UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF JOB RESOURCES IN PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG ACADEMICIANS IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION: A JDR FRAMEWORK

Siti Rosnita Sakarji[1]
Siti Nur Zahirah Omar [2]
Abdul Kadir Othman [3]

[1]Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kelantan Branch, Machang Campus, Kelantan, Malaysia. (E-mail: rosnita507@uitm.edu.my)
[2]Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kelantan Branch, Machang Campus, Kelantan, Malaysia. (E-mail: sitinurzahirah@uitm.edu.my)
[3]Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia.
(E-mail: abdkadir@uitm.edu.my)

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Abstract*: Mental health among employees has been a crucial part of the sustainable development and accomplishment of the organization's goal and objective globally. While most studies have focused on its influence on other populations, academicians have received little attention. Thus, this study focuses on the relationship between job resources and academicians' mental health at public higher education institutions in Malaysia. Considering this, the purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical framework that would clarify how job resources affect academicians' mental health. This study uses the Job-Demand Resources model, which postulates a health impairment and motivational process, to explain how job resources (job autonomy, social support, feedback and recognition, and job security) influence demanding and resourceful features. Four hypotheses were formulated based on the previous considerations and the JD-R model assumptions. Higher-level management is urged to encourage leaders of all work departments to offer the resources and support needed to solve the challenges faced by their employees. It is expected that the management can benefit from these findings in addressing the challenges brought by the psychosocial job factors that have a potential impact on academicians' mental health.*

Keywords*: Mental health, job resources, job autonomy, social support, feedback and recognition, job security, Job Demand-Resource Model*

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Introduction

Mental health encompasses the spectrum of experience, from good mental health to mental illness. Positive mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness, but rather the presence of the congruent skills, habits, and capacities that enable an individual to effectively respond to the environment around them (Nicholls et al., 2022). Employees' quality of life and productivity are significantly impacted by their mental health, which is a key factor in determining their general health (Sutarto, 2021). Healthy societies depend on healthy organizations where workers actively contribute to the organization's effectiveness while protecting their mental health. This encourages people to be more resilient, engaged, and healthy individuals (Tisu et al., 2020). Nevertheless, a growing number of individuals struggle with mental health conditions at work, impacting both organizations and employees.

The significance of examining academicians' mental health in public higher education institutions is continuously emphasized by research. The working population is seeing an increase in mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression. According to statistics, between 5.5% and 39% of academicians at higher education institutions worldwide report having work-related stress. More than 21.7% of workers at higher education institutions in Malaysia reported feeling stressed; academicians were the most likely to voice concerns about stress at work (Yusof et al., 2022). Higher education staff members have also reported experiencing anxiety and depression. Academicians appear to be the foundation of universities because of their positions as researchers and lecturers, which give them direct interaction with students and recognition outside of the classroom (Cankir, 2017). The importance of providing faculty members with mental health education and assistance is emphasized by both McMaster (2021) and Smith (2022). Smith (2022) highlights the role of stigma, social interactions, personal experiences, and environmental factors. Aldiabat (2014) expands on this discussion to include the larger university community, stressing the need for supportive academic environments and preventive mental health initiatives. All these studies highlight how critical it is to address mental health concerns among academic staff members at public higher education institutions. Urbina-Garcia (2020) has compelling evidence that the university environment is triggering high levels of stress and burnout and low levels of well-being for academicians. Academicians experiencing stress were more likely to experience turnover, early retirement, early retirement, and absences from class (Burić & Kim, 2020; Ratanasiripong et al., 2022).

To support academicians' mental health and well-being in higher education institutions, it is imperative to comprehend the importance of job resources. The detrimental effect of job demands on faculty members' psychological well-being is partly mitigated by job resources such as social support, autonomy, and development possibilities (Demerouti et al., 2018). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), these tools improve job satisfaction, foster a healthy work atmosphere, and lessen the likelihood that academicians may experience burnout. As a result, by identifying the factors impacting mental health among Malaysian academicians, this study will supplement previous research and fill a gap in the literature. Job resources are commonly found to be a factor that improves employees' health, well-being, productivity, motivation, and job performance among employees. Using the well-known theory of Job Demand-Resource that postulates a health impairment process and a motivational process, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of four identified job resources: job autonomy, social support, feedback and recognition, and job security toward mental health among academicians at public universities in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Academician's Mental Health

As a multicultural nation in Southeast Asia, Malaysia constantly works to guarantee the efficacy and functionality of all national policies relating to modernizing the Malaysia Higher Education (MHE) system. Because of this, since the 1950s, several education programs have been proposed and implemented; the most recent of them is the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint for 2015–2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013). The education and training system is the main platform for Human Capital Development (HDC) intervention in Malaysia since its direction is a key enabler for driving and sustaining Malaysia's socioeconomic growth (Azizan et al., 2021). The MHE system has undergone periods of restructuring to provide high-quality instructions. These events are consistent with Malaysia's goal of moving up the global socioeconomic ladder. These trends are discovered to be in line with the modifications made to Malaysia's higher education system to improve its sustainability and quality as well as to keep up with the current waves of internationalization, globalization, and societal change (Asmawi & Jaladin, 2018).

As a result of the rigorous nature of their profession, which includes pressures from research, teaching, administration, and career promotion, academicians' mental health has become an increasingly pressing topic (Ghazali et al., 2023). The prevalence of stress among university staff has increased globally, and work-related expectations, poor coping strategies, and attributional behaviors have all been linked to high levels of anxiety and depression as well as low job satisfaction among university staff members (Mohamed et al, 2021). Academicians' well-being in higher education institutions might be adversely affected by an excessive number of demands on their jobs and insufficient resources (Naidoo-Chetty, 2021). University academicians are struggling to engage in teaching, supervision, research and publication, and many other tasks. The multi-sectoral comparison showed that the education sector had the highest ratings for burnout and the incidence of occupational stress (Kassim et al., 2020). Moreover, academicians are currently under more pressure than ever as Malaysian universities aspire to become top-tier research institutions, which makes them more susceptible to burnout. It is supported by other researchers who highlighted that burnout has been identified as a grave public health issue in the tertiary education industry.

Local evidence also confirmed the extent of academic burnout, and currently, trends indicate that academicians at Malaysia's Research Universities are more likely to experience burnout than those at private institutions (Shaiful et al., 2018). Maintaining health in different aspects of life for both the faculty and the students of the educational institutions is crucial to the development of academic excellence and the propagation of optimal quality of life. On the other hand, Malaysian academicians find it difficult to participate in teaching, consultation, supervision, research, and publication activities simultaneously (Che Nawi et al., 2016; Ismail & Noor, 2016).

On the other hand, another study revealed the existence of presenteeism among academicians, but they have been found to experience many of the risk factors that encourage such behavior, such as high demands (e.g., workload pressure, long working hours, and role stress), low resources (e.g., control and support) and orientations towards the job (e.g., high involvement and overcommitment) (Kinman & Wray, 2022). This is agreed by Mukosolu et al. (2015) who highlighted that workplace stress is a significant health risk factor for employees worldwide, making them less motivated and productive. Despite the importance of the academic profession

to higher education and its role as the backbone and asset of any institution, a limited systematic assessment of burnout in university teaching faculties has been identified (Henny et al., 2014).

Job Demand-Resource Model (JD-R Model)

The JD-R theory states that despite the type of work, a job's characteristics consist of two elements: job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). In contrast to other theories, the JD-R model does not identify certain characteristics that contribute to motivation or job strain. It makes the notion that each profession might have unique risk factors linked to work-related stress and that these characteristics fall primarily into two categories: job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and Voydanoff (2005), resources are structural or psychological assets that can be leveraged to improve performance, lessen demands, or create new resources.

The JD-R paradigm is predicated on the idea that every aspect of a work may be categorized as either resources or demands. JD-R affects workers' well-being or performance through two mediating mechanisms: motivation and health impairment. High employment expectations exhaust employees' physical and mental resources, which results in health problems, low satisfaction, and subpar performance in the health impairment process. Workplace resources boost workers' physical and mental energies during the motivating process, which improves performance and increases workplace engagement and happiness. These two psychological processes have a simultaneous impact on outcomes related to well-being, like balance satisfaction (Sarwar et al., 2021). Bakker et al. (2004) emphasized that resources play a crucial role in the demands of organizations and are used to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals, foster personal development, and lessen workloads. Thus, the purpose of job resources is to accomplish a job's objectives (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) serves as the conceptual framework for this study since the model is suitable to explain how the experiences of academicians are individually and collectively associated with well-being outcomes. The JD-R hypothesis directly considers one of the well-being outcomes examined here (mental health) as an indicator of employees' well-being outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Job Autonomy and Academician's Mental Health

The term "job autonomy" describes an employee's level of choice, freedom, and independence in determining how to divide their time, how to work, and other aspects of their jobs (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). According to some studies, job autonomy is associated with better mental health (Ferrie et al., 2016; Madsen et al., 2017; Theorell et al., 2016; Theorell et al., 2015). Numerous studies have been conducted on the connections between job autonomy and employee well-being and behavior. Sun et al. (2019) found a strong correlation between autonomy and life happiness, which raises the possibility that autonomy also affects mental health. Clausen et al. (2022) in their recent study also concluded that job autonomy is positively associated with individual psychological well-being or mental health.

Job autonomy has been linked in management literature to increased job satisfaction (Taylor & Westover, 2011), increased job involvement (Hassan, 2014), and decreased stress (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Tummer et al. (2018) anticipate that more workplace autonomy will improve workers' vitality. It is a situation where, when they work, employees feel strong both physically and emotionally and are full of good energy. People who have job autonomy operate according to their core beliefs, objectives, and passions (Graves & Luciano, 2012). Academicians often feel understood, respected, and inspired to voice their opinions when they are granted a high

degree of autonomy (Peng et al., 2022). They have higher levels of enjoyment, fulfillment, curiosity, pride, thankfulness, and love and less conflict, all of which are beneficial to their mental health.

While previous studies mostly focused on the individual and contextual factors as predictors of employees' self-development, a study by Zhou et al. (2019) asserts that job autonomy may promote employees' personal growth. Job autonomy can be used to forecast self-development from the following perspectives: it allows workers to devote their time and energy to work freely, pick how to work, and determine how often they connect with coworkers. According to a study by Cho et al. (2021), employees' perception of feeling trusted will be influenced by the relationship between employee job autonomy and their leadership. Job autonomy is described in the JDR model as a resource in the psychological work environment. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), resources in the psychosocial work environment should a) lessen the stress level brought by job expectations, improve employees' ability to accomplish work goals and promote learning, development, and personal and professional progress.

Social Support and Academician's Mental Health
In recent decades, many studies have been done on the impact of social support on health, quality of life, and especially mental health over the recent decades (Fiorilli et al., 2019; Fasihi Harandi et al., 2017). A study on the impact of social support among academicians in Malaysia has been conducted by numerous scholars (Abd Hamid et al., 2020; Achour et al. 2017; Ahmad et al., 2018; Nasution et al., 2022; Rusli et al., 2023). It indicates that social support is an important element for an academician's mental health.

In a recent study, social support was validated as a trustworthy tool to examine academicians' social support among Indonesian academicians, which aids universities in creating a supportive work environment and enhancing the caliber of employee relationships (Lestari et al., 2023). Khan et al. (2019) in a study among Pakistani academicians found that the reduction in workload and the burnout dimension was achieved by raising the degree of social support, particularly which came from coworkers and supervisors. Another study done by scholars also confirmed that social support moderates the relationship between job stress and disengagement among academicians (Khan et al., 2023). In contrast, the perceived social support and job satisfaction among employees have been found to act as sequential mediators in the relationship between job stress and job burnout (Wu et al., 2021). Moreover, higher ratings of perceived social support from family are reported as being associated with lower levels of depression (Liu et al., 2020), increased self-efficacy, sleep quality, and reduced anxiety and stress (Xiao et al., 2020).

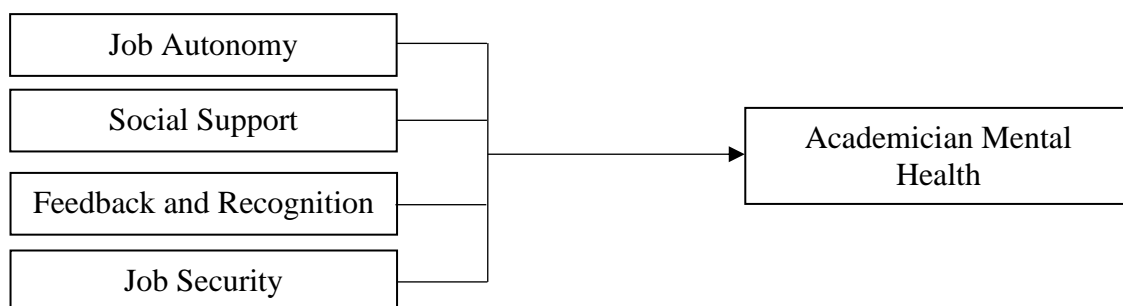### Feedback and Recognition and Academician's Mental Health
Unlike other forms of incentive, employee recognition focuses on the accomplishments and values of the individual rather than the quantity of money or goods awarded (Yang et al., 2022). Coworkers, subordinates, and bosses are some possible sources of workplace appreciation (Brun & Dugas, 2008). Recognition positively helps in reducing psychological distress at work (Dany & Livian, 2002), encouraging greater engagement (Tremblay et al., 2000), on-the-job learning (Lippit, 1997), and enhancing job satisfaction (Appelbaum & Kamal, 2000). Furthermore, research has shown that non-monetary managerial acknowledgment enhances employees' psychological well-being in a positive way (Merino & Privado, 2015).

A study by Montani et al. (2020) provides evidence that there is a strong correlation between manager appreciation and overall employee behavioral engagement in both in-role and extra-role activities by examining how and under what conditions recognition practices are related to employee behavioral involvement at work. The findings of a study conducted by Baqir et al. (2020) indicated reward and recognition can motivate employees to perform better in the workplace. Additionally, research by Yang et al. (2022) has indicated that the time taken by supervisors to express recognition can boost employee perceptions of the organization's support and trust, enhance job happiness, and ultimately enhance job performance (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2018). A review of workplace culture on employee's mental health and well-being by Monteiro and Joseph (2023) summarized that workplace culture has a significant effect on workers' mental health and wellness. It is possible to create a healthy workplace culture that supports employees' mental health and well-being by fostering supportive leadership, social support, appropriate job expectations, work-life balance, and efficient rules.

Job Security and Academician's Mental Health

Even though job security is the most important determinant of the well-being of employees, Daud (2017) claimed that Malaysia has never carried out any scientific research on job security. The subjects of prior research have frequently included job performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. According to Shantan and Mah (2008), job security is vital in keeping workers in an organization and enabling them to work comfortably and efficiently. Zahari et al. (2020) also asserted that job stability is one of the factors that is needed to make employees retain for longer periods. The state of job security in the workforce is currently at an all-time high. When workers feel their jobs are secure, they believe that their employers have done their part. Workers are encouraged to dedicate themselves and give their best work for the sake of reciprocity. On the other hand, low perceived job security can be viewed as an unequal trade relationship between employers and employees since workers believe that regardless of how hard they work, their employers have not lived up to their responsibilities (Lu et al., 2017). In a study of public higher education in Malaysia, job insecurity was found to be significantly associated with anxiety in academician's mental health (Yusof et al., 2022).

Figure 1: The Hypothesized Model of Academician's Mental Health

The hypothesized model of academicians' mental health is shown in Figure 1 and the hypotheses developed show the relationships between job autonomy, social support, feedback, and job security and academicians' mental health.

H1: Job autonomy has a positive and significant influence on academicians' mental health.
H2: Social support has a positive and significant influence on academicians' mental health.
H3: Feedback and recognition have a positive and significant influence on academicians' mental health.
H4: Job security has a positive and significant influence on academicians' mental health.

Discussion and Conclusion

Using the JD-R model, this study aimed to examine the impact of job resources on the mental health of academicians in Malaysian public universities. It is imperative to pay close attention to how job resources can result in stressful life events and other negative effects, especially since there is a strong correlation between employee satisfaction and mental health. Teaching, researching, and servicing are just a few of the many duties that academicians frequently must balance. Academicians may also need to stay abreast of changes in their field, participate in training to advance their knowledge or pick up new skills, and adjust to new technology or methods.

The findings of this study are consistent with the previous study by Cankir (2017) and Sakarji et al. (2023) suggesting that social support and autonomy improved academicians' mental health. Despite these issues, the study's depth advances the body of knowledge on academicians' mental health and its contributing factors. By examining how job resources affect academicians, this study expanded the JD-R paradigm, it showed how job resources are connected to good mental health. Studying academicians' mental health can contribute to the body of knowledge in several ways, such as understanding the sources and consequences of psychological stress among academicians, and how it affects their physical and mental health, their teaching performance, and their relationships with students and colleagues, developing and evaluating effective interventions and strategies to promote academicians' mental health and well-being, such as self-care practices, peer support, professional development, and organizational changes, exploring the links between academicians' mental health and well-being and students' mental health and well-being, and how academicians can foster positive social-emotional learning and resilience among their students and addressing the challenges and opportunities of teaching in different contexts, or diverse and inclusive classrooms.

Providing faculty members with sufficient job resources is crucial to building resilience and supporting their mental health. Academicians can receive support from their institutions through collaborative networks, opportunities for professional development, and a culture of praise and acknowledgment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Higher education institutions can improve faculty members' work performance, well-being, and overall organizational success by allocating resources for their jobs. Therefore, further studies are warranted to investigate the influence of job resources on employees' mental health in the education sector as it is important for individuals, society, and national development. Future researchers can also use the third variables which are moderating or mediating variables to determine the strength of the link between independent and dependent variables. For example, personal resources such as religiosity can act as the moderating variable that may clarify the relationship between job resources and mental health.

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