

From Engagement To Exhaustion: Investigating How Organizational Citizenship Behaviour And Institutional-Personal Factors Influence Job Stress Among Employees In Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This study explores the complex interplay between Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), institutional and personal factors, and their cumulative impact on job stress among employees in higher educational institutions in India. Employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), the research assesses how discretionary behaviors, contextual variables, and internal role expectations contribute to psychological strain. Findings indicate that while altruism significantly enhances OCB, institutional stressors such as role management and career development concerns strongly predict job stress. Contrary to prevalent assumptions, OCB does not exhibit a buffering effect against job stress. The study underscores the necessity for tailored human resource strategies that balance performance-enhancing behaviors with psychological well-being.

Keywords: *Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), Job Stress, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Institutional Support, Emotional Exhaustion, Role Overload*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, higher education institutions (HEIs) have faced unprecedented challenges stemming from globalization, digital transformation, regulatory changes, and shifting societal expectations. These developments have profoundly affected how academic and non-academic staff engage with their work, balancing increasingly complex roles within institutions that demand not only competence but also commitment beyond formal job descriptions. In such a dynamic landscape, **Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**—discretionary behaviors that go beyond contractual obligations—has emerged as a critical determinant of institutional performance. Faculty mentoring, volunteering for committees, supporting colleagues, and participating in policy development are some forms of OCB that contribute to the overall functioning of HEIs. While these behaviors often promote collaboration and institutional excellence, they also risk leading employees from engagement into exhaustion when boundaries are blurred and recognition is lacking.

The duality of OCB is increasingly recognized in the literature. On one hand, employees who exhibit high OCB enhance teamwork, institutional culture, and even student success. On the other hand, unchecked and unreciprocated engagement can result in overwork, emotional depletion, and ultimately, **job stress**. This is particularly salient in Indian HEIs, where hierarchical cultures, bureaucratic processes, and rapid policy changes (e.g., NEP 2020) exert mounting pressures on academic staff. Unlike corporate settings, higher education demands intellectual labor, emotional labor, and institutional loyalty—often simultaneously. This complex ecosystem calls for an in-depth understanding of how seemingly positive behaviors like OCB may contribute to hidden costs such as burnout, disengagement, and psychological distress.

Job stress is broadly defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when job requirements do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the employee. In HEIs, job stress manifests in various ways: excessive workloads, conflicting role expectations, limited promotional opportunities, and lack of administrative support. The **Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model** and **Conservation of Resources (COR) theory** provide robust theoretical frameworks to explore how continuous engagement in OCB, without adequate resources or institutional support, can deplete employees' psychological reserves and trigger stress. More importantly, these models also highlight how personal attributes (e.g., emotional intelligence, tenure) and institutional mechanisms (e.g., leadership, policies) can buffer or intensify this stress.

Existing literature confirms that individual and institutional factors interact with OCB and job stress in nuanced ways. For instance, employees with longer tenures may demonstrate higher civic virtue but may also experience role fatigue. Similarly, faculty in private HEIs often display high conscientiousness but also report higher burnout due to performance-driven cultures. Gender, age, marital status, and emotional resilience also influence how individuals perceive and react to OCB expectations. While considerable research has been conducted on OCB and job stress as separate constructs, limited work has explored their interdependence—especially in the context of Indian academia where work-life boundaries are porous, and extrinsic rewards for OCB are minimal.

2. Literature Review

The interplay between Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), institutional and personal factors, and job stress has gained increasing scholarly attention over the past decade, particularly within the higher education (HE) sector. The current review synthesizes existing research from 2016 to 2025 to build a robust conceptual foundation for examining how engagement-driven discretionary behaviors may paradoxically contribute to burnout and job-related stress among academic staff.

2.1 Conceptualizing Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Organizational Citizenship Behavior, originally conceptualized by Organ (1988), refers to voluntary, non-contractual actions that go beyond formal job requirements and contribute to organizational effectiveness. Podsakoff et al. (2009) later categorized OCB into five key dimensions: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue. These behaviors have been extensively studied in corporate settings and are increasingly being explored in the context of educational institutions. Recent studies (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2016; Yadav & Lenka, 2020) affirm that OCB contributes to institutional cohesion, faculty collaboration, and student satisfaction in HE settings. However, scholars also caution against the “dark side” of OCB, especially when it leads to role overload, exhaustion, or perceived exploitation (Bolino et al., 2018).

2.2 OCB in Higher Education Institutions

In higher education, OCB manifests in various forms—mentoring junior colleagues, participating in curriculum committees, volunteering for extra academic responsibilities, and contributing to institutional branding. Chattopadhyay and Ghosh (2020) highlight that academic staff frequently engage in OCBs under implicit expectations, which can gradually blur the boundary between voluntary and obligatory behavior.

Research by Bhardwaj, Mishra, and Mishra (2019) in Indian universities shows that while OCB improves departmental harmony and student outcomes, it is often unrecognized in performance appraisals. This lack of formal reward may lead to emotional fatigue. Similarly, Gupta and Joshi (2017) found that faculty OCB increases when institutional trust and autonomy are high, but overcommitment without organizational support can breed resentment.

2.3 Institutional Factors Influencing OCB and Stress

Institutional culture, leadership style, bureaucratic workload, and governance policies significantly shape both the expression of OCB and the emergence of job stress in HEIs.

Transformational leadership has been positively associated with faculty engagement in OCB (Panda & Mohapatra, 2022). Leaders who inspire a shared vision and support faculty innovation foster discretionary effort. However, rigid bureaucracies and micromanagement can suppress OCB while simultaneously increasing stress levels (Sen & Jaiswal, 2021).

Mahmoud et al. (2019) argue that academic institutions often experience a misalignment between role expectations and resource availability, leading to a phenomenon termed “institutional dissonance.” This condition forces faculty into a state of continuous engagement without sufficient institutional backing, resulting in chronic job stress.

2.4 Personal and Demographic Factors

Individual-level variables such as age, gender, marital status, tenure, personality traits, and emotional intelligence also moderate the relationship between OCB and stress. For instance, Agrawal and Thakur (2021) observed that younger faculty exhibit higher altruism but are also more vulnerable to burnout due to identity negotiation and performance pressure.

In a longitudinal study, Jain et al. (2023) showed that early-career faculty are more likely to participate in multiple roles—advisor, teacher, researcher—without having fully developed coping mechanisms, thereby making them prone to emotional exhaustion. Conversely, experienced academicians often exhibit higher levels of civic virtue and sportsmanship but may disengage due to policy fatigue or stagnant career growth.

Personality traits such as conscientiousness and agreeableness have been positively associated with OCB (Chiaburu et al., 2016), while neuroticism has been linked to higher susceptibility to stress. Emotional intelligence has emerged as a buffer, enabling faculty to regulate emotions, navigate interpersonal dynamics, and manage work-life boundaries (Yusof & Halim, 2020).

2.5 The Paradox of Engagement and Burnout

Several studies highlight the paradoxical relationship between high engagement and high stress. Saks and Gruman (2017) explain that the same psychological resources that facilitate OCB—enthusiasm, empathy, and identification with institutional goals—can be depleted over time, leading to burnout. This aligns with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2018), which suggests that when employees invest heavily in their work without sufficient resource replenishment, stress ensues.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2019) propose the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which explains how high job demands (e.g., excessive teaching load, research deadlines) combined with low resources (e.g., lack of administrative support, recognition) lead to stress and disengagement. The model has been applied effectively in university contexts, showing that OCB can either buffer or exacerbate job stress depending on the balance of demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2020).

2.6 Empirical Gaps, Emerging Trends, and Theoretical Relevance

Although research on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) and job stress is growing, significant gaps remain—particularly regarding their interrelationship in academic contexts. Most studies examine these constructs independently, often using cross-sectional designs that overlook long-term psychological impacts. Recent studies, such as Sharma and Mehta (2024), highlight how sustained OCB without recognition can lead to emotional detachment. Post-COVID challenges have further complicated faculty roles, with remote teaching and digital fatigue increasing stress among highly engaged staff (Banerjee & Rao, 2025).

To address this, the current study integrates the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, and Role Theory. This framework captures the structural, psychological, and identity-based dimensions of stress arising from OCB. Applying this model to Indian HEIs allows for a deeper understanding of how institutional and personal factors drive employees from engagement to exhaustion, offering timely insights for academic policy and faculty well-being.

3. Research Objectives

- To examine the influence of OCB on job stress among employees in higher education institutions.
- To assess the role of personal and institutional factors in predicting OCB and job stress.
- To determine the strongest predictors of OCB and job stress using structural equation modeling.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The present study utilized a **quantitative, cross-sectional research design** to investigate the relationship between Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), institutional-personal factors, and job stress among employees working in higher education institutions (HEIs) in India. The research employed **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)** using SmartPLS 4.0 to test both the **measurement model** (examining construct validity and reliability) and the **structural model** (testing hypothesized relationships among variables). This methodological choice was guided by the study's objective to assess complex, multivariate relationships involving multiple latent constructs.

PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for research involving prediction, exploratory model testing, and studies with non-normal data distributions. Given the nature of OCB and stress-related constructs—which are often influenced by contextual and psychological factors—the PLS-SEM framework allowed for robust analysis of both direct and indirect relationships between variables.

4.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The study employed a **purposive sampling technique** to gather responses from academic and administrative personnel working in Indian HEIs. Participants were selected based on their active involvement in institutional roles that go beyond basic job functions, which made them suitable candidates for evaluating OCB and job stress indicators.

A structured questionnaire was disseminated both in print and through digital platforms, including email and institutional communication networks. Of the **350** distributed questionnaires, **321** valid responses were retained for final analysis after a rigorous screening process to eliminate incomplete or inconsistent

entries. The sample covered a diverse cross-section of faculty and staff across public and private HEIs, representing varied demographics including age, gender, designation, and years of experience.

4.3 Measurement of Constructs

The research model included a set of **exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) constructs**, all measured using previously validated instruments to ensure reliability and comparability with past research.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB):

Five dimensions of OCB were treated as exogenous constructs: Altruism, Conscientiousness, Civic Virtue, Courtesy, Sportsmanship. These were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), using items adapted from established scales by **Podsakoff et al. (2000)** and **Cohen et al. (1983)**. Each dimension included 3–5 items that captured specific discretionary behaviors relevant to academic work environments.

Job Stress Dimensions:

Job stress was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct influenced by both institutional and personal stressors: Career Development, Family-Work Conflict, Interpersonal Relationships, Job Itself, Organizational Style, Role Management. These constructs were measured using a modified version of the **Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI)** originally developed by **Cooper and Williams**. Respondents rated their perceived stress across these domains on the same 5-point Likert scale to maintain consistency.

The combined use of validated instruments from OCB and job stress literature ensured the credibility and robustness of the constructs. Furthermore, the use of Likert scaling facilitated statistical modeling through PLS-SEM, allowing for nuanced understanding of how discretionary organizational behaviors interact with stress-inducing institutional and personal variables.

5. Results and Model Assessment

5.1 Collinearity Assessment

All inner **Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)** values were found to be well below the recommended threshold of five, indicating no issues of multicollinearity among the predictor variables. This confirms the stability of the model and supports the reliability of the path estimates.

5.2 Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The model demonstrated substantial predictive accuracy:

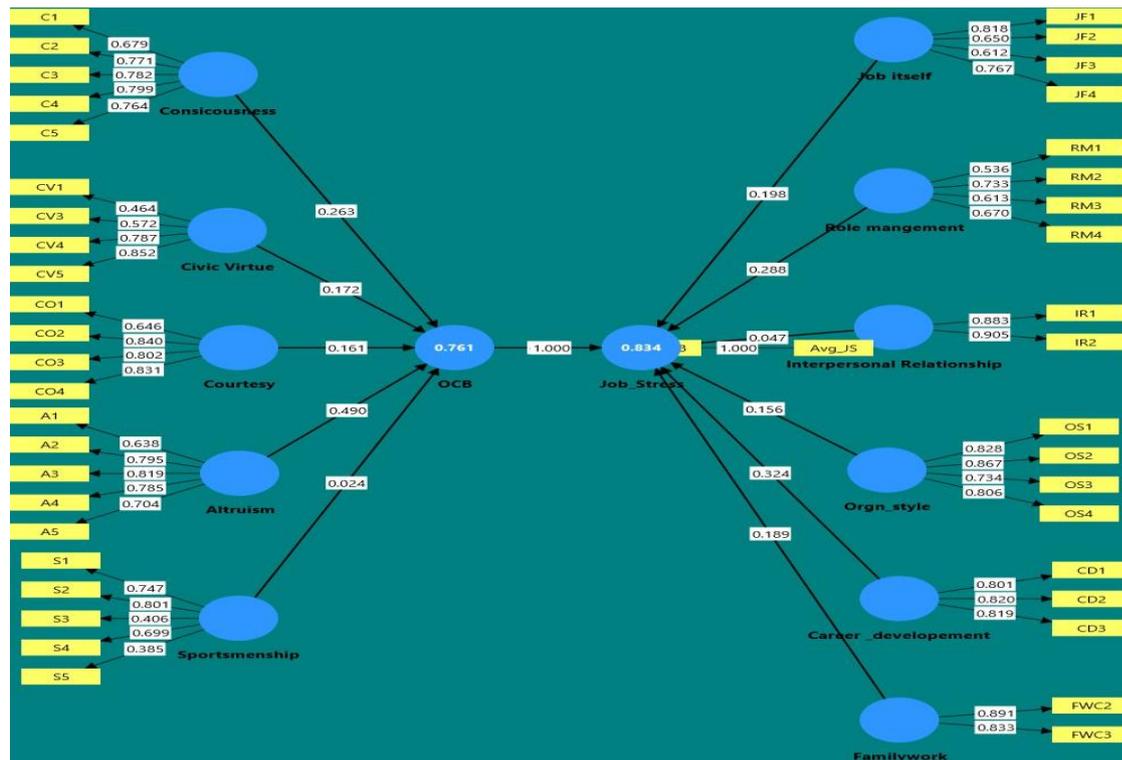
- **Job Stress:** The model accounted for **83.4%** of the variance ($R^2 = 0.834$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.826$), indicating strong explanatory power.
- **Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB):** The explained variance was **76.1%** ($R^2 = 0.761$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.753$), which also reflects a substantial effect size as per Cohen's (1988) guidelines.

5.3 Effect Size (f^2)

The **effect sizes (f^2)** of exogenous constructs on the respective endogenous variables were analyzed to evaluate the practical significance of relationships:

- **Predictors of OCB:**
 - Altruism ($f^2 = 0.540$) – Large effect
 - Conscientiousness ($f^2 = 0.176$) – Medium effect
 - Civic Virtue ($f^2 = 0.076$) and Courtesy ($f^2 = 0.067$) – Small effects
 - Sportsmanship ($f^2 = 0.002$) – Negligible effect
- **Predictors of Job Stress:**
 - Role Management ($f^2 = 0.323$) – Large effect
 - Career Development ($f^2 = 0.225$) – Medium effect
 - Family-Work Conflict ($f^2 = 0.138$) and Job Itself ($f^2 = 0.145$) – Small to medium effects
 - Organizational Style ($f^2 = 0.054$) and Interpersonal Relationship ($f^2 = 0.010$) – Small/negligible effects
 - OCB → Job Stress ($f^2 = 0.003$) – Negligible effect

These results suggest that while specific institutional and personal factors significantly contribute to job stress, OCB does not exhibit a strong buffering or aggravating effect on stress within the current model.



5.4 Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was employed to test the statistical significance of path coefficients. Key findings include:

- **Statistically significant positive paths** were observed from:
 - Altruism → OCB
 - Role Management → Job Stress
 (p < 0.01 in both cases)
- **Non-significant or weak paths** included:
 - Sportsmanship → OCB
 - OCB → Job Stress

Despite theoretical expectations, these paths demonstrated limited practical impact within the sample.

5.5 Model Fit Indices

- **Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)** was **0.071**, below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a good model fit.
- **Normed Fit Index (NFI)** was **0.894**, approaching the ideal value of 0.90.
- **Chi-square values** were within acceptable limits.

6. Discussion and Implications

This study reveals critical insights into the complex interplay between Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), institutional-personal factors, and job stress within higher education institutions (HEIs). While OCB is typically lauded for its institutional benefits, the findings highlight a paradox: its positive organizational impact does not necessarily translate into improved employee well-being.

A key insight is the significant influence of altruism on OCB, supporting earlier research (Chou & Pearson, 2012) that identifies altruistic behavior as central to discretionary workplace engagement—particularly in academic settings. Faculty and staff often engage in supportive behaviors out of intrinsic motivation or alignment with institutional values, rather than formal reward systems. However, the study reveals that such behavior, though collegial, may have unintended consequences when not backed by institutional support.

Interestingly, OCB was not found to significantly reduce job stress. This challenges the assumption that engaged employees are inherently less stressed. Instead, the concept of "citizenship fatigue" (Bolino et al., 2013) becomes relevant—suggesting that repeated, unrewarded acts of OCB may actually contribute to emotional exhaustion.

Most notably, Role Management emerged as the strongest predictor of job stress. This supports findings by Gmelch et al. (1994), who discussed the burden of managing multiple roles in academia. When

institutional expectations are unclear or conflicting, employees experience overload, role conflict, and declining satisfaction—despite being motivated or committed.

Other contributors, such as Career Development, Job Itself, and Family-Work Conflict, further illustrate the strain of institutional and personal misalignments. Inadequate growth opportunities, low job autonomy, and work-life imbalance exacerbate stress, regardless of high OCB. These findings reinforce the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, emphasizing the necessity for organizations to provide sufficient resources to counterbalance professional demands and safeguard employee well-being.

7. CONCLUSION

This study investigated how Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), along with institutional and personal stressors, contributes to job stress among employees in Indian higher education institutions. While altruism was found to be a strong driver of OCB, the behavior itself did not significantly reduce stress, suggesting that high engagement can coexist with emotional fatigue. Role management, career development issues, and work-life conflicts were major contributors to stress levels, emphasizing the need for systemic interventions.

The research highlights a critical disconnect: engaged employees are not necessarily protected from burnout. Institutions must carefully design roles, clarify expectations, and recognize discretionary efforts to maintain a healthy academic workforce. Through strategic HR practices, supportive leadership, and equitable policies, HEIs can ensure that the path from engagement does not lead to exhaustion, but toward sustained motivation, productivity, and well-being.

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