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A Case Study to Investigate the Level of Burnout of Employees among Government and Private Sectors in Malaysia

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Abstract

People's lives and jobs have changed drastically because of the COVID-19 crisis. COVID-19 has resulted in burnout brought on by ongoing work stress, which negatively affects both employees and their businesses. It may result in despair, substance abuse, interpersonal issues, personal and professional frustration, social isolation, relationship issues, and, in severe cases, suicide. The experience of burnout has been the focus of much research during the past few decades. However, there is a lack of research that covers scope on work burnout among the government and private sectors and focusing more on medical health practices. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the level of burnout among workers in the government and private sectors in Malaysia in terms of personal-related burnout, workrelated burnout, and colleagues-related burnout. For this study, a quantitative and crosssectional study was employed and a total of 108 respondents were purposely chosen across age groups from the private and government sector in Malaysia. The respondents were given an online questionnaire that was distributed using a google form that consists of 18 questions that measures the domains of personal burnout, work related burnout and colleague related burnout. The findings showed that on average, respondents sometimes have personal and work burnout. On the other hand, respondents rarely perceived colleagues related burnout. In conclusion, all employees and employers must be willing to work together to minimize this problem especially in organization and it is crucial to learn how to prevent burnout and to seek professional attention if it happens.

Keywords: Post Covid, Work Burnout, Work-Related, Personal Related, Colleague Related

Introduction

Background of Study

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has rapidly impacted the global and it all started back in December 2019. Malaysia reported its first positive COVID-19 case on January 25, 2020 and it is imported from Wuhan, China (Abdullah, 2020). Currently, Malaysia has started the "Transition to Endemic" phase of COVID-19, during which time all limitations on business hours will be lifted and prayer activities will be permitted without any physical separation (Hashim et al., 2021). Nevertheless, significant changes to people's daily working and home lives did result from the abrupt implementation of the COVID-19 restrictions that were implemented throughout the world (Rigotti et al., 2020). According to numerous studies, COVID-19 has resulted in burnout brought on by ongoing work stress, which negatively affects both employees and their businesses especially in professions such as nurses, doctors, and teachers (Joshi & Sharma, 2020; Pressley, 2021).

According to Maslach et al (2001), work burnout can be defined as a prolonged reaction to persistent interpersonal and emotional pressures at work, measured by the aspects of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. In specific terms, exhaustion is measured as the feeling of not being able to offer any more of oneself at an emotional level while cynicism is described as a distant attitude towards work and the people being served by it and colleagues. Meanwhile, inefficacy is expressed as the feeling of not performing tasks sufficiently and of being incompetent at work (Montero-Marin & Garcia-Campayo, 2010). In addition, findings have shown that there is a positive association between highly stressful work and work burnout (Embriaco et al., 2007). According to Pereira et al (2021), work burnout is a highly potential mediator variable that can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and occurrence of somatization symptoms. Hence, this showed that work burnout can put the individual's health and wellbeing at risk.

Based on the survey conducted by market research firm Ipsos last year, it has shown that Malaysians experienced the highest level of anxiety over job security with 74 percent followed by Saudi Arabia. This result is due to the stress caused by changes in work routines and organization and the difficulties of finding work-life balance since COVID-19 happened. This is maybe because many organizations have introduced the concept of work from home (WFH) due to the pandemic and employees must work online and some even have to share their live locations when they start their work. Thus, it is important to conduct a study that investigates how far is work burnout working online during post covid to give significant findings to those who were involved.

Statement of Problem

The burnout phenomenon is widely spread across the world, and is continuing to be a problem for everybody. In Singapore, a high and serious burnout has been reported among a percentage of the population of dentists. Furthermore, a moderate percentage of the sample indicated that they needed some support to help with burnout (Arora & Knight, 2022). Meanwhile, in Ireland, the educators who participated in the survey reported negative reactions to working during the pandemic, with high levels of stress and burnout reported as a result of the negative feelings (Minihan et. al., 2022). This is supported by Smith et. al (2022) that stated in their research that among education workers, those who engaged in online education have worse psychosocial exposures, leading to high rates of burnout. Additionally, in China, medical staff experienced greater fear, anxiety, and depression, which will also lead to burnout among medical staff (Lu et. al., 2020).

This phenomenon results in several downsides to work and life quality of the affected people. One of the drawbacks mentioned is turnover rates, which is observed among teachers in Ireland (Minihan et. al., 2022). Burnout also causes people to develop mental health problems, which in turn affects the efficiency at work, or even personal relations among family and friends. Medical workers may also experience compassion fatigue, which will affect their general friendliness towards their patients (Hochwarter et. al., 2022). However, there is a lack of research that covers scope on work burnout among the government and private sectors. Furthermore, the previous researches only cover the work burnout during COVID-19, and there is a possibility that the level of anxiety and burnout has increased since then. Hence, this study is done to investigate the level of burnout among workers in the government and private sectors in Malaysia.

Research Questions

This investigation is done to answer the following questions;

- What is the level of personal-related burnout during post covid?
- What is the level of work-related burnout during post covid?
- What is the level of colleagues-related burnout during post covid?

Research Objectives

This investigation is done to answer the following objectives;

- To investigate the level of personal-related burnout during post covid.
- To investigate the level of work-related burnout during post covid.
- To investigate the level of colleagues-related burnout during post covid.

Literature Review

Theory and Categories of Work Burnout Online

Due to pandemic COVID-19, society had to face big challenges which inevitably also affected most of the sectors such as economy and labour market, social, education, public health, and others. This causes most of the workplace to shift abruptly from traditional office setup to online work. Due to the online format, people struggled with technological interruptions during their video conference, class, or meeting sessions and some of them who work from home need to manage both the job and home responsibilities together. This causes them to think that the work tasks are getting heavier and work pressure is increasing. This leads to work-related burnout syndrome (Kumaresan et al., 2021).

Generally, work burnout is defined as a psychological syndrome involving a prolonged response and chronic stress at work (Hahm, 2017; Salvagioni et al., 2017). It will have several consequences to the workers' well-being, mental and health and that finally leads to reduced commitment and effectiveness in the workplace (Freudenberger, & Richelson, 1980, Győri & Perpék, 2021). Based on Chen et al. (2020), burnout syndrome also has a negative impact on organizational commitment, turnover intention which lead to nervousness, depression and stress, and cardiovascular disease as well as affect the positive psychological quality of individuals. This syndrome will cause damage at a cognitive, emotional, level of attitude, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Maslach et al., 2006).

Maslach and Jackson (1981) stated that work burnout can be categorized into three dimensions which are emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion can be described as a feeling of being stressed out

and being exhausted by the psychological efforts made at work (Bianchi et al, 2021). It includes fatigue, tiredness, weakening and lack of sufficient emotional energy to handle work tasks (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022). Individuals will feel tired and begin to think that they can no longer endure when the emotional source is finished (Hahm, 2017). Meanwhile, depersonalisation refers to a state characterised by a negative approach towards other people to create a space. It also includes the condition where people fear to go to work, indifference, insensitivity and being cynical to colleagues (Shlenskaya et al., 2020, Gyori & Perpek, 2021; McCann & Holt, 2009). On the other hand, personal accomplishment is defined as an individual's self-evaluation and self-esteem in relation to her or his work performance. This individual feels unable to perform work and has growing dissatisfaction with work including low productivity, low morale and decreased sense of competence (Gyori & Perpek, 2021, Nassani et al., 2021).

Ways to Cope with Burnout Online

Work burnout online has a huge impact on the level of skill and professionalism as an employee. Since those who work are not aware of the possible consequences of emotional exhaustion and how to prevent it, they do not care about the formation of qualities that increase the level of stress resilience. Therefore, they must know how to handle work burnout to avoid significant consequences.

One survey was conducted to analyse the coping for burnout and fatigue online learning during COVID-19 pandemic. According to Nurhidayati et al (2021), it showed that there are several ways on how someone can manage to handle burnout online including solving the problems efficiently, thinking in a positive way by seeing the problems as opportunities to gain experience, establish a good relationship with others, communicate the problem with the person concerned and understand that nobody is perfect.

Based on Shreffler et al (2020), their study has developed several strategies to prevent burnout. They include exercises, apply leave, and take breaks, eat well, support system, take time to have fun, reduce distractions, recognize feelings of burnout are normal and sleep well. These strategies can help people to reduce levels of burnout and maintain wellness. Mheidly et al (2020) stated that implementing practical and applicable strategies during online sessions can reduce the risk of psychological distress and help the public cope with burnout levels during pandemic COVID-19. From this survey, they suggested promoting awareness on stress and burnout, breaks during online sessions, directing wellness campaigns, exercises, yoga, supportive online communities and cutting down or quitting on unhealthy habits (Mheidly & Fares, 2020). It is also supported by (Pamungkas & Nurlaili, 2021) that these strategies can prevent work burnout online among people.

Past Studies

Past Studies of Working Online Burnout across Age Group

The abrupt shift away from traditional teaching and learning methods to fully online classes have badly interrupted university operations and presented many difficulties for the teaching staff. The study by Mosleh et al (2022) discussed the impact of online teaching and working remotely towards burnout levels of higher education's teaching staff. 278 of teaching staff and course instructors across age groups from 17 campuses in the United Arab Emirates participated in this web survey. The study consisted of three parts of a questionnaire which included participants' characteristics as the first part, stress level as the second part and perception of burnout as the third part. The study found out that around 29% of participants

faced a low stress level, 60% of participants experienced moderate stress level while another 11% participants suffered high stress level. The study also shows that participants with 7 to 10 years of online teaching experience were more stressful compared to those with 4 to 6 years of experience, according to independent sample t-tests and ANOVA tests. Furthermore, results from multiple regression analysis demonstrated that lower satisfaction with the online teaching experience and higher stress levels were associated with more significant personal and working burnout. Participants who were married and had children in school were more likely to experience personal burnout.

Another study by Gutentag et al (2022) discussed the teacher burnout during the pandemic due to shifting the teaching method to full-time online and remote teaching. The survey is conducted among 399 teachers with different age, gender and social-economic ranking. The t-test analysis from this study reported that teachers experienced more burnout during the pandemic compared to before the pandemic. In order to conclude the factors that contribute to the burnout, multiple regression analysis was conducted and the result shows that high family work conflict and low competency to teach online are the main contributors that lead to the burnout. Additionally, higher burnout among the teachers is also associated with mental health in terms of more depressed and anxiety symptoms as well as lower subjective well-being.

Past Studies of Coping Mechanisms for Working Online Burnout

Many studies have been done to investigate the burnout phenomenon among workers especially in terms of factors related to stress and the stress-coping methods. Many factors can contribute to stress among workers and there are some strategies that can be used to manage and control the effect of the stress.

The study by Amzat et. al (2021) is done to find out what is the factor that leads to burnout experiences among teachers and the coping strategies that are being used by the teacher to make sure they can continue doing their work. The study was conducted through semistructured interviews which were participated by ten teachers from two public high schools. Based on the analysed data, there are several factors that result on teacher's burnout including student misbehaviour and occupational stress in the teaching environment. This paper lists out some recommendations for coping strategies that help teachers to manage the burnout issues such as providing training and development activities for teachers and creating adequate support systems.

There is another study by Shikino (2022) which also focused on stress factors that cause burnout and the methods to cope with the stress during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. The research has been conducted using an open-ended questionnaire with 214 respondents whose all of them are physicians. Analysis of the questionnaire comes up with 50% of the respondents feeling stress working during the pandemic and spreading COVID-19 to their family members is the most significant factor that leads to stress. Among three categories of stress-cope strategies, most of the physicians who are involved in this questionnaire choose dysfunctional coping strategies compared to the other two strategies because it can be used to avoid the COVID-19 infection.

Conceptual Framework

Although work burnout is normal, the emergence of online and mixed modes of working has added to the work stress. According to Rahmat et al (2022), online work mode can bring both blessing and downside to the workers, and one downside is work burnout. This study is rooted by the burnout constructs by (Kristensen et al., 2005). They listed three main causes of work burnout and they are (a) personal-related burnout, (b) work-related burnout, and (c) colleague-related burnout.

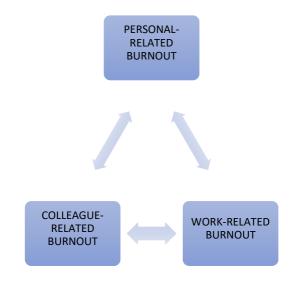


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Work Burnout Post-Covid (Source: Kristensen et al., 2005)

Figure 1 above showed a conceptual framework that consisted of personal-related burnout that had 5 items in the survey, work-related burnout that had 7 items in the survey and 6 items under colleague-related burnout.

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to investigate the level of the personal-related burnout, workrelated burnout, and employees-related burnout towards work burnout post covid. A total of 108 respondents were purposely chosen across age groups from the private and government sector in Malaysia. The data was gathered once over a period of three weeks. The method used is a survey where an online questionnaire is used to gain information from the respondents. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents using google form and they are requested to answer all questions to minimize non-response error.

Section	Constructs	No. of Items
В	Personal Burnout	5
С	Work Related Burnout	7
D	Colleague Related Burnout	6
		18

Table 1 Distribution of Items in Survey

Based on Table 1, it showed the distribution of items in the survey. The questionnaire used is a survey adapted from (Kristensen et al., 2005). It contains four sections as listed. The first section (Section A) examines the characteristics of the respondents. The next section (section B to D) discusses the analysis of the research questions. It consisted of 18 questions. This questionnaire measures the following domains, which are personal burnout, work related burnout and colleague related burnout. Responses for these sections used the interval scale matrix with pre-coded numerical scales in order to measure the extent of respondent's view, a 5-point scale was adopted. The scoring is 1 for Never, 2 is for rarely, 3 is for sometimes, 4 is for very often and lastly 5 is for always.

Section B is about personal burnout. The personal burnout domain includes 6 questions. These questions measure the individuals' emotional, exhaustion demands, fatigue and being tiredness or any other similar term by the psychological efforts made at work. Then, the next section (Section C) is work related burnout which consists of 8 questions. This section focuses on the person's own attribution of symptoms to her/his work. And, the final section (Section D) contains 6 questions which are about colleague related burnout. This section asked questions related to role clarity, role conflicts, social support, social relations and sense of community where people can attribute their fatigue to factors other than their work with colleagues.

Descriptive statistics were employed for this study. The study also uses Cronbach's coefficient alpha as a test of inter item consistency reliability. This is a test of consistency of the respondents' answer to all the items in a measure. Since the questionnaire used is adapted and modified from Kristensen et al (2005), it has been tested for its reliability and validity. The Cronbach's alphas for internal reliability are very high (0.85 to 0.87). The results of the analysis showed that the personal burnout domain had the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.87, the work-related burnout domain had the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.87 and the colleague related burnout domain had the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.85. These results proved that the instruments were reliable. Therefore, it can be concluded that these questionnaires are already valid and reliable.

Findings Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1. Gender

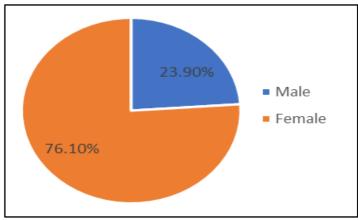


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 shows the gender profile for the respondents who are taking part in this survey. According to this figure, 76.1% of the respondents were female while another 23.9% were male.



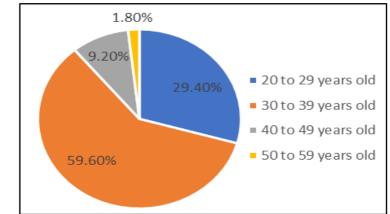


Figure 3- Percentage for Age Group

Figure 3 depicts the percentage of age group among the respondents. Most of the respondents are from the age group of 30 to 39 years which contributes about 59.60%. This is followed by 29.4% who come from the age group of 20 to 29 years old. Age group of 40 to 49 years old is contributed by 9.2% while the lowest percentage comes from the age group 50 to 59 years old with 1.8%.

Q3. Highest Academic Level

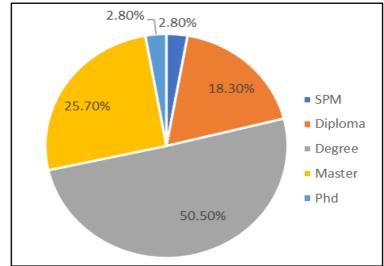


Figure 4- Percentage for Academic Level

Figure 4 depicts the percentage of academic level among the respondents. Most of the respondents have degree qualification with 50.50 %, followed by respondents who have Master qualification with 25.70%. Meanwhile, 18.30% represents respondents who have Diploma qualification and 2.80% represents respondents who have SPM and PHD qualification respectively.

Q4. Marital Status

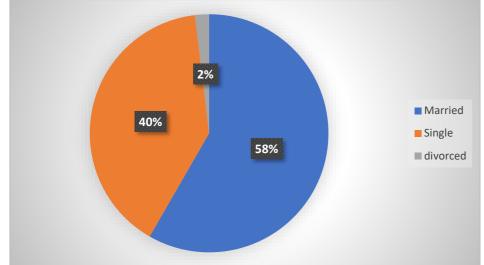


Figure 5- Percentage for Marital Status

There were 108 respondents who completed the questionnaire for this study. Figure 5 shows the details of the respondent marital status. Most of the respondents are married as it contributes the highest percentage with 58%. About 2% of the respondents are divorced and the rest are single.

Q5. Working Sector

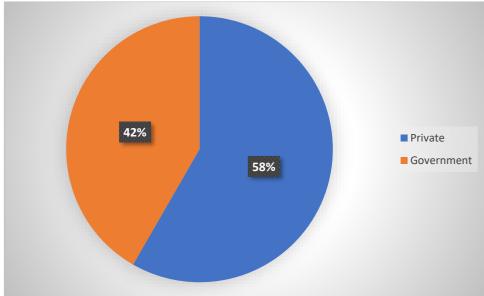
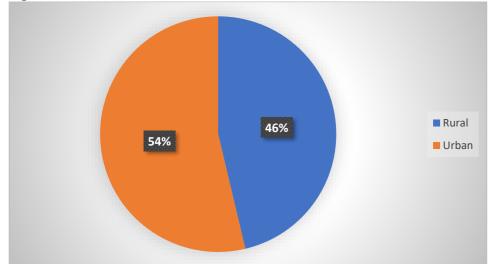


Figure 6- Percentage for Working Sector

Figure 6 shows the percentage of the respondent from two different working sectors. From a total of 108 respondents, 63 (58%) respondents are from the private sector and the other 45 (42%) respondents who answered the questionnaire are working in the government sector.



Q6. Working Area

Figure 7- Percentage for Working Area

The study focuses on two different working areas, that are rural and urban. From the conducted questionnaire, 46.3% respondents work in rural areas and another 53.7% are working in an urban area.

Findings for Personal Burnout

This section presents data to answer research question 1 on what is the level of personalrelated burnout during post covid?

Table 3

Mean for Personal Burnout

STATEMENT	Mean
PBQ1 How often do you feel tired?	3.8
PBQ2 How often are you physically exhausted?	3.7
PBQ4 How often do you think "I can't take it anymore!"	3.00
PBQ5 How often do you feel worn out?	3.2
PBQ6 How often do you feel weak and susceptible to illness?	3.00
TOTAL MEAN	3.34

There are five items measured for personal burnout (refer to table 3). The first question asked was "How often do you feel tired?" has a mean of 3.9, followed by the question of "How often are you physically exhausted?" with a mean of 3.7. The average of the third question that asked about "How often do you think "I can't take it anymore!" is 3.1 and for the fourth question of "How often do you feel worn out?" has a mean of 3.5. Lastly, the question of "How often do you feel worn out?" has a mean of 3.5. Lastly, the question of "How often do you feel worn ot personal burnout indicated 3 and above and this showed that on average, respondents sometimes have personal burnout.

Findings for Work-Related Burnout

This section presents data to answer research question 2 on what is the level of work-related burnout during post covid?

Table 4

Mean for Work Related Burnout

STATEMENT	Mean
WRBQ1 Do you feel worn out at the end of the working day	
WRBQ2 Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work	
WRBQ3 Do you feel that every working hour is tiring for you?	2.8
WRBQ5 Do you have enough energy for family and friends?	3.5
WRBQ6 Is the nature of your work emotionally exhausting?	3.2
WRBQ7 Does your work frustrate you?	
WRBQ8 Do you feel burnt out because of your work?	
TOTAL MEAN	

Based on the information given above (table 4), the mean recorded are at medium to moderately high level, ranging from 2.8 to 3.5. There are seven items measured for work related burnout. The first question asked was "Do you feel worn out at the end of the working day?" has a mean of 3.5, followed by the question of "Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?" with a mean of 3.1. The average of the third question that asked about "Do you feel that every working hour is tiring for you" is 2.8 and for the fourth question of "Do you have enough energy for family and friends" has a mean of 3.2 and "Does your work frustrate you?" with a mean of 2.8. Lastly, the question of "Do you feel burnt out because of your work?" has a mean of 3.1. Therefore, it can be summarized that overall,

work-related burnout has a mean at 3.14 and this showed that on average, respondents sometimes do feel work related burnout.

Findings for Colleagues-Related Burnout

This section presents data to answer research question 3 on what is the level of colleaguesrelated burnout during post covid?

Table 5

Level of Colleagues-Related Burnout

STATEMENT	Mean
CRBQ1 Do you find it hard to work with colleagues?	
CRBQ2 Does it drain your energy to work with colleagues?	
CRBQ3 Do you find it frustrating to work with colleagues?	2.4
CRBQ4 Do you feel that you give more than you get back when you work with your	
colleagues?	
CRBQ5 Are you tired of working with your colleagues?	2.4
CRBQ6 Do you sometimes wonder how long you will be able to continue working	
with your colleagues?	
TOTAL MEAN	2.55

Based on table 5, the first and second question asked was "Do you find it hard to work with colleagues?" and "Does it drain your energy to work with colleagues?" has a mean of 2.5 respectively. The third question asked was "Do you find it frustrating to work with colleagues?" has an average of 2.4 followed by "Do you feel that you give more than you get back when you work with your colleagues?" with a mean of 2.9. Next, a mean of 2.4 represents "Are you tired of working with your colleagues?" and lastly, "Do you sometimes wonder how long you will be able to continue working with your colleagues?" has a mean of 2.6. Therefore, it can be concluded that the overall mean score for colleague work burnout is 2.55 that represents respondents who rarely have colleagues related burnout.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

People all throughout the world have suffered greatly as a result of having to cope with the unexpected difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic. There are a lot of people who have lost their work due to this sudden outbreak and some have difficulty in coping with their current work resulting in burnout. There are many consequences due to burnout such as people tend to become less productive and less energetic and makes people feel more hopeless, cynical, and resentful. On top of that, there are not many researchers who focus on work burnout especially among the government and private sectors while there are numerous studies targeted on work burnout among medical health practices. Therefore, this study is conducted to investigate the level of work burnout among workers in the government and private sectors in Malaysia. Based on findings, it showed that on average, respondents sometimes do feel personal burnout based on the 3.34 mean score produced. According to Kang et al (2020), living far from family and friends and working in dangerous environments may have long-term psychological consequences such as emotional exhaustion. This can be one of the factors on why respondents do not all the time feel personal burnout because high

levels of burnout can be decreased when one has talked to their loved one or gathering around with their family and friends. To minimize the error caused by personal burnout, one must try to shape themselves to be a complacent and easy-going person because those who are the worst victims are those who have high expectations and a sense of purpose, for themselves and for others (Chauhan, 2009).

In addition, the level of work burnout also has an average of 3.14 that indicated respondents sometimes do feel work related burnout. This result is supported by Murat et al (2021) that implies that burnout is a psychological, emotional, and physical stress condition that people experience because of their work when they are exposed to stress in work life for an extended length of time. This is because work-related burnouts occur because of people having long hours, a variety of tasks, and complex relationships with their families and other co-workers puts a great deal of stress on them (Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Meanwhile, the third and last objective of this study to identify the level of colleagues-related burnout during post covid found that overall mean score for colleague work burnout is 2.55 that represents respondents who rarely have colleagues related burnout. Although Kristensen et al (2005) reported that that fatigue and exhaustion, including person (personal/self), client, and work/workplace, are the root causes of burnout, this may not be severe for our study because respondents may not have pressure from their colleagues since most of the time, they are all working remotely from home and not by physical meet. This finding is supported by Tavares (2017) that reported work from home can be helpful for avoiding coworker distractions, especially in open plan offices, and it gives employees the freedom to work when they are most productive. In conclusion, in order to prevent and reduce burnout, understanding its causes is very crucial because it can affect people mentally and physically. To make it worse, it can cause symptoms to worsen or inflame when it is left untreated. Burnout is viewed as a problem that needs to be addressed on a personal and organisational level because it negatively impacts both work and social life.

This study demonstrates the level of burnout among employees in the private and government sectors in Malaysia. Even though the level of burnout among employees in both sectors is average, if the phenomenon that can contribute to work burnout is continuously ignored and no action is taken, it will negatively affect employees in ways that can be seen in their emotional, physical, social, and professional lives. Therefore, this study is expected to provide benefits to any organisation to pay more attention to work burnout that has a negative impact on employees' commitment. It can be used as a benchmark by the top management in order to control burnout by taking care of the employee's welfare. At the same time, the management can also find solutions to the causes of burnout among their employees and take action to prevent this problem from continuing in that organization. Aside from that, this study is significant for employees since they will be more sensitive to emotions as well as their physical and mental health. The employees will also attempt to reduce or avoid burnout symptoms by improving their understanding of them.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Burnout is a psychological side effect of working that is well-known, and it is such a popular topic that the World Health Organization (WHO) defined it as an "occupational phenomenon" in May 2019. It is recommended that some preventive and promotive interventions in tackling this burnout problem should be planned and implemented to improve and maintain the

wellbeing of employees in any organization by providing emotional and physical support. In addition, it can also be suggested that some variables such as depression and resilience be included for future research because there is a possibility that resilience can be a mediator in the relationship between depression and dimensions of burnout. Additionally, it can be recommended that certain factors, such as resilience and depression, be included in future studies because it is possible that resilience can act as a mediator in the association between depression and certain burnout aspects. Given that the COVID-19 outbreak has reached the endemic stage worldwide, there is a good likelihood that workloads in some industries will increase, and there is no question that the problem of burnout could get worse in the future.

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