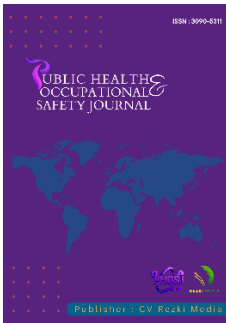


Workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia: A systematic review of stressors, outcomes, and protective factors



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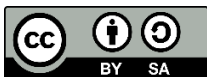
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- E – Critical revision of the article
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ABSTRACT

Background: Workplace stress and burnout have emerged as critical occupational health concerns among university lecturers, particularly amid increasing academic workloads, performance pressures, and organizational demands intensified during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite growing empirical attention, evidence remains fragmented, especially within Southeast Asian higher education contexts.

Objectives: This study aims to systematically review empirical research on workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia, with a focus on identifying key stressors, associated outcomes, and protective factors.

Methods: A systematic literature review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Peer-reviewed articles published in English were retrieved from the Scopus database using predefined search terms related to workplace stress, burnout, lecturers, and higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia. After screening and eligibility assessment, 19 studies published between 2004 and 2025 were included. Methodological quality was assessed using the Newcastle–Ottawa Scale, and findings were synthesized through qualitative narrative analysis due to study heterogeneity.

Results: The review reveals that workplace stress and burnout are prevalent among university lecturers in both countries. Major stressors include excessive workload, role ambiguity, performance-based evaluation systems, work–life imbalance, and limited organizational support. These stressors are consistently associated with adverse outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, impaired performance, and increased turnover intention. Protective factors, including social support, supportive leadership, emotional intelligence, and workplace spirituality, were found to mitigate stress and burnout effects.

Conclusions: Workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia are multifactorial and systemic issues embedded in contemporary academic work environments. Organizational- and policy-level interventions are essential to promote lecturer well-being and ensure sustainable academic careers.

Keywords: burnout, higher education, Indonesia, Malaysia, university lecturers, workplace stress.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced modern era, people's lifestyles are increasingly characterized by greater complexity and challenges than previous generations, who had relatively lower stress levels. This situation causes individuals today to be continuously exposed to pressure, particularly from the demands of their jobs and work environments ([Chienwattanasook & Jernsittiparsert, 2019](#)). In the context of higher education, the complexity of modern lifestyles has been exacerbated by the increasing demands of lecturers' work, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic period. During the pandemic, lecturers were faced with sudden changes in the learning system towards online learning, which required rapid adaptation to technology, adjustments to teaching methods, and an increase in administrative workload ([Godber & Atkins, 2021](#)). This condition continues to this day, where most lecturers are required to perform various roles simultaneously (multitasking), ranging from teaching, research, community service, to administrative duties and professional development ([Godber & Atkins, 2021](#); [Kidd & Murray, 2020](#); [Ladyanna & Aslinda, 2021](#); [Raharjo et al., 2023](#)). The accumulation of these demands has the potential to increase work stress and burnout among lecturers, which in turn can impact individual well-being and the quality of the implementation of the three pillars of higher education.

University lecturers play a central role in sustaining the core missions of higher education institutions through teaching, research, community service, and academic governance. In recent decades, however, the academic profession has undergone substantial transformation, characterized by intensifying workloads, heightened performance expectations, and increasing administrative responsibilities ([Houston et al., 2006](#)). Lecturers are no longer evaluated solely on teaching quality, but are also required to meet stringent publication targets, secure research funding, engage in institutional service, and respond to continuous quality assurance demands. This intensification of academic labor has contributed to growing concerns regarding workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers ([Koon & Pun, 2018](#); [Rusdi et al., 2023](#)).

In Indonesia, lecturers are legally required to carry out the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi (Three Pillars of Higher Education)—teaching, research, and community service—with a minimum workload of 12 and a maximum of 16 credit units per semester ([Rahmayati et al., 2022](#)). Empirical evidence shows that this formal workload often exceeds the limits set in practice, especially in private universities that offer day and evening classes, so that working hours can reach up to 14 hours per day ([Hamukti et al., 2017](#); [Herdiana, 2020](#)). This will also have an impact on the mental health and productivity of lecturers ([Suwarsi et al., 2024](#)). Meanwhile, several studies in Malaysia show that work stress is a problem experienced by the majority of academic staff. Research on 421 lecturers at Universiti Putra Malaysia found that 60.8% of respondents experienced work stress, with most experiencing moderate to severe stress levels ([MZ et al., 2016](#)). Empirical evidence from Malaysia shows that work flexibility plays an important role in maintaining work-life balance and reducing stress among lecturers ([Subramaniam et al., 2020](#)). These findings are relevant to the Indonesian context, where lecturers face high workloads and long working hours that impact their mental health and academic productivity ([Suwarsi et al., 2024](#)).

Workplace stress and burnout among academic staff have been widely recognized as critical occupational health issues in higher education. Prolonged exposure to excessive job demands, role ambiguity, time pressure, and work–life imbalance may lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment—core dimensions of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Empirical studies have shown that lecturers experiencing high levels of stress and burnout are more likely to report decreased job satisfaction, reduced work performance, impaired psychological well-being, and increased turnover intention (Multamasatika et al., 2023; Susanto et al., 2025). At the institutional level, these outcomes may undermine teaching quality, research productivity, collegial relationships, and the long-term sustainability of academic systems.

Globally, research on academic stress and burnout has expanded considerably, particularly in response to the managerialization and marketization of higher education. Studies from Europe, Australia, and North America consistently highlight workload intensification, performance-based evaluation systems, and limited institutional support as dominant stressors affecting academic staff (Kinman & Johnson, 2019; Watts & Robertson, 2011). More recent studies have emphasized the role of organizational factors—such as leadership style, organizational justice, and supervisor support—in shaping lecturers’ experiences of stress and burnout (Astuti et al., 2023; Jermisittiparsert et al., 2021). Despite this growing body of literature, findings remain fragmented due to differences in study design, conceptual frameworks, and contextual settings.

In Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, higher education systems have experienced rapid expansion and reform over the past two decades. Both countries have implemented performance-based academic frameworks emphasizing research output, international publication, and institutional ranking, often without proportional increases in resources or structural support. Studies conducted in Indonesia and Malaysia report that lecturers frequently experience high workloads, unclear role expectations, and pressure to meet key performance indicators (KPIs), contributing to elevated levels of stress and burnout (Islam et al., 2025; Nurhayati et al., 2025). These two countries share comparable cultural, organizational, and policy characteristics—such as collectivist work cultures and centralized higher education governance—while also differing in funding structures and institutional autonomy. Examining both contexts together provides a valuable regional perspective and enhances the comparative relevance of the findings.

Although numerous primary studies have investigated workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers, systematic reviews synthesizing this evidence remain limited, particularly within the Southeast Asian context. Existing reviews often focus on Western countries or broader occupational groups, with limited attention to lecturers as a distinct professional population. Moreover, prior reviews rarely integrate stressors, burnout outcomes, and protective factors within a single analytical framework. To date, no systematic literature review has comprehensively examined workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia, despite the growing volume of empirical studies emerging from these countries.

This study addresses this gap by conducting a systematic literature review of empirical research on workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia. The novelty of this review lies in its regional focus, its exclusive attention to academic staff, and its integrative synthesis of stressors,

outcomes, and protective mechanisms across individual, organizational, and policy levels. By consolidating evidence from diverse methodological approaches, this review offers a nuanced understanding of how academic stress and burnout manifest within comparable yet distinct higher education systems.

The primary objective of this systematic review is to identify key sources of workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia, examine their reported consequences, and synthesize factors that may mitigate or exacerbate these conditions. By providing a structured synthesis of existing evidence, this study aims to inform policymakers, university leaders, and academic practitioners about strategies to promote sustainable academic careers, enhance lecturer well-being, and maintain productivity without compromising mental health.

METHODS

Study Design

The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). No deviations from the registered protocol were made during the review process. Ethical approval was not required because this study involved a synthesis of previously published literature and did not include individual-level participant data.

Search Strategy

A systematic literature search was conducted in the Scopus database to identify studies examining workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia. The search strategy was developed based on the PICOS framework and combined relevant keywords using Boolean operators (“AND”, “OR”).

The main search terms included combinations of keywords related to workplace stress and burnout (“workplace stress”, “occupational stress”, “job stress”, burnout), academic populations (lecturer, academic staff, university faculty), higher education settings (university, higher education), and geographical context (Indonesia, Malaysia). The search was applied to the TITLE-ABS-KEY fields to ensure that the core concepts were explicitly addressed in the retrieved records.

The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, written in English, classified as final publications, and published in academic journals. The search strategy did not apply any publication year limits. As a result, studies published between 2004 and 2025 were retrieved, with a higher concentration of publications in the most recent years. Minor adjustments to the search syntax were made to align with the database indexing structure and maximize search sensitivity. Although no publication year restrictions were applied, the final included studies were published between 2004 and 2025, reflecting both early and recent research on workplace stress and burnout in higher education.

Study Selection and Eligibility Criteria

Study selection was guided by predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria developed in accordance with the PICOS framework. Studies were eligible for inclusion if they:

1. were original research articles published in peer-reviewed journals;

2. focused on university lecturers or academic staff employed in higher education institutions;
3. examined workplace stress, occupational stress, job stress, and/or burnout as key outcomes; and
4. were conducted within the context of Indonesia and/or Malaysia.

Studies were excluded if they were reviews, editorials, commentaries, conference abstracts without full text, case reports, or non-peer-reviewed publications. Articles focusing exclusively on student populations, non-academic occupational groups, or stress unrelated to workplace or occupational contexts were also excluded. Non-English publications were not considered. Of the 46 reports sought for retrieval, 24 full-text articles could not be obtained and were therefore excluded. Of the remaining 22 full-text articles assessed for eligibility, three were excluded because they did not meet the predefined inclusion criteria. Consequently, 19 studies were included in the final review.

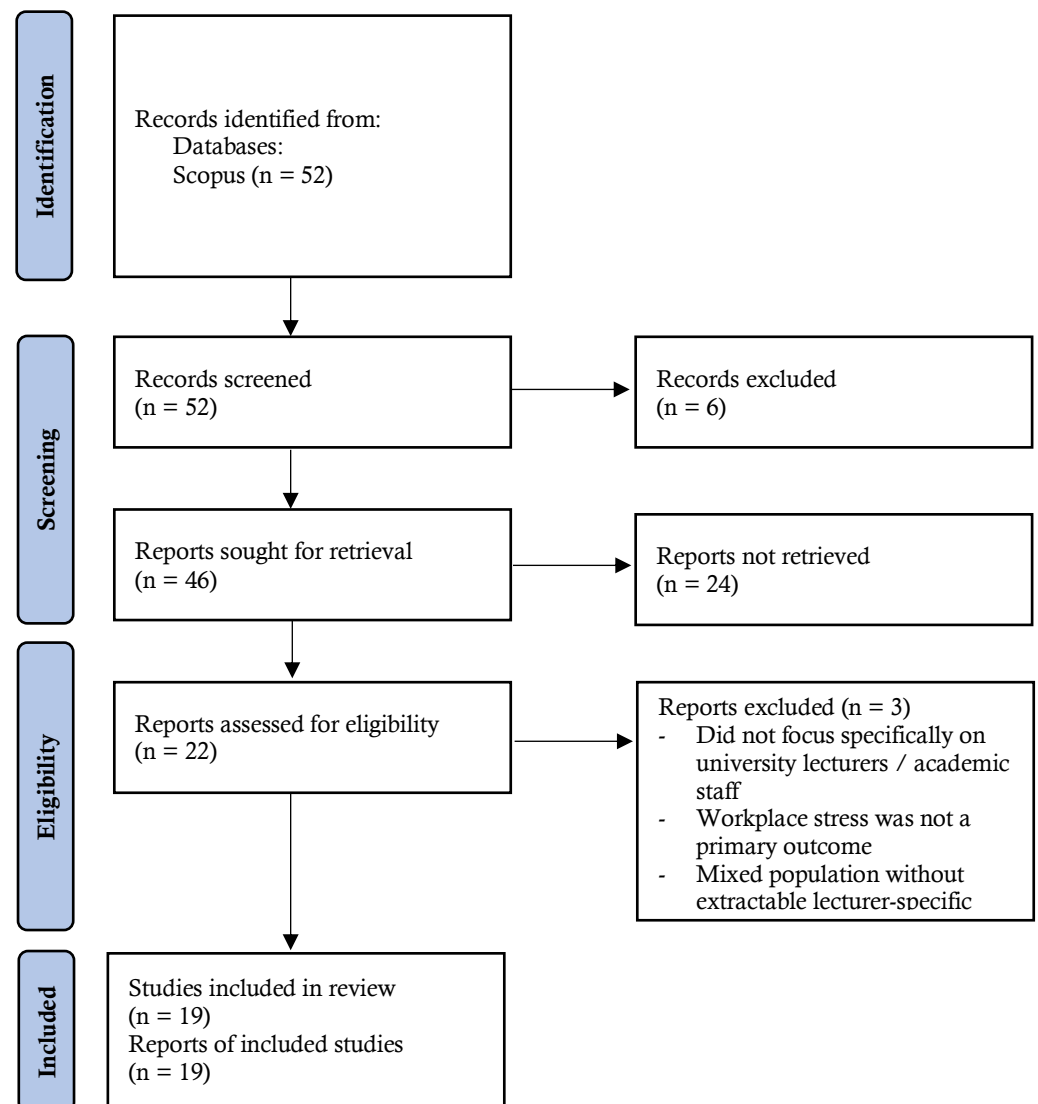


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process

Screening and Data Extraction

Screening and data extraction were conducted independently by at least two reviewers. After the initial database search, all retrieved records were exported and

screened for eligibility. First, titles and abstracts were independently screened to identify studies relevant to the review objectives. Records that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded at this stage. Full-text screening was subsequently conducted for the remaining articles to confirm eligibility. For each included study, data were systematically extracted using a standardized extraction form. Extracted information included author and publication year, country of study, study design, participant characteristics, measurement instruments, and key findings related to workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers. Any discrepancies during screening or data extraction were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached.

Quality Assessment

The methodological quality and risk of bias of the included studies were assessed using the Newcastle–Ottawa Scale (NOS) (Table 1). The NOS was selected because it allows for consistent and transparent quality assessment across heterogeneous study designs, including cross-sectional, cohort, and other observational studies commonly used in occupational stress research. Quality assessment was conducted independently by the reviewers. The NOS evaluates study quality across three domains: selection of study groups, comparability of groups, and outcome assessment, with a maximum score of nine points. Studies scoring 7–9 points were classified as having a low risk of bias, scores of 5–6 points as moderate risk, and scores of ≤ 4 points as high risk of bias. Quality assessment results were used to support the interpretation of findings rather than as criteria for study exclusion.

Table 1. Summary of Methodological Quality using the Newcastle–Ottawa Scale (NOS)

Author / Year	Selection	Comparability	Outcome	Total	Risk of Bias
Nurhayati et al. (2025)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Susanto et al. (2025)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Effendi et al. (2025)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Islam et al. (2025)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Goi et al. (2024)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Suhariadi et al. (2023)	4	2	2	8	Low
Rusdi et al. (2023)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Multamasatika et al. (2023)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Muafiah et al. (2023)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Astuti et al. (2023)	4	2	2	8	Low
Kori et al. (2022)	4	2	2	8	Low
Pariyanti et al. (2022)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Jermsittiparsert et al. (2021)	4	2	2	8	Low
Yousefi & Abdullah (2019)	4	2	2	8	Low
Lina (2018)	3	1	2	6	Moderate
Koon & Pun (2017)	4	2	2	8	Low
Henny et al. (2014)	4	2	2	8	Low
Nur Aqilah & Jalaludin (2012)	4	2	2	8	Low
Huda et al. (2004)	4	2	2	8	Low

The Newcastle–Ottawa Scale (NOS) evaluates methodological quality across three domains: selection (maximum 4 points), comparability (maximum 2 points), and outcome assessment (maximum 3 points). Studies scoring 7–9 points were considered low risk of bias, 5–6 points moderate risk, and ≤ 4 points high risk of bias.

Data Synthesis and Analysis

Due to substantial heterogeneity across studies in terms of research design, measurement instruments, outcome definitions, and analytical approaches, a quantitative meta-analysis was not feasible. Therefore, a qualitative narrative synthesis was conducted.

Study findings were synthesized thematically, focusing on key sources of workplace stress, dimensions of burnout, and contextual factors influencing academic staff wellbeing in Indonesia and Malaysia. Patterns of results, similarities and differences between national contexts, and potential mechanisms underlying reported stress and burnout were identified and discussed. This approach enabled a comprehensive synthesis of the evidence while maintaining methodological rigor and transparency.

RESULTS

Study Selection

The study selection process is summarized in the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 1). A total of 52 records were identified through database searching in Scopus. After title and abstract screening, 6 records were excluded, resulting in 46 records sought for full-text retrieval. Of these, 24 reports could not be retrieved due to unavailability of full-text articles. Consequently, 22 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. After full-text evaluation, 3 articles were excluded, and 19 studies met the predefined inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis.

Study Characteristics

The characteristics of the included studies are summarized in Table 2. Overall, the 19 included studies were published between 2004 and 2025, indicating sustained scholarly attention to workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers over more than two decades.

Most studies employed cross-sectional quantitative designs, frequently using survey-based methods and structural equation modeling (SEM or PLS-SEM). One study adopted a qualitative longitudinal phenomenological approach, providing in-depth insights into lived experiences of burnout among academics.

Geographically, the studies were conducted in Indonesia ($n = 10$) and Malaysia ($n = 9$), representing both public and private higher education institutions. Sample sizes varied considerably, ranging from 61 to 736 participants, with study populations primarily consisting of university lecturers, although a small number included mixed academic and administrative staff where lecturer-specific data were reported.

Table 2. Study Characteristics

Author (Year)	Study Design	Country / Setting	Participants (n, characteristics)	Key Exposure / Stressor	Main Outcome(s)	Key Findings
Nurhayati et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Indonesia (private universities)	University lecturers (n=136); adult academic staff	Workload balance	Social well-being	Balanced workload was positively associated with lecturers' social well-being, indicating that better workload management supports psychosocial functioning at work
Susanto et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional quantitative study (SEM-PLS)	Indonesia (private universities in Medan)	University lecturers, Generation Y (n = 293); born 1981–1996; male & female; ≥2 years teaching experience	Digital burnout; work alienation; toxic leadership (mediator)	Turnover intention	Digital burnout and work alienation significantly increased turnover intention. Toxic leadership significantly mediated the relationships, amplifying the negative effects of burnout and alienation on lecturers' intention to leave
Effendi et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional quantitative study (SEM)	Indonesia (public and private universities)	University lecturers (n = 736; mixed academic ranks)	Workload; supervisor support	Work–life balance; lecturer productivity	Workload negatively affected work–life balance but positively influenced productivity; supervisor support improved work–life balance but showed a negative relationship with productivity; work–life balance mediated the workload–productivity relationship
Islam et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional quantitative study (PLS-SEM)	Indonesia (public universities, Central Java)	University lecturers (n = 228; adult academic staff; male & female)	Job stress	Life satisfaction; professional commitment (affective, normative, continuance); social support (moderator)	Job stress significantly reduced life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.001$) but had no direct effect on professional commitment. Life satisfaction positively influenced affective and normative commitment. Social support moderated the relationship between job stress and professional commitment, but not between job stress and life satisfaction.
Goi et al. (2024)	Cross-sectional quantitative study (SEM)	Malaysia (public & private HEIs)	Academic staff (n = 219)	Workplace bullying	Psychological distress	Workplace bullying significantly increased psychological distress; perceived organisational support moderated and reduced this effect; religious coping showed no mediating effect
Suhariadi et al. (2023)	Cross-sectional quantitative study (SEM)	Indonesia (public university)	University lecturers and educational staff (n = 556); adult academic & administrative staff	Work stress during work-from-home, organizational support, boredom	Productive behavior, mental health, work engagement	Work stress negatively affected mental health and productive behavior; higher stress increased boredom; organizational support reduced stress and boredom and improved mental health; mental health strongly predicted productivity

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Table 2. Study Characteristics

Author (Year)	Study Design	Country / Setting	Participants (n, characteristics)	Key Exposure / Stressor	Main Outcome(s)	Key Findings
Rusdi et al. (2023)	Qualitative longitudinal phenomenological study	Malaysia (public & private universities)	University academics (n = 12; age 28–46; 75% female; lecturers–senior lecturers–assistant professors)	High workload, performance pressure (KPI), lack of institutional support, work–life imbalance	Burnout experiences, emotional exhaustion, resilience	Academics experienced persistent burnout driven by excessive workload, demanding KPIs, lack of resources, and insufficient managerial support. Coping strategies included resilience, social support, spirituality, and adaptive behaviors.
Multamasatika et al. (2023)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Indonesia (public university)	University lecturers (n = 100; active lecturers from various faculties)	Work factors (interpersonal relationships, workload, faculty type, academic rank)	Work stress	Interpersonal relationships were significantly associated with lecturers' work stress, while workload, faculty type, and academic rank showed no significant relationship with work stress. Most lecturers experienced moderate stress levels.
Muafiah et al. (2023)	Cross-sectional quantitative survey study (PLS-SEM)	Indonesia (Islamic higher education institutions)	Female university lecturers (n = 200; working mothers with children >4 years old; majority aged 38–47 years; civil servant & non-civil servant)	Burnout; work–family balance (WFB)	Work–family balance; character-building outcomes; burnout effects	Burnout significantly affected work–family balance ($\beta = 0.680$, $p < 0.001$) and character-building ($\beta = 0.253$, $p < 0.001$). Work–family balance positively influenced character-building ($\beta = 0.554$, $p < 0.001$) and mediated the relationship between burnout and character-building ($\beta = 0.377$, $p < 0.001$).
Astuti et al. (2023)	Cross-sectional quantitative survey study (PLS-SEM)	Indonesia (private higher education institutions – Muhammadiyah & Aisyiyah Colleges)	University lecturers (n = 354; 60% female; majority ≥50 years; assistant–associate professors; permanent lecturers with national ID)	Job stress; workplace happiness; pandemic-related workload and performance demands	Innovative work behavior; work performance	Workplace happiness negatively affected job stress ($\beta = 0.499$, $p < 0.001$). Job stress negatively affected innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.459$, $p < 0.001$). Innovative work behavior positively influenced work performance ($\beta = 0.582$, $p < 0.001$). Job stress mediated the relationship between workplace happiness and innovative work behavior.

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Table 2. Study Characteristics

Author (Year)	Study Design	Country / Setting	Participants (n, characteristics)	Key Exposure / Stressor	Main Outcome(s)	Key Findings
Kori et al. (2022)	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	Malaysia (public & private universities; Covid-19 context)	University lecturers (n = 435; 61.6% female; various academic ranks; wide range of working experience)	Work overload, technological advancement, emotional intelligence, organizational support, telecommuting	Work-life balance	Work overload showed the strongest negative association with work-life balance ($\beta = 0.518$, $p < 0.001$). Technological advancement also negatively affected work-life balance ($\beta = 0.136$, $p = 0.001$). Emotional intelligence was positively associated with work-life balance ($\beta = 0.132$, $p = 0.007$). Organizational support, spiritual intelligence, and telecommuting were not significant predictors.
Pariyanti et al. (2022)	Cross-sectional quantitative study (SEM)	Indonesia (Islamic-based universities, Lampung)	Academic and administrative staff (n = 178; 53.9% male; majority aged <40 years; bachelor-master degree holders)	Organizational justice, job stress; moderator: Islamic workplace spirituality	Cyberloafing behavior	Organizational justice was negatively associated with cyberloafing, while job stress showed a positive association. Islamic workplace spirituality directly reduced cyberloafing and significantly moderated the relationships between organizational justice-cyberloafing and job stress-cyberloafing.
Jemsittiparsert et al. (2021)	Cross-sectional quantitative survey study (PLS-SEM)	Indonesia (public universities)	University lecturers (n = 247; 60.7% female; majority aged 25–45 years; master's & PhD holders)	Workload components (time pressure, interruptions); job stress (mediator)	Job satisfaction	Time pressure and interruptions significantly increased job stress ($\beta = 0.504$ and $\beta = 0.461$, $p < 0.001$). Job stress strongly reduced job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.806$, $p < 0.001$) and significantly mediated the relationships between (1) time pressure-job satisfaction and (2) interruptions-job satisfaction.
Yousefi & Abdullah (2019)	Cross-sectional quantitative study (PLS-SEM)	Malaysia (public research universities)	Academic staff (n = 209; lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors, professors; majority senior lecturers)	Organizational stressors: role ambiguity, role conflict, workload	Job performance (teaching & research performance)	Role ambiguity ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.01$) and role conflict ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.01$) had significant negative effects on academic job performance, whereas workload showed no significant effect. Role ambiguity emerged as the strongest stressor affecting performance.
Lina (2018)	Cross-sectional quantitative study using path analysis	Indonesia (private universities, West Jakarta)	Full-time lecturers at Faculties of Economics (n = 123; age 29–77; 52.9% female; majority master's degree holders)	Role stressors (role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload)	Burnout; lecturer performance	Role ambiguity and role overload had significant negative direct effects on lecturer performance, while role conflict had no direct effect. Burnout significantly mediated the relationship between all three role stressors and lecturer performance. Sustained role overload and unclear roles increased burnout, which in turn reduced performance.

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Table 2. Study Characteristics

Author (Year)	Study Design	Country / Setting	Participants (n, characteristics)	Key Exposure / Stressor	Main Outcome(s)	Key Findings
Koon & Pun (2018)	Cross-sectional quantitative study (mediation analysis; PROCESS macro)	Malaysia (universities in Klang Valley)	University academic staff (n = 102; mean age 34.2 ± 10.1 years; 58.8% female; permanent & contract staff)	High job demands (workload pressure, time pressure)	Emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, instigated workplace incivility	Job demands were positively associated with emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 1.075$, $p < .001$). Emotional exhaustion negatively predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.236$, $p < .05$), and lower job satisfaction increased instigated workplace incivility ($\beta = 0.201$, $p < .01$). Emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction fully and sequentially mediated the relationship between job demands and workplace incivility.
Henny et al. (2014)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Malaysia (public research university)	University academicians (n = 194 sampled; n = 169 respondents; mean age 39.6 ± 7.25 years; 66.3% female; majority master's/PhD holders)	Occupational stressors; low job satisfaction; limited teaching experience	Burnout prevalence and associated factors	The overall prevalence of burnout was 10.7%. Burnout was significantly associated with female gender (14.3%), teaching experience ≤5 years, and low job satisfaction. Female academicians and those dissatisfied with their jobs were four and seven times more likely to experience burnout, respectively.
Nur Aqilah & Juliana (2012)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Malaysia (Universiti Putra Malaysia)	University lecturers (n = 61; age 28–61 years; 59% female; non-smokers; ≥2 years working experience)	Occupational stress (high strain: high psychological demand & low decision latitude)	Occupational stress level; respiratory symptoms (cough, phlegm, wheezing, breathlessness)	High occupational stress (high strain) was observed in 26.2% of lecturers. Female lecturers were significantly more likely to experience high occupational stress (OR = 4.14; $p = 0.035$) and breathlessness (OR = 4.04; $p = 0.011$). No statistically significant association was found between occupational stress level and respiratory symptoms overall.
Huda et al. (2004)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Malaysia (Universiti Sains Malaysia, School of Medical Sciences)	University lecturers (n = 73 respondents; response rate 58.4%; majority male; clinical & non-clinical lecturers)	Job strain components (high psychological job demand, low decision latitude), psychological stressors, job insecurity	Job strain prevalence; job dissatisfaction	The prevalence of high job strain was 23.3%, with clinical-based lecturers reporting significantly higher job strain than non-clinical lecturers (34.1% vs 6.9%). Psychological stressors and job insecurity increased the risk of job strain, while decision authority and created skill were protective. Job dissatisfaction prevalence was 42.6% and was strongly associated with high psychological job demand and low decision authority.

Key Workplace Stressors

Across the included studies, a broad range of workplace stressors were examined. The most frequently reported stressors included:

1. Workload and time pressure, including role overload and performance demands;
2. Job stress and occupational stress, measured using validated stress scales;
3. Burnout and emotional exhaustion, particularly among early-career and female lecturers;
4. Organizational stressors, such as role ambiguity, role conflict, and workplace bullying;
5. Leadership-related factors, including toxic leadership and perceived organizational support; and
6. Work–life balance challenges, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and work-from-home arrangements

These stressors reflect the multidimensional nature of academic work demands across institutional, interpersonal, and individual levels.

Outcome Characteristics

The included studies reported diverse outcome variables related to lecturers' well-being and work-related functioning. The most commonly examined outcomes were:

1. Psychological outcomes, including burnout, emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, and life satisfaction;
2. Work-related attitudes, such as job satisfaction, professional commitment, and turnover intention;
3. Behavioral and performance-related outcomes, including productivity, innovative work behavior, cyberloafing, and workplace incivility; and
4. Work–life balance and social well-being, particularly among lecturers with family responsibilities

Several studies also explored mediating and moderating mechanisms, such as social support, workplace spirituality, leadership style, and emotional intelligence.

Narrative Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the synthesis revealed consistent evidence that workplace stress and burnout are prevalent among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia. High workload, unclear role expectations, and insufficient organizational support were repeatedly associated with adverse psychological outcomes, including burnout, emotional exhaustion, and reduced life satisfaction.

Several studies demonstrated that burnout and job stress function as key mediating mechanisms, linking work demands to negative outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction, lower performance, and increased turnover intention. Conversely, protective factors, including social support, emotional intelligence, workplace spirituality, and supportive leadership, were shown to buffer the negative effects of workplace stress.

Methodological Quality of Included Studies

The methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using the Newcastle–Ottawa Scale (NOS), with results summarized in [Table 2](#). Overall, the studies demonstrated moderate to low risk of bias, with NOS scores ranging from 6 to 8 points.

Most studies scored well in the selection domain, reflecting clearly defined study populations and appropriate recruitment strategies. However, comparability between groups was a recurring limitation, as many studies did not fully control for potential confounding variables. Outcome assessment was generally adequate, although limited use of longitudinal designs restricted causal inference.

Summary of Findings

Taken together, the findings from the 19 included studies indicate that workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers are systemic and multifactorial phenomena, influenced by workload demands, organizational context, leadership practices, and individual coping resources. The evidence provides a robust foundation for understanding stress-related challenges in higher education settings in Indonesia and Malaysia, while also highlighting the need for organizational-level interventions and more rigorous future research designs.

DISCUSSION

This systematic literature review synthesizes evidence from 19 studies examining workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia. Overall, the findings indicate that workplace stress is a pervasive issue in higher education, with workload, role ambiguity, job demands, and organizational factors consistently associated with adverse psychological and occupational outcomes. Across studies, high levels of job stress and burnout were linked to reduced job satisfaction, impaired work-life balance, diminished work performance, and increased turnover intention. These findings suggest that workplace stress among lecturers is not an isolated or episodic phenomenon but rather a structural and systemic challenge embedded within academic work environments ([Astuti et al., 2023](#); [Jermisittiparsert et al., 2021](#); [Rusdi et al., 2023](#)).

From a conceptual perspective, the findings align closely with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that excessive job demands such as workload, time pressure, and role overload contribute to strain and burnout when not adequately balanced by job resources ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2007](#)). Several studies in this review demonstrated that job stress and burnout function as key mediating mechanisms linking job demands to negative outcomes, including lower job satisfaction, reduced innovative behavior, and impaired performance ([Jermisittiparsert et al., 2021](#); [Koon & Pun, 2018](#); [Lina, 2018](#)). This pattern underscores burnout not merely as an outcome, but as a central process through which academic work demands erode lecturers' well-being and effectiveness.

The inclusion of both Indonesia and Malaysia in this review provides valuable regional insights into workplace stress among academics within comparable yet distinct higher education systems. Both countries share cultural characteristics such as collectivist values, strong hierarchical structures, and increasing performance-driven academic environments. However, differences in governance models, research funding mechanisms, and institutional autonomy allow for a nuanced understanding of how systemic and organizational factors shape academic stress and burnout across similar socio-cultural contexts. This comparative regional perspective strengthens the generalizability of the findings within Southeast Asia and highlights shared structural challenges faced by academics in emerging higher education systems.

When compared with international literature, the patterns observed in Indonesia and Malaysia appear broadly consistent with findings from studies conducted in other regions, where academic staff report high stress levels associated with workload intensification, performance metrics, and administrative demands (Kinman & Wray, 2013; Watts & Robertson, 2011). However, the reviewed studies highlight contextual nuances, particularly the prominence of performance-based evaluation systems, publication pressures, and resource constraints in Southeast Asian higher education. These contextual factors may exacerbate stress experiences beyond those reported in more resource-rich academic systems, suggesting that structural and policy-level conditions play a significant role in shaping academic stress in this region (Henny et al., 2014; Yousefi & Abdullah, 2019).

Despite the predominance of stressors, the review also identified several protective factors that mitigate the negative impact of workplace stress. Social support, supportive leadership, emotional intelligence, and workplace spirituality emerged as important buffering mechanisms across multiple studies (Kori et al., 2022; Pariyanti et al., 2022; Rusdi et al., 2023). Studies examining moderating and mediating effects suggest that these resources can weaken the relationship between job stress and adverse outcomes, consistent with the JD–R model's emphasis on job and personal resources. These findings emphasize that workplace stress is not solely determined by job demands but is shaped by the availability and quality of organizational and psychosocial support systems.

The findings of this review have important practical implications for higher education institutions. At the organizational level, universities should prioritize workload management, role clarity, and realistic performance expectations to reduce chronic job stress among lecturers. Strengthening institutional support systems, fostering supportive leadership practices, and promoting work–life balance policies may help mitigate burnout and enhance lecturer well-being and productivity (Astuti et al., 2023; Kori et al., 2022). Interventions targeting both structural conditions (e.g., workload allocation, performance metrics) and individual capacities (e.g., emotional regulation, coping skills) are likely to be more effective than isolated, short-term initiatives.

This review also highlights several gaps in the existing literature that warrant further investigation. Most included studies employed cross-sectional designs, limiting causal inference and the ability to examine long-term stress trajectories. Future research would benefit from longitudinal and intervention-based studies that assess the effectiveness of organizational and individual-level strategies in reducing workplace stress and burnout among lecturers. Additionally, greater attention should be given to underexplored variables such as institutional culture, governance structures, and policy reforms, which may substantially shape stress experiences in higher education contexts (Kinman & Johnson, 2019).

In summary, this systematic review provides comprehensive evidence that workplace stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia are widespread, multifaceted, and deeply embedded in academic work structures. By integrating findings across diverse studies, this review advances understanding of the mechanisms, consequences, and protective factors associated with academic stress. Addressing workplace stress in higher education requires coordinated institutional, managerial, and policy-level efforts to ensure sustainable academic environments and the long-term well-being of lecturers.

Based on the synthesized findings, the following implications are proposed at the policy, institutional, and individual levels. At the policy level, governments in Indonesia and Malaysia should re-evaluate academic performance frameworks that emphasize output quantity over sustainability. Aligning workload policies with realistic teaching, research, and service expectations may reduce chronic stress and prevent burnout among lecturers. Policy interventions that prioritize research support, mental health services, and balanced academic career pathways are essential to sustain academic productivity without compromising well-being.

At the institutional level, universities should implement supportive leadership practices, clarify academic roles, and develop transparent workload allocation systems. Providing access to counseling services, mentoring programs, and work–life balance initiatives may help mitigate stress and foster a healthier academic environment. Leadership development programs emphasizing emotional intelligence and supportive supervision may further reduce burnout risks among academic staff.

At the individual level, lecturers are encouraged to develop adaptive coping strategies, including effective time management, boundary setting, and peer support utilization. Enhancing personal resources such as resilience, emotional intelligence, and reflective practices may help lecturers navigate increasing academic demands. These individual strategies, however, should complement—not replace—organizational and policy-level interventions.

Limitations of the study

Several limitations of this review should be acknowledged. First, the analysis was limited to studies indexed in a single database and published in English, which may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant research. Second, the heterogeneity of study designs, measurement instruments, and outcome definitions precluded quantitative synthesis and meta-analysis. Third, the predominance of cross-sectional studies limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Nevertheless, the systematic approach, rigorous screening, and quality assessment provide a robust qualitative synthesis of the existing evidence.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the synthesis of 19 reviewed studies, it can be concluded that work stress and burnout among university lecturers in Indonesia and Malaysia are systemic, multidimensional, and persistent problems. Excessive workload, performance pressure based on indicators, role ambiguity, work-life imbalance, and limited organizational support consistently emerge as the main sources of stress and burnout. These conditions have a significant impact on lecturers' psychological well-being, job satisfaction, academic performance, work behavior, and intention to leave the institution. On the other hand, protective factors such as social support, supportive leadership, emotional intelligence, and spirituality in the workplace have been shown to mitigate the negative effects of work stress. These findings emphasize that efforts to address stress and burnout cannot be solely placed on individuals but require integrated interventions at the policy, institutional, and managerial levels. Therefore, the development of realistic workload policies, clarity of academic roles, strengthening of institutional support systems, and promotion of a healthy work environment are crucial steps to ensure the sustainability of academic careers and the quality of higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Artificial intelligence tools were used solely to assist with language refinement and manuscript editing. The authors take full responsibility for the content and integrity of the study.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the results of this study were gathered through field-based observations and have been recorded by the researcher. Although the dataset is not openly accessible, it can be shared by the corresponding author upon reasonable and well-justified request.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author hereby declares that this research is free from conflicts of interest with any party.

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