

## Occupational Stress and Turnover Intentions Teachers in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

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Stress is considered as a serious problem in the modern workplace. This paper summarizes occupational stress and turnover intentions experienced by secondary school teachers in the state of Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The aim of this study is to investigate the differences across different personal characteristics of the teachers and their level of stress and turnover intention. A total of 150 self-administered questionnaires were collected from secondary schools in the state of Negeri Sembilan. The study reveals that there are significant differences between teachers' personal characteristics with occupational stress and turnover intention. This study also revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between occupational stress and turnover intention experienced by these teachers. Based on the results, some recommendations are provided.

### Introduction

Teachers' stress has been a subject that interests researchers worldwide. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health of America defined stress as "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. However it is defined, stress is a serious problem in the modern workplace. This statement is supported by the fact that stress-related medical bills and the corresponding absentee rates cost employers over 150 billion annually (Goetsch, 2005). Most of the researches available in the literatures suggest that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations. At least one third of teachers can be seen as suffering under extreme stress and burnout. Therefore, it is of great interest to get a deeper knowledge of antecedents and consequences of teachers' stress (Van Dick, 2001). Teachers' stress is defined by the experience by a teacher of unpleasant negative emotions such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from some aspects of their work (Kyriacou, 2000). Numerous studies have also shown stress in the workplace to be associated with reduced productivity, absenteeism, worker turnover and impaired employee health and well being (McCormick, 1996). Individuals affected by stress may experience feelings of fatigue, loss of sleep, anxiousness, and even burnout (Gaziel, 1993). Stress could also affect the health of teachers. Significant and positive relationships between the teacher stress measures and the General Health Questionnaires were found, indicating that teachers' health may well be affected by the very nature of their profession (Ho T.S. 1996). In schools, teachers' stress may result in growing number of teacher absences per year. The fear is that teachers become so stressed that teaching becomes secondary as they simply

ve lost their love for the job. Teacher turnover is no school context. More and more teachers are leaving the other job opportunities. As far as researchers are concern, teacher turnover has numerous detrimental effects that can lower the quality of care received by children and families (Hale-Jinks, Knopf and Kemple, 2006). Students have to cope with new environment brought forward by replacing teachers. This consequently will result in low motivation and satisfaction in the classroom.

## Literature Review

The experience of workplace stress has been subject to a large amount of research and interest in the topic shows no sign of waning The amount of stress a person experiences at work is likely to be a result of the interaction of a number of factors such as type of work they are doing (their occupation), the presence of work stressors, the amount of support they receive both at work and at home and the coping mechanisms they use to deal with stress (Johnson et al, 2005). Teachers' stress in the other hand has been a topic of much discussion over the years. Adams (1999) noted that stress is a phenomenon that can produce both positive and negative results in teachers. While the positive effect of stress is seen to be fruitful, Unproductive levels of stress might be harmful to teachers and can affect their teaching, personal lives and most importantly, their students (Swortzel, 1999). Teaching is a challenging task which can generate stress. In fact, stress in the teaching profession has been recognized as a crucial problem (Halim et al, 2006). Teachers have a wide range of meanings when they use the term stress and when they accept or deny the existence of stress in themselves or in their colleagues (Ho, 1996). One definition of stress according to teachers is anxiety, fear, inability to cope, frustration and happiness (Kyriacou and Pei-Yu, 2004). Teachers' stress is also known as an experience of unpleasant negative emotions such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from some aspects of the teachers' work (Kyriacou, 2000).

A comparison between teachers with non-teachers found that 67 percent of teachers reported that work was the main source of stress for them (Cox and Brockley, 1984). They also found that 30 percent of non teachers claimed that they are under no stress, relatively only 11 percent of teachers reported that they are not under any stress at all. In a study on occupational stress it is revealed that teachers are experiencing higher stress level and lower job satisfaction level if compared to other occupations (Travers and Cooper, 1993). Job demands such as the amount of paperwork and lessons planning contribute to higher stress level among teachers and that teachers experienced the highest level of stress in comparison with other occupations (Travers and Cooper, 1996). Meanwhile, Johnson and Cooper (2003) found that; of the 26 occupations included in their research, teachers were identified to be one of the most stressful jobs (Kahn, 1993). In another study done in the United Kingdom, the findings showed that teachers are experiencing above average level of stress (Travers and Cooper, 1993). McCormick (1996) indicated in his study on teachers' stress, "Overall significant differences for personal characteristics when grouped with occupational stress". Furthermore, in the same study he found that female teachers were experiencing more stress than their male

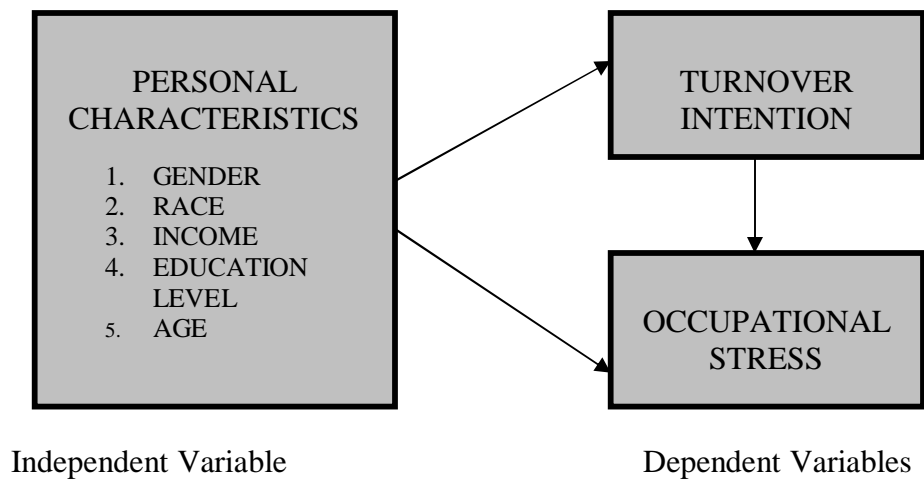
hat the younger teachers were experiencing less stress in the past when researchers asked, who suffered more supported the view that women were more susceptible to burnout since they often took primary responsibility for children in addition to their employment (Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001).

Teacher turnover is the number of teachers who leave a program during a particular year (Granger and Whitebook, 1989). Carter (2001) suggests that turnover may disrupt attachment and thus cause emotional stress and risk factors among children. Hele-Jinks, Knopf and Kemple (2006) suggest that teachers' turnover has negative effects on children and valuable learning time is lost during the time between when turnover occurs. Highly educated teachers sometimes leave their jobs to pursue higher paying positions (Hale-Jinks, Knopf and Kemple, 2006). High job stress is also one of the factors why teachers decided to leave (Curbow, Spratt, Unagaretti, McDonnel and Breckler, 2001). Manlove (1993) pointed out that job stress among child care teachers has been found to lead to lower job satisfaction, teacher burnout and job turnover.

### Research Objectives

The aim of this paper is to examine the occupational stress and turnover intention among secondary school teachers in Negeri Sembilan. For that purpose, this study will: (i) compare teachers' occupational stress with their personal characteristics, (ii) Compare teachers' turnover intention with their personal characteristics, and (iii) examine the relationship between occupational stress and turnover intention among the secondary school teachers in Negeri Sembilan.

Figure 1 presents the research framework of the study relating teachers personal characteristics, occupational stress and turnover intention based on the previous literature discussed earlier.



**Figure 1: Research Framework**

selected randomly from ten schools in the state of Negeri Sembilan. Of the two hundred teachers that were selected, 150 agreed to participate in the study. A total of 150 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to these teachers and they were required to administer/answer the questionnaires on their own. The final sample for this study was 150 teachers. The survey instruments were adopted from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) developed by the Psychosocial Department, National institute of Occupational Health, Copenhagen, Denmark. These instruments were found reliable and valid. Therefore it was used in this study.

The first section is the demographic values of the respondents which compromise of five items. These items include gender, race, age group, level of education and income groups. The second section is the turnover intention instrument which compromise of four items of measurement. This instrument consists of a five-point scale asking respondent to indicate the applicability of each statement to him/her from 'always to never/hardly ever' with a higher score indicating higher turnover intention. The third section is the behavioral stress scale which has seven items measuring the level of behavioral stress experienced by the respondents in the study. In this instrument, a five-point scale was used again asking the respondent to indicate their perception of the amount of behavioral stress from 'correct to incorrect'. The higher score will indicate higher behavioral stress. The fourth section is the somatic stress instrument which compromise of five items of measurement. This instrument consists of a five-point scale asking respondent to indicate the applicability of each statement to him/her from 'always to never/hardly ever' with a higher score indicating higher level of somatic stress. The fifth section is the cognitive stress instrument. In this instrument, respondent are asked to state from 'always to never/hardly ever' with the high scores indicating high cognitive stress. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were employed to analyze the data gathered using SPSS at 0.05 significance level.

## Findings and Discussion

### Comparisons of Teachers' Personal Characteristics and Occupational Stress.

Table 1 presents the results which compare teachers' personal characteristics with their occupational stress.

**Table 1: Independent t-test for occupational stress by gender.**

Gender	Mean	Levene test (p)	t-value	p-value
Male	3.1202	0.0005	-3.267	0.001
Female	3.6200			

Based on the results in table 1, there is significant different between teachers' occupational stress and gender. The mean score for female teachers is higher than the

all occupational stress of female teachers found to be teachers. This result is consistent with the previous

Table 2 shows the f-test conducted on the teachers mean overall occupational stress and their personal characteristics namely, (i) race, (ii) age, (iii) income and (iv) education level.

**Table 2: F-test for overall occupational stress by personal characteristics.**

	Mean	ANOVA	
		F-value	p-value
<b>Race</b>			
Malay	3.4561	8.874	0.0005
Chinese	3.0750		
Indian	3.7991		
<b>Age</b>			
20-25	3.3611	3.351	0.021
26-30	3.3333		
31-40	3.6712		
>40	2.9375		
<b>Income</b>			
<RM1000	1.9375	7.195	0.0005
RM 1000-1999	3.3000		
RM 2000-2999	3.5965		
RM 3000-3999	3.6656		
>RM 4000	2.9375		
<b>Education Level</b>			
SPM	4.2118	5.545	0.001
Diploma	2.8125		
Degree	3.5856		
Master	3.0625		

ANOVA results in table 2 revealed that statistically significant differences existed in the overall occupational stress of respondents when grouped by race (F=8.874, p= 0.0005). There is also a statistical difference in the overall occupational stress of respondents when grouped by age (F= 3.351, p= 0.021). Table 2 also revealed that statistically significant differences also existed in the overall occupational stress when grouped by income and education level respectively (F= 7.195, p= 0.0005 and F= 5.545, p= 0.001).

**Personal Characteristics and Turnover Intentions.**

compare teachers' gender with their turnover intention.

**Table 3: Independent t-test for Turnover Intention by Gender.**

Gender	Mean	Levene test (p)	t-value	p-value
Male	3.7179	0.391	-0.101	0.920
Female	3.7419			

Results of the t-test analysis shown in table 3 disclosed that statistically no significant differences existed in the overall turnover intention of respondents when grouped by gender ( $t = -0.101$ ,  $p = 0.920$ ). Turnover intention for male and female teachers is the same. Table 4 shows the results of F-test for overall turnover intention by personal characteristics of teachers.

Table 4 presents the results which compare teachers' personal characteristics with their turnover intention.

**Table 4: F-test for Overall Turnover Intention by Personal Characteristics.**

	Mean	ANOVA	
		F-value	p-value
<b>Race</b>			
Malay	3.7568	0.944	0.392
Chinese	3.4333		
Indian	3.8214		
<b>Age</b>			
20-25	4.2593	2.117	0.101
26-30	3.6481		
31-40	3.7029		
>40	3.0200		
<b>Income</b>			
<RM1000	2.0000	9.639	0.0005
RM 1000-1999	2.6667		
RM 2000-2999	3.7246		
RM 3000-3999	4.2833		
>RM 4000	3.0000		
<b>Education Level</b>			
SPM	2.5000	8.054	0.0005
Diploma	2.8333		
Degree	3.7538		
Master	4.9556		

that statistically no significant differences existed in when grouped by their races and age respectively, ( $F=0.101$ ). The findings also indicated that there was a statistically significant differences in the turnover intention when grouped by income and educational levels respectively, ( $F=9.639$ ,  $p=0.0005$  and  $F=8.054$ ,  $p=0.0005$ )

### Relationship between Occupational Stress and Turnover Intention

Table 5 shows the Pearson correlation between occupational stress and turnover intention. As shown in table 5, there was a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between the two variables ( $r=0.607$ ,  $p=0.0005$ ).

**Table 5: Pearson Correlation between Occupational Stress and Turnover Intention**

Variables	r-value	p-value
Occupational Stress	0.607	0.0005
Turnover Intention		

This implies the higher the occupational stress, the higher the turnover intention among the school teachers. In other words if the occupational stress increases there will be increase in the turnover intention.

### Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

The findings of the study have highlighted the importance of teachers' personal characteristics on their occupational stress and turnover intention. The results showed that female teachers are more stressful in their job compared to their counterparts. This seems to suggest that female teachers in the present study observed higher stress due to their dual commitment to their job and their family. This finding is consistent with the study done by McCormick (1996). Another finding is that occupational stress would differ significantly according to the respondents' race, age, income and educational level. The Indian teachers tend to demonstrate higher stress level which could be related to their minimum association in their workplace when compared to other races due to the fact that they are the minority group in the schools.

The younger teachers demonstrate lower level stress compared to older teachers. This implies that the older teachers have more responsibilities in their work and other commitments. The teachers that are 40 years old and above experienced lowest level of stress due to they are already comfortable with their job as teachers. The teachers with higher salary in the schools would experience more stress compared to lower income teachers. In the schools context, teachers with higher salaries are occupied with more responsibilities and duties which could increase their stress level. Teachers whom are getting salary more than RM 4000 demonstrate the lowest level of stress because they felt more secured in their career.

Qualifications experienced higher stress due to the fact of not having other opportunities in deciding their career path. This study by Curbow et al. (2001). In this study, gender, race and age were not having an influence on turnover intention among the school teachers. Personal characteristics such as income and educational level however have a significant impact on turnover intention. The higher income teachers demonstrate higher turnover intention. This may suggest that higher incomes come with more responsibilities and workload for these teachers. Highly qualified teachers tend to leave the schools and move to other academic institution to take up posts which suit their academic qualification. This confirms earlier findings in the literature e.g. Hale-Jinks, Knopf and Kemple (2006).

With the statistically significant and positive correlation of occupational stress and turnover intention which implies that occupational stress among teachers will lead them to leave the schools and pursue some other job opportunities. In other words, these findings suggest that increase stress in teaching profession could lead to more teachers resigning from their current job. Previous studies indicate that stress tends to affect individuals differently (Eskridge & Cooker, 1985; Fimian and Santoro, 1983; Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980). Knowing one's self and one's emotions is extremely beneficial in stressful conditions (Schamer and Jackson, 1996). It is recommended that teachers should learn to understand their level of stress and find ways to minimize it (Swortzel, 1999).

It is also recommended that the Ministry of Education should provide educational or training programs to help the teachers reduce their occupational stress. Workload of teachers should be reduced in line with the effort to help them manage their stress. According to Kyriacou and Pei Yu (2004), a decrease in the teachers' workload was seen to be the most effective action that could be taken by schools or the government to reduce teachers' stress. There is also a need to reconsider how the day to day functioning of school programs occurs as there is increasing complexity in the demands on teachers (Kelly and Berthelsen, 1995).

It is also recommended that continuous motivational program and other activities to be carried out in order to sustain the morale of job motivation of teachers. An attractive remuneration and incentives schemes may encourage more teachers to be more dedicated and passionate in their job. Implementing a plan for increasing compensation can contribute to employee satisfaction and is an effective retention method (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006). This will lead to lower stress among the teachers which in turn reduced the turnover intentions among them.

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