

## Gendered Occupational Stress and the Impact of Changing Student Behaviour on Female Faculty Well-being in Higher Education: A Theoretical Perspective

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### ABSTRACT:

The revolution of higher education in the last few decades has dramatically changed the relationships between faculty and students, bringing about new occupational issues. The article is a theoretical work exploring the concept of gendered occupational stress through the lens of the effects that changing student behaviour has on the psychological health of female faculty members. Modern students are becoming more and more consumer-oriented, digitally addicted, emotionally vulnerable, and assertive, and these traits impose extra cognitive and emotional stress on the teacher. With the gender roles socially constructed, female faculty tend to be subjected to a disproportionate burden of these demands, especially in the case of emotional labour and relational engagement. Using Role Theory, Emotional Labour Theory, Job Demands Resources model, and Gender Role Theory, this paper presents a combined theory to appreciate the relationship between gendered expectations and occupational pressures in academic institutions. The paper also examines the effects of stress, such as burnout, work-life imbalance, and lack of professional recognition. It finishes by highlighting the necessity of institutional changes, gender-sensitive policies, and support mechanisms that can boost the well-being of the faculty, but still maintain the quality of higher education.

### Keywords:

Gendered stress, Female faculty, Student behaviour, Higher education, Emotional labour, Occupational stress.

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## 1. Introduction

Higher education institutions across the globe have undergone substantial transformation over the past few decades due to globalization, technological advancements, market-oriented educational reforms, and evolving socio-cultural expectations (Yolles, 2020). Universities are no longer viewed merely as centers of knowledge dissemination; rather, they are increasingly expected to function as dynamic organizations that respond to the changing needs of students, society, and industry. These transformations have significantly altered the academic work environment and the nature of faculty responsibilities. The traditional role of faculty members as providers of subject knowledge has expanded to encompass multiple responsibilities, including mentoring, advising, emotional support, administrative service, research productivity, community engagement, and continuous professional development (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021). Consequently, academic work has become increasingly complex and demanding, creating new challenges for faculty well-being and job satisfaction.

One of the most notable developments in higher education has been the transformation of student behavior and expectations. Contemporary students are more technologically connected, highly informed, and increasingly assertive in expressing their academic and personal needs. The rapid growth of digital communication technologies has fostered a culture of immediacy, wherein students expect quick responses to emails, instant feedback on assessments, flexible learning arrangements, and continuous accessibility from faculty members (Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021). Furthermore, the marketization of higher education has encouraged students to adopt a consumer-oriented mindset, viewing education as a service and themselves as customers entitled to personalized experiences and outcomes. Such developments have fundamentally reshaped student-faculty relationships and introduced new emotional and professional demands on academic staff (Rakow et al., 2025).

The changing nature of student behavior has become an emerging source of occupational stress within higher education. Research suggests that academics increasingly encounter students

who expect individualized attention, extensive academic support, emotional guidance, and accommodations beyond traditional teaching responsibilities (Rakow et al., 2025). Faculty members are often required to manage diverse student expectations while simultaneously maintaining standards of academic rigor, institutional accountability, and professional performance. This balancing act can be particularly challenging when student demands conflict with institutional policies, workload limitations, or pedagogical objectives. As a result, faculty members frequently experience emotional exhaustion, work overload, and psychological strain associated with managing student interactions and expectations (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021).

Occupational stress has emerged as a significant concern within higher education due to its adverse effects on employee well-being, job performance, and institutional effectiveness. Occupational stress refers to the psychological and physiological responses that occur when work demands exceed an individual's capacity to cope effectively (Leka et al., 2004). Within academic settings, occupational stress has been linked to excessive workload, research pressures, administrative responsibilities, performance evaluation systems, promotion requirements, and work-life conflict (Zaheer et al., 2016). Studies consistently indicate that faculty members experience moderate to high levels of occupational stress, which negatively influences their psychological health, work engagement, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life (Zaheer et al., 2016; Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021).

Although occupational stress affects faculty members across demographic groups, evidence suggests that its causes and consequences are not uniformly distributed. Gender plays a critical role in shaping professional experiences within academia. Female faculty members often encounter additional challenges arising from social expectations, gender stereotypes, workplace inequalities, and multiple role responsibilities (Venkat et al., 2022). Despite significant progress in women's participation in higher education, women continue to face structural and cultural barriers that affect their career advancement, leadership opportunities, and workplace experiences. These barriers include gender

discrimination, patriarchal organizational cultures, unequal access to decision-making positions, and persistent stereotypes regarding women's roles and capabilities (Venkat et al., 2022).

The concept of gendered occupational stress provides a useful framework for understanding how workplace stressors are experienced differently by women and men. Gendered occupational stress refers to stress that emerges from the interaction between occupational demands and socially constructed gender expectations. In higher education, female faculty members often perform multiple roles simultaneously as educators, researchers, administrators, mothers, spouses, and caregivers. The need to balance these competing responsibilities frequently generates role conflict and work-life imbalance, contributing to heightened stress levels (Zaheer et al., 2016). Research indicates that women academics are more likely than their male counterparts to experience work-life conflict because they continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic and caregiving responsibilities alongside their professional obligations (Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021).

Beyond role conflict, female faculty members are frequently expected to engage in greater emotional labor than male faculty members. Emotional labor refers to the process of managing emotions and interpersonal interactions to meet organizational or social expectations. Within academic environments, women are often perceived as more approachable, nurturing, empathetic, and supportive than men, leading students to seek greater emotional and personal support from female faculty (Constantin et al., 2024). Consequently, women academics may spend considerable time and emotional energy addressing student concerns, providing mentorship, managing conflicts, and offering psychological support. While such activities contribute positively to student development, they often remain undervalued within formal performance evaluation systems and can increase emotional exhaustion and occupational stress among female faculty members (Venkat et al., 2022).

The literature also highlights the role of gender inequality in shaping academic experiences. Women faculty members continue to

encounter barriers such as the glass ceiling, limited representation in leadership positions, gender bias in promotion decisions, and workplace microaggressions (Elliott & Blithe, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022). Stress Process Theory suggests that individuals occupying disadvantaged social positions are more likely to experience stressors and have fewer access to supportive resources, resulting in poorer well-being outcomes (Elliott & Blithe, 2021). Empirical evidence indicates that women faculty members report higher levels of work-life conflict, workplace discrimination, and exposure to microaggressions than their male colleagues, all of which contribute to psychological distress and job dissatisfaction (Elliott & Blithe, 2021).

The increasing importance of faculty well-being has become a major concern for higher education institutions because of its direct relationship with teaching quality, student engagement, organizational commitment, and institutional performance. Faculty well-being encompasses psychological, emotional, social, and professional dimensions of functioning and extends beyond the mere absence of stress or mental illness (Rakow et al., 2025). Research demonstrates that poor faculty well-being is associated with burnout, reduced productivity, diminished teaching effectiveness, and lower job satisfaction (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021). Furthermore, evidence suggests that faculty well-being and student well-being are interconnected. Students are highly perceptive of lecturers' emotional states and often interpret faculty stress, enthusiasm, and engagement through classroom interactions. Consequently, faculty well-being can directly influence student learning experiences, motivation, and psychological well-being (Rakow et al., 2025).

Despite growing scholarly attention to occupational stress, work-life balance, gender inequality, and faculty well-being, relatively limited research has examined how changing student behavior functions as a gendered occupational stressor within higher education. Existing studies have predominantly focused on organizational factors such as workload, research demands, institutional culture, and work-family conflict (Zaheer et al., 2016; Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021; Roosa & Borkoski, 2021). Comparatively less attention has been paid to the ways in which evolving student expectations and interactions contribute to stress experiences among

female faculty members. Given the increasing emphasis on student-centered education and the growing emotional demands placed on academics, there is a need to explore how changing student behavior intersects with gender-based expectations to influence faculty well-being.

Therefore, this paper seeks to develop a theoretical understanding of gendered occupational stress by examining the impact of changing student behavior on the well-being of female faculty members in higher education. Drawing upon feminist theory, role conflict theory, stress process theory, and work-life balance perspectives, the paper proposes that evolving student expectations create additional emotional and relational demands that disproportionately affect female academics due to prevailing gender norms and role expectations. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the paper contributes to the emerging discourse on faculty well-being and provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical research investigating the gendered dimensions of academic work in contemporary higher education institutions.

## 2. Conceptualizing Gendered Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is widely recognized as a psychological and physiological response that arises when workplace demands exceed an individual's ability or resources to cope effectively (Buunk et al., 2013). In higher education, occupational stress is commonly associated with heavy workloads, research expectations, administrative responsibilities, performance evaluations, and work-life conflict (Zaheer et al., 2016; Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021; Roosa & Borkoski, 2021). However, contemporary research suggests that stress cannot be viewed as a gender-neutral phenomenon because workplace experiences are shaped by broader social and cultural expectations (Gallego et al., 2015; Elliott & Blithe, 2021).

Gendered occupational stress refers to the unequal experience and consequences of workplace stress arising from socially constructed gender roles and expectations (Gallego et al., 2015). In higher education, female faculty members often encounter demands that extend beyond their formal responsibilities of teaching,

research, and administration. They are frequently expected to provide emotional support to students, create inclusive learning environments, mentor struggling learners, and manage interpersonal issues within the classroom (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022). Such responsibilities often remain invisible within formal performance evaluation systems despite their importance to student success.

These expectations are reinforced by societal norms that associate women with caregiving, empathy, patience, and emotional sensitivity (Björk, 2017). Consequently, students often perceive female faculty as more approachable and emotionally available, resulting in increased requests for guidance, mentorship, and personal support (Constantin et al., 2024). While these interactions contribute positively to the educational experience, they also increase emotional demands and workload, leading to role overload and occupational stress (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021).

The concept of emotional labour further explains this phenomenon. Emotional labour involves regulating emotions and interpersonal interactions to meet professional expectations (Hochschild, 1983). Female faculty members frequently engage in emotional labour by demonstrating empathy, patience, and emotional support regardless of their own circumstances. Over time, the continuous management of emotions can contribute to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and reduced well-being (Lauroza et al., 2025).

Role conflict also plays a significant role in gendered occupational stress. Female academics often balance multiple roles, including educator, researcher, administrator, caregiver, spouse, and parent. The competing demands of professional and personal responsibilities can create work-life conflict and increase vulnerability to stress (Zaheer et al., 2016; Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021). Additionally, women in academia continue to face workplace challenges such as gender discrimination, microaggressions, limited leadership opportunities, and unequal recognition of their contributions (Elliott & Blithe, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022). These factors further intensify occupational stress and negatively affect job satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Recent changes in higher education, including student-centered learning approaches, digital communication, and consumer-oriented educational models, have further expanded the emotional and relational dimensions of academic work (Rakow et al., 2025). Students increasingly expect immediate responses, personalized attention, and continuous support from faculty members. Given prevailing gender stereotypes, these expectations often fall disproportionately on women academics, increasing both emotional labour and occupational strain (Constantin et al., 2024).

Therefore, understanding occupational stress through a gendered lens is essential for capturing the unique experiences of female faculty members. Such an approach highlights how workplace demands interact with social expectations, emotional labour, and institutional inequalities to shape women's well-being in higher education.

### 3. Theoretical Foundations

Understanding gendered occupational stress among female faculty members requires a multidimensional theoretical perspective that considers professional responsibilities, emotional expectations, organizational conditions, and societal norms. Several theories help explain how occupational stress develops and why women academics may experience it differently than their male counterparts.

Role Theory suggests that individuals occupy multiple social roles simultaneously, each associated with specific expectations and responsibilities (Biddle, 2013). Female faculty members often perform various professional roles, including educator, researcher, mentor, advisor, and administrator, while also managing family and caregiving responsibilities outside the workplace (Zaheer et al., 2016; Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021). When these expectations become incompatible or excessive, role conflict and role overload occur, resulting in stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced well-being (Kahn et al., 1964).

Emotional Labour Theory further explains how stress emerges from the continuous regulation of emotions in professional settings. According to Hochschild (1983), many occupations require

employees to display emotions that align with organizational expectations regardless of their actual feelings. Teaching is particularly demanding because faculty members must consistently demonstrate patience, empathy, and emotional stability (Çabuk, 2022). Due to societal expectations linking women with caregiving and emotional sensitivity, female faculty members often perform greater emotional labour through mentoring, counselling, and supporting students (Sandler & Hall, 1986; Björk, 2017). Over time, this hidden emotional work can contribute to occupational stress and burnout (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021).

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model explains occupational stress as the result of an imbalance between job demands and available resources (Schaufeli, 2017). Job demands such as workload, emotional involvement, administrative responsibilities, and increasing student expectations consume employees' energy, whereas resources such as institutional support, autonomy, and collegial relationships help them cope effectively (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). When demands exceed available resources, stress and burnout become more likely, particularly among female faculty members who face additional emotional and relational responsibilities (Rakow et al., 2025).

Gender Role Theory highlights how socially constructed expectations shape workplace experiences (Eagly, 1987). Women are often perceived as more approachable, nurturing, and supportive, leading students to seek greater emotional and academic assistance from them (Björk, 2017). These expectations increase invisible labour and contribute to occupational stress (Venkat et al., 2022).

Finally, Stress Process Theory argues that individuals in disadvantaged social positions experience greater exposure to stressors and fewer coping resources (Pearlin et al., 1981). Female academics often face discrimination, microaggressions, work-life conflict, and limited leadership opportunities, all of which negatively affect their well-being (Elliott & Blithe, 2021).

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how gendered expectations, emotional labour, workplace demands, and institutional inequalities

contribute to occupational stress among female faculty members in higher education.

#### 4. Evolving Student Behaviour in Higher Education

Student behaviour in higher education has undergone significant transformation in recent decades as a result of technological advancements, globalization, changing cultural values, and the increasing marketization of education (Yolles, 2020). These developments have altered traditional student–faculty relationships and reshaped expectations regarding teaching, learning, and academic support. As universities increasingly adopt student-centered approaches, faculty members are required to respond to evolving student needs and preferences, creating new professional and emotional demands that contribute to occupational stress (Rakow et al., 2025).

One of the most notable changes is the emergence of a consumer-oriented mindset among students. Higher education is increasingly viewed as a service, with students perceiving themselves as customers who expect personalized attention, flexibility, responsiveness, and measurable outcomes from their educational experiences (Yolles, 2020). Consequently, faculty members face growing pressure to provide immediate feedback, accommodate individual learning preferences, offer flexible assessment arrangements, and remain consistently accessible beyond classroom hours. While such practices may enhance student satisfaction and engagement, they also increase workload and blur the boundaries between professional and personal time (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021).

The widespread integration of digital technologies has further transformed student behaviour and learning patterns. Contemporary students are digital natives who rely heavily on online resources, social media, artificial intelligence tools, and multimedia content for learning and communication. Research suggests that students increasingly prefer interactive, technology-enhanced, and visually engaging instructional methods over traditional lecture-based approaches (Yolles, 2020). As a result, faculty members must continuously update their pedagogical strategies, learn new technologies,

redesign course materials, and adapt to hybrid or online learning environments. These additional responsibilities increase cognitive workload and contribute to professional stress, particularly among faculty who must simultaneously balance teaching, research, and administrative duties (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021).

Another important shift is the increasing assertiveness of students in academic settings. Modern students are more willing to question authority, challenge grading decisions, express dissatisfaction, and actively participate in institutional decision-making processes. While these developments can foster critical thinking, democratic engagement, and collaborative learning, they may also create challenges in classroom management and faculty–student interactions (Constantin et al., 2024). Faculty members are often required to invest additional time and emotional energy in addressing complaints, negotiating expectations, and managing conflicts, thereby increasing occupational strain.

Alongside these developments, higher education institutions are witnessing a growing prevalence of student mental health concerns. Rising levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and emotional vulnerability among students have increased the demand for emotional support within academic environments (Rakow et al., 2025). Although faculty members are not formally trained mental health professionals, students frequently seek guidance, reassurance, and emotional assistance from trusted educators. These expectations often extend beyond academic responsibilities and place additional emotional demands on faculty members (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021).

Importantly, these emotional demands are not distributed equally across faculty members. Female faculty are often perceived as more approachable, caring, empathetic, and emotionally available than their male colleagues due to prevailing gender stereotypes (Björk, 2017; Constantin et al., 2024). Consequently, students may be more likely to seek personal advice, emotional support, and mentorship from women academics. This increases the emotional labour performed by female faculty members and contributes to role overload, emotional exhaustion,

and occupational stress (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022).

Therefore, evolving student behaviour represents an important contemporary challenge in higher education. Consumer-oriented expectations, technological dependence, increased assertiveness, and growing emotional needs have significantly expanded the responsibilities of faculty members. For female academics, these changes interact with existing gender expectations and emotional labour demands, making them particularly vulnerable to occupational stress and diminished well-being. Understanding these behavioural shifts is therefore essential for examining the gendered nature of occupational stress in modern higher education institutions.

### 5. Impact on Female Faculty Well-being

The interaction between gendered expectations and evolving student behaviour has significant implications for the well-being of female faculty members in higher education. As academic roles increasingly extend beyond teaching and research to include mentoring, emotional support, and continuous student engagement, female faculty often experience heightened psychological and emotional demands (Constantin et al., 2024; Rakow et al., 2025). These pressures can negatively affect multiple dimensions of well-being, including emotional health, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and professional development.

One of the most prominent consequences is emotional exhaustion, which results from the continuous performance of emotional labour. Female faculty members are frequently expected to demonstrate empathy, patience, and emotional availability while addressing students' academic and personal concerns (Björk, 2017; Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021). The sustained regulation of emotions and management of complex interpersonal interactions can gradually deplete psychological resources, leading to fatigue and emotional strain (Hochschild, 1983; Lauroza et al., 2025). Over time, such exhaustion may develop into burnout, a condition characterized by emotional depletion, reduced motivation, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of professional accomplishment (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021).

Work-life imbalance represents another

major challenge affecting female faculty well-being. Academic responsibilities increasingly extend beyond formal working hours due to expectations of constant accessibility, rapid responses to student communications, flexible teaching practices, and ongoing academic support (Rakow et al., 2025). Female faculty members often devote additional time to mentoring and supporting students, while simultaneously managing family and caregiving responsibilities (Zaheer et al., 2016; Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021). This overlap between professional and personal roles can create role conflict and reduce opportunities for rest, recovery, and personal well-being, thereby increasing stress levels (Biddle, 2013).

The lack of recognition for emotional and relational work further contributes to occupational dissatisfaction. Activities such as mentoring, counselling, supporting struggling students, and fostering inclusive learning environments are essential to student success but are often undervalued in promotion criteria and performance evaluation systems (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022). Consequently, female faculty may invest considerable effort in tasks that receive limited institutional acknowledgment, creating feelings of inequity, frustration, and reduced professional satisfaction.

Long-term exposure to these stressors may also result in adverse mental health outcomes. Research has linked chronic occupational stress with anxiety, depression, psychological distress, reduced job satisfaction, and lower organizational commitment (Elliott & Blithe, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022). Furthermore, declining faculty well-being can negatively affect teaching effectiveness, student engagement, and overall academic performance (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021; Rakow et al., 2025). Therefore, addressing the well-being of female faculty members is not only important for individual health but also for maintaining the quality and effectiveness of higher education institutions.

### 6. Integrating Theoretical Perspectives

Understanding gendered occupational stress among female faculty members requires an integrated theoretical approach because no single theory can fully explain the complex interaction between professional demands, emotional

expectations, organizational structures, and societal norms. By combining Role Theory, Emotional Labour Theory, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, Gender Role Theory, and Stress Process Theory, a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by women academics can be developed.

Role Theory explains how female faculty members simultaneously occupy multiple professional and personal roles, including educator, researcher, mentor, administrator, caregiver, and family member (Biddle, 2013; Kahn et al., 1964). The increasing demands associated with these roles often create role conflict and role overload, particularly when professional and personal expectations compete for time and energy (Zaheer et al., 2016; Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021). While Role Theory identifies the sources of competing demands, Emotional Labour Theory highlights the hidden emotional costs associated with fulfilling these responsibilities. Female faculty members are frequently expected to display empathy, patience, care, and emotional availability while supporting students and maintaining positive learning environments (Hochschild, 1983; Björk, 2017). Such emotional regulation requires substantial psychological effort and can contribute to emotional exhaustion and burnout over time (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021; Lauroza et al., 2025).

The JD-R Model complements these perspectives by providing a structural explanation of how occupational stress develops (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli, 2017). Contemporary higher education environments are characterized by increasing job demands, including greater student engagement, digital accessibility, administrative workload, and emotional support responsibilities (Rakow et al., 2025). When these demands exceed available resources such as institutional support, autonomy, recognition, and professional development opportunities, stress and burnout become more likely (Deep et al., 2025).

Gender Role Theory further contextualizes these experiences by emphasizing how socially constructed expectations influence workplace behavior and interactions (Eagly, 1987). Cultural norms often portray women as nurturing, caring, and emotionally supportive, leading students and institutions to place greater relational and

emotional expectations on female faculty members (Björk, 2017; Constantin et al., 2024). These expectations increase invisible labour and contribute to gendered patterns of occupational stress (Venkat et al., 2022).

Additionally, Stress Process Theory demonstrates how broader social inequalities influence exposure to workplace stressors and access to coping resources (Pearlin et al., 1981). Female faculty members may encounter discrimination, microaggressions, limited leadership opportunities, and unequal recognition of their contributions, all of which intensify occupational stress and negatively affect well-being (Elliott & Bliethe, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022).

Taken together, these theories reveal that gendered occupational stress is not merely an individual experience but the result of the interaction between organizational demands, emotional expectations, institutional structures, and societal norms. This integrated perspective highlights the need for systemic interventions that address workload management, emotional labour recognition, institutional support mechanisms, and persistent gender inequalities in higher education. Such an approach is essential for promoting the well-being and professional sustainability of female faculty members in contemporary academic environments.

## 7. Institutional and Policy Implications

Addressing gendered occupational stress among female faculty members requires comprehensive institutional and policy-level interventions that recognize the unique challenges arising from evolving student expectations, emotional labour, and persistent gender inequalities within higher education. Since occupational stress is influenced not only by individual factors but also by organizational structures and cultural norms, institutions must adopt a holistic approach that promotes faculty well-being and workplace equity (Elliott & Bliethe, 2021; Roosa & Borkoski, 2021).

One important strategy is the establishment of faculty support systems that enhance psychological well-being and resilience. Universities should provide accessible counselling services, employee assistance programs, peer-

support networks, mentoring initiatives, and stress management workshops to help faculty cope with increasing professional demands (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021). Such initiatives can reduce emotional exhaustion, strengthen coping mechanisms, and foster a supportive academic environment.

Higher education institutions should also reconsider traditional performance evaluation and promotion systems. Existing evaluation frameworks often prioritize research output, publications, grants, and administrative achievements while overlooking the substantial emotional and relational work performed by faculty members (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021). Activities such as student mentoring, academic advising, emotional support, and the creation of inclusive learning environments significantly contribute to student success but frequently receive limited recognition (Venkat et al., 2022). Incorporating these contributions into appraisal and promotion criteria would promote greater equity and acknowledge the full scope of academic work.

Professional development programs are equally important in helping faculty navigate contemporary educational challenges. Training related to classroom management, student engagement, conflict resolution, digital pedagogy, emotional intelligence, and boundary-setting can equip faculty members with the skills necessary to manage evolving student behaviours effectively (Rakow et al., 2025). Such initiatives are particularly valuable in reducing the emotional burden associated with increased student expectations and continuous digital accessibility.

Furthermore, institutions should implement gender-sensitive policies that address structural inequalities within academia. These policies may include transparent workload allocation systems, flexible work arrangements, family-friendly practices, equitable promotion procedures, leadership development opportunities, and mechanisms for addressing discrimination and workplace harassment (Venkat et al., 2022; Elliott & Blithe, 2021). Ensuring equal access to professional opportunities can help reduce gender-based disparities and improve overall job satisfaction among female faculty members.

Beyond formal policies, universities must

promote a cultural shift that challenges traditional gender stereotypes and assumptions regarding emotional labour and caregiving responsibilities. Creating inclusive organizational cultures that value diversity, respect, and shared responsibility can reduce the disproportionate emotional demands placed on women academics (Björk, 2017; Constantin et al., 2024). Institutional leaders should actively encourage awareness of gendered workplace expectations and foster environments where emotional support and mentoring responsibilities are shared more equitably among faculty members.

Ultimately, addressing gendered occupational stress is not only a matter of employee welfare but also a strategic institutional priority. Research indicates that faculty well-being is closely linked to teaching effectiveness, student engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and educational quality (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021; Rakow et al., 2025). By implementing supportive policies and fostering equitable workplace cultures, higher education institutions can enhance the well-being of female faculty members while simultaneously improving student outcomes and institutional performance.

## 8. Future Research Directions

Although this paper provides a theoretical framework for understanding gendered occupational stress among female faculty members, further empirical research is needed to validate and extend the proposed relationships. The increasing complexity of academic work, changing student behaviour, and persistent gender inequalities create several opportunities for future investigation.

One important area for research is the direct relationship between evolving student behaviour and faculty stress. While previous studies have identified growing student expectations, consumer-oriented attitudes, digital dependence, and increasing emotional needs (Yolles, 2020; Constantin et al., 2024; Rakow et al., 2025), limited empirical evidence exists regarding their specific impact on occupational stress among female faculty. Quantitative and qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into how these factors contribute to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and work-life conflict (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021).

Comparative research across academic disciplines, institutional types, and cultural settings would also enhance understanding of gendered occupational stress. Differences in workload, organizational culture, and societal gender norms may influence how female faculty experience and respond to workplace stressors (Venkat et al., 2022; Elliott & Blithe, 2021). Such studies can provide a more nuanced understanding of stress across diverse higher education contexts.

Future studies should further examine coping strategies and resilience mechanisms adopted by female academics. Research on emotional intelligence, mentoring networks, social support systems, and work-life integration practices may help identify effective approaches for managing occupational stress and promoting well-being (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021). These findings could support the development of targeted institutional interventions.

Longitudinal research is particularly important because most existing studies rely on cross-sectional designs (Zaheer et al., 2016). Long-term investigations could explore how occupational stress evolves across career stages and how sustained exposure to emotional labour, role conflict, and workplace inequalities influences mental health, job satisfaction, and career progression (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli, 2017).

Additionally, future research should explore the role of institutional culture, leadership, and support systems in mitigating occupational stress. Supportive organizational environments, equitable policies, and inclusive leadership practices may help buffer the negative effects of high job demands (Deep et al., 2025; Schaufeli, 2017). Research should also investigate how emerging technologies, online teaching, and digital communication platforms influence workload, emotional labour, and faculty well-being (Yolles, 2020; Rakow et al., 2025).

Overall, future research should adopt interdisciplinary and context-sensitive approaches to advance understanding of gendered occupational stress and support evidence-based policy development in higher education.

## 9. Conclusion

The contemporary higher education landscape is undergoing rapid transformation driven by technological advancements, globalization, changing student expectations, and increasing institutional demands (Yolles, 2020). While these developments have created new opportunities for student engagement, innovation, and academic growth, they have also generated significant challenges for faculty members. This paper has argued that these challenges are not experienced uniformly across academic staff and that female faculty members are particularly vulnerable to occupational stress due to the interaction between changing student behaviour and gendered workplace expectations (Constantin et al., 2024; Venkat et al., 2022).

The discussion demonstrated that gendered occupational stress extends beyond traditional workload concerns and encompasses emotional, relational, and social dimensions of academic work. Female faculty members are frequently expected to perform substantial amounts of emotional labour, mentoring, caregiving, and student support that often remain invisible within formal performance evaluation systems (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021). At the same time, contemporary students increasingly expect personalized attention, immediate feedback, emotional support, and continuous accessibility from faculty members, thereby expanding the scope of academic responsibilities (Rakow et al., 2025). These evolving expectations often place disproportionate demands on women academics because societal norms continue to associate femininity with empathy, nurturing, and emotional availability (Björk, 2017; Constantin et al., 2024).

Drawing upon Role Theory, Emotional Labour Theory, the Job Demands–Resources Model, Gender Role Theory, and Stress Process Theory, this paper has provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the mechanisms through which occupational stress develops among female faculty members (Biddle, 2013; Hochschild, 1983; Schaufeli, 2017; Eagly, 1987; Pearlin et al., 1981). These theoretical perspectives collectively illustrate how competing role expectations, invisible emotional work, increasing job demands, gender stereotypes, and structural

inequalities interact to shape women's experiences within higher education institutions. The integration of these perspectives highlights that occupational stress is not merely an individual problem but a phenomenon rooted in organizational practices, institutional cultures, and broader social structures (Elliott & Blithe, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022).

The findings further emphasize that prolonged exposure to these stressors may have significant consequences for faculty well-being, including emotional exhaustion, burnout, work-life conflict, reduced job satisfaction, and psychological distress (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021; Lauroza et al., 2025). Such outcomes not only affect individual faculty members but may also influence teaching effectiveness, student learning experiences, organizational commitment, and overall institutional performance (Rakow et al., 2025). Therefore, promoting the well-being of female faculty should be viewed as both a gender equity issue and a strategic priority for higher education institutions.

The paper also underscores the importance of institutional support mechanisms, gender-sensitive policies, equitable workload distribution, recognition of emotional labour, and inclusive organizational cultures in mitigating occupational stress (Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021; Elliott & Blithe, 2021). Universities that invest in faculty well-being through supportive leadership, professional development opportunities, counselling services, and fair evaluation systems are better positioned to foster healthy, productive, and sustainable academic environments (Deep et al., 2025; Roosa & Borkoski, 2021).

Finally, as higher education continues to evolve, understanding the gendered dimensions of occupational stress will become increasingly important. Future research should continue to investigate how changing student behaviour, technological developments, and institutional structures influence the experiences of female academics across diverse contexts (Yolles, 2020; Rakow et al., 2025). By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by women faculty members, higher education institutions can contribute to more equitable, inclusive, and resilient academic communities. Ultimately, prioritizing faculty well-being is essential not only for supporting educators but also for ensuring the

long-term quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of higher education itself (Roosa & Borkoski, 2021; Venkat et al., 2022).

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