



Effect of job burnout on workplace deviant behaviour among university academic staff

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Abstract

Workplace deviant behaviour as a phenomenon has been on the increase among academic staff of universities. Job burnout has been recognized as the main contributor of academic staffs' engagement of workplace deviance which has cast negative consequences on the university system and impedes the achievement of its goals and objectives. Consequently, this study emerges to determine the effect of job burnout on workplace deviant behaviour among the academic staff of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. The study in essence investigated the effect of the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization on workplace deviant behaviour. 458 sample from the population of 2258 academic staff of ABU Zaria across its 17 faculties were drawn via proportionate stratified sampling technique. Data were collected through questionnaire. The study employed Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling to test the hypotheses developed for the study at 5% level of significance. Findings revealed that both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization have significant positive effect on workplace deviant behaviour among academic staff. The study therefore recommends that Federal Government should lift the embargo placed on hiring academic staff in the university and the university authority should utilize individual level burnout intervention strategies that will improve academic staff's ability to cope with workplace stressors. The study therefore concluded that workplace deviant behaviour among academic staff is majorly predicted by job burnout.

Keywords: Workplace Deviant Behaviour, Job burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, academic staff, ABU Zaria.

Introduction

Workplace Deviant Behaviour (WDB) occurs in a situation where individuals behave in a manner that is not in line with the norms of the organization which consequently pose a threat to the welfare of either the employees, the organization itself, its employees, or customers (Harder, 2019; Bennett, Marasi & Locklier, 2018). There has been an increase in employees engagement in WDB. For instance, a report by the Ethics and Compliance Initiative (2021) has it that the rate of misconduct among employees globally was 58% in 2015, increased to 63% in 2019 and also increased to 81% in 2020. This negative trend highlights the prevalence of WDB among employees which is harmful to the organizations, customers, and the society. Consequently, Bennett, Robinson and Locklier (2018) reported that all over the world, WDB annually costs organizations billions, employees suffer monetary, mental and emotional costs, while the society suffers from increased prices of goods and services. It was also added by Omoankhanlen and Mutairu (2021) that WDB reduces work morale of workers, erodes cohesion among them, reduces the performance of firms and their competitive capacity in the industry.

Also, a university that is supposed to be an ethically inclined environment is not immune from WDB because there are increasing reports of WDB among workers (Olasupo & Fangbenro, 2021). For instance, in Canada, Sharp (2021) reported that one third of women and almost a quarter of men teaching and researching in University and College campuses deal with harassment. In UK, a survey of 1,839 current and former students in

2018 conducted by National Union of Students (NUS) and 1752 Group shows that 41% of the respondents reported at least one experience of sexualized behavior from staff in the higher education institutions. The survey further reveals that one in ten current students (9.9%) reported that a staff member had attempted to lure them into discussion about sex. In Zambia, Mugala, Masaiti, and Mwila (2022) reported professional misconduct, biased marking or grading to be prevalent forms of corruption among academic staff. In Nigeria, a report by the World Bank shows that 70% of female graduates in Nigeria have reported harassment with main perpetrators being lecturers and students. Specifically, 39 lecturers across Nigerian Higher institutions were indicted for sexual harassment in five years (Tolu-Kolawole, 2024). This shows that the current level of WDB will bring negative consequences to the Nigerian university system when allowed to continue and will impede the achievement of university goals and objectives (Goga, Bashir, & Aliyu, 2023).

Consequently, this study emerges to examine the factors that may trigger academic staff to engage in WDB. In order to determine the antecedents of WDB, several literature efforts have been made, however, more attention has been given to personality variables/factors as antecedents of WDB with less attention to situational variables which are central in predicting WDB (Zappala et al, 2022). Thus, this study focuses on job burnout because it is one of the significant situational variables that leads to many negative outcomes among employees such as WDB (Prince, 2018; Amir, 2020). Emotional exhaustion,

depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment are the dimensions of job burnout that make the construct multi-dimensional. However, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were the only dimensions used in this study. This is mainly because Green, Walkey, and Taylor (1991) viewed them as the dimensions that are core to job burnout and have opined that reduced personal accomplishment dimension is the weakest in relations to link with the other dimensions, (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Thus, the two dimensions (that is, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) make up of a syndrome which is weakly related to reduced personal accomplishment dimension (Demerouti, Nachreiner, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2001).

Emotional exhaustion entails the development of a feeling characterized by tiredness and fatigue when emotional resources become depleted making academic staff unable to give themselves to students as once could. It arises when academic staff are overworked (Margulescu, 2020), which make them likely to engage in deviant acts like coming to classes late, absenteeism, among others (Spector & Fox, 2001). Academic staff are especially suffering from this syndrome because the university is now a relatively stressful workplace with high demands such as teaching loads, excessive paper works, research, publication, pressure, and increased work demands (Amir, 2020). The second dimension is depersonalization which is the negative feeling academic staff have about their students, colleagues or co-workers that leads to detachment through psychological withdrawal and physical distancing (Maslach, 1982). It is an immediate reaction to

exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2003). Academic staff experiencing this feeling will no longer have positive feelings toward their students and will use derogatory labels, exhibit distant attitudes, psychological withdrawal among others (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996).

The limitation of past studies on job burnout in relation to WDB is that they looked at job burnout from unidimensional view (Wallace & Coughlan, 2022, Tageja, Chaturvedi, & Rajput, 2021; Enwereuzor, Onyishi, Onyebueke, Amazue, & Nwoke, 2017). In addition, these studies have utilized generic measures to assess WDB (Bennett & Robinson, 1995; Fox et al, 2001). However, the use of generic measure of WDB is misleading as asserted by Bennett et al (2018) that, some cultures or countries differ in what they consider “deviance”, hence, it may be acceptable to drop, add, or modify the deviant behavior scale items depending on the employees and organization participating in the study. Furthermore, past studies have focused on specific types or dimensions of WDB. However, in reality, employees engage in different forms of WDB (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Thus, focusing on specific or dimensions of WDB gives an unclear or incomplete picture of the phenomena (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Thus, the existing study attempts bridging the aforementioned gaps by examining the effect of the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization on WDB among academic staff of Ahmadu Bello University. Consequently, the study seeks to achieve two objectives. First, to determine the effect of emotional exhaustion on WDB and secondly,

to determine the effect of depersonalization on the academic staff WDB.

Literature Review

Workplace Deviant Behaviour

The most widely used definition of WDB was given by Bennett and Robinson (1995). According to them, WDB is seen as a form of behaviour that is voluntary in its nature which goes against the norms of the organization that are considered significant thereby posing a threat to the organizational, as well as members' well-being. However, WDB is considered as a multi-dimensional variable comprising Organizational Deviance (OD) and Interpersonal Deviance (ID). It is an organizational deviance when the organization is targeted for the deviant behavior either physically, figuratively or financially (Bennett, Marasi, & Locklear, 2018). They further pinpoint behaviors like sabotage, theft, coming to work late, taking excessively long breaks, sharing company secrets to outsiders, using drugs or alcohol at work, littering at the work environment as negative behaviours that constitute organizational deviance. While interpersonal deviance refers to workers engaging in deviant behaviours that are targeted toward peers, customers, subordinates and supervisors (Bennett, Marasi, & Locklear, 2018). It constitutes behaviours like gossiping, verbal abuse, sexual harassment etc. However, in the context of this study, organizational deviance was mainly considered. This rests on the fact that by focusing on organizational deviance, simplicity in the development of the concept and in terms of its measurement would be ensured (Kura, Shamsuddin & Chauhan, 2015; Arthur, 2011). To add, by focusing on

OD, other researchers in the field of WDB will have room to focus on interpersonal deviance (Kura et al, 2015).

Job Burnout

Maslach (1982) defined job burnout "as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment that often occurs among people who do people work of some kind." In another definition, Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996) see the concept as a syndrome that is psychological in nature manifested by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment which is found among employees engaged in working directly with other people.

Emotional Exhaustion

When individuals lost energy and feel drained of their emotional resources, they have developed emotional exhaustion (Codes & Dougherty, 1993). It is a response to a situation where individuals get extensively involved emotionally, over extend themselves and also feel overburdened by demands of other people who are usually emotional (Maslach, 1982). In addition, Maslach, et al (1996) found that emotional exhaustion is closest to the traditional stress variable. Thus, in this paper, emotional exhaustion refers to the feeling of tiredness and fatigue developed by academic staff when their emotional resources become drained making them unable to attend to their students.

Depersonalization

Maslach (1993) sees depersonalization as a negative, callous or extensive aloofness to people (Maslach, 1993). This feeling separates

workers from others and give birth to pessimism to colleagues, customers and the organization (Beheshtifar & Omidvar, 2013). Depersonalization is an immediate reaction to exhaustion. Academic staff experiencing this feeling will no longer have positive feelings toward their students and will use derogatory labels, exhibit distant attitudes, psychological withdrawal among others (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). In this paper, depersonalization refers the negative feeling academic staff have about their students, colleagues or co-workers that leads to detachment through psychological withdrawal and physical distancing.

Emotional Exhaustion and Workplace Deviant Behaviour

Several empirical efforts were made to determine the nexus between emotional exhaustion and WDB. For instance, Goga, Bashir, and Aliyu (2023) investigated the moderating role of affective commitment on the emotional exhaustion-WDB link of lecturers in the Faculty of Education, ABU Zaria. 142 lecturers from the faculty were selected as sample using simple random sampling technique. The study found emotional exhaustion to significantly affect WDB. Additionally, Tageja, Chaturvedi, & Rajput (2020) have examined the link between emotional exhaustion and workplace deviant behaviour among a sample of 205 sales executive of three insurance firms. The study finding reported a significant positive nexus between emotional exhaustion and WDB. Similarly, Lubbadah (2021) conducted a study on the nexus between dimensions of job burnout and employees' performance among employees working in Jordan banks.

406 professionals working in the banks were sampled. The study finding revealed a significant but negative effect of emotional exhaustion dimension on performance and a positive significant effect of emotional exhaustion dimension on WDB. In another effort, Makhdoom, Atta and Malik (2019) investigated the link between job burnout and counterproductive behavior among 364 teachers of both private and public school of Sarghodka division. Emotional exhaustion dimension showed to be a significant determinant of abuse but not a predictor of withdrawal.

Most of these studies considered the five dimensions of WDB which beclouds understanding of the various forms of WDB employees engaged. Additionally, these studies were conducted in non-educational settings. Hence, this study focuses on university because limited attention has been given to it, especially public universities in Nigeria (Adeoti, Shamsudin & Mohammad, 2020). Hence, we hypothesized based on the above discussions that:

H₀₁: Emotional exhaustion has no significant effect on WDB among academic staff of ABU Zaria.

Depersonalization and Workplace Deviant Behaviour

Maslach (1993) sees depersonalization as a negative, callous or extensive aloofness to people. This feeling separates workers from others and give birth to pessimism to colleagues, customers and the organization (Beheshtifar & Omidvar, 2013). This feeling separates workers from others and give birth to pessimism to colleagues, customers and the organization (Beheshtifar & Omidvar, 2013).

Several empirical efforts were made to determine the effect of depersonalization on workplace deviant behaviour. For instance, Lubbadah (2021) investigated the nexus between job burnout and WDB among 307 workers of bank in Jordan. It was established that there exists a significant relationship between depersonalization and WDB. Meanwhile, Bicer (2020), in a study of 230 sales staff of pharmaceutical companies that are based in the provinces of Hatay and Gaziantep, found that, depersonalization is statistically significant in predicting WDB. Similarly, Hudiana and Jong (2021) examined the link between depersonalization and performance. Respondents comprise 58 nurses at the Condong Catur Hospital Indonesia. The study established that depersonalization has a negative effect on performance. In another effort, Turek (2020) conducted a study among 253 telephone customer support service employees from Poland companies on the effect of the 3 dimensions of job burnout on perceived organizational support, organizational citizenship behaviour, and workplace deviant behaviour. Findings in relation to depersonalization and WDB showed a relationship that was significant.

However, most of the reviewed studies viewed depersonalization from the perspective of attitudes toward the work rather than attitudes toward the recipient of service and also viewed depersonalization as not causally related to emotional exhaustion, which in actual sense are causally related (Maslach & Jackson, 1982). This therefore shows the presence of knowledge gap that warrant further study on depersonalization as an attitude towards the recipient of service in

relation to WDB. Thus, based on the foregoing, we hypothesized:

H0₂: Depersonalization has no significant effect on WDB among academic staff of ABU Zaria.

Underpinning Theory

Stressor-Emotion Model

Spector and Fox (2002) were the developers of the Stressor-Emotion Model which provided some theoretical underpinning that supports the link between emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and workplace deviant behavior. The model points out that various emotional responses are developed as a consequence of employees' appraisal of the work environment (Smoktunowicz, Baka, Cieslak, Nichols, Benight & Luszczynska, 2015), and all events that pose threat to well-being are stressors which lead to emotional reactions that are negative (Spector, 1998). Spector and Fox (2002) stated that people that continually become exposed to emotion-induced events have an increased likelihood to engage in behavioural response. Hence, negative emotions heighten the likelihood or facilitates WDB by motivating individual to attack (actively and directly) the person who creates the situation or develop coping strategies like work avoidance, alcohol drinking, etc., which are passive and indirect, (Spector & Fox 2002), while positive emotions are facilitators for organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). In essence, the model suggests a flow from environment to perception, to negative emotion and finally to WDB (Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001).

Hence, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and WDB in this study

based on the explanation above, are considered stressors that induce negative emotion among academic staff which heightens the likelihood of engagement in WDB. This is because, academic staff work in an extremely stressful environment (Goga, Bashir & Aliyu, 2023). Similarly, Aminullah and Olojuola (2021), reported that lecturers in Nigerian universities are suffering from high academic workloads which include teaching very large classes, invigilating students under tension due to poor accommodation, producing students' result within short time, attending to staff meeting on regular basis, supervising undergraduate and post-graduate projects within limited time, attending to defense, workshops, conferences and seminars, etc.

Research Methodology

The paper employed quantitative method to examine the effect of the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of job burnout on workplace deviant behaviour. Thus, the unit of analysis used in this paper is the academic staff of Ahmadu Bello University across its 17 faculties. The total population of academic staff across 17 faculties as at 2024 stands at two thousand two hundred and fifty-eight (2258) (ABU Registry). Based on Krejcie and Morgan sampling technique, the sample size is 327. However, in order to minimize non-response rate, 40% was added (Salkind, 2007) making the sample 458 which were distributed to the sample drawn through stratified sampling technique. Thus, 350 questionnaires were

retrieved of which 20 were found to be unengaged, finally 330 questionnaires were used for analysis.

Measurement of Variables

Workplace deviant behaviour was measured using organizational deviance dimension which consist of 12 items adapted from Bennett and Robinson (2000) WDB scale. A 5-point scale ranging from always=5 to never=1 was used. Maslach's Burnout Inventory [MBI] (1986) Educators Survey (ES) was used to measure emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Specifically; emotional exhaustion consists of 9 items while depersonalization has 5. The items were also rated on a 5-point scale ranging from always=5 to never=1.

Results and Discussion

The measurement model constitutes the individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability and discriminant validity. Firstly, attempt was made to assess the individual item reliability by the examination of each measure's outer loadings (Hair et al, 2017). Hair et al (2017), provided that items having 0.70 are reliable for already developed scale. However, they also suggested that researchers should consider the elimination of items below 0.7 only if the elimination improves the AVE and CR. Thus, based on the foregoing rule of thumb, the study has 26 items of which 11 were deleted leaving the study with 15 items that are acceptable for analysis.

This is provided in Figure 1 and Table 1 respectively:

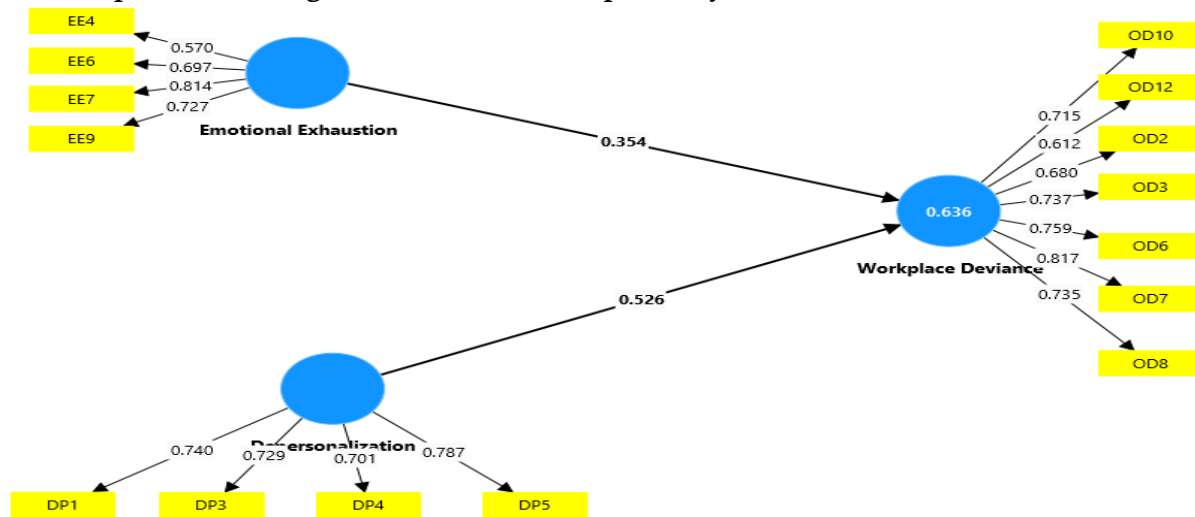


Figure 1: Measurement Model

Table 1: Loading of Items, AVE, and Composite Reliability

Variable	Code	Loading	AVE	CR
Workplace Deviance	OD2	0.680	0.525	0.885
	OD3	0.732		
	OD6	0.759		
	OD7	0.817		
	OD8	0.735		
	OD10	0.715		
	OD12	0.612		
Emotional Exhaustion	EE4	0.570	0.501	0.798
	EE6	0.697		
	EE7	0.814		
	EE9	0.727		
Depersonalization	DP1	0.740	0.548	0.829
	DP3	0.739		
	DP4	0.701		
	DP5	0.787		

Secondly, composite reliability was employed by the current study to investigate the constructs internal consistency. According to Hair et al (2019), internal consistency reliability of 0.70 and above is significant. Table 1 shows that, the internal consistency reliability is adequate because the CR ranges

from 0.798-0.885 which is beyond the threshold. Thirdly, this study employed AVE to measure the construct's convergent validity. The recommended threshold of the AVE should be 0.50 or higher, (Hair et al, 2017). The construct's convergent validity was achieved because the values are above the

threshold. Lastly, to assess discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was employed. As indicated in Table 2, all the reflective measures have discriminant validity

because the square root of the constructs' AVEs are higher than their correlation with any other.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larcker Criterion)

	DP	EE	WDB
Depersonalization	0.740		
Emotional Exhaustion	0.628	0.708	
Workplace Deviance	0.722	0.684	0.724

Structural Model Result

Hair et al (2017) stated that finding the predictive abilities and the interrelationships between the latent constructs is the purpose of the structural model. The current study's

structural model consists of main effect where the direct relationships between emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and workplace deviance were investigated.

This is shown in Figure 2:

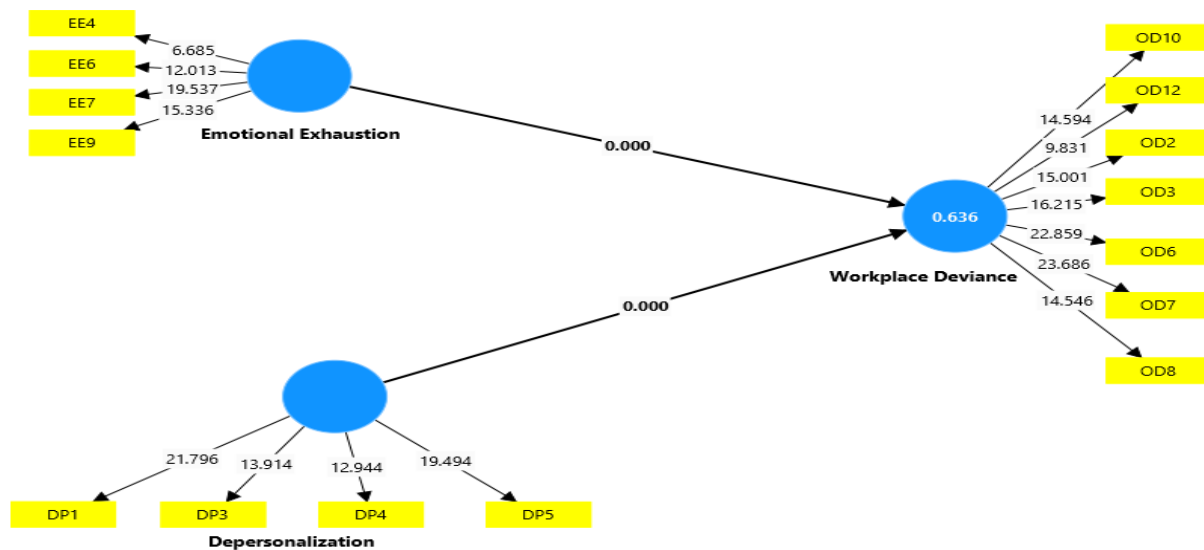


Figure 2: PLS Algorithm for the Direct Relationship

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	Beta Value	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Value	Decision
EE->WD	0.527	0.055	9.581	0.000	Reject
DP->WD	0.352	0.058	6.130	0.000	Reject

The assessment and explanation of the path coefficient's significance is provided by the structural model. The coefficient of determination for this model is 0.636. This

implies that variation in WDB of academic staff is explained by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization by 63.6%.

As can be seen from the result, hypothesis one which stated that emotional exhaustion does not have significant effect on workplace deviant behaviour was rejected ($\beta=0.527$, $T=9.581$, $P<0.000$). Also, the second hypothesis which stated that depersonalization does not have significant effect on workplace deviant behaviour was rejected also ($\beta=0.352$, $T=6.130$, $P<0.000$) at 5% level of significance. It is therefore established that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization have a positive significant effect on workplace deviant behaviour among academic staff. Specifically, increase in one unit of emotional exhaustion leads to 52.7% increase in workplace deviant behaviour while increase in one unit of depersonalization will lead to 35.2 increase in workplace deviant behaviour.

Discussion and Implications of Findings

The prevalence of WDB among academic staff especially in universities of Nigeria calls for a deeper examination into the factors in the university environment that trigger such deviant behaviours. Thus, previous studies have paid more attention to personality factors as antecedents of WDB rather than situational factors which are also central in triggering WDB (Zappala et al, 2022). Drawing from stressor-emotion model, we investigated the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of job burnout on WDB among academic staff of ABU Zaria.

First, the result revealed that emotional exhaustion has a positive significant effect on WDB among academic staff. This implies that the higher the emotional exhaustion, the higher that academic staff engaged in workplace deviance. Thus, the positive

relationship is consistent with the stressor-emotion model (Spector & Fox, 2002) that proposes that as people continually become exposed to emotion-induced events like emotional exhaustion, they develop emotions that are negative which heightens facilitates the occurrence of WDB. Accordingly, academic staff exposed to emotional exhaustion will develop negative emotion which will make launch an attack on the person that causes the situation or decide to develop coping mechanisms like work avoidance, alcohol drinking, refusal to complete course outline, etc which are passive and indirect responses (Spector & Fox 2002).

Another strong explanation for the positive and significant relationship is that academic staff of universities work in an extremely stressful environment with high workloads (Goga, Bugaje, and Aliyu, 2023; Aminullah & Olojuola, 2021; NUC, 2020). These make them experience emotional exhaustion (workplace stressor) which then gives birth to negative emotions and thus leads to WDB. This research finding is in tandem with previous studies which also established positive and significant link between emotional exhaustion and WDB (Goga, 2024; Goga et al, 2023; Jia, et al, 2022; Ogunbamila & Adedayo; Lubbadah 2021; Tajeja et al, 2020; Cohen & Abedallah, 2020; Makhdoom, Atta & Malik, 2019; Ugwu, Enwereuzor, Fimber & Ugwu, 2017; Cohen & Diamant, 2017). However, the study is not in line with the findings of Makhdoom et al, (2019), and Guetirrez (2019) who found an insignificant relationship between emotional exhaustion and WDB.

Secondly, the result established that depersonalization has positive significant effect on WDB among academic staff of ABU Zaria. Implying that, increased level of depersonalization, increases the tendency of academic staff to exhibit workplace deviant behaviour. The finding is also in line with stressor emotion-model (Spector & Fox, 2002). Thus, academic staff develop negative feelings about their students, colleagues or co-workers that leads to detachment through psychological withdrawal and physical distancing (Maslach, 1982). Additionally, academic staff experiencing this feeling will no longer have positive feelings toward their students and will use derogatory labels, exhibit distant attitudes, psychological withdrawal among others (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). The finding is in tandem with previous findings (Lubbadeh, 2021; Bicer, 2020; Turek, 2020; Ugwu et al, 2017; Smoktunowicz, 2015; Bolton et al, 2013) that established a significant positive effect of depersonalization on WDB. However, the finding is not in congruent with the finding of Goga (2024) who found an insignificant effect of depersonalization on WDB.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Significant contribution to practice has been provided by the current study by stressing the importance of reducing the occurrence of the job burnout syndrome (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) which leads to the occurrence of deviant behaviours. Thus, the study concludes that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization trigger academic staff to engage in different types of WDB which are harmful to both the university, students and colleagues. Thus, the following

recommendation are put forward on the basis of the findings and conclusion oozed from the study:

The Federal Government, National University Commission, and the university should find a way of reducing academic staff's burnout by lifting embargo in order to hire more academic staff, provide conducive work environment, increase the academic staff's salary, etc. else, the occurrence of WDB among academic staff will continue. Additionally, the study recommends that the university authority should utilize individual level burnout intervention strategies that will improve academic staff's ability to cope with workplace stressors. Improving the psychological capital as well as emotional intelligence of academic staff are some strategies that can be employed along this trajectory. This will equip the academic staff with skills that will help them cope with stressors and emotion management.

Limitations and Suggestions for future Research

Despite the contributions provided by the study, it is not void of flaws. First, there was a heavy reliance on self-report measures in the study that might give birth to social desirability bias, hence, the true picture of the result may be defaced. Further studies should utilize non-self-report measures to investigate the relationship. Secondly, the present study is restricted to only the academic staff of Ahmadu Bello university Zaria. Future studies should consider using more than one university. Lastly, the study establishes a positive significant effect of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization on WDB based on stressor-emotion model, however,

the result suffers from incompleteness as it does not show how job burnout through the chain of negative emotion leads to WDB. Thus, the study does not empirically show why the relationship exist. Hence, future studies should consider incorporating negative affect as a mediator in the job burnout-WDB relationship.

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