

Workplace Stress: Intention to Leave

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ABSTRACT

Workplace stress becomes a serious employment issue that eats away at profits and reduces efficiency. Stress affects people differently in which some may on extremely stressful lifestyles or struggle to cope with everyday life. Some even intend to leave their workplace. This study which was conducted among 36 UiTM Pahang lecturers revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between the workplace stress and intention to leave. This study also revealed that there is a significant difference in stress level between the young and senior lecturers. Surprisingly, these young lecturers are more stressful even though they just have been serving for less than five years as compared to senior lecturers. This is due to heavy workload and too much work to be done and doing others work make them feel stressful. It also indicates that senior lecturers can adapt to their workplace without having high level of stress. Hopefully this study can help the management team to overcome or reduce stress level especially among lecturers.

Keywords: *Stress, Intention to Leave, Lecturer*

Introduction

A workplace is the one of the causes that leads to stress. Expecting day to day tasks should be accomplished make it overwhelming and become challenging. Zero-stress at the workplace is impossible. However it is important to make employees feel safe and comfortable working in a health environment. Therefore, management team should take a precaution any action by carefully and regularly monitoring the stress level among staff. Pre-action that is taken by the management can reduce many negative consequences such as absentism, increase turnover rates, low productivity and poor of quality (Carr, Kelly, Keaton and Albrecht, 2011).

Universiti Teknologi Mara (Pahang) is located in a small township in Jengka, Pahang. It consists of more than 500 staffs and more than 5000 students. In order to achieve the mission of the university, the vision of upper administrators, the aspirations of faculty indirectly create burdens to the non-academic and academic staff. Each faculty or department has their own Key Performance Index (KPI) and this definitely is part of the annual appraisal which needs to be fulfilled. This paper focuses on the academicians' point of view because there are the different of workload between the non-academic and academic staff. This was agreed by (Rees, 1995; Young and Cooper, 1995) where job stress differ depending on the group. The academicians in UiTM Pahang are bounded with minimum 16 hours of teaching. They need to conduct research as well as publish articles or journals and they are also required to hold certain managerial roles. Gmelch, Wilke and Luvrich (1986) mentioned the responsibilities as academicians who have a greater workload, a mountain of researches but doing the tasks as a sense of duty, without specific training especially in administrative experience, distraction and reporting requirements. Do these show that the academicians have sacrificed their professional and personal time and replaced them with greater of stress?.

Stress at the Workplace

Stress can be described as an adaptive response to a situation that perceived as challenges or threatening to a person's well-being (Mc Shane and Glinow, 2010). Furthermore, stress is a psychological condition that

prepares individual to hostile or noxious environmental conditions. Preston (1996), listed out the following symptoms of workplace stress and impending low morale:

- *Work efficiency declines markedly, as does general initiative and work interest;*
- *Refusal to cooperate with others, citing dissatisfaction;*
- *Negative behavior towards one's work group, one's entire organization or profession;*
- *In conversation, saying that one's personal efforts and contributions are unappreciated and unnoticed;*
- *Higher turnover and absenteeism than those not affected;*
- *Blame scapegoats, such as bosses and spouses. Even blames other for their own errors and failures; and.*
- *Disorientation and signs of mental or physical breakdown during crisis periods.*

Teaching profession invites stress among teachers since they need to cope with in-class structure, class heterogeneity, and work overload (Male and May, 1998; Lewis, 1999; Forlin, 2001). Byrne (1991) documented that young teachers present higher level of stress as compared to the older colleagues. He also added the possibilities of occurrence due to difficulties of young teachers to activate the appropriate strategies in order to reduce the occupational stress of their job. Antoniou, Polychroni and Vlachakis (2006) have found in their study in Greece school that younger teachers up to 31 years old have a higher job burnout as compared to the older group up to 51 years old. Another study by Byrne (1991) found that additional predictor of burnout is a personal accomplishment for teachers since his previous study, the burnout predictors were role overload, role conflict, classroom environment, school environment, work pressure, teaching efficacy, self-esteem and external locus of control.

Intention to Leave

Many researchers investigated the relationship between job related stress and intention to leave. They conclude that job related stress is significantly related to the intention to leave. The workers who work in a stress condition and in an unhealthy environment become less productive. Hasin and Omar (2007) who had conducted the study regarding an audit firm in Melaka discovered that there is a strong relationship between job stress and the intention to leave among auditor. This is because auditing is the most stressful job in accounting field. On the other hand, a study by Bigliardi, Petroni and Ivo Dormio (2005) indicated that turnover is motivated by the dissatisfaction of the individual with some aspect of the work environment or the organization with some aspect of the individual such as poor performance or attendance. Apart from that Cummins (1990) stated job stressors are a greater factor towards job dissatisfaction and lead to leave the organization.

Research Methodology

The methodology applied was to achieve one research objective which is to access the relationship between the job stress and intention to leave among academic staffs. The case study was carried out in Universiti Teknologi MARA (Pahang), Jengka involved 36 lecturers from various faculties and were selected randomly. Questionnaires were distributed to 36 of lecturers contained 14 items to identify the level of stress contributing for them to have an intention to leave. The items were a mix of positively and negatively worded statements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Researchers used direct interview as method of collecting data so that the researchers were assured of full response apart from having the chance to clarify any doubtful matters.

The information obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS Version 21.0. Procedures used include descriptive statistics, t-test and regression analysis.

Results

Out of 36 total samples, 8 respondents (22.22%) were males and 28 respondents (77.78%) were females. The respondents were from eight different faculties in the selected university. Eighteen respondents (50.00%) involved in this study were from Business Management, 5 respondents (13.89%) were from Accountancy and Mathematical and Computer Sciences, 4 respondents (11.11%) were from Applied Sciences and the least number of respondents which is 2.78% were from Civil Engineering, Islamic Study and English respectively. In addition, the education levels among respondents are denominated by master holder with 88.89%. This shows that Universiti Teknologi MARA (Pahang) is very particular about this matter.

Normality test result shows that the data obtained was approximately normal distribution with skewness value between one to negative one as stated by Leech et. al (2005). Hence the independent sample t-test which was conducted revealed that there is significance difference between the stress level between the young lecturers who served less than five years and senior lecturers who served more than five years. The result also revealed that young lecturers are more stressful as compared to senior lecturers as mentioned by Byrne (1991) especially by having more workload and this is consistent to Forlin (2001). The young lecturers are also more stressful due to many works that need to be donemone time, the need to do others' work and the need to do things that should be done differently. All of these causes can be categorized as work pressure. Byrne (1991) also agreed that work pressure may cause job stress.

Regression analysis shows that there exists strong positive relationship between job stress and the intention to leave among lecturers with p-value less than 0.05. This finding is similar to a study conducted by Hasin and Omar (2007) in which they found out that there is a strong relationship between job stress and the intention to leave. The model obtained by this study as follows

$$\textit{Intention to leave} = 1.584 + 0.402\textit{Stress}$$

As an example when the job stress score is 5, the intention to leave for a lecturer is

$$\textit{Intention to leave} = 1.584 + 0.402(5) = 3.594, \text{ compared to job stress score is 1}$$

$$\textit{Intention to leave} = 1.584 + 0.402(1) = 1.986$$

The above scores of intention to leave indicates that when the job stress score becomes higher, the intention to leave also becomes higher, and vice versa.

Discussion

This study represents an effort to examine the relationships between stressful work and the intention to leave. More precisely, the objective of this research was to examine the relationship between stressful work and the intention to leave by examining the period of employment in UiTM among lecturers. Results found that young lecturers are more stressful as compared to the senior lecturers and they become more stressful when handling multiple tasks or works' pressure. The results highlight the importance and implication of intention to leave in stressful environments.

When taken as a whole, by providing additional results, our study complements previous research. Although the mediating role of job satisfaction on the relationship between stress work and outcomes is known with the recent findings of Fried et al., (2008) and Villanueva and Djurkovic (2009), our research is to show such scores of intention to leave which indicates that when the job stress score becomes higher, the intention to leave also becomes higher, and vice versa. Consistent with previous findings (e.g., LeRouge et al., 2006), job satisfaction is related to stressful work. Furthermore, this study is also consistent with previous

empirical research (Firth et al., 2004; Gupta and Beehr, 1979; Kemery *et al.*, 1985), stressful work is related to the intention to leave the employer.

Working as lecturers is recognized to be a stressful occupations (Igbaria and Siegel, 1992). In addition, knowledge industry where lecturers should be occupied as well is characterized by high turnover environment (Hemphill, 2005). Given this two particularities, the present study provides interesting findings. In the high turnover environments examined in this study, stress effects were buffered by job satisfaction. Thus, despite the existence of a stressful work environment, employers are able to retain their employees when the workplace generates great satisfaction. Incorporation of other factors such as salary, benefits in-kind, pressure from others would be the future research.

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