



Determinants of Turnover Intention amongst Academic Staff in Private Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia

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Abstract. The objective of this study is to explore the potential mediating role of job satisfaction in the connection between workplace stress and turnover intention among academic staff in private higher education institutions in Malaysia. High turnover intention amongst academic staff has caused many negative impacts towards universities which affects the quality of education provided to students. Thus, it is important to address these issues in this study so as to improve the quality of education provided. This quantitative cross-sectional study employs primary data collected from 110 academic staff throughout Malaysia using purposive sampling method. Various statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. The findings revealed that workplace stress predicted job satisfaction and turnover intention, while job satisfaction predicted turnover intention. Based on the mediating analysis via PROCESS Macro, findings showed that workplace stress has an indirect effect on turnover intention through job satisfaction. The current study has raised awareness among the management of private higher education institutions about the significance of ensuring job satisfaction and managing workplace stress among their employees.

Keywords: Workplace stress job satisfaction, turnover intention, academic staff, private higher education institutions, Malaysia

1 Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in the advancement of a nation's development and human capital. The progress and growth of a country are intricately tied to the universal provision of education as a fundamental civil right to its entire populace. It is of utmost importance that students receive the best education possible to ensure a nation's progress. Tertiary education plays an important role in promoting growth, development, and reducing poverty [1]. Unfortunately, high turnover intention amongst academic staff in universities has caused many negative impacts which affect the quality of education provided to students. Therefore, when it comes to tertiary education, the role of academicians is vital in order to produce high quality graduates as it is the academicians

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who act as mentors, nurture students, become role models, and spread knowledge to their students.

As indicated by Halid et al. [2], there is a notable prevalence of high turnover rates among educators within specific Malaysian universities. This phenomenon is of significant concern to numerous educational institutions, as highlighted by Masud & Daud [3]. The inclination to depart from one's job often arises when individuals experience stress and job dissatisfaction, as pointed out by Li et al. [4]. The research conducted by Falahat et al. [5] reveals an escalation in the annual turnover rate within Malaysia's education sector, surging from 13.2% in 2013 to 20% in 2017. Adding to the complexity, the turnover rate among academic staff at Malaysian universities has surged, consequently leading to short-ages in labor supply. Research by GuiXia and Rashid [6] underscores a notable difference in turnover rates between Malaysian private and public universities. The turnover rate for academic staff within private universities stands at over 26%, while public universities exhibit a notably lower rate of 11%.

Workplace stress has always been a problem among academicians, especially in the private education sector in which the sector faces a shortage of manpower due to budgetary issues, thus causing academicians of the private sector to be faced with more work and pressure. Furthermore, research conducted by several universities in Malaysia has shown that the competitive pressure from other universities has led to the academic staff receiving more pressure from the management [7]. With fierce competition among the universities in the country to obtain greater ranking when it comes to being a university that is excel-lent, indirect pressure was placed among the employees of the university to improve their performance, thus leading them to feel stressed up about their work [7].

Even though an abundance of studies had been done on it, the issue of work-place stress is still yet to be resolved. Despite considerable efforts done by the Ministry of Education to expand the educational sector, the issue regarding private university academicians' workplace stress was still not resolved as can be observed from the revolutionary Industry aspect and the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, whereby the education system has changed to include new methods of teaching and learning, including conferences and workshops to be virtual in nature [8]. Lecturers are now expected to have expertise in the information technology system along with the capacity and accessibility of internet networking, which will affect the mood of lecturers in virtually carrying out their lectures [8]. These changes towards the role of the lecturers will lead them to have higher levels of stress in order to adapt to the new methods [8]. As a result, stressed up academicians would be impaired in the quality of teaching and commitment, provide fewer information and praise and have lesser interaction with their students in order to reach this ultimate goal.

When individuals become discontented with their employment, they tend to develop a wish to depart from it [4]. Maintaining high levels of job satisfaction, on the other hand, is linked to a reduced inclination to leave; thereby leading to lower turnover rates [9]. As noted by Rathakrishnan, Ng and Tee [10], there is an increasing dissatisfaction among academicians with their jobs, stemming from concerns regarding job security, support from supervisors, contentment with compensation, autonomy in their roles, and the achievability of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These issues have contributed

to a decline in lecturer performance, subsequently exerting a detrimental influence on the quality of education provided. When academic staff is faced with high levels of stress, it causes them to feel less satisfied with their workplace, thus leading to them having thoughts of leaving the organization. Addressing these issues is of paramount importance, as neglecting to do so will cause academic staff to perform poorly or decide to leave the organization, which in turn would affect the organization in terms of finding new staff as well as provide the necessary training for them, the quality of education provided to students of the institutions will also be affected as the academic staff are constantly changing or just having no desire to perform well due to a lack of job satisfaction and elevated levels of stress.

As the years go by, different situations arise and previous studies may not be relevant to suit the new challenges that academic staff face. Hence, in order to gain a deeper comprehension of this scenario, it is imperative to undertake a study aimed at investigating the underlying reasons for the elevated turnover intentions among academic personnel within Malaysian private universities. At the time of conducting this study, many academicians were still dissatisfied and stressed with their current work due to the changing landscape of the education industry. Notably the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, this study would provide the opportunity to assess the current severity of this issue in private universities in Malaysia.

2 Literature review

2.1 Turnover Intention

Turnover Intention (TI) refers to an employee's subjective perception to quit their current job for other job opportunities and when such thoughts exist among employees, the likelihood of employee turnover increases [11]. Turnover intention is willingness that is conscious as well as deliberate in leaving one's current job and it is one of the significant drivers of staff resignation [12]. Turnover intention occurs from unsatisfactory and stressful work environments, which in turn has adverse outcomes on the organization leading to staff shortages [12]. Turnover intention refers to the longing of an employee to leave the organization, whereby this longing has not arrived at the part of actually leaving the organization [13]. Once this desire to move or leave the organization arises, employees will begin to display behaviors such as more violations of work rules, absenteeism on an increased basis, an increase in likelihood towards opposing or protesting against their superiors, and a reduction in terms of their sense of responsibility in completing their work. Turnover Intention refers to the way employees react after experiencing unsatisfied things in the withdrawal process which in turn creates high levels of stress for employees at the workplace [14]. This causes employees to lose their organizational loyalty and commitment, thus increasing the turnover rates among employees which in turn cause organizations to increase expenditure for employee training [14].

2.2 Workplace Stress

Workplace stress, which is also known as occupational stress or job stress, refers to a force that is harmful which affects employees' well-being, either psychological or physical, and happens when job requirements do not meet the employees' needs, resources, and capabilities [11, 15]. Workplace stress comprises of the environmental surroundings of the employees and also the conflicts that occur within employees themselves when fulfilling tasks or responsibilities within a given period of time by their supervisors [11]. Employees' mental health, physical health, and behavior are affected by workplace stress [15]. In accordance with Kerdpitak and Jermsittiparsert [11], elevated levels of workplace stress can result in diminished motivation, deteriorating health, subpar employee performance, and increased absenteeism. The adverse effects of workplace stress do not only impact employees, but also family income and company performance.

2.3 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction cannot be viewed from just a single definition as it has many dimensions [16]. Job satisfaction is defined as employees' attitude or feeling towards their work, whereby positive attitudes indicate satisfaction with what they do and negative attitudes means dissatisfaction with their work [17]. Job satisfaction refers to a combination of psychological conditions and environmental styles which causes employees to honestly admit satisfaction with their work [16]. Job satisfaction pertains to the favorable emotional condition resulting from an assessment of an employee's work encounter, while job dissatisfaction emerges when these anticipations are not fulfilled [16, 18]. Job satisfaction is being satisfied with one's own job, recognition, pay, association between employees and supervisors as well as advancement opportunities [18]. The core of job satisfaction is characterized by a sense of contentment [16]. Job satisfaction encompasses both internal and external dimensions. Internal satisfaction pertains to the characteristics of work tasks and how employees perceive their duties, while external satisfaction concerns external motivators like the work environment and compensation [17]. Job satisfaction can also be referred to as the driver of staff retention and staff productivity [19].

2.4 Relationship between workplace stress and turnover intention

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that the workplace environment exerts a noteworthy impact on turnover intentions across diverse industries. In a study undertaken by Kamal et al. [20] within Japanese restaurants in Malaysia, the investigators identified a notable and positive correlation between workplace stress and turnover intention. Long working hours, conflicts and tensions with fellow staff members and dealing with guests who are fussy turned out to be the factors that increase the levels of workplace stress. High levels of workplace stress led to employees' exhaustion and in turn affected their job satisfaction and overall performance, leading them to having high

turnover intention [20]. Similarly, a study conducted among employees of manufacturing firms in China indicated that workplace stress had tremendous impact on employees' intention to leave [21]. Huge amounts of time pressure and job anxiety that usually originates from working for long hours would cause a person to have lesser time to spend with family members, often resulting in employees developing elevated levels of turnover intention [21].

Hypothesis 1: Workplace stress has an effect on turnover intention amongst academic staff of private higher education institutions in Malaysia.

2.5 Relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention

Numerous studies have discovered that job satisfaction to exert a substantial influence on turnover intention of employees [22-23]. Research conducted among accountants working in companies in Istanbul revealed job satisfaction to negatively influence turnover intention [23]. In this case, a lack of supervisor support, lesser opportunities for growth and advancement as well as the absence of recognition of significant achievements along with special contributions of employees were factors that decrease levels of job satisfaction which led to an increase in turnover intention [23]. Another study carried out among employees of an Indonesian marketing company indicated that job satisfaction had a negative significant impact on turnover intention [22]. Low levels of compensation were seen as the main factor that reduce the employees' job satisfaction and increase turnover intention. A poorly managed compensation will lead to dissatisfaction with the remuneration received this will in turn have an impact towards employees' turnover intention [22].

Hypothesis 2: Job satisfaction has an effect on turnover intention amongst academic staff of private higher education institutions in Malaysia.

2.6 Relationship between workplace stress and job satisfaction

A study conducted amongst hotel employees in Bali unveiled a noteworthy and adverse correlation between workplace stress and job satisfaction [24]. One of the primary contributors to heightened workplace stress in this study was the pressure experienced by employees during their work responsibilities, which subsequently impacted their level of job satisfaction. Specifically, considering that employees within the hotel industry frequently encounter challenging situations due to their constant interactions with clients, their contentment with their roles would decline if this pressure isn't effectively managed or alleviated, leading to reduced job satisfaction [24]. Another study conducted in Bandung, Indonesia in the food industry revealed similar results [25]. Employees in this study were found to be given too much work by the organization which led to employees experiencing high levels of workplace stress. When the level of workplace stress felt by employees becomes too high, employees will become exhausted at work which leads to depression, causing them to have decreased levels of job satisfaction [25].

Hypothesis 3: Workplace stress has an effect on job satisfaction amongst academic staff of private higher education institutions in Malaysia.

2.7 The mediating role of job satisfaction

While past studies have directed their focus on the effects of workplace stress on turnover intention, limited studies are examining the underlying mechanisms that may account for these effects. Given the scholarly emphasis on the need for further investigation in this domain, the current study delves into the role of job satisfaction as an intermediary factor in the connection between workplace stress and turnover intention. Past studies have been conducted in various industries but not in the education industry. Studies conducted in Indonesia in the food and marketing industries have shown that job satisfaction acts as a mediator in the relationship between workplace stress and turnover intention [22, 25]. In both studies, the contribution of job satisfaction acts as a positive catalyst to employees to not leave the organization even though faced with stress. By being satisfied with their job alleviates the stress they feel, thus making the job feel bearable, thus reducing their turnover intention.

Hypothesis 4: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between workplace stress and turnover intention amongst academic staff of private higher education institutions in Malaysia.

3 Conceptual framework

Derived from the insights garnered through the literature review, the envisioned conceptual framework for this study is visually depicted in Figure 1.

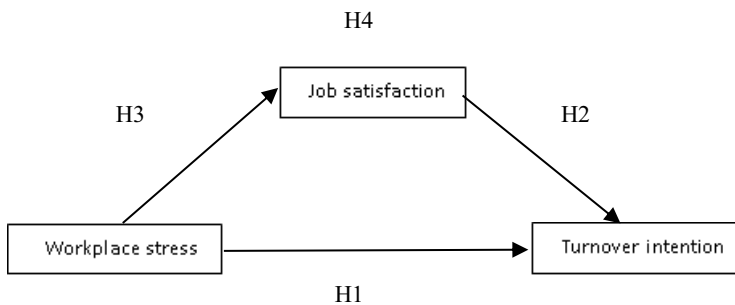


Fig 1. The Research Model

4 Research methodology

4.1 Sampling design

This study employed a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling as this sampling technique can help to select the participants that fulfilled the research purpose and characteristics. G-power analysis was conducted and the recommended sample size is 110. The selection criteria are Malaysian academic staff in tertiary education and with at least one year working experience. A total of 110 academic

staff was recruited. There are 59 female respondents and 51 male respondents. Their job position included lecturer, senior lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor and professor. 80 of the respondents are married while another 30 of the respondents are single.

4.2 Research procedure

The study utilized a dual approach for questionnaire distribution which are email and face-to-face distribution. Via email, questionnaires were sent to academic staff in Malaysian private higher education institutions. The email will introduce the researcher, outline the study's purpose, and provide a link to the questionnaire. Participation is voluntary, ensuring confidentiality. Due to low response rate in online questionnaire, the data collection was conducted via face-to-face distribution. Prior to printed copy survey distribution, researchers obtained the permission from relevant authorities. Scheduled appointments were made to personally administer surveys on campus. Researchers approached available academic staff, explaining the study's goal and voluntary nature. Upon consent, the academic staff completed the questionnaire and placed it in a sealed box (to mix with other completed questionnaires) to ensure anonymity. Both methods prioritize participant understanding and voluntary involvement, adhering to institution guidelines and ethical practices.

4.3 Measures

Workplace stress was evaluated using the Workplace Stress Scale (WSS) [26] developed by The Marlin Company and the American Institute of Stress in 2001. This scale comprises 8 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and was employed to assess the level of workplace stress experienced by academic staff (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = very often). Example of the item is "I have too much work to do and/or too many unreasonable deadlines". This scale showed a good reliability among the respondents in this study (Cronbach's Alpha = .77). Higher scores, higher workplace stress.

Job satisfaction. The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) developed by Spector in 1985 [27] was utilized to gauge the job satisfaction among academic staff. The survey entails a total of 36 items, each to be rated on a 6-point Likert scale by the respondents. ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). Examples of the items, "Communications seem good within this organization" and "I feel a sense of pride in doing my job". This scale is a reliable scale in this study (Cronbach's Alpha = .89).

Turnover intention. Turnover Intention Scale [28] was deployed to assess turnover intention of the respondents. The respondents are required to respond to 6-item scale with 5-point Likert scale (e.g., never-always; very satisfying-totally dissatisfying; highly unlikely-highly likely). Example for the item, "How often have you considered leaving your job?" This instrument showed a good reliability with Cronbach's Alpha value (.81).

5 Data analysis

Following data validation procedures including tests for multicollinearity, a linear regression analysis was carried out to ascertain the predictive impacts of workplace stress and job satisfaction on turnover intention within the academic staff cohort. Taking into account potential influences of demographic factors, several controlled variables were included in the linear regression analysis. These variables encompass gender, years of working experience, marital status, and monthly income. The findings revealed that higher work-place stress was linked to an increase in turnover intention ($\beta = .19$, $p = .035$). Furthermore, the findings revealed that a higher level of job satisfaction is associated with a reduced level of turnover intention. ($\beta = -.49$, $p < .001$).

Furthermore, this study also aimed to explore the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between workplace stress and turnover intention. The PROCESS macro was employed to execute a mediation analysis with bootstrapping procedure (5000 resamples). Workplace stress exhibited a negative prediction on job satisfaction ($B = -2.25$, $p < .001$), and positively predicted to turnover intention ($B = .18$, $p = .04$). Furthermore, job satisfaction inversely forecasted turnover intention ($B = -.10$, $p < .001$). In this mediation model, controlled variables were added as covariances (i.e., gender, years of experience, monthly salary, and marital status). Total indirect effect is .25 (confidence interval = .13, .35).



Fig. 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the relation between workplace stress and turnover intention, as mediated by job satisfaction. Total indirect effect = .25.

6 Conclusion and discussion

The findings revealed that academic staff with a higher level of workplace stress is prone to have a higher intention to depart from their organization. The result is in alignment with previous studies [29-30] that the workers who reported higher stress with their current working conditions will seek for another job opportunity and leave the current stressful working place. If the academic staff experienced high stress in the university such as failed to express their opinions in work related tasks can lead to high turnover intention. Intention to leave the university may be manifested when they en-

counter barriers in voicing opinions or perceive an unpleasant workplace. Put differently, when academic staff experience a positive sentiment towards their existing work environment, their inclination to depart from the organization diminishes.

Additionally, the outcome demonstrated that academic staffs who exhibit job satisfaction are more inclined to remain within the current organization. This finding is corroborated by prior research. [31-32]. Staff perception of superiors, colleagues, job characteristics, compensation, and career growth shapes overall job satisfaction. Malaysian academic staffs who experience greater job satisfaction, evidenced by recognition and reinforcement from superiors and the organization, exhibit a higher inclination to remain within their present institution.

The mediation model showed that academic staff with elevated level of workplace stress is prone to report a lower level of job satisfaction; which in turn it leads to an elevated level of turnover intention. The outcomes of the mediation model are in accordance with findings from earlier studies [33-34]. It is evident that when these staff members experience low workplace stress, characterized by a pleasant and less demanding environment, their job satisfaction increases, subsequently reducing the likelihood of leaving the organization.

The current study brought awareness to the management of private higher education institutions on the importance of providing job satisfaction and controlling workplace stress of their employees. While acknowledging potential challenges, the study emphasizes the need to implement stress reduction measures. Suggestions include organizing stress management workshops and enhancing benefits. The study highlights that although job satisfaction is pivotal, turnover intention remains significant if work stress persists. Employers are advised to address both aspects equally to effectively reduce turnover.

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