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# Work-Life Balance, Mental Health, and Life Satisfaction among Preparatory Stage Teachers: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

Teachers are instrumental in shaping the destiny of generations, but they regularly under pressure with respect to work-related responsibilities and demands which often encroach upon their private lives. This qualitative look investigates how preparatory stage school teachers understand and navigate the interconnections between work-life balance (WLB), intellectual fitness, and lifestyles delight. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 20 preparatory instructors from urban schools in Jamshedpur, the investigator employs thematic analysis to become aware of 5 key issues: boundary blurring, emotional exhaustion, gendered expectations, professional identity, and organizational support. The findings underscore the need for systemic and cultural reforms to strengthen teachers' well-being, which is critical for sustaining quality educational outcomes.

**Keywords:** Teachers, Work-life balance, Mental health, Life satisfaction

### Introduction

Teaching is broadly identified as one of the most stressful and emotionally intensive professions. Teachers are expected not only to take care about managing the educational content and their delivery in the classroom, but additionally controlling various activities, mentoring and providing regular feedback to the guardians apart from holding administrative responsibilities. This multifaceted position commonly extends beyond faculty hours, ensuing in a heavy workload and enormous emotional work (Kyriacou, 2001). In India, the scenario is especially acute because of high student-teacher ratio, constrained infrastructure support and socio-cultural expectations that place unnecessary and enhanced burden on teachers especially female teachers. Teachers often work long hours without adequate reimbursement or recognition, this situation has an adverse effect on their mental health, manifesting itself as anxiety, melancholy or exhaustion (Maslach & Leather, 1999). The balance between work and life (WLB) refers to individuals' ability to manage the responsibilities of both work and personal life. When teachers struggles to keep this stability, this could result in conflicts, fatigue, stress, reduced job-satisfaction levels and psychological disorders. On the contrary, achieving WLB can increase productiveness, emotional resilience and the general well-being.

### Review of Related Literature

According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010), many teachers report feeling overloaded with work-related tasks that extend to their personal time, such as lesson planning, classification and extracurricular supervision. Suryawanshi and Bhosale (2020) found that Indian teachers, especially in urban areas, struggle to demarcate clear boundaries between their professional and personal lives, leading to emotional fatigue and dissatisfaction. Maslach and Leiter (1999) identify exhaustion as a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a small sense of personal fulfillment. Nair and Thomas (2019) have highlighted stigma for psychological help, which prevents many teachers from proactively addressing their mental health problems. Kim and Asbury (2020) opined Pandemic COVID-19 exacerbated these problems, with remote teaching by adding technological stress and blurring the lines between work and home. Ballet & Kelchternans (2009) opined that the lack of recognition, the advance of the limited career and the social undervaluation of the teacher profession can harm this sense of accomplishment. Klassen and Chiu (2010) argue that factors such as employment autonomy, colleagues and administrators support, and professional growth opportunities are positively correlated with life satisfaction. Shukla & Mishra (2015) argued that in India, life satisfaction among teachers is also influenced by cultural norms, gender roles and economic restrictions. Teachers, in particular, usually experience the "double load" of managing household responsibilities along with professional tasks that can decrease their overall well-being.

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## Research Gap

While many quantitative studies have detected work-life balance, mental health and job satisfaction among teachers, there is a lack of qualitative research that delays the experiences behind these figures. Qualitative approaches allow for a deep understanding of how teachers interpret and face them from the challenges of their profession. In addition, there is a lack of studies conducted on initial platform teachers in Jamshedpur region in Jharkhand. This literature review underlines the importance of examining these interconnected issues through qualitative lenses to catch the complex realities faced by teachers in Jamshedpur.

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## Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences of school teachers. The approach was chosen to hand over the individual narratives of the participants and highlight the meaning that cannot be occupied through the quantitative matrix. The participants were the 20 preparatory stage teachers, between 28 and 55 years of age, they were selected through purposive sampling from private schools in Jamshedpur. In alignment with NEP 2020 framework, 'Preparatory Stage Teacher' refers to those teaching students in grade in the term 3 to 5. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews held face to face on an individual basis. Each interview lasted around 30 minutes and was recorded with consent. The process of thematic analysis was used to decipher the data.

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## Findings and Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of interview data from twenty teachers revealed five interconnected themes that illuminate their experiences with work-life balance, mental health, and life satisfaction: (1) blurred boundaries and role spillover, (2) emotional exhaustion and burnout, (3) gendered expectations and the "double shift," (4) professional identity and meaning, and (5) institutional support and organizational culture. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between teachers' professional demands and personal well-being.

### (1) Blurred Boundaries and Role Spillover

Participants consistently described the challenge of maintaining clear boundaries between work and personal life. Teachers reported that their professional responsibilities frequently extended beyond formal school hours, intruding on personal and family time. Tasks such as lesson planning, grading, preparing teaching materials and parent communication often spilled over into evenings and weekends, making it difficult to disengage from work. One teacher noted:

"My day doesn't end at 4 PM. There's grading, planning, and sometimes even counseling parents after hours. It's like I carry my work with me everywhere."

This blurring of roles created a persistent sense of being "on duty," which disrupted relaxation and family interactions. The inability to "switch off" from work led to feelings of stress and guilt, particularly when family needs conflicted with professional obligations. These findings align with previous research indicating that work-family conflict undermines teachers' psychological well-being (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

### (2) Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout

Many participants described the emotionally drained feeling for the cumulative demands of their work. Emotional work has involved managing not only their own stress, but also supporting students through academic and personal challenges. The constant need to demonstrate patience and empathy, despite the internal fatigue, contributed to emotional exhaustion. A teacher shared: "It's not just teaching; you're managing emotions. When I get home, I have no energy - not even for my own children." This exhaustion was often accompanied by physical symptoms such as fatigue and sleep disorders and, in some cases, indicative symptoms of exhaustion. Teachers expressed concerns that sustained emotional tension diminished their enthusiasm for teaching and reduced job satisfaction. These narratives reinforce the conceptualization of Burnout by Maslach and Leiter (1999) and highlight the need for interventions directed to the emotional health of educators.

### (3) Gendered Expectations and the "Double Shift"

Gender emerged as a significant factor in shaping the experiences of teachers of work-life balance. Women teachers, in particular, reported to the dual responsibilities: managing professional responsibilities during the day and taking care of the household chores in the evening. This "double shift" has been imposed significant stress and has some time left for self-care or leisure activities. A female participant commented: "After school, I will run to cook, oversee homework, and take care of elders. It never ends." These gender expectations increase the challenges of managing stress and maintaining life satisfaction. These findings are echoed by wide social -cultural patterns in India, where women's roles are often divided between the work and traditional care responsibilities (Shukla and Mishra, 2015). Male teachers, when reporting work -related stress, describes less frequently domestic overload, showing continuous gender inequality in balance roles.

### (4) Professional Identity and Meaning

Despite the challenges, many teachers expressed their intense understanding of professional identity and internal inspiration that originated from their work. The ability to influence young life, contribute to the knowledge-building process and promote students' growth is a source of personal fulfillment.

A participant reflected: "Proud to shape the young mind. It is a difficult task but nurtures the concept of Nation-building ." This theme shows the complexity of the well-being of the teacher, where a positive professional identity can be buffer against stress and contribute to life satisfaction. However, many teachers have also noted that the inadequate recognition from institutions and society has reduced their sense of value, indicating that meaningful connection alone is inadequate without external validation.

### **(5) Institutional Support and Organizational Culture**

Organizational factors played a crucial role in shaping the experiences of teachers of work-life balance and mental health. Participants who reported supporting leadership, collective relationships and flexible work arrangements reduced further satisfaction and stress. For example: "When the head of the institution believes in you and respects your time, it makes a big difference." On the contrary, lack of autonomy, harsh policies and high administrative demands increase the feelings of depression and burnout. Teachers publish the need for systemic changes such as professional development on mental health support services, workload management and well-being.

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## **Discussion**

This study highlights complex interplay between professional demand and personal well-being among teachers by five key themes: vague boundaries, emotional fatigue, gender expectations, professional identity and institutional support. Teachers reported a significant work-life spillover, which makes it difficult to relieve prolonged stress and work. Emotional labor, especially contributed to the symptoms of exhausting, fatigue and burnout, managing the needs of students. Gender emerged as a crucial factor with female teachers disproportionately affected by the "double shift" of professional work and domestic responsibilities. Despite these challenges, many teachers found internal meaning and value in their work. Importantly, auxiliary leadership, collectivity and autonomy were referred to as protective factors that increased well-being. These findings show the urgent need for systemic, gender-sensitive policies and organizational improvements to support the teacher mental health, work-life balance and job satisfaction.

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## **Implications**

The implications of this study are deep, given that the teacher well affects educational quality and student results. Increasing work-life balance and mental health among teachers is not only a matter of personal flexibility, but requires systemic changes at school and policy levels. The intervention should address the charge management, create an atmosphere of support and respect, and challenge the sociological norms that eliminate gender inequalities.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study is delimited to urban schools of Jamshedpur and may not reflect rural experiences.

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## **Conclusion**

This qualitative study offers nuanced insights into the lived experiences of school teachers navigating the complex interrelationships between work-life balance, mental health, and life satisfaction. The findings reveal that teachers face multifaceted challenges that extend beyond the classroom and significantly impact their personal well-being and professional effectiveness.

The pervasive blurring of boundaries between work and personal life emerged as a fundamental concern, contributing to sustained stress and reduced opportunities for rest and recovery. Emotional exhaustion and burnout were common, underscoring the intense emotional labor inherent in the teaching profession. Importantly, these experiences are often exacerbated by entrenched gender roles that disproportionately burden female teachers with the "double shift" of professional and domestic responsibilities. This intersection of gender and occupational stress highlights the need for gender-sensitive policies and support systems.

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