

WORK-FAMILY BALANCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF OF UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between work-family balance and psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria. A descriptive correlational research design was employed, and data were collected from 356 academic staff using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire measuring dimensions of work-family balance (time-based, strain-based, behavioural, and resource-based) and psychological distress (emotional, cognitive, and somatic). Descriptive statistics revealed that participants reported moderate levels of work-family balance and low to moderate psychological distress. Multiple regression analysis indicated that work-family balance significantly predicted psychological distress, accounting for 26.4% of its variance. Specifically, time-based balance, strain-based balance, and resource-based balance were significant predictors, whereas behavioural balance did not contribute significantly. The findings suggest that difficulties in managing time, controlling stress spillover, and limited access to supportive resources increase psychological distress, while better balance reduces strain. The study concludes that work-family balance significantly predicts psychological distress among university academic staff in South-West Nigeria, with poor management of work and family demands linked to higher emotional, cognitive, and physical strain, while improved balance is associated with better mental well-being. Recommendations include implementing flexible scheduling, providing mental health support, and strengthening organizational resources to improve balance and reduce distress.

Keywords: Academic staff, Nigeria, Psychological distress, Universities, Work-family balance.

Introduction

The global academic profession is under increased pressure as higher education institutions report rising levels of work-family imbalance combined with mounting psychological distress among academic staff. Across numerous countries, university lecturers and researchers face heavy workloads, blurred boundaries between professional and family roles, and growing emotional strain that threaten both their well-being and institutional productivity (Abraham et al., 2025). In such an environment, the interplay between work-family balance and psychological distress among academic staff merits close investigation.

Psychological distress refers to a state of poor mental well-being characterized by symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and general emotional turmoil, arising when individuals' coping resources are insufficient to meet the demands of their environment (Esteban, 2022). Among university academic staff, psychological distress may stem from role overload, constant availability, research performance pressures, and the dual demands of teaching and service. For example, Coker et al. (2024) found significant levels of work-related distress and psychological morbidity among lecturers, and attributed

such distress to work stressors and inadequate coping mechanisms.

The dimensions of psychological distress often include emotional symptoms (such as persistent sadness and irritability), cognitive symptoms (such as persistent worry, difficulty concentrating), and somatic symptoms (such as sleep disturbance, fatigue). In higher-education settings, symptoms such as burnout, diminished job engagement, and reduced quality of life may emerge when these dimensions remain unaddressed. For example, research in Latin America showed that among female university professors workload and psychological distress predicted lower life satisfaction (Esteban, 2022).

Work-family balance denotes the degree to which individuals are able to negotiate and satisfactorily fulfill their work and family-related roles, and achieves a sense of harmony between professional obligations and family or personal life (Lin & Li, 2025). It is distinct from mere absence of conflict; it emphasizes positive alignment of roles, adequate allocation of time and energy, and the minimization of interference between work and family duties.

The dimensions of work-family balance may include time-based balance (sufficient time for work and family roles), strain-based balance (minimal spillover of stress from work to family, or vice versa), behavioural balance (role-behaviour compatibility across domains), and resource-based balance (availability of personal and organizational resources to meet role demands). Empirical research has identified specific sub-dimensions such as adjustment (deliberate changes to schedule or role demands), defence (protecting one domain from intrusion by the other), conversion (leveraging experiences in one domain to benefit the other), feedback (resources from one area enhancing the other), and compensation (resources from one area offsetting deficiencies in the other) (Lin & Li, 2025).

Empirical evidence indicates a negative relationship between work-family balance and psychological distress. When academic staff manages to achieve better balance, they report lower distress levels; when balance is poor, distress rises. Ashari et al. (2024) found that work-family balance correlated significantly with psychological well-being and job satisfaction. In academic settings, blurred boundaries between work and home, high job demands and inadequate institutional support fuel this relationship. Moreover, in the Nigerian context, recent findings indicate moderate to high stress levels among university employees, where high perceived stress was significantly associated with anxiety and depression (Adeleke, 2025).

Despite this growing body of work, gaps remain. Very few studies focus specifically on academic staff within universities in the South-West Nigeria region addressing both work-family balance and psychological distress together. Those Nigerian studies that do exist often treat work-life or work-family issues abstractly without disaggregating dimensions of balance, or they focus solely on performance outcomes rather than psychological distress per se (Kadiri & Isokpan, 2023). Moreover, existing studies often do not explore how specific dimensions of work-family balance relate to the separate dimensions of psychological distress within the academic staff population in Nigeria. As such, the specific problem addressed by this study is the limited empirical evidence concerning how work-family balance and its sub-dimensions relate to psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria.

This study is justified because academic staff in Nigerian universities plays a critical role in national development through teaching, research and community service. Psychological distress and poor work-family balance among this group may have far-reaching consequences not only for individual well-being but also for institutional effectiveness and student outcomes. By investigating the relationships among work-family balance and psychological distress among academic staff in South-

West Nigeria, this research will inform institutional policy and individual coping strategies. It will also fill the regional empirical gap and provide evidence for appropriate interventions.

Objectives

- i. To assess the levels of work-family balance and psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria;
- ii. To determine the relationship between the dimensions of work-family balance and the dimensions of psychological distress among academic staff; and
- iii. to investigate the extent to which work-family balance predicts psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria

Research Question

What are the levels of work-family balance and psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: The dimensions of work-family balance do not significantly relate to the dimensions of psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria.

H₀₂: Work-family balance does not significantly predict psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive correlational research design. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to examine the relationship between the variables of interest, namely, work-family balance and psychological distress, without manipulating any condition. It also enabled the identification of the predictive influence of work-family balance on psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria. A correlational design is suitable for studies that seek to determine the degree of association or prediction between two or more variables in a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The population of the study comprised all academic staff of federal, state, and private universities located in South-West Nigeria. This region consists of six states, namely, Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti, and hosts several universities with varying institutional ownership and staff structures. The academic staff population includes lecturers across all ranks (Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer II, Lecturer I, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, and Professor). According to the National Universities Commission, there are approximately 15,000 academic staff serving in universities across the region as at 2024. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select academic staff. In the first stage, six universities (two federal, two state, and two private institutions) were purposively to ensure representation across ownership types. In the second stage, proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select participants across academic ranks to maintain representativeness. Finally, simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to select individual respondents. The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations, which yielded a minimum of 384 participants. This sample size was considered adequate to allow meaningful statistical analysis and generalization of findings (Mertens, 2020).

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into three sections. Section A obtained demographic information such as gender, age, marital status, academic rank, years of service, and university type. Section B measured work-family balance using the Work-Family Balance Scale (Carlson et al., 2009), which assesses time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based balance. The scale

consists of 18 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument has been validated in several studies, showing Cronbach’s alpha coefficients between .78 and .89 (Ashari et al., 2024; Lin & Li, 2025).

Section C measured psychological distress using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) (Kessler et al., 2003). The K10 consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point scale (1 = none of the time to 5 = all of the time) assessing symptoms of anxiety and depression over the past four weeks. The K10 has been widely validated for use among adult populations and demonstrated reliability coefficients above .80 in Nigerian and international samples (Adeleke, 2025; Coker et al., 2024). A pilot study was conducted among 30 academic staff outside the selected universities to test the reliability of the instruments. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients obtained were .86 for the Work-Family Balance Scale and .90 for the K10, indicating high internal consistency.

Method of Data Collection

After obtaining institutional permission and ethical clearance, questionnaires were administered to respondents both physically and electronically (through institutional mailing lists). Trained research assistants assisted in distributing and collecting the questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were given one week to complete and return the instruments. Follow-up reminders were sent to enhance the response rate.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, means, standard deviations were used to determine the levels of work-family balance and psychological distress among respondents, addressing the research question. Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficients were employed to test the first hypothesis, while multiple regression analysis was used to test the second hypothesis. All hypotheses were tested at a .05 level of significance.

Results

Demographic Presentation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Participants’ Demographics (N = 356)

S/N	Variable	Level	Count	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	192	53.9
		Female	164	46.1
2	Age (years)	Below 30	69	19.4
		30-49	167	46.9
		50 & above	120	33.7
3	Marital Status	Single	32	9.0
		Married	296	83.1
		Separated	28	7.9
4	Academic Rank	Assistant Lecturer	60	16.9
		Lecturer II	57	16.0
		Lecturer I	53	14.9
		Senior Lecturer	92	25.8
		Associate Professor	50	14.0
		Professor	44	12.4
5	Years of Service	Less than 10	65	18.2
		10-19	164	46.1

6	University Type	20 & above	127	35.7
		Federal	134	37.6
		State	138	38.8
		Private	84	23.6

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 356 academic staff who participated in the study. The gender distribution shows that males (53.9%) slightly outnumber females (46.1%), indicating a modest male predominance among respondents. In terms of age, nearly half of the participants (46.9%) fall within the 30–49-year age bracket, followed by those aged 50 years and above (33.7%), while 19.4% are below 30 years, suggesting that the sample is largely composed of mid-career and senior academics. The majority of respondents (83.1%) are married, with smaller proportions being single (9.0%) or separated (7.9%). Regarding academic rank, senior lecturers constitute the largest group (25.8%), followed by assistant lecturers (16.9%), lecturer II (16.0%), lecturer I (14.9%), associate professors (14.0%), and professors (12.4%), reflecting a fairly balanced representation across ranks with a concentration at mid-level positions. Concerning years of service, most participants have between 10 and 19 years of experience (46.1%), 35.7% have served 20 years or more, and 18.2% have less than 10 years of service, indicating a predominance of experienced staff. Finally, respondents are fairly evenly distributed across university types, with 38.8% from state universities, 37.6% from federal universities, and 23.6% from private universities, demonstrating broad institutional representation within the sample.

Analysis of Research Question

What are the levels of work-family balance and psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria?

Table 2: Levels of Work-Family Balance and Psychological Distress among Academic Staff (N = 356)

S/N	Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	Work-Family Balance	3.42	0.78
2	Psychological Distress	2.76	0.84

The results presented in Table 2 show that academic staff reported a moderate level of work-family balance, with a mean score of 3.42 (SD = .78). This indicates that, on average, lecturers experience a fair ability to manage their work and family responsibilities effectively. The mean score for psychological distress was 2.76 (SD = .84), suggesting that the respondents experience a low to moderate level of psychological distress. These findings imply that while academic staff are moderately successful in balancing work and family roles, some level of psychological strain still exists within the academic workforce.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One (H₀₁)

The dimensions of work-family balance do not significantly relate to the dimensions of psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria.

Table 4.1: Multiple Regression Showing the Influence of Work-Family Balance Dimensions on Psychological Distress (N = 356)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	32.441	2.155	-	15.05	.000
Time-based balance	-.218	.064	-.211	-3.41	.001
Strain-based balance	-.304	.072	-.265	-4.22	.000
Behavioural balance	-0.097	0.058	-0.089	-1.67	.096
Resource-based balance	-0.185	0.061	-0.173	-3.03	.003

R = .521, R² = .272, Adj. R² = .264, F_(4, 351) = 32.74, p < .05, Std. Error = 4.21

Dependent Variable: Psychological Distress

Table 4.1 presents the regression results showing the influence of the four dimensions of work-family balance on psychological distress among academic staff. The regression model was significant, $F_{(4, 351)} = 32.74$, $p < .05$, with the predictors jointly accounting for 26.4% of the variance in psychological distress (Adjusted R² = .264). This shows that work-family balance meaningfully explains the level of psychological distress experienced by the respondents. Three predictors contributed significantly to the model. Time-based balance ($\beta = -.211$, $p = .001$) and strain-based balance ($\beta = -.265$, $p = .000$) showed the strongest effects, indicating that academic staff who are able to manage their time and prevent the spillover of strain between roles reported lower distress. Resource-based balance also contributed significantly ($\beta = -.173$, $p = .003$), suggesting that access to personal and organisational resources reduces distress levels. Behavioural balance did not make a significant contribution ($\beta = -.089$, $p = .096$).

Since the overall regression was significant and several predictors showed meaningful effects, the null hypothesis that the dimensions of work-family balance do not significantly relate to the dimensions of psychological distress is rejected. The findings show that work-family balance has a measurable influence on psychological distress among academic staff in universities in South-West Nigeria. Time-based, strain-based, and resource-based balance are important predictors of emotional, cognitive, and somatic distress, while behavioural balance was not statistically meaningful in this analysis.

Hypothesis Two (H₀₂)

Work-family balance does not significantly predict psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria.

Table 4.2: Simple Linear Regression Showing the Influence of Work-Family Balance on Psychological Distress (N = 356)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	14.327	1.216	-	11.78	.000
Work-Family Balance	-.462	.055	-.518	-8.41	.000

R = .518, R² = .268, Adj. R² = .266, F_(1, 354) = 70.73, p < .05, Std. Error = 3.27

Dependent Variable: Psychological Distress

Table 4.1 shows that work-family balance significantly predicted psychological distress among academic staff in universities in South-West Nigeria, $F_{(1, 354)} = 70.73$, $p < .05$. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .268$) indicates that work-family balance accounted for 26.8% of the variation in psychological distress. The regression coefficient for work-family balance ($\beta = -.518$, $p < .05$) was negative and significant. This means that psychological distress decreased as work-family balance increased. In practical terms, academic staff who could manage their work and family roles reported fewer signs of emotional, cognitive, or physical distress compared to those with lower levels of work-family balance. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis stating that work-family balance does not

significantly predict psychological distress was rejected.

Discussion

The first major finding in this study showed that academic staff reported a moderate level of work-family balance and a low to moderate level of psychological distress. This suggests that while lecturers are fairly successful in managing their work and family duties, they still experience emotional, cognitive, and physical strain. This finding agrees with Ashari et al. (2024), who reported that lecturers experience middling levels of work-family balance due to competing job and personal commitments. It also aligns with Adeleke (2025), who found that Nigerian academic staff experience moderate psychological strain linked to role overload and limited institutional support. The present finding is contrary to the report of Coker et al. (2024), whose study showed higher levels of psychological distress among lecturers in public universities, possibly due to differences in organisational conditions across study locations.

The regression results further showed that the dimensions of work-family balance jointly predicted psychological distress among academic staff, accounting for 26.4% of the variation in distress levels. This confirms that difficulties in balancing work and family duties contribute meaningfully to psychological strain among lecturers. The result strengthens the findings of Esteban (2022), who reported that poor work-family alignment was a major contributor to emotional exhaustion and reduced life satisfaction among female academics in Latin America. It also supports the submission of Lin and Li (2025), who argued that work-family balance exerts a measurable influence on mental well-being outcomes in higher education. In the Nigerian setting, the finding extends the observations of Adeleke (2025), who reported that high perceived stress among university staff was associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms. Together, the results confirm that work-family balance is not merely a matter of convenience but an important determinant of psychological health among academic personnel.

A closer examination of individual predictors revealed that time-based balance significantly reduced psychological distress. Lecturers who were able to allocate adequate time to both work and family experienced less emotional strain. This agrees with the work of Ashari et al. (2024), who found that lecturers with better schedule control reported lower stress and higher well-being. It also corresponds with Esteban (2022), who observed that workload pressure and time scarcity were major triggers of emotional turmoil among female academics. The present result differs from Kadiri and Isokpan (2023), who did not find a significant association between time allocation and teacher well-being in their study of college lecturers in Edo State. Their finding, however, may be linked to differences in job autonomy between university and college environments.

Strain-based balance also contributed significantly and was the strongest predictor of psychological distress. Academic staff who experienced less spillover of strain between work and family roles reported lower levels of distress. This finding strengthens the position of Coker et al. (2024), who linked distress among lecturers to stress spillover from demanding work schedules into family life. It also supports the result of Ashari et al. (2024), who reported that strain interference between work and home was a strong predictor of psychological ill-health.

Resource-based balance significantly predicted psychological distress in a negative direction. Academic staff who possessed personal and organisational resources such as family support, workload flexibility, and institutional assistance were less distressed. This finding is consistent with Lin and Li (2025), who emphasised the importance of resource access in supporting balance between family and work roles. It also agrees with the observations of Esteban (2022), who reported that lack of institutional resources increased psychological strain among female academics. The present finding further confirms earlier Nigerian evidence (Adeleke, 2025), which noted that lack of workplace

support was associated with psychological morbidity among university employees.

Behavioural balance did not significantly predict psychological distress. This suggests that role-behaviour compatibility across work and family duties does not exert a strong independent influence on distress levels among academic staff. This finding differs from the submission of Lin and Li (2025), who reported that behavioural alignment was a significant predictor of psychological well-being among professionals in China. However, it agrees partly with findings by Kadiri and Isokpan (2023), who observed that behavioural adjustment strategies were less influential than stress-related and time-related factors in shaping teachers' mental health outcomes. The non-significant finding in the present study may indicate that academic roles allow more behavioural flexibility than roles in other professions, reducing the effect of behavioural mismatch on distress levels.

Thus, the findings from this study reinforce the assertion that work-family balance and psychological distress are closely linked among academic staff. The pattern observed highlights the importance of time management, strain reduction, and access to resources in reducing distress. The results provide evidence that improving balance between work and family roles may contribute to better mental well-being and enhanced performance among lecturers in South-West Nigerian universities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that work-family balance is a significant predictor of psychological distress among academic staff of universities in South-West Nigeria. Difficulties in managing time, controlling stress spillover between roles, and accessing supportive resources were associated with higher distress levels, while better balance reduced emotional, cognitive, and physical symptoms of strain. The results indicate that the ability to coordinate work and family demands is an important determinant of mental well-being among lecturers, and improving balance may help reduce psychological distress in the university system.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Universities should introduce structured work-family support programmes, including flexible scheduling, reduced workload periods, and family-friendly policies, to help academic staff better manage competing role demands and reduce psychological distress.
2. Regular mental health and stress management interventions should be provided, including counselling services, mindfulness training, and employee assistance programmes, to assist lecturers experiencing psychological strain linked to work-family imbalance.
3. Management should strengthen organizational resources, such as mentorship systems, fair task distribution, and accessible welfare services, to ensure that academic staff have adequate support to maintain work-family balance and protect their psychological well-being.

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