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“I find it very difficult to go to work; it is emotionally exhausting”: Understanding the Burnout and Underlying Emotions among Malaysian University Academics

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Abstract. This study investigated the academic burnout experiences of staff at various universities in Malaysia. Qualitative content analysis was used to deconstruct the interview texts. The study involved $n = 12$ academics (ages 28–46) from several Malaysian higher education institutions. The key findings of this study centre on resilience, engagement and burnout. Eight themes were found: warning indicators of burnout, academic burnout triggers, coping strategies, work-life balance, love for the career, resilience and surviving in academia, the impact of burnout phases on oneself, and stress-inducing variables. The themes were connected to the academics' unique experiences with the burnout phenomenon and problems in their current profession. Data from interviews revealed that most academics considered their work taxing and blamed issues like unmanageable workloads, excessive university requirements and a lack of resources for their burnout episodes. The results also demonstrate that academics were aware of the difficulties and institutional circumstances that add to the complexity of their day-to-day burnout experiences, offering a rich picture of their individual perspectives. Furthermore, individuals with specific personality types, such as perfectionistic traits or standards, tend to be more vulnerable to burnout. The results imply that for academics who experience burnout, relevant interventions and emotional support are essential and that the most resilient are those who maintain a positive attitude and have the capacity to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of an academic profession.

Keywords: burnout; academics; resilience; workload; job engagement

1. Introduction

Academic expectations on university faculty members include an excessive workload, strict deadlines for research and publications, an unbalanced work-life balance and a lack of adequate support (Parmar et al., 2022). These directives could subject the faculty to long-term stress and exhaustion (Garcia-Rivera et al., 2022; Henny et al., 2014; Panatik et al., 2012; Vesty et al., 2015). Although it is known that burnout impacts faculty members' social, psychological and physical health, it is yet unknown how it affects their work-life. We set out to evaluate the effects of burnout on the daily work-life of academics from various disciplines.

Depersonalisation, a lack of personal accomplishment, and long-term exhaustion are the three main components of the phenomenon known as burnout, which is a response to high stress levels in jobs that require communicating with and working with others (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). People's mental and physical health is impacted by how effectively they can adapt to their settings' psychosocial, contextual and physical demands (Sterling, 2012). While physiological reactions to stress are typical and occasionally helpful, burnout may develop from persistent exposure to high levels of professional stress (Psyhalto et al., 2011).

According to previous studies, academics in higher education institutions may experience everyday burnout due to the rising demands and constantly shifting circumstances in areas like economic, political and social life (Henny et al., 2014; Panatik et al., 2012). The increased number of academics quitting their jobs at universities worldwide is one of the issues that university administration is dealing with (Ologunde et al., 2012). Evidence suggests that severe job burnout and other undesirable circumstances lead academics to leave (Ologunde et al., 2012). Malaysia's Ministry of Education, particularly at private universities, faces tremendous problems retaining valuable academic staff.

As part of the nation's goals to become a global hub for higher education by 2020, five of Malaysia's 20 public institutions have already been granted research university status (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2015). These research universities have the luxury of handling administrative, financial, student admissions, human resources and academic issues separately (ahzah et al., 2016). Even more public and private institutions of higher learning have been founded due to this development and revisions to the existing colleges and universities. Performance has become a significant indicator in Malaysian academia due to all these changes, with academics now experiencing more stress and pressure due to the limited resources provided by institutions and the growing competitive pressure (Henny et al., 2014). Owing to the current intense workload placed on these academics, it is not surprising that many academics are experiencing rising levels of stress and burnout due to the growing number of responsibilities demanded of them.

For this study, because the qualitative approach focuses on people's subjective lived experiences, the researcher chose phenomenology within qualitative research to learn about the participants' experiences of a phenomenon.

Phenomenology was chosen for this study because it focuses on how people experience reality, even though constructivist grounded theory was also considered as a research approach. The researcher used the phenomenological study to get insights into how participants perceived their circumstances and analysed people who had experienced burnout and how it affected their jobs, among other things. A few participants were interviewed for the phenomenological investigation to obtain a wider diversity of viewpoints and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

The JD-R model, which reflects an organisational psychological approach, was the foundation for the study's framework. Several workplace factors can be put into a reasonably simple model to explain how burnout and work engagement may be influenced. Although exposure to job demands predicts burnout, job resources are essential in determining work engagement and a decline in cynicism (Bakker et al., 2007). This aligns with the social cognitive theory (SCT) of Albert Bandura (1977, 2001), a psychological theory explaining behaviour. Self-efficacy is predicted to be related to positive affective-cognitive outcomes like engagement at work by SCT. The existence of a descending "loss spiral" where high job demands lead to exhaustion and simultaneously contribute to an increase in job demands over time has also been confirmed. These reciprocal relationships are consistent with the idea of "gain spirals" in the conservation of resources theory (Demerouti et al., 2004).

Since higher education institutions increasingly identify academics as being under a lot of stress, this study aims to understand better the factors influencing burnout among those working in these higher learning institutions. Studies have also outlined how job demands affect the well-being of persons working in the higher education sector, which is commonly acknowledged as a setting for high-stress work. This study also sheds light on academics' coping strategies and coping processes for dealing with challenges at work from the standpoint of the academic environment.

2. Materials and Methods

In-depth semi-structured interviews with academics were conducted in this study's longitudinal qualitative research methodology to elicit their accounts of burnout and "gain insights into a person's subjective experiences, opinions, and motivations" (Busetto et al., 2020, p. 3). In-depth interviews were chosen since they allow for a more thorough examination of a subject's experiences and a more comprehensive data collection.

Since in-depth interviews enable a more extensive examination of participant experiences than other methods, they were chosen for the qualitative approach. To track changes over time in the academics' three quadrants (resilience, engagement and burnout levels) and because the researcher is interested in each academic's unique experience over the course of a semester, a longitudinal qualitative research design (LQR) was chosen. Incorporating phenomenology into this study and LQR was done to understand better the meanings that university academics give to their experiences with burnout at work and how resilience and

engagement have changed their day-to-day activities. According to Ashworth (2003), phenomenology is an approach for delving into a particular event or person's lived experience; in other words, it examines the lived events occurring or phenomenon as it appears to the individual. They focus on first-person stories of burnout appearing in people's experiences and paint a vivid picture of their reality (Creswell, 1998).

This study comprised in-depth interviews with those individuals who were burned out and engaged to acquire detailed narratives on the experience of burnout in Malaysian university academics. Each person's unique burnout and engaged experiences were assessed, and content analysis was employed to find trends and changes shared by the academics. Additionally, the goal was to accurately and ultimately capture the involvement and resilience of respondents and describe how these events occur and how each academic feels about them.

3. Participants

Most phenomenological studies employ small participant groups (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Standard sample sizes for phenomenology research are one to ten people (Starks & Brown, 2007). However, for the researcher to deliberately select interview subjects contributing to a thorough understanding of the phenomenon, Creswell (1998) recommends interviewing five to 25 persons.

As a result, twelve academics were chosen to participate in the study's in-depth interviews. The participants were purposely chosen to demonstrate diversity. These 12 academics were selected from a group ($n = 681$) who consented to participate in follow-up interviews after completing the Maslach Burnout Inventory: Educator's Survey (MBI-ES). Four of the 12 participants were chosen because their burnout subscale scores were relatively low, two because their burnout subscale scores were average, and six were chosen because their burnout subscale scores were high, indicating they had significant burnout (Creswell & Eklund, 2006).

A greater proportion of individuals in the high burnout cohort than in the average and low cohorts was chosen to concentrate more on academics who had experienced several burnout experiences during their careers rather than those who were less burned out or in the medium average type of burnout.

Twelve university academics between the ages of 28 and 46 made up the participants ($M = 35.5$, $SD = 5.8$); nine were women (75%), and three were men (25%). Their years of academic experience they were ranged from 2 to 19 ($M = 7.4$ years, $SD = 5.5$). These participants worked as academics in public ($n = 8$, 66.7%) and private ($n = 4$, 33.3%) universities. Academic positions comprise 50% Lecturers, 33.3% Senior Lecturers, 8.3% Assistant Professors, and 8.3% University Teachers. All participants, $n = 12$, were taken from universities under the control of the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia.

4. Procedures

After making the necessary arrangements to meet at a particular time, date and location, the twelve selected academics were invited to offer comprehensive narrations of their experience with the burnout phenomenon, mainly connected to their path as academics within the university settings. These academics were free to discuss the specifics of their academic backgrounds and day-to-day duties. After that, they were thoroughly questioned about their encounters with the burnout phenomenon, including how incidents influenced their levels of job engagement, their work environments, their stories of resilience in handling incidents, and their feelings, among others.

As a starting point for the investigation into burnout, the sample ($n = 12$) was tracked over time for any changes. Over one semester, three in-depth interviews were done (T1, T2 and T3). A thorough account of their stories from the three different time points needed to be developed to comprehend the occurrences and trajectories of burnout and engagement at 4-6 weeks after the start of the semester (T1), at week 9 of the semester (T2), and once more at 12-14 weeks before the end of the semester (T3) (with a one-month gap between each time point).

Each interview lasted 30 to 90 minutes. Interviews were recorded after getting consent in writing. The option to leave the study at any time was made clear to participants, and confidentiality was ensured. The subjects' identifying details were removed from the interview transcripts to maintain data confidentiality.

5. Measures

A semi-structured interview script was developed to examine factors related to how academics described their own work experiences, the academic environment they worked in, and how burnout was perceived in this particular period. The script's foundation was the previous research, theoretical framework and available literature gaps. The first general inquiry in the interviews was, "Describe a specific situation(s) or event(s) reflective of your experiences with burnout".

Following this were open-ended questions (core/essential questions) about personal, organisational and job-related demands, such as "Can you offer some examples of the daily experiences of burnout you have as an academic at this university?" "How did you handle these episodes of burnout?" and "How has burnout affected your perception of your career as a university academic?" The interviewer could better understand the subject by letting participants react freely and unrestrictedly to the scripted questions, whose order was not strictly adhered to.

6. Data Analysis

ATLAS.ti version 7 was used to manage the study's data since it can organise and make the process of analysing qualitative data in large amounts of text more accessible (Muh, 1991). As a result, 36 interview transcripts ($n = 12 \times$ three-time points) were entered into ATLAS.ti. However, the transcribed content was coded and analysed using manual methods.

After interviews were transcribed using the phenomenological-hermeneutic technique, they were submitted to the three-step content analysis process: 1) naive reading, 2) structural analysis, and 3) critical interpretation, as recommended by Lindseth and Norberg (2004). The interviews produced raw data, which was audio-recorded. Verbatim transcriptions of the initial discussions were made. The audio files and the texts were cross-referenced. Following the transcripts' completion and the interviews' finalisation, the data were examined more thoroughly to comprehend the context of the participants' experiences. Initial codes were obtained in the naive reading stage (familiarisation). A text was created using fragments pertinent to the studied subject (unit of analysis). Preliminary codes were analysed to tie any new codes to the research concerns.

As seen in Table 1, the interview transcript was initially broken down into meaning-conveying units (words, phrases, or text fragments) during the structural analysis stage. This led to grouping meaning units with related content. "Condensed Meaning Units" were created. Meaningful links were established after the meaning units had been separated and organised. These relationships were further theorised, divided into subthemes and organised into themes.

Table 1. An illustration of how meaning units, condensed meaning units, subthemes, and themes were coded during the interpretation process (n = 12)

Participant	Meaning Unit/ Code text	Interpretation of the meaning (Condensed Meaning Unit)	Subtheme	Theme
H1	You are setting up high KPI (Key Performance Indicators) for the lecturers but you don't provide the necessary resources and you don't even send them out for any training or whatsoever	Respondents clearly stated the significance of training and having enough resources to carry out the job properly; some respondents even expressed their displeasure over the university administration's failure to send staff members to necessary training.	Lack of appropriate resources	Triggers of burnout among academics

The objective of the critical interpretation stage is to comprehend the subjects discussed in the interview transcript more thoroughly by building on the prior knowledge and conclusions from the naive reading and structural analysis stages and how they connect to the study's context, the research questions, and the relevant literature (Gustafsson et al., 2008; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Simply put, a full grasp of the significance of the lived experience is established after considering the text, the initial understanding, themes and relevant literature. Here, the clarifying process follows a spiral pattern in which the full interview text is absorbed by considering some text elements, which are included to explain the whole (Ricoeur, 1976).

7. Results

Summary of Findings

The first stage of data collecting (the beginning of the semester), summarised in Table 2, produced eight core themes (and 33 subthemes) due to the content analysis. Four themes and eight subthemes were produced in the second stage (halfway through the semester), as shown in Table 3, and three themes and eight subthemes were developed in the third stage, summarised in Table 4. The first time point offered more themes than the subsequent ones since the “core questions” or “essential questions” were asked in the opening first stage rather than the next stages.

Table 2. Themes and subthemes during Timepoint 1 (Start of the semester) (n = 12)

Timepoint	Themes	Definition	Subthemes
Timepoint 1 (T1) (Start of the semester)	Depiction of academics tell-tale signs of burnout	The illustration of the indicative symptoms of burnout experienced among academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of emotional drain. • Emotional exhaustion upon thinking about the workplace. • Feeling exhausted and lacking energy due to having trouble getting along with bosses.
	Triggers of burnout among academics	Factors leading to academics exhaustion and burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to the absence of institutional resources. • Poorly handled promotions or assessments. • Failure to receive social support from superiors. • An unbalanced workload and excessive workplace demands. • Conflicting employment demands and task overload. • Unreasonable expectations from university administration and superiors. • High standards for oneself and irrational ideas. • Student demands and issues. • Incompatibility of values (incongruity between personal and university values)
	Coping mechanisms against burnout	Coping techniques, strategies and skills in preventing burnout among academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication, social support from colleagues, and a positive, encouraging work atmosphere. • Close family relationships at home, actively-involved spouses acting as a protective shield. • Sports as a burnout coping mechanism. • Adopting a positive outlook on burnout and letting go of negativity (anxiety and pessimism). • Taking a vacation from work, rejuvenating or distancing themselves. • Religion and spirituality as buffers to counter burnout.

Thoughts of bringing work home	The ideals of bringing work home or otherwise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating self-care practices and work-life balance. • Prioritising home life after work hours with family and children.
The joy of being an academic	Academics' sense of fulfilment in academia and fondness towards the career.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of knowledge, research and publication. • A predisposition for students. • Passion for teaching and serving others/larger community. • Friendly working-hours.
Resiliency factors	On resiliency and overcoming burnout and other difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The necessity of resiliency due to no other options. • Developing resilience through adaptation and adjustments. • Resilience as part of academics' emotional intelligence. • The capacity to endure adversity as a result of surviving hardship in the past.
Effect of burnout phases on participants	Cynicism and depersonalisation brought on by burnout.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological detachment from relationships and the environment as well as depersonalisation. • Growth of cynicism and a pessimistic, uncaring outlook on life.
Factors triggering stress	The description of stress-triggering factors leading to burnout by academics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grading assignments and the university curriculum. • Stress brought on by university management, policy or both. • The concept of the Research University (RU) was introduced, along with the demanding KPI.

Table 3. Themes and subthemes during Timepoint 2 (Middle of the semester) (n = 12)

Timepoint	Themes	Definition	Subthemes
Timepoint 2 (T2) (Middle of the semester)	Illustration of the more negative aspects of the career	Academics give examples of the less favourable features of their profession.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to handle increasing workload. • Decreasing levels of engagement, demotivation and pessimism. • Expressions of less idealistic ideas on the career. • Visible emotional distress and signs depicting burnout levels not decreasing.
Four Themes: (10 Subthemes)	Taking time off to deal with burnout	Descriptions of going on vacation to get away from the stresses of work momentarily.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holidays not relieving workload. • Vacation drawbacks - pending assignments, pileup.
	Indication of the presence of an adaptation process among participants	Academics observed their newly acquired resilient-promoting traits where they adjust and adapt favourably under pressure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning-based adaptation or unintentional assimilation. • Adaptation due to an enhanced environment.

	Relentless attitude and continual grit	Academics consistently showed a desire to learn and a willingness to persevere (resilience) in their daily tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant eagerness, determination and resilience in their routine work. • Job engagement, prioritisation of work duties and students.
Table 4. Themes and subthemes during Timepoint 3 (End of the semester) (n = 12)			
Timepoint	Themes	Definition	Subthemes
Timepoint 3 T3 (end of semester) Three Themes: (6 Subthemes)	Ongoing evidence of exhaustion and burnout not decreasing	Continued display of burnout and exhaustion in this final stage of data collection from academics'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional weariness due to work expectations, workload imbalances, workplace conflicts and other external causes. • Burnout meltdowns caused by severe workloads and work unrelated to the main academic profession.
	Evidence of participants' adaptive processes (reappearing theme)	Academics had further adapted to and assimilated with the demands of the job.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning-based adaptation or unintentional assimilation. • Adaptation due to an improving environment and support from others.
	The demonstration of positive enthusiasm despite difficulties	Academics display perseverance through their levels of resilience and robustness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping a constant positive attitude. • Being immersed and engaged in work.

8. Summary of the Findings

The first, second and third stages of data collection were divided into three primary parts for the study's qualitative component. Each segment contained themes and subthemes unrelated to the current moment. The responses from academics at T1 focused mainly on how they perceived their professional positions, burnout and their degree of job engagement at the beginning of the semester. At T2, they stated their current levels of burnout and reported any significant changes from T1. The disparities in their involvement and fatigue towards the conclusion of the semester are finally revealed at T3.

In conclusion, the data analysis identified eight key fundamental themes from the first data collection stage (T1). The second round of interviews (T2) revealed four key themes, while the third round (T3) revealed three themes.

1) Individual-level facilitators/inhibitors of burnout

Some academics may naturally possess qualities that prevent burnout; these are referred to as individual-level burnout facilitators. Others, however, can be predisposed to burnout due to certain traits. Some people strive for excellence in all they do and frequently set impossible standards for their daily routines. This makes them experience burnout much more rapidly and frequently than those who give themselves the opportunity for error. Due to this, burnout is more prone to occur in academics with Perfectionist Personality tendencies than those lacking in these traits.

The sample also revealed that those classified as having “grit” were more likely to succeed than those without it. Grit is the constant desire to complete what has been begun, the capacity to persevere through difficulties and failures, the desire to grow and succeed, the inability to give up easily under pressure, and the willingness to put forth the consistent, occasionally uncomfortable effort to complete a task (Areepattamannil & Khine, 2018; Duckworth et al., 2007; Yang et al., 2023). Unquestionably, grit is crucial to the drive and persistence needed to pursue extremely long-term goals. By adopting grit, one may be able to prevent burnout.

Additionally, longitudinal data demonstrated that a crucial method to prevent burnout among academics is to recognise and know when to rest, get away or put a gap between themselves and all their obligations. Therefore, avoiding burnout meltdowns requires mastering the ability to know when to stop or take a break. One factor contributing to some people’s inability to disconnect is the need for knowledge about when to do so. Knowing your breaking point is essential when approaching or reaching a burnout juncture. Burnout could be controlled with stability by juggling obligations at home and work. Respondents also raised concerns about setting time limits and understanding when to bring work home to avoid losing concentration while spending valuable time with their children and families. Physical activity was another personal-level burnout inhibitor. Academics who were mentally exhausted from balancing numerous obligations frequently turned to exercise to revive themselves.

2) Interpersonal-level facilitators/inhibitors of burnout

It has been acknowledged that solid interpersonal connections and how they change over time play a key role in whether academic burnout is facilitated or inhibited. Academics recognised particular interpersonal facilitators and inhibitors that influenced burnout reduction by creating trusting relationships with co-workers they regularly seek advice from and people in similar circumstances. These connections helped participants get through complex or unpredictable burnout phases and difficult events they encountered daily. For many academics in the sample, having close peers and family to confide in and vent to was an essential interpersonal factor that prevented burnout.

Support from superiors and managers was also crucial, with participants citing the advantages of openly addressing their concerns at work with their reassuring bosses whenever necessary. This was an excellent chance to discuss problems and look for solutions in a welcoming environment, preventing burnout. For those who did not have the luxury of discussing these matters with their supervisors, on the other hand, burnout tended to advance because of the absence of social support, which resulted in supervisory confrontations. The type of assistance academics received from their spouses at home was also noted. The opportunity to share their uncertainties with their spouses was one that they sincerely valued. Instead, those who were not married confided in a close friend or family member to help them deal with this.

3) *Organisational-level facilitators/inhibitors*

Other topics concerned the academics' place of employment, such as the faculty or institution. Academics indicated specific organisational-level facilitators and inhibitors that either increased or decreased their levels of burnout. These included particular policies, working practices and behaviours of senior management. The majority expressed dissatisfaction with their schools' lack of essential resources and amenities, and they saw this as a significant barrier to success. They believed that finding materials themselves made burnout worse and sped it up. Another organisational-level contributor to academic burnout was the university administration's shortcomings and the need for more attention to staff training. Respondents also mentioned "unseen" behaviours that senior management members engaged in, like cronyism and improper promotion practices. This study's findings were similar to those of other studies where emotional, cognitive, and physical demands significantly impact burnout (Alloh et al., 2019; Graizi et al., 2021)

4) *Systemic-level facilitators/inhibitors*

Structural problems also influence academic burnout. It is possible that these systemic enablers or impediments – like the tendency to focus on educational measures or performance indicators – have different effects on different people and, to some extent, on other nations.

The systemic level comprises the local systems and university policies that participants interact with, which defines consequences at a systemic level. Younger academics in the sample disagreed on this point, but they both agreed that the paradigm shift was to blame for when their burnout peaked. The implementation of the RU model, however, was viewed as a beneficial local system by senior and known academics. Some people criticised the need for adequate planning for the launch of the RU status and that employees with less experience were thrust into this change without being informed of their tasks or what to anticipate in the first few months of the new environment.

Due to these conditions, junior academics in the sample were more likely to experience burnout. The participants emphasised the importance of guidance, especially while adjusting to the novel idea of being a part of the RU context. Participants identified the KPI's requirements as their primary cause of burnout at this level, which was related to the RU idea. Participants described the system's never-ending conflicting demands and difficulty meeting KPI standards. Before being granted tenure, having specific competencies assessed on junior staff was quite taxing and contributed to burnout.

9. Discussion

This study sought to identify the causes of burnout experienced by Malaysian university academics from various higher education institutions throughout the academic year.

Overall, the findings confirm past studies on academic burnout by showing that stress, demanding institutional elements, workload expectations, the need to

publish and highly competitive environments were the main drivers of burnout for these academics (Court & Kiman 2008; Khamisa et al., 2017; Vesty et al., 2015). Change management and work-family conflict are additional essential factors. The diversity of categories and subcategories emerging supports the notion that the professional setting of universities offers a variety of situations that can lead to academic burnout. Our findings provide crucial information on various factors influencing burnout among academics.

Evidence also shows that academic burnout in Malaysia is caused by a combination of stressors unique to academia and stressors unique to institutions, which can be dangerous for people working in higher education. The growing expectations of these academics and the institutional pressures they must face due to the demanding nature of today's academia must be considered. In this study, frustrated academics' reactions ranged from contemplating quitting academia, specifically among younger academics who desire to quit their current university, to continuously fostering strong and durable ties with colleagues, close friends and members of the family to counteract any unfavourable or tell-tale indicators of burnout at work. Additionally, they use a variety of tactics to do this, including individuals leaving the system by zealously preserving individual autonomy (e.g., by refusing to participate in activities beyond what is legally needed) and more.

Summary of the Burnout Dimensions

High levels of work-related stress have been shown to occur throughout career stages, and different university types are linked to intensified burnout phases (Khamisa et al., 2017). Academics may be more vulnerable to burnout due to individual-specific pressures, which can also cause anxiety, demotivation, lower productivity at work and intentions to quit.

Burnout is also more common among academics with particular personality types, such as the Perfectionist Personality Type, who pride themselves on being exact, thorough, organised, responsible and hardworking. They also have a strong sense of purpose and lofty standards. Perfectionism, described as the desire for perfection or the propensity to hold oneself to unreasonable standards, is a trait variable that can be either adaptive or maladaptive. It has been linked to stress, anxiety and depression (Bieling et al., 2004; Childs & Stoeber, 2012). Furthermore, according to earlier research, perfectionism predicts burnout even in the healthcare industry.

Interviews also indicate that academics attribute institutional or systemic elements to their episodes of burnout, i.e. academics' well-being can be significantly harmed by performance pressure and insufficient institutional support.

Burnout in academia tends to arise while working in a rigid, traditional and conservative institutional environment (characterised by a lack of open-mindedness, freedom to work and frequent evaluation of everything through accomplishment and performance indicators). The problem will likely worsen

due to a lack of resources, budget cuts, unmanageable workloads, growing demands from parents and students investing more in education, and academics who must perform up to the required standards are in even greater danger of developing burnout.

From the sample, none of the respondents sought professional assistance; instead, they confided with close friends and family members about their burnout experiences. Emotional dissonance can occur when tension or incongruity exists between the emotions experienced and those that must be displayed by established display norms (Zapf & Holz, 2006).

Evidence suggests that various risk variables and academic-specific stressors combine to put vulnerable academics at risk for developing burnout states. In contrast, institutional-specific stressors that cause burnout also surfaced during the interviews and affected most people working in higher education.

10. Recommendations

We advise academics to constantly be vigilant and aware of any potential burnout signs that could impair their performance at work. Understanding burnout is essential since academics work in environments where the nature and organisation of work are frequently changing, and resources are typically scarce.

It is crucial to be aware of the dangers of burnout if they want to lessen its effects. To do this, they must be able to differentiate between the different kinds of burnout ranges (high, mild or severe) and between demands that severely burn them out. Self-care should be prioritised and practised.

Despite the fact that academics have a personal obligation to take care of themselves, organisations also have a crucial role to play in the issue of burnout prevention. As a result, it is critical that institutions identify faculty members who are showing signs of burnout due to its negative impact on their academic performance and their students' well-being (Chen et al., 2014).

So, as part of their future professional development, it is necessary to develop and adopt appropriate intervention strategies that place an emphasis on improving their academic abilities as they must acknowledge the stressors they face as typical, realise the dangers of burnout and its crucial indications, and reflect on why they first chose the profession. The Ministry of Education may create uniform criteria to gauge academic burnout among university academics and improve the methods used to track the wellbeing of 250 academics. While metrics for assessing job satisfaction and work engagement are well-known and widely utilised, measurements for burnout have been less prevalent and less sought-after in the Malaysian working setting than those for job satisfaction.

Academic burnout ratings ought to be given the same weight as other performance indicators like workplace engagement and satisfaction. The Malaysian context should also be considered when creating regulatory bodies or panels to oversee academics and create assessment techniques based on these findings.

11. Conclusion

This study's key finding was that academics were aware of the challenges and external influences contributing to the complexity of their daily burnout experiences. This was thoroughly researched, and themes that came out during the writing process provided a vivid portrait of the opinions of academics.

According to interviews, academics' periods of burnout were caused by institutional problems or the university system. Academics have raised concerns that significantly impact their well-being and mental health. Nevertheless, many seemed to thrive while performing and working in highly conservative and traditional formal contexts. Academics were never given autonomy in a position where everything is constantly assessed and scrutinised using absurd standards and methods, and these needed to be more tolerant and open-minded. Many academics indicated that this was what was fuelling their degrees of burnout.

The study also described in detail the current situation and difficulties facing institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, including issues like a lack of funding, funding reductions, impossibly high amount of work, and growing demands, which are all expected to get worse in the coming future. Academics were very frustrated with the lack of resources that hindered them from producing the publication and research level required by the university. Many also expressed dissatisfaction with being pressured to undertake excellent research but needed to be given sufficient resources to do so.

Findings from the study showed that academics are aware of the early interventions and coping mechanisms they will need to get through a burnout episode. Respondents reported using various coping mechanisms, from asking for help from co-workers and working in a positive environment to being completely independent in resisting and surviving stressful situations by exercising total control in their academic role.

According to several academics, the Ministry of Education should make beneficial adjustments to help academics overcome their enormous barriers and their current workload, performance and objectives. The findings may raise awareness among academics, managers, university officials and other higher education stakeholders of the need to investigate the burnout issue in Malaysian academia.

Because it is one of the few studies on job engagement and burnout among university academics done in Malaysia from a comprehensive viewpoint on their experiences, when considered as a whole, the findings add to the body of knowledge on burnout. Notably, from the beginning to the middle of the semester, most academics' degrees of burnout declined. Still, from midway to the conclusion of the semester, they remained constant (displaying little or no change). Over the course of the 14-week study, patterns emerged that suggested a balanced mix of academics would either lead to a beneficial or unfavourable progression in terms of their levels of burnout.

Ethical Compliance Section

Funding

No funding was received for conducting this study.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

All procedures performed in this study were by the ethical standards of the University's Institutional Research Committee.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual adult participants included in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

12. References

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