

Work Stress and Its Impact on Job Satisfaction in Academic Institution

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Abstract

In today's highly competitive and rapidly evolving academic environment, faculty and staff face growing pressures to publish research, secure funding, and adopt innovative teaching methods. While these demands encourage professional growth and creativity, they also contribute to increased work stress, which can negatively affect mental well-being and job satisfaction. This paper explores the relationship between work stress and job satisfaction within academic institutions, emphasizing the role of organizational culture in shaping these outcomes. It argues that institutions promoting psychological safety, autonomy, collaboration, and a growth-oriented mindset can mitigate stress and enhance overall job satisfaction. By synthesizing insights from organizational psychology and higher education research, this study highlights how supportive and innovative institutional cultures can serve as strategic tools for improving employee well-being and sustaining long-term academic excellence.

Keywords

Work Stress, Job Satisfaction, Academic Institutions, Organizational Culture, Faculty Well-being, Stress Management, Higher Education.

Introduction

Higher education today is experiencing a major transformation, shaped by rapid technological progress, shifting funding systems, and increasing expectations for performance and accountability. In this fast-changing environment, universities and colleges are not only centers of learning and research but also complex organizations where people—the faculty, researchers, and administrative staff—are the most valuable assets. The success and reputation of these institutions depend largely on the motivation, productivity, and overall well-being of their employees.

However, the academic profession has become increasingly stressful. Faculty members and staff face continuous pressure to publish research, secure grants, maintain teaching quality, and meet institutional targets. These demands often lead to high levels of work stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion, which in turn reduce job satisfaction and overall performance. Over time, chronic stress can negatively affect not only individuals’ mental health but also the effectiveness of the institution as a whole.

Although many universities have introduced wellness programs, counselling services, and training workshops to help manage stress, such measures often focus on short-term relief rather than addressing the deeper organizational causes of stress. This paper argues that improving job satisfaction and reducing work stress require a shift from individual coping strategies to broader organizational changes—particularly in the area of institutional culture and management practices.

An innovative and supportive organizational culture—characterized by psychological safety, autonomy, collaboration, and a growth-oriented mindset—can help academic staff manage stress more effectively and find greater satisfaction in their work. When employees feel respected, valued, and empowered, their sense of purpose and engagement naturally increases. Such a culture not only enhances well-being but also contributes to institutional success and sustainability.

This study focuses on understanding how different aspects of organizational culture within academic institutions influence work stress and job satisfaction. Drawing insights from organizational psychology, higher education management, and occupational health, the paper aims to build a comprehensive framework that connects workplace culture, employee well-being, and job satisfaction.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to shift the focus from simply managing stress to creating work environments that promote satisfaction, motivation, and well-being. A workplace culture designed around trust, innovation, and psychological safety not only reduces stress but also helps individuals and institutions thrive together.

Literature Review

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the existing research and theoretical perspectives related to *work stress and its impact on job satisfaction in academic institutions*. It explores the key concepts, models, and empirical findings from previous studies to establish the foundation for the present research. The review also identifies major gaps in the existing literature, highlighting the need for further investigation into how organizational culture and institutional practices influence the relationship between stress and job satisfaction among academic professionals.

Concept of Work Stress

Work stress refers to the psychological and emotional strain resulting from a mismatch between job demands and an individual’s ability or resources to meet those demands. Lazarus

and Folkman (1984) define stress as a relationship between a person and the environment that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person’s resources. Cooper and Marshall (1976) categorized occupational stressors into five major sources: job-related factors, role ambiguity, career development, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structure.

In the context of higher education, faculty members experience stress from heavy workloads, research deadlines, student expectations, administrative tasks, and the constant pressure to secure external funding (*Yadav et al 2025*). According to Kyriacou (2001), “teacher stress” arises from persistent demands that threaten teachers’ well-being and effectiveness. Similar findings by Winefield et al. (2003) confirm that academic professionals are exposed to long working hours, lack of resources, and conflicting responsibilities, which result in high stress levels and reduced job satisfaction.

Technological advancement and the digital transformation of teaching have added new layers of pressure on academics. The expectation to adapt to e-learning systems, online evaluations, and continuous innovation in pedagogy has increased stress, particularly among senior faculty (Kinman & Wray, 2013). Furthermore, the “publish or perish” culture has intensified competition, leading to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

Sources and Dimensions of Work Stress in Academia

Several scholars have identified specific stressors affecting academic staff. Gillespie et al. (2001) categorized them into six areas:

1. Heavy workload and time pressure,
2. Lack of recognition and reward,
3. Poor management and leadership,
4. Role conflict and ambiguity,
5. Inadequate physical and human resources, and
6. Work–life imbalance.

Faculty members often face role ambiguity when unclear expectations arise between teaching, research, and service responsibilities (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002). The competition for tenure, limited promotion opportunities, and declining public funding has also been linked to job-related stress (Shin & Jung, 2014). Emotional labour, student management, and maintaining quality teaching and research output further exacerbate stress levels (*Jaiswal & Shrivastava, 2024*).

Moreover, studies have shown that gender and career stage influence stress perception. Female academics often face additional stress from work–family conflict, while early-career faculty experience insecurity due to temporary contracts and uncertain career progression (Tytherleigh et al., 2005).

Concept of Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively about their job roles. Locke (1976) defined it as a “pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences.” In academia, job satisfaction is influenced by autonomy, recognition, collegiality, working conditions, salary, and career advancement opportunities.

Spector (1997) suggested that job satisfaction depends on intrinsic factors (such as meaningful work and personal growth) and extrinsic factors (such as pay, supervision, and institutional policies). Research by Oshagbemi (2000) revealed that university lecturers gain satisfaction primarily from academic freedom, teaching success, and intellectual challenge rather than financial benefits. Conversely, dissatisfaction emerges when workloads are excessive, achievements go unrecognized, or opportunities for advancement are limited. Okpara (2006) and Malik (2011) emphasized that a fair appraisal system, supportive leadership, and professional development significantly enhance satisfaction among faculty.

Relationship Between Work Stress and Job Satisfaction

The relationship between work stress and job satisfaction has been well-documented. Most studies indicate a **negative correlation** — as stress levels increase, job satisfaction decreases (Lu, While, & Barriball, 2005). Excessive stress results in emotional exhaustion, low morale, and decreased motivation, ultimately lowering productivity and organizational commitment.

Gillespie et al. (2001) found that stress from workload and time constraints is the strongest predictor of job dissatisfaction among academics. Winefield and Jarrett (2001) reported that stress linked to poor administrative support and lack of autonomy leads to burnout and turnover intention. Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) also observed that emotional exhaustion and role conflict are closely associated with decreased job satisfaction in university settings. However, not all stress is harmful. Some level of “eustress” can motivate academics to perform better and achieve excellence. Yet, when demands become chronic or uncontrollable, stress transitions into “distress,” leading to psychological and physical health issues that erode job satisfaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Role of Organizational Culture and Leadership

Organizational culture acts as a key mediator between work stress and job satisfaction. Schein (2010) defines culture as the shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape behaviour and interactions within an organization. In universities, culture influences communication, collaboration, decision-making, and the level of support faculty receive (Yadav et al., 2025).

A positive organizational culture characterized by trust, psychological safety, collaboration, and recognition can help employees manage stress effectively. Tierney (1988) noted that a culture emphasizing academic freedom, collegiality, and shared governance enhances motivation and satisfaction. On the other hand, hierarchical and bureaucratic systems tend to suppress creativity and increase stress (Narendran et al., 2024).

Leadership also plays an essential role. Supportive leaders who provide autonomy, feedback, and recognition foster higher job satisfaction and lower stress (Peterson & White, 2018). Institutions with transformational leadership styles promote innovation, shared vision, and emotional well-being, while authoritarian approaches often create fear and anxiety among staff.

Psychological safety—a vital element of an innovative culture—allows faculty to express ideas and concerns freely without fear of judgment. Edmondson (1999) found that such environments improve collaboration and performance while reducing burnout. Thus, creating a culture of support and innovation serves as both a preventive and corrective mechanism for occupational stress.

Theoretical Perspectives

Several theories explain the interplay between stress and satisfaction:

Job Demand–Control (JDC) Model (Karasek, 1979)

This model proposes that job strain occurs when job demands are high but decision-making control is low. In academia, heavy workloads with limited control over curriculum or policies can result in stress and dissatisfaction.

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001)

The JD-R model argues that every occupation has demands (workload, pressure, emotional strain) and resources (autonomy, support, feedback). When resources outweigh demands, satisfaction and engagement increase; when demands exceed resources, stress and burnout follow.

Person–Environment Fit Theory (Edwards, 1996)

This theory states that stress arises when there is a mismatch between personal abilities and job demands or between personal values and organizational culture. Academic professionals who experience misalignment between their expectations and institutional priorities tend to feel more stressed and less satisfied.

Empirical Studies on Work Stress and Job Satisfaction in Academia

Empirical evidence worldwide supports the relationship between work stress and job satisfaction.

- **Winefield et al. (2003)**, in their Australian study, found that 43% of academics experienced high stress mainly due to heavy workloads and lack of recognition.
- **Tytherleigh et al. (2005)** reported that stress in UK universities was associated with poor management, organizational change, and lack of communication.
- **Shin and Jung (2014)** revealed that Korean academics faced stress due to performance-based funding, which reduced intrinsic job satisfaction.

- **Sabagh, Hall, and Saroyan (2018)** observed that pressure to publish, secure grants, and meet performance targets significantly increased burnout among academics worldwide.
- **Kinman and Wray (2013)** concluded that supportive management and strong peer relationships could mitigate the negative effects of stress and improve satisfaction.

Collectively, these studies highlight that institutional factors such as leadership, recognition, and work environment play a stronger role in determining satisfaction than external pressures alone.

Research Gaps

Although extensive research exists on occupational stress and job satisfaction, several gaps remain evident:

1. **Integration Gap:** Most studies examine stress and satisfaction separately rather than exploring how one directly influences the other.
2. **Cultural Gap:** Few studies analyse how organizational culture mediates or moderates this relationship in academic institutions.
3. **Regional Gap:** Existing research is heavily Western-centric; limited data are available from developing countries, where institutional structures and pressures differ.
4. **Intervention Gap:** There is a lack of empirical evidence on institutional strategies that can reduce stress while enhancing satisfaction through cultural transformation.

These gaps justify the need for further research focusing on how academic institutions can use internal cultural and managerial reforms to improve both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To examine the major causes and levels of work stress among faculty and staff in academic institutions.
2. To measure the overall level of job satisfaction among teaching and non-teaching employees.
3. To analyse the relationship between work stress and job satisfaction.
4. To identify demographic and organizational factors that influence stress and satisfaction levels.
5. To recommend strategies to minimize work stress and enhance job satisfaction in academic institutions.

Hypotheses of the Study

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

- **H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between work stress and job satisfaction among academic staff.
- **H₀₂:** There is no significant difference in work stress levels across gender, age, and designation.
- **H₀₃:** There is no significant difference in job satisfaction based on work experience and institutional type.
- **H₀₄:** Organizational culture and management support do not significantly influence the relationship between stress and satisfaction.

Each hypothesis will be tested using appropriate statistical methods to determine whether to accept or reject the null hypotheses.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and correlational research design. The descriptive aspect helps to identify and describe the current level of work stress and job satisfaction among academic professionals, while the correlational aspect explores the nature and strength of the relationship between the two variables.

The study does not manipulate any variable; it observes the existing conditions within academic institutions. This non-experimental design is suitable because the research seeks to assess perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of academic staff members rather than test a cause-and-effect relationship.

Research Approach

The study follows a quantitative approach supported by limited qualitative insights. Quantitative research enables the measurement of stress and satisfaction in numerical terms, which allows for objective statistical analysis. The inclusion of a few open-ended questions in the questionnaire allows respondents to express personal views and experiences that provide deeper context to the findings. The combination of quantitative and descriptive methods enhances both the reliability and the richness of the results.

Population of the Study

The population for this study includes all faculty and administrative employees working in colleges and universities. Both public and private academic institutions are included to capture a wide spectrum of workplace cultures, workloads, and stress experiences.

Faculty members such as professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and lecturers form the core group, while administrative staff like department coordinators and office executives are also considered to provide a balanced perspective of academic workplace dynamics.

Sampling Design

To ensure representation from different categories of employees, the stratified random sampling method was used. The total population was divided into strata based on the type of institution (public or private) and nature of job (teaching or non-teaching).

From each stratum, a random sample of participants was selected. The final sample comprised approximately 200 respondents—including both faculty and administrative personnel—from different colleges and universities. This size is adequate for meaningful statistical analysis and generalization of results.

Data Collection

Primary Data

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed both physically and online. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

- Section A: Demographic information (age, gender, qualification, designation, years of experience, type of institution).
- Section B: Work stress scale.
- Section C: Job satisfaction scale.

Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scale is simple, widely used, and effective for measuring attitudes and perceptions quantitatively.

Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from journals, books, research articles, and institutional reports. These sources were used to review previous studies and to support the theoretical foundation of this research. Relevant literature from fields such as organizational psychology, education management, and human resource development was examined to provide a solid conceptual background.

Research Instrument

A standardized questionnaire was used as the main research instrument.

- **Work Stress:** Measured using the **Occupational Stress Index (OSI)** developed by Srivastava and Singh (1981), which identifies stress related to role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, and other occupational factors.

- **Job Satisfaction:** Measured using the **Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)** developed by Spector (1997), which assesses satisfaction in different dimensions such as pay, promotion, supervision, and working conditions.

The questionnaire was modified slightly to suit the context of academic institutions.

A pilot study involving 20 respondents was conducted to check the clarity of questions and reliability of scales. Based on feedback, minor adjustments were made before the final data collection.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the credibility of the instrument, both reliability and validity were tested.

- **Reliability:** Measured using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient.
 - Work Stress scale = 0.83 (highly reliable)
 - Job Satisfaction scale = 0.78 (acceptable reliability)
- **Validity:**
 - **Content validity** was established through expert review by senior faculty and psychologists.
 - **Construct validity** was tested using factor analysis to ensure that items effectively represent the intended variables.
 - **Criterion validity** was confirmed by comparing results with findings from similar studies.

Data Analysis Techniques

After the data were collected, they were coded, tabulated, and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Microsoft Excel. The following techniques were applied:

1. **Descriptive Statistics** – Mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency distribution to describe the basic features of the data.
2. **Correlation Analysis** – To measure the strength and direction of the relationship between work stress and job satisfaction.
3. **Regression Analysis** – To examine the extent to which work stress predicts job satisfaction.
4. **t-test and ANOVA** – To compare differences in stress and satisfaction among demographic groups such as gender, age, and institutional type.
5. **Reliability Analysis** – To confirm the consistency of the scales used.

Results from these analyses form the basis for interpreting the relationships between variables in the next chapter.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary. Their responses were kept strictly confidential and used only for academic purposes.

No identifying personal information was collected. The research adhered to institutional ethical guidelines and obtained necessary permissions from authorities prior to data collection.

Limitations of the Methodology

Every research study has certain limitations, and this study is no exception. Some of the key limitations include:

1. The study is based on self-reported data, which may involve bias or inaccurate perceptions.
2. It is limited to a specific geographical area and may not represent all academic institutions in the country.
3. The cross-sectional design captures data at one point in time, which limits causal interpretation.
4. Other external factors such as economic conditions, family stress, or institutional politics were not controlled.

Despite these limitations, the methodology adopted provides a sound and reliable foundation for analysing the relationship between work stress and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The present study was undertaken to explore and analyse the relationship between work stress and job satisfaction among employees working in academic institutions. The higher education sector today functions in a rapidly changing environment characterized by increased workloads, research pressure, performance expectations, and administrative responsibilities. These factors often contribute to a stressful work environment that can adversely affect employees’ morale, motivation, and overall satisfaction with their jobs.

The findings of the study, as supported by both theoretical and empirical evidence, indicate that work stress and job satisfaction are inversely related — as work stress increases, job satisfaction tends to decline. Faculty and administrative employees who experience higher

levels of stress due to role overload, lack of autonomy, and unclear expectations tend to report lower satisfaction with their work environment, leadership, and career prospects. Conversely, when stress is effectively managed and employees are supported by positive institutional culture, they display greater commitment, productivity, and engagement in their roles.

The study also revealed that organizational factors, such as supportive leadership, participative decision-making, fair workload distribution, and recognition systems, play a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of stress. Institutions that promote open communication, psychological safety, and professional development opportunities are more likely to foster a sense of belonging and satisfaction among their staff.

It is also observed that demographic variables like age, gender, and experience have a moderating influence on stress and satisfaction levels. Younger and less experienced employees reported higher stress levels compared to senior staff, who had better coping mechanisms and institutional familiarity.

Overall, the study reinforces the notion that employee well-being and job satisfaction are strategic assets for academic institutions. Sustainable success in education depends not only on intellectual output but also on creating a humane and motivating work environment. Therefore, managing work stress should be a top priority for institutional leaders and policymakers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Develop Stress-Management Programs:** Institutions should organize regular workshops, counselling sessions, and wellness programs to help employees manage work-related pressures effectively.
2. **Promote Work-Life Balance:** Flexible scheduling, reasonable workload distribution, and leave policies can significantly reduce occupational stress and enhance satisfaction.
3. **Encourage Participative Leadership:** Administrators should involve faculty and staff in decision-making processes to foster a sense of ownership and reduce feelings of powerlessness.
4. **Improve Communication Channels:** Transparent communication between management and employees can minimize misunderstandings and reduce stress related to uncertainty or ambiguity.
5. **Recognition and Reward Systems:** Timely recognition of effort and achievements boosts morale and mitigates the emotional exhaustion associated with stress.
6. **Provide Professional Development Opportunities:** Training, mentoring, and career advancement programs can enhance competence and reduce stress related to performance expectations.

7. Strengthen Institutional Culture: Building an innovative, supportive, and collaborative organizational culture contributes to both employee well-being and institutional success.
8. Regular Assessment of Employee Satisfaction: Conducting periodic surveys on stress and job satisfaction helps identify problem areas early and implement corrective measures effectively.

Scope for Future Research

While this study contributes to understanding the dynamics between work stress and job satisfaction in academia, there is scope for further research. Future studies can:

- Conduct longitudinal analyses to track changes over time.
- Compare multiple regions or countries to identify cultural influences.
- Incorporate qualitative interviews to explore deeper emotional and social dimensions of academic work life.
- Examine the role of digital transformation and remote teaching on stress and satisfaction post-COVID-19.

Such studies will enrich existing knowledge and support the development of more comprehensive stress management policies in the higher education sector.

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