

Exhausted Minds, Passionate Hearts: The Silent Struggle of Academic Burnout

Fatimah Bibi Hamzah*, Dewi Izzwi Abdul Manan, Saifuddin Mohtaram, Nik Mazlinahaiza Abdullah, & Mohd Azril Abdul Aziz

Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia, Jalan 6/91, Taman Shamelin Perkasa, 56100, Kuala Lumpur

Abstract

Burnout, characterized by chronic physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, has become an increasingly recognized issue in academia, particularly within higher education institutions where teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities often overlap. This study investigates the prevalence, causes, and impact of burnout among 729 academic staff members at Kolej Poly-Tech Mara (KPTM) Sdn. Bhd. Utilizing the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) along with additional data on workload, institutional support, and individual coping strategies, the research provides an in-depth analysis of burnout within the institution. The findings identify excessive workload, administrative burdens, and inadequate support systems as the primary drivers of burnout. Additionally, the study highlights the adverse effects of burnout on both personal well-being and professional effectiveness, with many staff reporting moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Based on these insights, the study proposes solutions such as more equitable workload distribution, enhanced wellness programs, and the establishment of a more supportive work environment. By implementing these strategies, KPTM can alleviate burnout, improve staff well-being, and enhance overall institutional performance.

Keywords: Academic Anxiety; Academic Stress; Burnout; Higher Education; Teaching.

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1. Introduction

The role of academics in higher education has undergone a profound transformation over the past few decades. Traditionally, academics were regarded as esteemed scholars whose primary responsibility was to impart knowledge through structured lectures and established methods, earning them a revered status in society. However, the landscape of higher education has shifted significantly due to rapid advancements in technology, globalization, and the increasing demand for high-quality education tailored to a diverse and dynamic student population. Modern academics are now expected to adopt innovative teaching methods, integrate digital tools and platforms, and foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills to prepare students for the complexities of a globalized workforce (Shin & Jung, 2014). This shift has intensified the demands on academics, requiring continuous professional development and increasing their already substantial workload.

Beyond teaching and research, academics are also expected to serve as mentors and advisors, addressing students' personal and social challenges such as mental health issues, financial stress, and family conflicts (Zhong et al., 2009). Acting as the front line of student support places additional emotional and psychological demands on academics, often without formal recognition or adequate institutional support (Sestili et al., 2018). These increasing responsibilities, combined with mounting pressure to excel in research, publication, and institutional service, create a challenging environment that can lead to stress and burnout.

Burnout, first conceptualized by Freudenberger in the 1970s, is defined as a prolonged response to chronic work-related stress, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Schaufeli et al., 2017). Building on Freudenberger's initial work, Maslach and Jackson (1981) expanded the concept

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [bibibibi@uptm.edu.my](mailto:bibi@uptm.edu.my)

and introduced the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a widely recognized tool designed to assess these three core dimensions (Maslach, 2018). Maslach and Leiter's three-dimensional model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding burnout. Emotional exhaustion involves feelings of being emotionally drained and fatigued due to prolonged overexertion. Depersonalization refers to a sense of detachment or cynicism towards one's work, colleagues, or students, often used as a coping mechanism in high-stress environments. Reduced personal accomplishment is marked by a decline in perceived competence and a lack of fulfillment in professional achievements. Together, these components capture the complex and multifaceted nature of burnout in the workplace.

2. Literature Review

Burnout among academicians has become a significant concern in higher education institutions worldwide due to the increasing demands of academic work, including teaching, research, administrative duties, and student engagement with significant consequences for both individual well-being and institutional performance. Research shows that burnout is highly prevalent among academicians, with studies reporting that 30% to 45% of faculty members experience symptoms of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Mohamed et al., 2020). Faculty members experiencing burnout often face exhaustion, lack motivation, and report higher levels of anxiety, depression, and physical health problems, which can lead to reduced teaching effectiveness, lower research productivity, decreased student engagement, increased career turnover, and ultimately undermine the overall reputation and efficiency of educational institutions (Jaswantlal et al., 2014; Mesleki et al., 2025). The emotional labor involved in mentoring students, managing difficult classroom dynamics, and addressing student welfare issues adds to the psychological burden experienced by academicians (Springer & Werner, 2020). Furthermore, the impact of technology on academic work has intensified stress levels (Haghighinejad et al., 2021). The increased use of digital platforms for teaching, administrative tasks, and communication has blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, resulting in a state of "always being on" and reducing opportunities for mental recovery (Dlamini & Dlamini, 2024; Shen & Slater, 2021).

In the Malaysian context, (Lau et al., 2020) found that 38% of academicians experienced high emotional exhaustion due to heavy workloads, long working hours, and pressure to publish. The contributing factors to burnout include excessive workload, role conflict, lack of institutional support, job insecurity, and challenges in managing student behavior. The academic environment is inherently stressful, with increasing pressure to meet performance targets, secure research grants, publish in high-impact journals, and engage in community service. This "publish or perish" culture has been identified as a key driver of burnout among academicians (Bibi Hamzah et al., 2024). According to (Watts & Robertson, 2011), the constant pressure to balance research, teaching, and administrative responsibilities creates role conflict and ambiguity, which further exacerbates stress levels. Long working hours, lack of control over workloads, and limited resources contribute to emotional exhaustion and diminished job satisfaction (Raduan et al., 2022). Additionally, the growing reliance on temporary and adjunct contracts has increased job insecurity, leading to feelings of helplessness and professional instability (Mohamed et al., 2020). Research by (Kinman & Jones, 2008) found that inadequate institutional support and poor work-life balance are strongly correlated with higher burnout levels among academic staff. The lack of career advancement opportunities and the perceived unfair distribution of resources further compound feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction, contributing to chronic stress and disengagement from work.

Gender differences have also been observed in burnout patterns among academicians. Female faculty members are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and work-life imbalance due to greater involvement in household and caregiving responsibilities alongside professional duties (Seibt et al., 2013). A study by (Demirel & Erdirencelebi, 2019) revealed that female academicians report higher levels of emotional exhaustion, whereas male academicians are more likely to experience depersonalization. The underrepresentation of women in senior academic positions and the prevalence of gender-based discrimination further exacerbate stress and burnout among female faculty members (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2011). Similarly, early-career academicians face unique challenges, including precarious contracts, lack of mentorship, and unrealistic performance expectations, which contribute to increased burnout rates among younger faculty members (Cox et al., 2018; Jaswantlal et al., 2014).

Addressing burnout among academicians requires a comprehensive approach that combines individual, organizational, and policy-level strategies. At the individual level, interventions such as mindfulness training, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and stress management workshops have proven effective in enhancing emotional well-being and resilience (Reevy & Deason, 2014; Watts & Robertson, 2011). Organizational measures like workload redistribution, flexible scheduling, and increased access to mental health resources can significantly reduce stress levels and improve overall job satisfaction (Holder et al., 2024). Strengthening institutional support through professional development programs,

mentorship opportunities, and transparent career progression pathways can further ease the structural pressures contributing to burnout (Mohamed et al., 2020). On a policy level, ensuring job security, minimizing administrative burdens, and fostering a culture of recognition and open communication are vital for creating a healthier and more sustainable work environment (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2018; Schaufeli et al., 2017). Interpersonal dynamics also play a significant role; supportive relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and students can serve as a buffer against burnout, whereas unresolved conflicts, lack of recognition, and negative interactions can heighten emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Asfahani, 2024; Lei et al., 2021).

This research aims to investigate the prevalence and factors contributing to burnout among academic staff at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) Sdn. Bhd. By identifying key stressors and assessing the extent of burnout within the institution, this study seeks to propose actionable strategies to create a more sustainable and fulfilling work environment for academics. Addressing academic burnout is essential for maintaining the vitality and effectiveness of higher education institutions and ensuring positive outcomes for both faculty and students.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the prevalence and contributing factors of burnout among academic staff at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) and Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM). A census approach was adopted, targeting 731 eligible lecturers across seven campuses representing different regions in Malaysia. A total of 729 valid responses were collected (response rate: 99.7%), with exclusions limited to staff on extended leave or in administrative roles without teaching responsibilities.

Data were collected through a structured, self-administered online questionnaire, comprising six sections: socio-demographic factors, personality traits, job suitability, self-exhaustion, work exhaustion, and burnout contributors. The instrument integrated the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and a validated 3-item emotional exhaustion scale (MBI:SE) by Leiter and Shaughnessy. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used to assess burnout levels and associated factors such as workload, teaching demands, administrative tasks, and institutional support. High emotional exhaustion was identified using a cut-off score of ≥ 3.2 .

A pilot study involving 14 academic staff was conducted to evaluate the clarity and feasibility of the instrument. Minor refinements were made based on feedback, and the instrument demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$). Data from the pilot study were excluded from final analyses.

All responses were collected through an online platform with restrictions to ensure one response per participant and complete submission of items. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while inferential analyses (Chi-square test, independent t-test, and binary logistic regression) were conducted to examine associations between burnout and contributing factors. Variables with $p < 0.25$ in univariate analysis were included in the multiple logistic regression model. Final predictors with $p \leq 0.05$ were selected using automatic forward and backward LR methods. Multicollinearity and interaction effects were tested, and model fit was assessed using the Hosmer-Lemeshow test, classification accuracy, and ROC curve analysis. To complement the quantitative findings, open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to provide deeper insights into lecturers' experiences with burnout.

4. Results

The respondents had an average age of 37.5 years, showing they were generally mature and experienced. Most were female (76.7%), which may reflect the overall gender trend in academia. A large number had 11 to 15 years of work experience (32.8%), likely shaping their views on policies and workloads. The majority held permanent positions (69.3%), suggesting job stability and long-term commitment. Over half (59.5%) were not in administrative or rotational roles, which could limit their leadership experience.

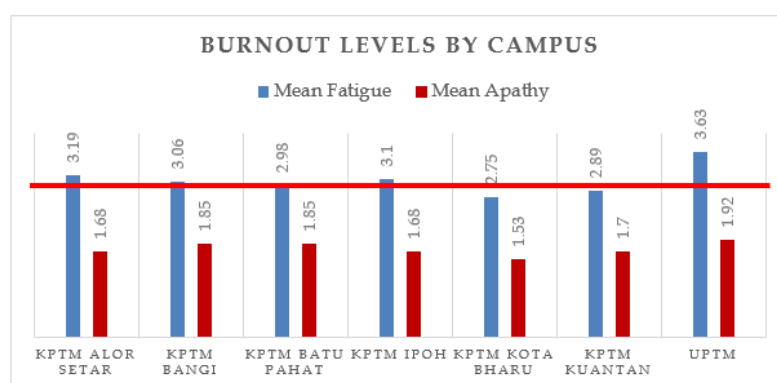
Many respondents held postgraduate qualifications, which may influence their expectations for career development and support. They came from various faculties and campuses, helping to provide a broader view of burnout across the institution. These diverse backgrounds help make the study's results more applicable to a wider academic setting. Overall, the demographic data suggest that the participants' experience and job stability may either help manage or add to their work-related stress. Table 1 provides the full demographic breakdown.

The survey results indicate that burnout among KPTMSB lecturers is primarily characterized by two key elements: fatigue and apathy. Fatigue levels were assessed using a set of 42 items, while apathy was measured through 9 items.

Table 1. Sociodemographics of the academics who participated in the study (n =729)

Sociodemographic Characteristics		Mean (SD)	n (%)
Campus	Alor Setar		50 (6.9)
	Bangi		169 (23.2)
	Batu Pahat		59 (8.1)
	Ipoh		73 (10.0)
	Kota Bahru		130 (17.8)
	Kuantan		58 (8.0)
	UPTM		190 (26.1)
Age (years)		37.5 (8.16)	
	21-25		34 (4.7)
	26-35		199 (27.3)
	36-45		365 (50.1)
	46-55		112 (15.4)
Gender	56 and older		19 (2.6)
	Female		559 (76.7)
	Male		170 (23.3)
Experience (years)			
	< 5		232 (31.8)
	5-10		107 (14.7)
	11-15		239 (32.8)
	16-20		67 (9.2)
	21-25		55 (7.5)
	26-30		18 (2.5)
Employment status	> 30		11 (1.5)
	Temporary		95 (13.0)
	Contract		129 (17.7)
	Permanent		505 (69.3)
Current Administrative/ Rotational Role			
	Yes		295 (40.5)
	No		434 (59.5)

Among the institutions surveyed, UPTM recorded the highest level of fatigue, with a mean score of 3.63. This was followed by KPTM Alor Setar (3.19), KPTM Ipoh (3.10), KPTM Bangi (3.06), KPTM Batu Pahat (2.98), KPTM Kuantan (2.89), and KPTM Kota Bharu (2.75). In terms of apathy, the levels remained relatively moderate across all campuses. However, UPTM again showed the highest mean score at 1.92, followed by KPTM Bangi and KPTM Batu Pahat (1.85), KPTM Kuantan (1.70), KPTM Alor Setar and KPTM Ipoh (1.68), and KPTM Kota Bharu (1.53). Figure 1 provides a detailed summary of these findings.

**Fig. 1.** Burnout Among KPTMSB Lecturers: Characterized by Fatigue and Apathy.

As shown in Figure 1, four KPTM branch campuses recorded burnout levels above the cut-off point of 3.00, while three others were just below it. This indicates that academic staff burnout is approaching a critical level. The average burnout score across campuses was 3.09, which falls in the medium-high range. Despite this, staff still showed a caring attitude, with a low mean score of 1.74 for apathy, suggesting they remain empathetic and responsive to others.

UPTM reported the highest burnout ($M = 3.63$), followed by KPTM Alor Setar ($M = 3.19$), KPTM Ipoh ($M = 3.10$), and KPTM Bangi ($M = 3.06$). UPTM and KPTM Bangi also have more students and academic programs, which may explain their higher burnout due to heavier workloads and responsibilities. Interestingly, all campuses showed low apathy levels, meaning lecturers continue to stay emotionally engaged despite being tired. This reflects a strong internal motivation and dedication to their roles. However, the increasing fatigue—especially in larger campuses—highlights the need for proactive steps to manage stress and protect staff wellbeing.

Table 2 further breaks down burnout by its key dimensions: role clarity and job demands, self-exhaustion, and work-related exhaustion.

Table 2. Comparison of Burnout Dimensions Among Academic Staff at Different KPTM Campuses

Burnout Domain	Burnout, n (%)		χ^2 (df)	p-value
	No Burnout	Burnout		
Role Clarity & Job Demands			6.4 (6)	0.381
KPTM Alor Setar	38 (76.3)	12 (23.7)		
KPTM Bangi	122 (72.0)	47 (28.0)		
KPTM Batu Pahat	44 (74.3)	15 (25.7)		
KPTM Ipoh	53 (72.8)	20 (27.2)		
KPTM Kota Bahru	95 (73.1)	35 (26.9)		
KPTM Kuantan	46 (78.8)	12 (21.2)		
UPTM	124 (65.2)	66 (34.8)		
Overall	522 (71.6)	207 (28.4)		
Self-Exhaustion			3.2 (6)	0.789
KPTM Alor Setar	35 (70.9)	15 (29.1)		
KPTM Bangi	126 (74.7)	43 (25.3)		
KPTM Batu Pahat	41 (69.5)	18 (30.5)		
KPTM Ipoh	55 (75.3)	18 (24.7)		
KPTM Kota Bahru	98 (75.3)	32 (24.7)		
KPTM Kuantan	44 (76.3)	14 (23.7)		
UPTM	131 (69.1)	59 (30.9)		
Overall	532 (72.9)	197 (27.1)		
Work-Related Exhaustion			10.6 (6)	0.100
KPTM Alor Setar	31 (62.8)	19 (37.2)		
KPTM Bangi	104 (61.4)	65 (38.6)		
KPTM Batu Pahat	37 (62.4)	22 (37.6)		
KPTM Ipoh	45 (62.1)	28 (37.9)		
KPTM Kota Bahru	90 (69.0)	40 (31.0)		
KPTM Kuantan	38 (66.3)	20 (33.7)		
UPTM	99 (51.9)	91 (48.1)		
Overall	444 (60.9)	285 (39.1)		

Based on Table 2, the results show that 28.4% of academic staff experienced burnout due to unclear roles and heavy job demands, while 71.6% did not. UPTM had the highest percentage (34.8%), followed by KPTM Bangi (30.4%) and KPTM Ipoh (27.8%), with KPTM Kuantan being the lowest (21.2%). However, the difference between campuses was not statistically significant. Still, it shows that about one in three staff face issues with their job roles and workloads, which highlights the need for clearer communication and fairer work distribution.

For self-exhaustion, 27.1% of staff reported feeling tired emotionally and physically. The highest levels were found at UPTM (31.5%) and KPTM Batu Pahat and Alor Setar (30.4% each), while the lowest were at KPTM Kuantan (18.2%) and Ipoh (22.2%). Again, the differences were not significant, but it shows that many staff are feeling drained and may benefit from better support, such as mental health services and flexible working options.

Work-related exhaustion had the highest percentage, with 39.1% of staff affected. UPTM had the most cases (48.1%), followed by KPTM Bangi (41.1%) and Batu Pahat (39.1%). The lowest was in Kota Bharu (30.0%) and Kuantan (30.3%). Although the differences were not statistically significant, the high numbers show that many staff are struggling with their workloads and would benefit from better time management support and reduced pressure.

In summary, even though the differences between campuses were not significant, the overall number of staff experiencing burnout is worrying. Larger campuses like UPTM and Bangi seem more affected, possibly due to heavier responsibilities. These findings suggest the need for improvements in managing job clarity, workloads, and providing support to help staff avoid burnout and stay motivated.

Table 3 presents the logistic regression results of factors associated with overall burnout among the academic staff.

Table 3. Logistic Regression of Burnout Factors.

Variables	Overall Burnout, n (%)		Simple logistic regression		Multiple logistic regression	
	Yes	No	Crude OR (95% CI)	P	Adjusted OR (95% CI)	P
Gender						
Female	222 (39.7)	337 (60.3)	1.62 (1.10, 2.40)	0.015	5.48 (3.150, 10.10)	<0.001
Male	42 (24.7)	128 (75.3)	1		1	
Current Administrative/Rotational Role						
Yes	120 (40.7)	175 (59.3)	1.14 (0.84, 1.56)	0.40		
No	144 (33.2)	290 (66.8)	1			
Relationship with the superior						
Good	243	107	1.38 (0.94, 2.04)	0.10	3.28 (1.501, 7.820)	0.032
Poor	317	62	1		1	
Bureaucratic constraints						
Yes	358	139	1.04 (0.70, 1.56)	0.04		
No	165	67	1			
Work-family conflicts						
Yes	143	95	2.03 (1.40, 2.94)	<0.001	1.81 (1.040, 6.620)	0.047
No	362	129	1		1	
Performance pressure						
Yes	474	116	1.26 (0.80, 1.96)	0.01		
No	108	31	1			

Based on Table 3, the logistic regression analysis identified several important factors linked to burnout among academic staff. Gender stood out as significant—female staff were over five times more likely to experience burnout than male staff (adjusted OR = 5.45, 95% CI: 3.15–10.10, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that women are more vulnerable to burnout.

Having an administrative or rotational role was not significantly related to burnout ($p = 0.40$), and while poor relationships with superiors showed a weak association (OR = 1.35, $p = 0.10$), it was not statistically significant. However, bureaucratic constraints ($p = 0.04$) and performance pressure ($p = 0.01$) were both significant, indicating that administrative burdens and high expectations contribute to burnout. The strongest predictor was work-family conflict—those experiencing it were more than twice as likely to feel burned out (OR = 2.03, 95% CI: 1.40–2.94, $p < 0.001$).

These findings point to gender, bureaucratic constraints, performance pressure, and work-family conflict as key burnout contributors. Women, in particular, may face greater stress due to overlapping responsibilities at work and at home, especially in cultures where they are expected to take on caregiving roles. This adds to their risk of burnout.

The impact of bureaucratic overload and pressure to perform also reflects broader issues in academia, such as excessive paperwork, changing targets, and pressure to publish. Without proper support, these demands can lead to frustration and emotional fatigue. To address this, institutions should simplify processes, offer better time and mental health support, and create a more compassionate work culture.

Based on Table 4, personal and social factors also influence burnout. For instance, 12.9% of respondents strongly agreed, and 23.6% agreed that they feel burned out from work, showing that burnout often affects their personal lives too. Additionally, 25.2% frequently thought about personal commitments while working, and 21.7% struggled to balance work and home life. These figures highlight the challenge of maintaining clear boundaries between professional and personal responsibilities.

Table 4. Comparison of Burnout Classification: Single-Item Measure vs. MBI:SE

Single MBI: SE item: <i>I feel burned out from my work</i>						
Non-proprietary single-item burnout measure:		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Family commitments make me too tired to be productive at work.	n	36	110	184	207	192
	%	4.9	15.1	25.2	28.4	26.3
I often think about my personal commitments while working.	n	40	83	182	246	178
	%	5.5	11.4	25.0	33.7	24.4
I cannot think rationally at work because of my personal problems.	n	11	33	92	248	345
	%	1.5	4.5	12.6	34.0	47.3
At home, I often feel emotionally exhausted.	n	94	172	147	172	144
	%	12.9	23.6	20.2	23.6	19.8
My exhaustion is influenced by my social relationships with my family.	n	25	69	118	237	280
	%	3.4	9.5	16.2	32.5	38.4
I find it difficult to balance work with personal life.	n	13	55	132	252	277
	%	1.8	7.5	18.1	34.6	38.0
I care less about other people's matters, even those of close family	n	24	61	137	235	272
	%	3.3	8.4	18.8	32.2	37.3
I feel that I do not contribute much to my family.	n	31	87	114	217	280
	%	4.3	11.9	15.6	29.8	38.4
I have no time for additional religious activities.	n	72	126	162	181	188
	%	9.9	17.3	22.2	24.8	25.8

Family-related pressures do play a role in staff fatigue, but they are not the main cause. Only a small percentage (4.9% strongly agreed, 15.1% agreed) felt that family commitments left them too tired to work effectively, while many (26.3% disagreed, 24.8% strongly disagreed) did not see family as a major barrier. Most respondents (32.5% disagreed, 38.4% strongly disagreed) also did not believe their exhaustion was due to social or family relationships.

Some staff also experienced emotional and psychological strain. About 27.2% reported trouble thinking clearly at work due to personal issues, and 28.5% felt emotionally distant, even from loved ones—indicating emotional exhaustion. Limited time was another factor, with 27.2% saying they had no time for religious activities, showing how work pressure affected personal and spiritual life.

Overall, the results show that burnout stems from both work-related and personal challenges. Although UPTM staff reported higher burnout levels in all three measured areas, the differences between campuses were not statistically significant. This suggests burnout is a systemic issue needing university-wide solutions such as fair workload distribution, strong leadership, and mental health support.

The study also identified 16 key causes of staff fatigue. The top three were: preparing audit-related documents (mean: 3.91), adapting to the trimester system (mean: 3.75), and handling tasks outside official duties (mean: 3.63). These issues are summarized visually in Figure 2.

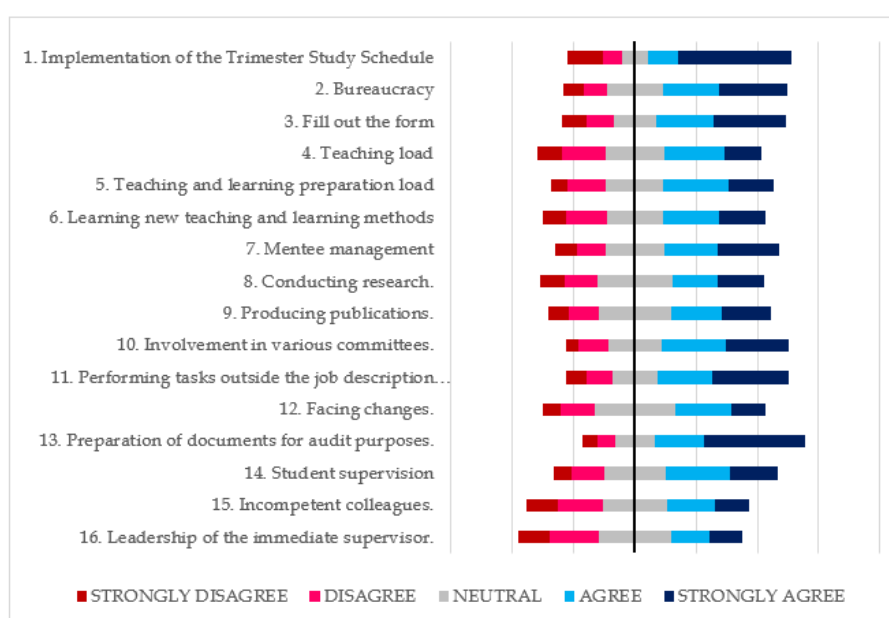


Fig. 2. Primary Causes of Burnout in Academic Settings Based on Mean Scores

Based on Figure 2, about 35% of the causes of fatigue and burnout among academic staff are related to administrative work, such as audit documentation, trimester system implementation, non-core duties, committee roles, bureaucracy, and lengthy forms. These tasks are seen as time-consuming and stressful, increasing the workload and leading to exhaustion. The pressure to meet university demands makes things worse. This highlights the need for the institution to simplify processes and reduce unnecessary tasks to help prevent burnout.

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of academic staff who agreed that these factors significantly contribute to burnout.

Over 60% of respondents agreed that all 16 factors in this study contribute to academic staff fatigue and eventual burnout. The most common causes were preparing audit documents (78.2%) and the trimester system (75%). Other stressors included doing tasks outside job scopes and dealing with bureaucracy. Most respondents reported moderate to high emotional exhaustion, showing they struggle with their roles. About 42% felt emotionally detached from students and colleagues, which can affect teaching quality. Meanwhile, 35% felt a lack of personal achievement, feeling unappreciated for their efforts.

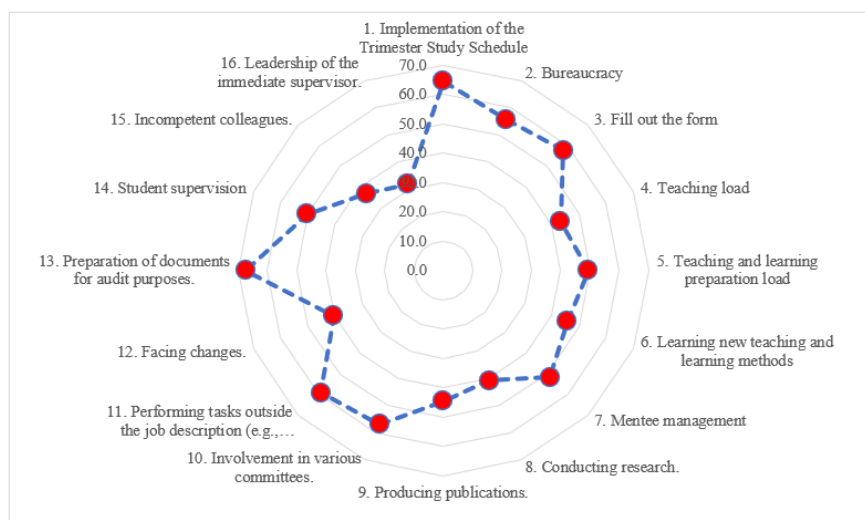


Fig. 3 Staff Agreement on Administrative Factors as Key Contributors to Burnout

Excessive workload was the main cause of burnout for 65% of respondents. Many worked beyond their hours, leaving little time for self-care or development. Administrative work, such as committees and reports, also consumed much of their time. Around 47% said they lacked institutional support, which added to feelings of stress and isolation. The pressure to meet research targets added further strain, especially for younger staff juggling teaching, admin, and research duties. This ongoing pressure may lead to burnout, lower productivity, and reduced teaching and research quality.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study align with previous research (Ahmeti et al., 2025; Jaswantlal et al., 2014; Mohamed et al., 2020), which have similarly highlighted excessive workload, administrative overload, and limited institutional support as critical contributors to academic burnout. The notably high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among KPTM academic staff suggest a working environment that is both emotionally taxing and unsustainable. This has broader implications, including diminished teaching quality, reduced institutional productivity, and increased staff attrition, all of which can negatively impact student outcomes and institutional reputation.

A burnout prevalence rate of 39.1% indicates that nearly four in ten academic staff are experiencing significant levels of psychological strain. This finding demands urgent attention, especially considering that burnout not only affects the individual's well-being but also undermines overall institutional effectiveness. In response, institutions like UPTM must prioritize interventions that systematically address workload imbalances, clarify role expectations, and enhance staff support mechanisms.

Among the most impactful contributors to burnout in this study were administrative burdens, which diverted time and energy away from academic responsibilities. This supports existing literature on the bureaucratization of academia (Raduan et al., 2022). Institutions must respond by simplifying reporting processes, digitizing routine documentation, and delegating administrative responsibilities to non-academic personnel where possible. Importantly, reducing such burdens will allow academic staff to focus on teaching and research, core activities that align with their professional expertise and motivations.

Equally critical is the role of institutional support. The study reveals that academic staff with access to wellness initiatives, mental health resources, and flexible working arrangements report lower levels of burnout. This underscores the need for universities to establish integrated support systems that are not only reactive but also preventive. For example, mental health services must be made more accessible and destigmatized, while flexibility in scheduling should be institutionalized, not treated as an ad hoc privilege.

In terms of intervention strategies, institutions should prioritise three main areas. First, there is a need to rebalance workload by ensuring tasks are distributed more equitably through regular workload audits. Teaching, supervision, and other academic responsibilities should be monitored transparently, and time allocated for professional development should be better streamlined. Second, structural reforms in administrative processes are crucial. Non-academic tasks

should be automated or delegated, and unnecessary meetings should be minimised. Clear policy guidelines are needed to limit administrative expectations and safeguard time for core academic duties. Third, institutions must adopt flexible and family-friendly policies, such as flexible working hours and options for partial remote work. This is especially important for staff with caregiving responsibilities. Women, in particular, often shoulder a larger share of domestic responsibilities, making them more vulnerable to burnout in rigid academic environments.

As such, gender-sensitive approaches must be embedded in institutional planning to address these disparities effectively. While these recommendations provide a starting point, effective implementation will require clear timelines, leadership commitment, and periodic evaluation to monitor their impact. Institutions must also prepare for resource and logistical challenges, including the need for staff training, digital infrastructure upgrades, and budget allocations.

Beyond the institutional level, the findings have significant policy implications. At the national level, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) could incorporate staff well-being indicators into institutional performance metrics and accreditation criteria. Encouraging universities to develop structured well-being programs and report on workload distribution would signal a shift toward more sustainable academic environments across Malaysia's higher education system.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. As a cross-sectional design, it captures burnout and associated factors at a single point in time, limiting our ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how burnout evolves and responds to interventions over time. Additionally, qualitative insights from interviews or focus groups could provide a more nuanced understanding of staff experiences, especially in relation to gender and role expectations.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study, which surveyed 729 academic staff at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM), confirms that burnout is a pressing issue that significantly affects both the well-being and productivity of academic professionals. The majority of respondents reported moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, suggesting that many staff members are struggling to cope with current institutional demands. Factors such as excessive workload, increasing administrative responsibilities, and insufficient institutional support were found to be the main contributors to burnout. Addressing these challenges requires tailored interventions that are aligned with the Malaysian higher education context. Institutions like KPTM should consider implementing strategies such as fairer and more transparent workload distribution by guidelines from the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), investing in institutional wellness programs, and introducing flexible work policies to support work-life balance. Special attention should also be given to female academics who often face additional challenges juggling professional and personal responsibilities. These initiatives would not only improve mental and emotional health but also lead to increased job satisfaction, motivation, and teaching effectiveness. The findings have broader implications for Malaysian higher education. If left unaddressed, burnout can erode academic quality, contribute to staff turnover, and weaken the resilience of educational institutions. Policymakers must recognize the need for supportive policies that prioritize mental health and institutional well-being across all public and private higher education institutions.

Finally, future research should include comparative studies across different types of institutions and states, as well as qualitative insights to provide a more holistic understanding of burnout and potential solutions in the Malaysian academic setting.

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