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Mediating Effect of Disengagement on Workload and Organizational Commitment among Academicians

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Abstract

Burnout is becoming more common in research and at the workplace. Additionally, academicians may experience burnout, especially disengagement, in different ways in different workplaces. The study of disengagement in the services and health sectors has been extensively identified, but less attention has been paid to the study of disengagement in education. Consequently, the current study examines the relationship between workload, organizational commitment and disengagement among academicians. Moreover, the study identifies the mediating effect of disengagement on workload and disengagement. Based on self-administered questionnaires, the study found that disengagement and organizational commitment were negatively correlated. From the findings, it has been concluded that workload affects academicians' levels of disengagement and commitment. Workload and organizational commitment are also mediated by disengagement. The study's findings were addressed to various stakeholders, including students, academicians, university administrators and policymakers.

Keywords: Workload, Disengagement, Organizational Commitment, Academicians,

1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in this fast-growing age of science and technology. In today's competitive world market, education faces new challenges, whereas technology expands, globalization takes hold, resources become scarce and political conflicts arise due to the world experiencing changes. As a result, working environments are becoming more complex. These changes in the working environment affect academicians. Past research shows teaching is a low-stress profession (Yusoff, Khan, Mubeen, & Azam, 2013).

On the other hand, academicians believe that teaching is a stressful job with a little workload and many opportunities. Moreover, they believe there were no administrative tasks, no meetings with parents or families, and no political disagreements among academics. Teaching is a stressful and emotional job due to changes in the educational system. As a result of

dissatisfaction, low productivity, less commitment, turnover, and burnout, academicians are dissatisfied.

The role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in uplifting socioeconomic and political standards is crucial (Khan, Sohail, Sufyan, Uddin, & Basit, 2019). Since the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has changed the HEIs, academicians have taken on more responsibility because organizational productivity is calculated based on individual and organizational performance. Academicians' burnout must be studied at HEIs, especially workload issues, disengagement and organizational commitment. Burnout and a stressful environment are among the most pressing issues in the current workplace (Khan, Khan, Kanwal, & Bukhair, 2018).

An organization's commitment is characterized by loyalty, belonging, and acceptance of its major goals, values, and positive evaluations of its work. Individuals and organizations need to be committed. Organizational commitment leads to improved academic outcomes and reduced burnout, especially disengagement. Turnover and burnout are most accurately predicted by organizational commitment. According to Porter et al. (1974), more committed employees are more productive than less committed ones. The working environment also leads to disengagement when stressors and resources are imbalanced.

Consequently, employees who are overworked and disengaged become exhausted and demotivated. Employee commitment, satisfaction and productivity decrease when disengagement and absenteeism occur in an organization. Based on this conclusion, an organization's commitment to its employees negatively correlates with burnout. The core dimension of burnout is disengagement following emotional exhaustion. As a result of an adverse attitude towards a client or another employee, the employee is deemed to have a negative attitude. Based on the discussion, the study will identify the effect of workload on disengagement and organizational commitment and determine the mediating effect of disengagement on the relationship between workload and organizational commitment.

2. Literature Review

An imbalance between the demands on the person and the resources available to them causes burnout. According to Maslach and Jackson (2013), three main factors contribute to burnout: emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and reduced personal accomplishment.

According to past research, burnout is more common when the core dimensions, “emotional exhaustion and depersonalization” measures, are higher and reduced personal accomplishments are lower simultaneously (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Several research studies agree that burnout manifests as low satisfaction, high absenteeism, a desire to work for the organization, and organizational commitment. Research studies have also documented that burnout positively impacts job performance. Indicators of burnout include the lack of resources and autonomy, while rewards and commitment increase (A. B. Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

In every sector of the economy, no matter what field you are in, whether home care, education, nursing, or hoteling, some employees experience burnout at some point in their careers (Khan., Khan, & Naz, 2017). Due to the nature of these professions, they are subject to a higher level of social and interpersonal demands. Academicians and teaching professionals are exposed to stressors impacting their daily routines and professional development. Burnout is a consequence of this situation, which is to say that academicians experience physical and psychological symptoms that are detrimental to their ability to work and perform (Khan, Khan, Malik, & Qureshi, 2017).

The literature shows that burnout is mainly defined as a combination of two core dimensions: emotional exhaustion and disengagement (Khan., Rasli, Yusoff, & Ahmad, 2015). However, a third measure of burnout could also be defined as a reduction in personal accomplishment. Reduced personal accomplishment is believed to be related to the individual's personality. The negative and positive aspects of burnout affect an individual's burnout. It is necessary to analyze the characteristics that determine the issue by looking at its dimensions (A. Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). There are behavioral and mental indicators included in the dimension, along with a relationship between the indicators and the work environment, for instance, the amount of emotional exhaustion and depression one experiences, as well as the manifestation of symptoms in people who do not suffer from psychopathology as well as the decrease in effectiveness and performance at work as a result of attitudes and behaviors associated with burnout. The dimensions of burnout include the study of an individual's emotional exhaustion, disengagement, physical exhaustion, and the symptoms associated with depression. Due to the limited focus of the study, there is only a brief discussion of

disengagement and its effect on organizational commitment in this section. Across occupational and organizational settings, disengagement is considered one of the most effective measures of burnout because it is strongly associated with emotional exhaustion. In the context of burnout, disengagement is the interpersonal component that traditionally manifests as negative, callous, or detachment from clients or employees within or outside an organization. The opposite of engagement is disengagement, which is similar to depersonalization. Demerouti *et al.* (2010) defined it as distancing oneself from one's work, object, and content. As a result of disengagement, one can feel negatively towards others and act dehumanizing toward them. As a result, employees feel disconnected from other aspects of their jobs within the organization. Maslach (2017), the term "disengagement" describes a reaction to various aspects of the work environment that is defensive, callous, or excessively detached. It is characterized by developing suspicion, unfavorable attitudes, and feelings towards other employees.

Disengagement among academicians results from negative feelings toward other employees and is potentially dangerous for the institution's routine operations (Khan, Khan, Naz, & Rasli, 2016). Academicians who experience disengagement develop behavioral attitudes toward students, such as ignoring or not paying attention and sometimes a communication breakdown. The researchers concluded that burnout occurs when, as a result of this discussion, any aspect of employees emerges due to the above discussion (Mukherjee, Tennant, & Beresford, 2020). In other words, some researchers suggested that disengagement results from exhaustion. In the study, the researcher believes disengagement can indicate an association's organizational commitment and a dependent variable. Additionally, the present study examined the following points in its investigation of work disengagement: innovation and interest in work, freedom and independence at work, self-determination at work, and negative tendencies towards work.

Workload refers to a specific amount of work performed at a specific time. A workload is defined by Goldenberg and Waddell (1990) as "the number of hours one works each day, week, or year beyond one's physical and mental capacity." Workload increases stress, strain, and burnout, mostly quantitatively. Undoubtedly, the workload is an important aspect of job demands and is the most common source of academic stress (Khan, Khan, Malik, et al., 2017). Several factors contribute to the shortage of professional skills, including career development, long

working hours, the number of students in classes, the shortage of teachers, and the lack of research productivity. There is a consistent relationship between it and job burnout. Furthermore, Goldenberg and Waddell (1990) found that the performance of less acceptable students adversely affected their academic performance.

The problems of burnout experienced by academicians in teaching and service professions include a lack of information, miscommunication, rewards, control, workload, technological change, deterioration of family relations, insufficient or mismatched rewards, supportive colleagues, long working hours, other conflicts, fewer facilities, and administrative red tape (Khan et al., 2014). In contrast to developed nations, developing countries struggle to equip their educational institutions with advanced technologies and train their academics to take full advantage of them. Academicians may also suffer from burnout if inadequate resources and classes are too large. Like other workplace demands, their workload affects academicians' mental and physical well-being. According to Frattaroli (2006), these symptoms include depression, anxiety, fatigue and depersonalization. The most stressful aspect of teaching is reportedly departmental problems with students, according to several research studies (63%) conducted among American and Canadian educators.

The workload is the extra work assigned to the employee, apart from the routine work. It works in a way beyond employees' physical or psychological capacities. The workload is considered one of the potential sources of burnout and mental exhaustion and negatively affects academicians' performance and productivity (Khan, Siddiqui, Ullah, Ur Rahman, & Zarrar, 2023). Historically, academicians' workloads have consisted of three types: research, teaching, and services or administration. Moreover, it was observed in Pakistan that academicians are asked to teach analytically and methodically diverse subjects every semester. They must also share the managerial load and teaching workload at departmental and organizational levels. At the same time, they are told to research to raise the institution's rank. They are, therefore, torn between justifying their roles and managing the workload (Ugwu & Onyishi, 2020). The workload becomes more pressing if there is a lack of resources or a funding cutback.

Organizational commitment refers to the attachment and willingness of an employee to remain with an organization for a long period. It was possible to establish this foundation due to

the members' connection to the entire system(Khan. et al., 2014). Buchanan conceptualizes organizational commitment as an emotional attachment to the goals and values of an organization rather than a purely instrumental one. The degree to which a person identifies with and participates in a particular organization is also considered a commitment. The most important outcome in teaching occupations is organizational commitment. Committing to academic development is key to their success in educational organizations. In the academic context, organizational commitment empowers academicians to improve their job satisfaction, student achievement, and personal fulfillment. Organizations and employees have a psychological connection, which is more important than anything.

Similarly, Cullen *et al.* (2003) conducted a research study to measure employee commitment, engagement, and identification. Different organizational goals and norms influence employees' attitudes and behaviors. Commitment is the degree to which someone identifies with and actively participates in a particular organization (Pool & Pool, 2007). In addition, the researchers examined the multidimensional construct: the desire to remain with the organization, a belief and acceptance of the organization's values, and a strong commitment to working for the organization.

Three components of organizational commitment have been identified: affective, continuous, and normative. Nurses, general practitioners, HR specialists, and academicians have approved these three-component models. We propose this model based on different institutions' experiences because each commitment component affects behavior differently. These model components negatively affect attendance, performance, and civic engagement. Employees develop relationships based on reputation, expectations, recognition, and future development. Meyer and Allen (1997) have described it as feelings of identification, attachment, and involvement in an organization and positive feelings of identification with it. Affective commitment is attaching emotional attachment, identifying with the organization, participating in its activities, and being involved. Those with high levels of affective commitment are more productive, have fewer intentions to leave the organization, have a strong attachment to it, and want to be a part of it. Employees with low levels of effective commitment show aggressive behavior, theft, sabotage, and missing work. Compared to structural characteristics, support from

supervisors and organizational rewards are significantly related to commitment. According to the study, affective commitment refers to an employee's decision to remain with the company but not for the organization (Karatepe, Beirami, Bouzari, & Safavi, 2014; Lizano, Godoy, & Allen, 2019).

Continuation commitment is the second critical component of organizational commitment that needs to be addressed. There is a rational basis for developing continuation commitments based on economic rationality. According to Allen and Meyer's study, continuity commitment is related to perceived costs and leaving the organization, which has been determined from their study. Because of this, organizational employees will commit to the organization, committing themselves to it, except for their self-interests. Less emotion and more logic are involved. The employee is also more likely to stay with the organization if it is an effective commitment, increasing their chances of staying with the company. In addition, one of the three components of organizational commitment is normative commitment, which entails an employee's obligation to remain with the organization.

Moreover, it is the sense of responsibility employees have within their organizations. Randall et al. found that a decision such as this would be made by an employee based on their socialization, differences in organizational practices, or their background. Therefore, it is further defined as an employee's obligation to an organization.

Relationship between Workload, disengagement and Organizational Commitment

The previous section has conceptualized the three concepts of the present study. After these readers are familiarized with the meaning and characteristics of these concepts, it is important to discuss the relationship between them so that the nature of these concepts and their interaction with each other is known. Moreover, the strength and direction of the relationship of these concepts is also known. The relationship between workload, disengagement and Organizational commitment interact in different ways (Taris, Ybema, & Beek, 2017), and this interaction changes with changes in circumstances. A review of existing literature will be helpful to understand this whole process. Therefore, the following section will explain the relationship between workload, disengagement and Organizational commitment by taking examples from

both recent and previous, discussing different findings and explaining the nature of the relationship(Li, Jiang, Yao, & Li, 2013).

Firstly, the relationship between workload and disengagement will be discussed as they are interrelated in how they lead to disengagement problems. As we know, workloads are unwanted environmental factors that negatively affect the working performance of employees by causing physical and psychological disengagement problems. Therefore, the nature of the workload decides the nature of disengagement. In this regard, several studies have explored the relationship between job demands and burnout problems. For example, Schaufeli and Bakker found in their study on job demands, job burnout and work engagement that there was a positive relationship between workload and the emotional problem of disengagement. They revealed that workload is a good predictor of disengagement.

Based on the relationship between workload and disengagement, let us discuss one of the outcomes: organizational commitment. It strongly correlates with stress, disengagement, job involvement, motivation, job satisfaction and occupational commitment. Similarly, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) reported that individuals more committed to their organization will have higher stress levels than less committed employees. From a review of existing literature, it is clear that job burnout is experienced by job satisfaction and low levels of organizational commitment. Another study examined a negative relationship between organizational commitment and burnout. As organizational commitment increases, burnout will be decreased(M. K. Lee, Kim, Paik, Chung, & Lee, 2020).

Organizational commitment is a significant component in determining an employee's performance, job satisfaction and turnover, organizational citizenship behaviors and counterproductive behavior. It is also relevant to burnout, absenteeism and turnover of the employees in the organization. Leiter (2017) reported that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between burnout and turnover intention. Marmaya *et al.* (2011) reported that social life within the organization is important to burnout dimensions. Therefore, the relationship between the employee and his superiors, subordinates, and colleagues is important in decreasing burnout.

It has been concluded that organizations should provide a favorable working environment to their employees, where they could be protected from unwanted job demands and provide enough resources to help them combat burnout in times of crisis. In this regard, the employees should be given training to develop awareness about the unwanted job demands. They should be provided opportunities to utilize the existing resources around them fully and, in this way, the organizations could be saved from the overwhelming effect of burnout.

3. Research Methodology

A research design is a blueprint for the research study, which includes everything from a broad assumption to data collection and analysis details. Moreover, it depends on the nature of the question (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Analyzing the association between study variables is what quantitative research does to test research objectives and theories. A valid and reliable questionnaire is typically used to measure these variables, and numbered data can be analyzed statistically. As an alternative, qualitative research explores and understands social problems individuals or groups perceive (Donald & Schindler, 2010).

Two philosophical schools of thought in social science are interpretivism and positivism. Positivism emphasizes objectives, whereas interpretivism emphasizes subjective matters. It is also important to note that a cross-sectional study is an observational study that entails data collection, analysis, and interpretation from a target population or sample for a particular period. It is also known as a transversal, prevalence, or one-shot study (Creswell, 2013). On the other hand, a longitudinal study is an observational study in which data are collected repeatedly from the same subjects during a set period. Another advantage of longitudinal studies is that the same individuals are studied for the study period. In the present study, a quantitative and cross-sectional study was chosen based on the nature of its research questions based on positivist principles. It was selected that the researcher would develop a cross-sectional and quantitative study, where the data would be collected once only. Three hundred-two (302) academicians from Pakistani higher education institutions were targeted in the current study. The researcher distributed a valid and reliable questionnaire to conduct a valid and reliable survey among academicians. After all, 212 questionnaires were returned with a 76% response rate.

Furthermore, only 212 questionnaires were used for the final data analysis, while the rest were left uncompleted.

Various scales, such as the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), were also used to measure disengagement. In addition to the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), this is another alternative inventory to consider. According to Demeroutiet al.(2010), this inventory includes positive and negative items. Furthermore, previous research studies have used the OLDI inventory with a reliability of 0.70 or 0.80 based on the data collected. Workload has been investigated with the help of dimensions like workload demands, research productivity, professional or career and skill development and number of working hours. Workload is measured through 12 items, including five from Crespo and Bertrand(2013) and three from Skaalvik and Skaalvik(2011).

On the other hand, organizational commitment was measured by 12 items included in the survey(Khan, Md, Yusoff, & Malik, 2014; Meyer, Stanley, & Parfyonova, 2012). The Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.91 in one study and 0.77 in another, where the alpha varied from study to study.

4. Findings of the Study

The present study used the correlation to examine the relationship between workload, disengagement and organizational commitment among academicians from Pakistani HEIs. The results of Table 1 also show a positive correlation between workload and disengagement among academicians in HEIs in Pakistan and a negative correlation between workload and disengagement with organizational commitment. According to the study, high disengagement reduces organizational commitment, which aligns with other studies, such as Leiter and Maslach(Leiter & Maslach, 2003). Different studies have described organizational determinants of disengagement, including absenteeism, turnover, dissatisfaction, low productivity, and reduced organizational commitment(Khan, Gul, & Naz, 2022). Furthermore, the table shows the reliability value of all the variables, which is acceptable for final data analysis.

Table 1: Correlation, Reliability

	Workload	Disengagement	Organizational Commitment
Workload	0.79		
Disengagement	.465*	0.71	

Organizational Commitment	-.450*	-.335*	0.81
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*Significant at 0.01

Moreover, the researcher uses four conditions by Baron and Kenny to determine the mediating effect of disengagement on workload and organizational commitment. Table 2 shows that the workload and organizational commitment were negatively correlated. The workload had a 17.3 percent variance in organizational commitment significance ($\Delta F = 49.12, p < .001$), while the standardized Beta value of workload was negative with high significance ($\beta = -0.601, p < .001$), thus satisfying Baron and Kenny's first condition. Workload and disengagement were positive and correlated to each other. The workload had an 18.3 percent variance in disengagement significance ($\Delta F = 63.01, p < .001$), while the standardized Beta value of workload was also positive with high significance ($\beta = 0.421, p < .001$), satisfying the Baron and Kenny second step. The relationship between mediator disengagement and organizational commitment was negative and described a 10.1 percent variance in organizational commitment ($\Delta F = 21.12, p < .001$), while the standardized Beta value of disengagement was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.442, p < .001$). This satisfied the third condition of Baron and Kenny for mediation. Last but not least, in the fourth step of mediation, when disengagement was inducted in the workload and organizational commitment relationship, the standardized Beta value of workload became smaller and more significant, such as from $\beta = -0.442 (p < .001)$ to $\beta = -0.201 (p < .001)$. Therefore, it satisfies the fourth step of Baron and Kenny, thus describing the fact that disengagement has a full mediating effect on the association between workload and organizational commitment.

Table 2: Mediation Analysis of Disengagement on the Relationship between Workload and Organizational Commitment

Step One Dependent Variable Organizational Commitment				
	β^b	Standard Error	t-value	P-value
Constant	4.143	0.199	24.302	.000
Workload	-0.601	0.073	-7.123	.000
R ²	0.173			
Adjusted R ²	0.174			
F Statistics	49.12 ***			
Step Two Dependent Variable Disengagement				
	B	Standard Error	t-value	P-value
Constant	1.834	0.159	15.102	.000
Workload	0.421	0.037	6.221	.000

R ²	0.183			
Adjusted R ²	0.185			
F Statistics	63.01***			
Step Three Dependent Variable Organizational Commitment				
	β	Standard Error	t-value	P-value
Constant	5.371	0.231	14.923	.000
Disengagement	-0.442	0.092	-2.099	.000
R ²	0.101			
Adjusted R ²	0.103			
F Statistics	21.12***			
Step Four Dependent Variable Organizational Commitment				
	β	Standard Error	t-value	P-value
Constant	4.298	.291	21.134	0.000
Workload	-0.201	.110	-0.913	0.418
Disengagement	-0.545	.076	-5.993	0.000
R ²	0.090			
Adjusted R ²	0.090			
F Statistics	20.1***			

Note: *Significant at $p < 0.05$, **Significant at $p < 0.01$; ***Significant at $p < 0.001$

5. Discussion, Conclusion & Implications

The current study's findings were in line with past research studies. Further, the current study found that disengagement negatively correlated with organizational commitment and positively correlated with workload(Khan, Khan, & Qureshi, 2017). It means that as the workload increases among academicians, the level of disengagement will increase and decrease the level of the employee's commitment to the organization. Different studies, such as Dormann, Demerouti and Bakker (2018) and Hakanen and Schaufeli (2012), have supported these results. Employee disengagement occurs as stressors in the workplace increase. This results in lower employee commitment and productivity, a decline in health, and lower employee satisfaction(Khan, Rasli, Yasir, & Khan, 2019). Based on the study results, burnout and low employee commitment are major factors affecting individual and company productivity in teaching. Previous studies have also shown that disengagement affects employee commitment, leading to low productivity(Khan., Khan, Naz, & Khan, 2017).

Similarly, Lee and Ashforth (1996) also found that disengagement was negatively correlated with organizational commitment. Accordingly, this study's results follow previous studies' contributions. Moreover, the studies found that disengagement mediates the relationship

between workload and Organizational commitment. Therefore, the studies declared that disengagement fully mediates the relationship. Like all other studies, the current studies have limitations. Firstly, the study is cross-sectional. The current study uses a cross-sectional approach, focusing only on academicians, which leads to biased decisions. Thirdly, the study focuses only on the aspect of burnout disengagement. Based on the study's outcome variables, disengagement was measured using the OLDI inventory(Khan., Khan, Naz, & Rasli, 2016; Sinal, Queirós, Pasian, & Marôco, 2019). Last, the researchers did not compare the study results with other studies conducted in the country.

Given the abovementioned limitations, the researcher recommends conducting a longitudinal or experimental study to find this relationship. The researcher also recommends testing other outcome variables, such as personality, leadership, and ill-health, in other fields, such as nursing, law, and engineering. Moreover, the researcher suggests confirming such results with other disengagement instruments. According to the study, disengagement negatively affects organizational commitment(Khan, et al., 2018). It is also worth noting that academicians who are engaged in their work will not dwell on negative criticism if they are engaged in their work, which may benefit the study. Students found the study useful. If teachers concentrate on class lectures, students will be more productive. In addition, the study is relevant to policymakers in many areas. They will organize academicians' routines and duties to ensure they do not burn out and increase their commitment to the organizational working environment.

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