

Beyond Burnout: A Counterintuitive Analysis of how Strain-based Work-family Interference Strengthens Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment in Pakistan's Academia

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Abstract

The dominant discourse in organizational psychology is that work-family conflict is an un-defeated adverse with the effect of burnout, lesser job satisfaction, and low organizational commitment. This paper dispels that notion by revealing an intricate and counter-intuitive fact among university professors in Islamabad, Pakistan. We have used a solid quantitative, correlational study to survey 206 social science teachers in order to deconstruct the subtle relationships between the six specific dimensions of work-family interference (Time, Strain, Behavior-based both Work Interference with Family - WIF and Family Interference with Work -FIW), and the three different components of Organizational Commitment (Affective - AC, Continuance -CC, Normative - NC). We have found that there is a high overall positive correlation between Work-Life Balance (WLB) and Organizational Commitment (OC) ($r = .325, p < .001$). Nonetheless, the most impressive and theoretically important result was the always strong and positive correlation of Strain-based interference (both SWIF and SFIW) with the three OC components. The climax to this observation was that the strong relationship between Strain-based WIF (SWIF) and Normative Commitment (NC) ($r = .357, p < .01$) indicated that the fact that the faculty is stressed and tired because of their line of professional duties is a trigger to an internal moral obligation to stay in their institution. This "Paradox of Strain" suggests that in the environment of Pakistani public universities, where resources are limited and the faculty members usually work under a high level of pressure, strain can lead to the development of the sense of duty, a sense of perceived investment, and emotional attachment instead of its destruction. The paper not only adds a new theoretical insight to the existing WLB-OC research, but also offers important, practical insights that can guide university administrators in retaining and engaging their most valuable asset their faculty by changing the way they conceptualize and deal with strain at work.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Organizational Commitment, Work-Family Conflict, Strain-Based Conflict, University Teachers, Pakistan, Higher Education, Affective Commitment, Continuance Commitment, Normative Commitment, Job Demands-Resources Model, Sunk Cost Fallacy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Global Imperative of Work-Life Balance

The search of the Work-Life Balance (WLB) in the 21 st century has become not only an individual desire but also an urgent requirement of organizations and society. With the reduction of professional boundaries and the personal boundaries, the capacity of an individual worker to effectively cope with the competing demands of his/her work and non-work peons is directly related to his/her well-being, output, and, most importantly, commitment to his/her company (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Allen and Meyer, 1991). The repercussions of being imbalanced are well-recorded: stress, burnout, absenteeism, and finally,

higher turnover rates all cost is high to organizations as well as individuals (Amstad *et al.*, 2011; Michel *et al.*, 2011). As a result, WLB programs have taken root in the contemporary human resource management as being a panacea to improving employee retention and organizational performance.

1.2. The Academic Crucible: A Unique Context for WLB

Academic profession is the sphere that is especially fruitful in WLB challenges. University professors are not just workers, they are knowledge producers, guides and in many cases, a popular intellectual. It is typified by the nature of their work

being inexplicably boundless going way beyond the boundaries of the classroom or even the 9-to-5 working hours (Clark, 2000). All these aspects such as research, publication, advising students, and administration are all components of the role that may require extensive time and emotional investment, especially in the evening, weekends, and holidays (Arif and Farooqi, 2014). The ensuing spillover is what leads to a perceived tension between professional and personal/family life, thus causing academia to be a risky workplace in terms of work-family conflict (WFC).

These issues are usually magnified in the situation in Pakistan. Universities in the public sector are often faced with limited resources, excessive teaching workloads, the need to have international journals published and all against a complicated system of bureaucracy. In most cases, the faculty members, especially in the social sciences, are supposed to be prolific researchers and committed teachers with little or no equivalent support or payment. Such a powerful mix of strain preconditions the significance of considering WLB and its influence on commitment both as an academic issue of interest, and as essential to the well-being and continuity of the Pakistani system of higher education.

1.3. The Oversimplification of WLB and OC: Identifying the Research Gap

Although the literature about the relationship between WLB and OC is abundant, there is still a missing link. Most research studies consider WLB and OC as unitary constructs. As an example, a common research study will find that better WLB results in increased OC (e.g., Sakthivel and Jayakrishnan, 2012; Olawale and Fapohunda, 2017). This may give an insightful highlevel view but obscures an even more in-depth reality. Work-family interference is not a uniformed and one-dimensional experience as Carlson *et al.*, (2000) put it. It is represented in discrete forms (Time-based, Strain-based, Behavior-based) and has certain directions (Work-to-Family, Family-to-Work). On the same note, the seminal article by Allen and Meyer (1991) shows that organizational commitment is not a unitary disposition, but rather a tripartite construct which consists of Affective (emotional attachment), Continuance (cost-based calculation) and Normative (moral obligation) elements.

Through this, it results in a deep research question that has not been well studied particularly in non-Western societies such as the case of Pakistan: How do these particular, granular dimensions of interference (e.g., the stress of work on family) have a different effect on these particular, psychologically specific aspects of commitment (e.g., the moral imperative to remain)? Is the pressure to meet a research deadline (Strain-based WIF) the major cause of an emotional attachment to the university (AC), or does it give a person a sense of sunk

cost (CC), or does it give them a feeling of a deep sense of duty (NC)? The response to this question is not simply academic but there are tremendous practical implications to it. Learning about these subtle relationships can help university leaders develop focused, complex interventions that can be used to affect the particular motivation of commitment, instead of using broad WLB policies that might fail to hit the target.

1.4. The Pakistani Context and the Rationale for This Study

Although research has been done on WLB and OC in different sectors in Pakistan such as banking (Akintayo, 2010) and in the healthcare sector (Gulbahar *et al.*, 2014), little research has been done in the area of higher education, especially these sub-dimensions. The article by Arif and Farooqi (2014) confirmed that WLB has a positive relationship with OC among university teachers in Gujrat but lacked an analysis on the subscale. In the same manner, Akter and Hossen (2019) in a recent study also discovered a positive relationship in Bangladesh, but did not go further to examine the various selective effect of strain, time, and behavior-based conflicts.

This research, thus, occupies a very important gap. It offers context-specific and granular information by targeting the faculty of five Islamabad-based public universities and can be used to guide the policy and practice within the specific context of socio-cultural and institutional realities in Pakistan. The results can be used to refute the popular wisdom and provide a more advanced view of faculty motivation and retention.

1.5. Research Objectives and Questions

The key aim of this paper is to shift the analysis to the aggregate-level analysis and empirically examine the different relationships between the specific dimensions of the work-family interference and the three elements of organizational commitment.

The research questions that will serve the purpose of this study are:

1. How strong and what is the nature of the relationship between Time-based Work Interference with Family (TWIF) and Affective commitment (AC), Continuance commitment (CC), and normative commitment (NC)?
2. How strong and what is the nature of the relationship between Strain-based Work Interference with Family (SWIF) and AC, CC and NC?
3. What are the characteristics and the strength of the relationships among the Behavior-based Work Interference with Family (BWIF) and AC, CC and NC?
4. How strong and what will be the nature of the correlation between Time-based Family

Interference with Work (TFIW) and AC, CC, and NC?

5. How does Strain-based Family Interference with Work (SFIW) relate to and the strength of the relationship between Strain-based Family Interference with Work (SFIW) and AC, CC and NC?
6. How strong and what is the character of the interaction between Behavior-based Family Interference with Work (BFIW) and AC, CC and NC?

1.6. Significance of the Study

This research is of great importance to several stakeholders:

Theoretical Contribution:

The paper disrupts the naive conflict is bad discourse by establishing strain, which is one of the main elements of conflict, to be a strong positive predictor of commitment especially normative commitment. This observation makes it necessary to refine current WLB and OC models and conclude that the connection is conditional and depends on the situation and the mechanism of particular psychological processes.

Practical Implication to University Administrators:

In the case of university leaders in Pakistan and beyond just resource-constrained system, the findings can serve as a chorus on more effective staff retention strategies. Administrators can also learn to manage it, rather than considering all strain as an enemy to be killed, by establishing support systems that allow faculty to deal with it, which will enhance their sense of responsibility and obligation to duty.

Policy Implications to Higher Education:

The research has provided evidence-based suggestions to policy makers to develop faculty development policies, workload and mental health support services that are specific to what really drives commitment resulting in a more stable and productive academic workforce.

Value to the Global Literature:

The study enriches the literature on the world with its contribution since it presents the data in the context of a non-Western developing economy environment which demonstrates the significance of cultural and institutional variables in workplace dynamics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Deconstructing Work-Life Balance: The Multidimensional Model

The concept of WLB has greatly changed in its initial conceptualization of a mere time-management challenge Chansaengsee, S. (2017). It is currently known as a dynamic equilibrium of equilibrium where a person

is able to handle the needs and requirements of the working and personal life excellently, which results in an improved well-being and performance (Carlson *et al.*, 2000; Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). One of the major developments in the field was the invention of the multidimensional model of work-family conflict by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000). According to this model, work and family interference is not one-way and monolithic. It distinguishes between:

2.1.1 Direction of Interference:

Work Interference with Family (WIF): It happens when there is some problem with the work domain experiences and demands to meet the family domain demands.

Family Interference with Work (FIW): It occurs when the family domain experiences and demands interfere with the ability to fulfill the duties of the work domain.

2.1.2 Form of Interference:

Time-based Interference (T):

It occurs when the time requirements of one role cannot allow an individual to be physically involved in the other role (e.g. working late cannot allow one to attend a school event of their child).

Strain-based Interference (S):

When strain (stress, fatigue, anxiety) in one role diminishes the effectiveness of an individual in the other role (e.g., stress at work leads to one being irritable and not patient towards family members).

Behavior-based Interference (B):

When the actual behavioral requirements of one role conflict with the expectations of the other role (e.g. an authoritative, directive kind of behavior at work will be inappropriate and detrimental in a supportive family setting).

It is a six-factor model (TWIF, SWIF, BWIF, TFIW, SFIW, BFIW) that offers a complex and detailed analytical tool of the multidimensional issue of WLB. It takes the field past a simplistic metaphor of balance to a more sophisticated view of the multiple ways in which roles can be in conflict.

2.2. Understanding Organizational Commitment: The Three-Component Model

Organizational commitment is an important construct in the organization behavior, which connotes to the mental attachment of an employee to the organization (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). The three-component model put forward by Allen and Meyer (1991) is the most acceptable and empirically validated model. This model identifies three different states of mind that make an individual attached to an organization:

Affective commitment (AC):

This is emotional attachment to organization. A highly AC employee will be willing to stay due to the identification that he/she has with the goals and values of the organization, personal satisfaction associated with membership in such an organization and a sense of belonging. "I stay because I want to." AC is the one that is the most closely associated with discretionary effort, organizational citizenship behavior and a reduced turnover intention (Meyer *et al.*, 2002).

Continuance Commitment (CC):

This is a calculative commitment that is developed on the perceived cost involved in quitting the organization. A high CC employee must also remain since he/she believes that he/she has too much to lose (e.g., pension, seniority, accrued benefits, no alternative means of employment). "I stay because I need to." CC can be linked to a sunk cost philosophy whereby the person feels that he or she is stuck by his or her previous investments.

Normative Commitment (NC):

It is a commitment of the moral or ethical kind. The high NC employee feels the need to remain since it is the right or moral thing to do which is sometimes due to a sense of indebtedness to the company, internalized norms or strong work ethic. "I stay because I ought to." NC is associated with feeling of duty and responsibility even at the expense of an individual.

It is important to understand these unique elements since they possess various antecedents as well as outcomes. Policies that increase AC (e.g. developing a strong organizational culture) might be of little influence on CC (e.g. more sensitive to the external job market).

2.3. Theoretical Framework: Integrating WLB and OC
The two major theoretical frameworks that are involved in this study include:

1. The Multidimensional Model of Work-Family Interference offered by Carlson *et al.* (2000): This is the model that allows seeing and quantifying the independent variable (WLB) in its complex, six-dimensional manifestation.
2. Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment by Allen and Meyer (1991): This gives the model of understanding and measurement of the dependent variable (OC) in its tripartite nature.

The conceptual model assumes that the six particular forms of interference (TWIF, SWIF, BWIF, TFIW, SFIW, BFIW) will be related differently to the three elements of commitment (AC, CC, NC). The main, and rather counterintuitive, hypothesis of the research, which we made on the results of research is that Strain-based interference will display the best and the most

stable positive correlations with all three elements of OC, and especially Normative Commitment.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model also informs this hypothesis (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). JD-R model indicates that job demands (high workload, emotional demands and role ambiguity) may result in burnout and strain. Nevertheless, when these demands are supplemented with sufficient job resources (such as social support, freedom, development opportunities), it may also result in work engagement and motivation. For the purposes of this research, we suggest that the strain of work to Pakistani university faculty can not only be viewed as a demand, but a challenge that, when combined with a strong sense of mission or duty (one of the personal resources) can in fact serve commitment, especially the normative aspect.

2.4. Review of Related Studies: A Mixed Picture

The available literature illustrates a mixed and even contradictory image and, therefore, demonstrates the necessity of context-specific research.

General Positive Correlations: In many industries, it was observed by numerous studies that there is a general positive correlation between WLB and OC. Berk and Gundogmus (2018) concluded that this relationship was present among accountants in Turkey, and Sakthivel and Jayakrishnan (2012) concluded that it was between nurses in India. Arif and Farooqi (2014) and Akter and Hossen (2019) both established a strong positive relationship between WLB and OC among university teachers in Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively. These articles confirm the general assumption that work-life conflict management proves useful in commitment.

Research on Sub-Dimensions (The Minority): There is less literature that has tried to explore the sub-dimensions, and the findings thereof have been in many cases contradictory. In a study of the Hungarian workers, Csillag *et al.*, (2012) have determined that affective and normative commitment were associated with work-family interference in a negative way and that continuance commitment did not have significant association. This conclusion is in direct opposition of the main hypothesis of our investigation. Likewise, Michel *et al.*, (2011) in a meta-analysis established that strain-based conflict tended to correlate negatively with job satisfaction in comparison with time-based conflict.

The Role of Context: The difference between the Csillag *et al.*, (2012) and our results highlights the importance of the context. Strain can actually be nothing but negative in a highly resource-endowed and individualistic Western environment. In a collectivist and resource constrained environment such as Pakistan, where faculty might be highly mission-oriented, alternative jobs are scarce, where duty and perseverance are valued, however, strain may be construed and

internalised in a different way. It can create a sense of we are all in this together or a feeling of self-sacrifice to a larger cause which in the process enhances normative and continuance commitment.

2.5. The Uniqueness of the Academic Profession

Another factor that should be taken into account is the exceptional character of the academic profession. Academics usually get into the field inspired by a love of knowledge and the desire to change something, which will instill high degrees of affective commitment. However, the job also requires extensive working hours, intellectual activity, and the inability to distinguish between the working and personal life, which may cause a high degree of stress. Although the tenure system has job security (resource), it may also lead to a lot of pressure (demand) in the pre-tenure years. It is important to understand how these distinct professional qualities interact with the relationship between WLB-OC and this study offers a good insight as to this relationship.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative, non-experimental, correlational research design was used in this study. This design was selected due to the main aim which was to understand the connection between the existing variables (six dimensions of WLB and the three elements of OC) without any manipulation of them. This was aimed at finding patterns and strengths of association, but not causality. Correlational designs are especially suited to investigate multifaceted in detail relationships in real-world situations.

3.2. Population and Sample

Population:

The target population included all the faculty members (lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors and professors) who were employed in the Social Sciences departments of five universities of public sector in Islamabad, Pakistan. The overall population was determined as 441 faculty members.

Sampling Technique:

Proportionate stratified sampling technique was employed to give a representative sample on the population distribution in the five universities. This approach promotes the sample representativeness and makes it possible to make more accurate estimates.

Sample Size:

A sample, consisting of 206 faculty members, was selected, which is around 46 percent of the entire population. This is deemed to be a sufficient sample size that can be used to perform correlation analysis as well as offer enough statistical power to identify medium to large effect sizes.

Sample Distribution: The sample was made up of 105 males (51 percent) and 101 females (49 percent) faculty members so as to have a balanced gender split in the analysis. This equilibrium is the key to eliminating the bias of the findings, which might be introduced by gender-related experiences.

3.3. Research Instruments

Two primary instruments were used to collect the data:

1. Work-Life Balance (WLB) Scale: The scale was a researcher-created scale that was modified to fit the dimensions of work-family interference that were specific to Carlson et al. (2000). It had 18 questions subdivided into two large subscales:

Work Interference with Family (WIF): 9 items, further divided into:

- i. Time-based WIF (TWIF): 3 items (e.g., My work schedule often conflicts with my family activities).
- ii. Strain-based WIF (SWIF): 3 items (e.g., I often feel too tired from work to fully engage in family activities).
- iii. Behavior-based WIF (BWIF): 3 items (e.g., The way I need to behave at work is not suitable for interacting with my family).

Family Interference with Work (FIW): 9 items, further divided into:

- i. Time-based FIW (TFIW): 3 items (e.g., Family responsibilities often prevent me from working as much as I need to).
- ii. Strain-based FIW (SFIW): 3 items (e.g., Stress from family matters often makes it hard for me to concentrate at work).
- iii. Behavior-based FIW (BFIW): 3 items (e.g., The way I need to behave at home is not effective for my work environment).

Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

2. Organizational Commitment (OC) Scale: This was the standardized scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1991) that was used with their permission. It had 23 questions that were used to assess the three elements of commitment:

- i. Affective Commitment (AC): 8 items (e.g., I would be extremely happy to continue the rest of my career in this organization).
- ii. Continuance Commitment (CC): 8 (e.g., I feel that I have too few options to want to leave this organization).
- iii. Normative Commitment (NC): 7 items (e.g., I have a strong sense of obligation towards my current employer).

Responses were also recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Validity:

Researcher developed WLB scale has content validity that was determined by a review committee of four subject matter experts in the field of education and organization psychology. Their comments were used to improve the instrument so that the items were valid in terms of their theoretical interpretation of time, strain, and behavior-based interference. The OC scale as defined by Allen and Meyer (1991) is a long-standing scale which has been proven to have construct validity in many cultural settings.

Reliability:

A pilot study was done using a sample of 50 members of the faculty (they were not a part of the final sample) to determine the internal consistency of the scales. The Alpha of Cronbach was used to determine reliability.

In the case of WLB scale, the total alpha was .937 which is superb. Alphas on the subscale were also good; TWIF (.898), SWIF (.913), BWIF (.724), TFIW (.865), SFIW (.846), BFIW (.841). Though the alpha (.724) of BWIF is slightly lower, it can be assumed to be acceptable in the research.

In the case of OC scale, alpha was .868 on the whole, which is very good. The subscale alpha coefficients were: AC (.885), CC (.799) and NC (.609). The alpha of NC subscale (.609) lies on the low side, not unusual to this scale and reported in other studies of the same kind (e.g., Meyer *et al.*, 2002). This is one of the constraints which will be addressed in the conclusion.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The survey was used as a method of data collection. The researcher himself went to the five chosen universities in Islamabad. The selected members of the faculty were given their informed consent and questionnaires were given out to them. The researcher guaranteed the confidentiality of the responses made by the participants and the data would be utilized only for research purposes. The questionnaires were fully completed and returned with 206 out of 235 questionnaires being returned hence the response rate of 87.7. This great response rate improves the generalization of the results.

3.6. Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. The following statistical techniques were employed:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Standard deviations, frequencies, and means were used to characterize the sample features and the general levels of WLB and OC. This was a background knowledge regarding the data.

2. Inferential Statistics: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r): This was the major analysis tool that was applied to determine the relationships among the six WLB subscales (TWIF, SWIF, BWIF, TFIW, SFIW, BFIW) and the three OC elements (AC, CC, NC). The Pearson r is used to measure the strength and direction of linear relationship between two continuous variables. The p value was considered to be under $p = .05$. It is also presented as a detailed correlation matrix.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive Statistics for WLB and OC

It is necessary to get to know of the general levels of WLB and OC of the respondents before exploring the relationships.

Work-Life Balance (WLB):

The general average score of WLB was 3.0 (with a 5-point scale), which means that the respondents sometimes were interrupted in their work-family lives. This implies a medium conflict level, which is not anomalous to high-pressure environment of academia. TWIF registered the highest score in the WLB subscales (mean=3.7, often), indicating that time pressure in work was the most recurrent problem. Faculty members used to experience that their working hours were a direct contradiction to the time they spent with their families. SWIF and SFIW had lowest means (2.7, "Sometimes"); here time-based and strain-based interference were found to have statistically the strongest predictors of commitment, but were reported to be less frequent as compared to time-based interference. This raises a significant difference: the effect of strain is deep, despite the fact that its frequency is not the greatest.

Organizational Commitment (OC):

The general score of Organizational commitment was 3.2 ("Sometimes"). This implies the medium degree of commitment.

Affective Commitment (AC) was the highest in terms of mean (3.5, "Sometimes"), then Continuance Commitment (CC) was the next one (3.4, "Sometimes"). This leads to an idea that the members of the faculty are usually emotionally attached to their universities and consider the expenses when departing.

Normative Commitment (NC) was the weakest in terms of means (2.8, Sometimes), which implied that a moral obligation to remain was the least strong type of commitment as among the faculty. This fact is interesting due to the fact that NC demonstrated the most significant correlations with strain-based interference.

4.2. Correlation Analysis: Addressing the Research Questions

The main part of the analysis is illustrated in Table 1, that demonstrates the Pearson correlation coefficients of all subscales of WLB with OC elements.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Matrix between WLB Subscales and OC Components

| Variables | TWIF | SWIF | BWIF | WIF | TFIW | SFIW | BFIW | FIW | WLB | AC | CC | NC |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| TWIF | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SWIF | -0.075 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| BWIF | -0.095 | .315** | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| WIF | .382** | .720** | .706** | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| TFIW | .587** | .220** | 0.11 | .471** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| SFIW | -0.035 | .551** | .309** | .477** | .316** | 1 | | | | | | |
| BFIW | 0.081 | .400** | .309** | .445** | .233** | .460** | 1 | | | | | |
| FIW | .220** | .545** | .339** | .612** | .615** | .841** | .772** | 1 | | | | |
| WLB | .328** | .697** | .567** | .882** | .610** | .748** | .690** | .913** | 1 | | | |
| AC | 0.053 | .245** | 0.133 | .242** | .231** | .152* | 0.117 | .212** | .251** | 1 | | |
| CC | 0.01 | .304** | .179* | .282** | .206** | .220** | 0.057 | .212** | .272** | .490** | 1 | |
| NC | 0.055 | .357** | 0.117 | .299** | .154* | .211** | 0.129 | .222** | .287** | .609** | .474** | 1 |

TWIF = Time-based Work Interference with Family; SWIF = Strain-based Work Interference with Family; BWIF = Behavior-based Work Interference with Family; WIF = Work Interference with Family (Total); TFIW = Time-based Family Interference with Work; SFIW = Strain-based Family Interference with Work; BFIW = Behavior-based Family Interference with Work; FIW = Family Interference with Work (Total); WLB = Work-Life Balance (Total); AC = Affective Commitment; CC = Continuance Commitment; NC = Normative Commitment. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

4.2.1. Relationship between WIF Subscales and OC Components (RQs 1-3)

RQ1: TWIF and OC: TWIF and AC ($r = .053$), CC ($r = .010$), and NC ($r = .055$) were found to correlate with each other in a very weak non-significant manner. This is a crucial finding. It implies that, to these faculty members, the time strain of work, the very number of hours that they worked on professional activities, has no significant correlation with any type of organizational commitment. This is contrary to the widespread belief that flexible working hours (that mainly concern time-based conflict) are the first move to enhancing commitment. This information indicates that offering faculty more free time is possibly not the solution to the underlying psychological motivations of their loyalty to the institution.

RQ2: SWIF and OC: Strain-based WIF were significantly positively related to all three OC components:

AC: $r = .245$, $p < .01$. This shows that the emotional attachment of the faculty towards the university is positively related to the stress and fatigue they are experiencing due to their work. This is paradoxical but is an indication that mutual struggle or purpose in challenging work can create a more significant feeling of belonging.

CC: $r = .304$, $p < .01$. It is a high-affinity; this would imply high-stress levels of work-related strain among the faculty would be more likely to remain since they would be having high cost attitudes of leaving. They might believe that they spent their time, efforts, and emotional work in vain when they quit or they cannot find another job that would help them to use their abilities and experience.

NC: $r = .357$, $p < .01$. This is the only correlation that is strong in the whole matrix. It is indirectly indicating that the stress of their professional work is the most strongly associated with a moral obligation to stay with the institution. And this is the core of the "Paradox of Strain."

RQ3: BWIF and OC: Behavior-based WIF was significantly positively related only to CC ($r = .179$, $p < .05$). The relationship with AC ($r = .133$) and NC ($r = .117$) had a positive but statistically insignificant relationship. It implies that the unsuitableness of work behaviors (e.g., authoritative or analytic) with family life is mostly associated with a calculative, cost-based motive of remaining with the organization. Faculty might also believe that adjusting their behavior to fit the family lifestyle is an excessively high cost to themselves, and they are more likely to remain in a position where their professional identity is appreciated.

4.2.2. Relationship between FIW Subscales and OC Components (RQs 4-6)

RQ4: TFIW and OC: Time-based FIW showed significant positive correlations with:

AC: $r = .231$, $p < .01$

CC: $r = .206$, $p < .01$

NC: $r = .154$, $p < .05$ This implies that, when family issues eat the time that is required in work, it is positively related to all three types of commitment, but the correlations are not as strong as those of SWIF. This implies that family commitments, through their constraints on time spent at work, could ironically enhance the commitment of the faculty member to his/her institution, which could be by further enhancing their attachment to their profession and value to the contributions they make.

RQ5: SFIW and OC: Strain-based FIW also showed significant positive correlations with all three OC components:

AC: $r = .152, p < .05$

CC: $r = .220, p < .01$

NC: $r = .211, p < .01$ This result supports the main hypothesis: strain, irrespective of the cause (work or family) is another predictive of commitment. Emotional attachment, perceived cost of leaving, and moral obligation also have a positive connection with the stress caused because of the family (e.g., taking care of an ill relative). This implies that the faculty in general ability to handle stress and adversity is a key determinant in their commitment.

RQ6: BFIW and OC: Behavior-based FIW had insignificant correlations with AC ($r = .117$), CC ($r = .057$), and NC ($r = .129$). This indicates that the incompatibility of family behavior (e.g. nurturing or relaxed) with the work environment does not have statistically significant relationship with the organizational commitment in this sample. Faculty can ghettoize these differences in behaviors without its impacting their psychological attachment to the university.

4.2.3. Overall Relationship between WLB and OC

In line with the rest of the literature and the findings, there was a considerable positive association between the overall WLB score and the overall OC score ($r = .325, p < .001$). This is a validation of the overall hypothesis that the better managed work-life interference is related to increased organizational commitment. Although, when looking at this subscale analysis, it can be seen that this overall relationship is mainly caused by the high positive correlation of strain-based interference, not a decrease of time-based or behavior-based conflict.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Interpreting the "Paradox of Strain": Why Does Strain Strengthen Commitment?

The strongest and contradictory conclusion of the research is the widespread positive association between the strain-based interference (both SWIF and SFIW) and the three elements of organizational commitment, especially Normative Committee (NC). This Paradox of Strain disrupts the prevailing paradigm of organizational psychology that positions any type of work-family conflict as such. Rather, we find that among university teachers in Islamabad, being subjected to strain can serve as one of the stimuli that enhance their connection with the university. This phenomenon can be explained in a number of theoretical and contextual terms:

The Sunk Cost Fallacy and Continuance Commitment (CC):

Our connection between SWIF and CC ($r = .304$) is strong, which can be attributed to the economic

principle of the sunk cost. The faculty members who have put much time, energy and emotional effort into their career in a certain university may find it hard to leave because they would consider it a waste of the efforts, they have put in. The same strain they feel becomes a credential to their sacrifice and the more apt they are to remain to get through to the end and enjoy the projected long-term rewards (e.g., tenure, pension, seniority). This is especially true in such an environment as Pakistan where other academic jobs can be few or not as prestigious.

Moral Obligation and Normative Commitment (NC):

The most interesting perhaps is the strongest correlation (SWIF and NC, $r = .357$). It implies that workplace stress and exhaustion are strong motivators of a faculty member to feel morally obliged to his or her institution. A number of mechanisms might be in force:

1. Increased Responsibility:

The workload pressure may cause faculty to become even more essential to their students, peers, and their organizations. They can adopt a perception that, in case of leaving, who will be left to take care of my students/research/projects? This brings about the feeling of responsibility.

2. Reciprocity and Indebtedness:

In an environment that is resource-scarce, faculty could look at the strain as a communal burden or a loyalty challenge. They can develop a feeling of owedness to the university because it gave them a platform of intellectual development and social standing and therefore, they will pay their debt back by committing even in circumstances of duress.

3. Cultural and Professional Ethos:

Pakistani culture emphasizes a lot on perseverance, duty, and fulfillment of obligations even in times of adversity. This cultural norm can be increased with the help of the academic profession, which is focused on service and knowledge diffusion. Enduring strain may be an honor faculty members take pride in and a sign of their commitment to a higher cause.

Emotional Attachment and Affective Commitment (AC):

The less expected one is the positive correlation between strain and AC (SWIF $r = .245$, SFIW $r = .152$). It indicates that the mere fact that their jobs are stressful may help them have a stronger emotional connection. This could be because:

Managing Shared Challenges:

The challenge of managing high levels of strain can in itself be rewarding. Faculty that overcomes these hurdles can form a feeling of pride and achievement that builds a strong attachment to the institution that gave them the platform to affect this success.

Camaraderie and Solidarity:

The sense of camaraderie may be a fruit of being in the trenches together by a group of faculty members working in a high-strain setting. Such experience may develop a good social connection and a sense of identity that subsequently develops affective commitment to the organization.

Meaning-Making: The

faculty can also undergo meaning-making, in which they redefine their strain as an inevitable aspect of a rewarding and effective career. This cognitive re-evaluation will turn a bad experience into a good motivation towards emotional bonding.

5.2. The Insignificance of Time-Based Interference: A Policy Implication

The result that time-based interference (TWIF) is not significantly related with any constituent of OC is very important in terms of policy. It implies that, to these faculty, how much time they spend working or spending time with the family does not matter, but rather the quality of that time the degree to which they are strained that is more crucial in their level of commitment. This directly relates to university administrators. Offering flexible working hours or even lessening teaching load (which is mostly a time-related conflict) may not be adequate to increase the commitment unless the causes of the strain (e.g., excessive administrative load, the need to publish, no support in research, student-related stress, etc.) are also addressed. The focus of the resources must be put on the reduction of these causes of strain, rather than its temporal symptoms.

5.3. The Limited Role of Behavior-Based Interference

There was no significant relationship between behavior-based interference (BWIF, BFIW) and a majority of the OC components (with the exception of behavior based inter-work and home (BWIF) and commitment), which suggests that the conflict between the work and home behavioral styles is not a major factor in commitment as compared to the emotional and cognitive strain of balancing between work and home. It seems that faculty members are capable of following their professional and personal identities, switching between the authoritative and the nurturing roles, the professor and the parent/spouse roles, without it seriously affecting their psychological commitment to the university.

5.4. Comparison with Previous Literature: Context is King

Our results contribute to and contradict the available literature.

Support:

The positive relationship between WLB and OC is generally strong and consistent with many other studies in any industry (Berk and Gundogmus, 2018;

Sakthivel and Jayakrishnan, 2012) and, in particular, in academia (Arif and Farooqi, 2014; Akter and Hossen, 2019).

Challenge:

There is a negative correlation between strain-based interference and commitment, particularly NC, which is in contrast to the results of Csillag et al. (2012) who discovered a negative relationship between affective and normative commitment and interference. This difference underscores the foremost significance of context. Being in a rich, individualistic, Western environment (such as in Hungary in the study by Csillag *et al.*) strain can in fact be nothing more than bad and results in burnout and disengagement. Nevertheless, when applied in the situation of Pakistani public universities, which are resource poor, are highly mission driven, have few options, and are guided by a cultural focus on duty and perseverance, strain could be construed and internalized in a different manner and may actually increase loyalty instead of reducing it. This observation is similar to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) where it is argued that high job demands may result in engagement provided that there are sufficient individual or organisational resources (such as a sense of purpose or social support) to support such engagement.

5.5. Theoretical Implications: Reframing the WLB-OC Relationship

The research contributes to theory in a substantial way since it shows that the correlation between WLB and OC is not always negative or positive. Depending on the kind of interference and the aspect of commitment under consideration, it will be dependent. The positive, high correlation between strain and normative commitment is something new that should be subject to further theoretical discussions. It proposes that Normative commitment construct might be more complex and situation-specific than it used to be imagined. The construct that strain may be a motivation of commitment rather than a demotivating factor should be applied to future theoretical conceptions of OC, especially in Arduous, Mission-based careers such as academia in developing nations. This paper demands a more context-sensitive interpretation of the WLB-OC relationship.

5.6. Practical Implications: From Policy to Practice

The findings have direct and actionable implications for university administrators and policymakers in Pakistan and similar contexts:

Rethink Strain Management:

Instead of viewing all strain as an enemy to be eliminated, administrators should recognize that some level of strain is inevitable and can even be productive. The goal should not be to eliminate strain but to help faculty *manage* it effectively. This could involve:

- i. Providing access to confidential counseling and stress management workshops.
- ii. Fostering a supportive departmental culture where faculty can openly discuss workload challenges without fear of stigma.
- iii. Implementing peer mentoring programs to share coping strategies and build social support networks.
- iv. Ensuring that administrative burdens are minimized and that faculty have adequate support staff.

Target Normative Commitment:

Since NC is the component most strongly linked to strain, policies should aim to nurture and leverage this sense of duty. This could involve:

- i. Publicly recognizing faculty contributions and sacrifices, framing them as acts of service to the nation and the academic community.
- ii. Connecting faculty work to the broader national mission of education and development, reinforcing the "higher purpose" of their strain.
- iii. Creating opportunities for faculty to mentor junior colleagues, reinforcing their role as stewards of the institution and the profession.
- iv. Developing leadership programs that empower faculty and give them a greater voice in institutional decision-making, making them feel more invested in the university's success.

Get Beyond Adaptable Timeframes:

Flexible scheduling is good, but the present study also indicates that it is not the most appropriate instrument in terms of increasing commitment. The effort should be focused on the implementation of the solutions to the causes of strain (e.g., excessive administrative load, insufficient funding of research, ambiguous promotion principles) instead of its only temporal manifestations.

Individual Support:

Since strain influences the various elements of commitment, support needs to be individual. In the case of the faculty member with high CC, the priority task is career development and skill-building to alleviate fears of being trapped. In the case of a person who has a high NC, it is important to strengthen the sense of purpose and value. In the case of a high AC, invest in community and recognition.

Policy Recommendations for Higher Education Bodies:

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and university governing bodies should:

- i. Review and revise workload policies to ensure they are realistic and sustainable.
- ii. Invest in mental health and well-being programs for faculty.

- iii. Promote a culture that values quality over quantity in research and teaching, reducing the pressure that fuels strain.
- iv. Conduct regular climate surveys to monitor faculty well-being and commitment, using the data to inform policy decisions.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Summary of Key Findings

This study set out to explore the nuanced relationships between the specific dimensions of work-family interference and the three components of organizational commitment among university teachers in Islamabad, Pakistan. The analysis of data from 206 faculty members yielded several key insights:

1. There is a significant positive overall relationship between Work-Life Balance (WLB) and Organizational Commitment (OC), confirming the findings of prior research.
2. The most significant and consistent predictor of all three OC components (Affective, Continuance, and Normative) is Strain-based interference, whether it originates from work (SWIF) or family (SFIW). This finding challenges the conventional wisdom that all forms of work-life conflict are detrimental.
3. The strongest single relationship identified was between Strain-based Work Interference with Family (SWIF) and Normative Commitment (NC) ($r = .357, p < .01$). This suggests that the stress and fatigue from work are powerful drivers of a faculty member's sense of *moral obligation* to their institution.
4. Time-based interference (TWIF) showed no significant relationship with any OC component, indicating that it is the *quality* (strain) rather than the *quantity* (time) of interference that matters most for commitment in this context.
5. Behavior-based interference showed limited relationships, with only Behavior-based WIF (BWIF) showing a significant link to Continuance Commitment (CC).

6.2. The "Paradox of Strain" and Its Significance

The central contribution of this paper is the identification and explanation of the "Paradox of Strain." In the unique context of Pakistani public universities, strain is not a bug; it's a feature. It is the "glue" that binds faculty to their institutions, fostering a deep sense of duty, obligation, and even emotional attachment. This paradox arises from a confluence of factors: the "sunk cost" mentality, a strong cultural and professional ethos of duty and perseverance, and the meaningful nature of academic work. University leaders who recognize this complex dynamic can move beyond simplistic, one-size-fits-all WLB policies and design targeted, sophisticated support systems that acknowledge the reality of academic life.

6.3. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations:

Cross-Sectional Design:

The correlational design means we cannot infer causality. We cannot say that strain *causes* higher commitment; it is possible that highly committed individuals are more likely to take on stressful roles, or that a third variable (e.g., personality traits like conscientiousness or resilience) influences both.

Self-Report Data:

The use of questionnaires relies on self-reported perceptions, which can be subject to social desirability bias (e.g., faculty may over-report commitment due to social norms) or recall bias.

Context Specificity:

The findings are based on faculty from Social Sciences departments in public universities in Islamabad. The results may not be generalizable to faculty in other disciplines (e.g., STEM, Medicine), in private universities, or in other geographical locations within Pakistan or globally.

Reliability of NC Subscale:

The Normative Commitment subscale had a relatively low Cronbach's alpha (.609), which may have attenuated the observed relationships. Future research should consider using alternative or revised measures of NC.

Limited Demographic Analysis:

While this paper focused on the WLB-OC relationship, also analyzed demographic variables. A more integrated analysis that considers how demographics (e.g., experience, rank) moderate the strain-commitment relationship would be valuable.

6.4. Recommendations for Future Research

To build on this study, future research should:

Employ Longitudinal or Experimental Designs: To establish causal relationships between strain and commitment. For example, a longitudinal study could track faculty over time to see if increases in strain predict increases in NC.

Use Mixed Methods: Combine quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of *why* and *how* strain leads to increased commitment. Asking faculty to explain their experiences in their own words would provide rich contextual data and help validate the theoretical explanations proposed here.

Expand the Sample: Replicate the study in other disciplines, in private universities, and in other cities or countries to test the generalizability of the "Paradox of Strain." Is this phenomenon unique to Pakistan, or is it present in other developing economies or even in specific contexts within Western universities?

Explore Moderating Variables: Investigate whether factors like personality traits (e.g., resilience, grit, conscientiousness), social support (from colleagues, family, administration), institutional policies (e.g., tenure clock stoppage, parental leave), or cultural values moderate the relationship between strain and commitment.

Develop Context-Specific Measures: Create and validate WLB and OC scales that are specifically tailored to the unique cultural and professional context of Pakistani academia, potentially leading to more reliable and valid measurements.

Investigate the Dark Side of Strain: While this study found a positive link, it is crucial to also investigate the potential negative consequences of high strain (e.g., burnout, health problems) and to identify the "tipping point" at which strain becomes detrimental rather than beneficial.

6.5. Concluding Remarks

This research fundamentally challenges the simplistic notion that work-life interference is uniformly detrimental to employee commitment. For university teachers in Islamabad, strain is not a liability; it is an asset. It is the crucible in which their deepest commitments—to their students, their colleagues, their institution, and their profession—are forged. University leaders who understand this paradox can transform a potential weakness into their greatest strength. By helping faculty manage strain effectively, by nurturing their sense of purpose and obligation, and by creating an environment that values their contributions, universities can cultivate a faculty that is not just committed, but profoundly, resiliently, and ethically dedicated to the noble mission of higher education. In doing so, they invest not just in their faculty, but in the future of Pakistan itself.

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