

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE INDIVIDUAL DETERMINANTS
OF PRESENTEEISM; THE
MEDIATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
DISTRESS AMONG ACADEMICS IN
MALAYSIA**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Business Management

Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School

December 2024

ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, presenteeism among academics is a significant issue that has not been widely studied. Academics in higher education often face high job demands and responsibilities, which lead them to work even when they are mentally or physically unfit. This research was designed based on two underlying theories: Self-Determination Theory and the Presenteeism Model by Coutu et al. The study aimed to identify the level of presenteeism among academics in Malaysia, determine the individual factors contributing to presenteeism (including self-determination, organizational commitment, self-esteem, and life stress events), and examine the mediating role of psychological distress in the relationship between these factors and presenteeism. Nine hypotheses were tested to answer the research questions. Utilizing a quantitative research methodology, data were gathered from 382 academics representing both public and private universities in Malaysia through a cross-sectional survey. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) 4. The research findings indicate a high level of presenteeism among academics in Malaysia. The findings revealed that self-determination and life stress events were positively related to psychological distress, whereas organizational commitment and self-esteem were negatively related to presenteeism. However, the findings also revealed that psychological distress had a negative relationship with presenteeism. There was a significant mediation effect between individual factors, psychological distress, and presenteeism. In conclusion, this study highlights the individual determinants of presenteeism, emphasizing the mediating role of psychological distress in the presenteeism phenomenon. The study offers recommendations to key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Higher Education, universities, and academics, and concludes by identifying potential avenues for future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I would like to thank Allah s.w.t for giving me the strength, patience, determination and opportunity to embark on my PhD and for completing this journey successfully. My gratitude and thanks go to my supervisor Professor Dr Syed Jamal Abdul Nasir Syed Mohamad for never ending support and guidance over the years. I have been extremely lucky to have him as my supervisor-someone who cared so much about my work, responded to my queries so promptly.

I would like to express my gratitude to my husband Ashraf Alam for the unconditional love, patience, endless support and understanding enabled me to complete this thesis. Thank you to my beautiful children 'Aaeshah 'Aisyqiya and 'Aqeef Thohir for always remember me in your prayer and being part of this journey.

A special thanks to Associate Professor Dr Abdul Rauf Ridzuan for providing me the knowledge and moral support. A big thank you to Professor T Ramayah from Universiti Sains Malaysia for the guidance especially on PLS-SEM, I am truly blessed to have had him in this journey. My appreciation goes to my family, siblings, my in-laws, my colleagues, friends and my PhD classmates for their motivation, encouragement through every phases of my PhD journey.

I am immensely grateful to have such supportive families and my bestfriends who consistently care about me and my wonderful journey through my PhD. Though I couldn't mention every one of you specifically, rest assured that you are all in my prayers. Not to forget, a special thank you goes to all participants who have participated in this study. May Allah bless all of you!

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my very dear late father, Mohd Azlan Mohd Zain and my lovely mother, for the vision and determination to educate me. This piece of victory is dedicated to both of you. Alhamdulillah.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

This chapter presents on presenteeism phenomenon, its consequences and determinants in general. The subsequent section examines the problems addressed in this study, followed by the study's objectives, research questions and its significance. This section additionally provides important definitions of the key terms used in the research.

1.2 Background of Study

Many firms struggle to retain productivity and remain competitive in the present economic context, which necessitates doing more with less. This has an enormous effect on employees' health, happiness, and productivity. Presenteeism is a relatively new phenomena that is gaining significant attention from a variety of angles (Karanika-Murray & Cooper, 2018). According to Google Scholar data from 2020 to 2022, there were 11,800 studies on presenteeism, with 135 specifically addressing presenteeism among academics in general, and 54 focusing on academics in Malaysia, based on Google Scholar data from 2020 to 2022.

Presenteeism, a concept coined by Professor Cary Cooper in the 1990s, attribute to a situation where employees extended their working hours, beyond the stipulated time due to underlying factors such as fears on employment stability or job insecurity. This behaviour, in which employees choose to stay at work despite illness or other impairments, reflect a growing trend documented in a variety of occupational settings around the world (Chander et al., 2023) and presenteeism as a common incidence across cultures (Daniels et al., 2021). Presenteeism defined as the practice of working while ill, in which individuals remain physically present at work while being poorly (Biron et al., 2022). According to the existing research recognised by Lohaus and Habermann, there are two principal approaches to presenteeism that have been discovered. Presenteeism phenomenon from the American perspective is understood as the loss of work productivity due to a person's health problems, (Rodríguez-Cifuentes et al., 2020).