

*Psychosocial Safety Climate and Burnout among
Malaysian Academicians: The Mediating Role of Job
Demands*

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Introduction

Contemporaneously, the community of academics is no longer perceived as a minimal stress working environment (Chen et al., 2014). The pervasiveness of burnout among academicians is increasing in developed and developing countries (Teoh & Yaakob, 2021). This phenomenon is observed when academicians are assigned with a greater level of job demands, such as teaching, consulting, doing research, having publications, and performing administrative work. Moreover, Darabi, Macaskill and Reidy (2016) claimed that the rise in the administrative workload, obtaining research funding, increasing student numbers, and having less time with students are all significant factors of stress for academicians nowadays. Furthermore, as Malaysian universities are progressing to be world-class universities, academicians are then experiencing more stress, which lead them more vulnerable to burnout (Henny, Anita, Hayati & Rampal, 2014, Teoh, 2020).

Based on the discussions of burnout scenarios among Malaysian academicians, it is understood that overwhelming effect of job demands leads to the pervasiveness of burnout among academicians from Malaysian universities. This is consistent with the findings by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001) as well as Teoh, Gan and Seow (2021) who stated that an individual tends to experience burnout when there are high levels of job demands and

low levels of job resources at the work settings. Furthermore, it is in line with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory that an individual may expedite to stress or burnout when he fails to cope with the significant levels of job demands while losing his job resources to cope with job demands at the same time (Hobfoll, 1989). As a result, Malaysian academicians encounter burnout when they are assigned with high levels of job demands, while possessing inadequate of job resources at work.

Literature Review

Burnout is defined as a phenomenon that is characterized by feelings (emotional, physical, and cognitive) exhaustion due to the demands of work among employees (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou & Kantas, 2003). As an effort to manage the burnout levels among Malaysian academicians, psychosocial safety climate (PSC) is employed in the present study since it acts as a leading indicator for a better working environment by providing manageable job demands and an adequate level of job resources (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Furthermore, Teoh and Kee (2020), Teoh (2021), as well as Lim and Teoh (2021) also suggested that PSC is useful in the burnout context because it is a shared viewpoint among employees relating to policies, practices, and procedures insides their organizations which emphasize to psychological health and well-being. As a result, the work settings in Malaysian universities can be realigned by PSC, which directly and indirectly bring the positive implications on job demands and burnout levels of Malaysian academicians.

However, job demands need to be further separated since they are not necessarily negative (Teoh & Kee, 2018; Teoh et al., 2021). Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling and Boudreau (2000) recommended that job demands should be classified into challenge demands and hindrance demands so that the effects of these two job demands on work outcomes can be studied accurately. According to Cavanaugh et al. (2000) as well as Ooi and Teoh (2021), challenge demands are perceived by employees as rewarding work experiences which create an opportunity for personal growth whereas hindrance demands are viewed by employees as obstacles to personal growth or demands that hinder or interfere with one's ability to attain valued goals. In relation to both challenge demands and hindrance demands, the present researcher intends to investigate if PSC creates more challenging demands and reduces further hindrance demands to manage the burnout levels among Malaysian academicians. Moreover, it is also interesting to examine if both challenge demands and hindrance demands play as the significant mediators between PSC and burnout.

Methodology

A quantitative approach was used in the present study. All data were collected from the universities located in Malaysia. The study employed purposive sampling. The sample was drawn based on three criteria. First, the respondents must be full-time academicians. Second, the respondents were academicians who have worked in their current universities for at least one year. Lastly, the respondents must work in the universities located in Malaysia. The present researcher considered full-time Malaysian academicians with at least one year of employment because academicians might not encounter burnout during their first year of employment (Teoh & Kee, 2019, Ahmad, Saffardin & Teoh, 2020; Juliana, Saffardin & Teoh, 2021; Juliana, Fairos & Teoh, 2021). The present researcher visited the general websites of all Malaysian universities so that the contact lists with e-mail addresses of all Malaysian academicians were retrieved. An invitation email, which acts as an acknowledgement regarding the purpose of the study, together with the link of online questionnaire was then sent privately to all full-time Malaysian academicians who have been working more than one year. A total of 414 academicians from Malaysian universities participated in the study during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the research instruments used in the present study were adopted from 12-item scale of psychosocial safety climate (Hall, Dollard & Coward, 2010), 5-item scale each from challenge demands and hindrance demands (Cavanaugh et al., 2000), as well as 8-item scale of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2003).

Results

Partial Least Square (PLS) modeling using the SmartPLS 3.2.8 version was used as the statistical tool to examine the measurement and structural model in the present study since it does not need the normality assumption to proceed further. The results of the present study are illustrated in Figure 1.

Discussion

In the present study, it was found that PSC was in significant negative relationship with both challenge demands ($\beta = -0.141$, $p < 0.01$), hindrance demands ($\beta = -0.541$, $p < 0.01$) and burnout ($\beta = -0.178$, $p < 0.01$). These findings imply that PSC in Malaysian universities could reduce the negative implications of both types of job demands, as well as the burnout levels among Malaysian academicians. Meanwhile, it is also noted that both challenge demands ($\beta = 0.419$, $p < 0.01$) and hindrance demands ($\beta = 0.191$, $p < 0.01$) were in a significant positive

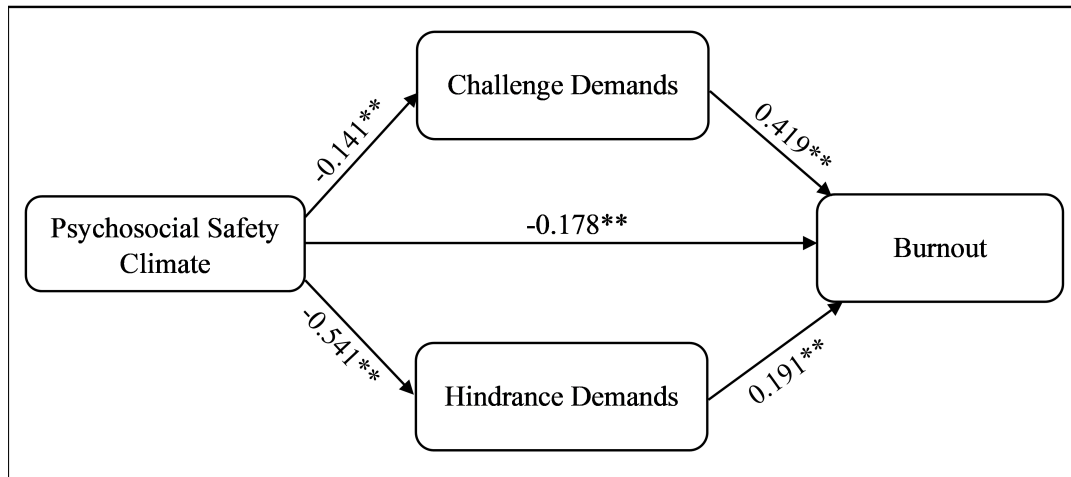


Figure 1: Research Framework

relationship with burnout. These findings indicate that both types of job demands could lead Malaysian academicians to experience burnout at work. On the other hand, it is realized in the present study that challenge demands ($\beta = -0.131$, $p < 0.01$) and hindrance demands ($\beta = -0.171$, $p < 0.01$) play a significant negative mediator between PSC and burnout. Hence, these findings denote that PSC reduces the negative implications of challenge demands and hindrance demands, which in turn to decrease the burnout levels among Malaysian academicians.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the present study are beneficial to both practitioners and academics. Firstly, the university management who wishes to manage the burnout levels among academicians could apply PSC in their work settings. Consequently, job demands among academicians are ensured to be manageable, and this could help to reduce their burnout levels. Secondly, the university management could sort out the job demands into challenge demands and hindrance demands. This initiative could prevent academicians from experiencing high levels of burnout since challenge demands are emphasized while hindrance demands are kept to the minimum level. For academics, the present study contributes to the literature of burnout among academicians. Also, it could serve as a reference for the future research to use the existing model in a wider range of population.

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