Religiosity as a Buffer Against Occupational Stress: Evidence from the Malaysian Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study examines occupational stress among academicians in higher education institutions, particularly in developing countries such as Malaysia, by investigating the relationships among job demands (workload and role conflict), stress, and mental health, as well as the mediating role of religiosity within the extended job demands–resources (JD-R) framework. A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected from 135 academicians in public higher education institutions in Malaysia and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that academicians experience significant stress due to high workload and role conflict, which negatively affect their mental health; specifically, workload ($\beta = 0.433$, $p < 0.001$) and role conflict ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$) were found to have significant positive relationships with stress, suggesting that higher job demands are associated with increased stress levels. However, this study is limited by its cross-sectional design and relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal approaches and larger samples. The findings provide important practical implications for higher education institutions and human resource practitioners in developing effective interventions, such as workload management strategies and role clarification, to reduce stress and improve mental health among academicians. From a social perspective, the study underscores the importance of addressing mental health issues in academic workplaces to enhance overall well-being, productivity, and educational outcomes. This study contributes to the literature by extending the job demands–resources theory by considering religiosity as a mediating factor and by providing empirical evidence on mental health among academicians, a relatively underexplored group, particularly in developing countries.

Keywords: Stress, academicians, workload, role conflict, religiosity

INTRODUCTION

The issue of stress among academicians has received increased attention in recent years (Babatunde et al., 2025; Mohammad et al., 2025; Sanders et al., 2025; Ueno et al., 2025). As the World Health Organization has proposed that mental health is an integral part of people's health and well-being and serves as a basic human right, however, to date, one in eight people in the world lives with a mental disorder. Mental health enables people to connect, function, cope, and thrive with daily challenges and pressures (World Health Organization, 2022). Mental health was one of the important pillars of Sustainable Development Goal (2030). However, to date, more than 280 million people of all ages suffer from mental health disorders such as stress, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and anxiety, which are leading causes of disability and reduced productivity (Nicholls et al, 2022; Tutun et al., 2023; WHO, 2023). Others manifest unstable mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders, and it is found to be common across the world (Have et al., 2023). Mental health disorders impacted not only communities from low-or middle-income countries (LMICs), but also high-income countries (HICs) (Kazdin et al., 2023; Stein et al., 2025).

Academicians experienced occupational stress and mental health challenges due to massive factors such as work-life conflict and lack of support (Othman et al, 2023), job demands (Sakarji et al., 2018), job insecurity, competing demands in teaching and research work, competition amongst peer, and pressure to publish papers and win research funding (Nicholls et al, 2022), the demands for research productivity, teaching excellence, and

administrative duties (Jayman et al., 2022; Patel et al., 2018; Sharma & Kumra, 2020). These factors have left researchers experiencing high levels of stress, which have the potential to negatively impact their mental health and well-being.

In other studies, a study among academicians in China reported that resource constraints, work overload, uneven competition, inefficient and imbalanced management procedures, lack of motivation, and continuous social and family pressures are the key challenges leading to job burnout among academicians (Lei et al., 20241). Contrarily, employees' incompetence is claimed to be the reason for their job burnout and stress (Leiter et al., 2017; Stankovic et al., 2022). As a result, a growing number of studies shifted to the prevention of academic mental health, such as a study by Abraham et al. (2025), suggesting that the grounded intervention, such as leadership support, institutional integration, peer networks, and flexible delivery, barriers included stigma. Using a similar Job-Demand-Resources theory, Whitsed et al. (2025) also asserted the importance of strong team relationships and supportive leaders as key elements in mitigating academician's job demands. In addition, Röbken et al. (2025) suggested that the institution needs to address contract insecurity, regulate workload, and institute burnout-prevention programs to foster more satisfied and resilient academics.

In Malaysia, mental health issues are considered conservative and have not been well understood by society historically, thus resulting in social stigmas against patients with mental health disorders (Mok et al., 2025). In collectivistic societies, mental health discussions remain taboo (Ahad et al., 2023), which may lead people to fear being labelled as different or deviating from societal norms, leading to reluctance in seeking psychological help (AthinarayananRao et al., 2025). However, according to You (2025), Malaysia has made strides in developing services and resources to support mental health. Findings from the Adolescent Health Survey (AHS) conducted as part of the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2022 painted a worrying picture: a notable increase in mental health among adolescents, with 26.9% of them reporting feelings of depression this year. This is a significant rise from 17.7% back in 2012, and it also highlights a disturbing uptick in suicidal thoughts (13.1%) and attempts (9.5%) over the same period. Given the current trajectory, mental health issues are expected to become major challenges for the population, with prevalence rates projected to soar from 7.9% in 2019 to 16.5% by 2023. Moreover, Munusamy et al. (2024) reported that the poor mental health of academicians in higher education and continuing education is a growing public health and policy concern, with clinical depression affected 27.7% of the 278 staff from academic institutions in Malaysia due to low income, working in an urban campus, low-tier job type, and inadequate workplace amenities.

However, robust relationships between academician's job demands and their mental health are scarce (Nicholls et al., 2022; Ueno et al., 2025), with a notable gap in the literature on the mental health of university academicians in Malaysia. Some studies focus only on research universities, as in Gan and Kee (2024), Kok and Nik Yaacob (2023), and Teoh and Kee (2022). A previous study by Teoh and Kee (2022) focused on the psychological safety climate and burnout, with the mediating roles of job demands and job engagement, and found that challenge demands and hindrance demands were significantly and positively related to the academicians. A limited number of respondents were identified in a study by Hasanudin et al. (2022) examining the relationship among job demands, interpersonal conflict, and the COVID-19 pandemic at a private university in Malaysia. Beta et al. (2024) found that the job demand and burnout among academics are moderate and moderated by religion. On the other hand, a systematic literature review conducted by Munusamy et al. (2024) among educators in Malaysia reported that work-family conflict and demands, pandemic impact, work environment, physical health, personality traits, and workload are the most common issues encountered by academicians in Malaysia.

Only a few studies have examined academics' mental health, particularly how it is affected by occupational and personal factors (Ratanasiripong et al., 2020). Most studies have concentrated on students, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of the health and well-being of academicians (Ibrahim et al., 2021). There is a need for more comprehensive research that focuses on the backbone of the teaching and learning process, namely, academicians themselves. This could help identify the factors contributing to depression symptoms among them and how these symptoms connect to other psychological issues like stress, burnout, and anxiety. This study is grounded in the Job Demand-Resource Model, which examines work design through the lenses of job stress and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This framework helps us understand how the work environment can influence employees' physical and mental health by focusing on two key elements: job demands and resources

(Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti et al., 2001). According to the JD–R model, the energy expended in managing job demands can lead to feelings of exhaustion and self-sabotage (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Van Veldhoven et al., 2020), while having sufficient job resources can boost employees' engagement and proactive behaviour (Chuang et al., 2025). It is frequently used to predict employee well-being, work behaviours, and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024).

Understanding how the light and shadow aspects of job demands affect employees' work and lives, especially their mental health, has become a crucial area of this study. The insights gained from this study benefit many parties, especially those directly and indirectly involved in the academic field. The findings of this study may also provide impactful insights for policymakers and academic leaders in preparing better guidelines for implementing strategies to reduce depression among academicians, ultimately fostering healthier academic environments. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2023), particularly in promoting good health and well-being, and quality education on a global scale. By enhancing educators' well-being, university management can help them achieve a better work-life balance, minimize burnout, prevent depression, and boost overall job satisfaction and quality of life. Therefore, this study aims to investigate and confirm the factors influencing mental health, with a particular focus on depression among educators at public higher education institutions in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress

A person may encounter stress when they appraise that the perceived demand of their job exceeds their internal and external resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Chronic stress and burnout have been characterised as negative job-related psychological outcomes (Hobfoll, 1998). Maddock (2024) pointed out that stress and burnout can have several negative effects on the individual's work performance, as well as to their mental health and well-being. Earlier study by Riepenhausen et al (2022) pointed out that stress-related disorders such as depression or anxiety are a major cause of disability in a modern society. Similarly, stress and depression are a major mental health challenge that poses a serious risk to communities worldwide (Ma et al., 2022). Fincham et al (2023) emphasized that World Health Organisation postulated that stress is contributing to several non-communicable diseases and can significantly contribute to physical and mental health conditions, such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease to anxiety and depression. Moreover, it is estimated that about 5% of adults around the globe are dealing with stress and depression, with those in academia being particularly vulnerable compared to other fields. This condition affects roughly 6% of the adult population globally and is the second-leading cause of the chronic disease burden (Halat et al., 2024). Recent statistics from the World Health Organization revealed that around 300 million people worldwide are impacted by stress and depression, cutting across all ages, genders, and cultures (Munusamy et al., 2024). For those in academia, stress can deeply affect their health, productivity, and overall well-being, significantly influencing both their personal and professional lives (Agyapong et al., 2022). Within institutions, the mental health struggles of academic staff can adversely affect their success and the quality of life for both staff and students (Munusamy et al., 2024).

Workload and Stress

Workload represents one of the most prominent jobs demands examined in occupational stress research. It refers to cognitive, physical, and emotional demands placed on individuals that they are obligated to perform (Liu et al., 2024). Upon it exceed from the individual's capability, then they will manifest stress. Stress refers to the psychological and physiological response of individuals facing demanding situations or challenges that exceed their perceived ability to cope (Liu et al., 2024). The study classified the education area as the third most stricken work environment in terms of stress, depression, and anxiety symptoms. This is proven by numerous studies confirming how an excessive workload had led to academician's stress and their mental state (Pace et al. 2019; Lee e al., 2022; Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023; Abraham et al., 2025).

Extensive empirical evidence reported the negative impact of workload on academician's stress and mental health. Such Ohadomere and Ogamba (2020) highlighted that more than 33% of all ill health incidences are attributable to work-related stress includes increasing workloads among academicians. The scholars suggesting

the urgency in combatting a stable mental well-being and further suggesting the management-led solutions in tackling the escalating levels of stress as it is a critical issue among academic staff. On the other hand, further study by Lee et al (2021) points out that academic staff suffered from the unrealistic workloads (mainly teaching and research) as the most factors impacting to their stress. It became worse to the early-career academics staff and staff who transition from industry to academia. Academic staff need to adjust to the changes in cultural identity and organizational priorities, all together to learn to teach and plan for their research career. Contrarily, Pace et al (2019) remarked that the academicians at the age group of 45–54 has the highest rate of illness due to occupational stress, as they hold higher post as professor in the university. The perceived workload including competitive and intense research, teaching and supervision requests, fundraising requests, and administrative responsibilities of university professors was found had effects on their well-being.

In comparing the attention among student and academician's mental health in universities and higher education institutions (HEIs), the preferences in focusing to student's mental health, leaving the scarce and ignorance to the academic staff (Hammoudi Halat, 2023; Tight, 2025; Wahab et al., 2024). In fact, academicians are overwhelmed with high workloads such as different tasks of teaching, mentoring, leadership, publication, funding, deadlines, administrative duties, and service. As proposed by Tight (2025), making sure the good mental health among employees are vital for a well-functioning institutional culture and for the maintenance and development of the workforce. Therefore, a further study needs to be done in investigating the interplay between workload and stress among academician in Malaysia. Therefore, based on the discussion, it can be postulated that:

H1: Workload has a significant effect on academicians 'stress at higher education institutions in Malaysia.

Role Conflict and Stress

An importance of role conflict among academician manifests an increase attention among scholars in a recent year (Asfahani, 2022). Role conflict encounters by academicians as their inability to achieve an effective balance between family and work had prone them to occupational well-being and stress (Zhou et al., 2021; Munusamy et al., 2024; Keshniri, 2024). Jahan Priyanka et al. (2021) asserted about work-family conflict (WFC) as a fact that it is related to personal and professional lives that affecting each other, appealing concept day by day. Generally, as first introduced by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), role conflicts exist when there are incompatible demands between the work and family roles of an individual that makes participation in both roles difficult. Most of the time, work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC) are relate to each other bi-directionally. The role conflict between work and family is associated with increased occupational burnout and job stress and decreased health, organizational commitment and job performance (Amstad et al., 2011). Moreover, excessive negative emotion due to role conflict not only resulting in energy depletion among employee, but also to the loss of organization's talent and potential turnover intention among talented employees, resulting from their stress and emotional exhaustion.

While academicians need to fulfil their role such as teaching and conduct research, the academician also need to support both the university and the community. These multiple roles create an interesting dynamic state that may have an impact on mental health and well-being (Munusamy et al., 2024). Academicians need to juggle from one task to another roles, resulting to the acceleration of occupational burnout and lack of productivity (Keshmiri, 2024). Naidoo-Chetty and Du Plessis (2021) categorized role conflict as one of the quantitative jobs demands which such as the number of tasks and the speed at which it can be accomplished by the employees. When quantitative work demands are elevated, work tasks will necessitate more time than what was planned for. When academician spent more time to complete the organizational demand, they will have to sacrifice and reduce their time to be spent to their family.

Similarly, a study by Asiedu et al. (2018) and Unruh et al. (2016) postulate that the conflict occurs when commitments and interests at work interfere with family life, like irregular or inflexible working hours, work overload, stress, interpersonal conflict at work and others. As a result, the role conflict between work and family will increase occupational burnout and job stress and decreased health among employees (Jahan Priyanka et al., 2024). Additionally, Erden (2024) proved that the role stressor involving either the mental or physical stress

experienced by the individual while performing their role and are correlated with stress (Huang et al., 2024). From the discussion, it can be hypothesized that:

H2: Role conflict has a significant effect on academicians' stress at higher education institutions in Malaysia.

Religiosity as Mediator

Lately, there has been a noticeable uptick in research surrounding work-family conflict (WFC), largely driven by the increasing number of dual-career couples. These couples often find themselves navigating the tricky waters of balancing their professional and personal lives, which can blur those important boundaries (Jakubowski et al., 2021). As noted by Abdou et al. (2024), WFC can lead to significant psychological distress. The impact of this conflict can be deep and long-lasting, affecting not just mental and emotional well-being, but also physical health and overall quality of life.

A variety of studies have explored the connection between work stress and work-family conflict (WFC), aiming to understand how job-related stress can spill over into our family lives. For example, research by Mohd Isa et al. (2018) and Suhartini et al. (2023) found that when individuals experience higher levels of role overload, conflict, and ambiguity at work, these often lead to increased WFC. Similarly, a study by Wang and Kee (2025), which used SmartPLS software, revealed that academics at Chinese universities frequently grapple with heavy workloads and public expectations, resulting in significant WFC and psychological stress, ultimately leading to burnout and depression. Instead of merely focusing on the impact of WFC on academicians, Kakul and Khan found that gender differences are a significant factor when facing WFC. The study highlighted that female academicians are more affected by their personal lives than their male colleagues. As noted by Asfahani (2021), the evolving roles of women and men in recent decades have moved away from traditional norms. This shifting paradigm has contributed to the rise of WFC. The conservative belief that women are responsible for household duties while men are the main breadwinners is becoming less relevant as social and economic changes take place.

Therefore, it means that gender equality is practiced more in the workplace nowadays, and women in the workplace hold significant positions, as men previously did. Additionally, a survey by Bayraktaroglu et al. (2019) pointed out that employees from diverse cultural backgrounds can also experience work-family conflict. This is particularly evident in a study that found academics in Turkish business schools experience higher levels of family-work and work-family conflict than their counterparts in the UK. As a result, it could be hypothesized that:

H3: Religiosity moderates the relationship between workload and academician's stress at higher education institutions in Malaysia.

H4: Religiosity moderates the relationship between role conflict and academician's stress at higher education institutions in Malaysia.

The research framework illustrated in Figure 1 indicates that factors such as workload and role conflict can directly influence an academician's mental health, especially leading to stress, while religiosity buffers the mental health effects of role conflict and workload. This idea is rooted in the understanding that academicians enduring long-term stress might find it difficult to maintain their mental well-being, which can subsequently hinder their mental health state, and how enduring high religiosity may protect them from coping with the workplace workload and burdens.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a quantitative approach was used to examine how workload, role conflict, work-family conflict, and stress are interconnected among academicians at Malaysian public universities. Malaysia's National Mental Health Policy, along with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being), underscores the vital role of promoting mental health in the workplace. This study zeroes in on

academicians, aligning with both national priorities and global initiatives aimed at fostering healthier, more resilient workforces, as well as on established, highly reputable institutions.

The data collected through a structured questionnaire administered via a Google survey form, with two types of Likert scales, were incorporated to reduce the likelihood of Common Method Bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The evaluation of job demands (workload) was based on items from Bakker and Costa (2014), while role conflict was assessed using their items, along with work-family conflict items from Netemeyer et al. (1996).

The instrument was validated by a panel of industry experts and prominent Professors from higher education institutions. This study utilized purposive sampling, as it allows researchers to select respondents with relevant expertise in the area under study (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019) and is a cost-effective option. A total of 135 questionnaires were completed and deemed valid for the final analysis, which was conducted using the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) technique (version 4.0). The data analysis was executed with SEM-PLS 4.0.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

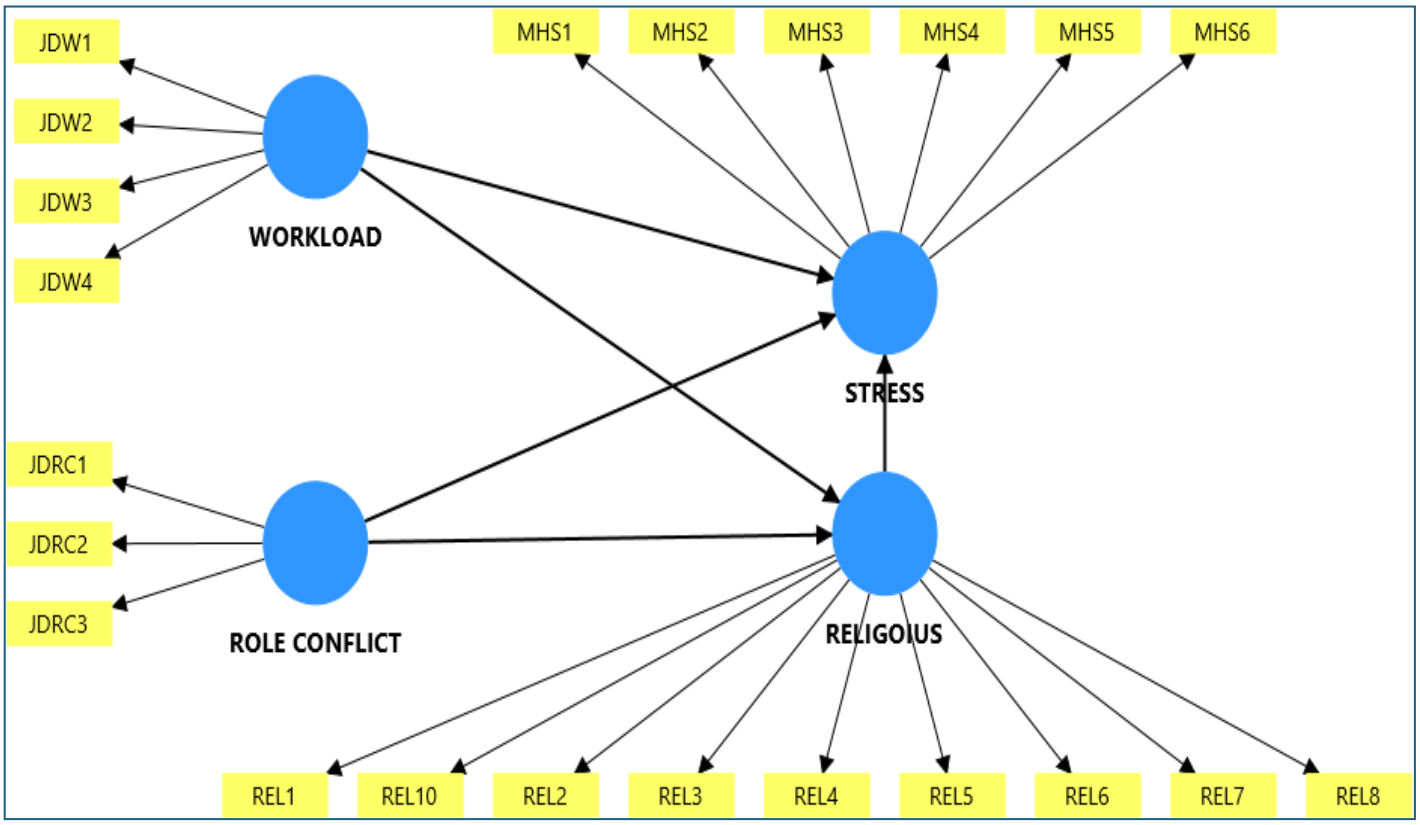

Figure 1: Research Framework

Table 1: Factor Loading Result

Dimensions	Items	Loading
Workload	JDW1	0.877
	JDW2	0.868
	JDW3	0.894
	JDW4	0.722
Role Conflict	JDRC1	0.872
	JDRC2	0.938
	JDRC3	0.899
Stress	MHS1	0.827
	MHS2	0.770

	MHS3	0.819
	MHS4	0.846
	MHS5	0.876
	MHS6	0.835
Religious	REL1	0.807
	REL2	0.825
	REL3	0.773
	REL4	0.846
	REL5	0.848
	REL6	0.912
	REL7	0.909
	REL8	0.813
	REL10	0.733

Hair et al. (2011) suggested that the quality of the measurement model should be assessed by examining convergent validity, which includes indicator loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha (CA). Based on the results presented above, one (1) item (REL9) was deleted due to its low factor loading of 0.445, which was below the recommended threshold. After removing this item, the results indicate that all remaining indicator loadings exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2009), thereby confirming adequate convergent validity for the measurement model.

Table 4.2 Average Varian Extract, Cronbach Alpha, and Composite Reliability Result

	Average Varian Extract (AVE)	**Cronbach's Alpha (CA)**	**Composite Reliability (CR)**
Workload	0.711	0.862	0.907
Role conflict	0.816	0.887	0.930
Religious	0.692	0.945	0.953
Stress	0.688	0.909	0.930

Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.688 to 0.816, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. Cronbach's alpha values ranged between 0.862 and 0.909, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.930 to 0.953, all of which surpassed the recommended minimum value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2009). These findings confirm satisfactory convergent validity and internal consistency reliability of the measurement model.

Table 4.3 Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Result

	Religious	**Role Conflict**	**Stress**	**Workload**
Religious				
Role conflict	0.396			
Stress	0.103	0.509		
Workload	0.283	0.210	0.499	

Henseler et al. (2015) suggested using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio to establish discriminant validity for the measurement model. The HTMT technique is regarded as a more stringent criterion for assessing discriminant validity because it compares the ratios of correlations between constructs against a preset threshold. Previous literature suggests a threshold of 0.85 (Clark & Watson, 1995; Kline, 2011), but Voorhees et al. (2016) found that values below 0.90 are acceptable for demonstrating discriminant validity. As indicated in the table above, all HTMT values fall below the acceptable levels, indicating that discriminant validity is satisfactorily accomplished.

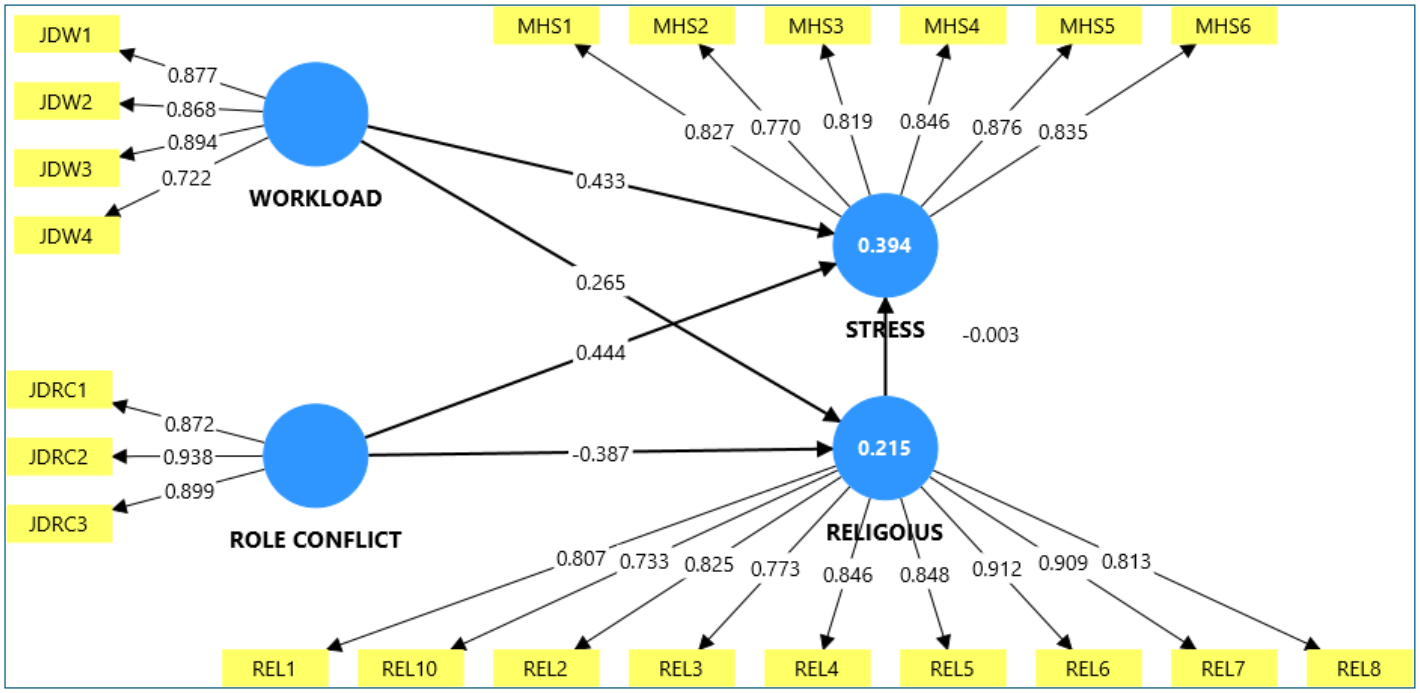

Figure 2: Structural Model

Based on Hair et al. (2011), path analysis was conducted to evaluate the structural model, with the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the significance of the path coefficients serving as the primary assessment criteria. According to Cohen (1988), an R^2 value exceeding 0.26 indicates a substantial explanatory power for endogenous latent variables. In this study, the R^2 value was 0.394, indicating that 39.4% of the variance in the dependent variable was explained by the independent variables included in the model. The remaining 60.6% of the variance may be attributed to other factors not examined in this study, such as family commitment, development opportunities, co-worker support, and rewards.

Table 2: Result Direct Relationships

Direct Relationship	Beta	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Results Hypotheses
Workload -> Stress	0.433	0.067	6.453	0.000	Significant
Role Conflict -> Stress	0.444	0.068	6.551	0.000	Significant

Path coefficient analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping technique to test the significance of the hypothesised relationships. Based on the results, the relationship between workload and stress was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.433$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, the relationship between role conflict and stress was also significant ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that both workload and role conflict have significant positive effects on stress. Therefore, Hypotheses H1 and H2 were supported.

The mediating effect of religiosity on the relationships between workload and stress, and between role conflict and stress, was examined using a bootstrapping procedure. As shown in the above table, the indirect effect of workload on stress through religiosity was not significant ($\beta = -0.001$, $t = 0.040$, $p = 0.968$). Similarly, the indirect effect of role conflict on stress through religiosity was also not significant ($\beta = 0.001$, $t = 0.041$, $p = 0.967$). These findings indicate that religiosity does not mediate the relationships between workload and stress or between role conflict and stress. Therefore, the proposed mediating hypotheses were not supported.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study contributes to the literature by empirically examining the effects of workload and role conflict on stress while assessing the mediating role of religiosity. The findings demonstrate that workload and role conflict

exert significant positive effects on stress, indicating that employees experiencing higher job demands and incompatible role expectations are more likely to report elevated stress levels. These findings reinforce previous evidence that excessive workload and conflicting role demands remain among the most prominent antecedents of occupational stress, particularly in organisational contexts characterised by unclear job expectations, limited resources, and increasing performance pressures (Dodanwala et al., 2022; McNeill & Culington, 2025; Qasim et al., 2025; Sadiq, 2022; Tran, 2023).

In contrast, the findings revealed that religiosity did not mediate the relationships between workload and stress or between role conflict and stress. These results indicate that, within the present sample, religiosity does not function as the underlying mechanism through which workplace stressors translate into employees' perceived stress. Although religiosity has frequently been associated with positive coping behaviours, psychological well-being, and emotional regulation, the current findings suggest that its influence may be indirect, conditional, or context-dependent rather than operating as a mediating process. One plausible theoretical interpretation is that the effects of workload and role conflict on stress are primarily explained by organisational and job-related conditions, which may exert stronger and more immediate influences than individual religious beliefs or practices (Chen et al., 2026; Kazan & Kocamış, 2025; McNeill & Cullington, 2025; Wei et al., 2025).

Consequently, employees may rely more heavily on problem-focused coping strategies, organisational resources, or professional support when dealing with work-related stress than on religious coping alone. Furthermore, the non-significant mediation may reflect contextual characteristics of the workplace, limited variability in respondents' religiosity, or cultural and occupational factors that influence how religiosity is expressed in professional settings. These findings are broadly consistent with emerging international studies suggesting that although religiosity contributes positively to individual well-being, its effectiveness in buffering occupational stress may depend on contextual, organisational, and psychosocial conditions rather than functioning as a universal explanatory mechanism (Chen et al., 2026; Kazan & Kocamış, 2025; McNeill & Cullington, 2025; Wei et al., 2025). Therefore, the present findings highlight the need to interpret the role of religiosity within broader theoretical frameworks that integrate both individual and organisational determinants of occupational stress.

From a practical perspective, organisations should prioritise interventions aimed at reducing excessive workload through equitable task allocation, adequate staffing, and realistic performance expectations. As Mwakyusa and Mcharo (2024) argue, clearly defined job responsibilities, effective communication, and well-structured organisational processes are essential for minimising role conflict and reducing ambiguity that contributes to employee stress. Organisations should also strengthen employee well-being initiatives by implementing evidence-based stress management programmes, including employee assistance programmes, counselling services, resilience-building interventions, and work–life balance initiatives, as recommended by recent studies (Abdul Aziz & Ong, 2025; Birhanu et al., 2026). Although religiosity was not supported as a mediating factor, organisations should continue to foster an inclusive workplace that respects employees' spiritual needs, including reasonable flexibility for religious practices, as such initiatives may indirectly contribute to psychological well-being, organisational commitment, and a positive workplace climate.

Future research should further investigate the role of religiosity by examining it as a moderating variable rather than solely as a mediating mechanism to determine whether religiosity buffers the adverse effects of workload and role conflict on stress under specific organisational conditions. Researchers are also encouraged to incorporate additional individual and organisational variables, including organisational support, emotional intelligence, resilience, coping strategies, workplace climate, and social support, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex mechanisms underlying occupational stress. Furthermore, future studies should employ longitudinal or mixed-method research designs with larger and more diverse samples across different sectors, institutions, and cultural settings to strengthen causal inference, enhance the robustness of the findings, and improve their generalisability. Such approaches would also provide richer insights into how occupational stress evolves over time and how personal and organisational resources interact in influencing employee well-being. As urged by WHO (2022), effective workplace policies and evidence-based interventions to promote employees' mental health are essential for safeguarding the fundamental right to health while

advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

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