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## Sources of Work Burnout: A Look At Their Relationship

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### Abstract

Work burnout among academicians is not a new phenomenon. A better understanding of work burnout and what sources can cause it will help to reduce the stress level among academicians. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between the sources of work burnout by embedding the McClelland's needs theory which has 3 basic needs of power component, achievement component and affiliation component. A questionnaire-based study was conducted on 30 respondents and this study used a quantitative method. The 5-likert scale instrument used a survey adapted from McClelland (1965) and Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen (2005). It has 4 sections; Section A is the demographic profile. Section B has 12 items on Power, section C has 14 items on Achievement and section D has 12 items on Affiliation. The finding of the study indicates that the sources of work burnout were at moderate level for all components. From the above finding on personal burnout which is influenced by the need for power the result shows that the needs in the workplace moderately can influence personal burnout among academics. Most respondents agreed that they feel tired and physically exhausted when power influences their work routines. The colleague-related burnout faced by respondents is at a moderate level. Findings in this study bear interesting implications in work needs and work burnout.

**Keywords:** Work Needs, Work Burnout, Personal Related Stress, Work Related Stress, Colleagues Related Stress.

### Introduction

#### *Background of Study*

In the human resource solutions provider Employment Hero report stated that most of the Malaysian employees said they felt burnout from work. This is congruent with the Employee Wellness Report 2022 stated that 58 % of employees agree feeling burnt out from their work

in the last three months. The report analysed gathered from 1,016 Malaysians between the ages of 18 and over 65 across various industries, with the majority (80%) being in full-time employment.

One of the leading risks to employee mental health is burnout. A feeling of exhaustion that erodes motivation, burnout can lead to high turnover, a drop in productivity and generally low workplace morale. The term work burnout was formally introduced by Frudenberg, where he observed it among people with helping professions (Hosseinian et al., 2007).

### **Statement of Problem**

Work burnout among academics is not a new issue. Burnout is a recognized workplace hazard in the teaching profession (Khan et al., 2019). Khan et al (2019) also stated the university teachers are exposed to a variety of stressors that causes burnout such as poor relationship with colleagues, large number of students in class, less time for research and role conflicts in the university.

As the world knows, the academics have been provided with a trust by the university to deliver knowledge to the students. This big burden became a priority for the academics in searching for the right method to share knowledge not only with the students but also with the community. A study by Moulton et al (2022) stated, the teaching and learning nowadays is challenging to academics because they might feel tired and burdened with the workload if they do not have any ways to control it. This is due to the covid-19 pandemic that made the emerging of online learning and forced the academician to use the technology as a mechanism in delivering knowledge. It's also supported by finding from Kovalkova & Malkova (2021) that lecturers with higher ability of regulation of emotions are better equipped to deal with the demands of their work and reduce emotional burnout. A good control can bring a way for the lecturer to manage their burnout effectively.

Moreover, the sources of burnout can be increased if the environment has offered unfair treatment to the lecturer. This can be proved by study from Mohammed et al (2020), which the university play an important role in reducing emotional exhausted by create a fair atmosphere and family environment, some autonomy to the academic by including them in the decision-making processes actively so that they will feel they have control over their jobs and duties.

Other than that, according to Kocur (2017), teachers who have higher results on the need of power may influence their workload and their teaching experience is also greater. It also explained that by having some control in their work and enjoying their status in position might affect the result of burnout among the academicians. García-Rivera et al (2022) found that professors with stronger academic resilience were better able to avoid burnout than their peers at university. Additional to that, the research suggests by concentrating on the synergetic empowerment of both resilience and classroom connections, with particular attention to professor–student interactions are an effective way to work on burnout. This study explores McClelland's Human Motivation Theory and to look if the theory influences the factors of work burnout from study by Kristensen, Borrits, Villadsen, & Christensen (2005) among the academicians.

### **Research Questions**

- How does the need for power influence work burnout?
- How does the need for achievement influence work burnout?

- How does the need for affiliation influence work burnout?

### Literature Review

#### *Causes of Work Burnout (relate to theory and how that leads to burnout)*

Numerous factors have received the majority of attention in research on the causes of work burnout. Three main sources of burnout—environmental, personal, and work-related—were identified by a systematic review of 54 papers on the causes and effects of burnout among academic staff (Khan et al., 2019). Work demands (such as academic workloads for teaching and research, administrative tasks, or bringing office work home or on weekends), role demands (such as role conflict and ambiguity), resource scarcity in the form of a lack of funds and a low salary, time pressure, and relationship demands (such as poor relationship with the colleague or students) are some examples of the environmental and work-related causes of burnout. Meanwhile, the personal sources of burnout can occur due to individual lifestyle, personality, family conflict, social isolation, interpersonal trust, daily problems, and failure to meet expectations.

The perspective of McClelland's needs theory, which is divided into three basic needs, namely needs for power, achievement, and affiliation can be used to investigate the causes of work burnout. Individual needs for power can cause personal-related stress. People who need power would perform better when given opportunities to control and influence others, such as providing opportunities to lead a team (Fisher, 2009). Since people have distinct personality characteristics will perceive their needs for power differently, which can cause work burnout. For instance, Brenning et al (2020) found that employees with high scores for depression, anxiousness and hostility appear to feel more emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The authors also reveal that, based on personality factors, neurotic people have a tendency to perceive and evaluate environmental changes (e.g., increased workload) differently from more emotionally stable people who go through the same changes. Mohamed et al (2020) reported that academicians at the university have greater burnout levels as compared to non-academician, and personal factors contribute to the highest burnout level compared to work and client factors.

Burnout at work can also result from individual needs for achievement. Individuals are driven by the possibility of success and the fear of failure (Fisher, 2009). Over the past few decades, work in general and work environments in particular, have undergone significant changes. Likewise, increasing diversity, shifting job requirements, new information technologies, innovative forms of organization, changed power distributions and hierarchies, and increasing globalization may impact employee motivation (Rybnicek, Bergner, & Gutschelhofer, 2019). Even during Covid-19, there is a shift from face-to-face to online teaching for university staff or academicians (Daumiller et al., 2021). Within this, some academicians can manage well or perceive the shift to online teaching as a positive challenge, and some perceive the change as threatening. Besides, role conflict and job demands, such as the requirement for teaching and researching roles simultaneously, can pressure university teachers or academicians to meet the requirement for promotion (Li et al., 2020). Hence, it increases the employees' burnout level associated with work-related factors.

Individuals' need for affiliations also could cause work burnout due to colleague-related stress. The need for affiliation refers to the feeling of being accepted and avoiding rejection (Fisher, 2009). Chan (2021) noted relational contract requires academicians to recognise themselves with the colleague and/or superior, that would lead to positive feelings at the workplace. Work burnout caused by the relationship demands includes student misbehavior,

poor working relationship with colleagues, student evaluation, cynical colleagues, and poor relations with students (Khan et al., 2019). Depersonalization, as one of the symptoms of work burnout, can affect interpersonal relationships and likely creates or increases conflict with students and colleagues (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

#### *Ways to Reduce Work Burnout*

Work burnout can result from personal, work and colleague-related stress, hence several suggestions can be incorporated to reduce it. The top management plays a significant role in providing various approaches, including a vibrant work environment, in motivating them to achieve successful performances and reduce work stress.

As discussed in the previous section, the need for power can create personal burnout among employees. Therefore, several methods can be undertaken to reduce stress among them, as these types of employees have their work preferences. A similar approach can also be employed for employees with a high emotional need for achievement and affiliation, which affects their work-related and colleague-related stress.

Employees with a high emotional need for power are likely to suffer personal burnout. It is because the individual usually competes, directs, manages and exerts influence over others. They also like to win competitions with others and prefer to take risks in achieving their status and control objectives, which can lead to stress due to the need for power. Due to that, some methods will help them achieve their target and reduce their stress level. According to Locke & Latham (2020), implementing high-quality performance management will help the employee to prevent burnout by setting developmental objectives and involving the employee through the process. It will not only support the employee but also provide several benefits to cultivating long-term, high-performing, happy employees.

The second factor that leads to work burnout is prolonged work-related stress caused by a high emotional need for achievement. Individuals with a high need for achievement constantly desire to deal with challenging tasks and feel delighted when it is achievable. According to Gabriel & Aguinis (2022), employees with high work-related stress are emotionally drained and feel negative and detached from their jobs, which leads to decreased performance, hampered creativity and innovation, workplace accidents, absenteeism, and physical and mental illnesses. Therefore, several rewards-related ways may influence them to thrive on the feeling of reward when their target is completed or achievable.

Lastly, individuals with a high need for affiliation prefer a vibrant work environment where people feel greeted, encompassed, and cooperative. They are also very insightful and have the sense to maintain effective social relationships to create a positive working environment. Moreover, they prefer low-risk and harmonious relationships with others which may lead to conflict. Hence, providing aid and social support from various sources such as friends, coworkers, and managers will enable them to have high-quality relationships with others, assisting in reducing conflict. Furthermore, as indicated by Pluut et al. (2018), the top management should play an important role through valuable communication with their employees, assisting them in achieving the target by developing new approaches and showing empathy and concern to them.

#### *Past Studies on Work Burnout*

Work burnout is normally associated with feelings of wearing out experienced by a person specifically during his/her working days. According to Sabagh, Hall and Saroyan (2018), a person experiencing burnout will face “physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, resulting



from a prolonged response to long term exposure to a demanding situation". There are three (3) fundamental ideas related to burnout, which are exhaustion (i.e. fatigue, loss of motivation/energy, tire up), cynicism and detachment from job (i.e. negative attitude/response towards job done, depersonalization, socially inhibited), and inefficacy and lack of accomplishment (i.e. low productivity, low morale, inability to cope) (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Burnout among educators in the tertiary level can be seen in terms of the contributors, its effects and the style of teaching adapted by them.

There have been many past studies on work burnout. A study by Sabagh, Hall and Saroyan (2018) is done to investigate the contributors and effects of work burnout at the faculty level in several universities by using the Job Demand Resources model (developed by Demerouti, et. al., 2001). SLR technique is used to analyse 32 articles from three (3) databases (i.e. ERIC, Scopus and PsycInfo), involving 9110 faculty members from 13 countries. *Burnout, university, college, faculty, professors, academics, teaching staff, lecturers, research staff and teacher burnout* are among the terms used for their study in retrieving the articles. Personal attributes, job resources and job demand seemed to be the contributors to work burnout among the faculty members. Work burnout is also found negatively affecting their well-being, work performance and job satisfaction, as well as detrimental psychological and physical health. In reducing the work burnout, the context must cover deeper than only provisioning interventions at the individual level, but also in terms of institutional reform (as a response to the high level of job demands).

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

There are many factors that influence employees to not be stressed out at work. According to Adam, et. al (2021), motivation at the workplace is influenced by the conditions surrounding it. These conditions can be physical, or even psychological. It be encouraged or hampered by the workers themselves, the work conditions or even the people around. The environment and social context can make a worker feel unstressed (Rahmat et.al., 2022). This makes up the intrinsic motivation of the workers to feel unstressed while working. Intrinsic motivation is positively impacted when workers feel competent and autonomous. This study is rooted from a combination of theories by (McClelland, 1965; Kristensen et al., 2005). According to McClelland's (1965) theory of needs, there are three motivating drivers and this context is motivating factors at work. The factors are (a) power, (b) achievement and (c) affiliation. Power refers to the need for taking (being) in charge of the work that one is assigned to. Next, people are motivated will need to feel a sense of achievement to enjoy the task assigned. Finally, in order to feel comfortable at work employees need to have a sense of belonging to a group via social acceptance.

Based on figure 1, when the needs at work are not met, employees may experience stress at work. In the context of this study, according to Kristensen, Borrits, Villadsen, & Christensen (2005), sometimes employees can experience work burnout and it can be caused by three factors. Firstly, the need for (a) power can create (i) personal burnout. Some people spend much energy to be at their best and this can take a toll on their personal well-being. Next, some employees go above and beyond the work basic requirements and this can lead to (ii) work related stress. Finally, the need for (c) affiliation can lead to some people feeling (iii) colleague related stress.

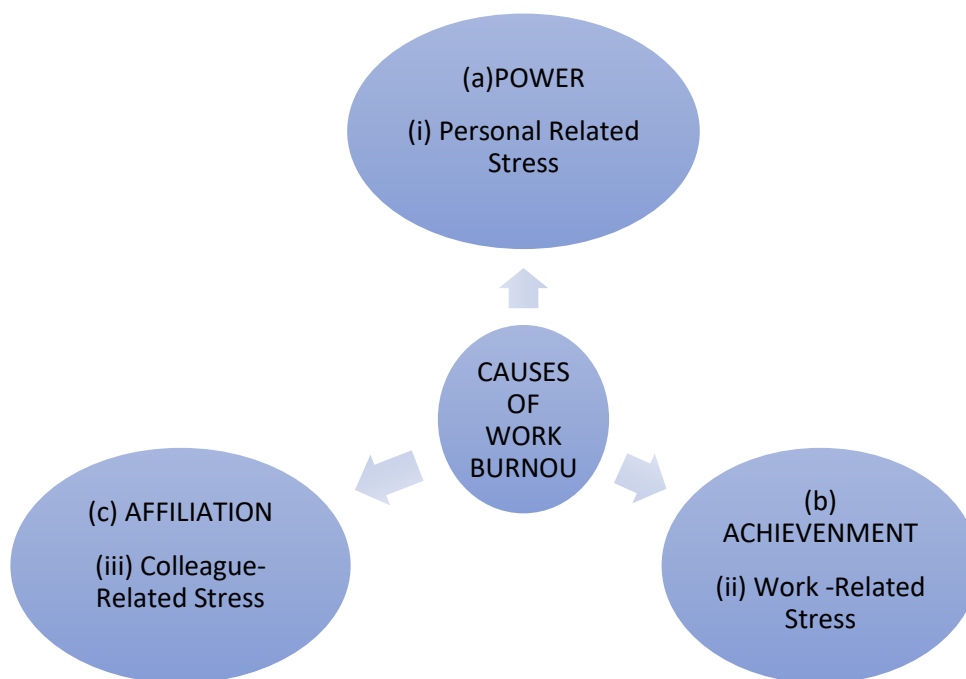


Figure 1-Conceptual Framework of the Study- Causes of Work Burnout

**Methodology**

This quantitative study is done to investigate learners’ motivation towards learning. 30 respondents participated in this study. The 5-likert scale instrument used a survey adapted from (McClelland, 1965; Kristensen et al., 2005). Table 1 shows the distribution of items in the survey. Section A is the demographic profile. Section B has 6 items on power (personal), section C has 8 items on achievement (work-related) and section D has 6 items on affiliation (colleague-related).

Table 1  
*Distribution of Items in Survey*

SECTION	WORK MOTIVATION (McClelland, 1965)	TYPE OF BURNOU (Kristensen, Borrits, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005)	NO OF ITEMS
B	POWER	PERSONAL	6
C	ACHIEVEMENT	WORK RELATED	7
D	AFFILIATION	COLLEAGUE RELATED	6
			19

Table 2  
*Reliability Statistics*

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.932	19

Table 2 shows the reliability statistics for the survey. SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha of .913 thus revealing a high reliability of the instrument used. Data is then analysed to reveal mean scores to answer all the research questions for this study.

### Findings

#### Findings for Demographic Profile

##### Q1.Gender

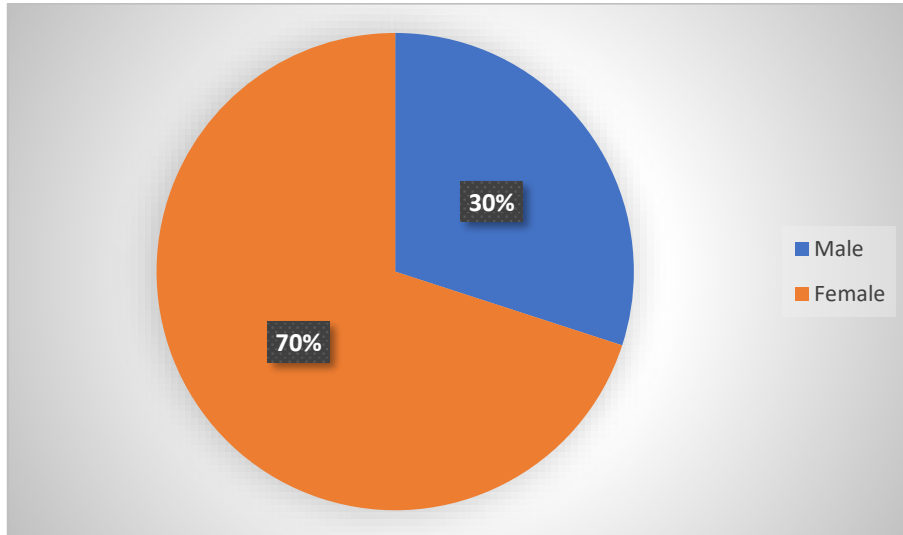


Figure 2- percentage for Gender

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondent gender, 70% of the respondents come from female and 30% male. Thus, this study shows most of the respondents are represented by female respondents.

##### Q2 Age Group

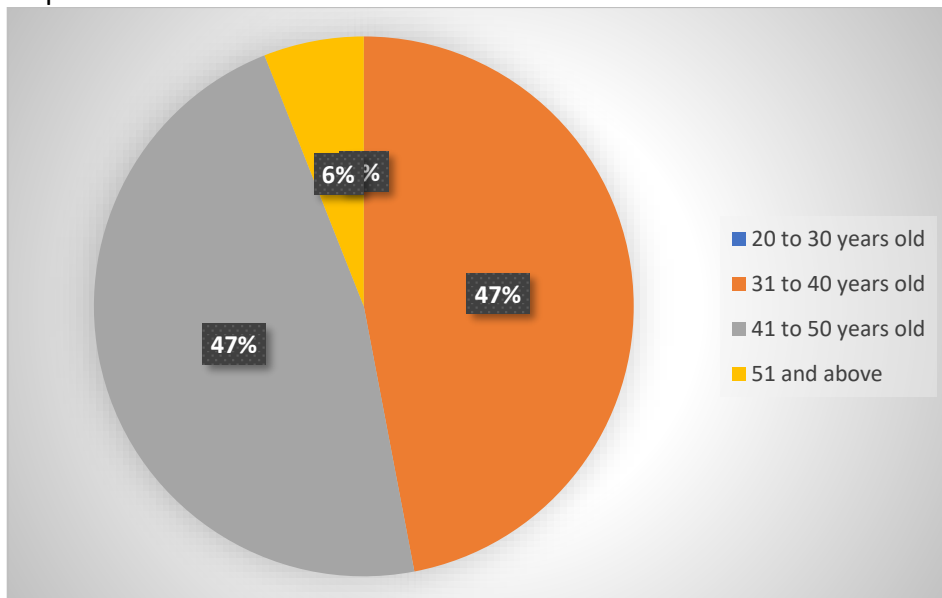


Figure 3- percentage for Age group



Based on figure 3 shows that the highest respondents come from the age group of 31 to 40 and 41 to 50 with 47% for each group and the lowest age group come from 51 and above with 6%.

Q3 Discipline

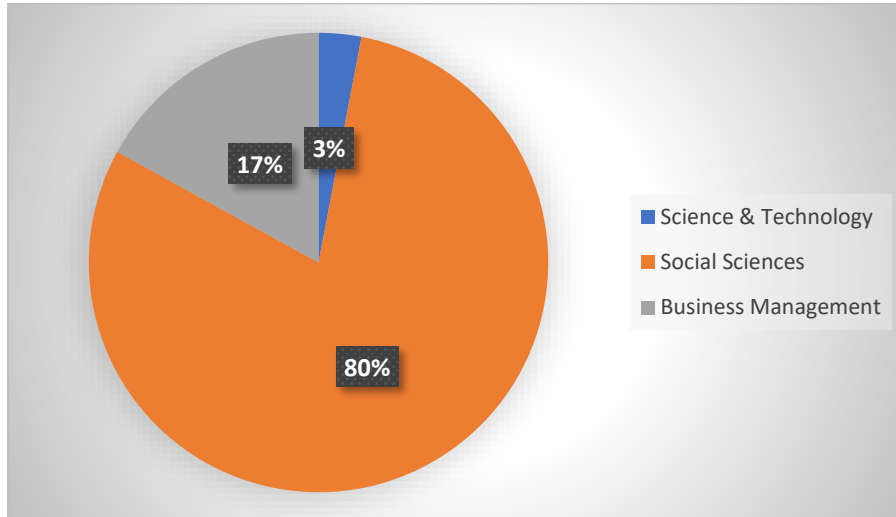


Figure 4- percentage for Discipline

Based on figure 4 shows that the highest respondents come from Social Sciences with 80 % respondents, followed by Business Management with 17% respondents and the lowest respondents come from Science and Technology with 3%.

Q4 Highest Academic Level

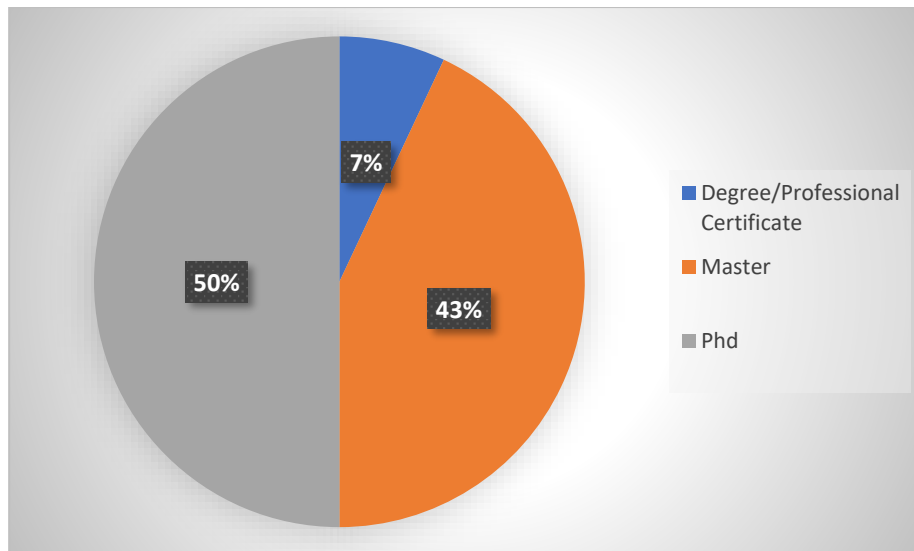


Figure 5- percentage for Highest Academic Level

Figure 5 shows the percentage for the Highest Academic Level of the respondents. The highest respondents come from Phd holders with 50% respondents, followed by master holders with 43% and Degree or Professional Certificate holders with 7%.

**Findings for Power**

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How does the need for power influence work burnout? In the context of this study, the need for (a) power can create (i) personal burnout.

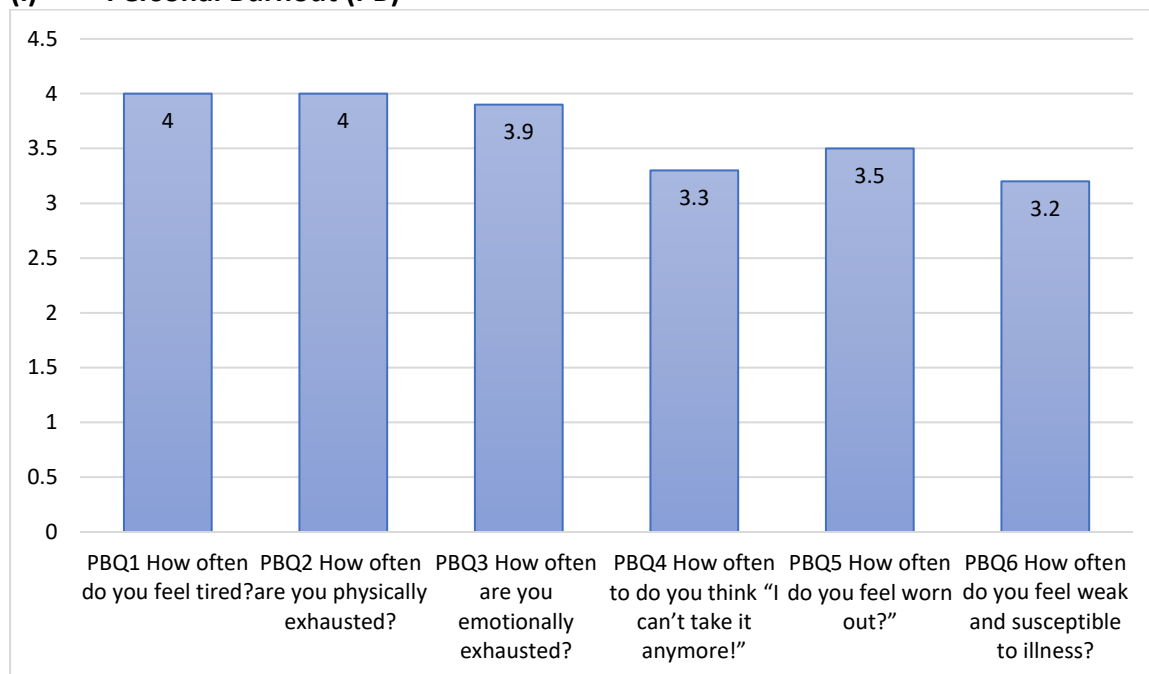
**(i) Personal Burnout (PB)**

Figure 7- Mean for Personal burnout.

Based on Figure 7, it shows the findings of personal burnout which are influenced by the need of power. From the mean values above, the highest value refers to the statement of "how often do you feel tired?" and "how often are you physically exhausted?" which has a mean value of 4. Most respondents agreed that they feel tired and physically exhausted when power influences their work routines. Next, the second highest value of mean goes to the statement "how often are you emotionally exhausted?" with a 3.9 score. Then followed by statement "how often do you feel worn out?" with 3.5 mean value and 3.3 mean value for "how often do you think 'I can't it anymore!'" statement. From the value show that it was consistent where when the employee feels tired it's also made them feel emotionally exhausted and feel worn out. Meanwhile, the lowest mean value is "how often do you feel weak and susceptible to illness?" (mean value = 3.2). From the result it can be stated that the need for power in the workplace moderately can influence personal burnout among academics.

**Findings for Achievement**

This section presents data to answer research question 2: How does the need for achievement influence work burnout? In the context of this study, some employees go above and beyond the work basic requirements and this can lead to (ii) work related stress.

(ii) **Work Related Burnout (WRB)**

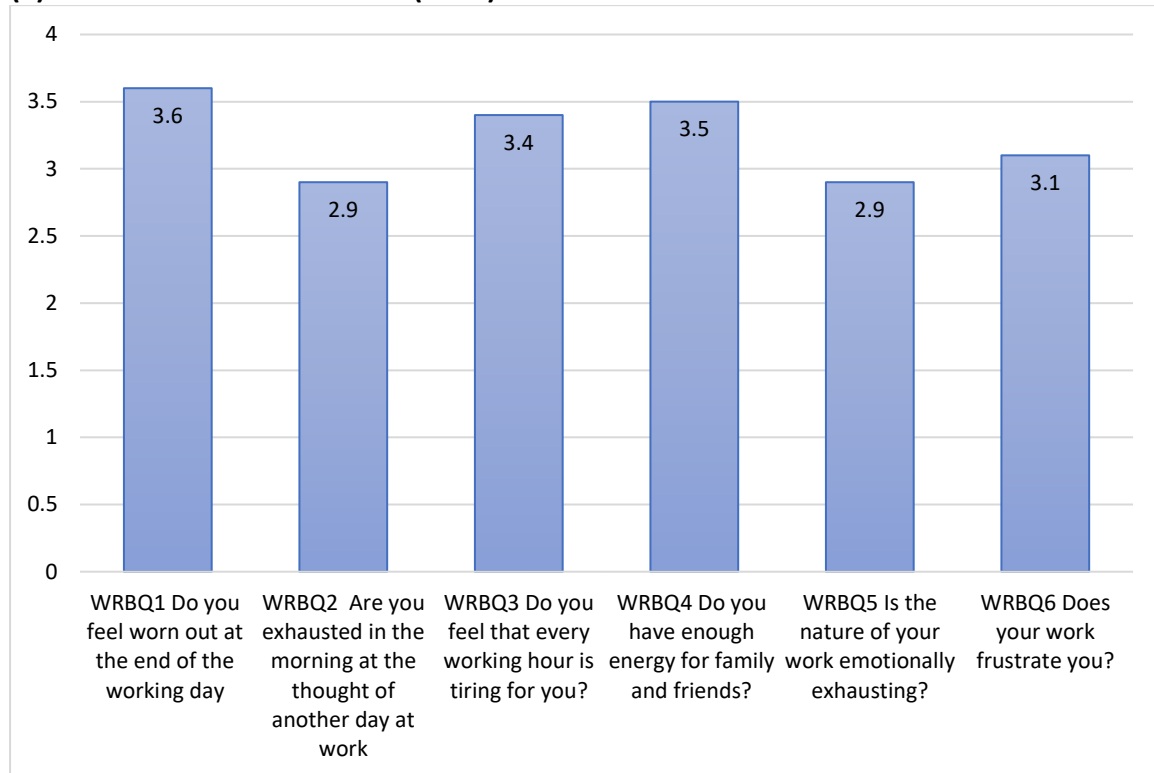


Figure 8- Mean for Work Related burnout.

Figure 8 shows the value of the mean score for work related burnout (WRB) assessed by the respondents. The highest mean score was associated with WRBQ1 (Do you feel worn out at the end of the working day?), with a value of 3.6. The second highest mean score is 3.5 for the statement WRBQ4 (Do you have enough energy for family and friends?). Meanwhile, the mean score for WRBQ3 (Do you feel that every working hour is tiring for you?) and WRBQ6 (Does your work frustrate you?) are 3.4 and 3.1, respectively. Lastly, the result reveals the same findings for WRBQ2 (Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work) and WRBQ5 (Is the nature of your work emotionally exhausting?) with a mean score of 2.9.

*Findings for Affiliation*

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How does the need for affiliation influence work burnout? In the context of this study, the need for (c) affiliation can lead to some people feeling (iii) colleague related stress.

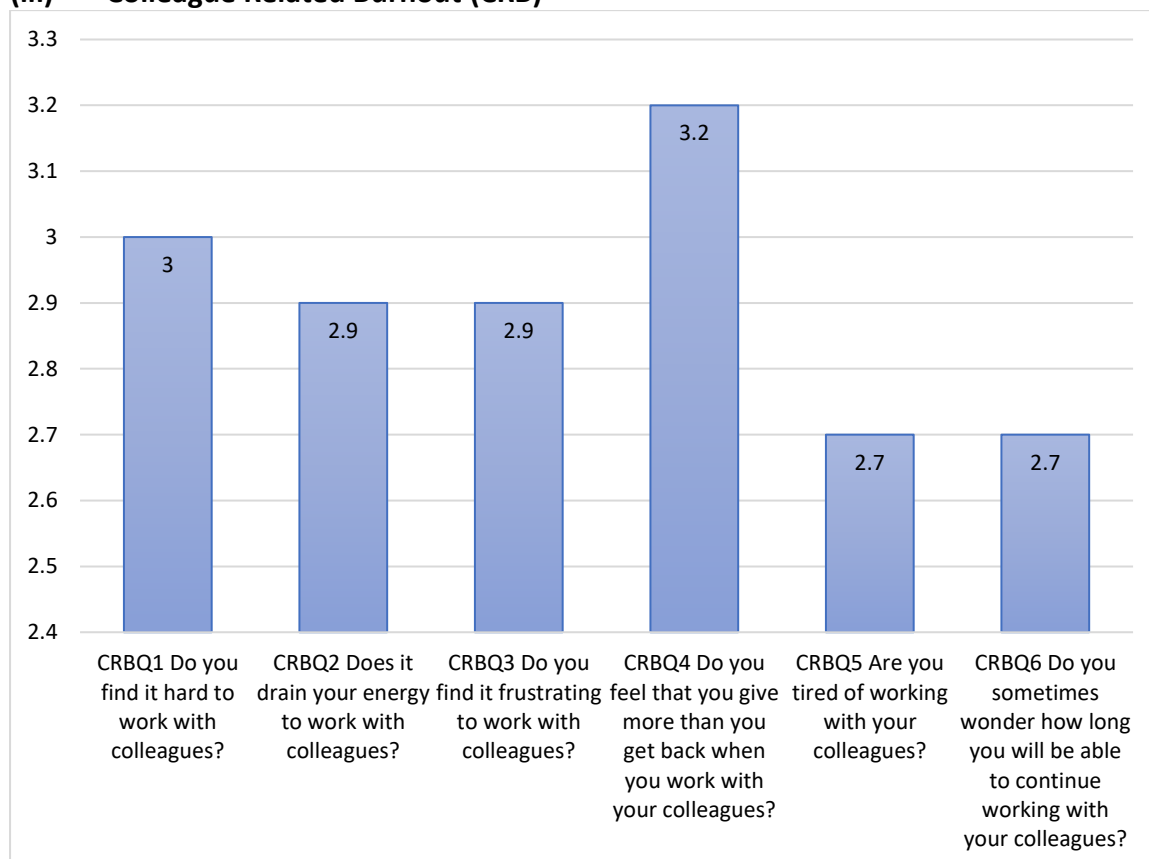
**(iii) Colleague Related Burnout (CRB)**

Figure 9- Mean for Colleague Related burnout.

Figure 9 presents the findings of colleague-related burnout. It shows how the respondents feel about the need for affiliation, which may lead them to feel colleague-related stress. Based on the mean value, the highest score is where the respondents feel that they give more than they get back when working with colleagues, with a mean value of 3.2. On the other hand, the lowest mean value of 2.7 implies that the respondents feel tired of working with colleagues and sometimes wonder how long they will be able to continue working with them. The findings also reported a medium level of colleague-related burnout where they feel it is hard to work with colleagues (mean=3.0). The average mean score of 2.9 demonstrates that the respondents feel that their energy is drained when working with their colleagues, and they feel frustrated working with them. Overall, the colleague-related burnout faced by respondents is at a moderate level. It indicates that the need for affiliation among academicians moderately leads them to feel colleague-related burnout.

## Conclusion

### Summary of Findings and Discussion

The work burnout among academicians in this study was average and not high. The finding of the study indicates that the sources of work burnout were at moderate level for all components. From the above finding on personal burnout which is influenced by the need for power the result shows that the needs in the workplace moderately can influence personal burnout among academics. Most respondents agreed that they feel tired and physically exhausted when power influences their work routines. This congruent with the Kocur (2017), teachers who have higher results on the need of power may influence their

workload and their teaching experience is also greater. It also explained that by having some control in their work and enjoying their status in position might affect the result of burnout among the academicians.

In colleague-related burnout components the result of the mean value shows the highest score is where the respondents feel that they give more than they get back when working with colleagues and the lowest mean value of 2.7 implies that the respondents feel tired of working with colleagues and sometimes wonder how long they will be able to continue working with them. Overall, the colleague-related burnout faced by respondents is at a moderate level. This is congruent with Khan et al (2019) studies, work burnout caused by the relationship demands includes student misbehavior, poor working relationship with colleagues, student evaluation, cynical colleagues, and poor relations with students. Depersonalization, as one of the symptoms of work burnout, can affect interpersonal relationships and likely creates or increases conflict with students and colleagues (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Apart from that, the finding for work related burnout reported that the lowest mean of 3.1 implies that the respondents feel frustrated with their work and the highest score is where the respondents feel worn out at the end of the working day with 3.6. This is congruent with Li et al (2020), role conflict and job demands, such as the requirement for teaching and researching roles simultaneously, can pressure university teachers or academicians to meet the requirement for promotion and this will increase the employees' burnout level associated with work-related factors. Besides, in Mohamed, Nikmat, Hashim, Shuib, and Raduan (2020) studies reported that academicians at the university have greater burnout levels as compared to non-academician, and personal factors contribute to the highest burnout level compared to work and client factors.

### **Pedagogical Implications and Suggestion for Future Research**

Stress and uncertainty mixed with the pressures of work can lead to burnout. Work-life balance could be a contributor to burnout, with 53% of workers saying this was average or poor for them over the last three months. However, responses were polarizing, with 47% of workers stating they had a good sense of balance. Future researchers may conduct in-depth analysing the gender difference, which compares the work burnout factors between male and female academicians as it might have potential implications in education strategies.

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