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**POST COVID-19: JOB STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG
LECTURERS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

This conceptual paper intends to examine the correlation between the changes of job scope requirement (due to post covid-19) and mental health condition of lecturers in a private university (a case study of Universiti Tenaga Nasional). Job stress and job satisfaction will represent the perspective of job in this study. Lecturer, undoubtedly, is the most importance component in any educational program and their contribution to the country's educational system cannot be overstated. The widespread of the Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) around the world caused the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a pandemic. In Malaysia, efforts to curb the spread of the epidemic forced the government to order universities and colleges to stop face-to-face classes and replace them with online learning. This situation causes anxiety among students and lecturers indicates that stress will occur when the person cannot continue the existing routine. This sudden change altered the implementation of existing learning system. Then, only when it is just about time that everyone is getting used to the new norm, the 'endemic' was announced. The implementation of endemic starting from 1st April 2022 has provided various occupational fields, including education, some flexibility in terms of operation. Learning sessions is back again to face-to-face. And, not only teaching, all other differed administrative and research work that cannot be done during MCO need to be completed by lecturers.

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1. Introduction

Higher education has withstood numerous worldwide trends, and via its duties of teaching, research, and service, institutions of higher learning play a crucial role in fostering knowledge-based economies. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, faculty members and students have been forced to quickly adjust to virtual learning patterns and the requirement for online teaching and learning were so instant (Mok & Montgomery, 2021). The actual practice was done within the shortest possible time and without sufficient training on the proper utilization of the online teaching and learning platforms to their fullest extent. The situation resulted in a stressful and unsettled state of the higher education landscape with particular effect on academicians' behaviors such as job performance and organizational behavior. Motivation to work, job stress and job satisfaction is highly relevant in this context. Job stress and job satisfaction have received much attention in recent academic discourse but the real effect of covid-19 situation to them remains widely open for further investigation (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

In today's world, stress has become a worldwide phenomenon, which occurs in every workplace. In today's work life, employees are generally working for longer hours, as the rising levels of responsibilities require them to exert themselves for excellence in work performance. All organizations are noticed under high level of job stress in these days (Sidhu et al., 2020). Siegrist et al. (2004) define job stress as an imbalance between the efforts and rewards on the job. Workplace environments in particular cause job stress. Stress can be brought on by a variety of things in the workplace, including the work task, the abrupt changes in the environment, the job requirements, role conflicts, and worker abilities. Job stress, in particular, may effect employees' health and lowers their productivity (Wei et al., 2016).

Human beings can bear only a certain level of stress and a continuous exposure to a stressful situation may create physical, organizational, social and emotional problem (Sidhu et al., 2020). Employees suffering from a continuous high level of job stress may compromise their health condition. As argued by El Shikieri and Musa (2012), excessive workload, lack of promotional opportunities, role conflict and unsatisfactory working conditions can have a negative effect on the health of employee. Job stress affects physical health of employees as high percentage of employees reported that they suffered from illness and were not present at job due to increasing level of job stress that leads to emotional exhaustion (Kashif et al., 2017). Individuals often face the problem in trying to balance between work and family commitments. The lack of time or capacity and energy of the individual leads to the so-called conflict between work and family, which has many negative consequences, including lower satisfaction at work and in life in general (Taşdelen-Karçay & Bakalım, 2017).

Job satisfaction is defined as the positive emotional reaction to the work environment brought on by achieving the employee's goals (Ahmad & Jameel, 2018). The definition is very much related to productivity and indication of positive job performance results, with a respect of feelings toward a career or specific aspects of the job. It is a healthy working environment in which individuals feel well and respected, as employees as well as persons with a private life, contributing to higher life satisfaction (Lee et al., 2018). Numerous research clarified the significant impact of work satisfaction on career and quality of life. Organizations should try to retain contented employees if they are the kind of employees who are dedicated, engaged and very productive (Kumara & Fasana, 2018).

1.1. Problem statement

Since the spread of COVID-19, two years went by and the world community has begun to adapt to a new normal life. Malaysians too has just begun to adapt to the life of this pandemic era when it is again announced as endemics. For academicians, the situation hugely involved the method utilized for teaching and learning which was required to be conducted online since 2020 by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Some felt it was very challenging to shift from the earlier practice when instruction mandating the use of virtual teaching was announced (Mohan Rathakrishnan, 2020). The readiness of lecturers in terms of skills and knowledge too was a huge issue (Mohd Hafiz Md Hanif, 2020). Facing uncertainties in life is a common situation to all. However, if such unfavourable condition prolonged, issues will start to emerge as daily functioning of individuals will start to be affected.

The changing of teaching and learning delivery method due to arrival of covid-19 pandemic was a huge challenge to many, and yet, after going through and overcoming so many challenges to implement the required online teaching and learning delivery method, the announcing of covid-19 as an endemic once again requiring the delivery method to be retracted to its earlier mode. It is not the 'shifting back', but rather the occurring 'continuous change' as a source of 'continuous uncertainty' with adverse effect to students, teachers, lecturers, mothers, fathers etc. in many perspectives that needs to be focused. This is especially hard to women who need to assume different roles in life as a mother with childcare necessity, home carer and working individuals. The aftermath of post covid-19 to; education delivery implementation, society's living arrangement, and incurred cost for living (individuals) and operation (organizations) must be thoroughly discussed in order to decide the next step to be taken and for us to be sure it is in the right direction. Thus, for a beginning, this conceptual paper will investigate the effect of post covid-19 effect to job demand shifting (from the perspectives of job stress and job satisfaction) and its relation to mental health among lecturers in private institution.

1.2. Purpose of the study

This study primarily aims to understand the connection between job stress, job satisfaction and mental health among lecturers in private institution post the endemic period. In other words, this conceptual paper intends to examine the correlation between the changes of job scope requirement due to post covid-19 and mental health condition of lecturers, in which situation at Universiti Tenaga Nasional will be used as the case study. This study will try to observe the transition from the pandemic to the endemic period and understand how the phenomena is affecting mental health of individuals in academic sector by probing into the actual possible factors that may cause the situation. Focus will be given to studying about the changes of society's living arrangement, the practice of cost saving and greener living and individuals' skills upgrading opportunity.

2. Research Methods

This paper is quantitative in nature and aims to examine variables influencing mental health condition of lecturers in private institution (job stress and job satisfaction). Quantitative analysis method is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data. It can be utilized to find patterns and average,

prepare the predictions, examine causal relationships, and generalize results to a wider population (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Quantitative analysis permits the isolation of invariant relations in the study of any nature (Nevin, 1984). This study will involve lecturers from the Putrajaya and Muadzam Shah campuses as the respondents. This study will use a cluster random sampling method where respondents are selected according to the college population.

Intended instrument for this study is the Pressure Management Indicator Questionnaire (PMI) that was developed from the Occupational Stress Index (OSI). It is the world's first integrated occupational stress questionnaire. Conducted confirmatory factor analysis has shown that the PMI is a significantly improved version of the original OSI (Williams & Cooper, 1996). The questionnaire, which is widely used worldwide in the fields of organizational analysis, stress counselling, stress training, and occupational health, was created to give a comprehensive, integrated, compact measure of the numerous characteristics of occupational stress. This instrument has 146 questions, takes 15 to 20 minutes to complete, and is divided into 24 subscales. Each subscale has an additional eight parts in addition to a section asking about demographic information. The outcome scales measure job satisfaction and organizational satisfaction, organizational security, organizational commitment, anxiety/depression (state of mind), resilience, worry (confidence), physical symptoms and energy. The factors of stress measured by the pressure scales include the workload, interpersonal interactions at work, career growth (recognition), organizational climate, managerial role, individual responsibility, domestic demands, and daily problems.

3. Data Analysis

Data analysis will be performed using Microsoft Excel 2019 and IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0. Microsoft Excel will be used for editing, sorting, and coding. Subsequently, the excel file will be imported into IBM SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean, percentage) and inferential statistics (correlation analysis) will be executed using IBM SPSS software.

4. Discussion

The unexpected arrival of covid-19 was greeted with chaotic situation. As death toll rises, everything was in panic orders and governments were forced to take instant measures that were unprecedented. Stories about people trapped at home with no food and yet too scared even to meet anybody due to possibility of contagion were frequent. The world was facing one of its darkest moments, at least that was how human understand it. Then, after a while there were news about the cleaner air, a huge reduction of sound pollution, and wild animals are seen roaming freely in the city. To think of it carefully, covid-19 was a tragedy, yet it was also a blessing in disguise. Just to think of one reason, it forces us to step upward in terms of technology education. It did not come easy, but we made it to some extent. The question here is why don't we continue to move forward? Why do we rather make a U-turn and step backward again? Efforts were made (i.e., learning software, buying equipment etc) but all are wasted, and we need once again to face a stressful change of retreating back to the previous step again.

A funny picture of a mother having to tape her children to the floor forcing them to be quite while she was having an online meeting from home during the lock down period was very amusing, but it was a reality for many. The transition was difficult, then as we realized, the situation allowed us to spend more time with our loved one at home. Online learning was an advantage to students who stayed far from campus and having to take care of their needy parents. It was possible for them to learn with lesser cost as they are staying with their parents while still having the opportunity to do part time work. Organizations too was able to cut a huge cost in their operation as employees were working from home. The lock down too has forced the reduce of daily car usage, the main contributor to our air pollution. Cost saving in many senses were possible and greener environment was again starting to emerge. And all we do is, turning back again to step one.

It is not difficult to see however, there are tons of issues and obstacle that we need to face in order to move forward. The issues of excellent and uninterrupted internet collection nationwide, academicians' capability to conduct online classes that is equally effective with face to face session through the usage of many new online teaching technology, suitable material preparation for online teaching with advance software, online examination setting system that is able to monitor the integrity of students in answering questions, providing off-campus students with programs that will allow them to experience campus-living, and many more are the issues that is right in front of the blink of our eyes. But again, should these be the reasons why we need to turn around and move backward?

Observing the mental health level of individuals (in this context, lecturers) is one way to understand if they are strong enough to coop with the changes that comes with covid-19, and again to coop with further changes that arrive after it slows down. It is merely a signal on the surface, and it needs deep digging down for us to understand the actual causes that trigger the situation. It is only upon knowing these causes that we may decide either to continue walking forward or turning backward, retreating back to our previous step. Both actions will have a huge consequence (be it negative or positive) to our living in many perspectives. This research is trying to find a hint of a correct direction in this issue and this is where the significance is.

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