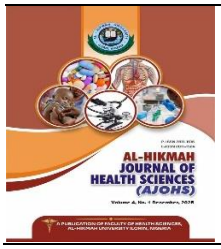
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Original Article

Association between Burnout Syndrome and Brain Drain Intention among University Lecturers in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria

Kuranga Amudalat Temitope[1], Olabode Oluyinka Kayode[2], Baydhaw Oluwafunmilayo Kuranga[3] and Olosasa Habeebat Oyindamola[2]

[1]Department of Behavioural Sciences, University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Ilorin, Nigeria.

[2]Department of Community Medicine and Public Health, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

[3]Federal Medical Centre, Jabi, Abuja, Nigeria.

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Corresponding Author:

Kuranga Amudalat Temitope
Department of Behavioural Sciences, University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Ilorin, Nigeria

Email: hamdallyk@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: Burnout syndrome is an emerging occupational health concern among university lecturers and may contribute to brain drain. This study examined the association between burnout syndrome and brain drain intention among university lecturers in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 411 lecturers selected through multistage sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire incorporating selected Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) items. Of the questionnaires administered, 380 were retrieved (92.5% response rate). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression at $p < 0.05$. The regression model adjusted for age, gender, marital status, academic rank, university type, and administrative duties.

Results: Most respondents were male (85.5%), married (56.6%), and employed in federal universities (57.6%). Overall, 43.2% experienced high burnout syndrome, with emotional exhaustion being the predominant dimension (39.5%). Burnout reduced teaching effectiveness (75.0%), negatively affected health (79.4%), and increased job dissatisfaction (73.1%). More than half (59.4%) reported an intention to seek employment outside Nigeria. High burnout syndrome significantly predicted brain drain intention (AOR = 1.967; 95% CI: 1.184–3.268; p = 0.009).

Conclusion: Burnout syndrome was significantly associated with brain drain intention among university lecturers. Institutional interventions that improve lecturers' wellbeing, workload management, and staff welfare may support academic workforce retention in Nigerian universities.

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Introduction

Universities remain fundamental institutions for advancing knowledge, innovation, skilled manpower development, and national socioeconomic transformation (Oderinde *et al.*, 2024). University lecturers drive these institutional mandates through teaching, research, student mentorship, community engagement, and academic leadership (Okolocha *et al.*, 2021). Their effectiveness depends considerably on psychological wellbeing, professional motivation,

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and supportive organizational working environments (Okolocha *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, increasing concerns surrounding burnout syndrome among lecturers threaten institutional performance and higher education sustainability (Eseadi *et al.*, 2023).

Burnout syndrome is a psychological condition resulting from prolonged exposure to persistent occupational stressors within demanding workplaces (Cao *et al.*, 2025). It comprises emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, affecting employees' psychological wellbeing and professional functioning (Cao *et al.*, 2025). Emotional exhaustion reflects overwhelming physical and psychological fatigue resulting from persistent academic and occupational demands (Efuwape & Aderinto, 2023). Depersonalization manifests through detached or cynical attitudes toward students, colleagues, and institutional responsibilities (Chukwuemeka *et al*., 2023). Reduced personal accomplishment involves feelings of professional inadequacy despite sustained efforts and measurable academic achievements (Akinwale *et al.*, 2023). Collectively, these dimensions may diminish lecturers' productivity, commitment, and effectiveness within higher education institutions (Aguwa *et al.*, 2024).

Contemporary university lecturers face increasing responsibilities encompassing teaching, research, grant acquisition, supervision, administration, and community service activities (Akah *et al.*, 2022). These responsibilities are intensified by competitive publication requirements, institutional rankings, and continuous performance evaluation systems (Akunne *et al.*, 2021). Developing countries experience additional challenges including inadequate funding, insufficient staffing, limited infrastructure, and constrained research opportunities (Kasimu *et al.*, 2024). Nigerian universities particularly experience recurrent industrial disputes, delayed promotions, welfare concerns, and increasing student enrolments without proportional staffing growth (Owogoga *et al.*, 2022). Such conditions may create environments where burnout develops progressively and undermines lecturers' professional satisfaction and organizational commitment (Ajayi *et al.*, 2024).

Burnout syndrome has implications extending beyond individual wellbeing to institutional effectiveness and workforce stability (Edokpolor et al., 2022). Burnout adversely affects teaching quality, research productivity, mentorship capacity, workplace engagement, and organizational commitment among lecturers (Aguwa et al., 2024). Persistent burnout may additionally encourage lecturers to consider employment opportunities offering better remuneration, recognition, and working conditions abroad (Iloakasia, 2024). The migration of highly skilled academics, commonly described as brain drain, is increasingly concerning within Nigerian universities (Owogoga *et al.*, 2022). Brain drain weakens institutional capacity through experienced staff losses, increased workloads, reduced supervision, and declining research productivity (Akinwale *et al.*, 2023).

Ilorin metropolis hosts federal, state, and private universities operating under diverse administrative structures yet comparable occupational demands. Lecturers across tertiary institutions frequently encounter workload pressures, resource limitations, and performance expectations potentially predisposing them to burnout syndrome (Mbata & Okemini, 2024). Despite increasing discussions surrounding academic migration, localized evidence examining burnout syndrome and brain drain intention remains limited (Aguwa *et al.*, 2024). Understanding this association can provide evidence supporting workforce retention strategies, institutional wellbeing programmes, and sustainable higher education development. Therefore, this study examined the association between burnout syndrome and brain drain intention among university lecturers in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria.

Methods

Study Design and Setting

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among university lecturers in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study employed a quantitative approach using a structured, self-administered questionnaire to assess burnout syndrome and its association with brain drain intention among university lecturers.

Study Population

The study population comprised full-time lecturers employed in selected federal, state, and private universities within Ilorin Metropolis.

Eligibility Criteria

Eligible participants included lecturers across all academic ranks who had at least one year of continuous teaching experience and were actively involved in teaching, research, or administrative responsibilities during the study period. Visiting lecturers, adjunct staff, lecturers on prolonged leave, and individuals unwilling to provide informed consent were excluded.

Sample Size

The minimum sample size was determined using Fisher's formula (z^2pq/d^2) for single population proportions, adopting a burnout prevalence of 57.7% reported among Nigerian university lecturers (Aguwa *et al.*, 2024). After adjusting for a 10% non-response rate, a final sample size of 411 lecturers was obtained.

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Sampling Technique
A multistage sampling technique was employed. Three universities were selected using simple random sampling. Subsequently, academic departments were randomly selected within each institution, and the sample was proportionately allocated according to the number of eligible lecturers. Respondents were finally selected through systematic random sampling using the sampling interval calculated for each department. No post-stratification or survey weighting was applied; representativeness was addressed through proportional allocation during sampling.

Data Collection Instrument
Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire. Socio-demographic and occupational information was obtained in the first section. Burnout syndrome was assessed using selected Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) items covering emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Brain drain intention was assessed using questionnaire items measuring respondents' intention to seek employment outside Nigeria. The questionnaire also included items assessing the occupational consequences of burnout.

Burnout Scoring and Categorization
The seven selected MBI items were scored from 0 (Never) to 6 (A Few Times a Week), producing a possible composite score of 0–42. For the study-specific composite categorization, scores of 21–42 (≥50% of the maximum possible score) were classified as high burnout, while scores below 21 were classified as low burnout. Dimension-specific high-burnout proportions were reported separately for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Because the study used selected MBI items rather than the complete instrument, these thresholds represent the operational criteria used for this study and should not be interpreted as the full MBI-HSS normative cut-offs.

Validity and Reliability
The instrument underwent expert review for content and face validity, while reliability testing during the pretest yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.79, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure
Questionnaires were administered face-to-face by four trained research assistants after obtaining informed consent from eligible participants. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and consistency before data entry.

Data Analysis
Data were coded, cleaned, and analyzed using IBM SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics, burnout dimensions, and brain drain intention. Binary logistic regression was performed to determine the association between burnout syndrome and brain drain intention. The model adjusted for age group, gender, marital status, academic rank, university type, and involvement in administrative duties. Involvement in research was not entered because all respondents reported research involvement. No sampling weights were applied. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ at the 95% confidence level.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical approval was obtained from the Kwara State Ministry of Health ethical research committee before commencement of the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing questionnaires and restricting data access to the research team.

Results

Table 1. Socio-Demographic and Occupational Characteristics of Respondents (N = 380)

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
< 35	106	27.9
35–44	65	17.1
45–54	107	28.2
≥ 55	102	26.8
Male	325	85.5
Female	55	14.5
Single	106	27.9
Married	215	56.6
Widowed	59	15.5
Lecturer I	71	18.7

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Lecturer II	106	27.9
Senior Lecturer	40	10.5
Associate Professor	61	16.1
Professor	102	26.8
Federal	219	57.6
State	98	25.8
Private	63	16.6
Research Involvement		
Yes	380	100.0
No	0	0.0
Administrative responsibilities		
Yes	357	93.9
No	23	6.1

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic and occupational characteristics of the respondents. The largest proportion were aged 45–54 years (28.2%), followed by those below 35 years (27.9%), while 26.8% were aged 55 years and above. The majority were male (85.5%) and married (56.6%). Regarding academic rank, Lecturer II (27.9%) constituted the largest group, followed by Professors (26.8%). More than half of the respondents (57.6%) were employed in federal universities, while 25.8% and 16.6% worked in state and private universities, respectively. All respondents (100.0%) were involved in research, while 93.9% also had administrative responsibilities.

Table 2. Responses to Burnout Syndrome (Selected Maslach Burnout Inventory Items) Among University Lecturers (N = 380)

Statement	Never n (%)	A Few Times a Year or Less n (%)	Once a Month or Less n (%)	A Few Times a Month n (%)	Once a Week n (%)	A Few Times a Week n (%)
I feel emotionally drained from my work.	26 (6.8)	37 (9.7)	45 (11.8)	69 (18.2)	83 (21.8)	76 (20.0)
I feel used up at the end of the workday.	18 (4.7)	34 (8.9)	42 (11.1)	71 (18.7)	92 (24.2)	78 (20.5)
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning to face another day on the job.	31 (8.2)	46 (12.1)	54 (14.2)	68 (17.9)	80 (21.1)	67 (17.6)
I feel indifferent or callous toward students.	158 (41.6)	84 (22.1)	52 (13.7)	39 (10.3)	25 (6.6)	16 (4.2)
I treat students or colleagues as objects rather than people.	205 (53.9)	79 (20.8)	41 (10.8)	28 (7.4)	15 (3.9)	8 (2.1)
I feel I am not making a meaningful contribution at work.	96 (25.3)	67 (17.6)	59 (15.5)	58 (15.3)	48 (12.6)	34 (8.9)
I am dissatisfied with my professional accomplishments.	103 (27.1)	74 (19.5)	55 (14.5)	52 (13.7)	43 (11.3)	35 (9.2)

Table 2 presents respondents' assessment of burnout using selected MBI items. Emotional exhaustion was the most prominent dimension, with 53.4% reporting feeling emotionally drained and 56.5% feeling used up at the end of the workday at least once a week. Similarly, 47.6% reported feeling fatigued before starting work at least once a week. In contrast, depersonalization was less common, as most respondents rarely or never felt indifferent toward students (63.7%) or treated students and colleagues impersonally (74.7%).

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Figure 1. Burnout Dimensions Among University Lecturers

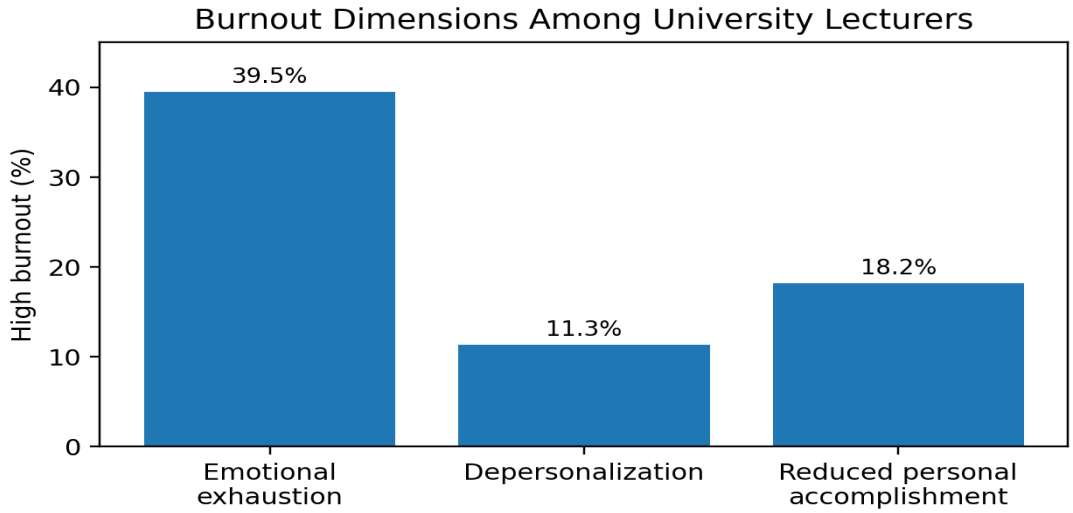


Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to the three burnout dimensions. High emotional exhaustion was the most prominent dimension (39.5%), compared with high depersonalization (11.3%) and high reduced personal accomplishment (18.2%).

Figure 2. Overall Burnout Syndrome Among University Lecturers

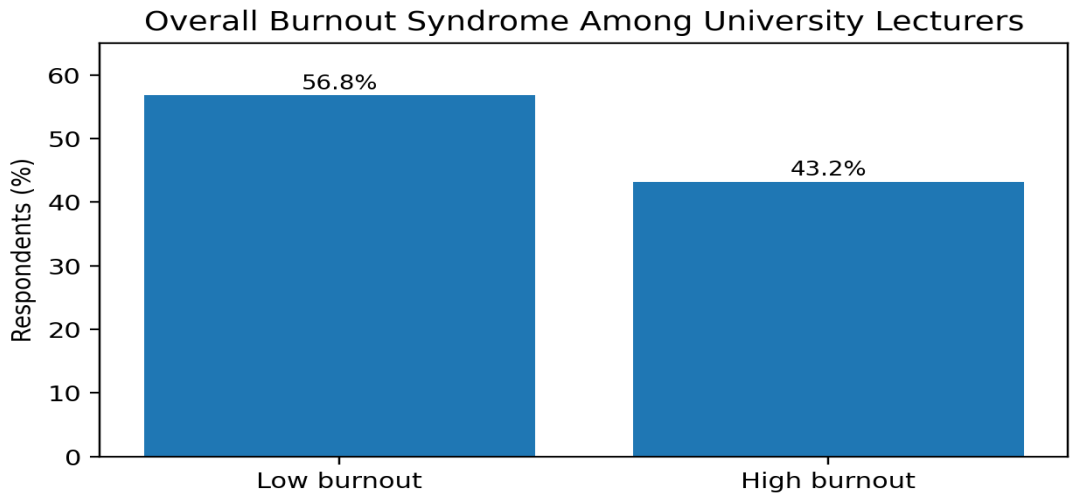


Figure 2 presents overall burnout based on the study-specific composite criterion. A total of 216 respondents (56.8%) had low burnout, whereas 164 (43.2%) had high burnout.

Table 3. Outcomes and Consequences of Occupational Stress and Burnout Syndrome among University Lecturers (N = 380)

Statement	SD n (%)	D n (%)	U n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)
Stress and burnout reduce my teaching effectiveness.	18 (4.7)	36 (9.5)	41 (10.8)	196 (51.6)	89 (23.4)
Stress and burnout negatively affect my health.	15 (3.9)	29 (7.6)	34 (8.9)	189 (49.7)	113 (29.7)
Stress and burnout increase my intention to leave the institution.	42 (11.1)	64 (16.8)	51 (13.4)	154 (40.5)	69 (18.2)
Stress and burnout contribute to job dissatisfaction.	21 (5.5)	38 (10.0)	43 (11.3)	186 (48.9)	92 (24.2)

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Stress and burnout influence my decision to seek employment abroad (brain drain).	46 (12.1)	59 (15.5)	49 (12.9)	151 (39.7)	75 (19.7)
Stress and burnout reduce my teaching effectiveness.	18 (4.7)	36 (9.5)	41 (10.8)	196 (51.6)	89 (23.4)
Stress and burnout negatively affect my health.	15 (3.9)	29 (7.6)	34 (8.9)	189 (49.7)	113 (29.7)
Stress and burnout increase my intention to leave the institution.	42 (11.1)	64 (16.8)	51 (13.4)	154 (40.5)	69 (18.2)
Stress and burnout contribute to job dissatisfaction.	21 (5.5)	38 (10.0)	43 (11.3)	186 (48.9)	92 (24.2)
Stress and burnout influence my decision to seek employment abroad (brain drain).	46 (12.1)	59 (15.5)	49 (12.9)	151 (39.7)	75 (19.7)

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions of the outcomes and consequences of occupational stress and burnout syndrome. Most respondents agreed that occupational stress and burnout adversely affected professional performance and wellbeing. Specifically, 75.0% agreed that stress and burnout reduced teaching effectiveness, while 79.4% reported negative effects on their health. Additionally, 73.1% indicated that stress and burnout contributed to job dissatisfaction. More than half reported that stress and burnout increased their intention to leave their institution (58.7%) and influenced their intention to seek employment abroad (59.4%).

Table 4. Binary Logistic Regression Showing the Influence of Burnout Syndrome on Lecturers' Intention to Seek Employment Outside Nigeria (N = 380)

Predictor Variable	AOR	95% CI	p-value	Adjusted Covariates
Burnout syndrome	1.967	1.184–3.268	0.009*	Age group; gender; marital status; academic rank; university type; administrative duties

**Significant at $p < 0.05$.*

The model adjusted for age group, gender, marital status, academic rank, university type, and involvement in administrative duties.

Table 4 presents the binary logistic regression analysis examining the association between burnout syndrome and lecturers' intention to seek employment outside Nigeria. Burnout syndrome was a significant predictor of brain drain intention. Lecturers with high burnout were approximately twice as likely to report an intention to seek employment outside Nigeria as those with low burnout (AOR = 1.967; 95% CI: 1.184–3.268; p = 0.009), after adjustment for the specified demographic and occupational covariates.

Discussion

This study examined the association between burnout syndrome and brain drain intention among university lecturers in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria. The findings showed that 43.2% of respondents experienced high burnout syndrome, indicating that burnout remains a substantial occupational health concern within the academic workforce. Emotional exhaustion emerged as the predominant burnout dimension, suggesting that the cumulative demands of teaching, research, student supervision, and administrative responsibilities place considerable psychological strain on lecturers. This finding is consistent with previous Nigerian studies identifying emotional exhaustion as a prominent manifestation of burnout among university academics (Aguwa *et al.*, 2024; Efuwape & Aderinto, 2023).

The study further demonstrated that burnout syndrome adversely affected lecturers' professional and personal wellbeing. Most respondents reported that burnout reduced teaching effectiveness, negatively affected their health, and contributed to job dissatisfaction. These findings support earlier reports that burnout compromises academic productivity, student engagement, and institutional commitment while reducing overall job performance (Edokpolor et al., 2022; Aguwa *et al.*, 2024). Such consequences have important implications for the quality and sustainability of higher education, particularly in resource-constrained university environments.

A notable finding was that more than half of the respondents expressed an intention to seek employment outside Nigeria. Furthermore, lecturers experiencing high burnout were almost twice as likely to report brain drain intention compared with those experiencing low burnout. This finding suggests that persistent psychological exhaustion and diminished professional fulfilment may encourage lecturers to pursue employment opportunities in settings offering better remuneration, working conditions, and career advancement prospects. Similar observations have been reported in Nigeria, where poor welfare, inadequate institutional support, and unfavourable

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working conditions have contributed to the migration of academic professionals (Iloakasia, 2024). Hence, the findings highlight burnout syndrome as an important factor associated with brain drain intention among university lecturers.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that burnout syndrome is significantly associated with brain drain intention among university lecturers in Ilorin Metropolis. Burnout was characterized predominantly by emotional exhaustion, with notable consequences for lecturers' professional performance and personal wellbeing. Lecturers experiencing higher burnout levels were more likely to express intentions of seeking employment outside Nigeria. These findings highlight burnout syndrome as an occupational challenge with implications for academic workforce retention. Institutional interventions aimed at improving staff welfare, managing workloads, strengthening psychological support, and promoting healthier work environments may reduce burnout and support the retention of experienced academics within Nigerian universities.

Recommendations

- Universities should implement targeted interventions to reduce burnout by promoting manageable workloads, strengthening staff welfare, and improving access to psychological support.
- University management should strengthen supportive work environments, transparent promotion systems, and recognition mechanisms to enhance job satisfaction and reduce brain drain intention.
- Government and university authorities should develop evidence-based academic workforce retention strategies that address remuneration, working conditions, research support, and career development.
- Future studies should employ longitudinal designs and larger samples to examine temporal relationships between burnout syndrome and brain drain intention among university lecturers.

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