

Presenteeism in the Education Sector: A Cross-Sectional Study of Psychological Distress Among Malaysia Academics In Higher Education Institution

Nurul Atiqah Mohd Azlan^{1*}, Syed Jamal Abdul Nasir Syed Mohamad²

¹*Fakulti Komunikasi dan Pengajian Media, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam Selangor*

²*Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam Selangor*

Author's Email Address: ¹atiqahazlan@uitm.edu.my, ²syedjamal145@uitm.edu.my

Received Date: 15 May 2025

Accepted Date: 20 July 2025

Revised Date: 17 July 2025

Published Date: 31 July 2025

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Presenteeism refers to employees attending work despite health issues, reduced productivity, or low psychological engagement. While it occurs across various sectors, it is particularly common in education, surpassing even healthcare. This trend reflects the demanding nature of academic roles, which require teaching, student support, and professional development. Academics, often intrinsically motivated, tend to prioritize their duties, attending work despite physical or psychological distress. Psychological distress—such as anxiety, burnout, and emotional strain—plays a significant role in influencing presenteeism. Therefore, the purpose of this cross-sectional study was to better understand the psychological distress has a significant relationship on presenteeism among academics in Malaysia. Using a quantitative research method, 382 academics from Malaysian public and private universities were chosen by stratified random sampling. This research was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to assess relationships and statistical significance. The study found a significant negative relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism. This implies that as psychological distress increases, the intensity of presenteeism decreases possibly due to mental exhaustion eventually forcing withdrawal from work. These results underscore the urgent need for institutional strategies aimed at addressing psychological distress among academic staff. These strategies should include reducing excessive workloads and expectations, increasing available resources, maintaining optimal staffing ratios to meet demands effectively, and cultivating a culture of self-care and well-being among faculty and staff. The article concludes with further discussion and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: academics, Malaysia, presenteeism, psychological distress

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of presenteeism is increasingly common and presents challenges in accurately assessing its effects on workplace productivity (Wee et al., 2019). Although it is generally associated with diminished performance, the underlying motivations for engaging in presenteeism significantly influence the extent of its impact (Henderson & Smith, 2022). In many cases, employees may be physically present but unable to perform their tasks effectively due to illness or health-related concerns.

This behaviour could reflect a misinterpretation on how workers or employees should act properly or, seen in another way, a destructive management of motivation (Rodríguez Cifuentes et al., 2020).

Presenteeism, a term introduced by Professor Cary Cooper in the 1990s, refers to the tendency of employees to work beyond their required hours, often driven by concerns related to job insecurity or fears about employment stability. This behaviour, in which employees choose to stay at work despite illness or other impairments, reflect a growing trend documented in a variety of occupational settings around the world (Chander et al., 2023) and presenteeism as a common incidence across cultures (Daniels et al., 2021).

This observation is reinforced by recent findings from Kinman and Wray (2022), who emphasized the detrimental effects of presenteeism on the health of academic staff, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging in work while unwell heightens the risk of burnout, fatigue, and diminished job performance, while also exacerbating existing health conditions. The surge in presenteeism during the pandemic has intensified these challenges, placing further strain on the well-being of academics. In this regard, tackling presenteeism and establishing a culture that prioritises employee health and safety is critical for reducing the negative repercussions of working while sick. As a result, affected individuals may have a reduced ability to perform their tasks effectively, resulting in either increased sickness absence, also known as absenteeism, or the persistence of difficulties in carrying out tasks while working, a phenomenon known as presenteeism (Aronsson et al., 2020). Recent research highlights that burnout among academics is a significant concern, with higher levels observed across personal, occupational, and client-related dimensions compared to non-academics (Mohamed, S. et al., 2021). This issue contributes to heightened psychological distress and diminished job satisfaction, with broader implications for the academic sector in Malaysia. Addressing burnout is particularly vital in the Malaysian context, where both public and private universities are integral to the nation's educational development. Public universities, in particular recognized for their emphasis on research, innovation, and knowledge dissemination (Khan, S. K. et al., 2022) must confront the challenges associated with academic burnout to sustain educational quality and progress.

Presenteeism among Malaysian academics has garnered increasing scholarly attention. Naidu et al. (2020) investigated the underlying causes of this phenomenon in both public and private higher education institutions, identifying factors such as excessive responsibilities and the need to compensate for high workloads as key contributors. Their findings suggest that providing academic staff with additional rest days or leave entitlements may help alleviate the burdens associated with these responsibilities, thereby reducing presenteeism. Moreover, academic professionals experiencing elevated levels of psychological distress are more likely to engage in presenteeism, as such distress can impair decision-making, diminish work engagement, and negatively impact overall well-being. Psychological distress encompasses a range of adverse emotional states and symptoms that undermine an individual's capacity to manage environmental stressors effectively (Ning et al., 2023).

Given the many ongoing disputes over Malaysia's education system and its future significance, it is vital to focus on educators, academicians, lecturers, and teachers who make significant contributions to this field. Health difficulties and its impacts on academic workers have been a long-standing concern. The issue of presenteeism's negative impacts on health has recently gained attention. Presenteeism has been a major topic of discussion throughout the last decade because of its negative impact on productivity and is influenced by a variety of factors.

Contributing factors of presenteeism such as excessive workloads, high job demands, and difficulties in achieving work-life balance significantly heighten this emotional strain (Nasution et al., 2022). Notably, lecturers in Malaysia report working, on average, 15 hours more per week than their counterparts in some neighboring countries—an intensity that exacerbates their psychological challenges (Panatik et al., 2022). This heightened psychological distress has a strong association with presenteeism, as academics may feel compelled to work despite compromised well-being in order to

meet institutional expectations. The consequences of presenteeism extend beyond the individual, affecting students as well. Academics experiencing distress and reduced engagement may be less effective in delivering quality instruction and support, potentially impairing students' learning experiences and overall satisfaction (Haider et al., 2024). The relationship suggests that there is a significant relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism. Thus, the researchers in this study proposed the subsequent hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Distress

Psychological distress refers to a state of emotional discomfort often accompanied by physical symptoms. It is commonly manifested through experiences such as sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, tension, restlessness, fatigue, headaches, forgetfulness, and diminished energy levels (Belay et al., 2021). A range of occupational and organizational factors may contribute to the onset of psychological distress, including excessive job demands, limited social support, low autonomy, job insecurity, interpersonal conflicts with colleagues or supervisors, difficulties in maintaining work-life balance, adverse organizational culture, ineffective management practices, as well as the nature and demands of the work itself and the physical working environment (Belay et al., 2021).

Mohamed et al. (2021) identified elevated levels of psychological distress among academic staff in their study. These findings align with those of a national survey conducted by Winefield et al. (2003) across Australian universities, involving 8,700 participants, which also reported significant psychological distress within the academic community. In the Malaysian context, psychological distress among academics has become a growing concern, with recent studies indicating a marked rise in stress levels among both academic and non-academic employees. For instance, research conducted 8.7% had symptoms of depression, 50.1% were anxious, and 14.8% had symptoms of stress among university staff at public university in Malaysia (Manaf et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study found that most academics exhibited mild to moderate levels of burnout related to work, personal, and client interactions, with job satisfaction showing a negative correlation with burnout levels (Nasution et al., 2022). Psychological distress manifesting as depression and anxiety has been shown to adversely affect both mental and physical health, as well as job performance.

High levels of psychological distress indicate a deterioration in mental well-being and may signal the presence of conditions such as anxiety and depression (Viertiö et al., 2021). Recognizing psychological distress as a valuable mental health indicator provides critical insights for monitoring emotional well-being and facilitates the early detection of potential mental health concerns. Viertiö et al. (2021) identified psychological distress as a prevalent issue, reporting that 50.7% of participants in their study experienced moderate to severe levels of distress—a general mental health condition characterized by symptoms of anxiety, low mood, and physical manifestations. As noted by Drapeau et al. (2012), psychological distress is marked by emotional states such as vulnerability, sadness, fear, excessive worry, agitation, intrusive thoughts, and social withdrawal.

Presenteeism

Presenteeism, a subtle yet increasingly prevalent issue within the evolving academic landscape, has garnered growing concern, often overshadowed by the more conspicuous problem of absenteeism. This behaviour, characterized by individuals being physically present at work despite experiencing psychological distress or disengagement, has become a pressing challenge within higher education. Although its impact on productivity and well-being is significant, presenteeism frequently goes

unnoticed due to its less visible nature, thereby facilitating its persistent rise within academic institutions (Naidu et al., 2020). In the context of academia—where commitment and passion are often equated with professional success—presenteeism affects not only individual academics but also the broader academic environment. As noted by Biron et al. (2021), presenteeism continues to be a prominent work-related phenomenon even in the post-pandemic era.

Presenteeism in Higher Education Institution

In higher education institutions, a culture of presenteeism has become increasingly embedded, particularly within the framework of the entrepreneurial university. Academics often feel compelled to work through illness to uphold a positive professional image and conform to institutional expectations (Bone, 2019; Jaye et al., 2020). This phenomenon aligns with Bone et al.'s (2018) analysis of precariously employed academic staff, which suggests that overcommitment and the need for visibility in the workplace are frequently driven by underlying fears of job insecurity and potential exclusion. The pervasive use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), such as smartphones and instant messaging platforms, has further exacerbated this issue by extending work responsibilities beyond standard hours. Employees are often subjected to a constant flow of instructions and inquiries from management, even during periods of illness or official sick leave (Cooper & Lu, 2016). Ruhle and Süß (2019) refer to this as a voluntary 'presentistic culture,' where attendance during illness is seemingly a personal choice, yet is implicitly expected and facilitated by digital connectivity. Consequently, such expectations cultivate an organizational environment in which employees feel obligated to remain present at work, despite being unwell, due to fears of punitive consequences for taking legitimate sick leave (Hadjisolomou, 2016; Taylor et al., 2010). This culture is underpinned by a unitarist assumption that individuals must remain loyal and committed to the institution's success, even when institutions fail to provide job security, fair working conditions, or adequate safeguards for employee health and well-being (Bone et al., 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to the operations of various sectors, including higher education institutions (HEIs). Although HEIs have traditionally been central to societal advancement through the education of future leaders and professionals, the pandemic's precise implications for specific domains such as sustainability education remain insufficiently explored (Vahdati et al., 2023). One of the notable consequences observed during this period was a rise in presenteeism among academic personnel. Evidence indicates that the transition to remote work, coupled with intensified job demands, contributed to this increase. For example, a study conducted in the UK revealed that the proportion of academic staff engaged in flexible working arrangements rose from 44% prior to the pandemic to 90% afterward (Mitsakis et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these flexible arrangements also facilitated a form of "virtual presenteeism," with 28% of academics continuing to work despite illness from COVID-19, even after notifying their supervisors. The abrupt shift in pedagogical and research approaches further amplified workload pressures and posed challenges to achieving work-life balance (Leal Filho et al., 2024). Notably, presenteeism was already a persistent issue within higher education prior to the pandemic. A study conducted in UK universities reported that approximately 88% of academic staff had, at least occasionally, engaged in work while unwell (Kinman & Wray, 2018).

Both public and private universities in Malaysia are committed to delivering high-quality education through comprehensive curriculum and diverse program offerings. Students can choose from a wide range of disciplines, including engineering, business, humanities, and healthcare. According to the most recent rankings issued by AppliedHE, a recognised higher education ranking and ranking service, Malaysian institutions of higher learning have emerged as strong contenders in the Southeast Asian landscape. Notably, Malaysian institutions dominated the top ten public and private universities in the area, demonstrating the country's growing reputation for academic prowess. Among public universities, four Malaysian institutions secured coveted positions within the top 10, with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia emerging as the highest-ranked. In the realm of private universities, six

Malaysian institutions showcased their prowess, with Sunway University clinching the coveted first place spot. These rankings, as underlined by Jane Francisca (2023), demonstrate Malaysia's commitment to building a strong higher education industry and developing academic institutions that constantly excel on regional platforms.

The role of academics in Higher Education Intuition is huge after Covid-19 crisis. Previously, a lecturer's experience in subject matter, fostering a healthy academic learning environment, information technology, delivery style, and understanding the role of university in a student's life trajectory will be used to engage students in any academic program. Unfortunately, Academics are frequently forced to take on the role of counsellor due to circumstances and instant accessibility due to Covid-19 crisis, which required students to isolate themselves. Students will continue to approach lecturers with mental health difficulties; this is an unavoidable reality. (Heim & Heim, 2021).

Thus, research on presenteeism in the world of education is important to do (Tantri, Norhamida, & Prasetyo (2022). Studies have indicated that numbers of variables, including psychological distress, quality of life, and social support from supervisors, can affect presenteeism among higher education workers. It has been discovered that having social support at work is crucial for addressing presenteeism and fostering a higher standard of living. (Magalhães, Barbosa, & Borges, 2022). According to the framework developed by Karanika-Murray and Biron (2019), academics appear to work when sick for dysfunctional reasons, most typically to manage a large workload (Kinman, & Wray (2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design, focusing exclusively on academics from both public and private universities in Malaysia. A sampling unit is a basic unit that contains a single element or a group of elements of the population to be sampled. The sampling unit selected is often dependent upon the sampling frame. For this research, academics in Malaysia be the unit analysis. Academics who work in Klang Valley either Public or Private Universities, male and female which consist of Malay, Indian and Chinese ethnicities.

The researchers chose Klang Valley as the research location based on its significant role in Malaysia's economic growth and its concentration of higher education institutions. There were 11 universities that have been selected based on QS world universities ranking, which were ranked among top 1000 universities in the world, as of 8 June 2021. There were five public universities listed namely University Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, International Islamic University and Universiti Teknologi MARA. UiTM is the biggest university in Malaysia that consists of 34 campuses, 4 colleges of study, 13 faculties, and 9 academic centres all over the country. For this study, the researcher only focused on UiTM located in Klang Valley.

For private university, there were six (6) universities listed namely Taylors University, UCSI University (Kuala Lumpur Campus), Management and Science University, Sunway University, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman as the population of the study. UCSI University has three (3) campuses in Kuala Lumpur, Springhill (Port Dickson) and Kuching, Malaysia but the researcher only focused on the Kuala Lumpur Campus. UTAR has two (2) campuses, one of them located in Perak, and the other one in Sungai Long, Kuala Lumpur (Klang Valley)

A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was utilized to ensure representativeness across different strata within the academic population. While simple random sampling is generally recognized for its convenience and cost-effectiveness, stratified sampling was selected to enhance the precision and accuracy of the sample by reflecting the proportions of key subgroups in the population. This methodological approach enabled more reliable generalizations and robust statistical analysis, aligning with the objectives of the study.

A minimum sample size of 377 was determined for a population of 20,000 based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) guidelines and the Raosoft sample size calculator. Data were collected through an online survey, yielding 401 responses. After removing outliers to maintain data quality, the final sample consisted of 382 valid responses. This exceeds the minimum requirement, confirming the adequacy and generalizability of the sample.

The data analysis process involved organizing responses according to constructs and examining their relationships. The completed questionnaires were first edited, coded, and classified before being entered into IBM SPSS for descriptive analysis. Subsequently, PLS-SEM 4.0 was used to assess the structural model, including the predictive power and relationships among constructs.

For the psychological distress scale, Psychological Distress Inventory (PDI) (Morasso et al, 1996) the self-administered questionnaire comprising of 13 items abbreviated and adapted from the Psychiatric Symptom Index. For the Presenteeism scale, the English language version of the Work Role Functioning Questionnaire (WRFQ) (Abma et al.,2018) assessed the impact of a health problem on work performance. The questionnaire had 27 items graded on a five-point Likert scale (never difficult = 0 to always difficult = 4) corresponding to the percentage of time, during the preceding 4 weeks, that employees had difficulty in fulfilling their work requirements.

FINDING

Demographic

In this study there were 382 Malaysian academics involved, 292(76.4%) of them from the public university while the other 90 (23.6%) represent private university. As shown in Table 1, the highest numbers length of services among participants were around 11 to 20 years of services 153(40.1%), followed by less than 5 years length of services 83 (21.7%) respondents, then 5-10 years of services 81 (21.2%) and more than 20 years of services is the minimum number which are 65 (17%) of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents, N=382

Demographic factors	Criteria	Mean/Frequency	SD/Percentage
Type of Higher education	Public university	292	76.4
	Private university	90	23.6
Length of services	Less than 5 years	83	21.7
	5-10 years	81	21.2
	11-20 years	153	40.1
	More than 20 years	65	17

Assessing Structural Model

As suggested by Hair et al. (2022) and Cain et al. (2017) the researcher assessed the multivariate skewness and kurtosis. As shown in the Table 2, the results showed that the data we have collected was not multivariate normal, Mardia's multivariate skewness ($\beta = 2.688$, $p < 0.01$) and Mardia's multivariate kurtosis ($\beta = 52.146$, $p < 0.01$), thus following the suggestions of Becker et al. (2023) we reported the path coefficients, the standard errors, t-values and p-values for the structural model using a 10,000-sample re-sample bootstrapping procedure (Ramayah et al. 2018). Also based on the criticism of Hahn and Ang (2017) that p-values are not good criterion for testing the significance of hypothesis and

suggested to use a combination of criterions such as p-values, confidence intervals and effect sizes. Later in Table 4 shows the summary of the criterions we have used to test the hypothesis developed.

Table 2: Mardia's Multivariate Skewness and Kurtosis

	β	z	p-value
Skewness	2.688	171.189	1.340039e-13
Kurtosis	52.146	4.136	3.532760e-05

Next, in Table 3 the researchers tested the effect on Psychological Distress on Presenteeism, with an R^2 of 0.239 which indicates that Psychological Distress explains 23.9% of the variance in Presenteeism which gives support for H1. There is a negative relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism. As advised by Falk and Miller (1992) R^2 values be equal to or greater than 0.10 for the variance explained by a specific endogenous construct to be deemed adequate. Cohen (1988) advised that R^2 values for endogenous latent variables be evaluated as follows: 0.26 (substantial), 0.13 (moderate), and 0.02 (weak).

Table 3: R-square Overview

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
Psychological Distress	0.413	0.406
Presenteeism	0.239	0.229

In Table 4, the researchers included all the criteria to test the direct relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism. From the result obtained, ($\beta = -0.124$, $p < 0.01$) a negative value of β indicates the negative relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism, and $p < 0.01$ indicates statistical significance. Since p values is 0.002, the relationship is statistically significant.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-values	p-values	BCI LL	BCI UL	F2	VIF
H1	Psychological Distress →Presenteeism	-0.170	0.060	2.825	0.002	-0.269	-0.071	0.022	1.702

Note: The researcher use 95% confidence interval with a bootstrapping of 10,000

A comprehensive analysis using PLS-SEM 4 was done in confirming the hypothesis in this study.

H1: There is a significant relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism.

Research indicates that there was a significant relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism among academics in Higher Education Institution in Malaysia. From the result obtained, there was a negative relationship between psychological distress ($\beta = -0.124$, $p < 0.01$), and presenteeism. By testing the effect on psychological distress on presenteeism, with R^2 of 0.239 which

indicates that psychological distress explains 23.9% of the variance in Presenteeism which gives support for H1.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings revealed a strong inverse relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism, implying that people with lower levels of psychological distress are more likely to engage in presenteeism. Academics often face high job demands, including teaching responsibilities, research obligations, and administrative duties. These demands can contribute to increased psychological distress, which in turn may affect their willingness or ability to engage in presenteeism. Research indicates that when academics experience heightened psychological distress due to overwhelming workloads, they may be less likely to attend work while being sick, leading to a decrease in presenteeism (Côté et al., 2021).

The observed negative relationship indicates that higher levels of psychological distress may lead to lower levels of presenteeism. This can be interpreted in several ways. Individuals experiencing significant psychological distress, such as anxiety or depression, may find it challenging to perform effectively at work, leading them to take time off rather than attend work while unwell. This finding supports and extends the work of Quigley et al. (2022), who emphasized that presenteeism is not merely the act of being physically present at work despite illness or stress, but is deeply intertwined with psychological states such as mental exhaustion, emotional suffering, and burnout. The study highlighted that while mild distress may initially drive individuals to persist at work due to internal or external pressure (e.g., workload, sense of duty, fear of judgment), sustained psychological distress often leads to a tipping point. At this stage, the individual becomes psychologically disengaged, and the mental cost of remaining present at work outweighs their motivation or perceived responsibility to do so. In essence, as psychological distress intensifies, it undermines cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and motivation; all of which are necessary to maintain any form of productive presence. This deterioration may lead to withdrawal behavior, absenteeism, or even long-term disengagement from professional roles (Quigley et al., 2022). Thus, individuals may reduce or stop engaging in presenteeism as a self-protective response, prioritizing their mental well-being over workplace attendance.

This finding is similar with previous research done by Coutu et al, 2015 which underlining on psychological distress has negative association with presenteeism. Research suggests a negative relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism, implying that higher levels of psychological suffering are associated with lower levels of presenteeism. This negative association persists even after controlling for sex, short-term work absence, and social desirability. As a result, psychological distress is more likely to be related with decreased presenteeism than increased presenteeism among employees. Other than that, Miraglia and Johns (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of data from several occupations and discovered a consistent negative link between psychological distress and presenteeism. (Maurício, A. C., & Laranjeira, C., 2023) in their research also found that inverse relationship between psychological distress and presenteeism. Overall, this shows that the inverse association between psychological distress and presenteeism is also likely to hold true in academia.

Academics often enjoy more flexible work schedules compared to other professions, which can significantly influence their approach to managing psychological distress. This flexibility allows them to adjust their work hours and work from home, potentially enabling them to cope with mental health challenges in ways that may inadvertently encourage presenteeism. The flexibility in academic schedules may encourage some individuals to adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms (Mazzetti et al., 2019), such as working longer hours or neglecting self-care. According to Naidu et al. (2020), presenteeism among academic staff is closely associated with heightened levels of stress. Gaining a

clear understanding of this relationship is essential for effectively addressing the issue. It is imperative for university administrators to acknowledge the detrimental effects of presenteeism on the productivity, health, and overall well-being of academic personnel. Strategic interventions—such as reducing excessive job demands, enhancing institutional support and resources, and promoting self-care practices—are vital in mitigating presenteeism among lecturers and other academic employees.

Academics experiencing psychological distress might feel compelled to demonstrate commitment by continuing to work, which can exacerbate their mental health challenges. This phenomenon is particularly concerning in high-pressure academic environments, where the culture of productivity and achievement may discourage taking time off for mental health reasons.

CONCLUSION

Presenteeism can cause delayed healing, higher health risks, lower productivity, mistakes, accidents, and injuries. Furthermore, presenteeism can exacerbate pre-existing health difficulties, reduce people's well-being and potentially contribute to long-term detrimental impacts on their physical and mental health (Lohaus et al., 2021). Academic presenteeism can have long-term negative implications. This problem affects not just the individuals concerned, but also the entire academic environment and productivity. Presenteeism among academic staff might jeopardise the quality of their work, potentially resulting to poor results in research, teaching, or administrative responsibilities. Furthermore, this behaviour may set a precedent in academic circles, normalising working while sick and maintaining a culture of overwork. Implementing comprehensive methods is critical for combating presenteeism in academic environments. Tackling presenteeism in academia is critical not only for individuals' health and well-being, but also for upholding academic standards and integrity. Presenteeism may have an impact on advancement opportunities and incentives for academic professionals. Those who routinely work when unwell may be viewed as bad performers, harming their career growth and rewards (Naidu et al., 2020).

This research highlights the negative association between psychological distress and presenteeism. Consequently, the findings of this study will enrich the current literature of management, which has been largely focusing on phenomenon of presenteeism happens in Malaysia, among academic's public and private university in Malaysia. Combating presenteeism among academics in Malaysia requires a multifaceted approach that includes flexible work arrangements, robust health and wellness programs, supportive leadership, and a culture that prioritizes well-being. By focusing on these areas, academic institutions can reduce presenteeism, improve productivity, and enhance the overall well-being of their staff. These strategies should include reducing excessive workloads and expectations, increasing available resources, maintaining optimal staffing ratios to meet demands effectively, and cultivating a culture of self-care and well-being among faculty and staff. Institutions may create settings that promote productivity, engagement, and overall employee happiness by taking a holistic strategy that addresses the core reasons of presenteeism. These methods not only reduce the negative effects of presenteeism but also contribute to a better and more sustainable academic community. Universities must recognise the extent of sickness presenteeism among academics and establish ways to foster functional presenteeism while discouraging dysfunctional behaviours (Kinman & Wray, 2022).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge an appreciation to Universiti Teknologi MARA for the resources, the authors extend their sincere appreciation to all academic staff who participated in this study. special thank you goes to all academics who have participated in this study.

FUNDING

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Azlan, NAM took the lead in writing the manuscript as a postgraduate student and Mohamad SJANS. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis and manuscript as the main supervisor.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

We certify that the article is the Authors' and Co-Authors' original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This manuscript has not been submitted for publication, nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all Authors have contributed significantly to the work, validity and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to Jurnal Intelek.

REFERENCES

- Abma, F. I., Bültmann, U., Amick III, B. C., Arends, I., Dorland, H. F., Flach, P. A., ... & Bjørner, J. B. (2018). The work role functioning questionnaire v2. 0 showed consistent factor structure across six working samples. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 28(3), 465-474.
- Aronsson, G., Hagberg, J., Björklund, C., Aboagye, E., Marklund, S., Leineweber, C., & Bergström, G. (2020). Health and motivation as mediators of the effects of job demands, job control, job support, and role conflicts at work and home on sickness presenteeism and absenteeism. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-020-01591-w>
- Biron, C., Karanika-Murray, M., Ivers, H., Salvoni, S., & Fernet, C. (2021). Teleworking while sick: A three-wave study of psychosocial safety climate, psychological demands, and presenteeism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 734245.
- Belay, A. S., Guangul, M. M., Asmare, W. N., & Mesafint, G. (2021). Prevalence and associated factors of psychological distress among nurses in public hospitals, Southwest, Ethiopia: A cross-sectional study. *Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences*, 31(6).
- Cain, M. K., Zhang, Z., & Yuan, K. H. (2016). Univariate and multivariate skewness and kurtosis for measuring nonnormality: Prevalence, influence and estimation. *Behavior Research Methods*, 49(5), 1716-1735.
- Côté, D., et al. (2021). The impact of presenteeism on job performance and health: A systematic review. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 26(2), 157-174. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000276>
- Coutu, M. F., Corbière, M., Durand, M. J., Nastasia, I., Labrecque, M. E., Berbiche, D., & Albert, V. (2015). Factors associated with presenteeism and psychological distress using a theory-driven approach. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 57(6), 617-626.
- Chander, K. R., Jeyaraman, M., Jeyaraman, N., & Yadav, S. (2023). Presenteeism: The Invisible Leviathan of Organizational Psychology. *Cureus*, 15(11).
- Cooper, C., & Lu, L. (2019). Excessive availability for work: Good or bad? Charting underlying motivations and searching for gamechangers. *Human Resource Management Review*, 29, 100682.

- Daniels, S., Wei, H., Han, Y., Catt, H., Denning, D. W., Hall, I., ... & Van Tongeren, M. (2021). Risk factors associated with respiratory infectious disease-related presenteeism: a rapid review. *BMC Public Health*, 21, 1-12.
- Drapeau, A., Marchand, A., & Beaulieu-Prévost, D. (2012). Epidemiology of psychological distress. *Mental illnesses-understanding, prediction and control*, 69(2), 105-106.
- Falk, R. F., & Miller, N. B. (1992). *A primer for soft modeling*. University of Akron Press.
- Hadjisolomou, A., Mitsakis, F., & Gary, S. (2022). Too scared to go sick: Precarious academic work and 'presenteeism culture' in the UK higher education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Work, Employment and Society*, 36(3), 569-579.
- Henderson, A. A., & Smith, C. E. (2022). When does presenteeism harm productivity the most? Employee motives as a key moderator of the presenteeism-productivity relationship. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 37(6), 513-526.
- Hahn, E. D., & Ang, S. H. (2017). From the editors: New directions in the reporting of statistical results in the Journal of World Business. *Journal of World Business*, 52(2), 125-126.
- Hair, J. F., Thomas, G., Hult, M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage.
- Heim, C., & Heim, C. (2021). Facilitating a Supportive Learning Experience: The Lecturer's Role in Addressing Mental Health Issues of University Students during COVID-19. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 18(6), 69-79.
- Haider, M. Z., Earthy, I. A., Halim, S. F. B., & Islam, M. K. (2024). Presenteeism and academic performance: a cross-sectional study among undergraduate university students. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 16(2), 343-357.
- Jane Francisca (2023, November 29) Malaysian Public, private unis dominate Asean rankings, *New Straits Times* retrieved on <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/11/984492/malaysian-public-private-unis-dominate-asean-rankings>
- Karanika-Murray, M., & Biron, C. (2020). The health-performance framework of presenteeism: Towards understanding an adaptive behaviour. *Human Relations*, 73(2), 242-261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719827081>
- Khan, S. K., Lim, B. C. Y., & Yacob, Y. (2022). Occupational commitment in private higher education sector: work-life balance, job burnout and the mediating effect of supportive culture. *International Journal of Business and Society*, 23(3), 1404-1422.
- Kinman, G., & Wray, S. (2022). 'Better than watching daytime TV': sickness presenteeism in UK academics. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(8), 1724-1735.
- Kinman, G., & Wray, S. (2018). Presenteeism in academic employees—occupational and individual factors. *Occupational Medicine*, 68(1), 46-50. <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqx191>
- Leal Filho, W., Wall, T., Salvia, A. L., Vasconcelos, C. R., Abubakar, I. R., Minhas, A., ... & Lombardi, P. (2024). The impacts of the COVID-19 lockdowns on the work of academic staff at higher education institutions: an international assessment. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 1-27.
- Lohaus, D., Habermann, W., El Kertoubi, I., & Röser, F. (2021). Working while ill is not always bad—positive effects of presenteeism. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 620918.
- Manaf, M. R. A., Shaharuddin, M. A. A., Nawati, A. M., Tauhid, N. M., Othman, H., Rahman, M. R. A., ... & Ganasegeran, K. (2021). Perceived symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress amongst staff in a Malaysian public university: A workers survey. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(22), 11874.
- Miraglia, M., & Johns, G. (2016). Going to work ill: A meta-analysis of the correlates of presenteeism and a dual-path model. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, 21(3), 261.
- Maurício, A. C., & Laranjeira, C. (2023). Presenteeism, Job Satisfaction, and Psychological Distress among Portuguese Workers in a Private Social Solidarity Institution during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Administrative Sciences*, 13(10), 220.
- Mazzetti, G., Vignoli, M., Schaufeli, W. B., & Guglielmi, D. (2019). Work addiction and presenteeism: the buffering role of managerial support. *International Journal of Psychology*, 54(2), 174-179. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12449>

- Mitsakis, F., Hadjisolomou, A., Kouki, A., & Kinman, G. (2023). Presenteeism' amongst UK higher education staff during and beyond the pandemic.
- Magalhães, S., Barbosa, J., & Borges, E. (2022). The relationship between presenteeism, quality of life and social support in higher education professionals: A cross-sectional path analysis. *PloS one*, 17(4), e0267514.
- Mohamad, M., Hasan, H., Wahid, S. N. S., & Suhaimi, M. H. (2021). Effects Of Presenteeism On Productivity Of Government Employees In Putrajaya. *Gading Journal for Social Sciences (e-ISSN 2600-7568)*, 24(04), 115-120.
- Naidu, P., Asshidin, N. H. N., & Hazlin Nor Asshidin, N. (2020). Examining the reasons of presenteeism among academic staffs: A focus group study. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 100.
- Ning, L., Jia, H., Gao, S., Liu, M., Xu, J., Ge, S., ... & Yu, X. (2023). The mediating role of job satisfaction and presenteeism on the relationship between job stress and turnover intention among primary health care workers. *International journal for equity in health*, 22(1), 155.
- Nasution, N. J. R., Mohamed, S., Hashim, N. A., Norley Shuib, A. W. N., & Al, N. F. (2022). Psychological Distress, Burnout and Job Satisfaction among Academicians in Science and Technology Faculties in a Malaysian University. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry*, 23(6).
- Panatik, S. A., Kamalulil, E. N., Yusof, J., & Ishak, K. A. (2022). Work-life Integration and Mental Health Issues among Higher Education Staff. *Journal of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development*, 8(2), 139-156.
- Quigley, J., et al. (2022). Exploring presenteeism trends: a comprehensive bibliometric and content analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1352602>
- Ruhle, S. A., & Süß, S. (2020). Presenteeism and absenteeism at work—an analysis of archetypes of sickness attendance cultures. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 35, 241-255.
- Ramayah, T., Cheah, J., Chuah, F., Ting, H., & Memon, M. A. (2018). *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.0: An Updated Guide and Practical Guide to Statistical Analysis* (2nd ed.). Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Pearson.
- Rusli, N. H., Anua, S. M., Endarti, A. T., Amin, W. S. H. W. M., Mazlan, N., & Ibrahim, T. A. E. (2023). Occupational stress among academicians between two selected universities in Malaysia and Indonesia during the covid-19 pandemic: A comparative study. *Kesmas: Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat Nasional (National Public Health Journal)*, 18(sp1), 105-111.
- Tantri, S. N., Norhamida, H., & Prasetyo, A. (2022). Presenteeism Among Accounting Educators: The Role of Work-Family Conflict, Work Engagement, and Organizational Support in Covid-19 Pandemic. *JIA (Jurnal Ilmiah Akuntansi)*, 7(1), 88-110.
- Viertiö, S., Kiviruuu, O., Piirtola, M., Kaprio, J., Korhonen, T., Marttunen, M., & Suvisaari, J. (2021). Factors contributing to psychological distress in the working population, with a special reference to gender difference. *BMC public health*, 21, 1-17.
- Vahdati, S., Seyyed Naghavi, M. A., Vaezi, R., & Sharifzadeh, F. (2023). Discovering the antecedents of virtual leadership in universities and higher education institutions of Iran during covid-19 pandemic: A qualitative study. *Journal of Management Development*, 42(5), 352-372.
- Wee, L. H., Yeap, L. L. L., Chan, C. M. H., Wong, J. E., Jamil, N. A., Swarna Nantha, Y., & Siau, C. S. (2019). Antecedent factors predicting absenteeism and presenteeism in urban area in Malaysia. *BMC Public Health*, 19(Suppl 4), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6860-8>
- Winefield, A. H., Gillespie, N., Stough, C., Dua, J., Hapuarachchi, J., & Boyd, C. (2003). Occupational stress in Australian university staff: Results from a national survey. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 10(1), 51.