

# WORK LIFE BALANCE AND WORKLOAD IN CONTRIBUTING TO EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

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## Abstract

*Burnout syndrome is a growing mental health issue within the medical field, defined by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from excessive and stressful work demands. Physical and psychological tiredness frequently comes from reasons such as escalating workloads, lack of clarity, and inadequate time management. This study explores how work-life balance and workload can lead to burnout, focusing on workers who feel burdened at work in Malaysia. These include unfair treatment, a lack of clear instructions or communication, problems with managing time effectively, and problems that escalate at work. In this paper, it will be discussed whether it is true that work-life balance and workload can contribute to burnout. The review identified gaps in the existing literature, highlighting the need for further investigation into the empowerment of job burnout in Kedah. This study seeks to clarify the topic of burnout among employees in Malaysia. This study uses quantitative research as its methodology, and the research design used is a correlational study. One kind of non-experimental where two variables are measured and the statistical relationship between them is evaluated.*

**Keywords:** *Burnout, Workload, Work Life Balance, Communication*

## Imbangan kehidupan dan Beban Kerja dalam Menyumbang kepada 'Burnout' Pekerja

### Abstrak

*Sindrom Burnout sebagai isu kesihatan mental yang semakin meningkat dalam bidang perubatan, ditakrifkan oleh keletihan fizikal, emosi dan mental akibat daripada tuntutan kerja yang berlebihan dan tekanan. Keletihan fizikal dan mental selalunya berpunca daripada sebab seperti beban kerja yang meningkat, kurang kejelasan dan pengurusan masa yang tidak mencukupi. Kajian ini meneroka bagaimana keseimbangan kehidupan kerja dan beban kerja boleh menyebabkan keletihan, memberi tumpuan kepada pekerja yang merasa terbeban di tempat kerja di Malaysia. Ini termasuk perkara seperti layanan yang tidak adil, kekurangan arahan atau komunikasi yang jelas, masalah mengurus masa dengan berkesan dan masalah yang meningkat di tempat kerja. Dalam kertas kerja ini, akan dibincangkan sama ada benar keseimbangan kehidupan kerja dan beban kerja boleh menyumbang kepada keletihan. Kajian semula mengenal pasti jurang dalam literatur sedia ada, menekankan keperluan untuk siasatan lanjut mengenai pemerkasaan kelesuan kerja di Kedah. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan topik burnout dalam kalangan pekerja di Malaysia. . Kajian ini menggunakan kajian kuantitatif sebagai metodologinya dan reka bentuk kajian yang digunakan ialah kajian korelasi. Satu jenis bukan eksperimen di mana dua pembolehubah diukur dan hubungan statistik antara mereka dinilai.*

**Kata Kunci:** Keletihan, Beban Kerja, Keseimbangan Kehidupan Kerja, Komunikasi.

### Introduction

In the middle of the 1980s, the term "burnout" was used to describe the demotivation and loss of emotional attachment that carers in the human services and healthcare sectors experienced cited in (Kumareswaran, 2023). Burnout among Malaysian workers is one of the many mental health issues that have been observed since the termination of COVID-19 a few years ago. According to Salvagioni et al. (2017), a syndrome brought on by continuous stress at work, burnout has several severe consequences on employees' health and well-being. Chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and a lack of work resources can lead to job burnout, a psychological state that results in unpleasant feelings and pessimistic attitudes cited in (Guseva et al., 2021). Work-life integration

in the workplace, which can result in burnout, will be the main focus of this study.

In-depth research on how poor communication impacts employees' workload and work-life balance and also contributes to employee burnout is lacking, despite the abundance of studies on employee job burnout. The American Medical Association (AMA) published a study in 2021 that examines the connection between communication, burnout, and bullying. They don't, however, go into detail on communication and how important it is to prevent workplace burnout cited in (Nuessle, 2023). Maslach and Leiter (1997) defines burnout as a sustained reaction to ongoing interpersonal and emotional pressures at work. It is characterised by three elements: inefficacy, cynicism, and exhaustion. Burnout is a cumulative negative response to ongoing occupational pressures related to the mismatch between employees and their assigned duties, according to Leiter and Maslach (Portoghese et al., 2014). Perhaps the most obvious sign that a person is not a good fit for their profession is work overload cited in (The Truth About Burnout, 1997). Portoghese (2014) indicates that Maslach and Leiter offer a comprehensive perspective by identifying six key aspects of work life that are considered primary contributors to burnout: community, fairness, rewards, job control, manageable workload, and values

## **Literature Review**

### ***Heavy Workload Impacting Burnout***

Workload has a major impact on employee fatigue, according to previous research. According to previous studies, employers must successfully manage workload to lessen staff weariness. Based on Chen, (2024) and Mustika et al., (2023) across a range of occupations, including education and healthcare, high workloads are consistently associated with increased rates of burnout. Chen also stated that stress levels are raised by more administrative tasks and shifting responsibilities, which results in emotional tiredness. Those researchers have offered serious insight into the relationship between heavy workloads and burnout that occurs among workers. Burnout does not only occur physically but it also involves significant emotions. When the workload given is too heavy, comes with unpredictable demands and work tasks, it will cause burnout. Based on Portoghese et al., (2014), work overload is a significant contributor to exhaustion, which in turn leads to burnout. Similar to Dewi and Riana (2019), higher workload experienced by employees will have

an impact on the burnout of an employee's role of stress that gives a bad impact on employees. Both authors have shown that how heavy workload led to exhaustion that can cascade into full-blown burnout, influenced by emotional and their physical fatigue. This perspective highlight that an excessive workload isn't simply a challenge to employee productivity and it erodes employees' mental and emotional resilience.

As indicated by Brom et al. (2015), the workload dimension is particularly significant in the context of burnout development, Leiter and Maslach stated that when job demands surpass human capabilities, emotional tiredness is the most probable outcome, as noted by Brom et al. (2015). Maslach and Leiter (2016) assert that workload exacerbates burnout by exhausting individuals' ability to fulfil job obligations. The author emphasises the significant influence of workload on burnout. This effect serves as a significant stressor in an atmosphere characterised by high job demands. This issue is associated with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) paradigm, which identifies excessive workload as the primary demand exerting pressure on individuals, leading to poor job isolation and ultimately, burnout. This study concurs with the aforementioned writers that prior research has highlighted the detrimental consequences of excessive workload on employee burnout in various aspects. Some employees are said to excel under pressure, perceiving their job as a challenge rather than a source of stress.

Based on Chen (2024), every organization should implement a strategic way to manage workload effectively, such as optimizing class sizes and providing mental health resources to reduce burnout among employees. This point of view highlights the necessity of strategic workload management techniques, which are critical for stress reduction initiatives and organisational support systems. Employers and organisations must not only lessen needless or overbearing 11 demands, but also provide workers with the tools, freedom, and recuperation chances they require to succeed.

### ***Poor Work-life Balance Led to Employee Burnout***

The relationship between work-life balance and burnout is important in understanding employee satisfaction and performance. Past research shows that a positive work-life balance can significantly increase job satisfaction among employees while burnout tends to have a negative effect. Based on Mustika et al., (2023), by promoting work-life balance can also alleviate burnout, as has been proven by the positive effect of employees on their performance. Similar opinion with Koçak et al.,

(2024), a balanced work-life is necessary in becoming adaptable for lowering burnout.

This viewpoint is particularly intriguing because it reframes burnout as a multifaceted issue that primarily affects workers and can be made worse by their work-life imbalances, rather than only involving workload or professional obligations.

### ***Context and Background of Study***

In recent years, employee burnout has become a significant workplace concern, adversely affecting overall well-being and productivity. Guseva et al. (2021) assert that, after over fifty years of research on occupational burnout, its prevalence, etiology, treatment, and prevention remain poorly understood. Workplace burnout constitutes a significant issue in Malaysia, as reported by Bernama (2023). Employee mental health is becoming increasingly apparent since the company has already returned to flexible arrangements. 67% of Malaysians indicated they have encountered workplace burnout in the past three months. In 2024, millennials are most likely to experience burnout (69%), followed by Gen Z (64%), Gen X (61%), and Boomers (38%), according to Employment Hero's Employee Wellness Report.

Written by Bernama (2023), individuals suffering from burnout frequently display a reduced sense of personal identity and an indifference towards the proper execution of tasks.

To fill this knowledge gap and provide recommendations for better workplace management and employee work-life integration, this study investigates the relationship between communication styles and employee burnout in Malaysia. People with higher levels of mindfulness are said to be better able to comprehend the actions of others, to be more sympathetic, and to form more positive connections with others (Qi et al., 2024). These qualities are linked to higher-quality interpersonal relationships and may also be associated with an increase in objective social support. This study will explore how workload management and work-life balance affect the burnout among employees involving aspects of communication.

### **Operational Definition**

According to the Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (2024), the term "burnout" is characterised by fatigue, lethargy, and

overwhelm. “Work-Life Balance” is the term of managing a personal life while working, without having to explain our actions to others or obtain permission, or having to give equal time or importance to personal and professional activities (Thomas, 2024). Lastly “poor communication” can be defined as a incapacity or insufficiency of an individual to communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings, or information to others in a variety of professional or interpersonal contexts (Bagshaw, 2024).

## **Methodology**

The research methodology used to study the adoption of work-life balance and workload in contributing to employee burnout among private sector workers in Kulim, Kedah involved the use of an online survey (Google Form) to collect quantitative data from respondents. This research uses a quantitative methods approach to understand factors that contribute to employee burnout. The research design, sampling strategy, data collection instruments, and data analysis methods are explained, providing a framework for interpreting the findings. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of work-life balance and workload on employee burnout.

A quantitative research approach has been applied in this study. Quantitative focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data to answer research questions and test hypotheses. This entry seeks to present the most popular methods for describing variables, establishing correlations between variables, and developing numerical comprehension of a subject using numbers and statistics (Rana et al., 2021). Park et al. (2019) prove that positivism employs the hypotheticodeductive method to validate a priori hypotheses, typically articulated in quantitative terms, allowing for the derivation of functional relationships between independent variables (causal factors) and dependent variables (outcomes). This study is grounded in the positivist paradigm, examining the impact of workload and work-life balance on employee burnout.

This study on work-life balance and workload in contributing to employee burnout adopts a deductive research approach. In deductive research, a theory, hypothesis, and generalisation are the starting points, and the researcher tests them by data collecting and observations. It starts with well-known ideas, such the Maslach Burnout Theory and the JD-R Model, from which particular hypotheses are developed.

The study examines whether a heavy workload and poor work-life balance are important predictors of employee burnout using quantitative techniques, including surveys and statistical analysis. Reliable data gathering and analysis are ensured by this methodical and impartial approach, which helps to validate or improve on current hypotheses.

The pilot test of this study aims to determine whether work-life balance and workload contribute to employee burnout. A sample of 79 participants who work for Wong Engineering Industries Sdn Bhd. This study is conducted at Kulim Kedah, and the research paper was performed at Shah Alam Selangor. The questionnaire used in this study was divided into four sections: Part A, Part B, Part C and Part D. All items were measured using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always) to capture the respondent's level of agreement with each statement. The items used in the questionnaire were both adopted and adapted from previous validated research instruments to ensure reliability and contextual relevance. Adaptations were made where necessary to align with the work culture and environment of private sector employees in Kulim, Kedah. A pilot test was carried out over the course of one month to evaluate the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire. The finalized survey was then distributed through Google Forms, allowing for convenient online access and efficient data collection.

## **Findings and Discussion**

*Table 1: Mean Value*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Workload	2.546	0.679
Work-Life Balance	2.562	0.704
Communication	3.174	0.520
Burnout	2.749	0.758

### ***Employees in experiencing Burnout***

The findings collected from the pilot test indicate that not all 79 participants are experiencing job burnout. According to the overall mean value, just one component is acknowledged to have contributed to job burnout: Part C. Part A pertains to the quantity of work assigned to a specific individual within a designated timeframe. The total mean value

for Part A is 2.54, indicating that respondents disagree that they have a lot of work to be done in a period. Transitioning to Part B, which pertains to work-life balance. The total mean value for this section is 2.56, lead to disagreement. Means that they not being able to manage personal life during the work day, without the hassle of having to get permission or explain our activities to others.

Subsequently, Part C pertains to inadequate communication. The total mean result for this section is 3.17, indicating that respondents concur that inadequate communication can adversely affect job performance. Part D pertains to occupational burnout. The entire mean value is approximately 3, with a score of 2.74 indicating that respondents disagree with feeling fatigued, listless, and overwhelmed.

The data collected is normal. Kurtosis falls within the range of -7 to +7 and skewness is between -2 and +2. Taherdoost (2016) states that Hinton et al. (2004) proposed four reliability cut-off points: excellent reliability (0.90 and above), high reliability (0.70 to 0.90), moderate reliability (0.50 to 0.70), and low reliability (0.50 and below).

Table 2: Normality Test

Variables	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistics	Std. Error	Statistics	Std. Error
Workload	0.009	0.271	-0.414	0.535
Work-Life Balance	0.138	0.271	-0.525	0.535
Communication	-1.754	0.721	-4.831	0.535
Burnout	0.151	0.271	-0.862	0.535

Table 3: Reliability Test

Variables	Items		Cronbach's Alpha	
Workload	5		0.802	
Work-Life Balance	5		0.782	
Communication	Before 5	After 4	Before 0.695	After 0.840
Burnout	5		0.850	

## **Recommendations**

Based on the data collection on the pilot test of this study, some recommendations can be made to improve employee well-being to prevent burnout. According to this study, efficient communication is thought to be a key factor in employee burnout, rather than work-life balance or burden. Even though three of the four parts disagreed with the insights, this study should nonetheless consider some of those issues. Employers should promote time management and the adoption of effective work practices to ensure a manageable workload in certain situations. Supporting appropriate responsibility distributions and task delegation can also aid in lowering the possible workload.

Next, employers should make accommodations for employees who are unable to manage their personal lives during the workday without having to ask permission or explain their actions to others. Work-life balance can be improved by providing flexible work schedules, remote work, or flexible work arrangements; implementing stress management workshops, mental health days, or other related programmes would also aid in promoting work-life balance.

Improving communication skills in the workplace also helps in preventing burnout. Employees need to maintain clear and open communication channels, including verbal and non-verbal communication. In promoting effective communication among employees, training programs can be one of the effective ways to improve communication skills, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment. Feedback sessions and transparent communication help in enhancing communication skills among employees.

Lastly, frequent employer monitoring will assist in spotting the warning signs of burnout. Peer support groups, counselling services, and employee assistance programmes are examples of support systems that can be established to help people manage their stress and avoid burnout. According to the pilot test, respondents might not have thought of workload and work-life balance as significant causes of burnout and might not have been exhibiting burnout symptoms in general. Nonetheless, Part C, which deals with effective communication, is acknowledged as a favourable aspect. The guidelines that follow will assist staff in maintaining and enhancing their productivity and well-being in light of the findings.

## Conclusion

Given the acceptable reliability of the questionnaire and the normal distribution of the data, this study is in a strong position to proceed with real data collection. However, it is advisable to consider any specific feedback or areas for improvement identified during the pilot test since it's a mixed perfection on the overall mean on Part A, B and D. There are aspects of the questionnaire that could be refined to better capture the experiences of my target population, making those adjustments could enhance the quality of the data collected in the next phase. Overall, researchers can confidently move the average of all the data values in the set, the "middlemost" value, forward with this study while remaining open to iterative improvements based on ongoing insights.

## Author's Declaration

This article has not been published previously, nor is it under consideration for publication elsewhere. This publication has been approved by all authors for publication and may not be published elsewhere, printed, or electronically in the same form or any other language without the written consent of the copyright holder, which is Forum Komunikasi.

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