

The Factors of Burnout among Working Women

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ABSTRACT

Burnout, characterized by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, has become a prevalent issue in today's workforce, particularly among working women. This study examines the factors contributing to burnout among women employed in Shah Alam, a rapidly growing city. The sample consists of 384 working women in Shah Alam, Selangor with data collected through a digital questionnaire to gather direct feedback and insights from the participants. The study identifies several key contributors to burnout, including lack of recognition for hard work, work relationships, the work environment, workload, and societal pressure related to women's roles. The findings reveal that the primary cause of burnout among working women in Shah Alam is the lack of recognition for their efforts. The study underscores the importance of implementing organizational policies and initiatives that foster a positive work culture. Addressing these factors can help employers in Shah Alam reduce burnout and improve the well-being and productivity of their female employees. The implications of this research extend to broader discussions on gender, employment, and mental health, offering valuable insights for policymakers, employers, and academics focused on occupational health and gender studies.

Keywords: working women, burnout, workplace, workload, no recognition, women's role pressure, stress, colleagues,

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Women today are very different from those of the past. Traditionally, women were primarily associated with domestic roles such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, often seen as managers of the household or as domestic helpers. This position allowed women to manage home life while also imparting essential soft skills to their children (Ismail & Hassan, 2020). However, in contrast to the traditional view, women have made significant strides in various industries, especially in the context of economic uncertainty and globalization. This shift has played a key role in transforming the workplace into a more modern environment. According to Ismail and Hassan (2020), women's ability to continue their education up to the tertiary level has been a significant factor in this change.

The impact of globalization on women is complex, with both positive and negative consequences. One of the positive outcomes of economic globalization has been the creation of job opportunities for women in sectors like export-processing, free trade zones, and global market factories. These opportunities have allowed women to earn and control their income, contributing to maintaining traditional patriarchal structures, such as conventional households and familial relationships (OKŞAK & KOYUNCU, 2017). However, despite these opportunities, women still face higher unemployment rates than men in many parts of the world, and the jobs available to them are often underpaid, unstable, or degrading.

Society continues to expect women to take on domestic duties (Riyono & Rezki, 2022), placing significant pressure on professional women to balance both work and household responsibilities (Riyono & Rezki, 2022). Scholars have highlighted the challenges women face as traditional gender roles evolve, and women

increasingly enter the workforce (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). The need to balance personal and professional obligations has become a significant source of stress, often leading to burnout. The struggle to juggle work, family, and personal well-being has led to rising rates of burnout among women in the workforce.

According to Sharma (2019), burnout is a gradual stress syndrome that develops over time due to prolonged emotional, mental, and physical strain. Job burnout extends beyond personal life and is characterized by a pessimistic view of one's work and uncertainty about one's ability to perform. The key symptoms of job burnout include cynicism, fatigue, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment (Gardazi et al., 2016). Santo et al. (2015) identified three dimensions of burnout: personal burnout, work burnout, and client-related burnout. Personal burnout refers to psychological and physical exhaustion, while work burnout is linked to stress and exhaustion related to one's job. Client-related burnout, meanwhile, is the fatigue and stress that individuals experience because of their interactions with clients. This study aims to explore the factors that contribute to burnout among working women.

In Malaysia, despite significant economic progress and industrial development since the implementation of the New Economic Policy in 1970, women's labor force participation remains below its potential. Although female participation in the workforce increased from 37.2% in 1970 to 47.8% in 1990, it has only slightly risen to 46.4% by 2010, with more than half of the female population still outside the labor force. This stagnation is concerning, particularly as Malaysia aims to transition from an upper-middle-income economy to a high-income economy by 2020 under the New Economic Model (NEM), which emphasizes the development of human capital. While women in Malaysia have made strides in education, with higher literacy rates and greater participation in universities, they still face significant challenges in the workforce.

Statement of Problem

Burnout among working women in Malaysia has emerged as a critical concern, affecting both personal well-being and workplace productivity. Burnout, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is a psychological syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. In Malaysia, studies indicate that women experience unique burnout triggers, including work-life imbalance, societal expectations, job dissatisfaction, and excessive work hours. Women are disproportionately affected by job-related burnout, experiencing higher rates of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and stress compared to men. These burnout symptoms are often linked to the dual burden of balancing work and domestic responsibilities, including childcare and household management. The increasing pressure of work-home conflict (WHC) among women in Malaysia, especially those with young children, has raised concerns about their mental health and well-being. A national study has found that over 50% of working Malaysians report high work-related stress, with one in five experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression. However, little is known about how emotional exhaustion and work-home conflict specifically mediate the relationship between work pressure and psychological disorders among working women in Malaysia.

A study conducted among Malaysian employees found that over 58% reported burnout, with extended working hours and lack of organizational support being primary contributors (Frontiers in Public Health, 2024). Additionally, female academics in Malaysia reported high emotional exhaustion, suggesting that burnout extends across different sectors (UKM Journal of Psychology and Human Development, 2024). Recent literature suggests that Malaysian women face significant workplace challenges, particularly the pressure to conform to male-dominated work cultures, which leads to emotional suppression and increased stress (Business News, 2024). Moreover, the post-pandemic shift to remote work has further blurred the boundaries between personal and professional life, amplifying burnout levels among women who juggle both roles (APIIT e-Journal of Business and Management, 2022).

This study aims to explore the factors contributing to burnout among working women in Malaysia, specifically examining the role of emotional exhaustion, work-home conflict, and the pressures women face in balancing work and family. The findings from this study will provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by working women and contribute to discussions on improving gender equality, work-life balance, and mental health support for women in the workforce.

Specifically, this study is done to answer the following research questions.

Research Question 1- What is the level of burnout among working women in Shah Alam, Selangor?

Research Question 2- : What are the factors that contribute to the burnout among working women?

Research Question 3- : What is the most influential factor that causes burnout among working women?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Burnout

The concept of burnout was first introduced by psychologist Christina Maslach in 1976, who identified it as a progressive psychological syndrome marked by emotional weariness, cynicism, and decreased commitment, particularly among social care providers. This framework has since become foundational in understanding burnout in various professional contexts. Maslach's original conceptualization described burnout as a state that could be observed in individuals who work in occupations with high interpersonal demands, such as social services and healthcare (Maslach, 1976). Over time, multiple empirical investigations have refined this definition, with burnout being recognized as a psychological syndrome manifesting through three core components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal achievement (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

A study on mental health by McKinsey (2022) reveals that globally, one in four workers show signs of burnout, with this rate rising to nearly one in three among Asian workers. There are regional differences in symptoms like sadness, anxiety, and distress across Asian countries. Increased workloads and job insecurity can turn burnout into serious mental health issues if not addressed properly. For example, a 2020 survey in Singapore found that nearly 90% of workers identified stigma surrounding mental health and the lack of support as major factors preventing employees from addressing burnout. Additionally, a recent Harris Poll highlighted that while burnout was reported by similar percentages of men and women in their work lives, 35% of women also experienced burnout at home, compared to only 25% of men. Moreover, 48% of women reported that their work-related burnout was severe enough to disrupt their sleep at night.

Burnout Among Working Moms

Burnout syndrome is a significant occupational health issue affecting a variety of workforce demographics. It is anticipated that the prevalence of stress-related illnesses caused or worsened by work will increase, along with the number of sick days attributed to job-related stress. Many scholars have recommended the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) as a key tool for measuring burnout. Widely used in research globally, the MBI was the first scientifically developed burnout assessment tool. Since its introduction in 1981, the MBI has been applied for various purposes, including individual diagnosis and organizational assessments (Maslach & Leiter, 2021).

A similar trend is observed in another study where 74% of women and 61% of men reported experiencing work-related stress. This data suggests that job fatigue is a leading reason why women leave their jobs. Moreover, women are more likely than men to be responsible for childcare and household tasks, spending approximately three times as many hours per week on these activities. Despite this, organizations still expect women to maintain the same level of productivity as their male counterparts, which can lead to a higher rate of burnout among women (Mafishiraz, 2023).

Mafishiraz (2023) also highlights the negative effects of job burnout on an individual level, such as headaches, insomnia, reduced productivity, difficulty concentrating, memory loss, and weakened immune systems. These consequences can significantly impact an employee's work performance, strain personal and marital relationships, and reduce overall happiness.

Past Studies

Factors of burnout among working women

The study identified multiple causes of burnout among working women, which can differ from one job to another and from person to person. Key stressors include a lack of recognition in the workplace, poor work relationships, and heavier workloads. In addition, personal life conflicts, such as the pressures related to societal expectations of women, also play a significant role in contributing to burnout. These factors collectively intensify stress and contribute to the overall experience of burnout among working women.

In 2018, researchers from the University of Montreal conducted a four-year study involving 2,026 employees, approximately half of whom were women, across 63 workplaces. The study concluded that there is gender-based differences in the extent to which employees experience burnout, as individuals are exposed to varying working conditions depending on their gender. Employees who receive recognition through praise and promotions tend to be happier and more engaged in their work. The result is a 12% increase in productivity and reduced burnout, according to economists at the University of Warwick (Gilbert G, 2023). Employee commitment is largely driven by rewards and recognition. McClelland's (1985) need theory suggests that employees are motivated when their needs for power, affiliation, and achievement are activated. Each individual is typically driven by one dominant need, which shapes how they respond to various stimuli and rewards. The theory integrates both internal motivation factors, specific to individuals, and external motivation factors, such as rewards. Research has shown that neural reward activations are stronger when rewards align closely with an individual's specific need, highlighting the connection between brain structures and reward types (Steers et al., 2004).

In general, needs create internal tensions that influence cognitive processes, which in turn affect behavior. In the workplace, three primary needs are particularly important: the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power. The need for achievement relates to the desire to excel through personal effort (McClelland et al., 1953), while the need for affiliation focuses on building close relationships with others (McClelland, 1976). The need for power, meanwhile, is driven by the desire to influence and control others (McClelland & Burnham, 2008).

Humans often identify with individuals who have a strong desire for affiliation, and such supportive roles are crucial in managing employee burnout. This support, which comes from both peers and superiors, can significantly improve employee well-being and productivity while fostering trust (Moulton et al., 2022). McClelland's theory, as cited by Rybnicek et al. (2019), emphasizes the need for affiliation, which involves the desire to create and maintain close personal relationships with others, including supervisors and colleagues. According to Kamarudin et al. (2023), the strong urge for connection promotes a dynamic work environment where people feel welcomed, connected, and cooperative. The study also highlights that individuals are perceptive and capable of sustaining healthy social relationships, which contributes to a positive work atmosphere.

However, maintaining a healthy work environment while dealing with personal issues can be particularly challenging, especially for women. Unlike men, who primarily experience stress from quantitative demands, women face both quantitative and qualitative (intellectual and emotional) demands at work, according to Cano et al. (2023). Artz et al. (2022) further explain that anxiety, depression, and both physical and emotional fatigue can arise from the conflicting demands of paid work and family responsibilities. This conflict can be exacerbated by high-risk and unsatisfactory relationships. Therefore, fostering strong relationships among individuals can help reduce conflict. This can be facilitated through support and social assistance from various sources, such as friends, coworkers, and managers. Organizational practices play a key role in how employees perceive their psychological contracts. Positive outcomes, both for individuals and organizations, occur when employees feel that their employer has fulfilled its commitments. This creates a flourishing relationship between the employee and the organization, aligning the needs of both parties (Chan, 2021).

Research on workload and employee burnout (Herminingsih & Kurnasih, 2018) has examined how workload perceptions and human resource management practices influence burnout, particularly in relation to inadequate

service levels. Studies by Mayasari and Gustomo (2014) and Chen et al. (2013) found that employees in organizations with high workloads often face burnout, suggesting a need to redesign jobs or hire additional workers. According to Nwinyokpugi (2018), when an organization lacks an adequate number of staff or properly trained workers, employees are forced to shoulder a larger portion of the workload. This imbalance in workload can further increase stress and contribute to burnout. In most organizations, the variability in employee workload is often influenced by the department to which employees belong, though there is no guarantee that workloads will be balanced, even within the same department (Heliyon, 2020). When employees perceive discrepancies between their workload and that of other organizational members, it can lead to disaffection (Sravani, 2018). For example, if an employee feels that colleagues who work just as hard are paid more, they may perceive this as unfair treatment.

Many women juggle multiple responsibilities, including career, family, and household duties, which can create a sense of overwhelm, leading to chronic stress and burnout. Burnout often results from various work-related stress factors, such as unclear supervision, peer conflict, excessive workloads, and working overtime. The rising cost of living may also force women to take on extra shifts or alternative income sources, such as freelancing or drop shipping, to support their families. Overwhelming expectations and consistently heavy workloads can take a mental and physical toll on women.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 2.1 illustrates the factors contributing to burnout among working women in Malaysia. The diagram highlights three key independent variables: recognition for hard work, work relationships, and the pressure associated with women's roles. These factors are believed to have a strong interconnection and influence the occurrence of burnout among working women in Malaysia. The dependent variable in this model is burnout, which reflects the impact of these factors on the well-being of working women.

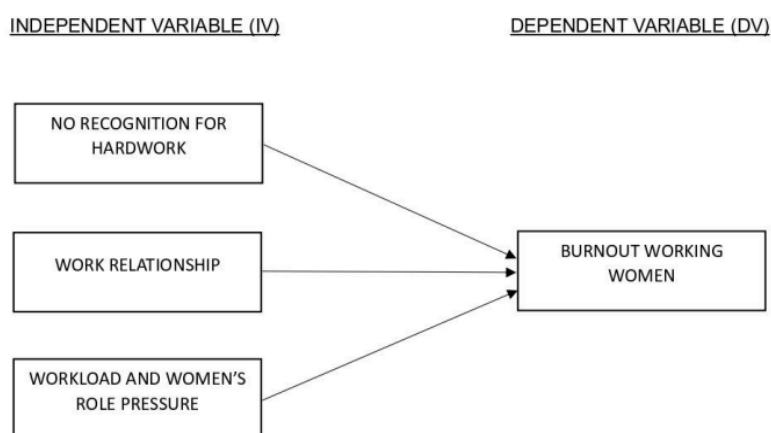


Figure 1 - Framework of factors and burnout among working women

The study identifies burnout among working women as the dependent variable, influenced by several independent variables, including lack of recognition for hard work, work relationships, workload, and pressure from women's roles. A lack of recognition for hard work can demoralize employees, reducing job satisfaction and contributing to burnout. Positive work relationships, including those with colleagues and superiors, can mitigate burnout by fostering a supportive environment. Additionally, heavy workloads and the pressure to balance professional responsibilities with personal life roles can lead to physical and mental health issues, increasing burnout among working women. These independent variables collectively help explain the causes of burnout and its impact on working women.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to explore the factors contributing to burnout among working women in Malaysia, with a specific focus on Shah Alam, Selangor. The study utilizes descriptive

analysis to interpret data patterns and multiple regression analysis to examine the relationships between burnout (dependent variable) and independent variables such as recognition for hard work, workload, work relationships, and women's role pressure.

The unit of analysis focuses on working women's performance, particularly how burnout impacts their productivity and well-being. A sample size of 384 participants is determined based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, ensuring statistical significance. The study adopts a Snowball Sampling technique, allowing the researchers to reach participants efficiently by leveraging social networks of initial respondents.

Data collection is conducted through an online questionnaire, which includes a Five-Point Likert Scale to assess burnout-related factors. The questionnaire comprises sections covering demographic information, workload, work relationships, recognition for hard work, and women's role pressure. This method ensures cost-effective and accessible data gathering while minimizing response bias.

The collected data is analysed using SPSS Version 26.0, employing both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including frequency values, percentages, and mean scores, provide insights into the level of burnout among respondents. Multiple regression analysis is utilized to determine the significance of independent variables in contributing to burnout, offering valuable insights into the primary drivers of burnout among working women in Malaysia.

FINDINGS

Findings for Demographic Profile

No.	Profile	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1. Race			
	Malay	371	96.6
	Chinese	4	1.0
	Indian	2	0.5
	Others	6	1.6
2 Age			
	20-25 years old	260	67.7
	26-30 years old	32	8.3
	31-35 years old	32	8.3
	36-40 years old	24	6.3
	41-45 years old	14	3.6
	46-50 years old	10	2.6
	51 years old and above	12	3.1
3 Academic Level			
	High School	23	6.0
	Diploma	72	18.8
	Bachelor Degree	270	70.3
	Master	18	4.7
	PhD	1	0.3
4 Marital Status			
	Single	285	74.2
	Married	97	25.3
	Divorced	2	0.5
5 Working Hour			
	Morning	319	83.1
	Night	9	2.3
	Shift	56	14.6
6 Duration of Working			
	Less than 8 hours	79	20.6
	8 hours	221	57.6
	More than 8 hours	84	21.9

Figure 2 – Demographic profiles

The study shows that most respondents were Malay (96.6%), with smaller numbers from other races such as Chinese (1%), Indian (0.5%), and Others (1.6%). Most respondents were aged 20-25 years (67.7%), followed by those aged 26-30 and 31-35 years (8.3% each). The majority held a bachelor's degree (70.3%), with fewer having a diploma (18.8%), secondary school education (6%), or a master's degree (4.7%), and only 0.3% had a PhD. Most respondents were single (74.2%), with 25.3% married and 0.5% divorced. Regarding work, the majority worked in the morning (83.1%), with fewer working in shifts (14.6%) or at night (2.3%). In terms of working hours, most worked 8 hours (57.6%), while fewer worked less than 8 hours (20.6%) or more than 8 hours (21.9%).

Findings for Level of burnout

This section presents analysed data to answer research question 1: What is the level of burnout among working women?

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Level of Burnout Among the Working Women	384	3.773	0.766

Figure 3- Level of burnout among working women

Figure 3 shows the result of mean and standard deviation for the level of burnout among working women. Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the level of burnout among the working women in Shah Alam. The questionnaire was given in a Likert scale for each statement that the respondents were asked to fill in. The Likert scale defines 1 = "Strongly Disagree", 2 = "Disagree", 3 = "Mixed Feeling", 4 = "Agree", and 5 = "Strongly Agree". Based on the table 4.4 above, the scale from 1.00 to 2.33 indicates the low level of mean score range, 2.34 to 3.67 shows the moderate level, and 3.68 to 5.00 depicts the high level. The mean of the level of burnout among working women was 3.773 which means it falls within the range of 3.68 to 5.00. Thus, it shows a high level of burnout among working women in Shah Alam.

Findings for the factors that contribute to the burnout among working women

This section presents data to answer research question 2: What are the factors that contribute to the burnout among working women?

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
No Recognition for Hardwork	384	3.410	0.867
Work Relationship	384	3.883	0.708
Workload and Women's Role Pressure	384	3.782	0.720

Figure 4 - mean for the factors that contribute to the burnout among working women

Figure 4 shows the mean values for factors that contribute to the burnout among working women. Descriptive analysis was conducted to investigate the factors that contribute to the burnout among working women. Descriptive statistics enable researchers to synthesize both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a thorough examination of factors (Maxwell, S. E., Delaney, H. D., & Kelley, K. (2017). Based on Table 4.7, the mean score for the lack of recognition for hard work is 3.410, indicating a moderate influence on burnout among working women in Shah Alam, as it falls within the range of 2.34 - 3.67. The mean score for work relationships is 3.883, which shows a high influence on burnout, as it falls within the range of 3.68 - 5.00, and

is the highest among the three variables. Additionally, the mean score for workload and women's role pressure is 3.782, suggesting that this factor also has a high influence on burnout among working women in Shah Alam.

Findings for the most influential factors that contribute to the burnout among working women

This section presents data to answer research question 3: What is the most influential factor that causes burnout among working women?

Multiple regression analysis is used to explain the relationship between dependent and independent variables by estimating the value of the dependent variable based on the observed values of the independent variables. In this research, multiple regression is applied to identify the most significant factors contributing to burnout among working women in Shah Alam.

Variable	Beta	Sig	Tolerance	VIF
No Recognition for Hardwork	0.414	0.000	0.552	1.811
Work Relationship	0.214	0.000	0.450	2.222
Workload and Women's Role Pressure	0.265	0.000	0.567	1.764
R^2	0.593			
Adjusted R^2	0.590			
F change	184.401			
Sig	0.000			

Figure 5 – multiple regression on the most influential factors that contribute to the burnout among working women

Based on figure 5, the adjusted R was 0.593, indicating that 59.3% of all independent 2 variables influence the working women to have burnout while the remaining 40.0% might be due to the other variables that were not included in this study. Result showed that the beta value of the no recognition for hard work ($\beta = 0.414$, $p = 0.000$), work relationship ($\beta = 0.214$, $p = 0.000$), and workload and women's role pressure ($\beta = 0.265$, $p = 0.000$). This showed that the most crucial factors of burnout among working women in Shah Alam are the no recognition for hard work as it has the highest beta value among the other independent variables. The tolerance values for all variables are greater than 0.200 and the VIF is less than 10. Thus, the multicollinearity assumption has not been violated.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Based on the findings, the study revealed that the mean score for burnout among working women in Shah Alam is 3.773, with a standard deviation of 0.766. This indicates a high level of burnout among these women in their workplace. According to McKinsey and Lean's 2021 "Women in the Workplace" report, when managers actively manage their team's workload, staff members are 32% less likely to experience burnout and 33% less likely to leave the organization. This emphasizes the need for employers to address burnout in the workplace, particularly among working women in Shah Alam.

The study further examined various factors contributing to burnout. The mean score for the work relationship factor was 3.883, with a standard deviation of 0.708. This suggests that many working women in Shah Alam feel that poor work relationships have a significant impact on their burnout. The second most influential factor was workload and role pressure, which had a mean score of 3.782 and a standard deviation of 0.720. Finally,

the factor of lack of recognition for hard work had a mean score of 3.410 with a standard deviation of 0.867. Research from DDI's Global Leadership Forecast (2021) indicates that burnout can lead to employee turnover, with one in four leaders who felt burnt out planning to leave their organizations within a year, highlighting the importance of addressing burnout to retain workers.

Among the various factors, the study found that the lack of recognition for hard work had the most significant impact on burnout among working women in Shah Alam. This factor had the highest beta value ($\beta = 0.414$, $p = 0.000$), emphasizing its strong influence. The findings align with Dr. R. Gopinath et al. (2021), who concluded that rewards and recognition systems play a vital role in motivating employees and preventing burnout. By recognizing employees' efforts, organizations can improve workers' wellbeing and help reduce burnout, ultimately leading to better retention and performance.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that cause burnout among working women in Shah Alam. It was found that the no recognition for hard work, work relationship, workload and women's role pressure were the factors that influence the working women having a burnout. The statistical techniques used in this study were descriptive analysis and the multiple regression to answer the research questions and research objectives. It was found that the burnout among working women in Shah Alam has a high level of burnout among working women in Shah Alam.

Future research should focus on effects of burnout among working women to understand the long-term effects of burnout and the efficacy of various interventions. Additionally, exploring the difference between race, socioeconomic status working women, and other demographic variables with burnout can provide a more comprehensive understanding of this issue. Addressing burnout among working women requires concerted efforts from individuals, organizations, and policymakers. By acknowledging and actively working to mitigate the factors contributing to burnout, we can improve the well-being and productivity of working women, leading to a healthier and more equitable society. The Malaysian Government Malaysia should create effective strategies to reduce the burnout among working women in Malaysia.

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