

Artikel Asli/Original Article

The Level and Associated Factors of Burnout among Teachers in Selangor, Malaysia

Tahap dan Faktor Berkaitan dengan Lesu Upaya dalam Kalangan Guru Sekolah di Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Burnout is a significant issue among teachers in Malaysia and worldwide. This study aimed to investigate the level of burnout and to determine the relationship between areas of work life, teachers' self-efficacy, psychological distress, and burnout among teachers in Selangor, Malaysia. A cross-sectional study was conducted in government schools, by randomly selecting participants for recruitment. Participants answered a questionnaire consisting of demographic and work-related information, sources of stress, area of work life, teacher's self-efficacy, and psychological distress, along with the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Results showed that a majority of teachers experienced moderate to high depersonalization (62.3%), followed by emotional exhaustion (23.5%). Only 0.05% teachers reported low personal accomplishment. Areas of work life, teachers' self-efficacy, and psychological distress were significantly correlated with burnout. Teacher burnout, especially in depersonalization, continues to be a problem, and requires systemic and personal interventions.

Keywords: Burnout, teacher, Selangor

ABSTRAK

Lesu upaya merupakan isu yang ketara dalam kalangan guru di Malaysia dan di seluruh dunia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat tahap lesu upaya serta menentukan hubungan antara bidang kehidupan kerja, efikasi sendiri guru, tekanan psikologi, dan lesu upaya dalam kalangan guru di Selangor, Malaysia. Satu kajian keratan rentas telah dijalankan di sekolah-sekolah kerajaan dengan pemilihan peserta secara rawak untuk pengambilan sampel. Peserta menjawab soal selidik yang merangkumi maklumat demografi dan berkaitan pekerjaan, sumber tekanan, bidang kehidupan kerja, efikasi sendiri guru, dan tekanan psikologi, serta Inventori Lesu Upaya Maslach. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti guru mengalami tahap depersonalisasi sederhana hingga tinggi (62.3%), diikuti oleh keletihan emosi (23.5%). Hanya 0.05% guru melaporkan pencapaian peribadi yang rendah. Bidang kehidupan kerja, efikasi sendiri guru, dan tekanan psikologi mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dengan lesu upaya. Keletihan kerja dalam kalangan guru, terutamanya dalam aspek depersonalisasi, terus menjadi masalah dan memerlukan intervensi secara sistemik serta peribadi.

Kata kunci: Lesu upaya, guru, Selangor

INTRODUCTION

Burnout in the workplace has surfaced as a public health issue (World Health Organization 2019). Burnout is now universally defined as a reaction that occurs among individuals exposed to prolonged, intensive levels of stress at work i.e. as a response to job stress produced by the demands of helping needy clients (Maslach et al. 1986). Researchers hypothesize burnout as occurring when employees who are emotionally exhausted and feel they lack the adaptive resources and are unable to give any more to their job. Depersonalization often occurs in response to the state of emotional exhaustion during which the employees become disengaged and cynical of their work and the organization they work in or with uncaring, callous attitudes towards their job. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to diminished perceptions of ability on the job i.e. the employees perceive that they cannot perform as well at their job as they once could (Maslach et al. 1986).

Teachers have been identified as being at risk of burnout as a result of them being in a demanding and emotionally charged relationship with their recipients (Maslach et al. 1986). In fact, in early burnout research, the term burnout has come to be used more in conjunction with the teaching profession than any other occupational group (Farber 2000). Recent studies show that burnout continues to be high among teachers, with a review estimating about 52% of teachers had burnout syndrome (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. 2023).

Excessive burnout has been associated with psychological distress and stress. Teachers in Hong Kong are noted to have numerous complaints of irritability, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms like headaches, multiple joint aches (Agyapong et al. 2023; Madigan et al. 2023). Teaching-related stress was affecting the physical and mental health of teachers (Agyapong et al. 2023; Madigan et al. 2023). Teaching in Malaysia has been found to be the most stressful occupation among 26 professions in a survey done (Wong & Tay 2010).

This study aimed to investigate the level of burnout in two districts of Petaling Jaya, Selangor and the sources of stress among teachers, and to determine the relationship between areas of worklife, teachers' self-efficacy, psychological distress, and burnout. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022), Selangor has the highest number of government school teachers in Malaysia, with 27,214 in secondary schools and 35,018 in primary schools.

METHODS

STUDY DESIGN

This is a cross sectional descriptive study, conducted among government school teachers in Selangor. The location of the schools were determined by the Department of Education Selangor (JPNS).

SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING

A one-proportion sample size calculation was used for this study, with precision (d) of 5%, confidence interval of 95% and a prevalence of 19.7 % (Quatrin et al. 2010). Thus, for the calculation of the sample size, it was assumed that the prevalence was 19.7%. These calculations rendered a projected sample size of 234.

Inclusion criteria of participants were as follows: 1. All subjects who are national government school teachers in Selangor. 2. Consent for participation in the study. 3. Subgroups of teachers encompassing counsellors, special education teachers and discipline teachers. The exclusion criteria are as follows: 1. Subjects who did not consent to participate in the study. 2. Subjects who were currently not actively in duty i.e. on long medical leave, pursuing higher education or personal leave.

The samples were collected via simple random sampling, recruiting non-duplicated subjects from a database of names provided by the JPNS. This was executed via random selection of teachers using the computer software program that contained the number of all teachers in the locations chosen by JPNS. The subjects that fulfilled the inclusion criteria were identified with the assistance of the Selangor State Education Ministry's record officers.

MEASURES

DEMOGRAPHIC AND WORK-RELATED INFORMATION

The demographic information included in the questionnaire were gender, age, marital status, number and age of children (if any), the combined household income, number of years in the teaching occupation, if the teacher has transferred schools, the number of schools they have been transferred from and the reason, locality of the school whether urban or rural, the number of working hours daily, and the main reasons for stress (5 options provided).

THE MASLACH BURNOUT INVENTORY (MBI)

The MBI measures burnout in three domains, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. It consists of 22 statements where the individual describes the

frequency of these phenomenon or feelings occurring. It is a Likert scale where the subject chooses the answer based on the frequency of symptoms that he experiences. This ranges from 0 which is never to 6 which is daily and the higher the score, the higher the level of burnout. The cut off scores for high levels of emotional exhaustion are more than 27, more than 14 for depersonalization and less than 30 for reduced personal accomplishment. Low levels were given as 0-16 for emotional exhaustion, 0-6 for depersonalization and more or equivalent to 39 for personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter 1986).

As the majority of teachers in Malaysia are more proficient in Bahasa Malaysia, the research team decided to validate and use a Malay version. This was done initially through a translation and back translation of the English version, followed by a face validity of the Malay version by two professors. The original English version was translated into Bahasa Malaysia by two bilingual researchers. Two different authors then back-translated it to English again. Then, pilot testing was conducted on 20 teachers using both the English and Malay versions. The finalised version of the scale was reviewed by two consultant psychiatrists for content validity and the questionnaire was deemed suitable.

TEACHER'S SENSE OF EFFICACY SCALE

This scale studies 3 factors that lead to a sense of efficacy, namely efficacy for Student Engagement, Efficacy for Instructional Strategies and Efficacy for Classroom Management. The scale consists of 12 items, and was validated among teachers (Fives and Buehl 2010). This was then studied in a Malaysian context in Bahasa Malaysia and validated by translation and back-translation into Bahasa Malaysia and English (Saw 2007) and it was deemed reliable.

AREAS OF WORKLIFE SCALE

This scale was developed by Maslach and colleagues and is usually used in accompaniment with the MBI. It studies six areas of workplace surroundings and organizational strengths or pitfalls. It has demonstrated good reliability and validity (Leiter & Shaughnessy 2006). It contains 28 items on a Likert scale and assesses job situations or stressors that rationally may be thought to lead to burnout. Each subscale includes positively worded items of congruence and negatively worded items of incongruence, and the items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), through 3 (hard to decide), to 5 (strongly agree) (Maslach & Leiter 2008). The higher the score, the more positive the

subjects' feelings are towards the organization. As with the MBI, the research team validated this scale in Bahasa Malaysia. This was done via translation and back translation of the English version and then face validity of the Malay version by two professors. The steps used mirrored the ones for validation of the MBI.

DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND STRESS SCALE-21 (DASS-21)

DASS is a globally used screening tool in mental and primary healthcare settings (Lovibond & Lovibond 1995). It has 21 items measuring three domains of depression, anxiety and stress symptoms. The Malay Version of the DASS-21 was used which is a widely accepted tool for screening for depression and anxiety. The DASS-21 was translated and validated into Bahasa Malaysia in 2007 with good psychometric properties (Musa et al. 2007). The Malay version was shown to have good internal validity and was suitable to be used among the local population (Musa et al. 2007).

DATA COLLECTION

The subjects that fulfilled the inclusion criteria were identified with the assistance of the Selangor State Education Ministry's record officers. Once the teachers were identified, they were contacted. The teachers from different schools were then given the questionnaires in a designated centre, determined by Jabatan Pelajaran Negeri Selangor (JPNS). JPNS aided us by assisting us in contacting the teachers who had been selected. The teachers were briefed on the study and if they agreed, then signed the consent forms. The response rate was maintained at an acceptable 90%.

The teachers were initially given the consent forms together with a briefing of the study by the researchers including voluntary participation, anonymity, data use, risks and benefits of the study, and withdrawal rights. They were assured that confidentiality would be strictly maintained. They were then given the 5 questionnaires which were completed in the presence of the investigator. Once consent was obtained, the subjects were first asked to fill up a socio-demographic data sheet before proceeding to the other questionnaires. The questionnaires took an average of 30 minutes to complete.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis was used to obtain frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation values. Independent samples t-test was used to test whether the participants were significantly different in burnout in terms of demographic and work-related characteristics. Pearson's correlation test was used to analyse the relationship between area of

TABLE 1 The socio-demographic and personal profile of the 220 teachers surveyed

Variables	n (%)	Mean	SD
Age		34.28	7.60
Sex			
Male	69 (31.8)		
Female	151 (68.2)		
Race			
Malay	110 (50.0)		
Chinese	88 (40.0)		
Indian	19 (8.6)		
Others	3 (1.4)		
Married			
Yes	131 (59.5)		
No	88 (40.0)		
Widow	1 (0.5)		
If married, working spouse			
Yes	125 (95.9)		
No	6 (4.1)		
Estimated family income/month (RM)		6503.53	4218.42
Years of teaching		8.00	7.53
Type of school			
Primary School	80 (36.4)		
Secondary School	131 (59.5)		
Primary National School	9 (4.1)		
Duration working at current school (years)		4.37	3.88

TABLE 2 Levels of Severity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (N=220)

Domain n (%)	Low	Moderate	High
Emotional Exhaustion	165 (75.5)	53 (23.6)	2 (0.9)
Depersonalization	83 (37.7)	99 (45.0)	38 (17.3)
Personal Accomplishment	1 (0.5)	0 (0.0)	219 (99.5)

worklife, teachers' sense of self-efficacy, and psychological distress with burnout.

ETHICS APPROVAL

This study was approved by the Medical Ethics Committee, Universiti Malaya Medical Centre (ID: 944.35).

RESULTS

Of the 234 teachers surveyed, 14 questionnaires were incomplete, thus the final data consisted of 220 teachers who had provided complete responses on all variables in the study. The table below provides information regarding the personal characteristics of all the participants (Table 1). Table 2 reports the level of burnout among the teachers based on the three domains of burnout. In terms of the prevalence of burnout, only a minority

of subjects rated themselves as having high levels of emotional exhaustion at 0.9% ($n = 2$) and low levels of personal accomplishment at 0.5% ($n = 1$). As for depersonalization, 62.3% ($n = 137$) respondents reported moderate and high levels.

As for sources of stress, 74.5% ($n=164$) of the teachers reported the work load was their primary source of stress, while about 26.8 % ($n=61$) reported their students were their primary source of stress, followed by 22% ($n=49$) who felt the environment was the most stressful for them.

Results of the correlation analysis showed that psychological distress (r (218) = 0.625), teacher's self-efficacy (r (218) = -0.619), and area of working life (r (218) = -0.554) were significantly correlated with burnout ($p < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the prevalence of burnout and the sources of stress among school teachers. We also examined the correlation between burnout and psychological distress, teacher's self-efficacy, and area of working life. A majority of teachers experienced moderate to high depersonalization, followed by emotional exhaustion. However, 99.5% had high personal accomplishment. The proportion of low personal accomplishment in our study participants is much lower than was detected in other Asian countries, where the proportion was between 19% and 54% (Agyapong et al. 2024, He et al. 2025, Luk et al. 2010). Further studies that explore theoretical or cultural explanations are needed to clarify why this difference exists. In addition, we found that psychological distress, teachers' self-efficacy, and area of working life were significantly correlated with burnout.

The results showed a positive correlation between the area of working life, which assesses the work environment, and the burnout level. A mismatch in workplace environment with the personality of teachers can lead to burnout among teachers, but those who had a positive work environment reported lower burnout, as a Malaysian study has revealed, suggesting the protectiveness of a supportive work environment (Shah et al. 2024). Factors such as job dissatisfaction may be one of the first steps to developing burnout (Nguyen & Kremer 2022). Therefore, there is a need to create a positive environment for teachers to prevent job burnout.

The teachers' self-efficacy negatively correlated with burnout, where the higher the self-efficacy, the lower the burnout scores. This has been clearly reported in previous studies that self-efficacy is inversely correlated with burnout (Hassan & Ibourk 2021; Li 2023). Teachers with high self-efficacy have been found to welcome challenging activities and master them, have a deeper interest in teaching activities, have a high sense of commitment (Hussain, Khan, & Bidar 2022), and have higher levels of resilience (Li 2023). These factors may explain the relationship between burnout and self-efficacy in our study.

Our study also found a positive correlation between burnout and psychological distress. Burnout has likewise been linked to psychological symptoms including depression and anxiety in other studies (Agyapong et al. 2022; Watson 2023). Bakker et al. (2004) hypothesized burnout is directly related to obstacles at work, and not to obstacles in private life which depression is. Lack of reciprocal at work indirectly leads to depression through burnout. Therefore, it is important to address psychological distress in individuals who have burnout.

This study had several limitations that became apparent throughout the course of the research. The

design of the study was cross sectional in nature, and thus could not help establish a causal relationship between the variables as well as factors such as organizational factors within the workplace with burnout. Psychological distress was measured using patients' self-report rather than an operator rated diagnostic assessment. The data was based on results from a single state that is predominantly urban which is not representative of the entire populations of teachers in the country. Finally, this study did not include a referral protocol for participants with severe psychological distress. In the future, a similar study using a more representative sample of teachers encompassing rural and urban areas would be applicable.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we found that a majority of teachers experienced moderate to high depersonalization (62.3%), while a lesser proportion experienced emotional exhaustion (23.5%). Areas of work life, teachers' self-efficacy, and psychological distress were significantly correlated with burnout. There is a need for systemic and personal interventions to mitigate burnout among school teachers, especially in terms of depersonalization.

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