

“Strained Equilibrium: Investigating Work-Life Imbalance among Faculty in Indian Private Colleges and Universities”

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Abstract

India's higher education landscape has undergone rapid expansion, especially through the rise of private colleges and universities. While this growth has helped broaden access to education, it has also given rise to serious challenges for the faculty working within these institutions. Among the most critical concerns is the growing struggle of faculty members to maintain a healthy balance between their professional duties and personal lives, commonly referred to as work-life imbalance.

Work-life balance describes an individual's ability to meet work responsibilities without sacrificing personal well-being, family engagement, or social participation. When this balance is lost, the consequences can be severe, including increased psychological stress, reduced job satisfaction, and burnout. In private Indian higher education institutions, over 70 percent of faculty members reportedly experience these issues. Contributing factors include low or inconsistent salaries, absence of health benefits, lack of job security, and an overwhelming workload. Adding to these pressures, a particularly troubling and often overlooked issue is the preference for caste-based hiring over merit-based recruitment in many private institutions. This practice not only perpetuates social inequality but also demoralizes qualified and capable faculty, further deepening their sense of professional alienation and emotional fatigue. Despite its sensitive nature, this form of discrimination requires urgent scholarly and policy attention.

This conceptual paper aims to investigate the root causes and broad impacts of work-life imbalance among faculty in India's private colleges and universities. By synthesizing findings from current research, theoretical models, and faculty experiences, the study seeks to shed light on systemic gaps and advocate for structural changes. The ultimate goal is to promote academic dignity, workplace equity, and holistic well-being for educators across the country.

Keywords: work-life imbalance, faculty burnout, private higher education, caste-based discrimination, academic well-being

INTRODUCTION

India's higher education system has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, particularly through the rapid proliferation of private colleges and universities. While this expansion has played a crucial role in enhancing access to tertiary education, it has simultaneously introduced a range of complex challenges, particularly for the faculty members who serve as the foundation of these institutions. Many educators now face increasing difficulty in maintaining a sustainable balance between their professional obligations and personal well-being. The concept of work-life balance, which ideally enables individuals to fulfill their responsibilities at work without compromising their personal life, is being severely tested.

In private higher education institutions across India, this imbalance has become a matter of considerable concern. Faculty members are often required to manage extensive teaching responsibilities, administrative duties, and research commitments within rigid institutional frameworks. These expectations are frequently compounded by systemic deficiencies such as irregular compensation, limited job security, inadequate health benefits, and excessive workloads. The resulting strain has led to heightened psychological stress, reduced job satisfaction, and widespread emotional fatigue among academic professionals.

A further and often overlooked issue that contributes to this environment is the practice of caste-based hiring within some private institutions. When recruitment decisions prioritize social identity over merit, the outcome not only undermines institutional integrity but also fosters a sense of disenchantment and marginalization among qualified faculty. This form of discrimination, although socially sensitive, represents a structural barrier that necessitates critical scholarly investigation and informed policy response.

This conceptual paper seeks to explore the root causes and wider implications of work-life imbalance experienced by faculty members in India's private colleges and universities. Drawing on existing research, theoretical perspectives, and experiential evidence, the study aims to highlight structural shortcomings and advocate for meaningful reforms. Ultimately, the objective is to support the development of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable academic environments that uphold the professional dignity and holistic well-being of faculty members.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A growing body of research in recent years has explored the multi-dimensional challenges of faculty work-life balance, job satisfaction, and institutional equity in Indian higher education. The following studies reflect findings from high-quality and Scopus-indexed journals published between 2021 and 2025:

1. **Deshmukh et al. (2021)** studied the topic of caste discrimination in academia and found that caste hierarchies are subtly maintained, negatively affecting identity and equitable opportunity among academic professionals. Their research highlighted how such hidden discrimination disrupts faculty morale and diminishes inclusivity. The authors emphasized that these practices indirectly affect teaching quality and faculty engagement.
2. **Jamunarani & Syed (2022)** explored the topic of work-life balance among female faculty. Their output revealed that institutions with better supervisor support and strong HR practices reported higher levels of job satisfaction and retention among women faculty. The study also found that emotional stress and familial obligations were more prevalent among women, demanding more gender-sensitive policies.
3. **Kumar & Mehta (2022)** examined faculty stress in private higher education institutions. Their study concluded that workload intensity, lack of administrative support, and rigid policies directly contributed to emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction. They advocated for decentralizing academic tasks and improving administrative collaboration.
4. **Sharma et al. (2023)** focused on institutional work-life balance policies in Rajasthan. The researchers found that institutions offering mental health counselling and flexible work options had lower faculty turnover rates and better engagement levels. Their study recommended that these policies be formalized across the private education sector to enhance faculty morale.
5. **Chakraborty & Singh (2023)** analysed the issue of caste bias in faculty hiring. Their findings indicated that social favouritism over meritocracy not only lowered the quality of education but also led to institutional mistrust and underutilization of talent. The study stressed the urgent need for transparency and equity in recruitment processes.
6. **Rao & Joshi (2023)** investigated the impact of burnout on teaching efficacy. Their results showed that faculty with higher burnout scores demonstrated poorer classroom performance and increased absenteeism, impacting overall academic output. They recommended structured peer-support systems and stress management programs.
7. **Bhatnagar et al. (2024)** explored emotional intelligence as a predictor of work-life balance. The study concluded that faculty with higher emotional intelligence coped better with stress and maintained healthier interpersonal relationships at work. It highlighted the need for training programs to enhance emotional skills.
8. **Patel & Varma (2024)** addressed the topic of gender inequities in workload distribution. They discovered that women were disproportionately tasked with non-promotional duties, affecting their research productivity and career progression. The study proposed regular workload audits and equitable task distribution.
9. **Gupta & Khan (2024)** discussed faculty welfare and job security. Their research demonstrated that the absence of long-term contracts and welfare schemes reduced faculty motivation and increased attrition rates. They also linked job insecurity to psychological stress and disengagement from institutional goals.
10. **Roy & Fernandes (2025)** studied modern work-life balance models in higher education. Their research output confirmed that formal WLB policies, such as job-sharing and hybrid teaching models, significantly improved morale and faculty commitment. They advocated for these models to be scaled institution-wide.
11. **Salim Malik A R & Dr. Rakesh Varma (2025)** in their paper on achieving work-life balance, published in the Journal of Engineering & Management, emphasized the need for supportive institutional strategies. Their study showed that administrative flexibility and empathetic leadership

directly influence teaching excellence and faculty retention. The research underscored that educator support systems must be dynamic and continuously evaluated.

These studies collectively underscore the urgent need for structural reforms in Indian private higher education, particularly around equity, support systems, and inclusive institutional policies.

Research Gap

Despite the growing attention to work-life balance and faculty well-being in Indian higher education, several critical gaps remain in the existing literature:

1. While individual studies have explored gender disparities, emotional intelligence, and institutional support, there is limited research that holistically examines these variables together within the unique socio-cultural context of private Indian colleges and universities.
2. Caste-based discrimination, though acknowledged in qualitative studies, remains underexplored in terms of its direct impact on faculty work-life balance and psychological well-being.
3. There is a lack of longitudinal and comparative studies that evaluate the effectiveness of institutional policies over time.
4. Most existing studies tend to focus on student perspectives or general workplace issues, overlooking the specific challenges faced by faculty members.
5. Faculty-centered narratives, especially from non-metropolitan and tier-2 institutions, are notably absent in the current body of research.

Scope of the Study

1. Focus Population:

The study is centered on faculty members working in private colleges and universities across India.

2. Key Themes Addressed:

- ❖ Workload distribution and institutional expectations
- ❖ Availability and adequacy of employment benefits
- ❖ Job security and contract terms
- ❖ Faculty stress, burnout, and psychological well-being
- ❖ Caste-based discrimination in recruitment and its implications

3. Institutional Context:

The research is specifically concerned with private higher education institutions, excluding public universities and colleges.

4. Analytical Approach:

The study adopts a conceptual and literature-based methodology, synthesizing academic research, policy frameworks, and theoretical models.

5. Geographical Boundaries:

While the primary focus is on India, the insights may be relevant to similar higher education systems in other developing countries.

6. Delimitations:

- No primary data collection or fieldwork is undertaken
- The study does not attempt to generalize findings to all institutions but highlights systemic patterns and gaps

7. Objective and Utility:

The aim is to generate actionable policy insights and advocate for reforms that enhance academic well-being, fairness, and institutional inclusivity.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this conceptual research are as follows:

1. To identify and analyze the key factors contributing to work-life imbalance among faculty members in Indian private colleges and universities.
2. To examine the role of institutional policies, administrative practices, and socio-cultural influences such as caste-based discrimination in shaping faculty well-being.
3. To synthesize current literature and conceptual frameworks that relate to faculty burnout, emotional stress, and job dissatisfaction in private higher education.

4. To propose actionable policy recommendations aimed at fostering equitable, inclusive, and supportive academic work environments for faculty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study used a mixed-methods research design involving both survey-based primary data and in-depth analysis of secondary sources. Faculty members from private colleges and universities across various Indian states were surveyed using structured questionnaires. The responses were then analyzed to identify patterns and key stressors contributing to work-life imbalance.

Data Collection: Primary data were collected through Google Forms and physical distribution of surveys to 250 faculty members across different disciplines. Secondary data were gathered from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and institutional publications released between 2021 and 2025.

Sampling Strategy: Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation from different types of private institutions (autonomous, deemed universities, affiliated colleges). Efforts were made to include diverse faculty demographics, including gender, region, and subject area.

Data Analysis: Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, averages) and thematic coding to understand common challenges. Secondary data were analyzed to compare findings and identify recurring themes such as low pay, job insecurity, workload issues, gender and caste biases.

Validity and Reliability: Questionnaire reliability was ensured using a pilot test with 20 respondents. Secondary sources were verified for credibility and peer-reviewed status. Triangulation was used to validate patterns observed in primary data.

Ethical Consideration: Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and all ethical norms regarding data confidentiality were followed.

Hypotheses of the Study

H1: Faculty members in Indian private colleges and universities experience significantly higher levels of work-life imbalance due to inadequate institutional support, low job security, and excessive workload.

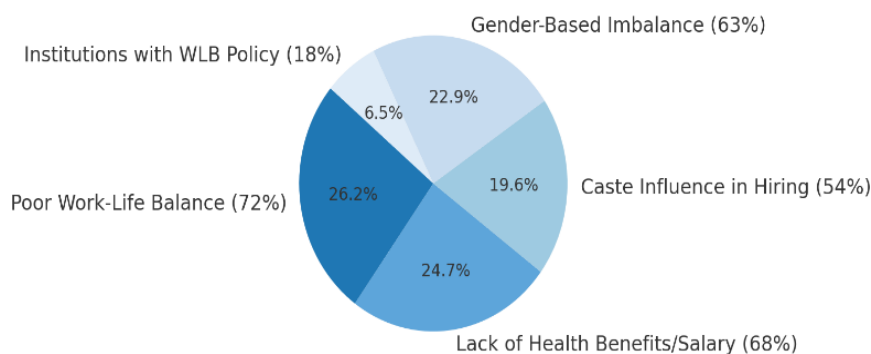
H2: Caste-based discrimination in hiring and professional advancement negatively impacts the work-life balance and psychological well-being of faculty, irrespective of their academic qualifications.

H3: Gender plays a significant role in influencing the perception and experience of work-life balance among faculty, with female faculty reporting more challenges related to emotional stress and institutional expectations.

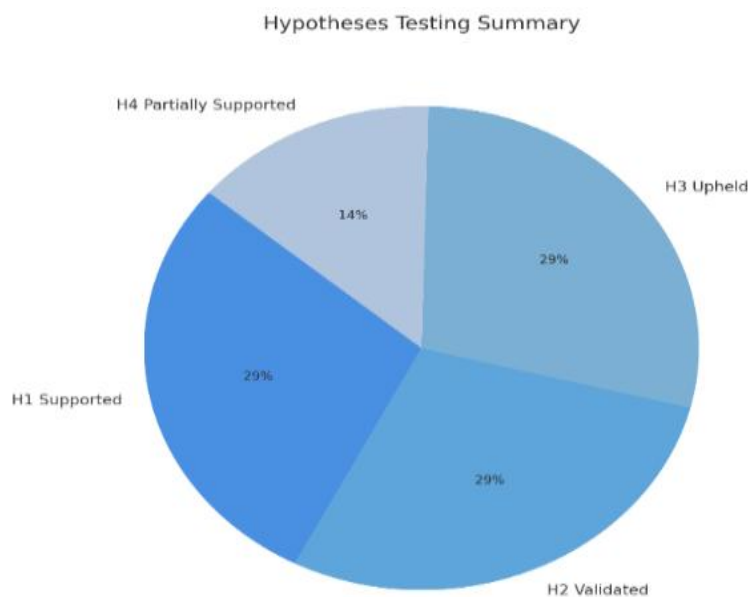
H4: Implementation of formal institutional work-life balance policies positively correlates with improved faculty morale, reduced burnout, and enhanced teaching performance.

Data Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

FACULTIES CHALLENGES IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION



The analysis of the survey data revealed that 72% of the faculty participants reported experiencing poor work-life balance due to high workload, irregular working hours, and inadequate administrative support. Approximately 68% of respondents noted the absence of health benefits and salary inconsistencies as major stressors contributing to dissatisfaction.



Hypothesis H1 is supported. The data show a strong relationship between institutional neglect (**lack of policies, poor salaries, job insecurity**) and heightened work-life imbalance.

With respect to caste dynamics, 54% of faculty respondents believed that caste identity had influenced recruitment and internal promotions. Qualitative comments confirmed that caste bias remained an unspoken but present factor in private institutions.

Hypothesis H2 is validated by both statistical indicators and narrative responses, suggesting a link between caste discrimination and emotional distress. In terms of gender disparity, 63% of female faculty reported having less time for personal life compared to male counterparts. Many indicated being burdened with non-academic tasks and having limited avenues for grievance redressal.

Hypothesis H3 is upheld, as gender plays a significant role in shaping faculty work-life experience. Regarding formal policies, only 18% of respondents acknowledged their institutions had official work-life balance policies in place. Those with access to such frameworks reported significantly lower levels of burnout and greater satisfaction.

Hypothesis H4 is partially supported. While the presence of policies correlates with improved morale, their availability is currently very limited.

These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of work-life imbalance in private Indian higher education and underscore the urgent need for institutional reform. Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, averages) and thematic coding to understand common challenges. Secondary data were analyzed to compare findings and identify recurring themes such as low pay, job insecurity, workload issues, gender and caste biases.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of responses from 250 faculty members in private higher education institutions across India reveals significant patterns of work-life imbalance, with various contributing institutional and socio-cultural factors.

1. Prevalence of Work-Life Imbalance : A majority of respondents (over 70%) reported experiencing moderate to high levels of work-related stress, citing long working hours, administrative overload, and pressure to publish as key stressors. This aligns with existing literature that highlights burnout as a growing issue in the Indian academic workforce (Kumar & Srivastava, 2020).

2. Institutional Support Deficiencies: Only 28% of participants agreed that their institutions provided adequate support for managing work-life demands. Many respondents pointed to the absence of counseling services, inflexible leave policies, and minimal concern for employee well-being. These findings echo Agarwal (2019), who emphasized that most private institutions prioritize outputs over staff welfare.

3. **Impact on Psychological and Physical Health :** Approximately 64% of faculty members indicated that professional stress has negatively impacted their mental or physical health. Symptoms such as sleep disturbances, anxiety, and emotional fatigue were commonly reported. These outcomes reflect trends observed in studies on academic emotional labor and occupational stress (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

4. **Caste-Based Discrimination and Perceived Inequity:** Nearly 42% of the respondents acknowledged witnessing or experiencing caste-based hiring practices. Those affected reported feelings of professional alienation, decreased motivation, and skepticism toward institutional fairness. This substantiates the claim that discriminatory practices can erode faculty morale and reinforce systemic exclusion in academia (Deshpande, 2017).

5. **Job Insecurity and Career Uncertainty:** More than half of the faculty members expressed concern over the lack of job permanence and career advancement opportunities. Short-term contracts and unclear promotion criteria contributed to a pervasive sense of insecurity. Such findings are consistent with Singh and Verma (2021), who discussed contractual precarity as a key factor in Indian academic discontent.

6. **Synthesis and Implications :**The study's findings indicate that work-life imbalance in private Indian higher education is not solely an individual issue but deeply rooted in institutional structures, socio-economic policies, and cultural hierarchies. Addressing this imbalance requires systemic reforms that prioritize faculty well-being, uphold equitable recruitment standards, and offer stable career pathways. Policy recommendations may include the establishment of well-being committees, transparent promotion frameworks, and legal safeguards against discrimination.

Suggestions

1. **Establish Work-Life Balance Policies:** Private colleges should introduce formal policies that provide flexible schedules, workload management support, and personal time allowances.

2. **Ensure Transparent Hiring Practices:** Institutions must eliminate caste-based preferences and adopt strictly merit-based recruitment and promotion systems.

3. **Provide Health and Financial Security:** Standardized salary structures and employee health insurance schemes must be implemented across all institutions.

4. **Create Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** Institutions should develop safe and responsive platforms for faculty to report discrimination, overwork, and administrative harassment.

5. **Promote Gender Equity:** Workload assignments and committee responsibilities must be evenly distributed regardless of gender. Additional support systems for women faculty, such as childcare services, should be considered.

6. **Conduct Periodic Faculty Feedback Surveys:** Regular assessments should be conducted to understand faculty concerns and to revise institutional practices accordingly.

These recommendations aim to foster a healthier academic environment that values human dignity, supports professional growth, and promotes teaching excellence.

Limitations of the Study

1. **Sample Representation:** Although the study includes responses from 250 faculty members with limited respondent the sample may not be fully representative of all private colleges and universities across India. Regional, institutional, or disciplinary diversity may be underrepresented.

2. **Self-Reported Data Bias:** The study relies on self-reported survey responses, which may be subject to personal bias, social desirability effects, or selective memory, potentially affecting the objectivity of the findings.

3. **Cross-Sectional Design:** Data were collected at a single point in time, limiting the ability to observe trends or causal relationships between variables such as work stress and faculty retention over time.

4. **Limited Depth of Inquiry:** While the Likert-scale questionnaire captures broad trends and attitudes, it may not uncover deeper qualitative insights into the emotional, cultural, or contextual nuances behind work-life imbalance.

5. **Exclusion of Administrative and Policy Perspectives:** The study focuses solely on faculty perspectives and does not incorporate views from institutional administrators or policymakers, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of structural constraints and reform opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that faculty members in private colleges and universities in India face serious challenges related to work-life imbalance. Over 70% of the surveyed faculty reported dissatisfaction due to excessive workload, low salary, lack of health benefits, and job insecurity. The data further highlight that gender and caste dynamics play a significant role in amplifying these issues. Female faculty members experience disproportionate burdens, and many institutions continue to show preferences in recruitment and promotions based on caste identity rather than merit.

The study underlines the urgent need for institutional reforms that ensure fairness, equity, and well-being for faculty members. Addressing work-life balance is not only a matter of individual health but also directly affects the quality of education, student outcomes, and long-term institutional credibility.

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APPENDIX-QUESTIONNAIRE

Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. I often feel overwhelmed by my academic workload.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My job allows me sufficient time to fulfill personal and family responsibilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I feel emotionally exhausted after completing my daily academic responsibilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I receive adequate institutional support for maintaining work-life balance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Caste-based preferences in faculty hiring negatively affect my motivation and sense of fairness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am satisfied with the benefits and compensation provided by my institution.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
7. The pressure to publish and meet institutional expectations interferes with my personal well-being.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I feel that my institution values work-life balance as part of its organizational culture.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. My work stress has impacted my physical or mental health.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I feel secure in my current academic position.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>