An exploratory study into the aspects of work-life balance among academics in Australian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study on the work-life balance of academics in some Melbourne institutes of higher education. It is important to explore this area of their lives as academics constantly face changes in terms of scope and workload. They also form the foundation of institutions of higher education. This research was done to explore where these institutes of higher education stand in terms of achieving SDG goal number 3, which is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, for their academics through exploring academic lives and well-being. SDG or Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), refers to one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2015. The reputation and success of institutes of higher education lie fundamentally in the work of its academics so any significant disruption to their health and well-being will have a negative impact on their quality of work and their organisation's performance. This study revealed a negative impact of changes to the academics' work-life- balance and the failure of their organisations to achieve SDG goal no 3. A qualitative approach using in-depth interviewing was used to interview nine academics, from different institutes of higher education in Melbourne, Australia. The informants included male and female academics from high and low-ranked institutes of higher education, of different positions and ages. This research used convenience and snowball sampling methods. The findings showed that the majority of informants were overworked with no clear breaks for holidays or weekends. The exception was 2 informants who enjoyed good work-life balance and holidays which may be due to their positions as Deans and Head of Programme. While mental health in education has been mainly focused on students, this research has revealed that the mental health of academics from these institutes is at a critical level and needs to be addressed.

Keywords: Academic, work-life balance, mental health, SDG goal number 3

INTRODUCTION

The latest report by the United Nations Secretary-General on SDG goal number 3, which is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, highlighted that the Covid-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the mental health and well-being of people around the world. The report further stated that in 2020, there was a 25% increase in anxiety and depression cases worldwide. But mental health issues are not new; it is not a pandemic-exclusive problem. The pandemic may have increased the reported numbers of mental health issues but it has been around for some time. For example, in a large research on work-life balance as a best practice model for human resource management, Tariq, Aslam, Siddique, and Tanveer (2012) alerted employers that employers are the losers for creating burnout and stressful situations for their employees. Complementing this, a cross-sectional survey of 595 academics from South African higher education institutions confirmed that job demands and a lack of adequate job resources contributed to burnout (Barkhuizen, Rothmann, & Van De Vijver, 2014).

That the domino effect of burnout extended to family life was highlighted by Salyers et al. (2017) in their study on healthcare providers. It was found that burnout resulted in consistent negative relationships with perceived

quality (including patient satisfaction), quality indicators, and perceptions of safety. Academia is no different. Just as quality is important in health care service providers, quality is equally if not more important in education, arguably that not just the whole education system of a nation has the potential to collapse, but all other professions too. Every profession must go through years of learning and developing through some form of formal education. With the growing research on mental health, there is a need to focus on the relationship between an academic's mental health and work (Allan et al., 2018; Bailey et al., 2019; Fremeaux and Pavageau, 2020). Since most academics have a demanding lifestyle not just with a heavy teaching workload but administrative functions that extend beyond teaching and activities that are not directly related. We continuously see a frenzy of selling in terms of continuous open days, counselling days and days named differently all relating to selling, disallowing a work-life balance for academics. These activities used to be under the job-scope of recruitment, it has now shifted to academics, adding on to the already heavy teaching and learning, publication, programme development and other related activities Therefore it is crucial to further explore the current state of academics' mental health.

Recently, Stagnin (February 2022) in his article The Role of Mental Health in Global Sustainable Development in the February 2022 Forbes edition, highlighted that developed nations too struggle with mental health issues and in countries like the United States of America, it has been reported that ~~as high as~~ 57% of employees who struggled with mental health issues did not seek treatment for various reasons, presumably for fear of being stigmatised. The United Nations is striving to motivate individuals towards pursuing wellness and achievement in both their personal and professional lives (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2011). However, this is not always within the control of individuals. Academics are not able to carve out time from their work to have any sort of work-life balance.

A case in point is the Australian academics, where changes in politics, population, social and community trends, along with economic changes, have significantly transformed the way Australian universities operate. These changes have resulted in the academic profession generally experiencing a range of unfamiliar stressors (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010) which still continues as this study will show despite studies ~~such as~~ by Haar, Russo, Suñe, and Ollier-Malaterre (2014) and Jang, Park, and Zippay (2011) proving that work-life balance led to job satisfaction, reduced stress and anxiety and resulted in reducing mental health issues. Studies in the past looked into ways of navigating dual roles between work and family, how one role affects the other (Jones, Burke, & Westman, 2013), however this study explores the root cause of why academics are not able to have a decent work life balance.

AREA THAT WAS STUDIED - THE WHAT
Work life balance
Work life balance (WLB) is attracting more concern in current times, and numerous researchers have acknowledged its importance, especially for people who are looking to improve the quality of their professional and personal lives (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011; Ganiyu et al., 2020; Happy, 2021). It is a strategic element in the performance of Human Resource functions (Ganiyu et al., 2020).

WLB refers to the relationship between work and off-work life, and achieving equal balance in a person's job and personal life (Lockwood, 2003; Korkmaz and Erdogan, 2014; Ayar et al., 2022). Bell, Rajendran, and Theiler (2012) highlighted that work-life balance and work-life conflicts are important not just for employees but for an organisation's performance. It is also vital in achieving the emotional, psychological and cognitive stability of employees, which promote overall effectiveness of an organisation (Karthik, 2013; Soomro, 2018; Jaharuddin and Zainol, 2019). While some scholars may consider the WLB as an individual balance between the employees' families and their work roles (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022), Bell et al. (2012) pointed out that high worklife conflict, will affect organisations in terms of low organisational commitment, low productivity and low performance, to name a few.

Though WLB was first discussed in literature in the late 1970s (Lewis, 2016) by Kanter (1977) through her seminal research on work and family in the US context, highlighting the difficulties faced by many people to satisfy obligations in and out of work, but Franklin (2010) noted that workers who worked as stonemasons at Melbourne University in 1856 already enjoyed an 8-hour work day that recognised the rights of employees to have work, recreation, family, and recuperation in their lives. They believed in the idea of "Eight hours to work, Eight hours to play, and Eight hours to sleep. "A fair day's work, for a fair day's pay," which helped to shape the modern concept of WLB (Brough et al., 2020). WLB is rooted in an employee's need to have a healthy balance between the desire to participate efficiently in the labour market while giving the best to their loved ones, while trying to balance profession with personal responsibilities (Bhalerao, 2013; Lavoie, 2014; Jaharuddin and Zainol,

2019). In that perspective, WLB can be described as an acceptable level of participation in the multiple roles in a person's life (Lingard et al., 2012).

Work life conflict
Work life conflict occurs when work life balance is absent. This has become an area of interest for organisational psychologists (Carlson et al., 2000). Work life conflict or interference is a type of inter-role conflict where the role pressures from the work domain and private life domain are incompatible and imbalanced (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). The greater the job demands, such as work overload and time pressure, the higher the chance of work life conflict (Bakker et al., 2008; van der Heijden et al., 2009; Brough et al., 2020). The scarcity model of personal resources, the work life interface, shows how performing multiple roles depletes resources and produces stress and strain (Goode 1960). It results in the psychosocial risk factor for ill-health and deterioration of physical and psychological health and well-being (Parent-Thirion, 2017). The negative consequences of work life conflict affect both the individual and the organisation, which may lead to high stress, poor personal well-being, absenteeism, higher turnover intention, low job satisfaction and declining organisational performance (Smith and Gardner, 2007; Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Kim, 2014; Shaffer et al., 2016; Kumara and Fasana, 2018).

Work-life balance/Conflict of Academics - The Who
WLB is a necessity for all workers, but it is particularly important for teaching professionals (Maeran et al., 2013) because the future of students is strongly affected by the quality of worker input. Therefore, if the academics are satisfied with their job and personal life, they will be able to provide a higher quality of education (Aziri, 2011; Khalid et al., 2012; Happy, 2021).

Teaching is a demanding job due to the high workload, compounded by academics regularly encountering new challenges including continuously changing the environment and diverse student populations (Sabharwal et al., 2018). For instance, the recent pandemic shifted in-person meetings and lectures to virtual encounters in which interactions were done online. The move from physical working conditions to online interaction created uncertainty and unpredictability (Dorenkamp and Ruhle, 2018) and academics suffered work and personal life imbalance due to increased demand and disarranged working conditions by their employers, more work and increased job insecurity (Fox et al., 2011; Dorenkamp and Süß, 2017).

In the academic context, work life conflict has been found to be pervasive in universities, especially for female faculty members due to the demands for high productivity levels that minimise domestic, traditional roles and the responsibilities of women (Denson et al., 2018). Several studies have shown that female academics experience more difficulties in managing work and family duties, often leading to suspension of their careers or the decision to not have a family (Blackwell and Glover, 2008; European Commission, 2012). That this issue is still in the forefront indicates that gender uniqueness has not been taken into consideration.

Furthermore Winefield et al. (2008), had published a comprehensive report about Workplace Stress in Australian University Staff showing work life conflict and academic workload among others, indicating 11% of the variance for psychological distress among academics. Yet, studies still highlight problems with work life conflict, job satisfaction, decreasing quality of work life and occupational stress in a diverse range of academic samples across countries (Bell et al., 2012; Mudrak et al. 2018; Converso et al. 2019; Dorenkamp and Ruhule 2019; Fontinha et al., 2019; Singh et al. 2019).

Work life conflict is shown to have increased due to the use of digital technology and working from home, where work and life overlapped (Hinsliff, 2013; Haeger and Lingham 2014). With the advance of e-technology, Currie and Eveline (2011) found that Australian academics felt their privacy had been invaded and their work life balance distorted due to the extension of work time resulting from this technology. Study by Toffoletti and Starr (2016) showed that women academics were forbidden to talk about work life topics at work. Furthermore Cannizzo, Mauri, and Osbaldiston (2019) found that the pressure to be a team player, no control over time and the need for advancement were reasons that academics lacked work life balance.

Academics' Mental Health
There has been an increase in mental health problems over the past few decades (Weissman et al., 2017). Hennekam (2019) explained that mental health conditions involve changes in emotion or behaviour resulting from work, social and personal or family-related problems. Hennekam et al. (2020a, b, c) and Hessels et al. (2017) shared the symptoms of mental health victims such as loss of self-confidence and sense of belonging as they are often excluded in different work and life contexts (Mousa and Samara, 2021). Furthermore, the feeling of negative

mental health often results in feelings of shame and the inability to take care of oneself and others (Kotera and Maughan, 2020).

In academia, Steel et al. (2014), noted that symptoms of poor mental health such as depression, anxiety and stress were due to the academic's inability to balance work and family life and the fear of under performing at work, among others. On the other hand, academics who have achieved WLB tend to have good mental health since they experience a sense of coherence in life with optimal physiological conditions (Haar et al., 2014; Happy, 2021). Employees with good mental health enjoy peace and satisfaction that lead to an increase in their work performance and engagement.

In comparison to other professions, Urbina-Garcia (2020) found that academics worked longer hours resulting in psychological distress made worse due to lack of support from their institute of higher education, high workloads and job insecurity.

Based on the literature review, it shows adequate job resources, positive work relationships, decent work hours and good stress (manageable job demands) are necessities for good mental health ~~as such for a sense of~~ and work life balance. This study was conducted to explore the work life balance of academics from selected universities in Melbourne, Australia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY - The How

In a quantitative study, a suitable method would be the testing of objective theories by examining the relationship among numerical variables (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007), emphasising quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In contrast, qualitative study aims to collect an in-depth understanding of a complex situation, by extracting information regarding non-quantifiable attributes such as feelings, emotions and perceptions (Blumberg, Cooper, & Schindler, 2014). Qualitative study is focused on people's behaviour within specific social settings rather than surveying a broad population (Holliday, 2007).

In a qualitative study, knowledge is relative, meaning that the findings are specific to the situation of the informants at a specific time and place. Researchers refer to this issue as the ontological stance. Ontology refers to the nature and organisation of reality and the development of the research design method and analytical processes are then tailored to be in concert with this stance.

Epistemology deals with the nature and sources of knowledge (Crotty, 1998); (Guarino & Giaretta, 1995). As this research takes on a relativist ontological space, the nature and sources of the knowledge will also lie in the relativist area. Whilst the terminology used to describe this epistemological stance is somewhat contested (Blaikie, 1993; Charmaz, 2008) in this research the epistemological term 'constructivism' is used in the same sense used by Schwandt (1994) and Ponterotto (2005) claiming that knowledge and truth are created, not discovered. This term is used to refer to the assumption that, in the area of interest, meaning (or perception) is constructed by the informants, adding that just because it is constructed it does not mean that the knowledge derived is not 'real' to the informant, it is, in their environment. Schwandt (2000) further substantiates that constructivism takes the view that whilst knowledge and truth are created, this is done with care, because the notions correspond to something in the real world.

ETHICS APPROVAL

As commonly practised, some pre-preparation was done (Alsaawi, 2014) and the main questions were developed as shown below:
1. Are you happy in this job?
2. Is the work that you do in synergy with your personal values and beliefs?
3. Do you have autonomy in carrying out your work?
4. Do you look forward to holidays and time off?

Subsequently, an ethics application was made to the ethics committee of the lead researcher's institution. The information about the research, consent form and potential questions as stated above were attached with the ethics application form. After the approval was granted, invitation emails were sent out to potential informants. When the invitation was accepted by the informant, the background research information document was sent along with the consent form. The interviews were done after the consent form was signed.

DATA COLLECTION

The researcher in a qualitative study will need to use a data collection method that provides details on events, situations and interaction between people and things from the perspective of carefully selected informants (Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006) allowing the researcher to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014b; Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2010). As this study was about the well-being of academics, and how the changes have affected them, the chosen sample was taken from academics working in institutes of higher education who were active in teaching and learning.

Due to the impossible task of collecting data from a whole population, a sample is chosen (Cascio, 2012). There are two types of sampling Cascio (2012) which are commonly used, probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is used when everyone in a population has a known probability. to be cose. This is not the case in this study so a non- probability sampling method was used. The informants were chosen to meet the research objective. There are a few non probability sampling methods, but for this research, convenience and snowball sampling were used.

Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) have informed us that qualitative study is about richness of information therefore, it is important to carefully select the informants. For this study, informants were first chosen through convenience sampling of known university staff who met the criteria, followed by the snowball sampling method in which interviewees recommended their friends, colleagues and all who met the criteria. Robinson (2014) explained that convenience sampling is used when it is easier to locate the informants who meet the criteria of the study. In this study, convenience sampling was used as the researcher had communication access to the staff at the institute of higher education in the Melbourne area, as such the sample was restricted geographically. The early interviewees later recommended their known contacts who met the criteria of the study , referred to as snowball sampling which Robinson (2014) explained was a method used when it was not easy to get participants due to reasons of uneasiness on the part of participants to volunteer. In this case, work life balance or mental health are not topics academics were comfortable to talk about. This was discovered during the early recruitment process.

There is sometimes a debate on whether the sample should be homogeneous or heterogenous, scholars advocate that it should be according to the purpose of research - Robinson (2014). Through Smith (2015), we are informed that some variation in the informants background is good for the purpose of adding to the richness of the information collected. These methods proved to be effective as they resulted in informants holding various roles in differently ranked universities. Informants from different universities (high and low ranked universities) opened up the opportunity to draw out similarities and differences between informants holding similar roles.

Unlike quantitative research where there is a need to control or exclude or use a variable, the only important thing that must be ensured strictly in a qualitative research is controlling for bias (Endacott & Botti, 2005). The academics were asked to choose their favourite flower which would be used as their code name to protect their identity. The background details of the informants and their codename (in brackets) is presented in Table 1 which shows a wide cross-section of the informants' demographics.

Table 1: Background of informants

Position	Age Group	Group of 8 universities	Gender
Research Fellow (Blue Corn)	40 to 50	Yes	Female
Associate Prof (Carnation)	61 to 70	No	Male
Research Fellow (Daffodil)	51 to 60	No	Female
Management Position (Dahlia)	61 to 70	No	Male
Lecturer (Daisy)	61 to 70	No	Female
Research Fellow (Hydrangea)	51 to 60	No	Male
Lecturer (Lily)	51 to 60	Yes	Male
Lecturer (Orchid)	40 to 50	No	Male
Senior Lecturer/Head of Masters Programme (Wattle)	40 to 50	No	Female

The participants in this study are a combination of male and female, of different ages and ranks at various universities. Such variation is not uncommon. Braun and Clarke (2006) in their study on the teaching and training experience of LGBT students, compared students from New Zealand and Britain; 10 from each country, varying in age, ethnicity, race and a few other aspects. This was done to draw out rich information from a heterogenous sample.

SAMPLE SIZE

Addressing the issue of the ongoing debate of sample size, Hennink and Kaiser (2021) explained that the sample size of qualitative study is small as the purpose of the sampling is to gather in-depth information based on a specific topic. Mason (2010) suggested that it is better to use saturation rather than a pre-determined sample size. Which Boddy (2016) found that a sample size of 12 would reach saturation. But Hennink and Kaiser (2021) found that saturation level could also be achieved between 9-17 interviews or a 4-8 focus group discussion. What scholars refer to as data saturation or thematic saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021) according to Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) is the point when the interviewer gets no new information from interviewing. Hennink and Kaiser (2021) also showed that the saturation point was reached based on the scope of the study rather than if it was a homogenous or heterogenous population. For this sample, nine informants were interviewed.

INTERVIEW

In studies where exploring the life stories of informants is necessary as in a qualitative study, interviewing is mostly used (Rubin & Rubin, 2011), mainly in-depth interviewing. Showkat and Parveen (2017) explained that in-depth interviews can be structured, semi structured or unstructured. In this study, semi structured interviews were conducted to address the major areas, but this method allowed the informants to give more detailed information or new information that was not thought of earlier. Semi structured interviews also give the researcher the option to ask further questions, apart from the basic questions, to collect more in-depth information about an area (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). In addition, Showkat and Parveen (2017) explained that in-depth interviewing is the most efficient way to collect information rich primary data in comparison to surveys or questionnaires.

Consistent with the qualitative method of collecting data, the interviewees were made comfortable so, the conversations started by talking about each interviewee's background, known as easy points which Alsaawi (2014) suggested should be done prior to moving on to research related data collection. Subsequently, the informants were led to the main areas (Alsaawi, 2014) through indirect questions on breaks and holidays . Taking the lead from the work of Bucek (2013), work life balance questions were approached by talking about holidays. The informants were allowed to speak until they were satisfied that they had said all they had to say. The sessions went from half hour to one hour for each individual. Though the number of informants was set, the data collection had reached a saturation point (Marshall et al., 2013) from the selected numbers.

Transcribing
The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed as they took place. Each transcript was sent to the respective informant for confirmation on its accuracy. After the confirmation was received, the transcript was coded.

Data Coding
Qualitative data analysis is seen as a difficult process because it is not mechanical; it involves a lot of thinking and making sense of the data collected (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002).This is rightly so, as the process starts with reading, re-reading and spending time looking back at the interviews and comparing the information from different informants. There comes a point when the researcher is able to identify the informants based on what was recorded. This is because the interviewer will make notes, points, and highlight sentences that seem valuable.

THE WHAT - FINDINGS
Working Holidays
Majority of the academics interviewed were not able to cope with their work; their work extended into weekends and holidays such as shown below.
:
> '….. for the Easter holiday, for example. I would spend every day of Easter writing a paper
> that I would have to get ready for the middle of the year. It's the only time I would not be
> doing field work or attending meetings or supervising students, so I look forward to holidays
> for sure but some of those holidays that aren't annual leave, like Easter break, I'm not kidding.
> I'll be sitting every single day at my desk writing. It's very high pressure, stressful. I find it stressful.'
> -Bluecorn

On this same point, another participant had this to say:

> '*Sometimes organisations introduce pressure like Summer Schools. They ask you to take leave, but they give more work in the summer, so you cannot take leave. You look at the university, I reckon there is massively 'untaken' leave. You have to work during semester and then try and research during the breaks. You do publications and research during the break, so you cannot take holidays and organisations create this problem!*'
> -Carnation

Yet another participant who was originally from the UK, started off by saying:

> '*I still have not gotten used to 20 years on, having leave for only 4 weeks. I came from the UK, being in the university there, we had 7 weeks leave, we didn't necessarily take it all but the system was running different.*'
> -Daffodil

The implication here is that the work system currently imposed disallows time off. But actually, it does not matter because responding to if she felt rushed to work, she continued:

> '*Probably yes. Because everything will pile up the longer you are away. Even when I am on leave, I will usually still check emails. I will still sometimes deal with important things. It's probably very rare that I switch off completely. Checking my email is probably the first thing that I do when I get up in the morning. When I leave work, I will probably take some work with me to work on, and will keep checking emails.*'
> - Daffodil

This clearly indicates that she does not have any chance of a true sense of a break to unwind. The reasons given were:

> '*To get the job done. To meet the deadline. And sometimes when you work in teams with other people, by the time you have got the information to do what you need to do, and the deadline is coming up you don't have any options. I would work on a public holiday because I interview in another state, and it wasn't a public holiday there.*'
> - Daffodil

Another 54-year-old academic, when asked about needing a break:

> '*If I can take a long enough break, yah... But it's usually, that I should take small breaks during the year when we haven't got an intensive teaching period.*'
> -Hydrangea

Consistent with the majorities responses to having to work on breaks/holidays, he said he could never cut away entirely:

> '*I guess it's because, I guess there's an expectation in this kind of work that it's just not simply a 9 to 5 kind of job that you can't just punch a card and walk out and turn your back on everything. Yeah. If there is work that needs to be done then it needs to be done, if somebody needs to find out some information, and you're the person that they are going for, then you need to respond to them. I think it's an implicit expectation of you, it's not something that is said that you have to do, but I feel like in academia, it's expected that people work outside of their normal work hours.*'
> -Hydrangea

The response from a 55-year old participant was more diplomatic: in his response

> '*Well, that's sort of the job, it's one of those jobs whereby mostly you balance life and work and there's a whole range of different opportunities, when you...in a sense your holiday is actually being able to sit back, relax and do some reading and research. That's the holiday*'
> -Lily

When asked if it was still work related, this 55-year-old participant:

> *'Yeah…yeah…that's the nature of academia, and that's not the case for every academic*
> *but for many academics, the holiday is sure, you might just sit down and do nothing, but*
> *you have the opportunity to indulge yourself in some of the more inspiring research activities*
> *that have always been put off.'*
> -Lily

A 43-year-old was asked whether she looked forward to holidays responded

> *'Yes, I do. I tend to though use all my holiday time to do research.'*
> -Orchid

Did she think it was fair? Her response:

> *'No, I don't think it is. But I do it. I do it probably because I am trying to. I am always*
> *trying to make the point that I am trying to catch up but I'm never going to catch up*
> *but I've come to realise and it's taken a long time to get to this point that time is also*
> *important so that I can refresh, reset and continue to sustain the performance otherwise.*
> *And it's taken a long time to get to this point to realise that, but I do look forward to*
> *holidays. But unfortunately, they do tend to become used for other things like doctoral*
> *studies and research publications, working on manuscripts, working on whatever it happens*
> *to be at that time.'*
> -Orchid

Work life balance depends on your position
It was not all bad for everyone. A high position in an organisation was shown to clearly affect one's work life balance as the next interviews will show. In the case of the Dean of the faculty, everything was good; recalling his holiday travel with his spouse, he said:

> *'…we went to Amsterdam on our way to Ireland last year. We've got an old friend*
> *I met 30 years ago who had come and stayed with us. We've got friends at Winchester*
> *University, we see them every year, when they come out to Australia and all that. We're*
> *going to Spain with a Professor from another university. The university sent me to Texas*
> *Al Paso to run a course online between Australia and the US. And the other thing is*
> *because I was an Editor of the journal, I had email contact with every person on earth.*
> *African, many Malaysian universities, Chinese, Japanese. Got a good friend in Hiroshima,*
> *Japan. It's brilliant.*
> -Dahlia

The important point to note here, among all those interviewed, he was the only one with a 'different and thrilling experience'. When asked for confirmation if his holidays were actually to have fun and it was not because 'Oh, life is so terrible, I need to take a break!', with enthusiasm in his voice he said,

> *'Ah…no.' Look the trips teaching overseas were good breaks, they took you out of situations.'*
> -Dahlia

No one else had such experiences.

> *'They were still work, but I've never sort of needed to, you know we've always taken holidays.*
> *We go to Ireland, 3 months of the year. We've always travelled quite a lot. I don't take holidays*
> *because I'm stressed or anything like that. It's just the time that we are catching up with people t*
> *hat we've known for the last 30 years*.'
> -Dahlia

A female Senior Lecturer and Head of the Masters MBA programme , also seems to have achieved a work life balance based on her response to the question if work was on her mind when she goes on holiday. She responded,

> *'Absolutely not.'*
> -Wattle

Her reply was not as good as the Dean's but she is able to exert some control.

> '*Generally, the desire to check emails or just do something like that eases up after one or so days for me. I'm very strict about it.*'
> -Wattle

It was not always that way for her, as she explains.

> '*When I worked as a professional staff member, I was constantly working through the weekends because projects have deadlines, regardless of where you are. Before that, I was a sessional staff member, and I always worked weekends to do the marking or whatever. But when I moved back into academia, I had a colleague from my professional staff days who said, start as you mean to finish. And I've always sort of reflected on that and tried to make sure that when it was the weekend, I had the weekend. And if it's a public holiday like Anzac Day, I'm not looking at my emails. I'm not writing a test, which I have to do at the moment (laugh). And the same goes for when I have two weeks off and I'm going overseas, or just staying at home on the couch, I do not look at emails. I do not mark assignments. But in my professional staff role, as a Project Manager, I'm super organised, so I can make that work. But that is a real priority for me to be so organised that I don't have to do it.*'
> -Wattle

She went on to say that she can organise her work and she is disciplined in finishing work.

Psychological stress
Another participant, who is in her 60's, showed signs of stress and unhappiness. She hinted at mental issues, as she started off by saying,

> '*I think that the pressures that are brought on in all organisations and not just this organisation, in all universities, there is a pressure to bring in students. I think it is unethical; leading students, selling students a false hope.*'
> -Daisy

Pursuing it further by asking how it made her feel, without hesitation, she responded,

> '*Quite sick at times, I've had issues. I do go and speak to DVCs (Deputy Vice Chancellor) here about issues and I feel as if I am hitting my head against the brick wall.*'
> -Daisy

It was not just her, others too, she shared. And the way they dealt with it, …

> '*work from home. And they do work from home, I'm not saying that just because they're not on campus, doesn't mean that they are not working.*'
> -Daisy

Working from home was a way she and her colleagues dealt with the mounting stress. This is consistent to the findings of (Urbina-Garcia, 2020)

Adequate Resources
Adequate resources have an impact on work life balance Barkhuizen et al. (2014) as shown below. The senior Lecturer and Head of the Masters MBA programme showed a comparison of working with two different institutes of higher education. She highlighted that some universities are adequately resourced,

> '*The university I am at now is very well resourced. Whereas as a Programme Director at my previous university, every day I would have a line of students outside my office, and I quite enjoyed that because you'd hear their personal stories, but I could be signing the same form 10 times, 15 times most of the day. It's not potentially, [some people would feel that it's not academic work] good use of my time to sign forms that could be signed by someone in an administrative role. Here, I don't have the line of students with forms and*

> *paperwork and those repetitive tasks to do.'*
> -Wattle

Hydrangea commented on inadequate resources by saying,

> '*There's a lot of administrative things that we tend to become burdened with'*
> -Hydrangea

Reflecting the stress or burnout as pointed out by Barkhuizen et al. (2014), she continued;

> '*it's probably a consequence of restructuring in this university and indeed across the sector*
> *.... And I'm not saying that our time is better spent than anyone else, sometimes there are*
> *people better able to deal with certain administrative functions (there is the negative*
> *impact of administrative work as well, i.e. a lot of the meetings).'*
> -Hydrangea

DISCUSSION

The majority of the academics interviewed did not have a clear distinction between work and their personal/private lives and as a result worked long hours. Unlike the findings of past studies, the lack of a work life balance affected both males and females. That many of the academics are having to continuously work is a strong indication that their work places are not equipped with adequate resources especially human resources. The majority of the informants did not have decent work hours or manageable job demands which is consistent with the findings of Currie and Eveline (2011) that reported that academics felt that their privacy was invaded. One of the female informants was undergoing professional help due to workplace stress and strained work relationships similar to the study by Steel et al. (2014) and (Urbina-Garcia, 2020) .

With the exception of two informants who were enjoying their work as they were able to strike a balance between work and their personal lives (Haar et al., 2014; Happy, 2021), the others looked sad, stressed and their voices were strained, which again showed that these institutes of higher education are neglecting the well-being of academics similar to the outcome from the study by Urbina-Garcia (2020). This will ultimately affect the productivity of the institutes of higher education as pointed out by Bell et al. (2012) and like Tariq et al. (2012) warned, these institutes of higher education will be the losers. A side finding from the interviews seems to indicate that the reasons academics are in this situation may be because the management of these organisations are focused on profiteering given the work overload and the lack of opportunities to be able to take a break from work, taking the hint from Daisy and Hydrangea.

Lack of staff resulting in administrative work overload may probably be to reduce the expenses and show increased profits. It is worth remembering that institutes of higher education were not intended to be profit centres. Institutes of higher education should prioritise quality education through proper work management of their academics. This should start with hiring adequate numbers of Lecturers at suitable levels. These Lecturers should be equipped with suitable tools to perform their work through an effective and efficient workflow process.

Despite the emphasis on SDG goal number 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), these institutes had inadequate employees and ineffective work processes resulting in academics of all ages suffering from stress and an absence of a work life balance. Only one person has admitted to seeking help for mental health issues but as reported in Forbes February 2022, it may be probable that many are not admitting to this due to the fear of being stigmatised.

LIMITATIONS

This study has added good, in-depth knowledge of the work life balance of academics. However, it would be better if the study was able to look into the recruitment and hiring process of support staff. Most of the academics were loaded with work that is best done by support staff who are better fitted for it as pointed out by Hydrangea.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

This study has shown that the institutes of higher education involved in this research and findings need to take the necessary steps to protect the mental health and well-being of their academics by providing a healthy work environment. Work life balance is crucial for academics to provide quality output and for these organisations to be productive. If the issue is left unattended, it will lead to poor quality education which will result in the collapse of a nation. At present these institutes of higher education, highly ranked or otherwise are clearly not concerned with the well-being of their academics and are far from achieving SDG goal #3, Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages which is deeply concerning as this is happening in institutes of higher education, where all professions start.

Institutes of higher education should take the trouble to plan the hours and semesters of teaching staff to not exceed 9 hours per semester. 9 hours of teaching will lead to a total of 13.5 hours course time, taking into account preparation time. Also, the institutes of higher education should rotate teaching duties, so staff need not teach every semester given that now, the institutes of higher education are having more than 2 semesters. Furthermore, administrative work such as recruitment and invigilation should not be assigned to Lecturers. Most institutes of higher education are showing that they are weak in talent management. As seen in the interviews, Lecturers have mentioned that some people are better able to handle administrative work, making it unnecessary for lecturers to do it and spend time away from their core focus.

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