



## **AN EXAMINATION OF JOB BURNOUT AND TURNOVER INTENTION IN MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY ACADEMICS': EFFECTS OF AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Over the years, the higher education climate has changed drastically due to the greater demands in work-related performances of academics', heightened occupational strain, overbearing job responsibilities, and research-related expectations set by institutions. All these contribute to the trend of job burnout and occupational stress occurring among those in the university setting; in cases where these academics' experience serious levels of burnout and diminished commitment, some opt to leave their career altogether (Ramasamy, & Abdullah, 2017; Winefield, 2003). This study investigates the relationship between affective commitment, an individual's emotional attachment to the organisation, job burnout and turnover intention or intention to quit an organisation on a sample of Malaysian university academics'. Burnout was measured using the 9-items emotional exhaustion component scale (higher scores indicate greater burnout symptom) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI); affective commitment was measured using the six items of the Affective Commitment Scale developed by Allen and Meyer and intention to quit was measured by Kelloway et al.'s (1999) Turnover Intention Scale consisting of four items. Significant and strong associations between burnout symptoms and the level of turnover intention were found. In addition, according to the findings affective commitment appears to mediate the relationship between burnout and academics' turnover intention. The results highlight the significance of academic burnout and the difficulties it poses in terms of academics' well-being, student progress, and institutional success. To minimise burnout and promote academic well-being, additional solutions are needed, including initiatives to resolve systemic problems in the university community. The findings, also shed light on how intervention efforts and services aimed at reducing academic burnout could be effective. These findings' implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Affective Commitment, Turnover Intention, Academics, Higher Education Institutions



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Recent global trends in academic turnover or resigning rates in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) public and private have revealed that universities are seeing an upsurge in cases (Manogharan et al., 2018; Metcalf et al., 2005; Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2011; Robyn, 2013, Winefield, 2003). HEIs once regarded as low-stress work settings are now becoming witness to worldwide trends of university academics becoming more and more exposed to levels of occupational stress that they have not before experienced (Khan et al., 2019; Kinman & Johnson, 2019; Noordin et al., 2013). As a result, the constant expectations placed on these academics have caused a disruption in their job quality, which has resulted in other disadvantages such as turnover (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002 Manogharan et al., 2018).

Although a university academic's employment is in fact pleasant and enjoyable, findings from previous literatures have also shown that, it is can also be tough and challenging (Idris, 2010; Khan et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2020; Winefield, 2003). Furthermore, while these academics confront several uncertainties in their professions, they are also constrained by commitments to their families and relationships, which may cause complications. Many people develop work-related burnout and a diminished sense of commitment to their job as a result of these responsibilities (Guthrie et al., 2017; Moueleu Ngalagou et al., 2019; Noordin et al., 2013). When experiencing extreme degrees of burnout and low commitment, some academics' choose to abandon their job entirely (Winefield, 2003). This, in turn, can have a negative influence on other parts of the organisation, such as the quality of graduates, research and publications, as well as other negative characteristics (Idris, 2010).

One of the major issues confronting university administrations throughout the world is the rising percentage of university instructors abandoning their positions (Manogharan et al., 2018; Ologunde et al., 2007; Ramasamy, & Abdullah, 2017). Aside from extreme burnout on the job, there have been reports of academics quitting their jobs due to unsatisfactory working conditions (Ologunde et al., 2007). Within the local context, the education sector, particularly within private HEIs, is experiencing similar difficulties in retaining valuable and talented academic staff.

Academics are chosen as the selected group due to the changing nature of an academic's job description and the rising importance of the increase in rates of academic turnover and turnover intention in Malaysian private HEIs (Anees et al., 2021; Choong, Keh, Tan, & Tan, 2013; Noordin et al., 2013). Private HEIs rely on their front-line personnel (in this case, academics) to gain a competitive edge (Noordin et al., 2013). University academics are expected to accomplish their duties outstandingly so as to please both the students and the organisation, while also managing their personal/emotional issues on their own (Arokiasamy et al., 2009). Not only are academics to be emotionally stable, they too ought to be incessantly engaged and able to go above and beyond in fulfilling students' needs (Noordin et al., 2013).

Academics are regarded significant members of the teaching force since they contribute a wealth of information to the classroom (Lew, 2009). Because academics play such an important role in today's educational landscape, specific measures must be made to sustain and retain the level of dedication in the teaching field, as well as safeguarding these professionals against job burnout. As a result, identifying the predecessors of this actual turnover is critical; one of these antecedents is the turnover intention variable or thinking about wanting to leave. This variable



has received a lot of attention from researchers since it is a direct antecedent to real turnover (Sousa-Poza & Henneberger, 2004). Burnout and affective commitment have both been linked to turnover intention in the turnover literature (Hemdi & Rahim, 2011; Ussahawanitchakit et al., 2009; Weisberg & Sagie, 1999).

Affective commitment is a worker's emotional attachment to an organisation, and it is regarded as a key aspect in determining his or her devotion and loyalty to that organisation (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Shafiq & Rana, 2016). In a similar line, previous studies has found that the affective commitment variable is substantially linked to the intention to leave variable (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Mahmud & Rosari, 2020). Malaysia's HEIs' ability to produce high-quality graduates is largely dependent on the well-being and commitment of its academic personnel (Morris, Yaacob, & Wood, 2004). It is consequently critical for HEIs to keep academics in check with the right amounts of affective commitment levels and to hinder burnout as much as possible. The changing conditions in HEIs, competition with public HEIs, and vague institutional expectations placed on these educators are among the key causes for high academic turnover rates in private HEIs (Gates, 2000; Lew, 2009). Furthermore, maintaining motivation and commitment levels is becoming increasingly difficult owing to the high requirements set to maintain performance productivity in parallel with nationwide educational changes (Arokiasamy et al., 2009).

Focusing on affective commitment is critical in this circumstance since it has the potential to minimise burnout levels. This promotes a more favourable climate for gaining improved employee support and collaboration, besides decreasing turnover risks (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). As a result, affective commitment may be identified as a mediator variable that connects both burnout and turnover (Jackson et al., 1986; Maslach & Jackson, 1984). Furthermore, the importance of affective commitment as a mediator is that it mediates between burnout and turnover intention, allowing academics who are more burned out to stay and remain in their jobs due to having degrees of affective commitment.

Although prior studies within the burnout, turnover intention and affective commitment continuum from other sectors have suggested a link amongst the variables, (Mahmud & Rosari, 2020; Rehman et al., 2012; Ussahawanitchakit et al., 2009), generalisation cannot be made to Malaysia's private HEIs sector without further investigation. Due to that, the present study aims to provide an understanding into samples of academics working at private HEIs who have yet to be appropriately investigated.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to current research on academic stress, the prevalence of burnout is growing at universities as the nature of an academic's day-to-day responsibilities have become far more intricate and taxing (Khan et al., 2019; Winefield, 2003). Nonetheless, there has been a scarcity of research examining the link between turnover intention and burnout among HEI faculty members, resulting in a scarceness of literature in this area. Burnout is a state in which one's physical and mental emotions are spent as a result of being involved in a particularly emotionally taxing scenario for a prolonged period of time (Pines & Aronson, 1988; Rotenstein



et al., 2018). If taken to its extreme, this might entail an individual desiring to quit their job and organization (Pines & Aronson, 1988; Wen, et al., 2020).

### **2.1 Job Burnout and Turnover Intention**

The principle component of burnout, emotional exhaustion, has been the topic of much recent research. Burnout or interchangeably referred to as emotional exhaustion, is a state in which an individual suffers emotional tiredness and a condition when a person's mental and physical well-being deteriorates (Aslam & Safdar, 2012; Maslach et al., 1997; Rotenstein et al., 2018). Previous studies has established a positive and substantial link between emotional exhaustion and one's intent to leave, and researchers too have confirmed that individuals who are more emotionally exhausted were more prone to withdraw from their workplace (Chuan, 2001; Russell et al., 2020; Westman & Eden, 1997).

An Australian study on  $n = 98$  teachers to determine their turnover intentions and well-being revealed that 29% of the sample had considered leaving the school, while others who had experienced burnout in their careers mentioned that they had deliberated about wanting to quit the profession (O'Brien et al., 2008). Emotional exhaustion was discovered to have a strong link with severe turnover desire to leave the teaching profession in this study. Furthermore, several participants stated that they would have not chosen teaching as a profession if they were again given the choice.

In one study conducted among teachers in Kuching, Malaysia, the burnout and intent to leave of ( $n = 131$ ) teachers were examined. A positive and significant relationship between both variables were found ( $r = 0.36, p < 0.001$ ). Teachers having a higher inclination to quit the job were in fact those experiencing a higher degree of emotional exhaustion in their careers.

### **2.2 Affective Commitment and Turnover Intention**

According to Celep (2000) in one study, teachers who were equipped with good levels of commitment are far lesser to engage in turnover intention. Additionally, these teachers were seen to be able to respond more effectively to a variety of life challenges in their careers. According to the findings, teachers who have a weaker affective commitment to the school are less effective in their job and are more likely to quit the profession altogether.

Likewise in a similar investigation, teachers scoring high on the variable of affective commitment were less likely to leave the institution (Chughtai & Zafar, 2006) indicating a negative connection ( $r = -0.40$ ). Many additional research have also depicted this adverse (negative) association between turnover intent and affective commitment (Chughtai & Zafar, 2006; Moreira et al., 2020; Slattery & Selvarajan, 2005).

### **2.3 Affective Commitment's Function in Mediating the Link between Turnover Intention and Burnout**

Rehman et al. (2012) discovered that affective commitment was a significant mediator between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention ( $B = 0.530, p < 0.01$ ), and that the link between affective commitment and turnover intention was also significant ( $B = -0.477, p <$



0.01). A significant and negative relationship was established between affective commitment and turnover intention in their research sample ( $B = -0.349$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Affective commitment was found to be a mediator in the link between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention in this study.

In a study conducted by Aslam and Safdar (2012) in regards to the effects of burnout and affective commitment on one's turnover intention, the aim of the investigation was to see if affective commitment had a role in mediating the link between burnout and workers' intentions to stay with the company. Emotional exhaustion and affective commitment ( $r = -0.28$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) were shown to have a negative and significant link with workers' desire to stay ( $r = -0.35$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ).

Here, burnout is linked to the intention of employees to leave an organisation, according to the two research mentioned above. Affective commitment also mediates the association between organisational burnout and turnover intention, with individuals who have a lower level of affective commitment owing to a higher level of burnout being more likely to participate in turnover intention.

## **2.4 Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were posited for this study:

- H1:** Burnout is positively linked to turnover intention; academics with a high level of burnout are more likely to plan to leave the organisation.
- H2:** Affective commitment will act as a mediator in the relationship between burnout and turnover intention of academics; turnover intentions are greater in academics who have a lesser level of affective commitment towards their organisation as a result of a higher level of burnout.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Participants**

The information was gathered by a voluntary online questionnaire survey from  $n = 297$  full-time academics' within five private colleges in the Klang Valley. The participants were drawn from various faculties at the chosen HEIs. The inclusion criteria for the HEIs must be continuously delivering degrees within its operation of two years and no less, be legally certified to offer a higher education programme beyond secondary education, and be recognised by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. Males and females were included in the sample, which was chosen using a purposive sampling method. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample.



### **3.2 Measures**

This study took a quantitative method. The questionnaire was made up of two parts. The first section was used to gather basic background information about the participants, while the second was comprised of three different scales. Several earlier research have validated the measures' psychometric properties used in this study (Kelloway et al., 1999; Maslach, et al., 1997; Noor Harun & Noor Hasrul Nizan, 2006).

**3.2.1 Burnout.** Burnout in university academics was assessed using five questions that corresponded to the emotional exhaustion component of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) created by Maslach et al. 1997. 'I feel burned out from my work' and 'I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day at work' were two example items. The items were scored on a seven-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always) (always). The Cronbach's alpha was 0.91.

**3.2.2 Affective commitment.** For this variable, the Affective Commitment Scale (Allen & Meyer, 1996) was used, comprising of six questions on a 5-point Likert scale. The commitment components are based on an employee's attachment to their organisation and relationship with it. Individuals scoring higher on this measure are thought to have a stronger level of affective commitment to their organisation. The instrument validity of this scale has been proven for both convergent and discriminant validity (Noor Harun & Noor Hasrul Nizan, 2006). The Cronbach's alpha for this study is 0.84. "I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organisation" is a sample item on the Affective Commitment Scale.

**3.2.3 Turnover Intention.** Four questions from Kelloway et al.'s (1999), Turnover Intention Scale was used to measure academic turnover intentions on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 5 (Strongly Agree). High scores indicates a more serious desire to leave the organisation. This measure has strong internal consistency in the current investigation, with a value of ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ). "I am planning to look for a new job" is a sample item of this scale.

### **3.3 Analyses**

Affective commitment, burnout and turnover intention were assessed with bivariate correlations to determine the degree and direction of the association. This analyses was also computed to determine whether affective commitment functioned as a mediator in the burnout-turnover Intention relationship. A multiple regression was also performed to see if affective commitment and burnout had any predictive value in predicting turnover intention whilst the sociodemographic characteristics were controlled.



#### 4. MAIN RESULTS

A total of 297 valid surveys were received. Overall, 297 sets of the 350 questionnaires were analysed, resulting in an 85% response rate. The study's sample included 297 academics from five HEIs in the Klang Valley, ranging in age from under 25 to 55 years old (mean = 2.76, SD = 0.875). Participants within the age groups of 25 and 34 years were the majority. Females accounted for 60.3% of the respondents in this survey, while males accounted for 39.7%. In terms of academic credentials, 4.4% had a bachelor's degree, 65.5% had a master's degree, and 30.3% had a doctorate. The length of time they had spent in their different universities was also inquired about. According to the responses, 14.8% served for less than two years, 22.6% for two to four years, 13.8% for five to seven years, 12.1% for eight to ten years, and 36.7% for more than ten years as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Frequency table displaying characteristics of the sample.

Personal Characteristics		Frequency (N=297)	(Percentage %)
Age	Below 25 years	4	1.3
	25 to 34 years	135	45.5
	35 to 44 years	98	33.0
	45 to 54 years	49	16.5
	55 years and above	11	3.7
Gender	Male	118	39.7
	Female	179	60.3
Race	Malay	192	64.6
	Chinese	62	20.9
	Indian	27	9.1
	Others	16	5.4
Academic Qualifications	Bachelor's degree	13	4.4
	Master's degree	194	65.3
	PhD degree	90	30.3
	Others	0	0
Duration of Service	Less than 2 years	44	14.8
	2 to 4 years	67	22.6
	5 to 7 years	41	13.8
	8 to 10 years	36	12.1
	More than 10 years	109	36.7

##### 4.1 Relationship between Variables

To assess the relationships among variables, bivariate correlation was performed. The standard deviations, means, and inter-correlations are displayed in Table 2.

The associations vary from weak to moderate to high in general. Emotional exhaustion was shown to have a significant positive link with turnover intention ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p 0.01$ ). Findings also show those who are more likely to declare a desire to quit their organisation are also the ones



who are emotionally exhausted. The first hypothesis, that burnout will be strongly correlated with turnover intention, was validated by this data.

**Table 2.** Means, Standard Deviation and Intercorrelations of Variables (N = 297)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Emotional Exhaustion</b>	15.62	11.17		
<b>2. Affective Commitment</b>	20.88	4.76	-.44**	
<b>3. Turnover Intention</b>	10.06	5.05	.43**	-.55**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)





**Table 3.** Results of multiple regression analysis

Measures	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	$\beta$	t	p	$\beta$	t	p	$\beta$	t	p
<b>Demographic</b>									
Age	-.18	-2.53	.01	-.15	-2.25	.03	-.15	-2.56	.01
Gender	-.14	-2.36	.02	-.13	-2.43	.02	-.11	-2.22	.03
Race	.13	2.16	.06	.10	1.93	.06	.01	.22	.82
Academic qualifications	-.07	-1.16	.25	-.08	-1.47	.14	-.06	-1.25	.21
Duration of service	.06	.83	.41	.06	.93	.35	.08	1.44	.15
<b>Burnout</b>									
Emotional Exhaustion				.38	5.90	.00	.23	3.75	.00
<b>Affective Commitment</b>									
							-.43	-8.00	.00
R <sup>2</sup>	.07			.25			.38		
F	4.16			11.66			19.75		
$\Delta R^2$	.07			.18			.14		
$\Delta F$	4.16			22.61			64.03		



#### **4.1.2 Affective Commitment and Turnover Intention**

Table 2 also shows that affective commitment has a significant and negative link with turnover intention ( $r = -0.55, p < 0.01$ ), indicating that academics with lower commitment levels have higher intents to resign or leave their organisations. Furthermore, affective commitment was found to be critical in shaping academics' intentions to stay in their current organisations. In contrast to academics with lower degrees of commitment or attachment to their HEIs, highly devoted academics were more likely to stay loyal to their institutions and had less plans to leave.

#### **4.1.2 Emotional Exhaustion, Affective Commitment and Turnover Intention**

The predictability of burnout and affective commitment in predicting turnover intention among academics at private HEIs was investigated using multiple regression analysis. Table 3 above displays the results of the multiple regression analysis. The multiple regression result was significant, with  $F(9, 287) = 19.75, p < 0.01$ , and  $R^2 = 0.38$ . As shown in Model 3, the factors in the last phase, affective commitment and emotional exhaustion, accounted for 38% of the variance in the amount of turnover intention.

#### **4.1.3 Affective Commitment as Mediator**

The four-step approach devised by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used to examine whether affective commitment played a role as mediator in the emotional exhaustion and turnover intention relationship (Hypothesis 2). The regression findings are summarised in Table 4. When affective commitment was included in the regression equation, the emotional exhaustion and turnover intention relationship was significantly reduced, suggesting that affective commitment indeed acts as a mediator. Affective commitment also negatively mediated the effect of emotional exhaustion on turnover intention in the study. The path between a predictor variable and the mediator variable, as well as the path between the mediator and the outcome variable, must be substantial for complete mediation to occur (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The major effect between the predictor and the outcome variable should be zero when both routes are controlled (Baron & Kenny, 1986). According to the findings, after adjusting for affective commitment, the major influence of emotional exhaustion on turnover intention is zero. As a result, this is a complete mediation. Hypothesis 2 is thus supported, based on these findings.



**Table 0.** Hierarchical regression results for Hypothesis 2

Variable	Model 2		Model 3	
	Beta	t	Beta	t
Emotional Exhaustion	0.38	5.90	0.23	3.75
Affective Commitment			-0.43	-8.00
R <sup>2</sup>	0.25		0.38	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.18		0.14	

## 5. CONCLUSION

The first hypothesis, that burnout (emotional exhaustion) will have a positive relationship with turnover intention, was supported by the findings of this study ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This results emulates previous studies depicting a link between burnout and turnover intention (Aslam & Safdar, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2008; Rehman et al., 2012).

The second hypothesis, that affective commitment will mediate the association between burnout and academics' turnover intention at private HEIs in Klang Valley, was equally supported by the findings owing to the fact that the paths from the predictor variable (emotional exhaustion) to the mediating variable (affective commitment), as well as the path from the mediating variable (affective commitment) to the criterion variable (turnover intention), were both significant ( $r = -0.55$ ,  $p 0.01$ ). In addition, the main effect between the predictor and the outcome variable was zero. As a result, there is a mediation effect of affective commitment in this interaction. The findings of this study also match some of the current research on turnover intentions in other industries, including customer service, banking, and hotel management (Aslam & Safdar, 2012; Rehman et al., 2012). These findings show that devoted employees are more likely to remain dedicated despite suffering some burnout throughout their time at the company.

Overall, the importance of both organisational burnout and affective commitment to turnover intention has been underlined in this study. Furthermore, it is well understood that affective commitment is indeed the most essential feature in shaping an individual's turnover intent – a person with high levels of commitment towards the organisation would be less prone to want to quit his or her job.

Findings gained from this study may help the administration of HEIs, particularly private HEIs in the Klang Valley, to devise appropriate methods in coping with and avoiding academic turnover. This is a rational concern, as private HEIs are rapidly entering a competitive market with public HEIs. Issues of staff turnover intention will become a major concern in such scenarios as this is more apparent in private HEIs than in public ones (Gates, 2000; Lew, 2009). Academics are under constant pressure to succeed in all areas, including teaching and research, while also retaining their status as frontlines within the educational setting. HEI management ought to



address this matter by increasing the affective commitment of their academic staff while correspondingly reducing their burnout levels. In addition, management need to give the appropriate training for these academics' in order to prepare them for circumstances of burning out on the job.

In relation to the topic of burnout, affective commitment, and turnover intention, the researcher would like to propose recommendations to private HEI policymakers. By measuring degrees of employee's burnout and affective commitment we are able to ascertain if employees have such desires of wanting to leave their organisation. Besides, by constantly inspecting academics' levels of affective commitment and burnout, more outstanding and committed employees can thus be produced by these private HEIs in the future.

### **Biography**

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