



Impact of Institutional Support on Mental Health and Work-Life Balance in Higher Education in Pakistan

Prof. Dr. Ismat Ullah Cheema¹, Muhammad Adnan²

1. School of Behavior Sciences, Minhaj University Lahore, Email: Icheema3@gmail.com
2. Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Email: adnanpakpattan69@gmail.com

Abstract

The pivotal role of mental health and work-life balance in higher education is increasingly acknowledged globally, especially in demanding academic settings. Students in Pakistani universities face academic, social, and financial pressures, while faculty encounter research, teaching, and administrative demands, all within a unique socio-cultural context. This study addresses the central issue of how institutional support systems impact the mental health and work-life balance of the higher education community in Pakistan.

Keywords: Institutional Support, Mental Health, Work-Life Balance, Higher Education in Pakistan

Introduction

The important contributors to well-being and productivity in the form of mental health and work-life balance is rising globally in the academics settings. The relevance of such an understanding is largely apparent in contexts in which people face many pressures (Kinman & Wray, 2021). The path of learning for students is characterized by intricate requirements, including academic performance, social transition and wage insecurity, which are especially intensified within impoverished environments like Pakistan (Alvi et al., 2023). Intense pressures to do research, give lectures, and handle administrative works and the promise of continuous production of academic publications are challenges faced by faculty members (Kinman & Wray, 2021). In light of specific cultural and socio-economic situations in higher education in Pakistan, these issues are faced by students and the faculty, as a result of their considerations. It is important to identify such specific contexts in order to apply proper support strategies.

The general concern under this research is to investigate how institutional support structures influence the mental health and the work-life balance of students and faculty in Pakistan's higher education institutions. Whenever there are inadequate or lacking support systems, students can be exposed to increase psychological pressure and have setbacks in their pursuit of learning; the same weakness can cause stress and burnout in the faculty which is likely to translate to reduced ability to teach, and research performance (Alvi et al., 2023). Kinman & Wray, 2021). Even though the world is paying increasing attention to these issues, little is being done to study the relationship between the institutional support, the student and faculty mental health, and balance between work and life in Pakistan (Alvi et al., 2023). Because of this knowledge gap, a comprehensive analysis is required to guide the design and presentation of effective interventions.

This study is planned to achieve a series of key goals. Initially, this study seeks to investigate how prevalent the common issues in mental health are among students' and faculty of Pakistani higher learning institutions. Second, it intends to evaluate the level to which the institutions assist both students and faculty members. Third, the article will analyze the relationship between institutional support and the mental health outcomes of students and faculty. Fourth, it will assess the connection between institutional support and the work-life balance experienced by faculty members. Finally, by synthesizing the existing literature, this article intends to identify gaps in current institutional support systems and propose evidence-based recommendations for their improvement.

Review of Literature

Institutional support in higher education can be broadly defined as the array of resources, policies, services, and the overall supportive environment provided by universities to promote the well-being and academic or professional success of their students and faculty (Cutrona, 1990). This support manifests in various forms, ranging from formal structures such as counseling centers, academic advising services, and clearly defined workload policies, to informal support networks facilitated by the institution, including peer support groups and mentorship programs (Cutrona, 1990). A comprehensive approach to institutional support recognizes that fostering a positive and conducive environment requires attention to both the tangible resources available and the intangible aspects of the campus culture, including inclusivity and a sense of community.

Research indicates a significant burden of mental health issues among university students in Pakistan. Studies reveal a high prevalence of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, stress, and even suicidal ideation (Alvi et al., 2023). The National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey carried out in Pakistan during the 2019-2022 period revealed that 37.91% of adults in Pakistan had an experience of a lifetime psychiatric disorder whereas 32.28 % had a current psychiatric disorder (Alvi et al., 2023). This problem is determined by the overlapping sets of underlying factors. The high competition that is a part and parcel of an academically demanding system where students find themselves thrusting for success compromises the students' mental health greatly (Khan et al., 2023). For many students, the combination of expensive schooling and increasing cost of living fuels stress generating helplessness and despair (Khan et al., 2023). Pokhrel et al., 2020). The behavior of academic bullying stands out as a significant problem as the risk of accomplishing the state of depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal ideation appears in students (Alvi et al., 2023). The social, cultural, norms and expectations, which exist in the university context, shape positive and negative outcomes amongst the students. On the one hand, stable family ties and a community effort can mitigate stress, but rigid cravings associated with mental health condition might discourage students from obtaining assistance (Khan et al., 2023). Technology and social media use at a large scale also put in more difficulties on the students' mental wellbeing (Khan et al., 2023). On the contrary, the academic studies indicate that social support by family, friends or the institution has a protecting effect, which can minimize such mental health issues (Cutrona, 1990; Khan et al., 2023). Khan et al., 2023).

Faculty at Pakistani universities have an identifiable rate of mental health challenges. High levels of reported stress, anxiety, depression and burnout result in frequent attributions of the intense demands of the profession of academia (Alvi et al., 2023; Kinman & Wray, 2021). Kinman & Wray, 2021). Academic exertions, including an urgent need for publishing the research, constant grant-seeking and balance between teaching, research, and administration, are among the reasons

for particular sources of stress for the members of the staff (Kinman & Wray, 2021). The even razor-back outlay of balancing a healthful work-life balance is one additional consideration that exacerbates stress and tarnishes psychological well-being at these professionals (Alvi et al., 2023; Kinman & Wray, 2021). These are not just issues of the well-being of individual faculty members; they can also adversely affect teaching effectiveness and student support, as well as overall institutional productivity (Kinman & Wray, 2021). The promotion of the faculty members' mental health is essential for the institutions, as it is the most direct contributor to the overall performance and mental health of the involved educational enterprise. Understand, dental education in Pakistan as found a study (Hussain et al., 2024) showed an average PHQ-9 score indicative of mild depression.

Academics in picecea find it difficult to achieve a balance between their work and the life. This weight of the expectation of the faculty to invest much effort and time for work and the crossing of professional demands into the personal life creates major barriers to work-life balance (Arif et al., 2020; Achieving the work-life balance is particularly difficult for many academics, according to the works of Cogin (2012), Fatima and Sahibzada (2012), Lamolla and Ramos (2020), Marra (2020), Shue and Falahat (2017) and Twenge (2010). Career women in academia face much pressure as they balance their learning tasks with the household chores and caring for young children (Dilmaghani & Tabvuma, 2019). Hjalmsdóttir & Le Feuvre, 2020; Khan et al., 2022; Shaukat et al., 2014). The value of family-based social support is great, but it is usually deficient in its absence of powerful and supportive institutional initiatives (Khan et al. 2022). Response Chaudhuri et al., 2020; Nayak & Pandey 2021). Work-life balance is important in influencing the faculty job satisfaction, career satisfaction and faculty turnover intentions (Arif et al., 2020). Fatima & Sahibzada (2012); Khan et.al.(2021). In Pakistan, among married female university teachers, the findings elicited a moderate work-life balance and job flexibility became a major positive influence (Batool et al., 2024).

The body of research explains how important support systems are for creating psychological health and for work-life balance within the educational institutions. Felt low social support has a strong association with greater psychological distress in students (Alvi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, institutional support positively impacts the wellbeing of students' psychological in nature and academic engagement is a crucial mediator in these findings (Khan et al., 2023). Faculty subject to a scarcity of institutional support are more prone to negative mental health outcomes and problems in harmonizing work and personal life (Alvi et al., 2023). Hussain et al., 2024). Supporting organizational input from the institution goes a long way in helping faculty achieve a more preferred work-life balance (Banik et al., 2021; Chaudhuri et al., 2020; Nayak & Pandey, 2021) Chaudhuri et al., 2020; Nayak & Pandey, 2021). Rainey, 2018). Nevertheless, when it comes to mental well-being stigma, students are discouraged from contacting the help they may require (Khan et al., 2023). Discrimination and money pressures could have a negative effect on students' and faculty's mental health, work-life balance (Alvi et al., 2023; Following findings in Khan et al. (2023) and Pokhrel et al. (2020).

Scales and Variables for Measurement

Appropriate measurement of the effect of institutional support calls for use of valid scales, clearly defining the central variables. Measurement of perceived institutional support is based on scales derived from surveys widely used in institutions support research. Based on a 5-item scale developed from established assessments, researchers would be able to know students' perspective

on institution care and whether it pro-actively motivates participation and directs students toward their goals (Khan et al. 2023). The scales typically include items misconceived to assess the academic, social, emotional, and financial resources the institution offers. Numerous standardized tools have been devised to measure mental health problems in the Pakistani context. Based a 14 item Likert-scale questionnaire, Warwick 14-item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) captures both the hedonic as well as eudaimonic aspect of mental well-being and has been validated in the Pakistani context (Tennant et al 2007). DASS-21 is an instrument comprising 21 items developed to measure the level of depression, anxiety and stress and is reliable and valid for use in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2023). Successful depression and anxiety symptom screening has been reported in Pakistan with the help of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) (Taskeen, 2022). There is a validated 22 item Social Anxiety Scale (SAS) that was developed in Urdu and subscaled into Performance, Interaction, and Evaluation Anxiety subscales for use in Pakistani higher education students (Khalid, 2020). Additionally, the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS), the Urdu translation and validation of which was conducted, is a helpful instrument for checking an individual's knowledge regarding mental health (Akhter et al., 2020). Students or faculty under research participants, both the research constitutes and the parties involved determine the appropriateness of a specific scale.

The 15-item scale developed by Hayman (2011) from Fisher (2001), which is used to quantify work-life balance among higher learning institutions in Pakistan, is the Work Life Balance Scale (Hayman, 2011). Consisting of three subscales, the tool measures work impact on personal life, effects of personal life on work, and the complementarity enjoyed in the two aspects. In Pakistan, wider Quality of Work-Life (QWL) scales that often include work-life balance as a key aspect have been used in different research studies (Afroz, 2017; similar methodologies have been used by previous studies such as that of Arif and Farooqi (2014) and Singh and Singh (2015). Arif & Farooqi, 2014; Singh & Singh, 2015). The scales capture several aspects of the educational context that define the overall well-being of individuals at the level. When carrying out research, it important to operationalize the independent variable (institutional support) and the dependent variables (mental health and work life balance) according to the adopted measurement scale. Inaugurating mediating variables such as academic engagement and perceived stress and also in the presence of moderating factors like gender, age, and rank within the academic setting can control the relationships that are being explored (Alvi et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2024). Hussain et al., 2024, Khan et al. 2023.

Numerous statistical tools can be used to explore the relationship between institutional support and mental health as well as work life balance of university students in Pakistan. The descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages) will be used initially to provide the profiles of the participants in terms of demographics and display overall trends in terms of institutional support, mental health, and work-life balance. This will make it easier to interpret if we present the data in the form of tables and graphs histograms, bar charts and pie charts. Analytical procedures enabling generalization beyond the sample will be essential in understanding the interrelationships between these variables (Khan et al., 2023). Using such an approach as linear and multiple regression analysis, it is possible for us to measure the extent to which institutional support influences both mental health and work-life balance while holding other factors that may affect these consequences stable. Hierarchical regression can be used to establish the role played by such variables as academic engagement in mediating the relationship between institutional support and mental health (Alvi et al., 2023. Khan et al., 2023). In the

evaluation of differences in mental health and work-life balance across various demographic classes, for instance, when comparing students to faculty members, or public university students to private university students, among others, independent samples t-tests and ANOVA are suitable methods of this evaluation (Batool et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2023). Khan et al., 2023). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and path analysis provide an appropriate methodology in studying both multifaceted association and testing different models with several variables (Banik et al, 2021; Khan et al, 2023). Hayman, 2011; Khan et al., 2023). Prior to any analysis it is essential that one ensures that for each statistical procedure the assumptions needed for implementation are met and that the methodologies used complement those characteristics and goals of the data and the research respectively.

Statistical analyses will be tested using software such as SPSS and AMOS as they offer us the necessary software for performing these analyses and creating efficient graphics of the results (Khan et al., 2023; Tabassum, 2012). Using the findings in the visual form along with the research article will help make the content of the research more accessible and easily interpretable.

Findings and Discussion

Analyzing these research snippet units, one understands a great deal of the nature of connection between the two vital concepts, institutional support and mental well-being and work-life-balance in the Pakistani universities. The most important thing to take away from this is that university students in Pakistan have a greater risk of psychological distress if they do not have a good social support (Alvi et al., 2023). This suggests that students who have limited social networks are especially vulnerable meaning that universities should take effective initiative to enhance peer support and community engagement in their response. Furthermore, bullying is discovered to play a vital role in rising numbers of depressive, anxious, stressed, and suicidal thoughts in students (Alvi et al., 2023). Universities must be very quick in putting in place and following through on strict anti-bullying policies while guaranteeing easy access to mental health support for the affected.

Academic and financial pressures are discovered as the most important stressors for students of Pakistani universities, seriously affecting their mental health (Khan et al., 2023; Pokhrel et al., 2020). Pokhrel et al., 2020). The adoption of various adaptive and varied assessment methods along with better academic assistance may assist institutions in reducing academic pressure experienced by their students. It is crucial to provide better scholarship, easy financial aid, and financial literacy skill development resources for students' mental health (Khan et al., 2023; Pokhrel et al., 2020). Pokhrel et al., 2020). The evidence likely indicates that the higher the level of institutional support the better the psychological state in management college students with academic engagement serving as a mediator (Khan et al., 2023). By arming institutions with the power to drive or promote academic involvement, they make it possible to directly support student well-being and, in doing so, go beyond this to ensure more academic involvement and motivation. Institutions support deficit is repeatedly pointed out as a major cause of poor mental health among faculty in Pakistan (Alvi et al., 2023 Hussain et al., 2024. Results of research conducted at dental faculties revealed that high job-demands, lack of institutional support, financial impediments, and loss of work-life balance were major factors in producing negative mental health in these precariat (Hussain et al., 2024; Kinman & Wray, 2021). Kinman & Wray, 2021).

Lack of institutional support is one of the most accomplished reasons behind the poor work-life

balance among Pakistani higher education faculty, as identified by the research (Hussain et al. 2024); it has reflections in its adverse effects on mental health. Kinman & Wray, 2021). This requires the establishments of higher education to create measures and practice of empowering faculty to control their professional and personal tasks more effectively. In academia, when it comes to working mothers, they usually discover that family-based social support alone is insufficient. Development of dependable and conducive institutional policies in a bid to promote balance between work and life among academics cannot be overemphasized (Khan et al., 2022). Feeling of unfairness in faculty promotions, work assignment, and timings schedules correlates with low work-life quality, specifically in terms of work-life balance (Arif et. al., 2020). Openness and justice of institutions are an invaluable asset in creating healthy workplace and enhancing well-being of university faculty. According to studies, the quality of organizational support has a strong link with academics' work-life balance (Banik et al., 2021), and the provision of flexible work practices is closely associated with improved work-life balance in educational institutions (Batool et al., 2024). Lamolla & Ramos, 2020; Marra, 2020). Job flexibility generated the highest F value (29. 545) in ANOVA for the study of married female university teachers in Pakistan, indicating its great utility in enhancing work-life balance (Batool et al., 2024).

Khan et al. (2023) emphasize the fact that academic engagement fills a gap between institutional support and psychological wellbeing of students, playing a critical mediating role. Supportive environment at places of learning promotes higher academic involvement thus building a better mental health. Also, people can focus on diversity and inclusion, which would make students feel like a community member better, which may positively influence the students' mental health and indirectly contribute to better work-life balance through less stress connected to discrimination (Hussain & Jones, 2021). However, stigma associated with mental health problems remains a significant barrier, preventing students from seeking the support they need (Khan et al., 2023). Several challenges and barriers hinder the mental health and work-life balance of individuals in Pakistani higher education. Job-related workload is consistently identified as a major factor negatively impacting both faculty mental health and work-life balance (Hussain et al., 2024; Kinman & Wray, 2021). Financial limitations also contribute to mental health problems for both students and faculty (Khan et al., 2023; Pokhrel et al., 2020). Additionally, Muslim students may face discrimination and lack access to culturally appropriate mental health services (Islam, 2021). Systemic issues such as bureaucratic red tape and poor resource endowment within Pakistan's higher education institutions can further exacerbate stress levels (Tabassum, 2012).

Figure 1: Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders in Pakistan (2019-2022)

Based on the National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (2019-2022) (Alvi et al., 2023), the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among adults in Pakistan is as follows:

Disorder Category	Prevalence (%)
Any Psychiatric Disorder (Lifetime)	37.91
Any Psychiatric Disorder (Current)	32.28
Mood Disorders	19.62
Neurotic and Stress-related Disorders	24.81
Psychotic Disorders	4.52
Substance Use Disorders	0.85

Figure 2: PHQ-9 Depression Severity among Dental Faculty in Pakistan

A study on dental faculty members in Pakistan (Hussain et al., 2024) using the PHQ-9 scale revealed the following distribution of depression severity:

Severity Category	Percentage (%)
None	42.62
Mild	32.79
Moderate	14.75
Moderately Severe	7.10
Severe	2.73

Figure 3: DASS-21 Subscale Severity among Dental Faculty in Pakistan

The same study (Hussain et al., 2024) also assessed depression, anxiety, and stress using the DASS-21 scale, with the following results:

Subscale	Severity	Percentage (%)
Depression	Normal	61.75
	Mild	13.11
	Moderate	14.75
	Severe	8.74
	Extremely Severe	2.73
Anxiety	Normal	61.20
	Mild	14.75
	Moderate	13.66
	Severe	7.10
	Extremely Severe	3.28
Stress	Normal	75.41
	Mild	7.65
	Moderate	11.48
	Severe	4.92
	Extremely Severe	0.55

Table 1: Key Findings from Research Snippets on the Impact of Institutional Support

Target Group	Key Finding
Students	Low social support, academic pressure, and financial stress negatively impact mental health; institutional support positively influences well-being; academic engagement mediates this relationship; bullying is a major factor in psychological distress.
Faculty	Lack of institutional support, high workload, and financial limitations negatively affect mental health and work-life balance.
Faculty	Organizational support and flexible arrangements are crucial for achieving work-life balance; perceptions of inequality negatively impact quality of work-life; job flexibility is a significant positive determinant.
Students	Perceived lack of institutional support for diversity and inclusion negatively impacts the sense of belonging and mental health; Muslim students may lack culturally appropriate services and face discrimination.
Students	Stigma associated with mental health prevents students from seeking support; lack of research in Pakistan hinders effective interventions.
Faculty	Bureaucratic red tape and poor resource endowment can contribute to stress.

Recommendations

Based on the reviewed literature, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance institutional support for mental health and work-life balance in higher education in Pakistan. For students, institutions should prioritize the establishment of comprehensive mental health frameworks, including easily accessible and confidential counseling services staffed by qualified professionals (Alvi et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023; Taskeen, 2022). Robust anti-bullying policies must be developed and strictly enforced to ensure a safe and respectful campus environment (Alvi et al., 2023). Generating opportunities for peer support, mentorship and social participation development facilitates students' belonging and encourages the social bond (Alvi et al., 2023). Khan et al., 2023). Institutions can help relieve students of academic stress by revisiting evaluation procedures and providing a rich source of academic resources such as tutoring and workshops on how to study (Khan et al., 2023, Pokhrel et al., 2020). The process of diversity and inclusion found in specific programs and culturally appropriate support will make all the students feel valued and supported (Hussain & Jones, 2021). Islam, 2021). Finally, the provision of training on stress management and coping strategies enables the students to learn fundamental techniques that will enable them to manage mental health problems (Khan et al., 2023). Institutions should establish and adhere to effective managing of the workload policies which encourage equitable balance between teaching, research and administrative responsibilities for faculty (Hussain et al., 2024; Kinman & Wray, 2021). Kinman & Wray, 2021). Whenever possible, offering access to flexible-work options which include flexible-hours and remote-working facilities can have significant

effects on faculty members' work-life balance (Batool et al., 2024); Khan et al., 2022; Lamolla & Ramos, 2020 and Marra (2020). Providing extensive paid parental leave and subsidizing or establishing on-campus day care centres are some of the foremost methods for helping faculty members to balance their family requirements (Khan et al., 2022). Financial packages that pay competitive wages, protect comprehensive benefits, and feature professional development opportunities can usefully reduce the financial strain on faculty members (Hussain et al., 2024). Facilitating secure and unadorned mental health services to address faculty workforce needs directly is very important (Hussain et al., 2024; Kinman & Wray, 2021). Kinman & Wray, 2021). Developing such an environment in which respect, collaboration, and people can be harassed and discriminated against are important for promoting faculty well-being, as stressed by Taskeen (2022).

The involvement in the continuous learning process of stress and time management has additional chances for the empowering of the faculty established based on the research (Khan et al., 2023). The open and impartial policies in terms of promotions and workload will be crucial in the positive change of the work environment (Arif et al., 2020). The cultivation of a culture of support within the institution can benefit from the use of practices, which concentrate on faculty welfare (Tabassum, 2012).

Conclusion

From reviewed literature, institutional support plays a vital role in determining the psychological wellbeing, work life balance of employees in higher education in Pakistan. The influence of academic stress, financial struggles, and fellow-student support on student psychosocial health is significant, with features of workload, financial restraints and organizational support mainly impacting faculty members' psychosocial health and work-life balance. The correlation between these factors implies that higher education establishments in Pakistan need to give first priority to the mental wellbeing of their students and faculty as well as to their work-life balance. Providing adequate and viable support mechanisms is a responsibility and a necessity for a healthy environment and productive academic system, and therefore a higher standard of educational and scholarly work is achieved.

In the process of further researches, one should focus on the evaluation of how specific institutional support measures influence people in the course of time. A critical element of program development encompasses when it comes to identifying the diverse needs of the students and faculty members in Pakistan with regard to the cultural background, socio-economic position and gender (Islam, 2021). Cultural informed mental health and work-life balance strategies in the Pakistani higher education context should be championed through research (Khan et al., 2023).

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