

Beyond Burnout: A Case Study that Associates Quiet Quitting Among Working Women at a Higher Education Institution in Selangor

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The rising expectation of working women, especially married women, to balance professional and family responsibilities often lead to burnout, characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. This issue is worsened by societal expectations that women are solely responsible for household duties, even while contributing financially. Despite management awareness, burnout often remains unaddressed. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of quiet quitting where employees disengage and perform only the bare minimum has become more prevalent. This study investigates burnout and quiet quitting among female employees at a higher education institution in Selangor using a quantitative research design. A purposive sampling method was used to survey 74 working women with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) and the Quiet Quitting Scale (Galanis et al., 2023a). Results indicate that a majority experience high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, along with low personal accomplishment. However, Spearman's Rank correlation found no significant relationship between burnout and quiet quitting ($r = 0.003$, $p\text{-value} = 0.979$). These findings suggest that while burnout is common, other factors may drive quiet quitting, warranting further exploration into additional organisational and psychological influences to enhance employee well-being and retention in academia.

Keywords: burnout, quiet quitting, emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, working women

Working women, specifically working mothers, often find themselves in difficult situations to achieve a work-life balance. It is hard to maintain job performance and at the same time be able to manage their household responsibilities perfectly. According to Hansen and Skovsgaard (2015), gender inequality can be traced back to when humans began settling and developing agriculture. Throughout ancient human history, men and women held different roles. Men were supposed to battle, provide money, and guard the house; women were expected to give birth and raise children. Particularly in the

workplace, gender disparity has been underlined in modern society. Although women work just like men, the difficulty is that society still upholds a norm in which only women are in charge of domestic duties. Women often earn money for home usage, whether in a profession or a home, the issues arise when working women burnout and require greater help from their managers even with awareness.

Following the pandemic, a phenomenon known as "quiet quitting" has arisen, leading employees to become disengaged from their positions. Recent Gallup

research conducted in 2022 revealed that a staggering 85% of employees across the globe remain disengaged or actively disconnected in their workplace (Harter, 2022 as cited in Scheyett, 2022). Quiet quitting is the act of doing the minimum amount of work without extra effort or contribution (Christian, 2022; Tapper, 2022 as cited in Aydin et al., 2023). It is a trend that has been prevalent since the pandemic, where employees take on additional duties without going above and beyond what is expected (Pevac, 2024). The concept of quiet quitting has been inspired by the need to keep a good work-life balance since many companies highly value qualified professionals. However, for people looking to advance in their careers, this behaviour may not be the best long-term strategy. This behaviour has resulted in bad work attitudes, burnout, turnover intentions, and disengagement (Maulidyah et al., 2023). The "Great Resignation" movement has sparked a new employment trend, with employees becoming "quiet quitters" in order to reconcile work and life (Pearce, 2022 as cited in Aydin et al., 2023).

There is a huge difference between quiet quitting and quitting altogether. Quitting abruptly and silently is not necessarily required to be considered a quiet quitting. Instead, it is the act of an employee voluntarily diminishing their level of performance and productivity inside the workplace (Hamouche et al., 2023). Zenger and Folkman (2022) defined quiet quitting as mainly characterised by changes in attitudes and performance inside the workplace. Behaviours such as disengagement from work, decreasing motivation, and a desire to attain a better work-life balance are indicators of this phenomenon. The term "quiet quitting" can refer to a number of different behaviours, including a lack of dedication to the job, putting in only the bare minimum of effort, ignoring or downplaying important work-related emotions, or creating clear separation between one's work and personal lives (Carmichael, 2022; Wade, 2022).

The subtle withdrawal of the employee may be attributed to their manifestation of burnout. Thus, it is necessary to conduct a study that especially examines the underlying factors contributing to burnout and its impact on employed women who exhibit the phenomenon of quiet quitting. Among the reasons that people abandon their jobs, Galanis et al. (2023b) indicated that burnout is the most common explanation. The findings of this study show the need of addressing burnout in the workplace to avoid employees from resorting to a method of coping known as "quiet quitting." By acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental factors contributing to burnout, organisations can develop strategies to improve the welfare of their employees and reduce turnover rates. Ultimately, this will result in a workplace environment that is both more conducive to good health and more efficient for all those concerned. Burnout is a social problem that happens when people are physically, mentally, or emotionally tired from dealing with problems at work for a long time (Harrison, 1999, as cited in Akdemir, 2019). Burnout consists in three elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and a reduced accomplishment in life. Reduced personal accomplishment is a state of inefficacy and inadequacy towards job performance and situations; emotional exhaustion is the depletion of one's emotional resources while depersonalisation is a detached attitude towards people at the workplace (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001).

The Maslach Burnout Model (1981) elaborates that emotional exhaustion is the main element of stress, resulting from the sensation of being emotionally and physically overwhelmed and drained. Depersonalisation is the element of the interpersonal environment marked by unfavourable attitudes and cynicism against clients, employees, or colleagues. This separation might cause idealism and dehumanisation to drop, which finally

affects the quality of performance. Personal achievement is the process of self-evaluation distinguished by a sense of inadequacy and a lack of accomplishment and efficacy. Insufficient employment resources, poor social support, and little opportunities for professional development can all aggravate this problem. Burnout employees may begin to question their own and others' work choices and develop negative opinions of themselves and those close by. Other study by Li et al., (2019) reported that the cause of university professors who experienced high levels of burnout are due to conflicting research and teaching commitments. This study emphasises the common occurrence of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and diminished personal achievement within academic environments. Despite passion for teaching, an academician may experience constant pressure to achieve their key performance indicators which are to publish research, secure funding, meeting administrative deadlines as well as preparing for lectures. The emotional exhaustion will lead to a sense of depersonalisation where one individual feels detached from colleagues and students, impacting the ability to fully engage at work. Academic professionals experience a variety of complex tasks and difficulties that have a substantial effect on their overall well-being and productivity. Academic physicians face significant pressure in various areas such as clinical work, education, research, and administration. Researchers in tertiary education also must balance teaching, research, and community service (Nassar et al., 2019). Policies that underline teaching responsibilities above research often pressure them since they can limit their professional growth and cause exhaustion (Kaguhangire-Barifaijo, 2022).

The COVID-19 epidemic made these challenges more severe and calls for the adoption of alternative work schedules that allow effective remote instruction, also reveal different points of view on the linked

hurdles (Del Mundo & Guico, 2024). The integration of technology in the classroom has changed the duties of professors, emphasising the necessity for supportive leadership and personalised workload management measures to reduce stress and enhance resilience (Carnicer, 2021). Overall, there is an urgent need for institutions to reconsider workload regulations to properly assist academic professionals.

In addition, Akdemir (2019) discovered that there is a substantial impact on organisational commitment due to high levels of teacher burnout, which aligns with the findings of this study. This study emphasises the widespread occurrence of burnout and its influence on personal achievement. It uncovers a significant prevalence of burnout among the participants, which is characterised by emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, along with a low sense of personal success.

Meanwhile, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) describes intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, their influence on behavior, social and cognitive development, and personality (Ryan et al., 2000). It emphasises the importance of inherent inner resources for self-regulation and personality development. By applying SDT, which consists of three components which are relatedness, competence, and autonomy, it is possible to observe that people use quiet quitting as a way to achieve unfulfilled psychological objectives. Employees may lose interest in their work and only complete the bare minimum if these demands are not met. Employers could discourage employees from discreetly quitting by attending to their psychological needs.

Ming et al. (2023) explores the dynamic of burnout and quiet quitting during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting how burnout characterised by emotional exhaustion and diminished personal accomplishment can be exacerbated by

increased workloads and stress. This can then cause quiet quitting, a subdued kind of workplace disengagement. The research emphasises the need of psychological empowerment in avoiding burnout and preserving employee engagement under crisis.

Galanis et al. (2023b) extend their study into the nursing field to investigate how job satisfaction affects the relationship between burnout and quiet quitting. Their study shows that burnout lowers the quality of care for patients and makes organisations less productive. Furthermore, it raises the likelihood of nurses becoming disengaged. It is interesting to note that the results show that some nurses decide to cut back on their efforts rather than quit their employment altogether, which makes it more difficult to address issues with retention and turnover. Hence, improving job satisfaction is essential to reduce burnout and quiet quitting in healthcare settings.

On the other hand, Trang and Trang (2024) investigate the relationship between job burnout and quiet quitting in the banking area, emphasising the moderating effect of optimism. Their findings found that personal and work-related burnout has an impact on quiet quitting. It was discovered that optimism diminished the negative effects of personal and work-related burnout on quiet quitting. These findings imply that encouraging optimism can diminish the negative consequences of burnout on disengagement, particularly in high-pressure banking environments.

While burnout is a significant contributor, other factors can also play a role in the occurrence of quiet quitting. Pevec (2024) study investigated organisational factors contributing to quiet quitting, with burnout being one of the significant factors. The study identifies how variables such as excessive workload, role ambiguity, inadequate resources, and insufficient support can increase the risk of quiet quitting. It also points out that poor leadership, inadequate recognition, and

limited advancement opportunities can lead to employee disengagement and worsening burnout symptoms. This complex relationship necessitates targeted interventions to manage quiet quitting and enhance employee well-being and retention.

Method

Participants

The aim of this paper is to analyse the level of burnout and quiet quitting among working women, specifically academics at a higher institution in Selangor. An additional aim was to identify the relationship between burnout and quiet quitting. This empirical research was conducted in mid-2024. A purposive sample was selected in this study. The questionnaire was created and distributed physically to the targeted respondent. In total, 74 participants have filled out the questionnaire. Majority of the participants were aged 21 – 30 years old (37.8 percent), worked for more than 15 years of tenure (39.2 percent) and those were married (54.1 percent).

Instruments

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. First part of the questionnaire, the participants were informed about the aim of the research, and their involvement was voluntary. They are notified that the data collected would be used for scientific research purposes only. The second part of the questionnaire contained questions about demographic data of the participants. While in the third part of the questionnaire consists of two established instruments which are employed to examine burnout and quiet quitting among respondents. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was first developed in the early 1980s by Maslach and Jackson as an attempt to measure three dimensions of burnout: emotional

exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA). In the latest edition, there are three versions of MBI: the MBI-human services survey (MBI-HSS), the MBI-educators survey (MBI-ES), and the MBI-general survey (MBI-GS) (Brian et al., 2014 as cited in Maslach et al., 2001). The instrument that was used in this investigation is adapted from MBI-ES. This instrument consists of 22 items rated on seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (Never) to 6 (Everyday). Meanwhile, to assess quiet quitting, the Quiet Quitting Scale (QQS) developed by Galanis et al. (2023a) was utilised. This instrument consists of a 9-item scale with questions rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

A comprehensive reliability analysis was carried out to assess the general consistency of the findings. This study demonstrated 0.832 Cronbach's Alpha which highlights the results are reliable. The data obtained were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.

Results

The aims of this study are to identify the level of burnout among the participants. The findings from categorising burnout level provide valuable insights on how the three dimensions manifest among the participants.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalisation and Personal Accomplishment Among Working Women

Emotional Exhaustion	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Low	17	22.97
Moderate	19	25.68
High	38	51.35
Depersonalisation	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Low	14	18.92
Moderate	29	39.19
High	31	41.89
Personal Accomplishment	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Low	38	51.35
Moderate	13	17.57
High	23	31.08

Table 1 reveals high levels of emotional exhaustion (51.35%), while 25.68% felt moderately exhausted. This suggests that a considerable proportion of the labour force is suffering from burnout, resulting in exhaustion, sleep disturbances, and physical ailments. The high level of depersonalisation (41.89%) shows a lack of empathy and dehumanising effect in their

contacts with other people. This fostered mistrust, bad attitudes, guilt, avoidance of social events and disengagement. Meanwhile the low levels of personal accomplishment (51.35%) among the participants, highlighting the critical nature of burnout among employed women at this higher education institute.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis Quiet Quitting Among Working Women

Quiet Quitting	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Low	22	29.72

Moderate	47	63.51
High	5	6.77

Table 2 reveals that the level of quiet quitting is moderate (63.51%), followed by low level (22.72%) and high level (6.77%) among participants. This suggests that a notable proportion of employees are

moderately involved or dedicated to performing their work responsibilities, at the same time experiencing the verge of quiet quitting.

Table 3

Spearman's Rank Correlation Analysis between Burnout and Quiet Quitting among Working Women

Variables		Quiet Quitting
Burnout	Correlation Coefficient	0.003
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.979
	N	74

Notes. * $p < .05$.

Table 3 shows a coefficient value of $r = 0.003$ between burnout and quiet quitting among working women, with p value = 0.979 ($p > 0.05$), indicating no significant relationship between the two factors. In a previous study by Galanis et al. (2023b), revealed a correlation between burnout and quiet quitting among nurses which contradicts this current study. The differing samples may suggest a significant relationship between burnout and quiet quitting, but in this study of working women at higher education institutions, no significant correlation was found, indicating a potential variation in the relationship across different industries and respondents. Another study by Pevec (2024) identifies job fatigue as a significant factor contributing to quiet quitting in organisations. Meanwhile, Liu-Lastres et al. (2023) discovered that individual factors comprising demographic information, personality traits, industrial involvement, and personal concerns are the contributor factors to quiet quitting. They also found that work-related factors such as jobs,

human relations, work environment, and organisations are the cause of people to quietly quit. These findings indicate that other factors may be the cause of quiet quitting among workers. Burnout is a psychological disorder characterised by emotional exhaustion, separation from others, and a low sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Discussion

Burnout in female educators is a complicated issue that is affected by gender bias, institutional barriers, and relationships at work. Studies show that women in academia face unique problems that make them more likely to become burnout. A study by Bradshaw et al. (2024) found that higher education in the US has traditionally been controlled by men, which has made it harder for women to get ahead, often causing them to feel more stressed and burned out. Over half of college-educated workers are women, but they are under-represented in leadership

positions. This creates an environment where power imbalances can cause women to burnout. Boumaaize et al. (2024) state that female faculty members are more

likely to feel emotionally tired and burnout than male faculty members, especially in educational settings. Among the problems hurting are among young academics,

pressure to publish, and extra chores largely affecting women (Banerjee et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the reasons for female academics in Malaysia starting to feel burnout are including the demands of their jobs, problems between work and family, and changes in their communities. Studies demonstrate that increased job demands and insufficient job resources substantially lead to burnout while work engagement serves as a mitigation strategy (Teoh & Kee, 2022). Work-family conflict also plays a big role, making burnout more acute among women and urging them to leave their jobs (Hamid & Ahmad, 2017). Similarly, this can be the case for the current study conducted, where women in academic settings may face comparable challenges and stressors, potentially affecting their career development and well-being.

Zhang and Rodrigue (2023) discovered a high level of quiet quitting behaviours among working mothers, contradicting the current study showed moderate degree of quiet quitting and indicating that other contextual factors, such as maternity leave regulations, may be more important. Following that, the study on working women exposed varied degrees of quiet quitting behaviour where most respondents fell into the moderate group, suggesting that although quiet quitting does happen, it is not rather widespread.

Another finding of this study discovered that there is no notable correlation between burnout and quiet quitting among working women. Thus, it explains that various social and psychological factors could be responsible for the lack of significant correlation between burnout and quiet quitting among academics. This phenomenon can be attributed to several different causes. Psychological empowerment and the working environment significantly reduce the direct impact of burnout on quiet quitting. In fact, this remains true even when burnout impacts an important percentage of the

population. Moreover, the coping strategies and support networks of individuals in the workplace can significantly contribute to reducing the impact of burnout on academic staff.

Many studies suggest that burnout can lead to negative work outcomes, including intentions to leave, but the exact connection with quiet quitting remains unclear. This is significant because the relationship between academic women in Malaysia who are experiencing burnout and quiet quitting appears to be complicated and have numerous facets. Meanwhile, it was found that there was a negative correlation between job satisfaction and burnout among academicians. This means that higher levels of burnout are associated with lower levels of job satisfaction (Raduan et al., 2022). Besides that, female academicians who experience low to moderate levels of burnout, implying that although burnout can manifest, it does not necessarily lead to quiet quitting behaviours (Raduan et al., 2022).

The conflicts between work and family life are a major cause of burnout, which can affect women's plans to leave their jobs in a number of different fields (Hamid & Ahmad, 2017; Purnawati et al., 2020). However, burnout did not have a direct impact on the desire to quit among female employees in certain settings, suggesting that additional factors may mitigate this relationship (Purnawati et al., 2020).

These findings suggest that while burnout is prevalent, it does not necessarily lead to quiet quitting among women academicians. More important factors have come forward such as how satisfied an employee is with their jobs and how work and family life affect each other. It is important to note that burnout might not directly lead to quiet quitting, but it can still hurt the mental health and general job satisfaction of women academics, which could lead to disengagement in other ways. This shows how important it is to do more study to fully understand these dynamics. Hence, to

mitigate the adverse effects of burnout on employee retention and well-being, organisations must prioritise the resolution of these issues.

The growing academic environment, especially after the COVID-19 epidemic, has resulted in frustration and helplessness among academicians, which may impact their intents to quietly quit but may not necessarily be associated with degrees of burnout (Lu et al., 2023). The abrupt shift to online learning, coupled with lack of adequate training and resources, lead the academicians to disappointment and overwhelm. The sense of vulnerability and feeling disconnected from the academic community brings the desire to disengage from the responsibilities and that is a form of quiet quitting.

Asfahani (2023) indicates that while burnout is connected to role conflict, it does not significantly affect workplace dynamics when other variables are controlled.

The impact of psychological empowerment is critical, it can mitigate the consequences of burnout on quiet quitting, implying that empowered people may disengage less despite feel exhaustion (Lu et al., 2023). Furthermore, Abbak et al., (2024) proposed that factors such as career restrictions and demographic characteristics influence burnout levels, implying that personal circumstances may dilute the association between burnout and quiet quitting.

In conclusion, while burnout is a severe problem, its association with quiet quitting is multifaceted and impacted by a range of moderating factors, indicating that dealing with empowering and contextual challenges may be more effective than focused simply on burnout. In addition, addressing the culture of the organisation and the leadership practices that are in place may also play a significant role in avoiding people who are feeling burnout from departing quietly about their jobs. When it comes to reducing the probability of employees quietly disengaging from their

employment, it is essential for employers to provide a working atmosphere that is both supportive and empowering.

Organisations can create techniques to improve employee engagement and well-being, thereby resolving the mismatch between burnout and quiet quitting. Initially, fostering clear communication, which may diminish quiet quitting by as much as 96% (Joshi & Khullar, 2024). Consistent feedback systems also make sure that employees feel valued, which prevents burnout. Additionally, allowing work schedules that are flexible can boost job satisfaction (Joshi & Khullar, 2024) while giving mental health support, like counselling services, can help manage stress and keep people from losing interest in their work. As agency theory suggests, when organisational goals are in line with employee interests, it creates a feeling of ownership and commitment (Joseph, 2023). Similarly, transparency about professional growth can increase involvement (Zhong et al., 2023). Promoting positivity able to lower disengagement (Trang & Trang, 2024), and pushing for work-life balance stops burnout (Zhong et al., 2023). In conclusion, these strategies might help reduce the issues of stress and "quiet quitting," but the organisation's leaders still need to deal with the deeper systemic problems that cause them.

This study indicates that burnout may not be the primary determinant of quiet quitting among employed women. However, the limitation of this study is that it used purposive sampling and had a small sample size of only 74 people. This implies that the results may not be applicable to a larger group of people. This discovery underscores the need of further study to explore additional factors that might be influencing this phenomena. Understanding the phenomenon of burnout among academic women is crucial, but it is also essential to recognise that burnout may impact individuals in many ways. The explanation of issues and the

encouragement of equal workspaces will benefit every faculty member, thereby improving the academic atmosphere as well. Two further ways faculty members could be supported to suffer less burnout are improving their work-life balance and offering tools for mental health.

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