

A study of the perceptions of work life among faculties teaching at the Higher education level

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ABSTRACT: *An individual's life is structured around their work, occupation and work roles. People work in different organizations to fulfil and achieve their sense of self and identity. Work and life together constitute an important aspect of human being. Nature of academics is different from other kinds of job. Universities are specific organizations that are linked to the characteristics of teaching and research activities (Musselin, 2006). It constitutes a unique feature which distinguishes it from other organizations. However, faculties today continually perceive a change in their work life and these are creating an impact on nature of work-life and many a times it is creating a stressful situation for them. This paper discusses the issues perceived by the teaching faculties on the basis of data collected among a small sample of university faculty teaching in different universities in West Bengal.*

Key Words: *work, academics, nature of work-life, stress*

Introduction

Higher education plays a significant role in any nation by nurturing young minds for engaging in research and development and also by creating efficient work force as per the requirements of the industry. It is a responsibility on the faculties who are engaged in teaching and research at the University level to perform this crucial role by thoughtfully considering and channelizing the interest and knowledge of the students and giving them a sense of direction. It is becoming a challenge for the employees to successfully deal with the innovative advancements by matching the changing needs and requirements. This necessitates that the organisations also provide a better and flexible working environment so that the employees can give their best to the institutions. Issues of work-life focuses on the fact that an individual's life is not compartmentalized into various segments and issues arising in any one domain may affect that of the other. A good quality of work life balance ensures that an employee is motivated to work and contribute significantly in the work place and also gets to spend quality time with the family. Organizations today have also started to focus on work life balance issues for the overall development of the employees by maintaining their motivation levels and reducing stress levels so that individual as well as organizational health is also maintained. It is an area which has been given considerable attention in various public and private organizations but not much research has been conducted in the educational sector. Higher Education plays a crucial role in society. So the wellbeing of the employees engaged in educational sector must be given due consideration for benefit of the whole.

The Objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. To investigate the issue of changing nature of work-life of faculties teaching at higher educational institutions.
2. To explore the issue of work related stress among teachers serving in higher education levels at different academic stream across universities.

Method

The study is primarily done by collecting secondary data from books and journals to understand the concept of work life balance and identify the various issues faced by the university faculties. A small sample of 30 respondents provides an empirical basis for this research. Data was collected through face to face interview by visiting the respondents.

Result and discussion

Work-life balance is a broad concept which has been variously defined by different researchers from diverse dimensions. For an individual's psychological well-being, increased self-worth and in order to derive satisfaction from both work and life, it is important to strike a balance between work role and family

role successfully. Clark (2000) has given the definition of work-family balance as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict”.

In the present times, academic staffs at higher education institutes are required to perform multiple workplace roles like teaching roles, research roles, cooperating and assisting in various administrative roles such as during admission process, counselling of the students, supervision, invigilation, evaluation responsibilities. They are also required to participate in various other extra-curricular, co-curricular activities, extension activities including community service responsibilities (UGC, 2010). Moreover, faculties today are increasingly realizing that in order to meet the requirements of the industry and society at large, teaching methods need to be modified. According to Hagen (2002), in a UK case study of public/private sector partnerships, universities are considered to be the largest “knowledge-based” institutions in the region and they are urged by the industries and policy makers to transform their sole role of teaching and research by adding another role in economic regional development. Pressures of globalization and knowledge based economy and in order to aid economic regeneration, academics are expected to transform their traditional roles by disseminating their knowledge and expertise through industry linked partnerships. Studies on issue of work life balance among faculties are being discussed. Heydari et al. (2015) in their study indicated a significant relationship between organisational health and quality of work life. Mukhtar (2012) studied work life balance and job satisfaction among faculty members at Iowa State University and the results indicated that there is a significant relationship between work life and job satisfaction and the result also indicated that age, climate and culture were significant predictors for work life balance. It was also found out that female faculty have lower job satisfaction. The results also showed that the level of job satisfaction was lower for hard pure disciplines as compared to soft pure disciplines. The increasing demands and pressures of work-life are raising the conflict between work and personal life. Begas (2012) research on faculty of higher education institutions in the Philippines observed that there was a positive relation between QWL & satisfaction and QWL & productivity. Tabassum (2012) investigation in 11 private universities of Bangladesh concluded that there was positive relationship between the dimensions of QWL and job satisfaction. Shahbaji et al. (2011) study in Esfahan University and Esfahan Medical University identified the relationship between the quality of work life and performance and found inter university difference.

Table 1: Distribution of faculties on the basis of their Socio-Demographic Profile

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
26 - 30	12	40
31 - 35	9	30
36 - 40	6	20
41 - 45	3	10
Total	30	100
Gender		
Male	12	40
Female	18	60
Others	-	-
Type of Institution		
Central Universities	-	-
State Universities	18	60
Deemed University	-	-
Private Universities	12	40
Marital Status		
Married	18	60
Unmarried	12	40
Widow/widower	-	-
Divorced/Separated	-	-
Family Type		
Staying single	3	10
Nuclear family	24	80

Joint family	3	10
Others	-	-
Designation		
Associate Professor	10	30
Assistant Professor	20	70
Nature of Employment		
Permanent	24	80
Contractual	3	10
Guest Lecturers	3	10
Others	-	-
Educational Qualification		
Post Graduate, NET/SET	12	40
Post Graduate, M.Phil, NET/SET	-	-
Post Graduate, M.Phil, NET/SET, Ph.D.	6	20
Post Graduate, NET/SET, Ph.D.	12	40

N = 30

Table 1 show the socio-demographic profile of the faculty members who were being interviewed. The sample studied indicates that 40% of the respondents are in the age group 26 - 30 years, who are mainly Post graduate with either NET/SET qualified and has entered the teaching at Assistant Professor levels. Of the 30 sample studied, 60% are females. 40% of the respondents teach at Private universities and rest at State universities. 60% of the sample respondents are married with or without children. 80% of the respondents stay in nuclear family. 80% of the respondents have permanent nature of employment and 40% are Post Graduate with NET/SET and Ph.D. The faculties teaching in various universities cannot be generalised to have similar type of problems. Each university is unique in terms of its location, students, infrastructure and so on.. Any new faculty or experienced faculty members may anticipate the challenges and deal with them so that their level of success increases along with their level of satisfaction. The availability of resources necessary for teaching in institutions can be a challenge. Almost all faculties in the course of their teaching career face students with a wide range of skills, abilities, and experiences which can also be a challenge. Being aware of the diverse range of students will help the faculties to provide adequate support to the students which will help them to learn. Educational process today is changing rapidly which is affecting the demands of knowledge as well as the needs of society. A faculty member has to find the right type of knowledge to cater to the needs of students of the twenty-first century. Therefore, the role of a teaching professional is in the process of change. The changes and social pressures which are taking place have a direct bearing on the teaching faculties' role, responsibilities and teaching. The institutes of higher learning today require qualified faculty members. The faculty members play a number of roles such as combining research with teaching as well as application of theoretical knowledge. They are also required to devote time for research projects and guidance. The faculty members put in long working hours to provide assistance to the students for their various needs. They are also required to participate in conferences, publish papers and take up administrative responsibilities. It is a great challenge to the teaching professionals of higher education institutes to live with this constant change and dynamism.

Table 2: Preparation of resources provided to the students by the faculties

Teaching Resources are prepared by the faculties	Frequency	Percentage (%)
During working hours	6	20
At home	-	-
Both	24	80
Total	30	100

N = 30

From Table 2, it could be seen that, 80% of the faculties spend time both at work place and at home, to prepare teaching resources for the students. This is because many a times, the faculties get little time at their work place in between their classes and other administrative responsibilities. Moreover, in case of faculties who are teaching at universities in remote location from their place of residence, travelling to and from the work place takes about 10 hours per day. Since academics have no fixed work and home demarcation, the faculties perform their professional work and their own research activities at home. They

may encounter tension, anxiety, fear, pressure, strain and stress in their day to day life and may find it difficult to contribute effectively in the field of education. Further, teaching professionals are also subjected to face common stressors such as; work overload, time restraints, and problems with working conditions, relationship with colleagues, lack of resources and alarming increase in physical demands of teaching. Insufficient money as salary also lowers down the psychological well-being of teaching faculty members. All these can affect the teaching efficiency and it can disrupt the work life balance and lead to generation of stress.

The ever increasing demands of work and home and the multiples roles and responsibilities that individuals are required to perform today has made it increasingly relevant for employees and organizations to discuss on the issue of work-life balance in recent years. Overload of work, conflicting roles has generated stress among teachers which is leading to unfair work-life situation. All these signify the need to study work-life balance issues among the teachers. For achieving satisfactory work life balance an individual needs to be able to fulfil all his/her needs in respect of family, work and society (Irfan et. al 2015).

Table 3: Use of ICTs by faculties in teaching learning process

Use of ICT in teaching learning process by the faculties	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Frequently	18	60
Sometimes	12	40
Rare	-	-
Total	30	100

N = 30

The table 3 above indicates that 60% of the faculties frequently use Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in teaching learning process and the rest uses sometimes. Mostly, ICT based learning are done through use of smart classroom technology. It helps the teacher many a times, to cover a large syllabus in a limited number of teaching days. Also, it enables the students to have a deep knowledge and understanding through audio-visual effects. According to a faculty, "Academics is a continuous process, it is a 24x7 job, and there is no compartmentalization between home and work". Sometimes, in order to strike a balance between work and family roles, women had to opt for part time employment. According to Warren (2004), the role of part-time employment in the balancing of women's employment and family lives has generated an immense literature within the social sciences. Faculties are of the opinion that, the changes in nature of work life that is taking place is stressful. This could be overcome by systematic planning, positive attitude, and family support. Beauregard and Henry (2009) analysed the literature to identify the various ways in which organizational work-life practices can influence performance of an organization. They provided some evidence for the statement regarding recruitment practices that attract better applicants and reduce work-life conflict among existing employees in order to enhance organizational performance, but there is insufficient evidence to support the notion that work-life practices boost performance by reducing work-life conflict. Organizations today are also increasingly pressured to implement work practices which can facilitate employees' efforts to fulfil both their employment related and their personal responsibilities.

Issue of stress among faculties

Studies across the world have supported the existence of stress among teachers at all levels from primary to higher education. This study of faculties reveals that stress is inevitable, but one needs to strike a balance between academic pursuits and family responsibilities and undertake challenges with a positive attitude.

Table 4: Perception of stress among faculties

Perception of stress by faculties	Frequency	Percentage (100%)
Frequently	21	70
Sometimes	9	30
Rare	-	-
Total	30	100

N = 30

Table 4 indicates the perception of stress among the faculties. Data reveals that, 70% of the university teaching faculties experience stress frequently. According to the study, the stress levels keep increasing with time especially for those who are driven by quality work. Good quality of research work necessitates longer time devotion and then it becomes a difficulty to balance the multiple requirements. The desire to have academic growth increases the stress. Most of the faculties feel that teaching as a profession at University level is increasing becoming stressful because of increase in the research work, continuous

updating of knowledge is required, more time necessary to guide Ph.D. scholars, administrative responsibilities etc. Moreover, faculties who are teaching at private universities perceive that, it is stressful because of a process of continuous evaluation process by students and authorities. It creates a mental pressure. Just like any other profession, teachers also experience stress. Khan et al. (2014) identified performance evaluation system based on typical confidential reporting as a factor which is becoming stressful among university teachers in Pakistan. A significant negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction among university teachers in Pakistan was observed by Bhatti et al. (2011). In a study from 9 state universities in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, Reddy and Poornima (2012) revealed experiences of moderate and high levels of occupational stress and professional burnout. Ahsan et al. (2009) concluded on the basis of their study in Malaysia that there was an inverse relationship between job stress and job satisfaction. The teachers experience burnout and stress, which if not given adequate attention can reduce employee's efficiency and organizational performance. A study conducted in Finland by Kalimo and Hakanen (2000) revealed that, educators have the highest burnout levels when they are compared to workers in all other human services and white collar jobs. It could be seen from various studies that there is existence of stress and the problem of balancing work and life among the teaching faculties and it requires balancing paid work along with those activities that are important to an individual's life such as family, community services, personal development, leisure and recreation. Women and men have developed various ways to navigate the spheres of both work and family.

Table 5: Increase in demands of work related activities

Faculties perception of whether change in demands of work related activities are taking place	Frequency	Percentage (100%)
Yes	24	80
No	-	-
At times	6	20
Total	30	100

N = 30

Table 5 indicates that almost all interviewed perceives the changing nature of work life. The faculties feel that additional responsibilities are redefining the role of a teacher. The successful completion of one task increases the demands for newer tasks. Diverse responsibilities on the teaching faculties, less number of faculties and poor work load distribution are also changing the nature and demands of work. Moreover, female faculties who have small kids feel that the pressure is higher to manage both work and home needs. Faculties who were interviewed have responded that, many a times they feel that they need extra time to finish their work and pursue research activities. The faculties perceive that, time management is extremely essential for reducing stress. It is necessary to prioritise and organize, chalk out a balanced schedule and it is also necessary to take a relaxed break in between. Moreover, optimistic outlook and looking for satisfaction in the work one is doing will help to reduce stress levels.

CONCLUSION

In this work, the various issues faced by teaching faculties in higher education have been discussed. A focus has been given on the issue of changing nature of work life and stress. Significant changes are taking place in the sphere of teaching and learning in higher education levels which necessitates discussion on the part of those who are involved in administering the higher education sector and those who are bearing the crucial role of teaching and research. This will help in resolving these issues by achieving a balance between academic work load, research activities, leisure and extra-curricular activities.

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