection, a pilot study was conducted involving 34 respondents, 10% of the sample size. The Job Stress Scale questionnaire typically yields Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.71 to 0.82 (Parker et al., 1983). Specifically, for the subscales, Time Stress showed a Cronbach's α of 0.86, and Job Anxiety had a Cronbach's α of 0.74 (Parker et al., 1983). In this study, Cronbach's α values were as follows: Job Stress Scale total α =0.83, Time Stress α =0.77, and Job Anxiety α =0.51. For the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), Demerouti et al. (2003) reported a Cronbach's α of 0.84 for the overall scale, with Disengagement α =0.74 and Exhaustion α =0.73 for the subscales. In the current study, Cronbach's α values were OLBI overall α =0.73, Disengagement α =0.61, and Exhaustion α =0.63.

DATA ANALYSIS

For this study, SPSS version 28.0 was used to analyse data using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values were employed to measure work stressors and burnout levels among public university workers. At the same time, the Pearson Correlation was used to investigate the relationships between work stressors and burnout levels.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Table 1 shows the Demographic Data of the respondents. The mean age range was 29.33 ± 0.57 ; most respondents were 20 to 29 years old ($n=53$, 31.5%). In terms of the educational level, most are from tertiary education ($n=129$, 76.8%). As for the marital status, married ($n=78$, 46.4%) and unmarried ($n=90$, 53.6%). Based on the analysis, the respondent's mean value was 3840.64 ± 104.86 ; the highest salary category is B40 ($n=144$, 85.7%).

Table 1: Demographic Data of Workers in a Public University (N= 168)

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (Mean=29.33; SD=0.57)		
20 years – 29 years	53	31.5
30 years – 39 years	30	17.9
40 years – 49 years	45	26.8
50 years – 59 years	40	23.8
Educational level		
Primary	7	4.2
Secondary	32	19.0
Tertiary	129	76.8
Marital status		
Married	78	46.4
Unmarried	90	53.6
Salary (Mean= 3840.64; SD=104.86)		
B40	144	85.7
M40	24	14.3

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This questionnaire was measured using the Likert Scale, with the overall mean of the Job Stress Scale being 46.90 ± 14.53 . This tool consists of 13 questions with two subscales: Time Stress and Job Anxiety. Time Stress had the highest mean score of (28.71 ± 9.06) while Job Anxiety had a mean score of (18.19 ± 5.47).

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the first subscale of the JSS for Time Stress, consisting of eight items analysed for each question. JSS8, 'Too many people at my level in the company get burnout by job demand,' has the highest mean (3.78 ± 1.16). Meanwhile, JSS4, 'I frequently get the feeling I am married to the company,' has the lowest mean (3.44 ± 1.15).

Table 2 also shows Job Anxiety, the second subscale for the JSS. JSS1 'Working here makes it hard to spend enough time with my family' was the highest mean (3.76 ± 0.96). Besides that, JSS3 'Working here leaves little time for other activities' was the minimum mean score in Job Anxiety (3.53 ± 1.17).

Table 2: Job Stress Scale (N=168)

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Total score of JSS	46.90	14.53	13	65
Dimension: Time Stress	28.71	9.06	8	40
JSS4. I frequently get the feeling I am married to the company.	3.44	1.15	1	5
JSS13. I feel guilty when I take time off from my job.	3.45	1.18	1	5
JSS12. Sometimes, when I think about my job, I get a tight feeling in my chest.	3.46	1.16	1	5
JSS6. I sometimes dread the telephone ringing at home because the call might be job-related.	3.58	1.23	1	5
JSS2. I spend so much time at work.	3.65	1.02	1	5
JSS11. There are lots of times when my job drives me right up the wall.	3.67	1.06	1	5
JSS10. My job gets to me more than I should.	3.68	1.10	1	5
JSS8. Too many people at my level in the company get burnout by job demands.	3.78	1.16	1	5
Dimension: Job Anxiety	18.19	5.47	5	25
JSS3. Working here leaves little time for other activities.	3.53	1.17	1	5
JSS9. I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job.	3.58	1.13	1	5
JSS5. I have too much work and too little time to do it.	3.65	1.08	1	5
JSS7. I feel like I never have a day off.	3.67	1.13	1	5
JSS1. Working here makes it hard to spend enough time with my family.	3.76	0.96	1	5

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Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) is a burnout measurement tool that includes statements that span the exhaustion-vigor and cynicism dedication continuum (Denise,2020). The overall mean of OLBI was 40.80 ± 15.48 . I had this questionnaire with two subscales, Disengagement and Exhaustion, where both mean scores were identical (20.4 ± 7.74).

OLBI had two subscales, Disengagement and Exhaustion, where both mean scores were the same (20.4 ± 7.74). Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of subscale OLBI for Disengagement consisting of eight items. OLBI1, 'I will always find new and interesting aspects in my work,' was the highest mean score (2.82 ± 0.96), and OLBI3, 'It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative the lowest mean score (2.35 ± 0.96).

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory for Exhaustion subscale, which consists of eight items. Among all the items, OLBI5, 'I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well,' was the highest mean score (2.92 ± 0.91), and the minimum mean score was OLBI8, 'During my work, I often feel emotionally drained' with the score (2.21 ± 0.94).

Table 3: Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (N=168)

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Total OLBI	40.8	15.48	16	64
Dimension: Disengagement	20.4	7.74	8	32
OLBI9. Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work.	2.27	0.99	1	4
OLBI3. It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative way.	2.35	0.96	1	4
OLBI11. Sometimes, I feel sickened by my work tasks.	2.43	0.99	1	4
OLBI6. Lately, I tend to think less at work and do my job almost mechanically.	2.49	0.99	1	4
OLBI15. I feel more and more engaged in my work.	2.61	0.93	1	4
OLBI13. This is the only type of work that I can imagine myself doing.	2.70	1.01	1	4
OLBI7. I find my work to be a positive challenge.	2.73	0.91	1	4
OLBI1. I will always find new and interesting aspects in my work.	2.82	0.96	1	4
Dimension: Exhaustion	20.4	7.74	8	32
OLBI8. During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.	2.21	0.94	1	4
OLBI2. There are days when I feel tired before arriving at work.	2.27	1.09	1	4
OLBI12. After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.	2.31	1.02	1	4
OLBI4. After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.	2.44	0.98	1	4
OLBI14. Usually, I can manage the amount of work well.	2.55	0.98	1	4
OLBI10. After working, I have enough energy for my leisure time.	2.77	1.02	1	4
OLBI16. When I work, I usually feel energised.	2.85	0.90	1	4
OLBI5. I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well.	2.92	0.91	1	4

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WORK STRESSORS AND LEVEL OF BURNOUT AMONG WORKERS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

Table 4 shows the results of the correlation between the work stressor and level of burnout using the parametric test, as this study is a normal distribution. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used. As for this study, there was a weak, negative correlation statistically significant between Time Stress and Disengagement ($r = -0.15, p > 0.05$) and Exhaustion ($r = 0.17, p > 0.05$). Meanwhile, there was no correlation between the Time Stress and Job Anxiety ($r = 0.70, p < 0.05$), Job Anxiety and Disengagement ($r = -0.08, p > 0.05$), Job Anxiety and Exhaustion ($r = -0.09, p > 0.05$) and between Disengagement and Exhaustion ($r = 0.76, p < 0.05$).

Table 4: Correlation between The Work Stressors and Level of Burnout among Workers in a Public University (N=168)

Variables	Time Stress	Job Anxiety	Disengagement	Exhaustion
Time Stress	1			
Job Anxiety	0.70	1		
Disengagement	-0.15*	-0.08	1	
Exhaustion	-0.17*	-0.09	0.76	1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

DISCUSSION

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The sample size was 168 respondents among workers in a public university aged 18 to 59 years. The demographic data in this study consisted of age, educational level, marital status and salary. In this study, the result demonstrated that the respondents are mostly workers in a public university aged 20-29 years old and are unmarried, similar to a study that had been done by Ganga-Contreras et al. (2022), where most of the workers in the educational sector were aged between 24-30 years old. The educational level of the workers in this study was primarily tertiary, followed by secondary and primary education, which is similar to the study by Irandoost et al. (2021), where most of the participants were from tertiary education. There was a positive and significant relationship between education and burnout; where the level of education was high, burnout was increased (Irandoost et al., 2021). Most of the workers in this study were in the B40 category, similar to the study conducted by (Sun et al., 2020).

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The Job Stress Scale includes two subscales: time stress and job anxiety. Hemati et al. (2023) study highlighted higher job stress among teachers, finding no significant difference between time stress and job anxiety. Vallasamy et al. (2023) noted an increasing number of workers attributing stress to factors like excessive workload, job instability, and the fast-paced nature of modern life, which can pose occasional risks. Time stress, the first subscale, showed a moderate level in this study, with “too many people at my level in the company experience burnout due to job demands” scoring the highest, followed by “my job overwhelms me more than it should.” Boonduaylan et al. (2022) noted that when job expectations exceed workers’ capacities, it can lead to adverse reactions associated with job stress, impacting both positively and negatively.

Similarly, Bagheri et al. (2020) highlighted job demand as a significant stressor, indicating that insufficient job control can lead to mental health issues due to high psychological demands and inadequate self-monitoring. The second subscale, job anxiety, arises when there is a discrepancy between perceived and actual job security (Soelton et al., 2020). This study found higher job anxiety among workers in a public university compared to Hemati’s (2023) study on school teachers. Wu et al. (2020) observed that individuals with high trait anxiety tend to avoid stressful situations, such as spending time with family due to increased workloads. Additionally, in this study, “working here makes it hard to spend time with family” scored the highest, indicating anxiety due to the extra workload impacting family time. Susanto et al. (2022) suggested that supportive family behaviour can enhance job satisfaction and reduce work-related anxiety. Gemmano et al. (2023) highlighted the dual challenges of balancing family and career responsibilities contributing to burnout.

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The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory consists of two subscales: exhaustion and disengagement, where higher scores indicate more significant job burnout. Singh et al. (2024) found that 78.7% of the 2079 respondents in their study experienced burnout, echoing findings from Saxena and Jangra (2021), indicating high-stress levels among academicians leading to burnout. The first subscale, disengagement, measures negative attitudes and behaviours towards work (Meneguín et al., 2023). In this study, “I will always find new and interesting aspects in my work” scored highest, indicating significant burnout levels, consistent with Nayar’s (2024) findings, where disengagement strongly predicted burnout. The second subscale, exhaustion, evaluates physical, emotional, and cognitive weariness at work. Items like “I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well” and “When I work, I usually feel 37nergized” scored lowest, suggesting respondents struggle with job pressure and lack energy, leading to exhaustion. Bakker et al. (2020) noted that workers under pressure and lacking energy may need help with job crafting. Therefore, we should emphasise the global industry’s ongoing challenge of low worker performance, advocating for increased worker motivation to address this issue effectively.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WORK STRESSORS AND LEVEL OF BURNOUT AMONG WORKERS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

Excessive workload puts more stress on the workers, reducing productivity and increasing burnout (Md Shah et al., 2024). The study also found a negative correlation between time stress, disengagement and exhaustion, aligning with their findings that heavier workloads and negative work environments contribute to higher burnout. This study’s results support previous research indicating that burnout results from prolonged exposure to chronic workplace stressors (Guo et al., 2021). Additionally, Wu et al. (2020) suggested that social support at work could mitigate the impact of work stressors on burnout, echoing findings by Fleming et al. (2022), who proposed strategies like improving ergonomic conditions, increasing company support, managing workload effectively, and fostering social support to reduce burnout among workers.

There are a few limitations in this study. Firstly, the findings may be limited because the sample was drawn from one area only. Given the limitations caused by the resources at their disposal, the statistics will not accurately represent the population. It is essential to acknowledge the diversity of workers in a public university. In light of this, future diversity in the sample may prove beneficial for future studies to establish the universality of the findings. The survey responses may not be reliable since some respondents may have answered questions abruptly without carefully reading them. In addition, the demographic data was excluded from the results in the previous chapter. As a result, no relationship could be seen.

CONCLUSION

In essence, this cross-sectional study explored the link between work stressors and burnout among workers in a public university. Workplace stress can stem from various aspects of one's job, such as time pressure and job anxiety, which significantly impact mental health. This study recognised the red flags early as workers' burnout may affect overall well-being. Prevention and early detection are the finest form of medical care. Employers can address these issues by implementing targeted interventions after identifying these factors. Achieving work-life balance is crucial for overall well-being, and understanding the sources of stress can help develop effective coping strategies. Persistent exposure to stressors can lead to burnout, characterised by prolonged feelings of disengagement and exhaustion, as highlighted in this study. Beyond affecting mood, burnout can also adversely affect personal life, career, and health. The findings underscored a clear association between work stressors and burnout among university workers. Promoting mental health awareness in workplaces is essential for enhancing employee well-being. In summary, proactive measures such as prevention and early intervention are essential to effective healthcare.

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