

Work-Life Balance and Occupational Stress Among Private Higher Education Faculty: An Empirical Study in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the pressure on private higher education faculty in India has intensified due to growing institutional demands, administrative responsibilities, and performance expectations. This study investigates the relationship between work-life balance (WLB) and occupational stress among faculty members in private colleges in higher education (including private universities) in Karnataka. Using a structured questionnaire distributed to a diverse group of faculty members across various disciplines, the research adopts a quantitative approach to assess how faculty perceive and manage work-related pressures alongside personal responsibilities. The findings reveal that a significant portion of faculty experience moderate to high levels of stress, primarily attributed to extended working hours, lack of institutional support, and unclear role expectations. Additionally, poor work-life balance was found to strongly correlate with decreased job satisfaction and emotional well-being. The study emphasizes the need for institutional reforms to promote healthier work environments, including flexible policies and mental health support. These findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on academic labor, highlighting the hidden burdens faced by educators in the private sector and the urgent need for policy-level interventions.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Occupational Stress, Private Higher Education, Faculty Well-being, Karnataka



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INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of higher education, faculty members play a pivotal role not only in knowledge dissemination but also in shaping academic culture and student success. However, in recent years, private higher education institutions in India have witnessed a surge in administrative demands, increased student expectations, and tighter institutional oversight, all of which have placed mounting pressure on academic professionals. Among these, the ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance has emerged as a critical yet often overlooked factor influencing faculty performance and well-being.

Work-life balance (WLB) refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage professional responsibilities while maintaining personal well-being and social relationships. For faculty in private institutions who often face heavier workloads, job insecurity, and performance-linked evaluations the struggle to achieve WLB is more pronounced compared to their counterparts in government colleges. As a result,

many private faculty members experience chronic stress, emotional fatigue, and diminished motivation, which can directly affect their teaching effectiveness, job satisfaction, and overall mental health. Although numerous studies have explored work-life balance in the corporate sector and public education, research specifically examining the WLB-stress dynamic within private higher education faculty in regional Indian contexts remains limited. Karnataka, a state known for its expanding private education sector, offers a compelling case to investigate these dynamics, especially in cities like Davangere where private institutions are both growing and under pressure to deliver competitive academic outcomes.

This study, therefore, aims to examine the relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress among private higher education faculty in Karnataka. It seeks to identify key stressors, assess how WLB challenges affect faculty performance and emotional well-being, and propose institutional interventions that can promote a more supportive academic work

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environment. By focusing on this under-researched segment, the study contributes to the broader discourse on academic labor and educational reform in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malik, S. A. R., & Varma, R. (2025). "Achieving work-life balance: Strategies for supporting educator retention and promoting teaching excellence in higher education" "This article presents a comprehensive analysis of work-life balance (WLB) strategies specifically tailored to higher education institutions. Malik and Varma emphasize that educator retention and teaching excellence are intricately linked to institutional policies that support faculty well-being. The study highlights practical interventions such as workload redistribution, supportive administrative structures, and wellness-centered initiatives. Importantly, the authors argue for a cultural shift within universities—from reactive stress relief to proactive and preventive work-life integration. Their findings reinforce the idea that faculty engagement and institutional loyalty increase when educators feel supported in both their professional and personal lives. This research contributes by offering context-specific strategies for Indian higher education systems while aligning with global best practices.

Geetanjali & Pratima Rawal (2025), "The Development and Impact of A Work-Life Balance Model on University Faculty: A Prospective Study of Academic Effectiveness and Organizational Change" "This study proposed and validated a structured work-life balance model integrating flexible teaching schedules, administrative task limits, and institutional wellness policies. Based on longitudinal data from Indian universities, the findings showed that faculty with access to these policies reported enhanced academic performance, better emotional regulation, and greater institutional loyalty. The model advocates shifting from reactive stress management to proactive WLB integration at the institutional policy level.

Erwin R. Bucjan & Mardie E. Bucjan (2025), "The Role of Educational Management in Promoting Work-Life Balance and Reducing Workplace Stress in the University" This study emphasizes the strategic role of leadership in mitigating occupational stress through supportive institutional culture. It was found that clear communication of expectations, professional autonomy, and empathetic leadership helped reduce job burnout and emotional fatigue. The authors concluded that leadership style has a measurable effect on how faculty perceive their workload and balance it with personal life, especially in high-demand roles.

P. Karthika (2025), "A Study on Work-Life Balance of Private College Professors in Coimbatore" Focused on private sector colleges, this study found that nearly 70% of faculty experienced consistent work-life conflict, driven by excessive teaching loads, pressure to publish, and administrative duties. The absence of clear HR policies and wellness programs further exacerbated psychological strain. It recommended structured time-off, mental health days, and faculty feedback

mechanisms as vital to improving WLB in private institutions.

Abirami Arunachalam et al. (2024), "Quality of Work Life among the Faculty Members of Higher Education Institutions in India": A comprehensive survey across Indian HEIs revealed that while general satisfaction with Quality of Work Life (QoWL) was high, discrepancies existed based on gender, institution type, and teaching load. Female faculty reported feeling overextended and less supported, especially in private institutions. The study advocated for equity-based resource allocation and the inclusion of faculty in decision-making processes to strengthen morale.

JETIR (2024), "Work-Life Balance in Higher Education": Using a cross-sectional survey design, the research explored the link between WLB, stress, absenteeism, and productivity. It found that institutions lacking structured WLB frameworks reported higher faculty turnover and dissatisfaction. Key suggestions included management training, establishment of internal grievance redressed systems, and workshops for personal effectiveness and time management.

Sikandar & Sikandar (2025), "Being, and Job Satisfaction: A Study of Higher Education Institutions": This unique study explored how personal well-being behaviors—especially physical activity and social support—help mitigate occupational stress. Faculty who engaged in regular self-care routines such as exercise, social interaction, and non-work hobbies were found to experience lower psychological distress. The research supports the integration of lifestyle wellness programs within faculty development policies. Gupta & Gomathi (2022), "The Impact of Work-Life Balance Policies on Faculty Engagement" This study showed that when WLB policies like workload caps, remote work options, and mental health counselling are in place, faculty show higher engagement and lower attrition. The research particularly emphasized the lack of formal WLB frameworks in private colleges compared to public ones, suggesting that policy-level disparities widen performance and satisfaction gaps across institution types.

Mayya et al. (2022), "Gender Differences in Work-Life Balance among College and University Professors in Karnataka" his Karnataka-based study highlighted structural gender disparities in WLB. Female faculty faced more intense role conflict due to expectations at home and work, while male faculty had better access to institutional flexibility. The authors called for policy frameworks to address implicit gender biases in academic management and scheduling

Research Objectives

1. To assess the current state of work-life balance among private higher education faculty in Karnataka.
2. To identify key occupational stressors affecting private college faculty in their professional environment.

3. To analysis the relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress among private faculty members.
4. To propose institutional strategies that could improve work-life balance and reduce stress among private higher education faculty.

Scope of the Study

This study is specifically focused on examining the work-life balance and occupational stress experienced by faculty members working in private higher education institutions within the state of Karnataka, India. The research emphasizes faculty in non-government colleges, where institutional pressures, performance evaluations, and job instability often differ significantly from those in the public sector.

The scope includes:

- Faculty members across a variety of disciplines within undergraduate and postgraduate private colleges.
- The assessment of perceived workload, institutional expectations, support systems, and personal coping mechanisms.
- Measurement of occupational stress levels and their relationship with teaching effectiveness and well-being.

This study does not include faculty from government-funded institutions or those teaching in distance or open learning environments. By narrowing its focus to the private sector in a specific geographic context, the research provides deeper insights into a segment that is often underrepresented in academic labour studies, while also generating implications for policy reform and institutional support mechanisms.

Research Gap:

While existing studies have broadly explored work-life balance and occupational stress among educators, there is a limited empirical focus on private higher education faculty in the specific regional context of Karnataka. Much of the current literature either generalizes findings across public and private sectors or focuses on metropolitan settings, neglecting the unique challenges faced by faculty in non-government colleges in this state. Furthermore, the interplay between institutional demands, personal coping strategies, and their impact on both stress levels and teaching effectiveness remains underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by offering context-specific insights and actionable strategies tailored to the needs of private faculty members in Karnataka.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design: This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress among private higher education faculty in Karnataka. The aim is to collect measurable data that reflect the lived experiences and psychological responses of faculty members in relation to their workload and institutional environment.

2. Population and Sampling: The target population includes faculty members employed in private colleges and universities offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs in the **Davangere** district and other regions of Karnataka. A purposive sampling technique was used to select institutions representing a range of disciplines, including arts, science, commerce, management, and engineering. A total of **120 faculty members** were selected based on their willingness to participate, employment status (full-time), and experience (minimum one year in the current institution).

3. Data Collection Instrument: Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections:

- **Demographic profile** (age, gender, marital status, designation, years of experience)
- **Work-Life Balance scale** (adapted from existing validated scales such as the Fisher-McAuley WLB scale)
- **Occupational Stress scale** (based on the Occupational Stress Index by Srivastava and Singh, 1981)
- The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5).

4. Data Collection Procedure: The questionnaires were distributed both physically and digitally (via Google Forms) over a period of one month. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was assured to encourage honest responses.

5. Data Analysis: The collected data was coded and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize demographic and response data in graphical representation. Pearson's correlation and linear regression analysis were conducted to explore the relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress.

6. Ethical Considerations: Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study ensured confidentiality, and no identifiable personal information was recorded. Ethical clearance was sought from the institution's research committee.

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant negative relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress among private higher education faculty in Karnataka.

(Explanation: As work-life balance improves, occupational stress is expected to decrease.)

H2: Faculty members with poor work-life balance report significantly lower levels of job satisfaction and teaching commitment compared to those with better work-life balance.

(Explanation: Poor balance may reduce performance motivation and emotional well-being.)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the responses collected from 120 private higher education faculty members across Karnataka state, the study revealed several key trends related to work-life balance and occupational stress.

1. Work-Life Balance Levels:

Approximately **68%** of respondents reported **moderate to poor work-life balance**, citing long working hours, administrative overload, and lack of flexible policies as primary challenges. Female faculty members and younger faculty (under 35 years) were found to experience more difficulty in maintaining balance due to dual role conflicts.

2. Occupational Stress Patterns:

A significant **72%** of faculty reported **moderate to high stress levels**. Key stressors identified included unclear institutional expectations, job insecurity, frequent assessments, and lack of recognition. Faculty members with more than 10 years of experience reported slightly

lower stress levels, indicating better adaptation or coping mechanisms.

3. Correlation Between WLB and Stress:

A **strong negative correlation** ($r = -0.63$, $p < 0.01$) was found between work-life balance and occupational stress, supporting **Hypothesis 1**. This suggests that faculty who experienced better work-life balance reported significantly lower stress levels.

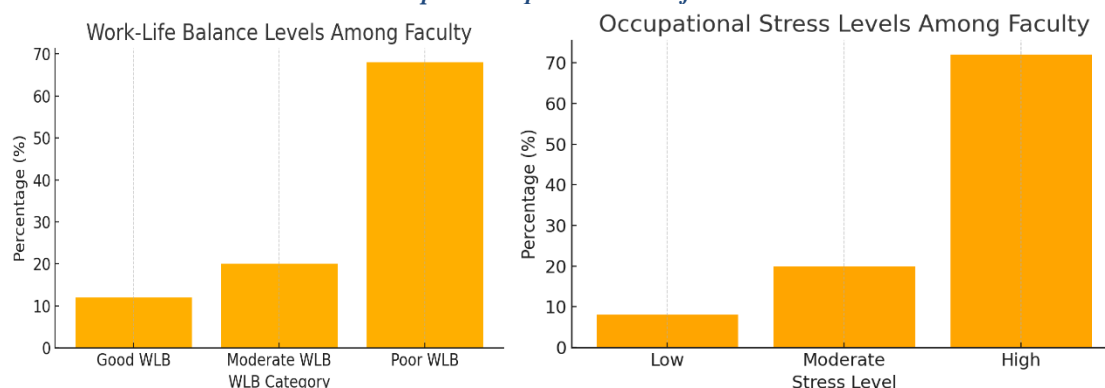
4. Impact on Teaching Commitment:

Regression analysis indicated that **poor work-life balance significantly predicted reduced job satisfaction and teaching commitment** ($\beta = -0.51$, $p < 0.01$), supporting **Hypothesis 2**. Respondents with high stress levels also reported increased feelings of burnout and emotional detachment from teaching responsibilities.

5. Qualitative Insights (Optional Add-on):

Informal comments highlighted a sense of being "mechanically driven" and "undervalued" among faculty in private institutions. Many called for institutional reforms, including counseling support, manageable workloads, and greater autonomy in academic planning.

Graphical Representation of Data



1. Work-Life Balance Distribution:

This chart shows that a large portion (68%) of private faculty experience poor work-life balance.

2. Occupational Stress Levels:

Most faculty (72%) report high levels of stress, while only a small segment (8%) experience low stress.

Suggestions

1. Institutional Support Systems:

Private colleges should implement **flexible scheduling**, reasonable workloads, and encourage a culture of work-life integration.

2. Counselling and Wellness Programs:

Establish in-house **mental health counselling**, stress management workshops, and peer-support forums to support emotional well-being.

3. Transparent Job Structures:

Provide **clear communication** of performance expectations and career growth opportunities to reduce anxiety and uncertainty.

4. Gender-sensitive Policies:

Offer gender-inclusive leave policies, remote work options, and on-campus childcare to support female faculty.

5. Recognition and Incentives:

Implement **faculty recognition programs** to motivate academic engagement and reduce burnout.

Limitations

1. **Regional Constraint:** The study is geographically restricted to the state of Karnataka, thereby limiting the extent to which the findings can be generalized to faculty in other regions or educational systems.

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2. **Institutional Scope:** The exclusive focus on private higher education institutions omits comparative insights from public colleges, which may exhibit distinct occupational dynamics and stressors.

3. **Reliance on Self-Reported Data:** The use of self-administered questionnaires introduces the potential for response bias, as participants may consciously or unconsciously misrepresent their experiences related to stress and work-life balance.

4. **Variability Across Disciplines:** The study encompasses faculty from diverse academic disciplines, yet it may not fully account for the unique workload demands and stressors inherent in each field, potentially affecting the uniformity of results.

5. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The research adopts a cross-sectional methodology, which provides a snapshot of current conditions but lacks the capacity to track changes in work-life balance and stress over time

CONCLUSION

This study explored the intricate relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress among private higher education faculty in Karnataka. The findings reveal a critical imbalance between professional demands and personal well-being, particularly among younger and female faculty members. A strong inverse correlation between work-life balance and stress confirms that institutional neglect in managing workload and personal time leads to emotional fatigue and declining teaching quality.

To address these challenges, educational institutions must prioritize strategic reforms that go beyond compliance and genuinely enhance faculty well-being. Integrating wellness into institutional culture not only benefits faculty but also ensures sustained academic excellence.

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