THE LAW OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ITS IMPACT ON JOB STRESS AND DISENGAGEMENT AMONG ACADEMICIANS

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Abstract

Job stress is examined in relation with disengagement among university academicians. Moreover, the study examines social support's moderating effect on job stress and disengagement. Using convenient sampling, 592 university academicians self-administered a questionnaire. The study's results indicate a positive association between job stress, disengagement. In addition, social support is shown to moderate the relationship between job stress and disengagement. In addition to making recommendations for future directions, the study includes practical implications for administrations, academicians, and policymakers in Higher Education Institutions.

Keywords: Disengagement; Job Stress; Social Support; Academicians;

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced work environment, job stress is becoming increasingly common among employees and is considered a significant risk factor for burnout. The relationship between job stress and disengagement is complex and multi-faceted, with various factors affecting the severity and duration of the effects. Studies have shown that prolonged exposure to job stress can lead to disengagement, burnout, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Conversely, disengagement can also lead to job stress, as individuals become less able to cope with job demands and more susceptible to stressors.

Existing studies reveal that academicians in an organization are considered low-stressed due to the nature of their job, low workload, and flexibility in working hours and opportunities (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua, & Stough, 2001; Khan., Khan, Kanwal, & Bukhair, 2018). However, new challenges and standards set like administrative responsibilities, competition, performance and ranking of universities based on research and teaching output, increased stress and burnout among academicians. There is a tendency to quit the organization, or there are indications of physical and psychological harm (Khan., Rasli, Yusoff, & Ahmad, 2015).

Since the 1970s, burnout has widely been recognized as a chronic problem in every profession related to employees' work-relationship and problems (Hartig, Kylin, & Johansson, 2007; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). In this context, Burnout refers to feelings of disinterest, reduction in performance and weariness (tiredness) (Maslach & Jackson., 1981). Burnout is multi-dimensional and encompasses emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Khan. et al., 2015; Khan., Yusoff, & Khan, 2014).

Job stress is the negative psychological and physiological reaction that occurs when the job demands exceed an employee's ability to cope. On the other hand, emotional exhaustion refers to chronic fatigue, reduced energy, and emotional depletion, which can negatively impact an individual's work performance and personal life. Burnout is primarily characterized by emotional exhaustion from job-related stress, absenteeism, and withdrawal from the profession. Secondly, disengagement, or

depersonalization, contributes to burnout, a condition characterized by a negative attitude toward co-workers and customers, a lack of control and failures related to work (Khan., Ali, Bashir, & Naz, 2021). Disengagement is also referred to as burnout. Finally, the burnout factor, reduced personal accomplishment, occurs due to high expectations and role ambiguity. Employees' feelings of competence and success are declining as a result. Job stress and disengagement, have been examined to understand job burnout among academicians. In addition, social support was found to moderate the relationship between job stress and burnout among higher education institutions (Khan., Ali, et al., 2021).

Lately, burnout has been one of the critical concerns in the field of psychology and management. Burnout has harmful consequences for employees and employers and gives rise to organizational problems (Khan., Rasli, Khan, Yasir, & Malik, 2014; Khan., Yusoff, et al., 2014). In the context of burnout, the workplace negatively affects individuals physically, emotionally, and well-being. In other words, burnout is viewed in a situation where the level of demand exceeds the capacity of employees (Khan., Rasli, & Zahra, 2020; Maslach., 2003).

Research studies reveal that teaching is stressful and complex (Chaplain, 2008; Gillespie et al., 2001; Johnson, Cooper, Donald, Taylor, & Millet, 2005; Klassen, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001). Academicians have many challenging activities and responsibilities on the job, which contribute to stress and burnout. Moreover, the outcomes of job stress among academicians are their health problems, career development decisions, job satisfaction and performance(Khan., Ali, et al., 2021).

Academicians quit their jobs because they face different problems within the institutes, mainly when there is a scarcity of trained professionals to assist and support them. In such cases, the loss of good academicians also negatively affects the organization and society. In this context, Farber (2010) adds that academicians lose their enthusiasm and idealism in teaching, which also affects the teacher-student association personally and academically. Further, burnout also demolishes their efficacy and productivity (Khan., Rasli, et al., 2020).

According to Dermouti et al. (2001), resources "can be physical, psychological, social, and organizational, and they can function to help get the job done, reduce demands, or stimulate growth and development" (p.368). Lack of resources also increases job demands on individuals, resulting in a withdrawal tendency in behavior (Faisal Khan, Khan, & Naz, 2016). Job resources have, therefore, a negative association with burnout. Therefore, the current study has taken social support as a resource and investigated it as a moderator in the relationship between independent variable job stress and dependent variables burnout dimensions (Khan., Rasli, Yasir, & Khan, 2019).

Social support comes from colleagues, supervisors and friends, which motivates and inspires employees. Various studies have shown that support groups are more effective at reducing burnout. It has been found that social support buffers stress's negative effects, not its positive effects. Besides the study variables, Russell et al. In the study, age, gender, and grade level were found to affect academic burnout. In the same way, Maslach et al. (2001) workers with higher expectations have higher burnout than those with lower qualifications. In their studies, Haque and Aslam (2011)and Khan et al. (2021) find that females are more disengaged, have fewer accomplishments, and are more exhausted (F Khan, Sufyan, & Malik, 2020).

Etymologically, stress has been derived from the Latin word stringere, which means "To draw tight." Researchers have also used different meanings for the word stress, like that of French writers who use Distress meaning "the place under authority" (Humphrey, 2005; Yusoff & Khan, 2013). According to Coleman, Morries and Glares (1987), stress is the opposing force that causes tension (Khan. et al., 2018).

The employees' health, interest and effectiveness are affected by stress and burnout. Therefore, the researchers view that there is still a need for research; however, the current study aims to examine the level of stress and burnout and determine the moderating role of social support on the relationship between the study variables among academicians in Pakistani universities. The study variables have been supported by conservation resources theory, which was first introduced by Hobfoll (1989), and was later on suggested as a leading theory of stress and burnout (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000; Faisal Khan, Yusoff, & Khan, 2014; Shirom, Melamed, Toker, Berliner, & Shapira, 2006). Hobfoll (2001) suggests in his study that "those who lack resources are likely to adopt a defensive posture to conserve their resources" (p.356).

The current study is motivated by an improvement in the number of successes at individual and organizational levels.

From previous studies, it was also elaborated that Job stress and disengagement are closely correlated with each other. For more details, high job stress levels can lead to work disengagement. When employees experience, high-stress levels may become disinterested or disengaged in their work, leading to reduced productivity, poor job performance, and higher absenteeism rates. Additionally, prolonged exposure to job stress can lead to burnout, a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. Disengagement from work can also lead to job stress. Employees feeling disconnected from their work or organization may experience frustration, boredom, and apathy, contributing to increased stress levels. This can create a cycle where job stress leads to disengagement and more job stress.

In the light of religious, Islam values social support within organizations. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment for individuals. Social support is deeply rooted in brotherhood, compassion, and cooperation. Islamic social support is discussed. First, Brotherhood and Solidarity, which explain that Islam promotes brotherhood and solidarity among Muslims (Latipah, Cahyo Adi Kistoro, & Khairunnisa, 2020). In his teachings, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "When one limb of the body suffers, the whole body responds to it by waking up and getting a fever." (Sahih Muslim). This teaches Muslims to support one another, both spiritually and materially. It also teaches them to be sensitive to the needs of their fellow Muslims within the organization. As a second point, Cooperation explains how Islam promotes teamwork and cooperation within organizations (Mahmudi & Suroso, 2014). The Quran mentions, "Help one another in acts of righteousness and piety" (Quran 5:2). This verse encourages Muslims to collaborate and assist each other in fulfilling their obligations and achieving common goals. In an organizational context, it translates into providing support, guidance, and resources to colleagues, fostering a culture of teamwork and collaboration. Third, Generosity and Charity: Islam encourages Muslims to be generous and charitable towards those in need. Zakat, one of Islam's five pillars, requires Muslims to give a portion of their wealth to support less fortunate members of society. This obligation also extends to organizations, where individuals are expected to contribute to the welfare of their colleagues, especially those facing financial hardships or other difficulties. Fourth, Fairness and Justice: Islam promotes fairness and justice in all interactions, including within an organization. Muslim colleagues should be treated with respect, equality, and justice. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever is not kind, gentle, and loving to others will not be treated kindly, gently, and lovingly by Allah" (Sunan Abu Dawood). As part of this principle, colleagues are supported and assisted without discrimination or bias. Finally, Islam stresses the importance of emotional support. As a companion of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), he was known for his empathy and compassion. In distressful times, Muslim members are encouraged to console, encourage, and uplift one another (Muhith, 2021).

In Pakistan's universities, stress and burnout are high, based on a review of existing studies. These studies also show that research on stress and burnout among academicians is still needed. Maphalala concludes in his research study that stress has risen due to workload and time pressure, co-worker support, recognition, rewards, and compensation systems. Researchers believe this study will be helpful to academicians in Pakistani universities. The study examines the relationship between stress and burnout dimensions in the context of burnout among academicians. In this study, social support is investigated as a moderator of the effects of job stress on disengagement from the workplace. This study has the potential to serve as a guide and would contribute to the body of knowledge about a safer and happier work environment.

Given the negative impact of job stress and disengagement on individuals and organizations, it is essential to understand the relationship. This requires a comprehensive approach that addresses individual factors, such as coping skills and job resources, and organizational factors, such as leadership and job design.

Based on the existing literature review, the following hypotheses have been developed;

H_1:There is a positive correlation between job stress and disengagement.

H$_2$: A moderated relationship exists between job stress and disengagement in the presence of social support.

2.   METHODOLOGY

The study's findings are based on a quantitative method employing a questionnaire using the positivism philosophy. Data were collected from sample respondents in the selected area using the adapted questionnaire. The current study's population is academicians from public sector universities in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. A convenient sampling has been used to select academicians, as those willing to understand and contribute to the research area are better placed to fill in the questionnaire. Eight hundred seventy-seven questionnaires were distributed in a timeframe of more than four months, and data was collected from 634 academicians, among the collected data. Five hundred ninety-two questionnaires were considered for final data analysis by using SPSS version 21.

2.1 INSTRUMENTS

The current study used valid and reliable instruments for job stress, social support and disengagement. The study survey used the Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Agree (5) Strongly. Burnout dimensions were calculated based on the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) (Demerouti., Mostert, & Bakker, 2010; Khan., Sufyan, Naz, & Bibi, 2020). OLDI is an alternative inventory to the Maslach Burnout Inventory to use and assess the different levels of academicians' burnout. The inventory has 8 items, both negative and positive items. The inventory is already valid and reliable, where the alphas is 0.81 for disengagement (Bakker, Demerouti., & Verbeke., 2004; Khan., Rasli, et al., 2014).

The independent variable: job stress, was measured through different items related to workload, time and role stressor. The questionnaire was valid and reliable where several studies have used and demonstrated the alpha value 0.75, 0.70 and 0.83 (Fimian & Fastenau, 1990; Faisal Khan, Yusoff, Khan, Yasir, & Khan., 2014; Prakke, Peet, & Wolf, 2007; Rizzo., House., & Lirtzman., 1970).

Social support was determined by two-sub dimensions: support from coworkers and supervisor. This scale consisted of six items having a reliability of 0.90 (Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin, 1998; Khan., Ali, et al., 2021).

3.   DATA ANALYSIS

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted using SPSS to analyze data from the population of academicians. Table 1 provides reliability coefficients for the sample, which indicate that all values fall within acceptable limits.

3.1   CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the Pearson correlation between the variables. The study results show a positive relationship between job stress and disengagement among academicians in universities of Pakistan. Conversely, table 1 shows a negative relationship between social support with job stress and both dimensions of burnout.

Table 1: Reliability Values and Correlation Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	JS	SS	Dis
JS	0. 77	1		
SS	0. 70	-.52*	1	
DIS	0.79	.62**	-.51**	1

*Significant at p<0.001

Note: JS: Job Stress, SS: Social Support, DIS: Disengagement

3.2   HIERARCHAL MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSES

In the current study, the Hierarchal Multiple Regression analyses have been used to find the moderating relationship of social support on the relationship between job stress and disengagement among academicians, as shown in Table 2. It is assumed that job stress predicts disengagement, and social support moderates the relationship between job stress and disengagement. From the analysis of the data, it has been shown that job stress has a significant effect on disengagement (Beta = 0.177, t= 1.665, p<0.001) among the academicians and social support moderates the relationship of job stress and disengagement.

Table 2 Hierarchal Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Disengagement	
	Standardized β Coefficients	T-test scores
Job stress	0.177	1.665
Adjusted R^2	0.632	
R^2	0.684	
F-Model	40.321*	
Job stress	0.147	1.443
Social Support	-0.293	-3.071
Adjusted R^2	0.288	
R^2	0.063	
F-Model	18.321*	
Job stress	0.124	1.221
Social Support	-0.255	-2.041
JS*SS	0.201	1.898
Adjusted R^2	0.343	
R^2	0.065	
F-Model	15.476*	

*Significant at p<0.001

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study's primary objectives were to investigate the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between job stress and burnout among the academicians of universities in Pakistan. The study used the Job Demand Resources (JD-R) theory, which explains the relationship and support framework of the current study. JD-R model was introduced by Demerouti et al. (2001) and then by Bakker and Demerouti (2016), and it has been concluded that it can be used as a theory. JD-R states that as the level of demands increases, outcomes like stress and burnout also increases, but when the level of resources increases, the level of outcome decreases; therefore, the researchers also used the theory to support the results and conceptual framework (Khan., Sufyan, Hussain, & Gul, 2022).

In theory, stress during a job plays a significant role in the outcome of burnout because burnout is the imbalance between demand and resources within the organization. Burnout occurs when the level of demand is high and the level of resources is low. In the studies of Maphalala (2014) and Khan et al. (2014), it is found that academicians face problems within the organization like role conflict, role ambiguity, workload etc. (Faisal Khan et al., 2014).

Social support was placed as a moderator variable between the study variables. Social support implied a resource in the current study, which is correlated with burnout dimensions and job stress. In figure 1, as the level of social support is low, the job stress and disengagement are high when social support is low and vice versa.
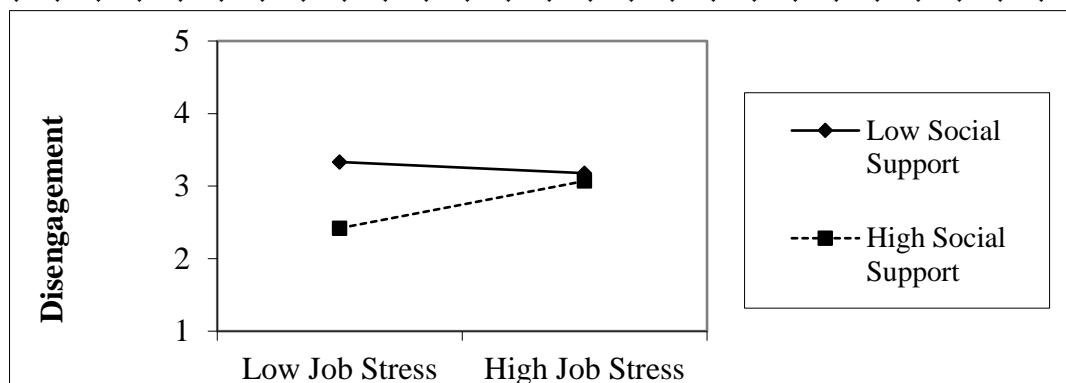
Figure 2: The moderating role of Social support on the relationship between job stress and Disengagement

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study was conducted with two main objectives: first, to investigate the relationship and effect of the study variables of stress and burnout dimensions among academicians and it was concluded that with the rise in the level of stress among the employees within the organization, the level of burnout especially exhaustion and disengagement would also increase. Therefore, to improve the level of performance and commitment among the employees within the organization, the policymakers and managers need to schedule a flexible working environment where the employee would avoid exhaustion, do their hard work, and improve their performance at individual and organizational levels. Second, the objective was to investigate the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between stress and burnout among academicians. The study results found that the level of stress increased the level of burnout, but when the level of social support was increased, it decreased the level of stress, thus reducing burnout among them. The study also concluded that social support was one of the most critical aspects in reducing employee stress and burnout.

The current study demonstrated a higher impact of environment on academicians, which determined that teaching was a high-risk profession and academicians suffered from psychological distress and burnout. Conducted in the context of Pakistan, this study has, however, some limitations. There is a need to design more complex and longitudinal or some other representative samples for a better understanding of the concept and development of burnout because it may differ in the short term compared to the long term. In addition, it would be helpful to undertake a research study through qualitative design. Lastly, the study used Oldenburg Burnout Inventory to measure burnout and suggested using another instrument for burnout. Despite limitations, the research study's results would help identify and inform developing policies and reduce job stress and burnout.

Job stress is a significant contributor to burnout in the workplace. Employees who experience high levels of job stress are more likely to experience burnout, leading to decreased job satisfaction, lower productivity, and a higher risk of physical and mental health problems. Employers can reduce job stress by offering workplace wellness programs, promoting work-life balance, and providing supportive management. By prioritizing employee well-being and reducing job stress, employers can create a more positive and productive work environment that benefits both employees and the organization. Furthermore, job stress and disengagement are closely intertwined; where in the organization, the employers should work to minimize stressors and create a pleasant working environment to help prevent disengagement and promote employee well-being.

The study has some practical implications for individuals, policymakers and administrators. For individuals, the study finds that stress level is a factor of burnout, which increases burnout and ignores how the level of exhaustion will decrease. For administration and policymakers, it recommends that to reduce stress and burnout, there is a need to improve the work environment to help each other. A better working environment will increase the efficiency and motivation toward academicians' responsibilities.

In the current study, it was observed that Social support could significantly impact disengagement, particularly in situations where individuals may feel disconnected or isolated from others. Here are some ways social support can impact disengagement: Emotional support, Practical support and Informational support can benefit individuals struggling to navigate scomplex systems, such as healthcare or government benefits. Access to accurate information and guidance can help individuals stay engaged with the resources they need to thrive. Moreover, social connection, social connections, whether through friends, family members, or community groups, can help prevent disengagement. Social connections provide a sense of belonging and help individuals feel more motivated to participate in social activities and pursue their goals. In addition, it was concluded that social support plays a critical role in preventing disengagement by providing emotional, practical, and informational support and fostering social connection and a sense of belonging.

Based on the research study's results in the field, the researcher suggested some future recommendations. In the current study, the researcher suggested using a large sample size: To increase the generalizability of the study, which will allow for a more representative sample and increase the statistical power of the study. Secondly, the researcher recommended that the validated measures for burnout from Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ), which have been widely used and validated in previous research. Thirdly, the researcher recommended using the Longitudinal design to examine the causal relationship between job stress and burnout. As a result, Longitudinal studies can provide more robust evidence than cross-sectional studies in establishing causal relationships. Fourth, the study recommended considering moderating variables such as coping strategies and organizational support can buffer the negative impact of job stress on burnout dimensions. Fifth, consider cultural differences can influence the experience of job stress and burnout dimensions. Sixth, to analyze data using appropriate statistical techniques such as regression analysis and structural equation modeling. These techniques can provide a more sophisticated analysis of the relationship between job stress and burnout dimensions. Lastly, to disseminate the findings widely to both academic and practical audiences. This can include publication in academic journals, conference presentations, and communication with relevant stakeholders such as employers and policymakers.

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