

WORK STRESS AS MEDIATOR AND RELIGIOUS
ORIENTATION COPING AS MODERATOR IN THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESSOR DIMENSIONS
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT BREACH
AMONG ACADEMICS IN MALAYSIAN PRIVATE
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

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ABSTRACT

Private Institutions of Higher Education (PVIHE) are the hub for regional education and contribute toward an income to nations. Serious efforts in ensuring the quality of education are to increase the number of quality generations. The enrollment and graduates from higher educational institutions have shown increments over the years. It has no doubt of how important is educational services to our nation. To align with demand in education services, academics play a vital role in the development of quality graduate students. To deliver that, maintaining quality academics are vital. In line with retaining quality academics and increasing demands of job responsibilities, academics might experience work stress. Severe work stress may influence the occurrence of psychological contract breach. The prevalence of work stress in private universities was under explored with regards to the increase number of PVIHE registered in Malaysia and past research could not provide a clear picture between stressors and work stress among academics in private universities. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the relationship between specific stressors and the psychological contract breach among academics in Malaysian Private Institutions of Higher Education with the mediating role of work stress and moderating role of religious orientation coping. Religious orientation coping is one type of coping styles as a way to curb the work stress on psychological contract breach. The items of stressor dimensions in this study are role conflict, career development, responsibility for people, and student misbehaviour. The research model for the recent study is extended from Transactional Model. The structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to answer the hypotheses. Surveys were distributed to the respondents who are among the academics in five selected Private Institutions of Higher Education (PVIHE). Cluster probability sampling is used in this study as the PVIHE in Malaysia are separated by state division. This study contributes to the knowledge and practical spectrum. Not only that, it creates a positive dynamic in the previously established theoretical aspects. The findings of this study showed that there is a positive significant effect of several stressors (role conflict, concern about career development, responsibility for people, and student misbehaviour) on work stress. The findings contribute to the psychological contract literature by showing that perceptions of stressors influence perceptions of psychological contract breach. The results of this study could help institutions and academics to eliminate unnecessary stress variables.

Keywords: Role Conflict, Concerns about Career Development, Responsibility for People, Student Misbehaviour, Work stress, Religious Orientation Coping, Psychological Contract Breach

المخلص

تعد المؤسسات الخاصة للتعليم العالي (PVIHE) مركزاً للتعليم الإقليمي وتساهم في توفير الدخل للدول. الجهود الجادة في ضمان جودة التعليم هي زيادة عدد الأجيال الجيدة. أظهر الالتحاق بمؤسسات التعليم العالي والتخرج منها زيادات على مر السنين. لا شك في مدى أهمية الخدمات التعليمية لدولتنا. لمواكبة الطلب في الخدمات التعليمية، يلعب الأكاديميون دوراً مهماً في تطوير جودة الطلاب الخريجين. ولتحقيق ذلك، يعد الحفاظ على جودة الأكاديميين أمراً مهماً. تمشياً مع الإبقاء على الأكاديميين ذوي الجودة والمتطلبات المتزايدة للمسؤوليات الوظيفية، قد يواجه الأكاديميون ضغوط العمل، الضغوط التي إذا اشتدت قد تثير حدوث خرق العقد النفسي. وكان معدل انتشار ضغوط العمل في الجامعات الخاصة ناقصاً فيما يتعلق بزيادة عدد المؤسسات الخاصة للتعليم العالي (PVIHE) المسجلة في ماليزيا، ولم تتمكن البحوث السابقة من إعطاء صورة واضحة بين الضغوطات وضغوط العمل بين الأكاديميين في الجامعات الخاصة. وبالتالي، فإن الغرض من هذا البحث هو تحديد الضغوطات المحددة المساهمة في ضغوط العمل والعقد النفسي بين الأكاديميين في المؤسسات الخاصة للتعليم العالي مع الدور التوسط لضغوط العمل والدور المعتدل للتوجه الديني. التوجه الديني هو نوع من أساليب التأقلم كوسيلة لمنع من ضغوط العمل على خرق العقد النفسي. وأن بنود الأبعاد الضغوطات في هذه الدراسة هي صراع الأدوار، والتطوير الوظيفي، والمسؤولية عن الناس، وسوء سلوك الطلاب. تم تمديد نموذج البحث للدراسة الحديثة من نموذج المعاملات. يتم استخدام نمذجة المعادلة الهيكلية (SEM) للإجابة على الفرضية. المجيبون هم من الأكاديميين في خمس المؤسسات الخاصة للتعليم العالي (PVIHE) المختارة. وقد تستخدم عينات الاحتمالية العنقودية في هذه الدراسة مع فصل المؤسسات PVIHE في ماليزيا حسب تقسيم الدولة. تساهم هذه الدراسة في المعرفة والطيف العملي، وليس ذلك فحسب، بل يخلق ديناميكية إيجابية في الجوانب النظرية لمعمول بها في السابق. تظهر نتائج هذه الدراسة أن هناك تأثيراً إيجابياً هاماً للعديد من الضغوط (صراع الأدوار، والقلق بشأن التطور الوظيفي، والمسؤولية عن الناس، وسوء سلوك الطلاب) على الإجهاد في العمل. وتساهم النتائج في الأدبيات المتعلقة بالعقد النفسية بإظهار أن تصورات الضغوطات تؤثر على تصورات الخرق بالعقد النفسي يمكن أن تساعد نتائج هذه الدراسة المؤسسات والأكاديميين على التخلص من متغيرات الإجهاد غير الضرورية

الكلمات المهمة: تعارض الأدوار، مخاوف بشأن التطوير الوظيفي، مسؤولية الأفراد، سوء سلوك الطلاب، ضغوط العمل، التأقلم الديني، خرق العقد النفسي

APPROVAL PAGE

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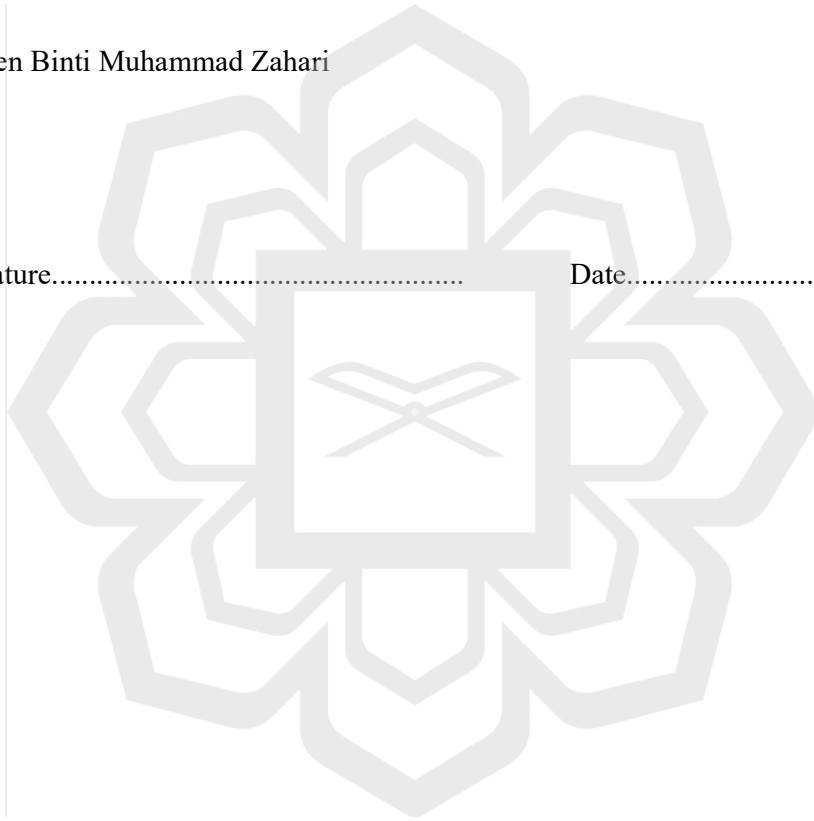
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents (Hj. Zahari and Hjh. Rozidah), my awesome partner (Afizul), my kids (Azhar and Alisya), my siblings (Aimy, Amirul, Amirah, Aizat, Azri, Adam) and all family members who support me along the Dba journey. Highly appreciation of their endless support.

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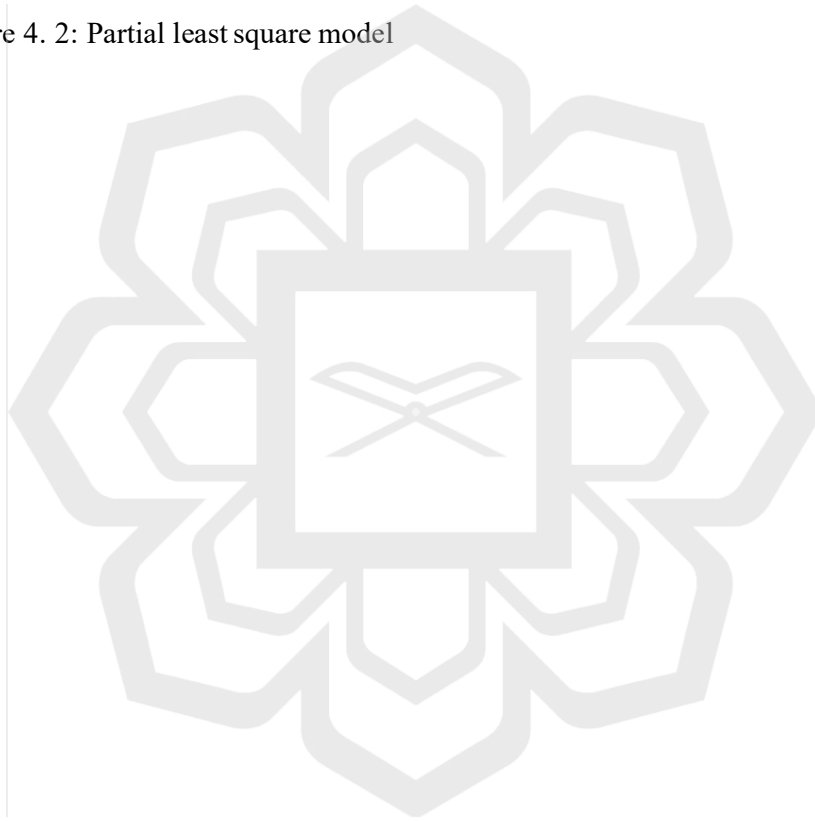
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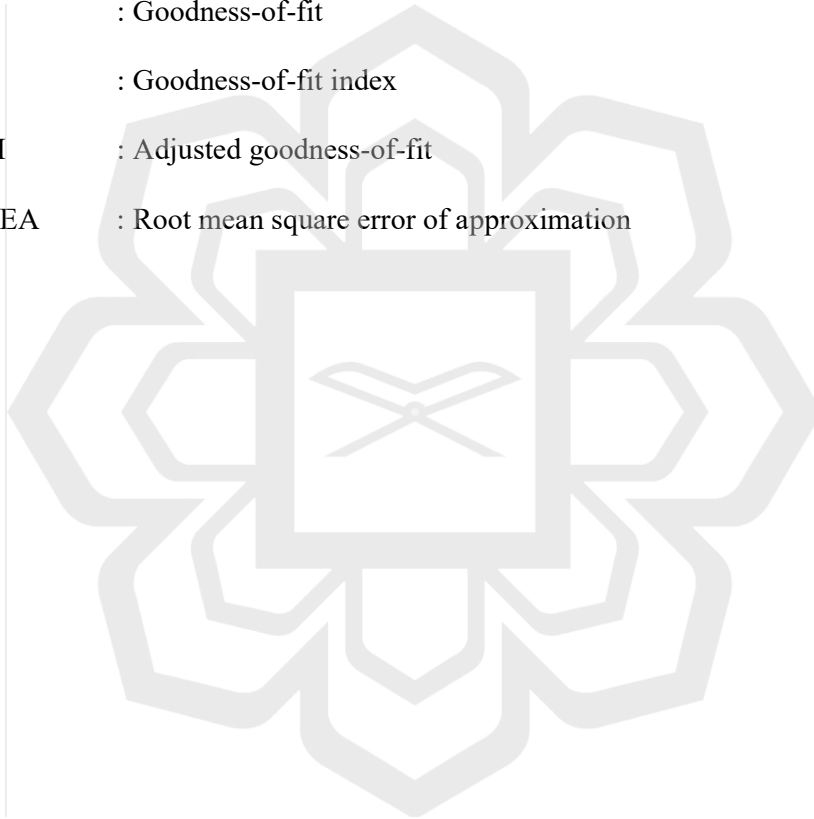
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PvIHE	: Private Institutions of Higher Education
GAS	: General Adaptation Syndrome
S.W.T.	: Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala
e.g.,	: for example
NC	: Normed chi-square
GOF	: Goodness-of-fit
GFI	: Goodness-of-fit index
AGFI	: Adjusted goodness-of-fit
RMSEA	: Root mean square error of approximation



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is the undeniable fact that everyone is exposed to stress experience in life as it is part of human nature. Stress is a reaction to the incompatible level of pressure in the body (Wei-Chih, 2016). Hans Selye (1907-1982) is the founder and the father of stress theory (Petticrew & Lee, 2011). Stress is defined as a universal reaction of the body such as unstable emotions and psychological changes to any demand on it to adapt to environmental conditions (Selye, 1970). Quick and Henderson (2016) focused their attention on two categories of stress which are “good stress” and “bad stress” because stress could be positive or negative depends on the definition. Good stress reflects enthusiasm and competition, whereas bad stress indicates the unwelcome condition of severe exhaustion, chronic anxiety, depression, that a particular person fails to cope with. For a better understanding of the implications of bad stress, Petticrew and Lee (2011) proposed the strong need for future investigation on the effects of negative stressors or “bad stress” in other sectors, including education. At that time, the authors studied stressors in the tobacco industry.

Even Selye (1974) classified stress into two categories, namely; eustress and distress. The eustress is the positive psychological reaction to the causes of the stress as a result of a positive psychological state (Mcgowan, Gardner, & Flether, 2006, p. 20). In contrast, the distress is defined as a negative psychological reaction to the causes of stress (Mcgowan et al., 2006, p. 93). The distress could lead individual to have abnormal changes including abnormal behaviour if it prolonged and severed (Karasek & Theorell,

1990). While extreme stress will affect physical body condition at large (Ismail & Gali, 2016), despair, emotional exhaustion (Tuxford & Bradley, 2015), worry, tedium (Glaser & Hecht, 2013), and somatic symptoms (Zhang, Zhang, Zhu, Du, & Zhang, 2015). Some studies (Idris, 2009; Richardson, Arsenault, Cates, & Muth, 2015; Souza-Talarico, Wan, Santos, Fialho, Chaves, Caramelli, Bianchi, Santos, & Lupien, 2016) mentioned that stress could cause poor health conditions such as headaches, muscle pains, stomach ulcers (Slavich & Shields, 2018) and eventually, resulted in the untimely end (Keller, Litzelman, Wisk, Maddox, Cheng, Creswell, & Witt, 2012). These empirical findings prove that stress is dangerous especially if continuing-for a longer period (Januszewska & Steuden, 2014).

Stress could occur from anywhere including at the workplace. Work stress differs from general stress (George, 2015). Work stress is a reaction of incompatible pressures of work demands that do not match their capabilities (Hussain & Lei, 2015). Work stress could be positive or negative, depends on their ability to cope (Ghorbani, Watson, Hajirasouliha, & Chen, 2016). Positively, work stress may enhance job performance (George, 2015) but will deteriorate after reaching the limit. Work stress if not countered properly may impose serious risk on individuals, as well as the organisation's well-being (Hussain & Lei, 2015). In addition, the behavioural effects of work stress including higher absenteeism, lower productivity, high turnover rate, violence at the workplace have been observed (Schaufeli, 2015) as well as psychological effects (Xavier & Jepsen, 2015).

On the other hand, the heightened sense of the importance of identifying the specific stressors, many researchers studied stressors and link them with other variables (Cooper & Marshall, 2013). Even though previous studies showed positive relationships between work stress and several stressors such as role conflict, career development,

responsibility for people (Xavier & Jepsen, 2015), still some researchers came up with contradicting results. For instance, George (2015) argued that previous scholars found role conflict was negatively associated with work stress. It seems that there are still insufficient studies to prove or reject these claims.

According to Noor and Ismail (2016), teaching has been reported as a stressful job. Similarly, another study found that an increase in the number of student enrolments, expansion of courses, and teaching requirements escalate the commitment of academics (Noor, 2011) lead to work stress (Noor & Ismail, 2016). Eventually, work stress will decrease job productivity level among academics (Vesty, Sridharan, Northcott, & Dellaportas, 2018). As reported by Noor and Ismail (2016), student misbehaviour is the greatest source of work stress among academic staffs. However, their study was limited to a few stressors, small socio-demographics, and did not include coping styles.

Nevertheless, stressful teaching job is found in primary and secondary level (Demjaha, Minov, Stoleski, & Zafirova, 2015), but also reported an increasing trend at the tertiary level (Noor & Ismail, 2016). Certainly, Private Institutions of Higher Education (PvIHE) plays a vital role in the education sector and contributes to the income of a nation. To demonstrate that, the vision of the Ministry of Higher Education clearly states “High-Quality Tertiary Education and Excellent Individual leads to Prosperous Nation” (Ministry of Higher Education, 2018). Thus, academics are important individuals to ensure this vision will be realized. To accomplish this, lots of efforts and initiatives have been conducted and challenges have been countered, yet they are still insufficient. One of the challenges could be work stress encountered by academics. Clearly, academics play a vital role in developing potential youth. The PvIHE is striving to retain the best academics in institutions because it will lead to the creation of future leaders as well as maximising stakeholders’ wealth.

Achour, Bensaid, and Nor (2015) also identified that previous studies of work stress have covered multidisciplinary fields namely; sociology, industrial relations and many more. Surprisingly, the study of work stress issues is still lacking in the education sector, specifically in PVIHE. Another issue related to work stress as claimed by Xavier and Jepsen (2015), there is still a lack of research between work stress and psychological contract breach; although the result indicated a significant relationship. They even suggested future research to be conducted in other sectors while they studied in the manufacturing sector.

Psychological contract breach occurs when the expected agreement between the employee and the employer is violated (Ihsan, Jaafar, Ayupp, & Usman, 2020) which leads to negative consequences in employee's job performance and behaviour (Malik & Khalid, 2016). When employer fails to fulfil employees' expectation in an organization, that will lead to psychological contract breach or in other words employees would not want to give their contribution to the organization (Sharif, Wahab, & Sarip, 2017). The psychological contract is necessary to create a productive employment relationship, whereby distrust and dissatisfaction in managing academics, may result to end of the relationship as the consequences of perceived breach. The negative consequences will result in employee turnover intentions, poor job performance, and low job satisfaction (Ihsan, Jaafar, Ayupp, & Usman, 2020).

With regard to the academic setting, despite teaching duties and research, academics also need to carry out administration tasks. In return for all of the hard work, proper rewards on remuneration packages and career advancements are expected. However, this seems difficult to be fulfilled with lower expectations of long-term career employment (Xavier & Jepsen, 2015). In South Africa, teachers from public schools opt for early retirement in their career due to work stress and low salaries (Mafukata &

Mudau, 2016). A research conducted by Manogharan, Thivaharan and Rahman, 2018 in Malaysian private institutions focusing on three colleges revealed that there are high turnover rates among lecturers (38% for college 1, 28% for college 2 and 42% for college 3 as of 2015). Lecturers turnover is a result of excessive workload and unfulfilled expectations in terms of salary and benefits in their career. Stressful academics require attention from their management. Severe work stress may influence the occurrence of psychological contract breach (Reimann & Guzy, 2017) among academics.

Certainly, failure to cope with continuous stress will risk academics' health and subsequently, become an occupational stress issue. Not only that, but work stress may also contribute largely to psychological contract breach (Xavier & Jepsen, 2015). Therefore, institutions, trade unions, health and safety departments at the workplace are striving to find the best solution to tackle work stress problems and eliminate the causes of stress deterrence and control (Achour et. al, 2015). Although the importance of work stress and the psychological contract breach has been acknowledged, the method on how to cope with work stress has not yet received systematic theoretical attention and often ignored (McCarthy, Lambert, & Crowe, 2010) and still unclear. In line with the confirmation of religious orientation coping to predict in improving mental health (Abu Raiya & Pargament, 2015), therefore, further investigation of religious orientation coping is necessary as a method to buffer work stress on psychological contract breach apprehended by academics.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The phenomenon of work stress in higher institutions is widespread and increasing (Noor & Ismail, 2016). A review of studies from around the world shows that stress

among university staffs worsened up to 2340 cases per 100 000 persons due to lack of support, anxiety, and depression (Mukosolu, Ibrahim, Rampal, Rampal, & Ibrahim, 2015). Noor and Ismail (2016) revealed that the British National Association of Head Educators conducted a study around May 2000 and found about 40 percent of the participants consulted the doctors are related to stress, 20 percent considered to be drunkard, about 25 percent of the participants had complicated stress issues while about 15 percent of the participants drinking alcoholics. The said evidence came from western countries, and it has dissimilar economic development, educational system, language, and cultural context with non-western countries. As such, more statistics related to stress among academics in Malaysia are needed.

Recently, an increase in the prevalence of stress among academics in public universities, Malaysia was about 22.1% (Noor & Ismail, 2016) and 21.7% (Mukosolu et al., 2015). As at the time of conducting this study, there is no empirical evidence of any attempt to include the prevalence of stress among academics in PviHE, Malaysia. It was reported that PviHE in Malaysia is growing with the registration of around 510 institutions in 2015 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2018). Due to this, empirical evidence on the prevalence of stress among academics in PviHE is very essential.

Work stress among academics either in public or private institutions is a great concern as it has significant implications for individuals and institutions especially satisfaction, productivity, emotional and physical health (Noor & Ismail, 2016). Moreover, costs related to work stress are burdening institutions in critical areas such as medications, absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover (Xavier & Jepsen, 2015). It has been documented that stress at the workplace is costly and regarded as a critical issue to many professions, especially in the education sector (Bhui, Dinos, Galant-Miecznikowska, Jongh & Stansfeld, 2016). Further, the performance of stressful

academics will reduce with respect to the increase in work stress (Idris, 2011). A review showed that the majority of the academics have made up their mind to quit higher education or regret working in an academic career (Fontinha, Easton, & Van Laar, 2019). Hence, the impact of work stress among academics is highly significant because it may affect not only academics but also learners (Noor & Ismail, 2016).

On top of that, it is clear that the academic profession has been reported experiencing considerable stress, proved by some studies at a significant level (Fontinha et al., 2019). Global studies related to work stress among academics have been conducted. The study including surveys in the UK that indicated 70 percent of them faced stressful jobs and this predicament continues to be the same for the past five years (Hans, Mubeen, Mishra, & Al-Badi, 2015).

On the other hands, 67 percent of Australian academics are reported facing the same issue (Pillay & Abhayawansa, 2014). Most of the professors are satisfied with their job related to intrinsic motivation but reported dissatisfaction with their extrinsic attributes such as workload, vagueness about faculty, decision-making process (Marinaki, Antoniou, & Drosos, 2017), and time constraint increased in trend (Moeller & Chung-Yan, 2013). Due to the effects of having a high level of work stress, professors were diagnosed with health problems such as depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, bad-temperateness, and intimidation (Marinaki et al., 2017). The concern does not only involve health issues but together with psychological effects (Xavier & Jepsen, 2015). As has been noted, academics around the world positively and significantly suffered from work-related stressors. As such, critical study related to work stress among academics should be extended.

Several stressors reported contributing to the increasing level of work stress such as role conflict (Noor, 2011), career development (Corrêa & Ferreira, 2011),

responsibility for people (Powell & Enright, 2015), and student misbehaviour (Aldrup, Klusmann, Lüdtke, Göllner, & Trautwein, 2018). Previous research found that teaching, research, and career development considered stressors have significant work stress impact among academics in public university, Malaysia (Noor & Ismail, 2016). Yet, the knowledge and information with regards to the academic field are still considered limited. Mujtaba and Reiss (2013), argued that stressors could not be specific to a particular stressor due to its limitless. Thus, further explorations of possible stressors are vital to be comprehended. On top of that, most of the researchers appointed the employees or non-academics as research samples rather than academics (George, 2015; Corrêa & Ferreira, 2011; Dewe & Cooper, 2012). Employees generally considered as admin staffs and have a different scope of work compared to academic staffs (Kuean, Kaur, & Wong, 2010). Thus, according to what has been mentioned earlier, existing research does not provide a clear picture of the relationship between stressors and work stress from academics' view, especially in PviHE. The further investigation becomes increasingly important.

On top of that, Xavier and Jepsen (2015) highlighted the importance of identifying stressors contributing to psychological contract breach as many researchers were more focused on another aspect such as consequences of breach and psychological contract violations. Argument in this the area continues as most of the researchers have drawn attention to some social issues or teaching approach while showing little attention to psychological aspects (Foloștină & Tudorache, 2012). To date, still, we could not find the specific combination of studies on the following variables: role conflict, career development, responsibility for people, student misbehaviour, work stress, religious orientation coping, and psychological contract breach in one study.

Many pieces of literature have shown the relationship between these variables. For example, some studies revealed that work stress and the psychological contract breach has a statistically significant relationship (see Aggarwal & Bhargava, 2010; Xavier & Jepsen, 2015). Although these sources have well-established relationships, yet there is little information related to academics' work stress and psychological contract breach. A suggestion has been made on the importance of conducting a study on the relationship among stressors, work stress, coping as well as psychological breach of contract simultaneously because it is crucial for the working environment (Xavier & Jepsen, 2015). Even Low, Bordia and Bordia (2016) affirmed that the organisation will survive for future generations if the negotiation of careers is allowed. Hence, research in-depth about the relationship with psychological contract breach is also outstanding. Further studies related to psychological contract breach should be continuous because Wei and Si (2013) pointed out that the psychological contract is dynamic or continuously changing. The findings from the present study might differ from previous results.

While there have been several studies on religious orientation coping in managing work stress (Dewe, O'Driscoll, & Cooper, 2010), Bankins (2015) has confirmed that coping is significant to buffer work stress on psychological contract breach. To date, the research attempts to find out religious orientation coping among academics in PVIHE are still lacking. Ghorbani et al. (2016) responded that positive religious orientation coping predicts religious and psychological adjustment, thus, the present study is interested to further explore the positive impacts of religious orientation coping to reduce work stress (Abu Raiya & Pargament, 2015) on psychological contract breach. To sum it up, this study seeks to examine the relationship between specific stressors (role conflict, student misbehaviour, responsibility for people, and career