# Work Stress and Organizational Commitment:
# A Study on Academician in a Private University in Malaysia

## Nor Azimah Chew Abdullah[1] and Mohd Fadzil Bin Hamid[2]

[1] *School of Business Management Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia*
*E-mail: norazimah@uum.edu.my*
[2] *Felda Global Ventures, Malaysia*

***Abstract:*** The aim of this study was to identify the relationship between work stress and organizational commitment among academician in a private university in Malaysia. 252 academicians were randomly selected to be the respondents for this study. Descriptive statistics results showed that the work stress level and organizational commitment was in a moderate level. Results showed that the work of academicians have some level of work stress. The Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between work stress and organizational commitment. Results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between work stress level and organizational commitment level. Findings also revealed that work stress explained the changes in organizational commitment. It is also suggested that for future research, this type of study is to be extended to more public and private universities in Malaysia. Since stress can also relate to other individuals, organizations, occupational or non-work factors, future researcher should try to explore these factors.

***Keywords:*** work stress, organizational commitment

## I. INTRODUCTION

An important asset in an organization is its human resources who provide talent and creativity to enhance organization's productivity. At times, human resources are unable to give total commitment as they experience disturbance in their work process and this negative impact may lead to a stressful situation. In today's ever changing surroundings and settings, stress presence is undeniable and almost unavoidable in the workplace. Work stress is seen as a rising problem that would affect the organizational effectiveness because stressed out employees cannot give full attention to their job. Consequently, effort and workers' contribution will lessen and the organizational goals will be hindered. Even though it is impossible to put an end to stress at

work place, it is important to manage it effectively so that the consequences due to negative stress could be reduced. Furthermore, the current era of rapid technology advancement requires the organizational environment to move towards competitiveness. Indirectly, the employees also receive the impact to enhance new skill, long working hours, continuous change and unrealistic claim from the organization. The constant struggle to perform in the work place will implicitly create anxiety and stress.

Stress among the academe has been highlighted worldwide [1]. Malaysian academic staffs are facing enhanced stress due to fast development in tertiary education including international reputation, fulfilling key performance indicators, etc. [2].

In line with the Malaysian current economic development, each element related to the industry's driving force should be taken into consideration especially from quality aspect and organizational commitments. Malaysia needs work forces that possess high commitment, productivity and progressiveness, competitiveness, and efficient in its mission to achieve the Vision 2020 objectives.

The current era of rapid technology advancements requires the organizational environment to move towards competitiveness. Indirectly, the academic people also get the impact to enhance new skill, long working hours, continuous change and unrealistic claim like ten articles from high impact journal in a year. The constant struggle to perform in the work place will implicitly create anxiety and stress.

In addition, most of the stress was related to work [3]. Serious stress could affect employee's commitment in organization and this will lead to a loss. Furthermore, stress is a job hazard and organizational problems such as dissatisfaction, work turnover, absenteeism and decrease in productivity were related to work stress [4]. A report by the United States Clearing House for Mental Health Information found that work stress caused about US$17 billion of lost a year due to low production and US$60 billion a year due to physical health problems [5].

Moreover, two factors play a role in work stress; firstly, there was no certainty about job achievement and secondly, the achievement was meaningful and important in their lives [6]. The unstable organizational structure, uncomfortable working environment, less social support, current boredom associated with work, and role conflict were among the factors that created work stress among workers [7]. Work stress created emotional imbalance which directly or indirectly affects employees' commitment towards the organization.

In sum, work stress affects individuals and organization. Therefore, organization must take this issue seriously because organizational productivity depends on employees' seriousness and commitment. Without productive and committed individual, it is difficult for organizations to move forward in achieving their objectives. Thus, human resources need to be managed systematically and effectively in order for them to contribute to their company's development.

Based on the above scenario, the aim of this study is to associate the degree of work stress and its relationship with work commitment among academic staff in a private university in Malaysia. Academic staff was chosen as they need to achieve international reputation to fulfil their key performance indicators. Furthermore, they play multiple roles including teaching, researching, consulting, presenting articles at conferences, mentoring students, doing administration works and etc.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### (A) Work Stress

Work stress is defined as something which influences physiological reaction and behavior towards unlikeable stimulation [8]. It involves either physical or psychological tension. Stress is a phenomenon that exist when one has the perception that the designed duty exceeds his ability to perform the duty successfully [9]. The unbalance mechanism will result in the experience of stress which will then followed by the reaction towards the stress. In other words, employees who have no obligation to conduct their responsibility will face extreme stress level [10]. This study identified stress as the differences between the requirement of the environment and the ability of the individual [11].

Challenges in the work setting such as fierce competition, inadequate time, insufficient space, endless technological advancement and inconsistent needs from organizational stakeholders lead to work stress [12]. A study on academic staff found that 60 percent of them experienced stress due to their jobs [13]. Further, a study on pressure among Malaysia Education Officer identified 31 percent of the participants experiencing stress due to too much workload, unrealistic dateline and demand by the leader to carry out the task while 28 percent said that interpersonal relations such as assistant officer and colleagues who decline to cooperate, negative attitude towards work and conflict are the causes of stress [14]. In addition, 21 percent of respondents also said that less understanding on the organizational policy, conflicting priority and bureaucracy procedure are the causes of stress.

Apart from that, a study on work stress and work fatigue among academicians identified many factors which did not involve academic workloads that caused stress among the lecturers [15]. Even, a study found that female respondents accounted a higher level of academic stress compared to men [16]. They also revealed that higher level of work stress was reported by academicians with lower position compared to higher position. However, work stress is nothing new for any employees in any organizations. For example, Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) reported that more than 1/4 employees nationwide experienced high stress level [17]. Also, a study in Japan, a country which monitors work stress amongst employees in every 5 years, found that the percentage of Japanese workers who feel highly stressed out at their workplaces have increased from 51% in 1982 to approximately 2/3 of Japan's population [18].

### (B) Organizational Commitment

Commitment towards the organization is described as the level of workers' recognition and contribution towards the organization [19]. Apart from that, commitment is also defined as identification, involvement and employee's loyalty towards the organization [20]. Identification refers to employee's recognition concerning the objectives and company's values [20]. Involvement relates to psychological and physical participation of the employees in executing the agreed duty while loyalty is a feeling of love and belonging concerning the organization [20]. Commitment towards the organization relates to the degree of how far the employees relate themselves to the organization and their keenness to be involved and to remain in the organization [3]. Commitment can be classified into three types: continuance commitment, normative commitment and affective commitment [21]. Continuance commitment is one's willingness to be in the organization because he/she has to. Normative commitment indicates the commitment that exists when

the employees remain in the organization because of pressure from other parties. Affective commitment represents the strong willingness of the employees to be in the organization because of strong beliefs towards the organization's objectives and values.

However, a study discovered no relationship existed between gender and commitment [22]. On the other hand, a study on human resource executives reported that women showed an increased in commitment compared to men [23]. Further, a study found that age, gender, duration at work, position level and experience have an association with organizational commitment [24]. Whereas, past study found that differences in workers' personal characteristics with regards to gender, age, education level, length of service and position level did not influence commitment to the organization [25].

From the organizational commitment aspect, previous studies have shown that there were an inter-relationship between organizational commitments with job satisfaction [19, 26]. Similar studies on the impact of organizational commitment towards employee's behavior showed negative relationship between work commitment, work absenteeism and turnover [19, 27, 28]. In addition, a study among academic staffs found that relationship between work stress and commitment existed where role ambiguity and role conflict were seen as the contributing factors [29]. Further, a study on a university's staffs in South African revealed that work stress plays a part in lowering organizational commitment [cited in 30].

Based on the above scenario, it was proposed that:

$H_1$: There is a significant relationship between work stress and organizational commitment among the academic staffs in a private university.

$H_2$: Work stress influence organizational commitment among the academic staffs in a private university.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focused on work stress and its relationship with organizational commitment among the academic staffs in a private university. Two hundred and fifty two (96.92 percent) academic staffs participated in this study. The academic staffs were chosen as they have been consistently identified as people who are experiencing high stress at work due to many demands they have to meet [31].

Data were gathered through questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on three parts: demography, employee stress level and organizational commitment level. Twenty seven items were utilized to assess respondents' stress level and the instrument was modified from [32, 33]. This study focused on three causes of stress: workload, role conflict and unclear task. Likert 4-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree was employed to analyze the respondents' stress level. 13 items related to organizational commitment level were evaluated based on 3 components namely identification, workers involvement and loyalty derived from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire [34]. The items examined respondents' commitment towards the organization using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree.

Analysis of data was done using statistical analysis from the SPSS version 17. Descriptive methods were used to simplify and characterize the data. Further analysis included correlation testing and regression. Significance was set at a two-tail with an alpha level of 0.05.

## IV. FINDINGS

### (A) Profile of respondents

Majority of the respondents were males (63.5 percent) compared to females (36.5 percent). As for the age group, most of the respondents were in the range of 31 to 40 years old (55.2 percent). Out of 252 respondents, 34.1 percent were from Faculty of Engineering, 25.4 percent were from Faculty of Information Technology, 17.1 percent were from Faculty of Management and 23.4 percent were from Faculty of Creative Multimedia. As for position, Professors were represented by 2.8 percent; Associate Professors were represented by 6.3 percent, Senior Lecturer represented by 14.7 percent, Lecturers represented by 60.3 percent and Tutors represented by 15.9 percent. Majority of the respondents hold a Master degree (52 percent), followed by PhD (32.1 percent), Bachelor's Degree (15.1 percent) and others (0.4 percent). In terms of length of service, majority of the respondents have been working for 6 to 10 years (44 percent). This is followed by 1 to 5 years of service (38.1 percent), more than 10 years of service (11.9 percent) and less than 1 year (6.0 percent).

### (B) Reliability

In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to analyze the internal reliability of the organizational commitment and work stress questionnaire. Table 1 shows that the Cronbach's alpha for work stress was 0.728 and organizational commitment was 0.668. A minimum alpha of 0.6 is considered to have an adequate reliability [35].

Initially, the Cronbach's alpha for organizational commitment was below 0.6, thus indicating that 7 out of 13 items were deleted and the final items used for analysis were only 6 items to measure organizational commitment. This might be because these items were negative items and as academia, the respondents felt that these do not reflect their current organizational attitude.

It can be seen that the mean value for each of the variables ranges from 2.67 to 2.71, with a standard deviation of 0.27 to 0.39.

**Table 1**
**Reliability Coefficients, Mean Scores and Std Deviations of the Instruments**

| Variables | Item | Cronbach Alpha | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work Stress | 27 | 0.728 | 2.67 | 0.27 |
| Organizational Commitment | 6 | 0.668 | 2.71 | 0.39 |
| Total | 33 | 0.747 | | |

### (C) Desriptive Statistics

#### (i) Level of Stress among Academicians

The respondents stress level was divided into three types mainly low, moderate and high. Table 2 presents the score range used to categorize the level of stress among the academic staff.

The respondents stress level was then analyzed to obtain the percentage and frequency. Results in Table 2 suggest that the level of stress among the respondents were in the moderate category. Out of 252 respondents, 80.6 percent indicated that they have moderate level of stress while another 19.4% responded that they have high level of stress. Interestingly, none of the respondents indicated that they have no stress at all in their work

**Table 2**
**Score Range and Frequency for Level of Stress**

| Score | Level | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| 16-31 | Low | 0 |
| 32-47 | Moderate | 203 (80.6%) |
| 48-64 | High | 49 (19.4%) |

### (ii) Level of Organizational Commitment among the Academicians

Level of organizational commitment among the academicians was categorized into three categories such as low, moderate and high. Table 3 shows the score range for level of commitment.

The level of organizational commitment among the academicians was analyzed to obtain percentage and frequency. Results in Table 3 indicate that the level of organizational commitment among the academicians was at a moderate level. Out of 252 respondents, 92.1 percent responded that they have moderate commitment towards their organization and 7.9 percent responded that they have high commitment towards their organization. None of the respondents suggested that they have low commitment towards their organization.

**Table 3**
**Score Range and Frequency for Level of Organizational Commitment**

| Score | Level | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| 13-25 | Low | 0 |
| 26-38 | Moderate | 232 (92.1%) |
| 39-52 (7.9%) | High | 20 |

## (D) Hypotheses Testing

### (i) Relationships between Work Stress and Organizational Commitment

The correlation analysis was to analyze the relationships between work stress and organizational commitment. Table 4 shows the correlation between work stress and work commitment. Findings showed that there was a significant positive association between work stress and work commitment. ($r$ (252) = 0.228, $p < 0.000$).

**Table 4**
**Correlation Analysis of Work Stress and Work Commitment**

| | *Organizational Commitment* |
|---|---|
| Work stress | 0.228* (p = .000) |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## (ii)  Influences of Work Stress on Organizational Commitment

For this study, regression analysis was carried out to predict the organizational commitment based on one independent factor: work stress. Table 5 shows the R square is 0.052. Based on the R square value, work stress could explain 5.2% variation in the organizational commitment. The result of the regression analysis as in Table 5 shows that work stress influences organizational commitment at 95% confidence level with standard beta of 0.228 where p < 0.000. Thus, the statistical results prove that positive linear relationships exist between dependent and independent variable.

**Table 5**
**Results of Regression Analysis for Predicting Organizational Commitment**

| *Model* | | *Unstandardized Coefficients* | | *Standardized Coefficients* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *B* | *Std. Error* | *Beta* | *t* | *Sig.* |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.840 | .237 | | 7.754 | .000 |
| | Work stress | .326 | .088 | .228 | 3.696 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: organizational commitment$r^2$ = .052, F = 13.658, sig = .000

## V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study deals with an important problem among the academia and work stress has been reported to be a common phenomenon in any organization. However, uncontrollable stress will bring negative impact to an organization. Previous researchers have identified many factors that resulted in stress; however this study focuses only on the intrinsic factors (organization) namely task, role conflict and workload burden. This is because, this study focuses on work stress and does not include stress due to family factor, economy, and other factors.

This study has shown that majority of the respondents (80.6%) experienced moderate stress level while 19.4% had high stress level. The study is supported by a study of Peterson et al. (1995) that reflects the level of stress in Asian countries is much lower than the Western countries [cited from 29]. The high stress might be triggered by heavy workload, conflict roles and unclear job tasks although is not so serious. The moderate stress level might be due to the flexible structure of academic work such that academia have more authority towards their jobs and they are not tight-up to 9 – 5 working hours. Even so, the university administrators cannot view this issue lightly as this may yield optimum and low productivity of the academia.

This study has also revealed that majority of respondents (92.1%) experienced moderate organizational commitment towards their university. Organizational commitment level was evaluated based on three components namely identification, workers involvement and loyalty. The moderate level of organizational

commitment might be due to the flexibility being given to academia for their involvement to perform their work and their loyalty might not be on long term as they might move to other organization if they are given good opportunities.

The results of this study have suggested that there was a significant positive association between work stress and organizational commitment among the academicians. Even work stress explained the changes in organizational commitment. This study is consistent with [36] study that showed a positive relationship between work stress and organizational commitment. Nevertheless, this finding is not consistent with previous research which found a negative relationship between work stress and organizational commitment [37, 38, 39]. This means, the lower the stress level is, the higher the level of commitment. Although previous studies found positive or negative relationship between work stress and organizational commitment, but a study revealed that there is no relationship between organizational commitment and work stress [40].

In conclusion, this study has revealed the work stress faced by academicians. Results have shown that the work of academicians has some level of work stress. From the managerial point of view, the findings of this study are vital to the university's administrators to pay attention to the organizational factors that are likely to contribute to work stress due to increasingly challenging and emotionally-taxing working conditions. Administrators should come up with the right approach of work stress handling strategies that will benefit both the workers and organizations.

Like other empirical studies, this study is not without limitations. This study's sample was from one private university in Malaysia and this may restrict issues of generalizability of the findings where they might not represent the public and other private universities in Malaysia. It is also suggested that for future research, this type of study is to be extended to numerous public and private universities as participation of more universities would generate further consistent results. Since stress can also relate to other individuals, organizations, occupational or non-work factors, future researcher should try to explore these factors.

## REFERENCES

Biron, C., Brun, J. P., and Ivers, H. (2008). "Extent and sources of occupational stress in university staff. Work, vol. 30, pp. 511 – 522.

Ministry of Higher Education, In Komoo, I., Azman, N. & Aziz, Y. F., A. Malaysian research universities and their performance indicators, *Bulletin of Higher Education Research*, vol. 11, pp. 5 – 7, 2004.

Greenberg, J., and Baron, R.A. (2000). "Behavior in Organizations (7th ed.)", New Jersey: Prentice Hall International Edition.

Cummins R. (1990). "Job Stress and the Buffering Effect of Supervisory Support, Group and Organizational Studies, vol. 15, pp. 92–104.

Ivancevich, J.M., and Matteson, M.T. (1980). Stress and Work: A Managerial Perspective. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.

Schuler, R.S. (1980). Definition and Conceptualization of Stress in Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, Massachusset: Addison-Wesley.

Gehlmann, S.C. (1992). "Individual differences in employee stress as related to office environment and individual personality factors, Assessments and Interventions for Occupational Mental Health, pp. 225-234.

Appley, M.H., and Trumbull, R. (1967). Psychological Stress, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Cox, T., and Brockley, T. (1978). "The experience and effects of stress on teachers", *British Educational Research Journal,* vol. 10, pp. 83-7.

French, J. R. P., Jr., Caplan, R. D., and Harrison, R.V. (1982). The Mechanisms of Job Stress and Strain. London: Wiley.

Greenberg, J. (2004). "Stress fairness to fare no stress: managing workplace stress by promoting organizational justice" Organizational Dynamics, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 352-365.

Hall, C.S., and Savery, L.K., "Tight rein, more stress", Harvard Business Review, vol. 160, 1986, Jan.

Gmelch, W.H., Lovrich, N.P., and Wilkie, P.K. (1984). "Stress in academe: a national perspective", Research In Higher Education, vol. 20, pp. 477-490.

Sharmizawati, S. (2001). "Pressure among Malaysian education officer: reason & how to manage", Unpublished Bachelor Degree Thesis from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

Mahmood Nazar Mohammad, Abdul Aziz Latif, and Sabitha Marican (1991). "Perhubungan di antara tekanan kerja dan keletihan kerja (burnout) di kalangan ahli-ahli akademik UUM", Unpublished Master Thesis from Universiti Utara Malaysia

O'Laughlin, E.M., and Bischoff, L.G. (2005). "Balancing parenthood and academia: work/family stress as influenced by gender and tenure status". *Journal of Family Issue,* vol. 26, pp. 79.

Derfel, A. (2003). Stress, developing a low stress. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 19,* 101-112.

Kawakami, N. "Preface to job stress in East Asia: Exchanging experiences among China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand", 2000, Proceedings of the first East-Asia job stress meeting, Waseda University International Conference Center, Tokyo, Japan.

Porter, L.W., Steers, R.M., Mowday, R.T., and Boulian, V. (1974). "Organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover among psychiatric technicians, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 8, 603-609.

Buchanan, B. (1974). "Building organizational commitment: the socialization of managers in work organizations" *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 19, pp. 533-46.

Allen, N.J., and Meyer, J.P. (1996). "Affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization: an examination of construct validity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 49, pp. 252-276.

Ngo, H., and Tsang, W. (1998). "Employment practices and organizational commitment: differential effects for men and women?, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 251-66.

Wahn, J.C. (1998). "Sex differences in the continuance component of organizational commitment, Group & Organization Management, vol. 23*, no. 3, pp. 256-267.

Sheldon, M.E. (1971). "Investment and involvement as mechanism producing commitment to the organization", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 143-150.

Pimchanok, P. (2004). "Factors related to the organizational commitment of automobile company employees", Unpublished Master Thesis from Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University.

Tett, R.P., and Meyer, J.P. (1993). "Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention and turnover: path analysis based on meta-analytic findings, *Personal Psychology Journal*, vol. 4, pp. 259-293.

Angle, H., and Perry, J. (1983). "Organizational commitment: individual and organizational influence", *Work and Occupations,* pp. 123-146.

Hom, W., Katerberg, R., and Hulin, C.L., "Comparative examination of three approaches to the prediction of turnover, Journal of Applied Psychology, pp. 280-290, 1979, June.

Ashari, H., Ahmad, U.N.U., and Rahman, S.A.A., "Organizational commitment among academicians: its relationship with stress level, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. 2005.

Sheikh Muhamad Hizam, S.K., and Zafir Khan, M.M., "Stress at the workplace and productivity: a pilot study on faculty administrators in a Malaysian research university", 2011, 2nd International Conference on Business and Economic Research (ICBER).

Sigler, R.T., and Wilson, C.N., "Stress in the work place: comparing police stress with teacher stress", Journal of Police Science and Administration, vol. 16, pp. 151–162, 1988.

Rizzo, J.R., House, R.J., & Lirtzman, S.I., "Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations", *Administrative Science Quarterly,* vol. 15, pp. 150-163, 1970.

Beehr, T.A., Walsh, T.J., and Taber, T.D., "Relationship of stress to individually and organizationally valued states: high order needs as moderator", *Journal of Applied Psychology,* vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 41-47, 1976.

Mowday, R.T., Porter, L.W., and Steers, R.M., Employee Organizational Linkages: The Psychology of Commitment, Absenteeism and Turnover. New York: Academic Press, 1982.

Nunnally J.C., Psychometric Theory (2$^{nd}$ ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.

Wells, J.B., Minor, K., Anger, E., Matz, A., and Amato, N., "Predictors of job stress among staff in juvenile correctional facilities", *Criminal Justice and Behavior,* vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 245-258, 2009.

Lambert, E.G., and Paoline III, E.A., "The influence of individual, job, and organizational characteristics on correctional staff job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment", *Criminal Justice Review,* vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 541-564, 2008, December.

Khatibi, A., Asadi, H., and Hamidi, M., "The relationship between job stress and organizational commitment in National Olympic and Paralympic Academy", *World Journal of Sport Sciences,* vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 272-278, 2009.

Omolara, B.E., "Influence of work related stress on organizational commitment at Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago Iwoye Ogun State Nigeria", 2008, EABR and TLC Conferences Proceedings Rothenburg, Germany.

Yaghoubi, M., Yarmohammadian, M.H., and Javadi, M., "The relation between organizational commitment and job stress between educational hospital managers from Esfahan University", Health Management Journal (In Persian), vol. 11, pp. 63-68, 2008.