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Factors Influencing Female Lecturers' Well-Being In Higher Education: A Comprehensive Review

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FACTORS INFLUENCING FEMALE LECTURERS' WELL-BEING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to comprehensively review and analyses the antecedents of well-being among female lecturers in higher education institutions. The issue of declining well-being among female academics, exacerbated by work-family conflicts, work-related stressors, lack of empowerment, insufficient institutional support, and gender inequalities has become a significant concern within the academic community. A comprehensive review of literatures from the past five years using relevant keywords from two major databases, Scopus and Google Scholar, identified determinants such as personal factors (e.g. work-family balance and occupational stress), social factors (e.g. empowerment opportunities) and environmental factors (institutional support and gender issues in the workplace). The results were synthesized from 31 papers after inclusion and exclusion process, highlighting the importance of specific interventions, such as improved institutional support, gender equality, empowerment, reduced occupational pressure, and work-life balance initiatives, aimed at enhancing female lecturers' well-being. The findings suggest that addressing these factors not only improves individual job satisfaction and psychological health but also positively impacts educational outcomes, making it imperative for higher education institutions to prioritize well-being initiatives for female faculty members.

Keywords: higher education, female academics, institutional support, occupational stress, work-family balance, well-being

1. Introduction

The job stress level in higher educational institutions (HEIs) is noticeably on the rise in recent years (Akanji et al., 2022; Bashir & Khan, 2022; Kusi et al., 2018; Shadrack & Pillay, 2023; Wen et al., 2024). Furthermore, within HEIs, there is more emphasis on competitiveness concerning research, teaching, and social services, which is associated with lecturers' stress, depressive symptoms, emotional exhaustion, and high turnover rates. In conjunction with the mounting demands placed on HEIs, the health and wellbeing of academic staff, and particularly female lecturers, has emerged as a contentious topic (Akanji et al., 2022; Bashir & Khan, 2022; Kusi et al., 2018; Shadrack & Pillay, 2023; Wen et al., 2024).

The fierce competition for teaching resources in HEIs is increasingly requiring lecturers to go beyond their teaching and academic service obligations. This integrated demand is difficult psychologically and emotionally for many lecturers, particularly women, who grapple with the complex matrix of gendered discrimination alongside slow professional opportunities and familial caregiving responsibilities. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the problems have escalated, fundamentally challenging how business operations and responsibilities are managed. A significant number of lecturers are now required to transition to remote teaching accompanied by increased caregiving responsibilities (Anda & Tay, 2024). Research has shown that female academics suffer greater levels of depression and anxiety during the pandemic, demonstrating a greater need for balance between professional and personal life (Akanji et al., 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021).

In this light, the administration of academic institutions has better recognized the necessity of caring for and supporting faculty members. Studies have reported that reasonable accommodations within the work environment, including mental healthcare, along with greater flexibility, significantly enhanced the wellbeing of lecturers and educators (Coats et al., 2023). Most importantly, for female lecturers, higher social support along with enhanced professional opportunities greatly improves job satisfaction and mental well-being (Cik et al., 2024).

The intersection of professional and domestic realms impacts women faculty in higher education differently. Wen et al. (2024) note the impossible balancing act of motherhood and work responsibilities that female faculty members have to manage. Many women tend to resolve the issue differently, relishing being both mothers and educators but bound by family commitments more than work obligations while being at peace with their decisions. This dual identity, exhausting as it may be, indicates that women are customarily expected to encompass both realms simultaneously.

The nature of these challenges differs across contexts. Bashir and Khan (2022) highlight the focus on multiple role stresses of women academics in Pakistan who engage in teaching, research, administration, and domestic work. Besides countless academic chores like managing a timetable, admissions, and departmental activities, these women face additional expectations to assume traditional feminine roles as caretakers and homemakers, which includes childrearing, cooking, and cleaning. In the same way, Shadrack and Pillay (2023) examine Black female academics who contend with imbalance between professional and personal lives due to unaddressed patriarchal and cultural norms alongside professional ones such as workload, underappreciation, and lack of regard from male peers. These findings illustrate the different but related challenges encountered by women educators around the world.

It is notable that women's responsibilities as both teachers and mothers can further their professional advancement. Wen et al. (2024) point out that STEM educators, for example,

often maternalize their roles and practice teaching in caring and nurturing ways. As a result of qualitative research conducted in China and Italy, educators reported that their student-centered teaching was profoundly enhanced by their experience as mothers and enabled them to consider different ways in which students learn and the pace at which they learn. This sociological imagination about the teaching profession implies that parenting in conjunction with academic life can positively conflict in a sense that over time it can enhance the professional identity and teaching practices of a person.

Similarly, balance and productivity in such challenging roles is supported by sociophobic and institutional policies, as well as managing stress effectively. Cik et al. (2024) highlight the importance of personal attributes in stress management and balance productivity, noting that lecturers remained productive amid the high demands of academia. Equally important is the social support from colleagues, which helps build a positive and supportive culture at work. Other policies within the institution, such as welfare policies, training in stress management, and in other areas, increase educators' coping abilities with academic demands. These policies do not only assist in managing workloads but also help work-life conflict, which for women educators protects and enhances their professional and personal development. When higher education institutions implement recommended policies, they demonstrate a proactive approach to healthy lecturer well-being alongside promoting academic achievement alongside academic rigor in the focus of educator welfare program in the institution.

Consequently, universities and colleges ought to consider the concerns of female lecturers and take adequate steps to better their working conditions as this will aid in improving the quality of education offered and the retention of faculty and staff, which is fundamental to the growth of higher education. Women working as lecturers in higher education institutions demonstrates their actual contribution which, regrettably, comes with obstacles that undercut their efforts.

Through this comprehensive literature review, this study aims to highlight the various factors that influence their well-being, shedding light on areas that need attention to support female lecturers in their roles.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Unique Challenges Faced by Women in Academia

According to previous studies, many articles highlight the unique challenges faced by women in academia. The Teacher Well-being Index (Education Support, 2019), which is primarily aimed at general teachers but contains information relevant to female lecturers, shows that high stress levels are common among educators, with 72% of respondents admitting to being stressed. From the research, it can be seen that excessive workload, lack of support and a poor work-life balance generally undermine a person's well-being, and the situation is even worse for women, who perform multiple tasks both at work and at home.

Recent studies published between 2019 and 2024 have examined a range of issues during this period, highlighting various factors influencing the well-being of female lecturers. Farradinna et al. (2019) conducted a study on factors affecting the well-being of female lecturers, focusing on the areas of self-esteem, specifically job satisfaction and perceived emotional support in the academic environment. They noted that female lecturers have been shown to have higher teaching loads and personal situational emotional and care responsibilities than male lecturers, and therefore they experience higher levels of stress.

In the COVID-19 pandemic period, these issues are more obvious. Istiningtyas (2021) explains that mental health status in a sample of female lecturers. Although it looms more on the impact of the pandemic, it also shows some of the difficulties that working female lecturers encounter in managing work and family life. Besides, various studies have been conducted to understand the stressors of female lecturers, and Eggley et al. (2021) conducted a categorized examination of specific stressors. These included issues related to work stressors, institutional demands, and lack of support, which are the main causes of occupational stress. In the study, it was recognized that there were problems that required organizational changes to improve the working environment and conditions of female faculty.

A qualitative study by Johnson et al. (2023) described the stress experience of female faculty members in higher education institutions and its impact on well-being. Nursyamsi et al. (2024) conducted a bibliometric analysis to identify research trends and found that a growing number of studies indicate that female lecturers undertake dual roles and responsibilities in both professional and personal spheres. Overall, this extensive literature review suggests that despite the widespread attention given to female lecturers at the university level, they are still underrepresented in leadership positions, which undermines their job satisfaction and psychological well-being. In the work of Iloakasia (2024), a comprehensive description of the experiences of women who work as lecturers in universities and have children is provided. The study suggests that such conflicting demands of the two roles increase stress and affect their professional performance.

2.2 Factors Affecting Well-being of Female Lecturers

Most related research focuses on the influencing factors of female lecturers' well-being, which are generally varied and complex. Akram (2020) explored the correlation between job satisfaction and mental health of female lecturers and called for more attention to institutional efforts aimed at improving the emotional well-being of female workers. The study also found that female lecturers benefited from an environment that promoted shared decision-making in teams and provided resources to handle the workload, meaning that job satisfaction equated to well-being and happiness for female lecturers. In the study conducted in 2021 on work-life balance and task performance among female lecturers, Umeh et al. noted how these women's ability to self-manage affects their well-being.

Umeh et al. (2021) highlighted that work-family interface significantly correlates with both occupational and general well-being among female lecturers. Besides, Handayani et al. (2023) pointed that work-family balance significantly contributes to the happiness at work for female lecturers and both work-family balance and quality of life enhance happiness, which is mediated by factors such as job satisfaction, work engagement, and self-confidence. However, Yudiani and Istiningtyas (2022) have different findings. They sought to establish a correlation between the dependent variable mental health and the independent variable work-life balance of female lecturers. The study participants were 225 female lecturers from Palembang, Indonesia, of whom 54 responded to a self-administered questionnaire. A small percentage (8.1%) was attributed to work-life balance and its relationship with mental health. This means that while the ability to balance work and family demands helps, other areas have an even greater impact on mental health.

In a study by Handayani et al. (2023) that focused on the well-being of female lecturers, it was found that female academics who served longer were happier and healthier, as evidenced by high job satisfaction levels. They concluded in their study that personal factors, including marital status, influenced the emotional state of these lecturers, with married female lecturers

showing higher levels of well-being than unmarried female lecturers. This means that female faculty and other female employees need to be encouraged to receive emotional and psychological support at home and in the workplace. Besides, some studies refer to the relationship between financial issues and female lecturers' well-being. Arumsari (2023) believed that improving financial personality traits and financial literacy among female lecturers ultimately contributes to their overall well-being. However, Tam et al. (2021) pointed that higher income may impact psychological health negatively.

2.3 Critical Analysis of the Literature and Research Framework

After years of research, it was found that female lecturers face many issues in terms of well-being. Factors that affect their well-being include work-family balance, resilience, occupational stress, interpersonal relationships, empowerment, institutional support, gender inequality, etc. These factors are categorized into three main domain—personal, social and environmental—to aid in structured analysis (Figure 1).

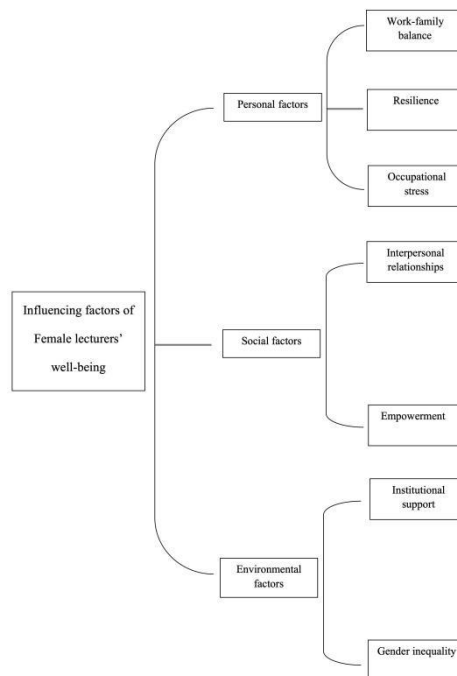


Figure 1: Summary of Influencing Factors Categorized into Personal, Social, and Environmental Domains

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by female lecturers and factors affecting their well-being, several critical observations can be made:

- i. **Methodological limitations:** Many studies rely on self-reported data and small sample sizes, which may limit the generalizability of findings. Future research should consider employing more diverse and robust methodological approaches, including longitudinal studies and mixed-methods designs.
- ii. **Contextual variations:** A majority of studies appear to concentrate on a particular area or region which may lead them to miss differences in culture, society, and even economics within different academic frameworks. More studies are needed that incorporate different countries and educational systems that can highlight the gaps in

understanding the issues.

- iii. Long-term impacts: The majority of studies seem to focus on direct or immediate impacts on the well-being of an individual. There should be more investigation into the life pathways and long-term health aspects of women holding lecturer positions to evaluate the sustained consequences of their challenges.

3. Statement of Problem and Research Aims

Women lecturers in higher education suffer from challenges that are particular to their status, and this affects their well-being in several crucial ways. While some studies have attempted to address parts of these problems, there remains a lack of comprehensive systematically integrates the existing literature and findings on the key determinants of female lecturers' well-being in higher education. This study seeks to fill this gap by conducting a systematic review to examine the literature, identify key findings, and offer useful explanations for developing informed policies aimed at improving the well-being of women lecturers in higher education. These measures are not only essential for improving individual well-being but also for ensuring equitable access to career advancement and sustaining high-quality academic output in higher education institutions.

Rather than adopting a narrow approach focused on isolated variables, this study employs a mixed inductive–deductive methodology. By systematically identifying and analyzing empirical studies that explicitly address the well-being of female lecturers in higher education, it compiles and categorizes the diverse factors examined in the literature into a cohesive framework based on thematic similarities. Thus, this review study represents one of the most comprehensive attempts to date that seeks to synthesize and analyze the available scholarly literature on the well-being of female lecturers in higher education, taking into account their gender role and socio-cultural context. Drawing from the reviewed literature, the identified factors are organized into three overarching categories: personal factors (work-family integration and friction, resilience and stress), social factors (social support and empowerment), and environmental factors (institutional support and gender considerations in the workplace). The significance of this study lies in its potential to guide researchers in identifying the factors that most effectively explain the well-being of female lecturers and in offering insights on how to enhance their well-being, as reported in previous studies. Our goal is to provide actionable recommendations to higher education institutions, aiming to raise awareness and improve employment support for female lecturers. This includes proposing comprehensive measures to improve job satisfaction and psychological contract within academic environments. Such measures may include flexible working arrangements, access to quality childcare facilities, clear promotion pathways, mentorship programs, and the integration of mental health and stress management resources tailored to the unique needs of women in academia. Addressing these issues is crucial for meeting current and future educational challenges while maintaining the competitiveness and sustainability of HEIs. With this in mind, the objectives of this review study are as follows:

- i. To evaluate the current literature and summarize factors influencing female lecturers' well-being.
- ii. To systematically identify and analyze the key factors influencing female lecturers' well-being in higher education settings.
- iii. To provide evidence-based recommendations for higher education institutions to improve the well-being of female lecturers in higher education settings.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Studies Selection

This review critically examines relevant original and peer-reviewed studies to establish the factors affecting female lecturers' well-being. The primary database for the literature review was Scopus and was supplemented with Google Scholar utilizing the indexing keywords "well-being", "university", and "female lecturer". Scopus was selected as a primary reputable database as it hosts over thirty-six thousand journals and eleven thousand six hundred seventy-eight publishers, and encompasses documents in the form of book series, academic journals, and conference proceedings. Alternatively, Google Scholar is a non-subscription-based search engine that is open to the public and indexes full text and information regardless of publishing format and subject area. Google Scholar has more than three hundred eighteen million items from diverse sources such as academic papers, books, journals, technical reports, and many others. The search was guided with the following search strings (Table 1). Based on prior research, the keywords "female lecturer", "female academics", "female scholars", and "women academics" tend to describe the study's target population. The terms "higher education" and "university" and "college" serve to describe the target organization of the study. Therefore, the derived keywords of search strings are created.

The criteria regarding the selection of studies were based on the publication window and the keyword relevance. Only studies within the scope of 2019 and 2024 were considered while older articles were excluded. Once the studies were identified, a thematic analysis was conducted to extract and categorize factors influencing female lecturers' well-being into overarching themes that formed the basis of the study's analytical framework.

Table 1: Search Strings

Database	Indexing Terms
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (Education)) AND (Well-being) AND (Higher education institutions) OR (University) OR (College) AND (Female Lecturer) OR (Female Scholars) OR (Female Academics) AND (LIMIT-TO (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2024) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2023) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))
Google Scholar	Female Lecturer, Female Academics, Female Scholars, Women Academics, Well-being, Higher education, University, College

Out of the initial set of 656 articles collected using indexing terms on Scopus and Google Scholar, 518 were eligible for further screening. Exclusion criteria were made where 138 articles did not pertain to higher education. To maintain a coherence of themes, the selected studies have to incorporate the following major keywords: well-being, female lecturers or female academics, or female scholars or women academics. Articles that failed to capture all the two categories were excluded to maintain the theme of this study. The process of keyword screening was done in two stages leading to 452 articles excluded and 66 remained for more in-depth analysis. Relevant articles were included after a final screening regarding specific reference to educational institutions – universities or colleges or higher educational institutions and female lecturer or female academics or female scholars or women academics. The final articles excluded 35 to leave 31 for comprehensive review as shown in Figure 2.

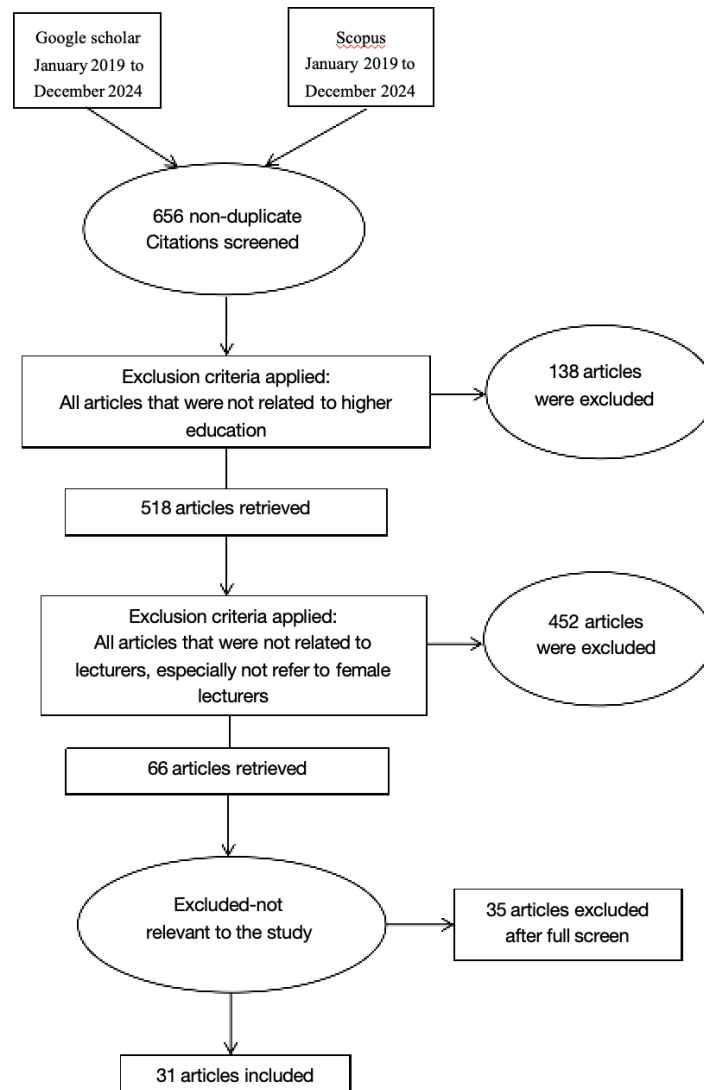


Figure 2: Literature Identification and Selection Procedure

4.2 Data Synthesis and Analysis Process

The synthesis and analysis of data was conducted in a way that maintained methodological rigor and reproducibility. For the last 31 articles, we applied a multi-stage analysis procedure:

4.2.1 Data Extraction

Two reviewers working independently collected data with reference to a pre-defined template which included information about the study such as: author, year, country of research, research design, participants (sample size, demographic information), methodology including methods of data collection and analysis, and the major findings concerning the female lecturers' well-being. Divergent views on the data extracted were settled at a meeting with a third reviewer.

4.2.2 Quality Assessment

Each included study was given a qualitative grade of high, moderate, or low based on the assessed methodological quality and rigor, adequacy of the sampling and analysis done. None of the studies were dropped due to quality assessment but there are some quality issues which were taken into consideration during the synthesis process.

4.2.3 Thematic Analysis

We undertook thematic analyses guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase paradigm:

- i. Documenting familiarization with data through reading and rereading it several times
- ii. 'Pre-coding' relevant segments of the data within each dataset.
- iii. Looking for these themes by assembling codes into designated possible themes.
- iv. Defining possibilities of themes in terms of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity
- v. Understanding and establishing these themes
- vi. Completing the results

5. Results

The findings from a comprehensive review of 31 articles highlight the well-being of female lecturers and its key influencing factors.

5.1 Summary of Studies According to Geographical Regions

The integration of insights from different geographic regions is essential for understanding how different cultures and backgrounds influence the well-being of female lecturers. In general, female lecturers in different areas face different unique challenges due to different cultural background.

In the past six years, the majority of studies focused on Asia. Of these, nine were in Indonesia (Arumsari, 2023; Cik et al., 2024; Farradinna et al., 2019; Farradinna et al., 2020; Handayani et al., 2023; Istiningtyas, 2021; Nova et al., 2022; Yudiani & Istiningtyas, 2022; Yudiani et al., 2024); three themes in Pakistan (Akram, 2020; Bashir & Khan, 2022; Fatima et al., 2024); one theme is in China (Wen et al., 2024); one theme in India (Tharini & Sowmiya, 2022); one theme in Oman (Rajagopal et al., 2024); one theme in Bhutan (Wangmo & Daker, 2021); one theme in Vietnam (Tam et al., 2021). Besides, seven studies focused on Africa (Eggley et al., 2021; Hardman et al., 2022; Iloakasia, 2024; Maboeta et al., 2023; Mends, 2023; Shadrack & Pillay, 2023; Umeh et al., 2021). In addition, six studies focused on Europe and the Americas, which includes two themes in USA (Elliott, & Blithe, 2021; Johnson et al., 2023); one theme in Canada (Gordon & Presseau, 2023); two themes in UK (Smith & Ulus, 2020; UYERI, 2024); one theme in Ireland (Nielsen, 2021) (Figure 3).

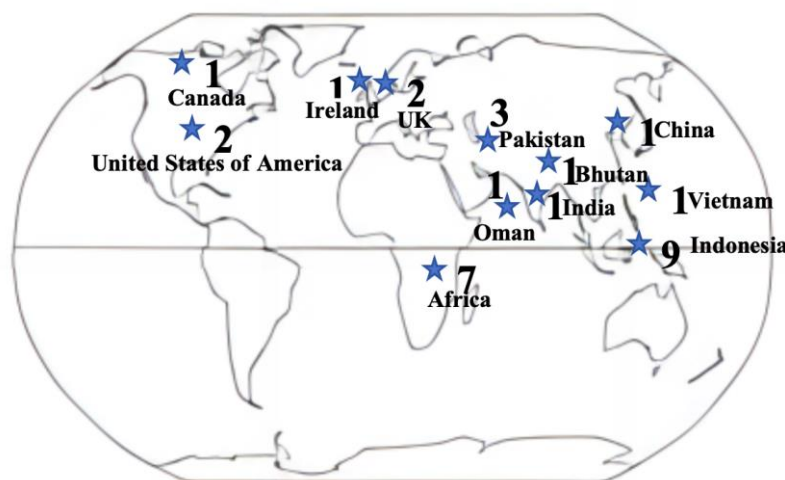


Figure 3: Number of Significant Studies Identified in Different Geographic Regions Around Globe

Research from Asia, particularly Indonesia, Pakistan, and China, emphasize that female lecturers have dual burden of work and life in conservative and traditional social background. In Indonesia, married female lecturers are often expected to take care of children due to the traditional role expectations for women, which leads female lecturers to balance between family and career (Arumsari, 2023; Cik et al., 2024; Farradinna et al., 2019; Farradinna et al., 2020; Handayani et al., 2023; Istiningtyas, 2021; Nova et al., 2022; Yudiani & Istiningtyas, 2022; Yudiani et al., 2024). In Pakistan, traditional patriarchal norms dominate, leading to expectations for women to prioritize domestic responsibilities, particularly in raising children, which is not beneficial to female lecturers' career development (Akram, 2020; Bashir & Khan, 2022; Fatima et al., 2024). In China, Wen et al., (2024) referred to significant challenges faced by female academics in balancing professional responsibilities with personal life, particularly in the Chinese context. These problems are much more obvious under China's three-child policy, increasing stress and necessitating the use of efficient work-life balancing techniques (Jiang et al., 2022).

In Africa, cultural and societal biases uniquely affect Black female academics. In this context, Black female academics are at a disadvantage in higher education and often constitute a small fraction in higher education institutions. Similar with Asia, African female lecturers also face societal expectations of taking care of children and other family obligations, making it harder for women to achieve a work-life balance, and this is due to Patriarchal Structures (Eggley et al., 2021; Hardman et al., 2022; Iloakasia, 2024; Maboeta et al., 2023; Mends, 2023; Shadrack & Pillay, 2023; Umeh et al., 2021).

In Europe and the Americas, their cultural background has both similarity and difference. In terms of similarity, the studies from two areas both focus on intersectionality of gender with other social categories like race and class. In many European contexts, like the UK and Ireland, cultural diversity led to challenges in academia for women from minority backgrounds (Nielsen, 2021; Smith & Ulus, 2020; UYERI, 2024). Similarly, in the U.S., women of color face unique challenges that are shaped by both gender and racial biases. In terms of difference, in some European countries, there may be greater societal support for work-life balance initiatives than in the U.S., and Americas have a more individualistic culture might leave female lecturers to solve these challenges without sufficient institutional support (Elliott, & Blithe, 2021; Johnson et al., 2023).

5.2 Summary of Reviewed Studies and Factors Influencing Female Lecturers' Well-Being

In higher education, female lecturers' well-being is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors according to previous studies. Based on previous studies, generally, these factors can be categorized into three main domains: personal factors, social factors and environmental factors to ensure a systematic analysis.

5.2.1 Personal Factors

Personal factors play a pivotal role in influencing the well-being of female lecturers. These include individual attributes such as work-family balance, resilience and occupational stress. Umeh et al. (2021) highlighted that work-family interface significantly correlates with both occupational and general well-being among female lecturers. Nova et al. (2022) emphasized that when female lecturers can balance their family and professional responsibilities, their overall satisfaction and well-being improve. Besides, one study reveals that about 8.1% of

psychological well-being is influenced by work-life balance, suggesting a positive relationship between these variables. The researchers note that female lecturers who have a balance between work and life tend to have higher psychological well-being (Yudiani & Istiningtyas, 2022). In addition, another research emphasized that some stressors that female lecturers may face could disrupt work-life balance, further affecting well-being (Tharini & Sowmiya, 2022). Handayani et al. (2023) pointed that work-family balance significantly contributes to the happiness at work for female lecturers and both work-family balance and quality of life enhance happiness, which is mediated by factors such as job satisfaction, work engagement, and self-confidence. Iloakasia (2024) stated that the balance between their work duties and family obligations affects female lecturers' psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Fatima (2024) emphasized that a higher sense of well-being at work has the positive relationship with better work-family balance and better performance. Besides, another study discussed how sociocultural beliefs can impose pressures on women academics, making strong relationships vital for support and coping with work-life balance challenges (Wen et al, 2024). However, Akram (2020) has different findings, which include female lecturers have low psychological well-being but better family-work positive spillover. To sum up, based on previous studies, most of scholars believed that work-family balance is very important factor of female lecturers' well-being.

Maboeta et al. (2023) emphasize that women academics utilize their strengths, such as resilience, to navigate their work environments effectively, thereby enhancing their overall well-being. Another research's findings suggest that female lecturers' resilience significantly contributes to their productivity and well-being, particularly in high-pressure environments (Cik et al., 2024). Complementing these findings, Egglely et al., (2021) specifically investigates occupational stress among female lecturers. The authors highlight that female lecturers experience various stress-related health issues, such as headaches, back pains, insomnia, and heightened anxiety. These stressors adversely affect their overall well-being and job performance. On a similar note, Wangmo and Daker (2021) examined the effects of occupational stress on female educators' mental health, opining that stress can cause some individuals to feel overwhelmed, negatively affecting their personal and professional life. Nicholls et al. (2022) in their study explored the academic environment as a source of mental health concern and highlighted the occupational stress faced by female academic staff. Tharini and Sowmiya (2022) associate occupational stress with increased marital strife, fatigue, and diminished work quality, identifying these factors as significant problems for female lecturers. Mends (2023) reviews the adverse health consequences of occupational stress on female lecturers, noting lowered satisfaction with their job and diminished overall well-being.

5.2.2 Social Factors

The social factors of interpersonal relationships and empowerment, among others, are also relevant to the well-being of female lecturers. Women lecturers' wellness and emotional health is positively influenced by warm and trusting relationships. In the sub-context of emotions and well-being, one study during COVID-19 highlighted that female lecturers felt that maintaining caring relationships with students and fellow colleagues was beneficial to their wellness in tough times (Hardman et al, 2022). It was noted that interpersonal relationships are among the major determinants of wellness among women faculty members (Wen et al, 2024). Given the interpersonal and empathetic inclination often associated with women, a positive and harmonious interactions in the workplace and classroom can significantly contribute to their psychological and emotional well-being.

Women in the academic field face a plethora of challenges; thus, any attempts or initiatives at empowerment enables educators set forth positive changes to their well-being (Wangmo & Daker, 2021). Such supports are critical so that female academicians could maintain a thriving, high-quality and fair tenure, allowing them to perform optimally in their work environments while embracing their authentic interpersonal qualities in social interactions. Hardman et al. (2022) further emphasize this by analyzing the effects of empowerment on the mental health and well-being of women in senior academic positions and found that inclusive environments are essential for fostering overall wellness.

In addition, one study investigated how positive workplace culture increases the empowerment of female academic staff which improves their mental health and well-being (Johnson et al., 2023). Moreover, another study focused on the empowerment of female scholars concerning career progression while explaining how this fosters their psychological well-being (Maboeta et al., 2023). According to Fatima et al. (2024), empowerment has been explained from the standpoint of female lecturers in that it affects their self-esteem and confidence, which in turn improves their wellbeing, mental satisfaction, and autonomy. Maboeta et al. (2024) noted that women who feel empowered through self-care, effective self-advocacy, and utilizing their personal strengths are better able to safeguard and promote their wellbeing in the workplace. These forms of empowerment are thus closely linked to social factors that foster belonging, reduce isolation, and enhance female lecturers' emotional resilience and overall well-being.

5.2.3 Environmental Factors

The environmental factors, for instance, the resources available within the institution as well as the existing gender inequality, may either facilitate or obstruct female lecturers' well-being. Akram (2020) underscored the relevance of adequate institutional support in alleviating work-family conflict and enhancing the psychological well-being of female lecturers. Elliott and Blithe (2021) reported on the important impact of institutional support on the wellbeing of female scholars, noting that supportive policies and resources have an important impact on their professional satisfaction and overall mental health. Johnson et al. (2023) noted that institutionally provided policies and practices that promote support are critical for women lecturers suffering from the specific challenges stress. Cik et al. (2024) observed that institutional support is fundamental not only in enhancing the wellbeing of female lecturers but also in improving their performance and productivity. UYERI (2024) highlighted the impact of institutional mentoring and workload management on the mental and emotional wellbeing of female lecturers, noting the relevance of these support systems, while Maboeta et al. (2024) examined the impact of personal resources and institutional support, explaining how these combine to influence mental health. These findings provide heavy implications that equitable workload distribution, access to career development opportunities, supportive leadership, and family-friendly policies significantly shape the academic experience of female lecturers. When institutions actively address systemic barriers and create inclusive, resource-rich environments, they enhance lecturers' sense of security, autonomy, and satisfaction—ultimately promoting sustained well-being and professional growth.

Extending this idea, another study by Elliott and Blithe (2021) noted that women faculty members endure micro-aggressions and work-life conflict more often than male faculty members. These factors are associated with heightened levels of psychological stress and disenchantment with one's job, suggesting that gender discrimination can profoundly impact the health and wellness of female academic staff. Moreover, unsupportive relational dynamics with deans or other individuals in administrative positions significantly increases their

psychological distress.

Tharini and Sowmiya (2022) emphasized that gender-based stressors contribute to psychological distress among female lecturers, suggesting a clear link between gender inequality and reduced well-being within higher education. Maboeta et al. (2023) emphasized that women in the academic workforce face unique challenges that hinder their well-being, such as mental health issues and work-family conflict. Besides, during the COVID-19 pandemic, one article discussed the impact of gender inequality on work and mental health, emphasizing how the additional burdens faced by women academics in crisis situations affect their overall well-being (Gordon & Pesseau, 2023). Nursyamsi et al. (2024) revealed that gender inequality is evident in senior academic roles, where women are underrepresented compared to men. Women's career advancement is often hindered by the challenges of balancing family commitments with academic careers, which directly impacts their well-being.

5.3 Analysis of the Key Influencing factors and Associated Theories

Considering all the above aspects, there are various factors influencing female lecturers' well-being, including work-family balance, resilience, occupational stress, interpersonal relationships, empowerment, institutional support, and gender inequality, which were categorized into three main groups: personal, social and environmental factors. While this categorization is justified for a systematic review analysis, it is crucial to recognize that these factors do not operate in isolation but interact in complex ways that can amplify or mitigate their impacts on well-being.

Incorporating established psychological and sociological reasoning into these factors, considering the interrelations and impact that each has on well-being, would strengthen the analysis. Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964), Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985), Feminist Standpoint Theory (Smith, 1987) are among relevant theories that can explain the complex multifaceted nature within which the factors operate with respect to female lecturers' well-being, providing a theoretical foundation for our subsequent findings.

Our findings are summarized in Table 2, in which work-family balance, occupational stress, empowerment, institutional support, and gender inequality are analyzed and regarded as five key or most important factors to influencing female lecturers' well-being.

Table 2: The Number of Literatures Based on Influencing Factors

Category	Influencing factors	Corresponding Articles' authors	Number of studies identified
Personal factors	Work-family balance	(Akram, 2020); (Umeh et al., 2021) ; (Nova et al., 2022); (Yudiani & Istiningtyas, 2022); (Tharini & Sowmiya, 2022); (Handayani et al., 2023); (Iloakasia, 2024); (Fatima, 2024) ; (Wen et al, 2024)	9
	Resilience	(Maboeta et al., 2023); (Cik et al., 2024)	2
	Occupational stress	(Egglely et al., 2021); (Wangmo and Daker, 2021); (Nicholls et al., 2022); (Tharini & Sowmiya, 2022); (Mends, 2023)	5
Social factors	Interpersonal relationships	(Istiningtyas, 2021); (Hardman et al, 2022); (Wen et al., 2024)	3

	Empowerment	(Wangmo & Daker, 2021); (Hardman et al., 2022); (Johnson et al., 2023); (Maboeta et al., 2023); (Fatima et al., 2024); (Maboeta et al., 2024)	6
Environmental factors	Institutional support	(Akram, 2020); (Elliott & Blithe, 2021); (Johnson et al., 2023); (Cik et al., 2024); (UYERI, 2024); (Maboeta et al., 2024)	6
	Gender inequality	(Elliott & Blithe, 2021); (Tharini & Sowmiya, 2022); (Maboeta et al., 2023); (Gordon & Presseau, 2023); (Nursyamsi et al., 2024)	5

5.3.1 Work and Family Balance

One of the factor influencing female lecturers' sabbatical pay satisfaction was work-family balance. Research claim that work and life balance is among the contributors of job satisfaction (Handayani et al., 2023). This is consistent with the Role Theory (Kahn et al, 1964) which accounts for phenomena of conflict when individuals face tasks which, from different life spheres, set out opposing demands. It is common for women academics to combine family responsibilities with demanding academic workloads, resulting in role strain and stress as the theory predicts. The Work-Family Border Theory (Clark 2000) assists in understanding the movements of women into and out of paid work and family care, suggesting that boundaries that allow movement not infrequently lead to spillover and wellbeing effects. Work-family balance is still an issue and not only stands alone; it interacts with and is deepened by other factors, which are lack of institutional support and gender discrimination and increases anxiety.

5.3.2 Occupational Stress

Most female lecturers, as major players in the teaching practicum, encounter a range of occupational stressors which can be harmful to their professional as well as personal life. These stressors comprise overwork, time constraints, and insufficient facilities for teaching (Eggley et al., 2021). Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) explains how these stressors consume valuable psychological resources over time and lead to burnout if demands outnumber resources. Likewise, the Job Demands-Resource Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) also describes how exhaustion and disengagement are due to high job demands and low resources. This occupational stress creates a ripple effect because it, first of all, reduces the cognitive and emotional resources necessary to cope with work-family conflict and then subsequently reinforces a vicious cycle of stress in one domain, aggravating stress in other areas. Together with inequality in the distribution of workloads by gender, this interaction can be particularly harmful to the wellbeing of female lecturers.

5.3.3 Empowerment Experiences

These experiences are major contributors to the self-growth and health of the female lecturers. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) explains how empowerment as a phenomenon attends to the fundamental psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are vital for intrinsic motivation and well-being. Engaging in other development activities enables academicians to achieve career milestones and boosts their self-esteem, which leads to a feeling of accomplishment. Psychological Empowerment Theory (Spreitzer, 1995) tries to explain these phenomena by outlining the empowerment processes and outcomes that enable female lecturers to experience worth through meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, thereby integrating their identities at work and at home (Fatima et al., 2024). It is important to note that empowerment can act as a moderator that mitigates the harmful effects of occupational stress, together with gender discrimination, creating positive resource gain spirals as explained in Conservation of Resources Theory. On

the other hand, in the absence of empowerment, stressors tend to be exacerbated.

5.3.4 Coping Strategies and Institutional Support

In order to combat stress, social support, and time management are two vital coping strategies (Smith & Ulus, 2020). The Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) provides cognitive reasoning as to why social support acts as a buffer against stress; it offers emotional, informational, and instrumental aid that improves coping ability. Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which states that perceived organizational support leads to increased commitment, job satisfaction, and wellness, offers an understanding of supportive institutional policies such as work-life balance initiatives and childcare services. Iloakasia (2024) argues that these measures not only mitigate stress, but also enhance job satisfaction and retention rates among females, as previously predicted by these frameworks. There is a synergistic effect - the combination of personal coping strategies and institutional support - in the presence of both, female lecturers are better able to deal with other issues such as work-family conflict and occupational stressor challenges. On the other hand, without any institutional support, even the best individual coping strategies are bound to fail when contending with systemic difficulties.

5.3.5 Gender Inequality and Professional Demands

The power relations at the workplace are worsened by gender discrimination for women lecturers in academic institutions. Feminist Standpoint Theory (Smith, 1987) and Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990) explain how institutions of higher learning are dominated by masculine ideology and values, which marginalize women. Stress is further compounded by factors such as increased class contact time and being in lower positions in the institution (Nursyamsi et al., 2024; Elliot & Blithe, 2021). Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) gives an account of the ways in which different social divisions (gender, race, class) interact to constitute different forms of subordination and inequality. This divide gives rise to tension and a self-perpetuating pattern of role conflict and family strain, which erodes the well-being of women academics, in line with what these theories suggest. Gender inequality further serves as an explanation for deepening the level of various other difficulties it increases the probability of experiencing work overload, prevents the suffering from gaining an empowering opportunity, and sets other obstacles to the work family balance, which contributes to well-being in a multiplicative rather than an additive way.

The interactions between these factors produce intricate feedback systems that can either bolster or diminish the wellness of female lecturers. In addition, strong institutional support helps to alleviate work family conflicts and occupational stress. Additionally, empowering experiences can promote resilience, thus helping female lecturers deal with gender inequalities. On the contrary, the combined effect of numerous stressors, such as high occupational stress, excessive family duties, and prejudice against women, is more devastating than any of the individual factors.

The most visible of such dynamics comes in a number of important forms. These one or more patterns in which one area's resource problem exhausts the resources required to solve another are termed resource depletion chains. For example, high levels of stressed work may deplete emotional and cognitive resources essential to performing the family role, leading to work-family conflict. This leads, through a negative reinforcing cycle, to heightened occupational stress. In female lecturers who experience institutional discrimination and support barrier particular strong social support networks provide, a compensatory effect would be observed. Finally, total well-being is not as strongly impacted by the change caused by a single factor

in question as it would be by the combined impact of a different factors above a certain level.

The difficult “time scale” of their interactions is another complexity. Constant exposure to multitude of stressors over time can erode resilience and overexpose female lecturers to greater risk. For example, a senior lecturer in some institutions with heavy teaching load and covert gender bias is often made to look as if she is really resilient. However, over time, and with the accumulation of additional family responsibilities, she is more likely to experience burnout. This consideration of the temporal accumulation of stress across domains underscores the need for preventive as opposed to reactive support systems.

In addition, cultural and contextual factors also modify the nature of the relationships among the variables in different academic cultures and regions. For example, in collectivist cultures, the extended family may help in the absence of adequate institutional childcare unlike in individualistic cultures where women lecturers depend more on the institutional childcare policy. The other extreme is the degree of anti-discrimination legislation together with the prevailing dominant culture concerning gender relations. Such factors greatly determine the extent to which the already existing gender inequalities are exacerbated by other stressors.

Grasping these interactive relationships is critical in formulating comprehensive interventions targeting the complex issues of female faculty members in higher education (Figure 4). Instead of addressing each factor individually, effective support should focus on the links between factors, breaking negative feedback loops and enhancing positive ones. This approach to the well-being of female lecturers is exciting for institutional policy and future research on women’s higher education issues.

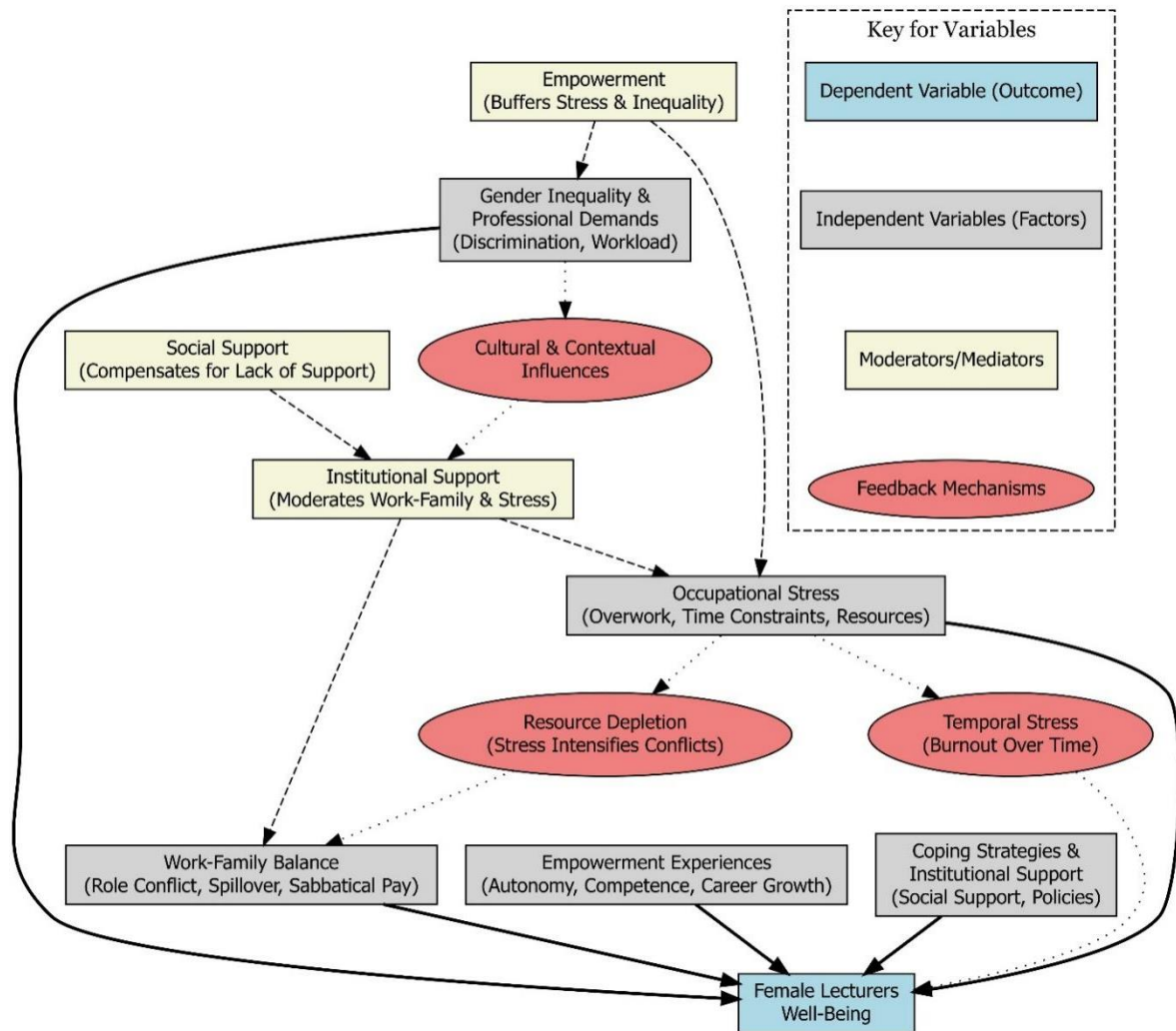


Figure 4: Overview of the Key Factors and Mediators or Moderators Influencing Female Lecturers' Well-Being

5.4 Actionable Recommendations

To enhance female lecturers' well-being, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should implement a comprehensive set of actionable solutions across five key areas. The following strategies include specific implementation approaches, potential barriers, and facilitators to make these recommendations more practical and actionable.

5.4.1 Work-Family Balance Initiatives

The implementation strategies include:

- i. Develop institutional policies that permit remote working or flexible working hours, including specific procedures regarding how female lecturers can transition to and out of these arrangements during significant life events such as caregiving periods (Begum et al., 2024).

- ii. Implement a campus-wide survey to ascertain the most critical childcare needs before onsite provision is considered, along with collaboration with local providers if full onsite provision is not immediately possible (Rajagopal et al., 2024).

The potential barriers include the following:

- i. Limited funds and space available for childcare centers: Childcare centers are also part of the educational institutions that operate with insufficient resources, which makes it hard to adequately finance the establishment and maintenance of childcare centers.
- ii. Scheduling issues stemming from reluctance of heads of departments: Flexible time policies can be met with resistance from department heads who are worried that established workflows, continuity of instruction, and productivity will be disrupted.

Facilitators:

- i. Use more willing departments to demonstrate effectiveness through pilot programs: Understanding and working with units that are willing to accept flexible policies provides good case studies in retention, productivity, and morale, which is employee satisfaction.
- ii. Employ digital calendars to better organize and control flexible scheduling: The deployment of fully fledged flexible and digitalized work scheduling systems will provide the most effective visibility around implementation of flexi working while also ensuring that essential responsibilities are adequately supervised and performed.

5.4.2 Occupational Stress Reduction

Implementation strategies include:

- i. Create a comprehensive model for workload calculation that incorporates all academic functions (teaching, research, and administration), and regularly check that there is equitable division of work among males and females.
- ii. Introduce a "communication hours policy" that sets expectations for email correspondence and prohibits after-hours communications unless in real emergencies (University and College Union, 2023).
- iii. Create a mental health resource office that is not only knowledgeable about the academic workplace's stressors, but also offers in person and virtual consultations during extended hours.

Potential Barriers:

- i. Resistance to social norms that control communication during free time: Many academic settings operate with a 'always on' culture in which people expect emails and messages to be responded to even during evenings, weekends, and holidays.
- ii. Standardization of workload measures across many different fields is challenging: There is a broad variation among academic disciplines in the methods of teaching, conducting research, and serving, which hampers equity in the workload measurement in relation to the overall contributions of faculty members.

Facilitators:

- i. Department champions who model healthy communication boundaries: Senior faculty members and administrators actively engaged in advocacy for communication boundaries can effect strong cultural change by showing that setting limits does not interfere with productivity or excellence.
- ii. Regular workload transparency reports shared across departments: Inter-faculty reporting of workload activity for every faculty member and instructor of all

departments has the potential to reveal imbalances and enable conversations about reasonable expectations based on data.

5.4.3 Empowerment Strategies

Implementation strategies include:

- i. Prepare an outline for a professional development program that will have quarterly workshops designed specifically to teach negotiation, grant writing, and publication strategies with the purpose of addressing barriers positioned against women (Ngoc et al., 2020).
- ii. Encourage a research support fund in aid of women academics on career breaks or those with primary caregiving duties.

Potential Barriers:

- i. Time constraints limiting participation: Female faculty members often deal with the responsibility of teaching, conducting research, providing service, and undertaking excessive care giving activities, making it extraordinarily challenging to fit professional development activities or self-care programs into their schedules.
- ii. Insufficient resources for targeted programs: Universities often do not have appropriate funding sources for the well-being of female academics which leads to such programs being underfunded or only available for limited periods of time and thus unable to have a sustainable impact.

Facilitators:

- i. Schedule workshops with multiple time options, including online recording alternatives: A flexible policy for program implementation that includes varying scheduling (morning, afternoon, or evening sessions) and hybrid and fully online formats enables women academics to participate within their constrained availabilities.
- ii. Seek external partnerships with foundations focused on gender equity in academia: Working with bodies can help in providing additional funding, developed curriculum, and even skilled resources for the implementation of effective programs.

5.3.4 Institutional Support Systems

Implementation strategies include:

- i. To better support female academics, create a formal mentorship program with clearly defined goals, prepared trainers, and meeting schedules so mentors can provide consistent support.
- ii. Schedule both virtual and face-to-face networking opportunities for female academics from various departments. Set aside time during regular work hours for these events (Center for the Education of Women, 2021).
- iii. Adopt a 'family care leave bank' policy where faculty members can voluntarily contribute unused leave days for the benefit of faculty members who have caregiving responsibilities (Nova et al., 2022).

Potential Barriers:

- i. Finding sufficient senior female academics to serve as mentors: Women's persistent underrepresentation in senior academic ranks represents a major bottleneck to mentoring programs as the few women at these levels often experience mentoring overload and service burnout.
- ii. Scheduling challenges for cross-departmental networking: Different academic departments normally have dissimilar teaching periods, research deadlines, and

administrative cycles, which makes it extremely impossible to identify some common available time for interdisciplinary networking functions.

Facilitators:

- i. Consider emeritus faculty as potential mentors to expand the pool: The utilization of retired female academics still associated with the university can dramatically enhance the available resources for mentorship leveraging their experience and knowledge of the institution.
- ii. Integrate networking opportunities into existing institutional events: The integration of structured networking parts into standing university functions such as a faculty senate meetings, convocations, or research symposiums, teaching workshops offers the most flexibility with no further time constraints.

5.3.5 Gender Equality Initiatives

Implementation strategies include:

- i. Carry out gender pay audits at an interval of six months, ensuring report transparency and setting deadlines for rectifying any highlighted issues.
- ii. Unconscious bias training for all members of hiring and promotion committees is obligatory, with refresher sessions required biannually (Nielsen, 2021).
- iii. Build a publicly accessible gender equity dashboard with essential metrics (rates of positions in leadership, promotions, etc.) that institutional leadership routinely reviews every three months (Nursyamsi et al., 2024).

Potential Barriers:

- i. Resistance to transparency in salary information: Most establishments foster environments of salary secrecy which allows for the systemic manipulation of compensation inequalities based on gender to persist, wherein administrators tend to use privacy issues or the lack of comprehensive compensation data as competitive advantages as excuses to not provide pay equity information.
- ii. Slow institutional decision-making processes: Universities have a reputation for operating via complex governance systems that can involve dozens of committees, administrative reviews, and approval stages that slow down policy changes from months to years. This is particularly true for policies that deal with broad systemic areas, such as gender equity.

Facilitators:

- i. Phased implementation approach beginning with anonymized data: The starting point of an aggregated departmental salary data aligned by gender, rank, and years of service makes it possible to detect potential cases of salary inequity without raising issues of privacy or individual comparison.
- ii. Create a dedicated gender equity task force with executive authority: The creation of a formal entity that is fully accountable and directly reports to the university leadership with a defined budget and a clear mandate to act on approved recommendations has the potential of transforming the pace of change within the traditional academic structures.

With the application of these standard action steps, higher educational institutions will be able to foster a more supportive and inclusive environment that promotes the well-being of female lecturers, enhances job satisfaction, improves the psychosocial contract within academic settings, and ultimately benefits the whole academic community.

6. Conclusion

This review underscores the pressing need for higher education institutions to take a more proactive and structured approach in addressing the well-being of female lecturers. The synthesis of diverse studies reveals that personal, social, and environmental factors are interrelated and have a profound impact on female academics' well-being. Among the most critical factors are work-family balance, occupational stress, empowerment opportunities, coping strategies, and gender inequality.

Achieving work-family balance is crucial for enhancing well-being, yet female lecturers often face conflicting responsibilities that lead to stress and reduced quality of life. Occupational challenges such as heavy workloads and limited resources further strain their mental health. Empowerment through professional development fosters personal growth and strengthens identity. Coping strategies like time management and seeking social support, alongside institutional measures such as work-life policies and childcare facilities, are vital for sustaining performance. Additionally, persistent gender inequalities—manifesting as disproportionate workloads and limited leadership representation—intensify stress and work-family conflict. Addressing these systemic issues is essential to promoting equity and improving female lecturers' well-being in higher education. While this study has certain limitations, its strength lies in the use of an inductive-deductive approach that allows for a comprehensive synthesis of diverse findings. Ultimately, this review underscores the urgent need for holistic, gender-sensitive policies and sustained institutional commitment to cultivating a supportive academic environment that prioritizes the well-being of female lecturers in higher education.

7. Implications and Significance

7.1. Contextual Relevance

This study is important in understanding the discourse on gender equality and well-being in academia. Women's lecturers' well-being is influenced by several complex intersecting factors, such as work-life integration, workplace distress, empowerment, institutional assistance, and gender discrimination, which is an undervalued sociological issue. A better and complete understanding of these interrelations is critical for higher educational institutions, policymakers, and other partners to devise strategies that will foster more supportive and equitable academic cultures. Addressing the issues these insights provide describes the supporting social, personal, and environmental problems that can be solved. These aspects can be used to bring more inclusivity in the workplaces, which to some extent are dominated by male professionals in academic disciplines.

7.2. Theoretical Impact

This study integrates evidence from different sources to fill gaps in existing theories of workplace well-being and gender concerns in academic settings. The findings confirm the Work-Family Conflict Theory (Greenhaus et al., 1989) that posits the existence of well-being challenges for individuals in roles at conflict between work and family responsibilities. Also, the study adds to the Organizational Support Theory (Kurtessis et al., 2017) about the system's policies concerning the female academic's well-being and supporting the theory. The confirmation of the relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction also confirms self-efficacy and psychological capital theories. The study complements and further develops existing research on job satisfaction and mental health in higher education by emphasizing the

need for the balance between work and family, and management of occupational stress.

7.3. Practical Outcomes

The study's findings have important implications for various stakeholders, including university administrators, policymakers, and faculty members. First, institutions need to prioritize policies that facilitate work-life balance, such as flexible working hours, childcare services, and support specifically tailored for female lecturers. Additionally, universities should implement mental health and well-being programs that offer stress relief services, counseling, and mental health support that address the unique challenges faced by female lecturers. Empowerment initiatives, such as mentoring programs, can also be instrumental in boosting female lecturers' confidence and career development. Furthermore, institutional support and gender equity measures are crucial, with gender-related policies and a focus on non-discrimination and supportive practices helping to bridge gender gaps in academic settings. Finally, fostering improved social support networks through faculty groups, peer support systems, and "Talking Heads" groups can significantly enhance both well-being and job satisfaction for female lecturers.

8. Limitations

This comprehensive review study has found key factors of female lecturers' well-being in higher education, with several limitations observed. Two major limitations recognized in this study were internal and external validity. Previous studies on women's job satisfaction as lecturers were conducted in specific cultural or institutional contexts and therefore cannot be generalized to women with different work environments, different geographical locations, or different types of higher education institutions. For example, when considering the problems faced by female academics, one may be surprised to find that the dilemmas faced by female academics in Western countries may be very different from their counterparts and in developing countries, where the culture and work organization differ.

Another shortcoming is that this study did not explore gender differences from an intersectionality perspective. However, gender was not the only driver for these female lecturers, meaning that other factors, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation were all determinants of their academic experiences and well-being. A more intersectional approach would complement previous studies, and the two integrated courses would actually help understand how multiple forms of oppression interrelate to shape women's experiences in academia.

In conclusion, the positive comparative results regarding the well-being of female lecturers in higher education clearly point out several limitations that need to be considered when drawing conclusions from the presented findings or developing necessary plans to improve the professional status and well-being of female academics.

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