



doi 10.5281/zenodo.10656872

Vol. 07 Issue 01 Jan - 2024

Manuscript ID: #01216

Workplace Well-Being: An Analysis of Lecturers' Mental and Emotional Well-Being in Relation to Their Academic Productivity

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ABSTRACT

Lecturers often face challenges like excessive workload, job insecurity, and ambiguity in their roles, leading to stress and burnout, which can significantly impact their job satisfaction and performance. This study aims to explore the relationship between lecturers' mental and emotional well-being and their academic productivity. The study focuses on how the level of support from academic institutions, stress, and burnout affect lecturers' overall well-being and productivity. The study adopts an interpretivist paradigm with hermeneutic epistemology and hermeneutic methodological approach. Findings from interviews with two participants identified themes such as institutional support, social support, work flexibility, coping strategies, and work-life balance as crucial factors influencing lecturers' well-being and productivity. The study emphasises the importance of promoting a supportive work environment that prioritizes lecturers' well-being by addressing workload management, fostering positive working relationships, and implementing well-being programs. Based on the research results, it is recommended that academic institutions prioritize lecturers' well-being by offering support for workload management, fostering positive working relationships, and implementing comprehensive well-being programs. A holistic approach, considering various job resources and factors, is crucial for creating an environment that supports lecturers' well-being and enhances their productivity. There are opportunities for further research, including examining the effectiveness of specific well-being interventions and exploring the long-term effects of lecturers' well-being on their career trajectory and job satisfaction. Addressing these aspects can help academic institutions foster a supportive and thriving environment that benefits both lecturers and the institution.

KEYWORDS

Lecturers, Well-Being, Academic Productivity.



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Introduction

The role of lecturers in the higher education system is critical as they are responsible for imparting knowledge and skills to students. However, lecturers often face numerous challenges that affect their well-being and, in turn, their academic performance (Molina et al., 2016). The well-being of lecturers is as important as the system in which they work for improved academic performance and the overall success of the educational institution. With increasing workloads, job insecurity, and role ambiguity, many lecturers are experiencing stress and burnout, leading to reduced job satisfaction and performance (Huang & Li, 2021). Some scholars would argue that the pressure to meet deadlines, manage a heavy workload, and balance multiple responsibilities can indeed lead to significant stress and anxiety for lecturers (Smith et al., 2022; Johnson & Brown, 2021). Furthermore, job insecurity and role ambiguity can contribute to feelings of uncertainty and instability, further exacerbating stress levels (Jones & Davis, 2019; Thompson, 2020). Lecturers' concerns about job security can have a detrimental impact on their mental health and overall well-being (Davis & Smith, 2018; Brown et al., 2017)

Chronic stress and burnout can result in decreased job satisfaction and performance, impacting lecturers' capacity to effectively teach and engage with students. This creates a negative cycle wherein reduced job performance intensifies stress, further diminishing job satisfaction and performance (Johnson, K. 2021). These observations align with Maslach, C., et al., (2001), who identified three core dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. In the context of lecturers, emotional exhaustion may manifest as a lack of enthusiasm and energy to engage with students effectively. Depersonalization may lead to a detachment from students, hindering lecturers' ability to establish meaningful connections. Reduced personal accomplishment may result in feelings of inadequacy, impeding lecturers' capacity to deliver high-quality teaching (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). However, Chen et al., (2019) have a contrasting view that those who experience high levels of job demands, such as workload and emotional demands, are more likely to experience burnout and reduced well-being. Furthermore, Bakker et al., (2014) ascertain that reduced well-being can also lead to lower academic performance, such as decreased engagement in teaching and research activities. The well-being of lecturers is an important factor that can impact their academic performance and the overall success of the educational institution. Therefore, it is essential to identify the factors that contribute to lecturers' well-being and explore effective interventions to improve their well-being and performance.

However, World Health Organisation (2014) defines mental health as state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. We adopt a multi-dimensional perspective on wellbeing which acknowledges the different dimensions of health – physical, social, emotional and psychological. These dimensions overlap and interrelate (Danby and Hamilton, 2016). Wellbeing is an aspect of mental health which affects people's participation in daily life.

Definitions of stress tend to focus on the adverse reactions that people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them (HSE, 2017). Not all stressors are detrimental to health; some act as motivators. However, when stress starts to affect people's participation in daily life it can then result in poor mental health. Anxiety is used as a general term for several disorders that cause nervousness, turmoil, fear, apprehension, panic, and worrying (Bouras and Holt, 2007). When anxiety is a selective response to specific circumstances it can be a positive sign of psychological

well-being. However, anxiety disorder is a pathological disorder which disrupts the routine course of daily life.

The problem of lecturers stress is pervasive. It is evident across all sectors of education and across countries (Gray et al, 2017) and results in burnout, lower job satisfaction and low productivity. Lecturers are consistently reported to experience an increased risk of developing mental ill health (Stansfeld et al, 2011; Kidger et al, 2016). Lecturers' wellbeing is influenced by factors such as life satisfaction and personal happiness (hedonic perspective) and positive psychological functioning. Lecturers are able to demonstrate positive psychological functioning when they are able to form good interpersonal relationships with others, have a sense of autonomy and competence and when they have opportunities for personal growth (Harding et al, 2019). School climate influences lecturers' daily experiences in school. It is shaped by the school ethos which is established by the senior leadership team. Limiting lecturers' agency can result in diminished their wellbeing, which detrimentally impacts on their productivity (Beck et al, 2011).

Statement to the Problem

Lecturers in the 21st century always face stressful situations that can affect their well-being in the workplace. There are numerous conflicts and problems in the education field that still cannot be resolved until today. The issue of job satisfaction and workload are some hot topics among industrial workers and educators. Currently, many teachers often complain and feel dissatisfied with their job [34]. According to the feeling of dissatisfaction occurs when an individual's need is not fulfilled. An unhealthy work environment not only affects the employees' motivation, but also employees' satisfaction, social relationship, performance, and health. Thus, several aspects need to be considered such as the provision of a conducive working environment that meets the lecturers' well-being requirements at school, and the role of school leaders in managing the work environment and lecturers' well-being.

Research Questions

1. How does the support system provided by the institution affect the mental and emotional well-being of lecturers and their productivity?
2. How do stress and burnout affect the productivity of lecturers?
3. How does the mental and emotional well-being of lecturers relate to their productivity?

Review

Institutional Support and Lecturers' Well-being

Institutional support refers to the provision of resources, policies, and practices by educational institutions to meet the needs and promote the well-being of their faculty members (Kinman & Jones, 2008). It includes measures such as, mentoring programs, professional development opportunities, workload management, and access to counselling services (Kinman & Jones, 2008). It encompasses various measures, such as providing opportunities for professional development, granting access to research funding, offering administrative assistance, and acknowledging scholarly accomplishments (Baldrige & Veiga, 2001). One key factor that impacts the mental and emotional well-being of lecturers is the level of support and resources available to them (Smith, 2019). This implies that the aura of institutional support will have a significant influence on the mental and emotional well-being of lecturers. This support encompasses various aspects such as workload management, professional development opportunities, mentoring programs, access to counselling services, research support and

funding, administrative support, recognition, and rewards for scholarly achievements, all of which contribute to promoting positive mental health outcomes among lecturers.

Workload Management: Research suggests that excessive workloads and job demands can negatively affect lecturers' mental health and emotional well-being (Deary et al., 2017). Institutions that prioritize workload management through fair distribution of responsibilities and reasonable expectations can alleviate stress and prevent burnout among lecturers (Kinman & Jones, 2010). They argue that institutions should strive to create an environment where lecturers have a manageable workload that aligns with their capabilities and resources. This includes providing support mechanisms such as appropriate staffing levels, realistic deadlines, and opportunities for collaboration and time management. By prioritizing workload management, institutions can create a conducive work environment that promotes lecturers' well-being and productivity. This not only benefits individual lecturers but also contributes to the overall success and effectiveness of the academic institution.

Flexible work arrangements can be a way in which institutions offer support. Scholars argue that offering flexible work arrangements can contribute to better workload management and enhance lecturers' well-being (Kossek, Gettings, & Misra, 2021; Perrewé, Rosen, & Maslach, 2012). Nonetheless, it is suggested that institutions offer choices of remote work, flexible hours of work, or job sharing to accommodate lecturers' individual needs and preferences. This flexibility can help reduce the strain caused by excessive workloads and promote a healthier work-life balance (Haggis and Williams 2011). By addressing workload management through strategies such as flexible work arrangements and training and development initiatives, institutions can create a supportive and sustainable work environment for lecturers, leading to improved mental and emotional well-being and increased productivity.

Professional Development Opportunities and Mentoring: Institutional support that offers professional development opportunities, such as workshops, conferences, and training programs, enhances lecturers' skills and self-efficacy. These opportunities contribute to job satisfaction and a sense of competence, positively impacting lecturers' mental well-being (Kinman & Jones, 2018). Institutions that offer ample professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and conferences, contribute to the enhancement of lecturers' knowledge and skills. Continuous learning and training positively impact lecturer productivity by keeping them updated with the latest teaching methodologies, subject knowledge, and research techniques (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2019).

When formal mentoring programs are provided, they tend to foster a supportive social environment that facilitates positive relationships among lecturers. Such support networks can enhance lecturers' emotional well-being, provide a sense of belonging, and create opportunities for sharing experiences and coping strategies (Baker & Pifer, 2011). Additionally, providing training and development opportunities to lecturers can support workload management by enhancing their skills and efficiency. The importance of continuous professional development in equipping lecturers with the necessary tools to manage their work effectively can however not be over emphasized. Offering training programs on time management, organizational skills, and stress reduction techniques can empower lecturers to handle their workload more efficiently and mitigate the negative impact on their well-being.

Stress, Burnout, and Mental and Emotional Well-being on Lecturers' Productivity

The role of lecturers in academia is crucial for education and student development. However, it comes with challenges such as stress, burnout, and issues related to mental and emotional well-being. Recognizing the impact of these factors on lecturers' productivity is essential for providing effective support from educational institutions. Numerous studies have emphasized the connection between these challenges and lecturers' productivity.

Stress and Lecturers' Productivity: Work-related stress incorporated in the form of excessive workload, time pressure, and job demands, can have detrimental effects on lecturers' productivity. The burden of stress on lecturers can result in several negative consequences that impair their optimal functioning in the academic setting. Firstly, heightened stress levels can lead to a decrease in concentration, hindering lecturers' ability to focus on their teaching and deliver engaging and effective lessons to students. The impaired concentration can hinder the transfer of knowledge and negatively impact the learning experience for students (Kyriacou, 2001).

Secondly, work-related stress can impair decision-making capabilities, challenging lecturers' sound judgment and appropriate response to various academic situations. This can negatively impact the quality of their teaching, evaluation of student performance, and overall classroom management. Furthermore, it is imperative to recognize that persistent stress can trigger emotional and psychological consequences for lecturers. Feelings of anxiety, fatigue, and burnout are common in high-stress environments. These negative emotions can further hinder lecturers' ability to engage effectively with their students and establish meaningful connections in the learning process. As a result, the quality of interaction and communication between lecturers and students may be compromised, impacting students' learning outcomes and overall academic experience (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).

Burnout and Lecturers' Productivity: Burnout is a psychological response to chronic work-related stress and is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Lecturers experiencing burnout often feel overwhelmed, and emotionally drained, and have a decreased sense of accomplishment in their work. Burnout has a significant negative impact on lecturers' productivity. Emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment associated with burnout can result in decreased motivation, engagement, and creativity in their teaching and research activities. This can ultimately hinder their ability to meet academic expectations and contribute effectively to their roles (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

The consequences of lecturers' reduced productivity due to stress and burnout extend beyond their well-being. They can negatively impact the quality of education provided to students, as lecturers may struggle to effectively engage with students, meet academic expectations, and contribute meaningfully to their roles as educators. Therefore, higher education institutions must prioritize the well-being of lecturers and address factors that contribute to stress and burnout. Implementing supportive measures such as workload management, providing resources for stress reduction and mental health support, promoting work-life balance, and fostering a positive and supportive organizational climate can help mitigate the negative impact of stress and burnout on lecturers' productivity and overall job satisfaction.

Stress and burnout are closely interrelated and can have a reciprocal relationship with lecturers' productivity. High levels of chronic stress can increase the risk of developing burnout, while

burnout can further exacerbate stress levels, creating a vicious cycle that negatively impacts productivity (Maslach et al., 2001). The relationship between stress, burnout, and lecturers' productivity is evident. High levels of work-related stress can lead to burnout, resulting in decreased productivity, motivation, and job satisfaction among lecturers. Understanding and addressing these factors are crucial for educational institutions to create supportive environments that promote lecturers' well-being, reduce stress levels, and ultimately enhance their productivity.

The well-being and productivity of lecturers are critical factors in maintaining high-quality education in higher education institutions (Smith et al., 2019). Stress and burnout can significantly impact lecturers' productivity, leading to reduced job performance and satisfaction (Maslach et al., 2001). Stress, which can arise from factors such as excessive workload, time pressure, and job demands, can have detrimental effects on lecturers' productivity (Maslach et al., 2001). It can impair their ability to concentrate, make decisions, and efficiently carry out their teaching and research responsibilities.

Consequently, this can hinder their overall performance in delivering effective education to students. Burnout, a psychological response to chronic work-related stress, further exacerbate the negative impact on lecturers' productivity (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Lecturers experiencing burnout often feel overwhelmed, and emotionally drained, and experience a decreased sense of fulfilment in their work. These feelings of burnout can lead to decreased motivation, disengagement, and reduced productivity in their professional roles.

Mental and Emotional Well-being and Lecturers' Productivity: Lecturers with positive mental health and well-being are more likely to exhibit higher levels of productivity. Positive mental health encompasses factors such as emotional resilience, self-efficacy, and work engagement, which contribute to lecturers' ability to effectively manage their workload, engage with students, and perform their teaching and research responsibilities (Bakker et al., 2014). On the other hand, emotional well-being, including positive emotions and job satisfaction, plays a significant role in lecturers' productivity. When lecturers experience positive emotions and job satisfaction, they are more motivated, energized, and committed to their work, leading to increased productivity and overall job performance (Hakanen et al., 2006).

Some factors may influence the relationship between mental and emotional well-being and lecturers' productivity. These include workload and work-life balance, and supportive organizational climate. An excessive workload and a lack of work-life balance can negatively impact lecturers' mental and emotional well-being, leading to decreased productivity. Institutions that prioritize workload management and support lecturers in achieving a healthy work-life balance are more likely to enhance their mental and emotional well-being, resulting in increased productivity (Guglielmi et al., 2016). While a supportive organizational climate that values lecturers' mental and emotional well-being promotes productivity. Institutions that prioritize a positive work environment, open communication, and supportive policies create conditions that enhance lecturers' well-being and, consequently, their productivity (McCarthy et al., 2019).

However, lecturers' mental and emotional well-being can be enhanced by providing access to employee assistance programs and support services such as counselling services, mental health workshops, and stress management programs, (Cameron et al., 2018); which will help address mental health concerns, reduce stress levels, and support lecturers in maintaining their well-being. Investing

in professional development and training opportunities for lecturers contributes to their mental and emotional well-being. Such programs can enhance their knowledge, skills, and confidence, reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction, ultimately improving productivity (Goleman, 2017).

The relationship between lecturers' mental and emotional well-being and productivity is evident. Positive mental health, emotional well-being, and job satisfaction are associated with increased productivity among lecturers. Factors such as workload management, work-life balance, a supportive organizational climate, and access to support services and professional development programs are essential for enhancing lecturers' mental and emotional well-being and, subsequently, their productivity.

Methodology

Research design is the "conceptual blueprint within which research is conducted" (Tomaszewski, Zarestky, & Gonzalez, 2020, p. 2). For this study, a semi-structured interview-based case study design will be adopted. This approach allows for a deep exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives while providing flexibility in the interview process (Jnanathapaswi, 2021). By selecting a semi-structured interview-based approach, the study aims to capture rich and nuanced data through open-ended questioning (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The design offers an appropriate balance between structure and flexibility, allowing for adaptation during the interview process to explore emerging themes and ideas (Kabir, 2016). Moreover, ethical considerations are incorporated to ensure participant rights and well-being (Creswell, 2014). The researcher emphasised the importance of anticipating potential obstacles and planning strategies to address them to uphold the integrity of the study (Bryman, 2016). Through the semi-structured interview-based case study design, this study endeavours to offer a comprehensive view of participants' perspectives, ensuring the research objectives are met with rigour and depth.

The data gathering approach for this study will primarily rely on qualitative research methods, specifically employing in-depth interviews. Qualitative interviews are a valuable tool for gathering rich and detailed information about individuals' experiences, thoughts, and emotions (Creswell, 2014). Through in-depth interviews, the research aims to create a safe and open space for lecturers to share their perspectives on mental and emotional well-being within the context of their academic profession. These interviews will be semi-structured, allowing for flexibility and spontaneity in the conversation, while also ensuring that key topics and themes are explored (Berg & Lune, 2016). Participants were selected purposefully to ensure a diverse representation of lecturers from various disciplines and institutions. The sample size will be established through data saturation, signifying that the process of data collection will persist until interviews no longer yield novel insights or themes. The interviews were conducted through virtual platforms, based on participants' preferences and availability.

This research used semi-structured interviews involving two participants as the primary data collection method. Individual interviews, a widely used qualitative data-gathering method, foster a dialogue between the researcher and participants, facilitating deeper insights (Jones & Johnson, 2022; Smith et al., 2023). Researchers take on a reflective role, remaining aware of biases and preconceptions, allowing participants to express their thoughts freely (Anderson & Davis, 2021). Individual interviews capture participants' perspectives and meanings on lecturers' mental and emotional well-being and academic productivity (Taylor & Williams, 2023). The insights gained from this approach will contribute valuable information to the research on lecturers' mental and emotional

well-being and may inform the development of supportive measures and policies to enhance their overall health and well-being.

This study employed purposive sampling. Those interested were emailed further materials including debriefing form: appendix 6, information sheets: appendix 2, participant consent form: appendix 4, email and follow up email for participation: appendix 3 and 7, interview guide: appendix 5 and ethical guidelines: appendix 1. The nature of this research warranted participants self-identifying under the BAME label. This aspect of the research is vital as individuals must feel empowered and comfortable in their association with the term BAME to combat assumptions I held as the researcher about their identity. All the participants are United Kingdom lecturers from Sheffield Hallam University, with one man and one woman, both having over 10 years of teaching experience.

The methodology adopted, which places major emphasis on personal realities supported by a subjectivist infrastructure, is what justifies the modest sample size (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Although results won't be generalizable, the aim of this study is to provide deep insight into participants' perspectives rather than generalising individual experiences.

Data Analysis – Deductive Thematic Analysis

Deductive thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis approach where researchers begin with a pre-existing theoretical framework or predetermined themes in mind, derived from prior theories or research questions, before analysing the data (Creswell, 2014). To guide the investigation, the researcher adopted a deductive thematic analysis approach, drawing on the theoretical framework of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. Through a qualitative interview approach, the researcher planned and conducted in-depth interviews with lecturers, aiming to gain deep insights into their experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013) on workplace well-being. The interviews explored various facets, including the challenges posed by job demands, the availability of job resources, coping mechanisms, and factors influencing their academic productivity.

In the data analysis phase, a deductive thematic analysis was employed. The researcher developed predefined themes based on the JD-R model (job demands and job resources) as codes to organize and categorize the interview data. By applying this deductive approach, the study sought to examine how these themes interacted and influenced lecturers' mental and emotional well-being and their overall academic performance. The analysis also delved into potential mediating factors that might clarify the relationship between job demands/resources and lecturers' well-being. Moreover, contextual factors such as institutional culture and support systems were considered to understand how the JD-R model operated within the unique academic environment. By interpreting and discussing the findings, the research aimed to draw meaningful conclusions about the implications for lecturers' well-being and productivity.

Conclusion

It is therefore concluded that the significance of positive working relationships with colleagues and students as a crucial job resource that contributes to a supportive work environment. Social support emerged as a vital factor in helping lecturers cope with job demands and stress, positively influencing their mental well-being and ultimately leading to improved productivity. This research underscores the importance of considering both job demands and job resources in understanding lecturers' well-being and productivity. The presence of social support and positive

working relationships emerged as key elements in fostering a conducive work environment for lecturers.

Organizations should focus on promoting a supportive work culture that encourages social interactions and strengthens collegial relationships among lecturers and students. The practical implications drawn from this study emphasize the importance for academic institutions to prioritize lecturers' well-being. By implementing strategies that promote social support, manage job demands, and integrate well-being programs, institutions can create an environment that supports the mental and emotional well-being of their academic staff, ultimately leading to improved productivity and a healthier academic community. Continuous evaluation and a comprehensive approach considering various job resources and factors are crucial to ensure sustained positive outcomes in the long term.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made:

1. Adequate support for workload management and administrative tasks should be prioritized by academic institutions.
2. Initiatives that promote social interactions and facilitate positive working relationships among lecturers and students should be implemented.
3. Comprehensive well-being programs addressing mental, emotional, and other aspects of lecturers' well-being should be introduced.
4. Training sessions should raise awareness among academic staff and students about the importance of social support and positive working relationships in fostering a healthy work environment.
5. Regular assessment and continuous adaptation of interventions and well-being programs based on feedback from lecturers and students are essential.

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