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Beyond (COVID-19) Lockdown: Faculty Experiences in the Post-Pandemic Academic Landscape

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Abstract

Background: This study investigates the nuanced experiences of faculty members in higher education institutions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on family-work conflict, job satisfaction, and personal wellbeing, the research aims to provide comprehensive insights into the challenges and adaptations encountered by faculty members amidst unprecedented disruptions.

Method: A mixed-method approach was employed, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative measures. The quantitative facet involved 82 participants who responded surveys distributed to faculty members across diverse regions of India. Concurrently, qualitative data were collected through interviews with 30 faculty members in three states. The quantitative study utilized standardized tools, while the qualitative inquiry followed a semi-structured interview schedule.

Result: Quantitative findings revealed a significant upswing in job satisfaction after institutional reopening compared to the lockdown period. However, no significant differences were observed concerning work-family conflict and personal wellbeing. Notably, faculty members reported heightened work-family and family-work interference compared to national statistics. Qualitative responses highlight a notable shift in teaching methodologies, incorporating multimedia and online tools. Faculty members exhibited mixed sentiments about returning to the office, expressed a deepened appreciation for social relationships post-reopening, and emphasized the positive impact of institutional hygiene protocols.

Conclusion: This study offers crucial insights into the multifaceted experiences of faculty members in higher institutions during the COVID-19 lockdown and subsequent reopening. The research contributes valuable perspectives to the evolving discourse on post-pandemic academia, providing a foundation for further exploration and understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by faculty members in the changing scenario of higher education.

37 **Article types**

38 Original Research Article

39 **1. Introduction**

40 In March 2020, the world experienced unprecedented uncertainty, with one of the significant
41 concerns being the disruption of the teaching-learning process due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
42 According to the World Bank (2022), the global impact was extensive, affecting the education of
43 approximately 1.6 billion students across 180 countries. In response, India decided to close all
44 educational institutions in March 2020 and implement remote learning through digital platforms.
45 This shift presented new challenges for teachers worldwide, particularly in higher
46 education (Neuwirth, Jović and Mukherji, 2020). First, it tested teachers' proficiency in computer and
47 information technology, revealing a dissatisfactory status despite specific policies governing the use
48 of information communication technologies in the Indian higher education system (Mukhopadhyay
49 and Parhar, 2014; Irrinki, 2021). Second, the preparation of online materials, especially in non-
50 English languages, proved to be a daunting task. Issues such as the lack of necessary internet
51 connectivity and smart devices added to teachers' dissatisfaction with online education (Dayal, 2023;
52 Singh, Gupta and Yadav, 2023). Third, teachers found themselves with the ethical responsibility of
53 delivering teaching at their own expense, covering costs for the internet, digital materials, equipment,
54 and even fees for acquiring new online/digital skills. Fourth, due to a shortage of staff, many
55 administrative responsibilities were shouldered by teachers alongside their teaching duties (Rawal,
56 2021; Christian, Sutariya and Kagathra, 2022), ranging from syllabus completion to result
57 preparation. Certainly, it has impacted teachers' well-being adversely.

58 The importance of a teacher's well-being cannot be overstated, as it plays a crucial role in their
59 performance in the classroom. A teacher's mental and physical health has a significant impact on
60 their ability to establish a positive learning environment, encourage student participation, and offer
61 effective support (Harding *et al.*, 2019). Considering this, promoting teacher well-being is essential
62 for the success of the educational system and the well-being of students (Evans *et al.*, 2022). Teaching
63 is widely acknowledged to be a demanding profession, often leading to high levels of burnout and
64 attrition rates (Gadermann *et al.*, 2023). However, the unprecedented and far-reaching modifications
65 brought on by the pandemic have further compounded the already-stressful nature of the job. Studies
66 on teacher mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed elevated levels of stress and
67 emotional depletion among educators across several nations (Sokal, Trudel and Babb, 2020; Ozamiz-
68 Etxebarria, Berasategi Santxo, *et al.*, 2021; Silva *et al.*, 2021). A notable proportion of teachers
69 experienced physical symptoms such as neck pain, back pain, headaches, and eyestrain. Additionally,
70 they are faced with psychological issues including stress, anxiety and loneliness, attributed to the
71 demands of online teaching (Dayal, 2023). Variables such as gender, age, job stability, the
72 educational level at which they taught, and parental status negatively impacted their teaching
73 efficiency (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, Idoiaga Mondragon, *et al.*, 2021; Besser, Lotem and Zeigler-Hill,
74 2022). Overall, their enthusiasm for teaching was adversely affected by COVID-19 pandemic (Voss
75 *et al.*, 2023).

76 The COVID-19 pandemic compelled most office-based professionals to transition to remote work, a
77 trend that persists across various sectors (Bick, Blandin and Mertens, 2023). This transformation
78 emphasizes the enduring impact of the pandemic on traditional work arrangements (Galanti *et al.*,
79 2021). It is intuitive, as well as proven in numerous studies (Byron, 2005), that while staying at home,
80 performing both home and office duties may interfere with each other. Work-family conflict refers to

81 the challenge individuals face when the demands and responsibilities of their work role interfere with
82 their family or personal life, and vice versa(Frone, Yardley and Markel, 1997). When employment
83 demands infiltrate family functioning, and family obligations encroach upon the workplace, it gives
84 rise to significant work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC) respectively. It
85 involves a struggle to balance the requirements of work and family responsibilities, leading to stress
86 and potential negative impacts on both domains(Strandh and Nordenmark, 2006). Similar to other
87 professionals, teachers encountered the challenge of adjusting to shifts in their families and personal
88 lives alongside changes in educational activities (Erdamar and Demirel, 2014; Solís García, Lago
89 Urbano and Real Castelao, 2021). Reports from various countries, including India, highlighted
90 alterations in work patterns and family activities among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
91 These studies suggested that the duration of teaching and other academic work increased during
92 COVID-19, leading to disruptions in family and social relationships (Schmidt-Crawford, Thompson
93 and Lindstrom, 2021; Dayal, 2023). Studies in Western countries indicated that job stress, family
94 conflict, and poor mental health are interconnected. WFC has been identified as a source of decreased
95 well-being in several studies, some research has also highlighted the negative impact of FWC on
96 well-being, transcending cultural boundaries(Lu *et al.*, 2006). In a study involving 12,461 married or
97 cohabiting individuals employed in Swedish organizations, researchers explored the relationships
98 between various factors and mental well-being. Though results revealed significant associations with
99 psychosocial working conditions, family circumstances, and WFC, it was WFC that emerged as the
100 most influential factor in mental well-being (Nordenmark, Almén and Vinberg, 2020). Specific to the
101 teaching community, Toprak *et al.* (2022) found that work-family conflict heightened teachers' job
102 stress. An Australian study with a large sample of university employees has reported that after
103 considering job demands, the presence of work-family conflict significantly contributed to explaining
104 the variability observed in both physical symptoms and psychological strain among individuals
105 (Winefield, Boyd and Winefield, 2014). Zhao *et al.* (2022) identified that work-family conflict
106 mediated the relationship between job stress and job burnout, with an individual's self-efficacy for
107 work-family playing a moderating role in this relationship.

108 To overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19 and maintain a semblance of normalcy, many
109 employees transformed their homes into offices. However, this adaptation came at the cost of several
110 compromises, with job satisfaction being one of them(Martin, Hauret and Fuhrer, 2022). While the
111 shift to home offices or remote work situations has been challenging for many, leading to diminished
112 well-being and a poor balance between home and family responsibilities, some argue that there may
113 be a bright side. Previous research has presented evidence that the primary benefits of teleworking
114 from home include increased flexibility and autonomy(Harpaz, 2002; Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi,
115 2020). Thus some studies found that employees were satisfied under remote or teleworking(Ahmadi
116 *et al.*, 2022; Karácsony, 2021; Prodanova and Kocarev, 2022). However, job satisfaction during
117 COVID-19 depended on several factors (such as longevity, home workspace space, autonomy, digital
118 social support, and monitoring mechanisms) (Petcu *et al.*, 2021; Sousa-Uva *et al.*, 2021; Yu and Wu,
119 2021), if these were not catered it resulted in poor job satisfaction(Feng and Savani, 2020;
120 Balasundarn *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, several previous studies had found that decreased job
121 satisfaction was associated with WFC and FWC (Kalliath and Kalliath, 2015) including poor well-
122 being of the workers(Armstrong, Atkin-Plunk and Wells, 2015; Haji Matarsat, Rahman and Abdul-
123 Mumin, 2021; Lim *et al.*, 2021). Among Indian social workers, a positive relationship exists between
124 work and family aspects. When social workers experience an improvement in their work-life balance,
125 it correlates with higher levels of job well-being. Additionally, this positive impact extends further,
126 leading to increased job satisfaction, especially when there is strong support from their
127 families(Kalliath *et al.*, 2019). A similar result was also seen in the Information Technology sector in
128 India, where WFC and FWC predicted job satisfaction and well-being of the employees(Aboobaker

129 and Edward, 2017). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a close association between well-
130 being, work-family conflict (including family-work conflict), and job satisfaction. Similar to other
131 work sectors, these variables are equally crucial for understanding the work experience of the
132 teaching community(Rahman *et al.*, 2020).

133 After being closed since March 2020, institutes of higher education in India reopened for academic
134 activities in physical mode in the second week of February 2022. Contrary to the expectation of
135 normalization and reduction in the negative impact caused by COVID-19, teachers initially showed
136 fear of contamination, other health-related concerns, and family and work-related concerns in
137 different parts of the world (Wakui *et al.*, 2021; Ryan *et al.*, 2023). A qualitative survey of Australian
138 teachers (Ryan *et al.*, 2023) reported increased workload and diminished well-being. Policy
139 implementation, seen as inconsistent and burdensome, made teachers feel like 'guinea pigs' in the
140 government's public health response. This frustration was evident as teachers faced strict isolation
141 rules in their private lives but had to teach in-person, facing challenges such as inadequate hygiene
142 measures and uncertain transmission risks from children. However, it is not clear whether almost one
143 and half years after the reopening of the educational institutions, which were shut down due to
144 COVID-19, what amount of normalcy has prevailed among teachers.

145 In this study, we aimed to investigate the experiences of faculty members in higher education in India
146 during the COVID-19 institutional shutdown and reopening. Our review revealed a gap in the
147 literature, with most studies focusing on the experiences of teachers in elementary or school levels,
148 while the experiences of faculty in higher education (i.e., college and university levels) remain
149 largely unexplored. While some studies have probed into teachers' experiences after reopening
150 (Wakui *et al.*, 2021; Awwad-Tabry, Kfir, *et al.*, 2023; Awwad-Tabry, Levkovich, *et al.*, 2023; Ryan
151 *et al.*, 2023) the duration of observation in these studies did not exceed six months. This limited
152 timeframe might be a contributing factor to the continued reporting of negative impacts by a
153 significant portion of the teaching faculty. Thus, this study was guided by following research
154 questions:

155 Research Question 1. Have there been any significant differences in personal well-being,
156 family-work interference, and job satisfaction among faculty members in higher education after
157 institutional reopening compared to the COVID-19 imposed closure?

158 Research Question 2. What are the subjective experiences of faculty members regarding post-
159 lockdown work changes and challenges, work-life balance after returning to the office, the
160 impact of the pandemic on work and career outlook, post-lockdown psychological status and
161 coping, the institution's adaptation to the post-lockdown work environment, and post-pandemic
162 future work perspectives and views on remote work?

163 The COVID-19 pandemic led to a surge in online studies due to restrictions on physical contact and
164 the convenience of distributing survey instruments digitally (Hlatshwako *et al.*, 2021). Following this
165 trend, our study was also designed to collect data online. However, online data collection has its
166 drawbacks; it is susceptible to selection bias (De Man *et al.*, 2021), careless responses (Jones *et al.*,
167 2022), and low response rates (Yu *et al.*, 2022). These limitations of the online data collections
168 prompted us our next research question about faculty experiences with online surveys.

169 Research Question 3: What was the faculty members' experience with online surveys?

170

171 **2. Methodology**

172 **2.1. Research Design**

173 The findings from mixed-method research studies tend to be more comprehensive than those from
174 studies using a single method (Wisdom *et al.*, 2012), it provides the advantage of covering the
175 complexity of the phenomena that cannot be tackled by a single method alone (Östlund *et al.*, 2011).
176 In the scenario, when quantitative and qualitative data don't match, it's an opportunity to dig deeper
177 into each set and get stronger results (Moffatt *et al.*, 2006). A Convergent Parallel Design is a type of
178 mixed-methods research design in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected concurrently
179 but analyzed separately (Creswell and Clark, 2011). The goal is to compare or corroborate findings
180 from both types of data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Hence,
181 looking at its advantages, and for a deeper understanding of the experience of the faculty members, a
182 convergent parallel mixed-method approach was adopted in this study.

183 **2.2. Participants and Sampling**

184 The targeted sample for this study was faculty members who were regular (permanent) employees
185 and were working at least two years before the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., must have been employed
186 since 2018 or before) in institutes of higher education (i.e., universities). For the quantitative phase of
187 data collection, one public university was randomly drawn for sampling across all states of India
188 from the list given on the website of the University Grant Commission (regularity bodies of Indian
189 universities). Then, the email addresses of the faculty members were searched on the websites of the
190 selected universities. Some states (union territory) have only one university and, in some cases, the
191 details of the faculty members were not available on the university website. In the case where the
192 email addresses of the faculty members were not given on the website, another university was drawn
193 for those particular states. Hence, faculties of 31 universities from 31 states and union territories in
194 India were invited to participate in this study through emails.

195 For the qualitative inquiry, 10 faculty members who responded to the quantitative measures and 20
196 new faculty members were contacted in person or via telephone. All the contacted faculty members
197 responded positively and all the thirty faculty members were then interviewed.

198 **2.3. Measures**

199 **2.3.1. Work-Family Conflict Scale (ISSP)** (Breyer and Bluemke, 2016)

200 This scale measures the extent of conflicting interests between work and family life. It is four items
201 rating scale with 4-point rating categories labeled as 1 = "several times a week", 2 = "several times
202 a month", 3 = "once or twice", and 4 = "never". There are two items for work-family (WF) conflict
203 because of the negative impact of work on family life and the other two items are for conflict because
204 of the negative impact of family life on work (FW). Items were reverse scored such that higher scores
205 represent higher conflict. Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) ranges for this scale and subscales between
206 .50 to .94 across samples of different countries as reported by Breyer and Bluemke (2016). Validity
207 of the scale was established through criterion validity (e.g., female gender, working hours, negative
208 impact on family and health). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .78 and .75 for WF and FW during
209 the lockdown phase, and .82 and .86 for WF and FW after reopening, respectively.

210 **2.3.2. The Generic Job Satisfaction Scale** (Macdonald and MacIntyre, 1997)

211 The generic job satisfaction scale measures various facets of job satisfaction, including aspects such
212 as job stress, boredom, isolation, and danger of illness or injury. It is 10 items rating scale with 5-
213 point rating categories labeled as 1 = “strongly disagree”, 2 = “disagree”, 3 = “don’t know”, 4 =
214 “agree” and 5 = “strongly agree”. The total score is interpreted such that higher scores represent
215 higher job satisfaction. Cronbach’s alpha for these items was .77 during the development of the scale.
216 Criterion (i.e., correlation with job stress, boredom, isolation, and danger of illness or injury) validity
217 for this scale was established. In this study, Cronbach’s alpha was .89 during the lockdown phase and
218 .92 after reopening.

219 **2.3.3. Personal Well-being** (Cummins *et al.*, 2003)

220 Participants' personal well-being was assessed using the Australian Unity Index of Subjective Well-
221 Being. Participants responded to the question “How satisfied are you with...?” in seven domain-
222 specific areas of satisfaction (standard of living, health, achievement in life, personal relationships,
223 how safe you feel, community connectedness, and future security) using a scale of zero to 10 (0=
224 Completely Dissatisfied to 10= Completely Satisfied). Cronbach’s alpha was .95 in both the
225 conditions – during the lockdown phase and after reopening – in this study.

226 **2.3.4. Semi-structured Interview**

227 The qualitative inquiry was guided by a semi-structured interview consisting of seven questions. The
228 questions are:

229 Q.1: How has your work style and routine changed since the lockdown restrictions were lifted? Have
230 you found it difficult to transition back to work in the office setting? What challenges have you
231 faced?

232 Q.2: How have you maintained work-life balance after returning to the office?

233 Q. 3: How has the pandemic affected your overall outlook of work and career goals?

234 Q.4: Have you noticed any changes in your mood or stress levels since returning to your office? How
235 have you managed this situation?

236 Q.5 How has your institution adapted to the changing work environment post-lockdown? What new
237 policies and initiatives have been implemented?

238 Q.6. What do you think the future of work looks like post-pandemic? Do you think that remote work
239 will continue to be prevalent?

240 Q.7: Have you refused any request to be a respondent to an online survey? If yes, what is your
241 opinion? What makes faculty members respond to this?

242 **2.4. Procedure**

243 To collect quantitative data, general information about the study, consent forms, and questionnaires
244 were prepared in Google Form. This form was circulated by email. The first section of the form
245 included general details of the study and information about the researcher. Interested faculty
246 members would read the consent form and provide consent by clicking the designated tab. Afterward,
247 they proceeded to the participant information page and the questionnaire page one by one. We aimed

248 to collect information on measures (work-family conflict, job satisfaction, and personal wellbeing)
249 during the COVID-19 imposed lockdown when all the educational institutes were shut along with
250 information on the same measures after reopening of the institutions in physical mode. Thus,
251 instructions and some of the items of the measures were modified and converted in the past tense. For
252 example, the instruction - “Recall your experience during the COVID-19 Lockdown Period (roughly
253 between March 2020- February 2022) when your academic activities were not physically operational
254 and answer the below given questions” was used to collect the information on measures during the
255 COVID-19 imposed lockdown; whereas instruction- “Answer below given questions on the basis of
256 your experience in last 10-12 months” was used to collect the information after reopening of the
257 institutions in physical mode. The data collection took place between January 2023 and April 2023.

258 For qualitative inquiry, interviews were conducted by the first three authors in their respective states
259 through one-to-one contact. Initially, participants were contacted telephonically to inquire about their
260 readiness to participate. All contacted participants agreed to participate, and the interviews were
261 conducted in their agreed places (i.e., office in all cases). The interviews were tape-recorded and
262 transcribed later for further evaluation by the respective authors.

263 Informed consent was obtained from all the participants for inclusion before they participated in the
264 study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was
265 approved by the Research Ethics and Publication Committee, S.N. Sinha College, Jehanabad, Bihar
266 (INDIA) (Ref. No.: RP/01/SNSC).

267 **2.5. Data Analysis**

268 Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows version 21.0. Transcribed
269 interviews were thematically analyzed following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).
270 This involved familiarizing ourselves with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes,
271 reviewing the themes, and defining and naming the themes before producing the report.

272 **3. Results**

273 **3.1. Quantitative Data**

274 Out of the 3987 emails sent to the faculty members, 379 could not be delivered due to various
275 reasons, such as incorrect email IDs or being blocked by email domains. Therefore, out of the 3608
276 emails that were successfully delivered, responses were obtained from only 82 faculty members of 25
277 states, resulting in a turnout of 2.27%. These complete responses were collected from 82 faculties,
278 out of which 48 (58.5%) were male. These faculty members held different positions: 50 (61%) were
279 assistant professors, 18 (22%) were associate professors, and 14 (17%) were full professors. They
280 belonged to diverse disciplines: 37 (45%) were from Arts, 9 (11%) from Engineering, and 36 (44%)
281 from Science. The participants' ages ranged between 28 and 63 years, with a mean age of 44.46 (SD
282 7.61). Regarding their experience as faculty, it varied between 48 months (4 years) and 420 months
283 (35 years), with a mean experience of 177.94 months (SD 101).

284 Pearson's correlation coefficient (Table 1) for all the measured variables [viz., personal well-being
285 (PWB), work interference with family (WF), family interference with work (FW), job satisfaction]
286 between lockdown phase and after reopening of the institutions was significantly high ($r \geq .70$,
287 $p < .01$). Personal well-being was significantly negatively correlated with WF and FW both during the
288 lockdown phase and after reopening. Conversely, as expected, personal well-being was significantly
289 positively correlated with job satisfaction during both the lockdown phase and after reopening.

290 [Insert Table 1. here]

291 Comparison between the lockdown and reopening phase on PWB index, WF, FW, and job
292 satisfaction suggest that there was a significant difference only in job satisfaction (Table 1). Job
293 satisfaction was high after reopening (mean 39.34) compared to the lockdown phase (mean 38.16) [t
294 = -3.43, $p < .01$].

295 [Insert Table 2. here]

296 As population statistics were available for work-family conflict from Breyer and Bluemke (2016), we
297 also compared our sample participants with national data using z-test (Table 2). Result suggests that
298 work-family conflict was significantly inflated among faculty members, compared to national data,
299 during lockdown as well as after reopening.

300 [Insert Table 3. here]

301 **3.2. Qualitative Inquiry**

302 Total 30 faculty members [17 (57%) female] were interviewed, who were working in different
303 positions [15 (50%) assistant professors, 9 (30%) associate professors and 6 (20%) full professors]
304 and were from three Indian states [7 (23%) from Nagaland, 8 (26%) from Bihar and 15 (50%) from
305 West Bengal]. The age of the participants ranged between 26 and 60 years [mean 42.77 (SD 9.31)].
306 Initial themes and subthemes, derived from the qualitative inquiry conducted on seven questions
307 (further details provided in Supplementary Table 1), are represented in seven major themes outlined
308 below.

309 ***Acceptance of the shift in teaching methods.*** Most participants (70%) felt that their use of
310 multimedia and information communication technologies (e.g., PowerPoint presentation: PPT and
311 use of Internet available or self-made video tutorials) increased significantly. All these measures
312 which they adopted during the COVID-19 lockdown, due to the closing of educational institutions in
313 physical mode, to continue the teaching-learning process actually have now taken the form of ‘habit’
314 as one of the participants (female, assistant professor, 28 years old) expressed it:

315 “During the COVID situation, I used to teach students through PowerPoint presentations, and after
316 this COVID, I found myself using the same PPTs in the classroom. Sometimes, I think that why I am
317 using the same PPT, I should teach the students in more interactive ways and should use PPT less,
318 but the habit of using PPT and online teaching is still sustaining. Now I am in the habit that before
319 classes I should have PPT in my hand.”

320 Participants expressed the need to be well-equipped to address students' diverse needs and enhance
321 their skills in a formidable position. Feeling unrecognized during the pandemic expressed a desire for
322 career enhancement and growth, and suggested their preparations for academic recognition.

323 ***Mixed emotions and adaptation towards reopening.*** Participants (47%) highlighted increased stress
324 levels, anxiety, and mood swings during the lockdown. This is generally related to strict university
325 regulations and increased family responsibilities. One male associate professor (47 years) said-

326 “We were trying our best, dealing with challenges moment by moment, without dwelling too much
327 on the future. Simultaneously, we felt a significant responsibility to complete academic and

328 administrative assignments within the given timeframe, ensuring that service delivery reached the
329 stakeholders. After reopening, in the physical mode, my stress level is not above normal.”

330 Participants experienced low stress levels because of a healthy work environment and positive
331 relationships with colleagues. They found support from institutions and colleagues, which reduced
332 stress, indicating the impact of a supportive work atmosphere. They also learned from others’
333 effective stress management, motivating them to overcome stress.

334 Many participants (80%) expressed that although they had adapted technology-based teaching and
335 learning methods, which had eased their teaching, they felt that it had made their classes less
336 interactive. They have adapted to new schedules post-lockdown and appreciated the return to official
337 working hours, contrasting the uncertainties during the lockdown period; however, they found an
338 increased workload at the workplace. They also expressed relief that, after reopening of the
339 institution, their work schedule was more predictable. However, they are still apprehensive about
340 contamination, and concerns regarding hygiene and cleanliness have significantly increased.

341 The participants (40%) also experienced changes in their social dynamics. COVID-19 imposed
342 lockdown gave them the opportunity to re-establish, strengthen, and re-explore their family and
343 social relationships, which were now missing after reopening.

344 ***Use of various organizational strategies to balance work-life.*** One of the female assistant professors
345 (32 years) said, “I think our kids also get adapted to the fact that mother works, office work, at home.
346 So yes, with the support of family and adjustment from the part of everyone – kids, spouse, self – I
347 think somehow the work-life balance is there. But yes, sometimes I do feel overwhelmed.”

348 The experiences regarding work-life balance after returning to the office varied widely. Challenges
349 arise from changes in routines, commuting difficulties, and the psychological toll of balancing
350 multiple responsibilities. Strategies such as organizational skills (time scheduling and diary
351 maintenance), multitasking, and family support play essential roles.

352 “Now it is easy to maintain work like balance because I and my family know what are the different
353 roles they can expect and what are the different time frame they can expect for me. During lock
354 down, I was doing all sorts of work in my home apart from my official work.” (Assistant Professor,
355 Male, 40 years).

356 ***Appreciation for work and human connections.*** The participants (70%) highlighted a newfound
357 appreciation for their work and human connections. The pandemic has made them value the working
358 culture, students, and interpersonal relationships more deeply. The subject specifically mentioned the
359 realization of being a social animal and appreciating interactions and relationships. A female faculty
360 from the north-east reflected-

361 "In (name of the place is masked), the lockdown felt like an unprecedented experience, akin to being
362 confined in a jail. Although many people worldwide face daily challenges, this situation has
363 profoundly affected us. Personally, it has transformed my perspective, fostered empathy and
364 understanding. Now I have come to the realization that, in one word, we are social animals. I now
365 realize the profound truth that humans are inherently social beings; we cannot thrive in closed
366 confines. This experience has deepened my appreciation for interactions and relationships,
367 highlighting the fundamental importance of human connection."

368 **Post-lockdown hygiene measures and humanitarian efforts.** Hygiene practice has improved in all
369 institutions compared with the pre-COVID-19 situation. The institution implemented strict hygiene
370 measures, including hand sanitization, mask-wearing, and maintenance of a clean environment.

371 "The humanitarian aspect was on another level, which honestly, I didn't know was part of our
372 teachers' agenda. The teachers really helped, and the authorities ensured that... Now, we have this, I
373 see... They were providing us with good, filtered drinking water [before COVID], but now they've
374 given us a cooler and better facilities, including new toilets for girls... So, all these changes happened
375 because of the COVID situation; now they understand that hygiene is very important. The staff
376 working area has also improved, so in a way, I can say that this COVID situation has changed us for
377 the better." (Female, Associate Professor, 44)

378 Participants (70%) mentioned the institution's emphasis on mental health by providing counseling
379 services and resources through apps, demonstrating a proactive approach to supporting students'
380 mental well-being. As another 30 years old female assistant professor mentioned:

381 "In my personal opinion, the institution has adapted very well to the post-lockdown working
382 environment by implementing a student-friendly atmosphere, promoting awareness of personal
383 hygiene and mental health, and enforcing a stricter policy towards misbehavior. There's also a
384 heightened emphasis on the academic performance of the students."

385 **Remote and hybrid work are there to stay long.** Institutions continued to implement the online
386 measures adopted during the lockdown period as an option for their faculty and students, as indicated
387 by 90% of the participants. Assignments, student attendance, and numerous classes are conducted
388 online, a practice highly valued by the participants due to the flexibility it offers, a feature lacking in
389 the physical mode.

390 The majority of the participants acknowledged that remote work and hybrid (partial online work)
391 work are likely to continue in some form post-pandemic. They pointed out the convenience, cost-
392 effectiveness, and opportunities it offers, particularly for individuals in remote areas and working
393 mothers. They highlighted that remote work has opened new opportunities and made work culture
394 more flexible, leading to continued growth.

395 "... I think in a way this pandemic has opened opportunities and also avenues for remote working,
396 and people have learned and adapted. So, in a way new opportunities and new work culture have
397 come up, and I think it is to be appreciated because that makes life more flexible," a male professor,
398 answered.

399 However, 70% of participants raised concerns about the effectiveness of remote work, emphasizing
400 that it might not be suitable for every employee or business.

401 **Time constraints and survey overloads.** Participants (47%) highlighted the inundation of online
402 surveys, indicating that a sheer number of requests can lead to selective participation. Time
403 constraints play a significant role in the decision-making processes. This reflects the challenges of
404 managing a busy schedule, especially in academia where faculty members often have multiple
405 commitments. A male assistant professor (32 years) expressed:

406 "To be completely honest, yes, I've simply ignored numerous requests for online surveys. There have
407 been far too many of them, appearing in my inbox or in WhatsApp groups every other day. Yes, I've
408 responded to those sent by people I know, but the ones from unknown senders, I've ignored. I believe

409 many people lack the time or motivation to respond to all the surveys they receive, especially those
410 from unfamiliar sources."

411 However, some (30%) participants indicated their selective approach based on the relevance of the
412 survey topic. If the subject matter aligns with their interests or expertise, they are more likely to
413 respond accordingly. This suggests that the perceived importance and relevance of the research topic
414 influence their participation decisions. A female assistant professor (40 years) shared her experience:

415 "I believe there have been occasions when I've said 'yes' and times when I've said 'no', perhaps
416 depending on the subject matter. If the topic isn't necessarily of personal interest but something I can
417 contribute to, I've declined such surveys."

418 Some participants (30%) also refused to participate because of doubts about the survey's
419 methodology, consent forms, and information about the research. This highlights the importance of
420 transparent communication and clear explanations of the survey invitations. Faculty members, as
421 researchers themselves, are likely to scrutinize the research design and ethical aspects before
422 participating. It can be sensed from the expression of a male assistant professor (40 years):

423 "Yes, I have declined participation in online research surveys because most of the time I doubted
424 their methodology or found the consent forms and research information lacking in detail. Since the
425 lockdown, our emails have been inundated with numerous messages daily, making it impossible to
426 reply to or read them all, so we must prioritize."

427 **4. Discussion**

428 In this study, we have used a mixed-method approach to understand the reflections of the faculty
429 members working in higher education on their experience with the COVID-19-imposed shutdown of
430 academic institutions and after the reopening of the academic institutions in physical mode. Eighty-
431 two faculty members' experiences on personal well-being index, work-family conflict, and job
432 satisfaction were quantitatively measured with the help of standardized questionnaires for both the
433 lockdown period and after reopening. Additionally, thirty faculty members shared their experiences
434 of post-COVID-19 institutions reopening while reflecting upon their COVID-19 lockdown
435 experiences in a semi-structured interview.

436 The study faced challenges in survey distribution, resulting in a low response rate of 2.27%. While
437 this rate raises concerns about representativeness, it is crucial to consider the context of academia
438 during and after the pandemic. In a survey involving 658 teachers and 945 students, 66.1% of the
439 respondents indicated their workplace as their primary location for internet usage, while only 19%
440 reported using the internet at home (Kumar and Kaur, 2006). However, back then internet service
441 was not so prevalent in India. Additionally, research has shown that the enforcement of mandatory
442 stay-at-home and isolation policies amid the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased dependence
443 on smartphones and the Internet. This heightened reliance has, in turn, given rise to problematic
444 internet usage, which has been linked to sleep disturbances and psychological distress among
445 teachers (Lee and Chen, 2021). As reported by faculty members in our study, they were inundated
446 with various commitments, along with several requests for participation in various online surveys,
447 which might have affected their interest and ability to engage in online research surveys
448 comprehensively. This argument is further supported by the fact that when they were requested in
449 person, they all volunteered to be a participant in this study.

450 High paired correlations for all constructs between lockdown and after reopening phases were
451 observed. It indicates a more precise estimate of the true difference between the group means (Moore
452 and McCabe, 1989). Our study confirms the research findings of previous studies (Lu *et al.*, 2006;
453 Nordenmark, Almén and Vinberg, 2020; Toprak, Tösten and Elçiçek, 2022) in terms of negative
454 correlation between personal well-being and work-family as well as family-work conflict. Moreover,
455 personal well-being was positively correlated to job satisfaction (Armstrong, Atkin-Plunk and Wells,
456 2015; Haji Matarsat, Rahman and Abdul-Mumin, 2021; Kalliath *et al.*, 2019; Lim *et al.*, 2021).
457 Interestingly, WFC during the lockdown phase was not correlated significantly with our participants'
458 job satisfaction at any phase (during the lockdown and after reopening). However, after reopening
459 WFC was significantly negatively correlated with job satisfaction after institutional reopening at both
460 phases. For this, family support in performing official duties from home, until it was not interfering
461 with family responsibilities, may be the plausible reason. Acceptance of the teacher's role as an
462 institutional tied worker by the family members was expressed by the participants in the qualitative
463 inquiry ("I think our kids also get adapted to the fact that mother works, office work, at home. So yes,
464 with the support of family and adjustment from the part of everyone – kids, spouse...," a female
465 assistant professor expressed). Contrary to this supporting scenario, when faculty members returned to
466 their respective workplaces, they found themselves burdened again with work responsibility interfering
467 with family. A male professor expressed:

468 "I am not able to manage my personal and office life has become a mess. Even after returning from the
469 office there are lot of official work which I have to do at my home. There is no space for myself."

470 Another female assistant professor expressed:

471 "...one good thing about the lockdown was that we were free from worries about leaving the kids at
472 home when we were at work."

473 In a comprehensive elaboration, a female professor depicted a typical Indian home scenario:

474 "...now I have three children so [it is] like juggling along with them; their school work, my husband,
475 you know, and I have to keep my housekeeper happy also, that's also a work okay, and my workplace
476 and now because of this new educational policy again everything has changed. So, you know,
477 sometimes it's very difficult obviously, I am stressed out, and you know, I am in a tense situation..."

478 Thus, for the collective conscious Indians family is of prime importance. The diluting role of family
479 support in WFC to enhance job satisfaction has been also confirmed in previous studies(Kalliath *et al.*,
480 2019).

481 Though studies have reported the negative impact of COVID-19 imposed lockdown on work-life
482 balance (Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Lonska *et al.*, 2021; Uddin, 2021; Adisa *et al.*, 2022)
483 psychological wellbeing (O'Connor *et al.*, 2021; Hutchison *et al.*, 2022) and job satisfaction (Hong,
484 Liu and Zhang, 2021; Yu and Wu, 2021). In our study, we did not find any significant change after
485 reopening in work-family conflict as well as the personal well-being of our participants. Quantitative
486 measure, however, suggests that work-family as well as family-work interference among faculty
487 members were significantly high compared to the national statistics. So, it might be the case that they
488 already had a work-family conflict, irrespective of the pandemic lockdown. The conflict between
489 work responsibility and family and vice versa among teaching professionals (Cinamon, Rich and
490 Westman, 2007; Erdamar and Demirel, 2014), especially for female teachers (Cinamon and Rich,
491 2005), is not new. However, to date in India, this aspect of university teachers has not been explored
492 well (Gopalan, Pattusamy and Gollakota, 2020). Our study has shown that work to family and family

493 to work, both the conflict levels are significantly higher among the university faculties. Their voice
494 became clearer as they insisted, during the qualitative inquiry, that they faced challenges in
495 maintaining work-life balance, especially, after returning to the office. As a curative measure, faculty
496 members mentioned that family support played vital roles in their coping. The study emphasizes the
497 importance of recognizing and addressing the psychological toll of balancing professional and
498 personal responsibilities, especially considering the evolving work dynamics.

499 A meta-analysis (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, Idoiaga Mondragon, *et al.*, 2021) suggested that the level of
500 anxiety, depression and stress were elevated among teachers during COVID-19, whereas Asian
501 teachers have more anxiety compared to the rest of the world. Our research revealed increased stress
502 levels, anxiety, and mood swings during the lockdown phase. However, after reopening, the stress
503 levels normalized for most participants due to a supportive work environment and positive
504 relationships with colleagues. This highlights the critical role of social support and a conducive
505 workplace atmosphere in mitigating stressors.

506 Since COVID-19, online teaching has been made essential, especially, in higher education; it raised
507 concern over whether traditional faculty members are ready for this rapid transition (Cutri, Mena and
508 Whiting, 2020; Valsaraj *et al.*, 2021). Our qualitative inquiry suggests that there is a significant shift
509 in teaching methods, with 70% of participants embracing multimedia and online tools. This
510 adaptation, initiated during the lockdown, became habitual even after the reopening phase. While
511 these tools streamlined the teaching process, concerns were raised about reduced interactivity in
512 classrooms. In the past, it was expected that mandatory transition to online teaching could be a major
513 issue of stress for sincere teachers willing to deliver effective learning to the students (Crawford-
514 Ferre and Wiest, 2012; Howard *et al.*, 2021). Faculty members in our study echoed the same and
515 indicated a need for balanced approaches in pedagogy.

516 While job satisfaction among teachers in some countries, like Turkey (Aktan and Toraman, 2022),
517 remained high during COVID-19, this may not hold for Indian teachers. Previous studies suggested
518 subaverage job satisfaction among Indian higher education teachers, ranging from poor to average
519 (Katoch, 2012; Nayak and Nayak, 2014; Tahir and Sajid, 2014). The pandemic appears to have
520 exacerbated this situation, with participants expressing a decline in job satisfaction, missing work
521 culture, feeling unrecognized, and facing hindrances in their career goals during lockdown. However,
522 post-reopening, they found support from institutions and colleagues, reducing stress and emphasizing
523 the positive impact of a supportive work environment.

524 This first attempt, capturing the COVID-19 pandemic and aftermath experiences of Indian faculty
525 members involved in the higher education system has some limitations. Though effort was made to
526 get representation from every state, including union territories, of India, the response rate in our study
527 was very low. Previous research that employed email-based recruitment has similar findings
528 (Murphy *et al.*, 2020), whereas another research suggests a better response rate by email than postal
529 mail (Tai *et al.*, 2018). This limitation highlights the need for a cautious interpretation of the findings.
530 Despite these challenges, the study provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between
531 work dynamics, personal lives, and psychological well-being during and after the pandemic.

532 In our study, due to the small number of participants, we could not see the effect of faculty rank and
533 gender. It can be expected that work responsibilities may vary rank-wise (assistant, associate, and
534 professor). Similarly, work and family expectations may also differ between males and females. In
535 future research, these limitations should be overcome for a deeper understanding and the generality
536 of the findings.

537 **5. Implications and future directions**

538 The study identified common reasons for faculty members' reluctance to participate in online
539 surveys, including time constraints, relevance, and methodological concerns. Addressing these
540 issues, such as minimizing survey frequency and ensuring transparent communication about research
541 goals, could enhance future survey response rates.

542 Faculty members highly valued the implementation of rigorous hygiene protocols, which
543 significantly enhanced the safety of their work environment. Furthermore, institutions took proactive
544 steps to support mental health, offering counseling services and promoting a comprehensive
545 approach to faculty well-being. These measures and practices should be permanently integrated into
546 institutional frameworks, rather than being seen as temporary or precautionary initiatives.

547 The study participants expressed a mixed outlook regarding the future of work post-pandemic. While
548 remote and hybrid work options were appreciated for their flexibility, concerns were raised about
549 their effectiveness for all employees and businesses. Striking a balance between remote and physical
550 work models emerged as a challenge, indicating the need for tailored approaches based on individual
551 roles and preferences. Future research could explore targeted interventions to support faculty
552 members' mental health and work-life balance. Investigating the long-term effects of the pandemic on
553 academic productivity and collaboration could provide valuable insights for institutions aiming to
554 create adaptive work environments.

555 **6. Conclusion**

556 In conclusion, this study sheds light on the multifaceted challenges faced by faculty members during
557 the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of supportive work environments, adaptive teaching
558 methodologies, and a holistic approach to well-being. Addressing these challenges can pave the way
559 for resilient and sustainable academic work practices in the post-pandemic era.

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809 **Tables**

810 **Table 1.**

811 *Correlation among Measured Variables at lockdown phase and after reopening of the institutions*

	PWB _{LD}	PWB _{RO}	WF _{LD}	WF _{RO}	FW _{LD}	FW _{RO}	JS _{LD}
PWB _{LD}	–						
PWB _{RO}	.88**	–					
WF _{LD}	-.37**	-.34**	–				
WF _{RO}	-.28*	-.30**	.70**	–			
FW _{LD}	-.55**	-.50**	.61**	.57**	–		
FW _{RO}	-.52**	-.48**	.45**	.58**	.74**	–	
JS _{LD}	.73**	.72**	-0.21	-.29**	-.47**	-.50**	–
JS _{RO}	.64**	.66**	-0.16	-.33**	-.36**	-.50**	.89**

812 *Note.* LD: Lockdown Phase, RO: After Reopening, PWB: Personal Wellbeing, WF: work
 813 interference with family, FW: family interference with work, JS: Job Satisfaction. ** $p < .01$

814

815 **Table 2.**

816 *Comparison of study variables using parred t-test (N = 82).*

	Lockdown Phase		Reopening Phase		t(df= 81)	Level of Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
PWB	50.74	14.15	51.95	12.65	-1.63	.108
WF	4.61	2.04	4.54	1.89	.43	.666
FW	3.72	1.73	3.50	1.59	1.65	.104
Job Satisfaction	38.16	6.95	39.34	6.80	-3.43	.001

817 *Note.* PWB: Personal wellbeing index, WF: work interference with family, FW: family interference
 818 with work.

819

820 **Table 3.**

821 *Comparison of study sample with national statistics on work-family conflict.*

	Sample in this study		Population*		z	p	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
WF _{LD}	4.61	2.04	2.50	0.86	22.22	.0001	2.45
WF _{RO}	4.54	1.89	2.50	0.86	21.48	.0001	2.37
FW _{LD}	3.72	1.73	2.14	0.78	18.34	.0001	2.03
FW _{RO}	3.50	1.59	2.14	0.78	15.78	.0001	1.74

822 *Note.* LD: Lockdown Phase, RO: After Reopening, WF: work interference with family, FW: family
823 interference with work. *Population statics obtained from Breyer and Bluemke (2016).

824

825 **Conflict of Interest**

826 *The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial*
827 *relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*

828 **Author Contributions**

829 RLD, IL, SG: Research Design, Data Collection, Writing and Review.

830 RLD, SP: Data Analysis, Review

831

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834 **Data Availability Statement**

835 Quantitative data pertaining to this study can be accessed from
836 <https://data.mendeley.com/preview/92g4pthx4p>. However, qualitative data could not be made public
837 to protect the identity and other sensitive information pertinent to the study participants.