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Article

Job stress and quality of work life through job engagement in private higher education institutions in Muscat, Oman

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Abstract: This study examines the association between job stress and Quality of Work Life (QWL) among academic staff in private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Muscat, Oman. Drawing on Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, the study uses a quantitative cross-sectional design and 303 complete responses analysed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Job stress was measured through time stress and anxiety stress, while QWL was operationalised through the eight dimensions of Walton's model. The reported estimate comes from the full structural model, which also includes job satisfaction, remote e-working, and job engagement. Job stress was negatively associated with job engagement ($\beta = -0.271$, $t = 3.665$, $p < 0.001$), and job engagement was positively associated with QWL ($\beta = 0.765$, $t = 18.397$, $p < 0.001$). The resulting specific indirect association between job stress and QWL through job engagement was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.207$, $t = 3.886$, $p < 0.001$). The full model jointly explained 58.5% of the variance in QWL and showed predictive relevance for QWL ($Q^2 = 0.228$). These findings are consistent with the JD-R health-impairment process, but the cross-sectional design does not establish causality. The paper contributes context-specific evidence from Omani private HEIs and identifies workload governance and faculty support as possible managerial responses rather than tested interventions.

Keywords: job stress; quality of work life; job engagement; academic staff; private higher education; Oman; JD-R theory; PLS-SEM

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Higher education institutions (HEIs) depend on academic staff to deliver teaching, research, supervision, administration, community engagement, and institutional service. These responsibilities increasingly coexist with digitalisation, performance monitoring, accreditation requirements, student-service expectations, and research targets. In private HEIs, these demands may be intensified by market competition, financial constraints, and the need to sustain student satisfaction and institutional quality (Ahmad et al., 2024; Brady & Wilson, 2022).

Quality of Work Life (QWL) captures employees' evaluation of their working conditions, opportunities for development, fairness, social integration, work-life balance, and the social relevance of their work. For academic staff, lower QWL may coincide with weaker engagement, retention, and continuity in teaching and research. Examining the relationship between job stress and QWL is therefore relevant to both employee well-being and the management of private HEIs.

1.2. Problem statement and research contribution

A negative relationship between occupational stress and work-related well-being is already established in many settings. The contribution of this study is therefore contextual rather than a claim that the underlying association is new. Evidence remains limited for academic staff in private HEIs in Muscat, where teaching, research, administrative, accreditation, and student-service demands operate within a diverse and often contract-based workforce. The study examines whether a stress–engagement–QWL pathway observed in the broader international literature is also evident in this setting. Contextual characteristics are used to interpret the results cautiously; they were not tested as moderators.

The analysis uses 303 complete responses and examines the specific indirect association between job stress and QWL through job engagement. The full structural model also includes job satisfaction and remote e-working. R^2 and Q^2 describe the performance of this full model and should be interpreted in relation to the complete set of predictors.

1.3. Research objective and hypothesis

The objective is to examine the association between job stress and QWL among academic staff in private HEIs in Muscat, with specific attention to the indirect pathway through job engagement.

H1: Job stress has a significant negative indirect association with QWL through job engagement among academic staff in private HEIs in Muscat, Oman.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Job stress

Job stress refers to adverse psychological and physiological reactions that arise when job demands are perceived to exceed an employee's capacity or available resources (Chukwuemeka et al., 2023). Academic stressors include workload, deadlines, research expectations, administrative responsibilities, job insecurity, and performance evaluation. This study represents job stress through time stress and anxiety stress. Time stress captures pressure associated with workload and insufficient time; anxiety stress captures worry, tension, and strain associated with work demands.

2.2. Quality of work life

QWL reflects employees' overall evaluation of their work experience. Following Walton's model, the study covers eight dimensions: adequate and fair compensation, opportunities to develop human capacities, social integration at work, constitutionalism at work, opportunities for growth and security, safe and healthy working conditions, social relevance of work, and work and total life space. This multidimensional specification is broader than a single work-life-balance measure and reflects both material and psychosocial aspects of academic employment.

2.3. Job demands resources theory

JD-R theory distinguishes job demands, which require sustained effort and carry psychological or physiological costs, from job resources, which help employees achieve work goals, reduce the costs of demands, or support learning and development (Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). The theory describes a health-impairment process in which sustained demands deplete energy and increase strain, and a motivational process in which resources support engagement.

Time stress and anxiety stress capture experienced pressure and strain on the demand side of JD-R. They do not constitute a complete measurement of job

demands, and this study does not directly test resource buffering. Job satisfaction and remote e-working appear in the full structural model, but they do not substitute for a direct measurement of autonomy, supervisory support, staffing, or recovery resources. The findings are therefore described as consistent with the JD-R health-impairment process rather than as proof of the entire demands–resources mechanism.

2.4. Hypothesis development

Prior research generally links workload and occupational stress with poorer quality of life and work-life balance among academics (Chukwuemeka et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2024; Rathi & Kumar, 2023). In private HEIs in Muscat, simultaneous teaching, research, accreditation, administrative, and student-facing duties may create sustained time pressure. Such pressure can constrain recovery and family time, while anxiety-related strain can weaken energy and psychological attachment to work. Lower engagement may then coincide with poorer evaluations of working conditions, work-life integration, growth opportunities, and the broader quality of the work experience. This logic supports a negative indirect association from job stress to QWL through job engagement. Because the design is cross-sectional, the hypothesis concerns statistical association rather than temporal causation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This design permits estimation of associations among latent variables at a defined point in time but cannot establish temporal order or causal direction. SPSS 27 was used for screening and descriptive analysis, and SmartPLS was used for measurement-model, structural-model, and mediation analysis.

3.2. Population sampling and recruitment

The population comprised 1,216 academic staff across 19 private HEIs in Muscat. The 19 institutions formed the sampling frame. A stratified cluster process identified six participating institutional clusters on the basis of accreditation status, faculty size, programme diversity, and institutional access. After institutional permission was obtained, eligible academic staff within the participating clusters were assigned numeric codes and selected using a random-number generator. Selected staff received personalised invitations through institutional email systems and academic networks, together with the study information and a secure Google Forms link.

The pilot was conducted from 10 to 15 December 2025. Thirty-five academics were invited and 30 returned usable pilot responses. The pilot assessed questionnaire clarity and reliability. The main survey used the refined instrument. Of 310 invitations, 303 complete responses were received, giving a response rate of 97.7%. All questionnaire items were mandatory, and no submitted questionnaire was incomplete and no outlier was detected in the 303-case dataset. A high response rate does not by itself eliminate possible non-response bias.

3.3. Ethics and informed consent

The study followed the university's research-approval procedures and obtained the required national statistical clearance and institutional permissions before the main fieldwork. The survey information page explained the study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, academic use of the data, and the researcher's contact details. Participants proceeded to the questionnaire after reviewing this information; submission of the questionnaire indicated informed consent. No directly identifying

information was reported in the analysis.

3.4. Measurement instruments

All items used a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Work stress was measured using 12 adapted items covering time stress and anxiety stress, with six items per dimension, based on Parker and DeCotiis's (1983) Job Stress Scale. QWL was measured using 36 items across the eight dimensions of Walton's (1973) model. The broader questionnaire also included 20 job-satisfaction items, nine remote e-working items, and 17 job-engagement items. Appendix A presents the QWL and work-stress items used for this article.

Five experts reviewed the instrument for content, language, contextual suitability, and clarity. Wording was adapted to the HEI setting, including replacement of "company" with "institution." In the 30-response pilot, Cronbach's alpha was 0.964 for work stress and 0.890 for QWL, supporting use of the refined instrument in the main study.

3.5. Measurement and structural model assessment

The hierarchical component model was specified as reflective–reflective and estimated in two stages. In the first stage, individual items measured the lower-order dimensions. Item reliability, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity were assessed at this level. In the second stage, lower-order dimension scores served as indicators of the higher-order constructs. The higher-order indicators are dimension scores rather than individual questionnaire items.

The structural analysis used 5,000 bootstrap subsamples and a two-tailed 5% significance criterion. The full model included work stress, job satisfaction, remote e-working, job engagement, and QWL. The focal statistic in this article is the specific indirect association from work stress to QWL through job engagement. R^2 and Q^2 are explicitly reported as statistics for the full model rather than as variance explained by work stress alone.

3.6. Common method bias

The questionnaire used anonymous responses, neutral wording, and separate construct sections to reduce evaluation apprehension and demand characteristics. Harman's single-factor test showed that the first unrotated factor accounted for 34.009% of total variance, below the conventional 50% threshold. This result does not prove that common method bias is absent, but it provides no evidence that one factor dominated the covariance among the measures.

4. Results

4.1. Respondent profileommon method bias

The final sample comprised 303 academics. Male respondents represented 59.1% and female respondents 40.9%; 60.1% held a PhD. Respondents represented different academic ranks, disciplines, nationalities, and levels of experience.

4.2. Descriptive statistics

Variable	n	Mean
Job Stress	303	3.1749
Quality of Work Life	303	3.9235

The mean work-stress score was 3.1749 and the mean QWL score was 3.9235 for the 303 respondents. On the five-point response scale, these values indicate moderate work stress and generally favourable QWL. Item-level skewness and kurtosis were within ±3.00, and all 303 cases were retained after screening.

4.3. Measurement model

At the first stage, work-stress item loadings ranged from 0.702 to 0.914 and QWL item loadings ranged from 0.718 to 0.943. Internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were assessed for these lower-order measures before evaluation of the higher-order constructs.

Construct	**Cronbach α**	Dimension loadings	HTMT WS–QWL
Work Stress	0.957	0.812–0.833	0.317
Quality of Work Life	0.961	0.753–0.860	0.317

At the second stage, the loadings for time stress and anxiety stress were 0.812 and 0.833, respectively, and loadings across the eight QWL dimensions ranged from 0.753 to 0.860. Higher-order Cronbach's alpha values were 0.957 for work stress and 0.961 for QWL. The HTMT value between work stress and QWL was 0.317. Dimension-level VIF values were 2.567 and 2.408 for time stress and anxiety stress, and 2.158–2.753 for the QWL dimensions. These dimension-level VIF values should be distinguished from structural predictor VIF values.

4.4. Structural model and focal indirect association

Path	**β**	**t**	**p**	**95% CI**	**f^2**
Work Stress → Job Engagement	−0.271	3.665	< 0.001	Not reported for component path	0.174
Job Engagement → QWL	0.765	18.397	< 0.001	Not reported for component path	0.741
Work Stress → Job Engagement → QWL	−0.207	3.886	< 0.001	Not reported	Not applicable to an indirect product

Work stress showed a negative specific indirect association with QWL through job engagement ($\beta = -0.207$, $t = 3.886$, $p < 0.001$). Higher work stress was associated with lower job engagement, while higher engagement was associated with higher QWL. The product of the two component paths (-0.271×0.765) was consistent with the reported indirect coefficient after rounding. On the basis of the reported mediation test, H1 was supported.

Effect size f^2 is defined for the contribution of a predictor to an endogenous construct and is not assigned to the product of two paths. In the full model, work stress had a medium effect on job engagement ($f^2 = 0.174$), and job engagement had a large effect on QWL ($f^2 = 0.741$), using the stated 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 reference values.

Endogenous construct	**R^2**	**Q^2**
Job Engagement	0.629	0.258
Quality of Work Life	0.585	0.228

These R^2 and Q^2 values belong to the full structural model. The QWL R^2 of 0.585 indicates that the full set of predictors jointly accounted for 58.5% of the variance in QWL; it does not represent the variance attributable to work stress alone. The QWL Q^2 of 0.228 was obtained by blindfolding and indicates predictive relevance within the reported model.

5. Discussion

The findings identify a significant negative indirect association between job stress and QWL through job engagement. Academics reporting more time pressure and anxiety-related strain also reported lower engagement, and lower engagement coincided with poorer QWL. This pattern is consistent with prior higher-education research linking workload and stress with poorer quality of life and work-life balance (Chukwuemeka et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2024; Rathi & Kumar, 2023). The result should not be interpreted as proof that stress caused a later decline in QWL because all variables were measured at one time.

The result is consistent with the JD-R health-impairment process: sustained pressure may consume energy that would otherwise support engagement. The present measures capture experienced time pressure and anxiety, however, rather than the full range of job demands. The model also did not test whether autonomy, supervisory support, collegial support, staffing, or recovery opportunities buffered the association. The study therefore provides limited support for a theoretically expected pattern and does not demonstrate the complete JD-R mechanism.

The main contribution lies in the setting. Private HEIs in Muscat operate within accreditation, enrolment, financial, teaching, research, and student-service requirements and employ diverse academic workforces. These characteristics make the observed association managerially relevant, but they were not measured as moderators. They remain plausible contextual explanations that require direct testing in future research.

6. Theoretical implications

The study extends the empirical setting in which the stress–engagement–QWL pathway has been examined. It shows that the negative indirect association expected from the JD-R health-impairment logic is present among academic staff in Omani private HEIs. Its theoretical claim is deliberately limited: time stress and anxiety stress represent selected manifestations of pressure and strain, while job resources and buffering processes were not directly measured. Future research should test a fuller JD-R model with explicit job resources and longitudinal ordering.

7. Practical and strategic implications

The results do not establish that any specific intervention will improve QWL. They nevertheless identify possible responses that private HEIs may evaluate. Academic affairs units could review teaching loads, assessment peaks, course allocations, research expectations, and concurrent administrative assignments. Human-resources units could monitor faculty well-being, absence and turnover indicators, and access to confidential support. Senior management could coordinate these functions through transparent workload models and periodic faculty reviews.

Flexible scheduling, protected research time, hybrid work for suitable tasks, counselling access, and limits on concurrent assignments should therefore be

presented as options for evaluation rather than proven outcomes of this study. Feasibility will depend on enrolment patterns, staffing, specialised-course requirements, finances, and accreditation deadlines. Pilot implementation and follow-up measurement would allow institutions to assess whether these responses reduce stress and improve QWL in their own context.

8. Limitations and future research

First, the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal or causal direction. Second, all variables were self-reported in one questionnaire; the Harman test does not rule out common method bias. Third, the institutional sampling frame covered 19 private HEIs, but participation and random selection occurred within six accessible institutional clusters, which limits generalisation beyond those settings. Fourth, a formal comparison of respondents and non-respondents is not reported. Fifth, time stress and anxiety stress capture only part of the job-demands domain, and explicit resource-buffering mechanisms were not tested. Sixth, the focal coefficient is an indirect effect from a broader model; f^2 can be reported for the component paths but not for the indirect product itself.

Future studies should use longitudinal or repeated-measures designs, include public HEIs and institutions outside Muscat, measure specific job resources, and test whether nationality, contract type, academic rank, or institutional governance changes the stress–engagement–QWL pathway. Mixed-method research could also explain how academics interpret workload, anxiety, support, and recovery in different institutional settings.

9. Conclusion

Among academic staff in the participating private HEIs, job stress showed a significant negative indirect association with QWL through job engagement. The result is consistent with the JD-R health-impairment process but does not establish causality or test the full demands–resources mechanism. The study's contribution is context-specific evidence from Oman and a clearer managerial rationale for evaluating workload and faculty-support practices. Any institutional response should be treated as a testable management option and monitored for its actual effect on staff well-being and QWL.

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Appendix A1 Quality of Work Life Items

Code	Item
AFC1	I feel my current salary (remuneration) is fair compared to the work I do.
AFC2	I feel my salary is equitable when compared to my colleagues doing similar work in this institution.
AFC3	I feel I am rewarded fairly (e.g., recognition, financial help, etc.) for my contributions to the institution.
AFC4	I am satisfied with the benefits (e.g. Medical and dental plans) provided by my institution.
ODH1	I feel my work gives me a sense of achievement and professional growth opportunity.
ODH2	I am satisfied with the trainings I received.
ODH3	I have sufficient opportunities to develop my skills and knowledge
ODH4	I am satisfied with the professional development opportunities offered by the institution.
SIW1	My institution values diversity and inclusion among staff.
SIW2	My institution encourages positive relationships among faculty members.
SIW3	My ideas and initiatives are respected and valued as part of this institution, regardless of my background or position.
SIW4	There is a strong sense of teamwork and cooperation among faculty members.
COW1	My rights are treated fairly and respectfully by my superiors and colleagues.
COW2	I can express my opinions freely without fear of unfair treatment.
COW3	The institution has clear and fair policies regarding employee rights and responsibilities.
COW4	My institution ensures equality and justice in decision-making.
OGS1	I have an autonomy and opportunities to make decisions in this job.
OGS2	I feel the importance of the task/work/activity that I do.
OGS3	I am able to be versatile and perform multiple tasks at one time.
OGS4	There is a fair performance evaluation and I do receive feedbacks on my performance.
OGS5	I am encouraged to take initiative and improve how I perform my tasks.
SHC1	The weekly working hours provided are fair.
SHC2	The amount of workloads provided to me are reasonable.
SHC3	I have access to the use of technology and resources that promote my well-being at work.
SHC4	The physical working conditions (e.g., cleaning, lighting, noise etc.) in my institution are comfortable and not hazardous.
SHC5	My institution provides a safe and secure working environment.
SHC6	My workload allows me to maintain my well-being.
SRW1	I feel proud to work in an institution that values social inclusion.
SRW2	My institution has a positive image in the eyes of the society.
SRW3	My institution contributes positively to society.
SRW4	My institution produces quality and marketable graduates.
SRW5	The human resources policy used by the institution is reasonable.

Continuation Table:

Code	Item
WLS1	My job allows me to balance my work and personal life routine effectively.
WLS2	My work schedule allows me to participate in personal or community activities.
WLS3	I have enough time to spend with my family and friends outside of work.
WLS4	I do not feel that my job negatively affects my personal well-being.

Appendix A2 Work Stress Items

Code	Item
TS1	I feel working here makes it hard for me to spend enough time with my family.
TS2	I feel I spend so much time at work that I lose sight of the bigger picture.
TS3	I feel working here leaves me little time for other activities.
TS4	I feel my work often takes up too much of my personal life.
TS5	I feel like I never have a day off from work.
TS6	I feel I sometimes dread work-related calls outside working hours.
AS1	I feel fidgety or nervous as a result of my job.
AS2	I feel my job affects me more than it should.
AS3	I feel guilty when I take time off from job.
AS4	There are many times when my job makes me extremely stressed.
AS5	Sometimes when I think about my job, I experience tightness or tension in my chest.
AS6	Too many academic staffs at my level in the college experience burnout due to job demands.