Biannual Journal of Gender and Social Issues
Spring 2017, Vol. 16, Number 1


# Factors Affecting Academicians Burnout in Higher Education Institutions: A Systematic Review of Literature

***Abstract***

*The current study presents a systematic review of literature regarding the predictors affecting academicians' job burnout in higher education institutions. It is also an in-depth study of the relevant literature regarding variables and sectors. The objective was to reach the main predictor that affect academicians' burnout. The literature is based on the study of the latest databases in social sciences. The results of the research introduce the review of literature in a systematically organized methodology to evaluate factors affecting burnout among academicians. The study also concludes that academicians, students, policy makers and administrators must be aware of stress, burnout, demands and resources of job along with suggesting coping mechanisms and framing policies for making the working environment congenial.*

***Keywords:*** *Job Burnout; Factors, Job Stress, Academicians, Higher Education Institutions*

## INTRODUCTION

Job burnout is described as a psychological response to occupational stress characterized by exhaustion, lack of motivation, and feelings of frustration along with negative emotions that reduce professional efficacy at workplace. There are two main

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factors, i.e. institutional and individual that trigger negativity among employees. former include workload, control, rewards, fairness, value and social network (Maslach & Leiter 2008), while the later relate to demographic factors (Cordes *et al*. (1997). Burnout may also be the outcome of conflicting changes in the job design of organizations, where individual wants do not correspond with organizational expectations (Maslach & Leiter 2008). In the recent past, the incidence of burnout has dramatically increased particularly in the education sector which form the backbone of knowledge economies (Khalid, Irshad, & Mahmood, 2012). Professional well-being is a multidimensional process and Taris, Van Horn, Schaufeli and Schreurs (2004) emphasize the need of "positive evaluation of various aspects of one's job, including affective, motivational, behavioral, cognitive and psychosomatic dimensions" (p. 366-377). On the contrary, burnout is caused by imbalance between job demands and job resources (Demerouti., Mostert, & Bakker, 2010). The imbalance is responded to by employees in a negative and stressful manner (Hartig, Kylin, & Johansson, 2007) that nurture feelings of disaffiliation with the organization. It may also result in drastic consequences for individuals and organizations if it ends in job loss.

Practically, it seems all the more probable if job demands increase with decrease in relevant resouces at the same time (Karasek, 1979; Khan., Rasli, Khan, Yasir, & Malik, 2014). Primarily in environmental response, stress is one of the outcome of daily interaction between a person and the environment. Job stress is the deforming force that disturbs and interrupts the free flow of work in various ways. For example, it can be the outcome of job demand in terms of working hours and its disconnect with familial needs of the employees. It is also observed that stress is one of the main factors of job burnout and turnover intentions (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker-gail, & Baker, 2010; Rai, 2010). According to various studies, burnout is defined as a specific form of multidimensional chronic stress that includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005; Maslach & Jackson., 1981). Some researchers view it the last step and negative extreme of stress because of its exponential impact on the professional and the profession (Martinussen, Richardsen, & Burke, 2007). Among the contributing factors, the role of family life cannot be overlooked however (Bekker, Croon, & Bressers, 2005).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of higher education, the existing literature points to the insurmountable pressure academicians undergo in fulfilling job demands. In many cases, they fail to

appreciate the significance of and to reconcile their responsibilities in dealing with workload, their duty as researchers and to measure their output for future career goals (Goldenberg & Waddell, 1990; Khan., Rasli, Khan, et al., 2014). Entrusted with the primary task of teaching, they are also expected to perform additional responsibilities found relevant to organizational objectives. They are expected to attend meetings, give their valuable input as members of committees and assist the administrative machinery. At the same time, they also have to look after their individual career goals as researchers and professionals. When combined these factors may trigger feeling of exhaustion and can thus lead to burnout (Khan., Rasli, Khan, et al., 2014). Owing to the competitive environment of higher educational institutions, academicians also carry the burden of doing well to impress their high-ups, meeting targets set by the administration and attending different socio-educational events as necessary requirements of their professional growth. All these professional etiquettes become more relevant in less secure jobs with poor horizontal and vertical communication, and conflicting institutional trends (Calloway., 2003; Gupta, 1981; Johnstone, 1993; King, 2002; Ling., 1991; Moore, 2003). Overall, dissatisfaction with job and the resultant stress is viewed as logical offshoot of the interplay of demands and expectation in the job design that promote negativity and disarm professionals to display commitment and to perform in the workplace (Khan. et al., 2014; Raza, 2012).

The recent trends of innovation and creativity in higher education institutions (Drazin & Schoonhoven, 1996) have considerably added to the imbalance between individual and institutional demands. It is observed that majority institutions particularly in developing economies strive for less expenditure and increased earnings. The same is displayed in the hiring criteria of academicians where every effort is made to meet the institutional objectives with low paid professionals. Job demands have also multiplied as professional growth and promotions are linked with research productivity. Some academicians may find these accomplishments superhuman or at the least imaginative than practical. Thus, traces of burnout in behavior may be observed in the form of absenteeism, anxiety and health problems. At the same time, this has also its negative bearings upon the productivity of the organization. Because of these effects, employees are found interested neither in their job nor in relationships with colleagues.

Several research endeavors establish that job burnout has negative effect on the well-being of academicians and the institutions that negates the idea of productive job performance (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; C. Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Along with reduced productivity, the rate of turnover also increases (Kim & Stoner, 2008; Nissly, Barak, & Levin, 2005). Research studies that bring different

dimensions of the phenomenon of burnout into the limelight include (Demerouti, et al., 2001; Kalliath, O'driscoll, & Gillespie, 1998; Khan, Rasli., Yusoff., & Ahmad, 2015; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Other factors that are found relevant to job burnout among academicians are highlighted below. The sustained pressure of students is a potential contributor to burnout among teachers. Several research findings testify that American and Canadian teachers (63%) view departmental problems of students as the most stressful factor in teaching environment (Kuzsman. & Schnall., 1987). Research studies also show other causes of stress but primary origins of teachers' stress are from emotional outbursts and derogatory remarks of students that result as a consequence of the overall academic environment rather than directly related to teachers (Lee & Smith, 1993). This is also attributed to the low amount of engagement of students during teaching hours that otherwise positively affect their academic behavior. Further, research studies indicate a healthy connection between academic achievement and students' engagement (Khan, et al., 2015; Khan, Yusoff, & Khan, 2014; Khan., Rasli, Khan, et al., 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004).

Teachers, no doubt, must be model par excellence responsible for the overall performance of their students. However, some parents expect more from them and feel less hesitation in attributing a low individual performance to teacher. In doing so, they assume teacher to be answerable for everything, which may become a potential cause of stress for a teacher. Sometimes, direct interference of parents in the student-teacher relation may aggravate the situation to a level that it causes stress and burnout (Cockburn, 1996). Technological machines have considerably added to the efficiency of teachers, have lessened their burden and have therefore proved a huge support to avoid stressful situations (Agbatogun, 2010; Calloway., 2003; Moore., 2005). However, teaching by nature is a highly complex job and asks for more responsibility and activities which can potentially lead to stress and burnout, the risk of which can be considerably minimized by ensuring the meaningful employment of modern technology in teaching strategies (Gupta, 1981).

Unlike developed nations, the developing countries are still struggling with their financial resources to acquire state of the art technologies and more importantly to train teachers to utilize those resources properly. The later part of this challenge has been found of great concern as majority of the teachers find themselves inexperienced and less competent to manage and appropriate the use of technological resources (Fimian & Santoro, 1983; Terry., 1997). In a sense, there are many more teachers in these countries who have not been able to reap the benefits of these technological tools. Globally, education is ever-growing, endless, and creative and has become the best platform for committed people to learn and spread knowledge. It is also significant for individual success and societal prosperity (Hargreaves, 2002; Özer &

Beycioglu, 2010)**.** Like education, health professionals also face challenges in hiring and promotion policies, increased patients load, less salary, reduction of funding and limited chances for professional opportunity to upgrades their education (Drolen & David Harrison, 1990). Professional experience, job satisfaction, environment and culture also add to the pressure. Researchers have found the debilitating effects of adverse work environment on the desire for professional development among academicians in higher education institutions (Correnti, 2007; Desimone, 2009; Khan., Rasli, Khan, et al., 2014). According to Shirom (2005) burnout is one of the essential outcomes of stress mostly in developing countries. It is not generic but the outcome of working environment combined with pressing family issues. Particular job conditions are directly associated with the incidence of job stress such as sidelining stakeholders in the decision-making process and to restrict the process to selected few individuals, the presence of familial and social problems and the ever increasing expectations of institutions from their employees. Those employees who are less exposed to these multiple but polarized fronts mostly feel trapped and fall prey to stress resulting from the apparent conflict between the nature and environment of work where work demands and the degree or level of controlling mechanism appear disproportionate (CUPE, 2003).

Researchers have been attempting to highlight the problem with a view to draft models based on elements, contents and demands of jobs along with career concerns of employees to minimize the incidence of job stress and burnout (Sainfort, 1991). In this connection, job stress is explained from both negative and positive aspects. Mostly, researchers focus its negative features to individual interface and use different types of stressors such as work overload, role ambiguity and role conflict (Beehr & Newman, 1978; House, 1981; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). The positive aspects of stress include life changing events which produce a state of challenge coupled with pleasure for individual (Bhagat, McQuaid , Lindholm, & Segovis, 1985). It is observed that sometimes demands motivate the academicians to do more study or practical exercise. In the context of research, less or no résistance at times deprive it from the status of being called overload for a researcher. Further, stress is inversely related to performance in its negative sense i.e. increase in stress decreases performance of an individual (Jex, 1998). It also directly affects the overall organizational targets reducing the capacity to utilize time and resources. In stressful situations, employees tend to waste time and thus become less productive to the disadvantage of the employer (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). Also relevant is the deteriorated physical health of employees undergoing stress that increase the frequency of absenteeism, less productivity, dissatisfaction and turnover (Cummins., 1990; Spielberger., Ritterband, Sydeman, & Reheiser, 1995).

Stress related studies are complicated and cannot be dealt with in all their subtleties by a single researcher within limited time and resources. Therefore, job stress, which is implicated for more organizational functions and quality of work life, can be a fruitful focus of research. Primarily, there are two perspectives on stress in this context. Firstly, an employee perspective that relates to his or her psychological well-being and secondly, organizational perspective, which is associated with behavioral and attitudinal correlations. Job stress is forecaster of job satisfaction and leads to dissatisfaction (Kaur.R. & Chaddha., 1988). Schabracq & Cooper (2000) have presented a detailed view of the results of job stress that include. no motivation at work, reduction in performance, increased absenteeism and turnover, less organizational commitment, and no quality in product and services. Similarly, Raza (2012), conducted cross-sectional survey of education sector regarding occupational stress, job satisfaction in Pakistani universities where he identified that there were four main factors of job stress including job demands, work overload, dissatisfaction and social responsibilities. Likewise, Watts and Robertson (2011) conducted a cross sectional study to investigate factors of burnout in university academicians. They found that the number of students was one of the predicators in burnout and established its higher rate of burnout in young or less experienced academicians (Doyle & Hind, 1998).

The cross-sectional study of Bhatti, Hashmi, Raza, Sheikh and Shafiq (2011) investigating job satisfaction among academicians found management role, workload pressure, performance pressure, role ambiguity and association with colleagues as the major contributors to the prevalence of job stress. In addition, they also found low salaries and less healthy environment as potential stressors. Agbatogun's (2010) study on stress and burnout among academicians in Nigeria concluded that by using recent technologies during teaching profession in education would minimize workload and thus job stress. We have also observed the positive consequences of the use of technology on the mental health of academicians and on the overall quality of education. In the context of gender, Martinussen, *et al*. (2007) found no significant differences in burnout among academicians but in the context of age, it was observed that young academicians were more exhausted and less satisfied in comparison to the older or experienced ones. On the contrary, Lackritz's, (2004) cross-sectional study of academicians in higher education institutions found gender-based difference while investigating burnout. Similarly, Byrne investigated the relationship between demographic variables including age, gender and marital status with burnout. The author found marital status an important indicator that created differences in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and disengagement. Overall, the findings of the study concluded that academicians quit their respective organizations due to less

resources and high demands like workload, lack of career development and job insecurity (Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper, & Ricketts, 2005; Winefield et al., 2003).

**Objectives of the study**

a. To investigate the factors of job stress and burnout among the academicians in higher education institutions.
b. To determine the factors of job stress and burnout to effect the job performance among the academicians in higher education institutions.
c. To identify the challenges to academicians in higher education institutions.
d. To demonstrate the policy recommendations to the relevant institutions/organizations in Pakistan.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method of systematic literature review is applied to investigate the main predictors of job stress and burnout among academicians (Khan, Yusoff., & Khan., 2014; Watts & Robertson, 2011). The study is guided by a clearly stated objective and scrupulous selection of existing research studies to dig into the core of the problem (Croucher, Policy, Work, Economic, & Council, 2003). For the purpose of the current study, various research studies have been reviewed that are found relevant and rewarding. Assisted by search engines like Google, Google Scholar and other well-known databases, many works including research papers, books and articles with extensive citations were downloaded and reviewed from Taylor and Francis, Jstor, Web of Sciences, Willy Online Library, Sage and Science Direct as shown in Table 1.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

**Table 1:** *Stress and Burnout Related Databases and Publishers*

| Variable | Name of Database/Publisher | Frequency | Countries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Job Burnout, Education, Stress | Taylor and Francis | 15 | UK, Australia, Canada, USA, Turkey Pakistan, Spain, South Africa, Nigeria |
| | Emerald Insight | 2 | |
| | Online Wiley | 6 | |
| | Google Scholar | 5 | |
| | Sage Publisher | 8 | |
| | Science Direct | 6 | |
| | Web of Sciences | 1 | |
| | Books | 15 | |

The study also followed the systematic method where the researchers included both the inclusion and exclusion criteria for selection of papers from the said databases. This method was also supported by prominent researchers (Wallace et al., 2005; Yusoff & Khan, 2013). The review included only those research endeavors that were found relevant to burnout, stress, job stress in the context of higher education sector. Further, those research articles and papers which related to burnout but in the context of health, banking and primary and secondary education were excluded due to the different nature of the work environment. Overall, the approach of the study was qualitative in nature. The reviewed literature included studies that had also used quantitative and mixed method approaches however.

In the current study, the researchers examined the factors that affect stress and burnout by the systematic review of the literature. Therefore, it has been revealed that stress and burnout is chronic problem in every profession. On the other hand, very few of the study were conducted on stress and burnout empirically in Pakistan, but still there is high level of stress and burnout among the academicians. The results may be due to difference between the practical work. In the same way, it is observed that teaching profession improve the social activities both by practical and psychological needs of the society. Moreover, review of research studies, few organizational factors are identified among the academicians like role stressor, technology support, parents pressure, student interactions, challenges in the jobs, professional development and autonomy (Khan., Rasli, Khan, et al., 2014).

In further detail, the researchers evidently discussed in his research paper that professional development is an important issue of discussion among the academicians. In the support of the result, study conducted in UK determined that higher education institution employees are more stressful especially in working relationship, lack of control, communication and resources (Tytherleigh, et al., 2005). Moreover, due to repaid changes in the education sector, the individual faces challenges in the form of professional development, technological changes and resources. The results of the study also indicated that stress and burnout are directly associated with demands. on the other hand, it is also observed from previous studies, that stress and burnout is the imbalance between demand and resources. The results of the study will be helpful in the examining of factors affecting stress and burnout among academicians, which can further suggest to the policy makers to reduce the stress and burnout by designing at both individual and organizational (Khan et al., 2014; Khan, Yusoff, et al., 2014).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the current study was to investigate the predictors of burnout among academicians in higher education institutions through systematic review of the literature. The paper is guideline for future research studies to investigate the increasing trend of burnout and decreasing of academicians performance both individual and organizational (Chiang & Liu, 2017; Khan, et al., 2015). The study concluded that the imbalance between job demands and job resources triggered stress and burnout. The findings revealed inverse relationship of job demands and job resources with burnout (Khan, Yusoff, et al., 2014). The study also identified significant stressors including the more demanding and less rewarding organizational policy and role of administration, lack of supervision and supervisory support, role ambiguity, role conflict, lack of resources, academic problems, workload, research productivity, student performance, parent involvement and low salaries (Doyle & Hind, 1998; Watts & Robertson, 2011). Moreover, it has concluded from the above discussion that younger staff are more burnout as compare to older. It was also revealed that in adverse working conditions, academicians were exhausted and less committed that also influenced their individual and organizational performances. Overall, the study was an attempt to inform the mangers, policy makers and researchers and to impress upon them the need for revisiting and resetting the job design with view to manipulate the available human capital in the larger interest of the employees and the higher education institutions.

The research study recommends that qualitative data analysis may useful to the initial step in the stress and burnout. Due to this data analysis the performance of the students, individual and organization will be improved. Furthermore, the current study recommends proper measures to the effect that will save academicians from the factors that affect them and shove them to stress and burnout. This research study will enable the academicians to minimize the stressors and design and redesign their responsibilities, which affect their performance.

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