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Mental Health and Wellbeing of Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia

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Abstract. The teaching profession has been consistently ranked as the most stressful job in the world today. Teachers who experience prolonged exposure to high levels of work-related stress can find there to be a detrimental effect on their physical health, mental health, social life, and work performance. This study aims to characterise the mental health and wellbeing of secondary school teachers in Malaysia according to gender and age group. We examined burnout levels among 776 secondary school teachers who were measured across three dimensions (i.e., depersonalisation, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment), as well as their sources of stress, manifestations of stress, and psychological symptoms. The quantitative data analysis revealed that most of the teachers had experienced burnout in terms of their personal accomplishments, work-related stressors, and time management, and that it mostly manifested as fatigue. Overall, the sample of secondary school teachers in Malaysia indicates a risk of poor mental health. Further psychological interventions and self-care programs are suggested to help secondary school teachers cope with the early signs of burnout.

Keywords: mental health; wellbeing; secondary school teachers; Malaysia

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1. Introduction

Teaching ranks among the world's most stressful professions which affect mental health and wellbeing. The environment in which teachers work is extremely stress-provoking (Sveinsdottir et al., 2007), and teachers have been shown to experience greater stress than other white-collar professionals (Munir et al., 2014). The teaching profession has also been identified as involving nearly twice the level of cynicism, professional strain, and sadness as other professions (Baig et al., 2016). Such a high level of stress could be attributed not only to the teachers' increased exposure to a toxic working environment but also to the higher demands of their job and the frequent need to work overtime (Rusli et al., 2006).

As a consequence, adverse mental health conditions among teachers have become increasingly common and, as such, increasingly problematic (Bauer et al., 2007; Weber et al., 2005). If not handled effectively, the stress and mental pressure on teachers is bound to affect their mental health and impact their wellbeing. In the previous research, teachers who attributed their stress to internal factors reported higher levels of depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion as among the dimensions of burnout, as well as a higher intention to quit and more symptoms of illness, than the teachers who exhibited a lower score for stress who reported more personal accomplishments (Teles, et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2015). Among teachers, mental health deficiencies may not only cause them problems but also negatively impact their students as well. In fact, the teachers' mental health and wellbeing has been shown to affect their students' psychological wellbeing and their depressive symptoms were found to be associated with their students' mental health and wellbeing as well (Harding et al., 2019). In particular, depressive symptoms among teachers can also lower the quality of the classroom learning environment and the students' academic achievements (McLean & Connor, 2015). Among the other downsides, poor mental health among teachers can adversely impact their physical health—and even cause lower back pain—and in a vicious cycle, weakened physical health can intensify their anxiety and depression (Zamri et al., 2017). Over and above all of those trends, workload has been found to significantly affect the mental health status of teachers (Samad et al., 2010), and especially high workloads can raise the risk of burnout in the form of emotional exhaustion (Jimenez & Dunkl, 2017).

The results of the present study will be able to address several gaps from previous research. Most of the previous studies related to burnout amongst Malaysian teachers were conducted within a limited geographical scope and did not examine its distinction between or its prevalence among different age groups (Amzat, 2021; Mousavy & Nimehchisalem, 2014; Mukundan & Ahour, 2011; Roslan et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2012). Similar previous studies on the teachers' stress level also cover either a single state in Malaysia or a limited geographical range (Hadi et al., 2009; Ismail et al., 2019; Othman & Sivasubramaniam, 2019; Samad et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2018). While there have been studies which include a wider geographic demographic when it comes to research on Malaysian teacher burnout (Yusof, 2012) and stress (Yahaya et al., 2010), there are no recent studies which provides the same wide coverage and overview. This shows that there is a need for an update regarding the burnout and stress amongst Malaysian school teachers on a

wider scale. The present study will include a larger number of participants to increase its generalisability to better reflect the overall population, especially after the effects of the pandemic. The present study has also attempted to identify the teachers' mental health symptoms according to various dimensions through self-reported questionnaires, which has been rarely addressed in previous studies.

1.1 Burnout

In any human undertaking that involves working with other people, burnout can be defined as a syndrome with three dimensions: a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, depersonalisation, and emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 2003). According to Mukundan and Ahour (2011), a reduced sense of personal accomplishment among teachers could mean that they no longer feel capable of teaching students or helping them to grow. In contrast, depersonalisation among teachers experiencing burnout suggests a lack of sense of having a positive effect on the students. Last, emotional exhaustion among teachers is marked by fatigue and a feeling of being emotionally drained (Mukundan & Ahour, 2011).

Multiple studies have pinpointed depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion as the central elements of burnout (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Panari & Simbula, 2016). In one such study conducted by El Helou et al. (2016), elements in the school environment found to cause burnout among teachers included their relationships with administrators, their relationships with other teachers, the school's rules, and among new teachers without sufficient preparation, a sense of disillusionment. More recently, Khan et al., (2019) found that sources of burnout included environmental demands related to the teacher's role, the demands of the job, pressure in terms of time management, and a lack of resources, as well as personal demands imposed by their family and their personal perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and involvement towards work.

In terms of the demographic factors, women in the profession were found to be more susceptible to emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment than men were (Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2009). Along similar lines, Mukundan and Ahour (2011) found that women teachers had moderate levels of emotional exhaustion and high levels of reduced personal accomplishment, while younger teachers had higher levels of burnout. However, several studies have also shown that demographic factors such as age and gender do not have any effect on the level of burnout among teachers (Smith & Leng, 2003; Yildirim, 2008). Beyond that, Gavrilovici (2009) discovered that teachers with more teaching experience had higher levels of emotional exhaustion.

In sum, burnout has been identified as a risk factor not only for poor physical health but also for poor mental wellbeing (Salvagioni et al., 2017), including heightened depressive symptoms (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). Among teachers in particular, burnout is likely to increase the intention to leave the profession (Hong, 2012).

1.2 Stress among Teachers

Being a teacher is undoubtedly a stressful job, and stress among teachers is a phenomenon known to occur around the world (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016).

Among researchers who have sought to define stress, Abebe and HaileMariam (2011) have posited that stress is due to either internal or external factors that increase the difficulty adapting, and they urge individuals experiencing it to intensify their efforts to maintain the equilibrium between themselves and their external environment. Jiang et al. (2017) added that stress occurs when a teacher's expectations differ from reality, and other researchers have agreed that stress results from an incongruence between a person's coping strategies and the demands of their situation (Okeke et al., 2014; Okeke et al., 2015). Among teachers, stress has more specifically been described as negative emotions experienced due to aspects of the profession (Kyriacou, 2010) and what teachers feel due to their failure to effectively cope with challenges in the workplace.

As for its negative effects among teachers, stress has been shown to accelerate career attrition (Lindqvist et al., 2014), manifest behaviourally in physical aggression and increased hostility (Kanchika et al., 2015), and be associated with job dissatisfaction and level of burnout. In contrast, teachers who reported feeling in control of their stressors had higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of emotional exhaustion (Wang et al., 2015). In research on sources of stress among teachers, Kourmoussi and Alexopoulos (2016) found that longer distances between the teachers' home and workplace can heighten discipline- and motivation-related stressors, that a longer work experience lowers levels of professional distress and stress, and that female teachers perceive themselves to have more stress and work-related stressors than male teachers. The authors also found that younger teachers had higher levels of perceived stress than the older ones. Stress among new teachers can be derived from their relationships with other teachers, their relationships with their mentors, poor feedback, and poor classroom management (Paker, 2011; Mahmoudi & Özkan, 2016). Adding to that, Yusof (2011) found that the teachers' stress can be affected by the leadership style of the school administrator, while others have revealed that the teachers' stress stems from the pressure that they feel when it comes to being held accountable for test-based evaluations (Ryan et al., 2017; Saeki et al., 2018).

Against that background, we aimed to evaluate the mental health and wellbeing of secondary school teachers in Malaysia by identifying their level of burnout, sources of stress, manifestations of stress, and experiences with the symptoms of mental health conditions. We also aimed to identify any differences in the mental health and wellbeing of said teachers according to their gender and age group. The results are expected to clarify the mental health and wellbeing of teachers in Malaysia in general and to aid in identifying their sources of stress. With the findings, Malaysia's Ministry of Education and other policymaking bodies can formulate targeted intervention plans to help teachers effectively manage their stress and maintain positive mental health.

2. Methods

The present study aimed to provide an overview of Malaysian secondary school teachers' mental health and wellbeing. Therefore, the objective of the present study was to examine the (1) burnout, (2) stress, and (3) psychological symptoms of the secondary school teachers from the different regions of Peninsular

Malaysia. The study hypothesised that the Malaysian secondary school teachers are experiencing (1) burnout (2) stress, and (3) psychological symptoms.

2.1 Research Design

The present study used the quantitative research methodology. The data required in this study was collected using a self-reported questionnaire scored using a Likert scale. The present study also used a cross-sectional design for the data collection whereby all data required was collected once from the participants during a single time frame.

2.2 Participants

The Ethics Committee of the Sultan Idris Education University in Perak granted permission for the conducting of this research (2019-00-18-01). Permission was also obtained from the Educational Research Planning and Policy Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM.600-3/2/3-eras (3468) for collecting data at the selected schools. The study consisted of two stages for the sampling selection. The first stage of the study involved the selection of schools based on their location. The research team categorised the schools according to the four regions of Peninsular Malaysia, namely the Northern Region (Kedah, Penang, Perak), the Central Region (Selangor, Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur), the Southern Region (Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johor), and the Eastern Region (Kelantan). A list of schools located in each region was obtained, and the research team employed purposive random sampling to select the 27 schools to make up the targeted sample for study. The research team then contacted the principals of the 27 schools to inform them about the aim of the study. Upon the granting of permission to conducting the research, the school counsellors were handed the questionnaires. The study was conducted by the means of the traditional paper-and-pencil method. Each participant that agreed to participate in the study was asked to fill in an informed consent sheet, three questionnaires, and to provide their sociodemographic information. In total, 1000 questionnaire sets were handed out, and 854 sets were returned (85.4%), out of which 78 (9.1%) were excluded due to incomplete data. The final data analysis involved 776 secondary school teachers, consisting of 167 men (21.5%) and 609 women (78.5%).

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Burnout

Maslach et al.'s (1996) Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey is a modified version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory designed to gauge burnout among educators in three dimensions (depersonalisation, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment). It was used to measure burnout among the teachers of the sample. The scale consisted of 22 items—seven on the Depersonalisation subscale, seven on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale, and eight on the Personal Accomplishment subscale—all rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Higher scores for each subscale indicate a higher burnout level in that dimension, whereas the overall scale has no composite score. The Cronbach's alpha scores were .842 for the Depersonalisation subscale, .778 for the Emotional Exhaustion subscale, .848 for the Personal Accomplishment subscale, and .777 for the overall scale.

2.3.2 Teachers' Sources and Manifestations of Stress

The teachers' sources and manifestations of stress were identified using Fimian's (1984) Teacher Stress Inventory containing 49 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (no strength, not noticeable) to 5 (major strength, extremely noticeable) such that higher scores indicate a stronger source of stress or a more frequent manifestation of stress. The sources of stress included time management (eight items), work-related stressors (six items), professional distress (five items) discipline and motivation (six items), and professional investments (four items), whereas the manifestations of stress included emotional manifestations (five items), fatigue (five items), cardiovascular manifestations (three items), gastronomical manifestations (three items), and behavioural manifestations (four items). The Cronbach's alpha scores were .715 for time management, .813 for work-related stressors, .834 for professional distress, .865 for discipline and motivation, .861 for professional investments; .953 for emotional manifestations, .904 for fatigue, .918 for cardiovascular manifestations, .942 for gastronomical manifestations, and .864 for behavioural manifestations; and .924 for all sources of stress, .948 for all manifestations of stress, and .956 for the Teacher Stress Inventory overall.

2.3.3 Mental Health Symptoms

Derogatis' (1975) Brief Symptom Inventory was used to identify psychological symptoms relevant to teaching, as self-reported by the teachers. The instrument consists of 53 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (extremely) in nine dimensions: somatisation (seven items), obsession-compulsion (i.e., six items), interpersonal sensitivity (i.e., four items), depression (six items), anxiety (six items), hostility (five items), phobic anxiety (five items), paranoid ideation (five items), and psychoticism (five items). Four items that did not factor into any dimension were nevertheless included in the instrument due to their clinical importance. The raw scores were converted and compared with the T scores to identify the participants experiencing psychological symptoms. The Cronbach's alpha scores were .901 for somatisation, .890 for obsession-compulsion, .811 for interpersonal sensitivity, .869 for depression, .902 for anxiety, .825 for hostility, .866 for phobic anxiety, .845 for paranoid ideation, .832 for psychoticism, and .981 for the Brief Symptom Inventory overall.

2.3.4 Translation and Validation of Instruments

All of the instruments employed in the present study were translated to and adapted from the original English language version to Bahasa Malaysia (Malay Language) (see Appendix). This was to facilitate the teachers' understanding of the questions presented in the questionnaires within the Malaysia context. The translated instruments were validated by six experts in the field who were fluent in both the Malay and English languages. The experts were asked to rate the translated items on a scale of 1 to 4, with a higher number representing the better suitability of the translations. They were also asked to provide comments and suggestions to improve the suitability of the translated items if they saw fit to do so. The scores given by the experts for each translated items were added together and divided by the highest possible score to calculate the scale content validity index. The average scale content validity index (S-CVI/AVE) in the present study

has a value of 0.945. S-CVI/AVE values of above 0.9 can be considered excellent (Shi et al., 2012).

2.4 Procedure

We sampled data from the four regions of West Malaysia: the northern region (the states of Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, and Perak), the central region (the states of Selangor, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, and Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya), the southern region (the states of Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Johor), and the eastern region (the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang). Schools within each cluster were randomly selected before being contacted for permission to visit and distribute questionnaires to the teachers. Before the questionnaires were distributed, the teachers were briefed about the purpose of the study and given an informed consent form to be sign. The teachers were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences and that their data would remain anonymous and not be disclosed to any third parties without first obtaining their consent.

2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 23). The participants' demographic statistics were analysed to compare the differences according to gender and across the age groups (i.e., 22–29 years old, 30–39 years old, 40–49 years old, and 50–59 years old). For the Maslach Burnout Inventory's Depersonalisation subscale, scores that were less than 6 indicated "Low burnout," scores of 6–11 indicated "Moderate burnout," and scores greater than 11 indicated "High burnout." For the Emotional Exhaustion subscale, scores that were less than 6 indicated "Low burnout," scores of 18–29 indicated "Moderate burnout," and scores greater than 29 indicated "High burnout." For the Personal Accomplishment subscale, scores that were less than 39 indicated "Low burnout," scores of 34–39 indicated "Moderate burnout," and scores greater than indicated "High burnout." For the Teacher Stress Inventory, an average score between 0 and 1 indicated "No strength," an average score between 1 and 2 indicated "Mild strength," an average score between 2 and 3 indicated "Moderate strength," an average score between 3 and 4 indicated "Great strength," and an average score between 4 and 5 indicated "Extreme strength." Last, following the Manual for the Brief Symptom Inventory, we considered scores of at least 63 on the Global Severity Index and scores from two dimensions totalling at least 63 to indicate a positive result for the corresponding psychological symptom and categorised individuals earning those scores as having self-reported said symptoms.

3. Results

Based on the descriptive demographic analysis, 776 secondary school teachers in Peninsular Malaysia completed the questionnaires. Out of the total, 29.4% were from the Northern Region (N=228), 25.4% from the Central Region (N=197), 32.2% from the Southern Region (N=250), and 13.0% from the Eastern Region (N=130). The teachers were aged between 22 and 59 years old (M=42 years), and there were 167 male teachers and 609 female teachers.

3.1 Burnout

The Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey was used to identify burnout among the participating secondary school teachers in Malaysia. As presented in Table 1, most participants (50.5%) reported a higher level of burnout in the dimension of personal accomplishment than in the dimensions of depersonalisation (33.4%) and emotional exhaustion (2.3%). Generally, teachers were less likely to experience emotional exhaustion than the other two dimensions, as 72.6% of them reported a low level of burnout for that dimension specifically.

Table 1

Burnout among the Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia Overall

Dimension of burnout/ Level of burnout	Depersonalisation		Emotional exhaustion		Personal accomplishment	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Low burnout	256	33.0	563	72.6	146	18.8
Moderate burnout	261	33.6	195	25.1	238	30.7
High burnout	259	33.4	18	2.3	392	50.5
Total	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency

#: Percent

In terms of gender, both men and women reported a higher level of burnout in the dimension of personal accomplishment than emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation (refer to Table 2). However, the results also included that women (52.4%) were more likely to experience burnout in the dimension of personal accomplishment than men (43.7%), who themselves were more likely to experience burnout in the dimension of depersonalisation than women. Specifically, 34.7% of men reported moderate burnout compared with 33.3% of women, and 35.9% of men reported high burnout compared with 32.7% of women. Teachers of both genders were the least likely to experience burnout in the dimension of emotional exhaustion, which 74.3% of men and 72.1% of women reported experiencing at a low level.

Table 2

Burnout among the Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia Based on Gender

Dimension of burnout/ Level of burnout		Depersonalisation		Emotional exhaustion		Personal accomplishment	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Low Burnout	Men	49	29.3	124	74.3	41	24.6
	Women	207	34.0	439	72.1	105	17.2
Moderate Burnout	Men	58	34.7	40	24.0	53	31.7
	Women	203	33.3	155	25.5	185	30.4
High Burnout	Men	60	35.9	3	1.8	73	43.7
	Women	199	32.7	15	2.5	319	52.4
Total		776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency

#: Percent

In terms of age among the domains of depersonalisation, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment in Table 3 respectively, the younger teachers were more likely to experience burnout in the dimension of personal accomplishment.

Table 3

Burnout among Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia Based on Age

Dimension of Burnout/ Level of burnout		Depersonalisation		Emotional exhaustion		Personal accomplishment	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Low Burnout	22-29	18	36.0	36	72.0	3	6.0
	30-39	85	32.3	118	71.5	38	14.4
	40-49	86	32.3	199	74.8	57	21.4
	50-59	67	34.0	140	71.1	48	24.4
Moderate Burnout	22-29	15	30	13	26.0	18	36.0
	30-39	81	30.8	69	26.2	69	26.2
	40-49	99	37.2	62	23.3	79	29.7
	50-59	66	33.5	51	25.9	72	36.5
High Burnout	22-29	17	34.0	1	2.0	29	58.0
	30-39	97	36.9	6	2.3	156	59.3
	40-49	81	30.5	5	1.9	130	48.9
	50-59	64	32.5	6	3.0	77	39.1
Total		776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency

%: Percent

Teachers between the age of 30 and 39 years old (59.3%) reported a high level of burnout in that dimension, followed by teachers aged 22 to 29 years (58.0%), teachers aged 40 to 49 years (48.9%), and teachers aged 50 to 59 years old (39.1%). Similarly, teachers aged 30–39 years (36.9%) were slightly more likely to experience a high-level burnout in the dimension of depersonalisation, followed by teachers aged 22 to 29 years (34.0%), teachers aged 50–59 years (32.5%), and teachers aged 40–49 years old (30.5). Teachers across all age groups were least affected by emotional exhaustion; 72.0% of teachers in their 20s, 71.5% of teachers in their 30s, 74.8% of teachers in their 40s, and 71.1% of teachers in their 50s reported a low level of burnout in that dimension.

3.2 Teachers' Sources of Stress

The Teacher Stress Inventory was used to identify the teachers' sources of stress. Generally, based on Table 4, the teachers reported that their top stressors were work-related stressors—7.5% reported those stressors as having “Extreme strength,” while 37.1% reported them as having “Great strength” —followed by time management, 2.4% of which reported as having “Extreme strength” and 41.2% as having “Great strength.” The next strongest stressor for the teachers was discipline and motivation, 4.4% of whom reported as having “Extreme strength” and 27.8% as having “Great strength.” After that was professional distress, which 2.2% of teachers reported as having “Extreme strength” and 16.8% for “Great strength”. The weakest source of stress experienced by the teachers was professional investment, with 1.3% of whom reported it as having “Extreme strength” and 13.1% as having “Great strength.”

Table 4
Sources of Stress among the Teachers in Malaysia Overall

Type of stressor/ Level of strength	Time management		Work-related stressors		Professional distress		Discipline and motivation		Professional investment	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
No strength	2	0.3	3	0.4	44	5.7	43	5.5	79	10.2
Mild strength	30	3.9	64	8.2	215	27.7	128	16.5	212	27.3
Moderate strength	405	52.2	363	46.8	370	47.7	355	45.7	373	48.1
Great strength	320	41.2	288	37.1	130	16.8	216	27.8	102	13.1
Extreme strength	19	2.4	58	7.5	17	2.2	34	4.4	10	1.3
Total	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency
%: Percent

According to the sources of stress by gender as presented in Table 5, men were more likely to experience stress in the form of professional distress than women; 2.4% reported it as having “Extreme strength” and 25.1% as having “Great strength” compared with only 2.1% and 14.4% of women, respectively. In contrast, women experienced slightly higher stress than men in discipline and motivation; 4.4% reported it as having “Extreme strength” and 28.2% as having “Great strength” compared with only 4.2% and 26.3% of men, also respectively. Women also reported being less affected by stress due to professional investment than men did; 11.3% of women reported it as having “Extreme strength” relative to only 6.0% of men. In terms of age, the sources of stressor presented in Table 6 indicate that the younger teachers experienced higher levels of stress due to time management; 10.0% of teachers in their 20s reported it as having “Extreme strength” compared with only 2.7% of teachers in their 30s, 1.5% of teachers in their 40s, and 1.5% of teachers in their 50s.

Table 5
Sources of Stress among the Teachers in Malaysia Based on Gender

Type of stressor/ Level of strength		Time management		Work-related stressors		Professional distress		Discipline and		Professional investment	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
No strength	Men	1	0.6	2	1.2	9	5.4	6	3.6	10	6.0
	Women	1	0.2	1	0.2	35	5.7	37	6.1	69	11.3
Mild strength	Men	6	3.6	15	9.0	39	23.4	34	20.4	52	31.1
	Women	24	3.9	49	8.0	176	28.9	94	15.4	160	26.3
Moderate strength	Men	87	52.1	72	43.1	73	43.7	76	45.5	72	43.1
	Women	318	52.2	291	47.8	297	48.8	279	45.8	301	49.4
Great strength	Men	69	41.3	69	41.3	42	25.1	44	26.3	32	19.2
	Women	251	41.2	219	36.0	88	14.4	172	28.2	70	11.5
Extreme strength	Men	4	2.4	9	5.4	4	2.4	7	4.2	1	0.6
	Women	15	2.5	29	8.0	13	2.1	27	4.4	9	1.5
Total		776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency %: Percent

Table 6:
Burnout among the Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia Based on Age

Types of stressor/ Level of stress		Time management		Work-related stressors		Professional distress		Discipline and motivation		Professional investment	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
No strength	20-29	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	10.0	1	2.0	6	12.0
	30-39	0	0.0	1	0.4	15	5.7	15	5.7	21	8.0
	40-49	1	0.4	1	0.4	8	3.0	16	6.0	31	11.7
	50-59	1	0.5	1	0.5	16	8.1	11	5.6	21	10.7
Mild strength	20-29	1	2.0	3	6.0	15	30.0	7	14.0	15	30.0
	30-39	14	5.3	22	8.4	72	27.4	41	15.6	62	23.6
	40-49	9	3.4	19	7.1	73	27.4	48	18.0	84	31.6
	50-59	6	3.0	20	10.2	55	27.9	32	16.2	51	25.9
Moderate strength	20-29	25	50.0	25	50	22	44.0	24	48.0	17	34.0
	30-39	137	52.1	110	41.8	122	46.4	111	42.2	135	51.3
	40-49	145	54.5	131	49.2	134	50.4	126	47.4	121	45.5
	50-59	98	49.7	97	49.2	92	46.7	94	47.7	100	50.8
Great strength	20-29	19	38.9	21	42.0	7	14.0	16	32.0	2	4.0
	30-39	105	39.9	102	38.8	45	17.1	78	29.7	39	14.8
	40-49	107	40.2	95	35.7	47	17.7	70	26.3	29	10.9
	50-59	89	45.2	70	35.5	31	15.7	52	26.4	23	11.7
Extreme strength	20-29	5	10.0	1	2.0	1	2.0	11	22.0	1	2.0
	30-39	7	2.7	28	10.6	9	3.4	18	6.8	6	2.3
	40-49	4	1.5	20	7.5	4	1.5	6	2.3	1	0.4
	50-59	3	1.5	9	4.6	3	1.5	8	4.1	2	1.0
Total		776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency

#: Percent

Teachers in their 20s were also more likely to experience stress from time management than from other forms of stressors, including work-related stressors, discipline and motivation, professional investment, and professional distress. Teachers in their 30s experienced higher levels of work-related stressors than other age groups; 10.6% of them reported the stressors as causing extreme stress, followed by 7.5% of teachers in their 40s, 4.6% of teachers in their 50s, and 2.0% of teachers in their 20s. Teachers in their 30s, 40s, and 50s primarily experienced stress due to work-related stressors, followed by discipline and motivation, time management, professional distress, and professional investment. However, teachers in their 50s experienced less stress overall than teachers in their 30s and 40s.

3.3 Teachers' Manifestations of Stress

The Teacher Stress Inventory was also used to identify the teachers' manifestations of stress. Generally, based on Table 7, the teachers primarily experienced stress manifesting as fatigue, 4.1% of whom reported its "Extreme strength" and 18.9% its "Great strength." Second were cardiovascular manifestations, which 3.1% of teachers reported as having "Extreme strength" compared with 16.5% who reported its "Great strength," followed by emotional

manifestations, which only 1.4% of teachers reported as having “Extreme strength” and 10.7% as having “Great strength.” The teachers were less affected by the gastronomical and behavioural manifestations of stress, which 45.9% and 53.4% of teachers reported as having “No strength,” respectively.

Table 7

Manifestations of Stress among the Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia Overall

Manifestations of stress/ Level of strength	Emotional manifestation		Fatigue		Cardiovascular manifestations		Gastronomical manifestations		Behavioral manifestations	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
No strength	164	21.1	63	8.1	135	17.4	356	45.9	414	53.4
Mild strength	247	31.8	193	24.9	231	29.8	201	25.9	199	25.6
Moderate	271	34.9	341	43.9	258	33.2	157	20.2	134	17.3
Great strength	83	10.7	147	18.9	128	16.5	53	6.8	24	3.111
Extreme	11	1.4	32	4.1	24	3.1	9	1.2	5	0.6
Total	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency

#: Percent

By gender, Table 8 shows that men reported stronger gastronomical manifestations than women, with 1.8% of men reporting as having “Extreme strength and 9.6% as having “Great strength” compared with 1.0% and 6.1% of women, respectively. Men were also more likely to experience behavioural manifestations of stress, which 1.2% of men reported as having “Extreme strength” and 6.6% as having “Great strength” compared with 0.5% and 2.1% of women. In contrast, 56.2% of women also reported behavioural manifestations as having “No strength,” the rate was 43.1% among men. Teachers of both genders responded similarly when it came to emotional manifestations, fatigue, and cardiovascular manifestations.

Table 8

Manifestations of Stress among the Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia Based on Gender

Manifestations of stress/ Level of strength		Emotional manifestation		Fatigue		Cardiovascular manifestations		Gastronomical manifestations		Behavioral manifestations	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
No strength	Men	36	21.6	13	7.8	22	13.2	71	42.5	72	43.1
Mild strength	Women	128	21.0	50	8.2	113	18.6	285	46.8	342	56.2
Moderate strength	Men	49	29.3	41	24.6	41	24.6	44	26.3	47	28.1
Great strength	Women	198	32.5	152	25.0	190	31.2	157	25.8	152	25.0
Extreme strength	Men	56	33.5	74	44.3	62	37.1	33	19.8	35	21.0
No strength	Women	215	35.3	267	43.8	196	32.2	124	20.4	99	16.3
Mild strength	Men	24	14.4	32	19.2	40	24.0	16	9.6	11	6.6
Moderate strength	Women	59	9.7	25	4.1	22	3.6	6	1.0	3	0.5
Great strength	Men	2	1.2	7	4.2	2	1.2	3	1.8	2	1.2
	Women	9	1.5	25	4.1	22	3.6	6	1.0	3	0.5
Total		776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency

#: Percent

In terms of age, Table 9 indicates younger teachers had higher levels of fatigue; 10.0% of teachers in their 20s reported their manifestations of fatigue as having "Extreme strength," followed by 6.8% of teachers in their 30s, 2.6% in their 40s, and 1.0% in their 50s. Teachers in their 30s also reported experiencing a higher rate of cardiovascular manifestations than the other age groups, which only 4.2% of teachers in their 20s reported as having "Extreme strength," followed by 3.0% in their 50s, 2.3% in their 40s, and 2.0% in their 20s. The strongest manifestation of stress for teachers in their 20s, 30s, and 40s was fatigue, followed by cardiovascular manifestations, while 3.0% of teachers in their 50s reported cardiovascular manifestations of "Extreme strength," which was greater than all other manifestations of stress, and 17.2% reported it as having "Great Strength."

Table 9

Manifestations of Stress among the Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia Based on Age

Manifestations of stress/ Level of strength		Emotional manifestation		Fatigue		Cardiovascular manifestations		Gastronomical manifestations		Behavioral manifestations	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
No strength	20-29	7	14.0	2	4.0	7	14.0	22	44.0	25	50.0
	30-39	53	20.2	23	8.7	52	19.8	121	46.0	147	55.95
	40-49	62	23.3	23	8.6	43	16.2	125	47.0	140	52.6
	50-59	42	21.3	15	7.6	33	16.8	88	44.7	102	51.8
Mild strength	20-29	16	32.0	8	16.0	17	34.0	12	24.0	19	38.0
	30-39	74	28.1	56	21.3	71	27.0	67	25.5	56	21.3
	40-49	92	34.6	73	27.4	88	33.1	66	24.8	72	27.1
	50-59	65	33.0	56	28.4	55	27.9	56	28.4	52	26.4
Moderate strength	20-29	19	38.0	21	42.0	17	34.0	11	22.0	4	8.0
	30-39	91	34.6	105	39.9	83	31.6	55	20.0	49	18.6
	40-49	91	34.2	127	47.7	89	33.5	54	20.3	44	16.5
	50-59	70	35.5	88	44.7	69	35.0	37	18.8	37	18.8
Great strength	20-29	7	14.0	14	28.0	8	16.0	4	8.0	1	2.0
	30-39	39	14.8	61	23.2	46	17.5	18	6.8	10	3.8
	40-49	20	7.5	36	13.5	40	15.0	17	6.4	7	2.6
	50-59	17	8.6	36	18.3	34	17.3	14	7.1	6	3.0
Extreme strength	20-29	1	2.0	5	10.0	1	2.0	1	2.0	1	2.0
	30-39	6	2.3	18	6.8	11	4.2	1	0.8	1	0.4
	40-49	1	0.4	7	2.6	6	2.3	4	1.5	3	1.1
	50-59	3	1.5	2	1.0	6	3.0	2	1.0	0	0.0
Total		776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0	776	100.0

F: Frequency

#: Percent

3.4 Brief Symptom Inventory

The Brief Symptom Inventory was used to identify the teachers' self-reported psychological symptoms. Table 10 shows that 55.0% of teachers reported psychological symptoms. The psychological symptom with the highest rate of response (i.e., $T \geq 63$) was psychoticism (51.8%), followed by interpersonal sensitivity (47.9%), phobic anxiety (41.0%), obsession-compulsion (39.9%), paranoid ideation (38.8%), somatisation (31.4%), anxiety (28.9%), depression

(27.3%), and hostility (24.1%). By gender, more men (70.1%) reported psychological symptoms than women (50.9%), and they scored higher than women in all dimensions of psychological symptoms except for paranoid ideation, for which 36.5% of women reported a T score exceeding 63 compared with 17.3% of men. Among men, phobic anxiety (62.9%) was the most reported symptom, followed by interpersonal sensitivity (61.1%), whereas for women it was psychoticism (50.6%), followed by interpersonal sensitivity (44.3%). By age, teachers in their 20s (70.0%) reported more psychological symptoms than teachers in other age groups, followed by teachers in their 40s (56.0%), teachers in their 50s (54.8%), and teachers in their 30s (51.3%). In general, a larger percentage of teachers in their 20s scored $T > 63$ in most dimensions except hostility. The majority of teachers in their 30s, 40s, and 50s scored $T > 63$ for psychoticism, followed by interpersonal sensitivity.

Table 10

Psychological Symptoms among the Secondary School Teachers in Malaysia

Dimensions	Self-reported frequency of cases (Percentage relative to non-cases)						
	General (<i>N</i> = 776)	Men (<i>n</i> = 167)	Women (<i>n</i> = 609)	20–29- year- olds (<i>n</i> = 50)	30–39- year- olds (<i>n</i> = 263)	40–49- year- olds (<i>n</i> = 266)	50–59- year-olds (<i>n</i> = 197)
$T_{CSI} \geq T_{63}$ /	427	117	310	35	135	149	108
$T_{2Dimensions} \geq T_{63}$	(55.0%)	(70.1%)	(50.9%)	(70.0%)	(51.3%)	(56.0%)	(54.8%)
Somatisation	244	72	172	22	72	86	64
	(31.4%)	(43.1%)	(28.2%)	(44.0%)	(27.4%)	(32.3%)	(32.5%)
Obsession- compulsion	310	87	223	26	98	108	78
	(39.9%)	(52.1%)	(36.6%)	(52.0%)	(37.3%)	(40.6%)	(39.6%)
Interpersonal sensitivity	372	102	270	32	115	133	92
	(47.9%)	(61.1%)	(44.3%)	(64.0%)	(43.7%)	(50.0%)	(46.7%)
Depression	212	88	124	20	68	74	50
	(27.3%)	(52.7%)	(20.4%)	(40.0%)	(25.9%)	(27.8%)	(25.4%)
Anxiety	224	73	151	18	73	79	54
	(28.9%)	(43.7%)	(24.8%)	(36.0%)	(27.8%)	(29.7%)	(27.4%)
Hostility	187	47	140	12	67	68	40
	(24.1%)	(28.1%)	(23.0%)	(24.0%)	(25.5%)	(25.6%)	(20.3%)
Phobic anxiety	318	105	213	24	88	123	83
	(41.0%)	(62.9%)	(35.0%)	(48.0%)	(33.5%)	(46.2%)	(42.1%)
Paranoid ideation	301	79	222	28	97	109	67
	(38.8%)	(17.3%)	(36.5%)	(56.0%)	(36.9%)	(41.0%)	(34.0%)
Psychoticism	402	94	308	36	128	144	94
	(51.8%)	(56.3%)	(50.6%)	(72.0%)	(48.7%)	(54.1%)	(47.7%)

F: Frequency

%: Percent

4. Discussion

Overall, the results indicate that teachers in Malaysia are generally more likely to experience burnout in the form of having a low sense of personal accomplishment. The reason for the findings may be that as technology becomes more accessible and as today's students can thus access and learn a great of information without needing a teacher, teachers may feel that the importance of their role when

teaching students has diminished. Among the teachers in our sample, women indicated a greater burnout in the dimension of personal accomplishment than men. Likewise, Mukundan and Khandehroo (2009) found that, among teachers, women reported higher levels of burnout in the form of lessened personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion. This could be a result of Malaysia mainly being a patriarchal society that emphasises the contributions of men more than women. Mukundan and Ahour (2011) found that women reported only a moderate level of burnout in the dimension of emotional exhaustion, however. While the women in our study did report experiencing slightly more burnout in terms of emotional exhaustion than men, the majority of both genders reported low burnout in that dimension. This could indicate that the current teachers in Malaysia are still emotionally satisfied with their jobs and possibly find it rewarding. Men also indicated having slightly more burnout in terms of depersonalisation than women. This could be due to men usually being expected to keep their problems to themselves which leads to a higher possibility of them experiencing depersonalisation than women.

Younger teachers also reported experiencing higher levels of burnout in the dimension of personal accomplishment. Young teachers may lack the life experience needed to deal with others, including students, parents, and their fellow teachers, which may render them more likely to experience burnout than their older counterparts (Luk et al., 2010). However, younger teachers stand a greater chance of accumulating the skills and experience necessary to help them teach students more effectively than older teachers do. At the same time, a previous study found that older teachers are less susceptible to depersonalisation than younger teachers (Mukundan & Ahour, 2011). This finding was not replicated in our study because no noticeable pattern in the development of depersonalisation across the age groups emerged. This could indicate that teachers now are clearer about who they are and feel more grounded compared to teachers of the past.

In our sample, the teachers' stress stemmed mostly from work-related sources, followed by time management. The findings point to the teachers' being stressed due to having too many job responsibilities to complete in a limited amount of time. Indeed, teachers in Malaysia today are tasked with a multitude of responsibilities, including co-curricular activities, dealing with parents, and administrative duties, in addition to their classroom responsibilities (Othman & Sivasubramanian, 2019). In the past, other researchers have ranked classroom management as among the chief sources of stress for new teachers in particular (Paker, 2011; Mahmoudi & Özkan, 2016). However, time management seems to be a main source of stress for younger teachers as well, possibly because they face new responsibilities when entering the profession without having acquired the proficiency to effectively organise their completion beforehand. In general, the older teachers in our study had less stress which corroborates the previous findings that seniority and age are negatively correlated with the teachers' level of stress (Kourmoussi & Alexopoulos, 2016). This is potentially because older teachers are more proficient at their jobs and closer to retirement, both of which give them a sense of relief.

Above all, the teachers' stress in our study manifested as fatigue, which may be attributed to the high and easily tiring workload that they face. The second-most common form of stress manifestation, in comparison, was cardiovascular manifestations. Burnout is a risk factor for poor physical health (Salvagioni et al., 2017), due to which the teachers may incur increased blood pressure, a higher heart rate, and rapid, shallow breathing. Teachers in their 50s reported experiencing cardiovascular manifestations more commonly than the other manifestations of stress which may be because older people have deteriorated bodily functions. However, in that case, it is surprising that a higher percentage of teachers in their 30s reported cardiovascular manifestations than teachers in their 50s. This results signal that the teachers in their 30s were given more of a burden than their younger and older colleagues due to having more experience than the younger teachers and less seniority than the older teachers.

A higher percentage of secondary school teachers from Malaysia in our sample (55%) reported psychological symptoms. Although the self-reported symptoms were not clinically verified, their responses do suggest that a large percentage of secondary school teachers in Malaysia feel that they are at risk of having poor mental health and wellbeing. A higher percentage of men versus women in our study reported experiencing psychological symptoms, which counters a previous finding that women have higher levels of mental health problems than men (Chen & Lucock, 2022; Yang et al., 2009). However, another study on teachers has shown that women generally have normal levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, although some reported severe or extremely severe mental health problems (Lee & Lai, 2020). In our study, teachers in their 20s were also found to have poorer mental health than their counterparts in other age groups. However, that outcome can be explained by the idea that older teachers generally have higher resilience. Because resilience may not be an innate characteristic but one that is taught or influenced by various factors (Gu & Day, 2007; Pearce & Morrison, 2011; Mansfield et al., 2012), older teachers may have developed their resilience over time as a protective factor against poor psychological symptoms. Nevertheless, the high rate of self-reported psychological symptoms is an indicator of perceived poor or at risk-mental health for Malaysian teachers which warrants more in-depth research in this regard.

5. Conclusion

Our findings indicate that secondary school teachers in Malaysia are generally at risk of having poor mental health and wellbeing. The findings shed light on the sources of stress among teachers in Malaysia and may help to guide future studies focused on developing intervention plans to help teachers to maintain or improve their mental health and wellbeing. Another implication which can be derived from the findings is the urgent need for a closer examination of the Malaysian teachers' mental health status based on the self-reporting of psychological symptoms as recorded in the present study.

However, several limitations of our study warrant mention. One was the imbalance between the number of men and women in our sample. Although the

proportions may accurately represent the demographic distribution of teachers in Malaysia, the low number of men may not accurately represent the overall status of male teachers in Malaysia. We also collected data primarily from public secondary schools in West Malaysia. Thus, future studies could recruit teachers from different types of schools as well as recruiting more participants in general, including those from East Malaysia, to provide a more accurate representation of secondary school teachers in Malaysia. Future research could also look into the use of a qualitative research design to gain a deeper understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of secondary school teachers in Malaysia.

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