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Work Life Balance, Academic Pressure and Mental Well-Being Among College-Going Students

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Abstract

The present research paper will focus on the influence of academic pressure and work-life balance on the mental health of emerging adults in the Indian higher education context. A quantitative cross-sectional approach and standardised measurements at the levels of academic stress, mental health and work-life balance were used to collect data on 121 participants (age from 18 to 28 years). The outcomes depicted that the relationship between mental and work-life balance is strongly inverted, such that the greater the imbalance, the worse the psychological functioning. Regression analysis demonstrated that academic pressure was an effective predictor of worse mental health, and much of the variance was explained. The level of academic stress was also important, and work-life balance was not important when both variables were considered simultaneously, which means that academic demands are more influential factors on mental health. The results show the relevance of academic stress in determining the emotional and psychological responses of students. To promote healthy learning conditions and enhance student welfare, the research findings indicate the importance of institutional programs, counselling services, and stress-management programs.

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KEYWORDS: Work–Life Balance, Academic Pressure, Mental Well-Being, Academic Stress, College Students, Emerging Adulthood, Psychological Health, Higher Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Student Life in the Contemporary Context

College life represents a significant developmental stage characterised by intellectual, social, and personal transformation. Students entering higher education must manage several responsibilities, including academic tasks, peer relationships, family expectations, and future career planning. Developmental psychologists describe this stage as *emerging adulthood*, a period marked by identity exploration, instability, and increasing independence (Arnett, 2000). Although higher education is associated with personal growth and opportunities, it has increasingly been linked with rising levels of stress and psychological pressure among students.

In recent years, academic environments have become more competitive and performance-oriented. Students are expected to maintain strong academic performance while simultaneously developing professional skills, participating in internships, and building social networks. Many college students also take part-time jobs to manage financial needs, which increases time pressure and role overload.

Technological advancements have further transformed the academic environment. Online learning platforms, academic emails, and digital communication tools enable students to remain constantly connected to academic work. While these technologies improve access to information, they often blur the boundaries between academic and personal life. Continuous engagement with academic activities may lead to mental fatigue and emotional strain (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2022).

In India, academic challenges are intensified by cultural expectations that place a high value on educational success. Academic achievement is often associated with personal worth, social mobility, and future security. As a result, students frequently experience pressure from family, society, and institutions to perform well academically (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015). These expectations can make it difficult for students to maintain a healthy balance between academic responsibilities and personal life, increasing their vulnerability to stress and psychological difficulties.

1.2 Work–Life Balance among College Students

Work–life balance refers to the ability to effectively manage time and energy between work-related responsibilities and personal life activities in order to maintain overall well-being. Although the concept was originally developed in relation to working professionals, it has become increasingly relevant for college students whose primary responsibilities involve academic tasks (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

For students, work–life balance involves managing academic responsibilities such as attending classes, completing assignments, preparing for examinations, and participating in internships while also maintaining social relationships, family commitments, leisure activities, and personal care. Achieving this balance is often difficult due to the demanding nature of modern academic environments.

The academic workload in higher education frequently includes strict deadlines, continuous assessments, and competitive grading systems. These demands can require long hours of study, leaving limited time for rest and personal activities. When students are unable to maintain a balance between academic work and personal life, they may experience stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced academic satisfaction.

Financial responsibilities also influence work–life balance. Many students take part-time jobs to support their education, creating additional time constraints and role conflicts (Butler, 2007). When academic and work responsibilities overlap, students may struggle to meet expectations in both areas.

Digital technology also contributes to work–life imbalance. Constant access to academic resources and communication platforms can make it difficult for students to disconnect from academic tasks. This lack of separation between study and leisure time may contribute to chronic stress and reduced psychological recovery (Derks & Bakker, 2014). Therefore, maintaining work–life balance is essential for students' psychological well-being and academic functioning.

1.3 Academic Pressure in Higher Education

Academic pressure refers to the psychological stress experienced by students due to academic demands and performance expectations. In higher education, students are required to achieve good grades, meet strict deadlines, and compete for academic recognition and career opportunities. Many students view academic success as a major determinant of their future stability and self-worth, which increases the pressure to perform well (Putwain, 2007).

Several factors contribute to academic pressure among college students, including demanding coursework, frequent examinations, competitive grading systems, and fear of failure. External expectations from parents, teachers, and society can further intensify this pressure. In countries like India, where academic achievement is highly valued, these expectations can significantly affect students' emotional well-being (Deb et al., 2015).

Research indicates that excessive academic pressure can negatively affect both physical and mental health. Students experiencing high levels of academic stress may report fatigue, headaches, poor sleep, and weakened immunity. Psychological effects may include anxiety, irritability, depression, and difficulty concentrating (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2020). These challenges may reduce academic performance and create a cycle of stress and declining achievement.

Academic pressure can also disrupt work–life balance by limiting time for relaxation, social interaction, and personal activities. When students prioritise academic responsibilities over their personal well-being, they may experience emotional exhaustion and reduced motivation (Robotham & Julian, 2006).

1.4 Mental Well-Being of College Students

Mental well-being refers to a state in which individuals are able to cope with everyday stress, maintain positive relationships, and function effectively in daily life. It includes emotional

stability, psychological resilience, and overall life satisfaction rather than simply the absence of mental illness (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2014).

College students are particularly vulnerable to psychological distress due to academic demands, identity development, and uncertainty about future careers. During emerging adulthood, individuals face increased independence and responsibility, which can create emotional challenges if adequate coping strategies and social support are lacking (Arnett, 2000).

Research suggests that many college students experience symptoms such as stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and low mood. Persistent academic pressure and limited opportunities for relaxation may reduce motivation, concentration, and interpersonal functioning (Keyes et al., 2012). Over time, these difficulties may affect both academic success and overall quality of life.

In the Indian context, cultural and social factors further influence student mental health. High academic expectations, stigma surrounding mental health issues, and limited access to counselling services often discourage students from seeking professional support (Gururaj et al., 2016). Consequently, many students continue to experience psychological distress without adequate help.

1.5 Relationship between Academic Pressure, Work–Life Balance, and Mental Well-Being

Academic pressure, work–life balance, and mental well-being are closely interconnected aspects of students' psychological functioning. High academic demands can reduce time available for leisure, social interaction, and self-care, leading to an imbalance between academic and personal life. Students who dedicate excessive time to academic activities may sacrifice sleep, hobbies, and relationships (Robotham & Julian, 2006).

Work–life imbalance can significantly affect mental well-being. When students are unable to manage academic and personal responsibilities effectively, they may experience stress, frustration, and emotional fatigue. Continuous academic engagement without sufficient recovery time may weaken coping mechanisms and increase vulnerability to psychological difficulties (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

Academic pressure can also directly affect mental well-being by increasing anxiety and fear of failure. Concerns about academic performance and future employment opportunities may intensify emotional strain. When these pressures remain unresolved, they may contribute to burnout and reduced psychological resilience.

Understanding the combined effects of academic pressure and work–life balance is therefore essential for explaining variations in students' mental health.

1.6 Indian Context, Research Gap, and Significance

The Indian higher education system presents unique challenges that influence students' academic experiences and mental well-being. Academic success is often associated with social mobility, family expectations, and career stability. Parents frequently encourage students to achieve high academic results, which can increase stress levels (Deb et al., 2015).

Structural factors such as competitive examinations, heavy academic workloads, and limited institutional mental health resources further contribute to academic pressure (Sharma & Kirmani, 2015). Although awareness of student mental health is gradually increasing, stigma surrounding psychological difficulties often prevents students from seeking help (Gururaj et al., 2016).

Existing research has mainly examined academic stress or mental health separately. Few studies have explored the combined relationship between academic pressure, work–life balance, and mental well-being among Indian college students. Addressing this gap is important for developing effective interventions.

The present study, therefore, examines how academic pressure and work–life balance influence the mental well-being of college students. By providing empirical evidence in the Indian context, the study aims to contribute to the development of supportive academic environments and improved mental health services for students.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Zhu et al. (2025) investigated the mental health of examined college students by integrating physiological (heartbeat rate variability (HRV) into the psychosocial tests. The study indicated that female students performed worse in scores on mental well-being, HRV, and anxiety levels than their male counterparts. Anxiety was significantly correlated with reduced indices of HRV only in female students. The findings revealed the utility of the conjoint use of subjective and objective measures to have a clearer insight into the implications of sex differences on the mental health of students.

Abdilah, Shari, and Ibrahim (2025) explored the impacts of work-life balance on the perceptions of part-time students with regard to stress. In the study, perceived stress and work-life balance have been found to be strongly negatively correlated, indicating that students with good balance were less stressed. Moreover, when the regression analysis was carried out, it was found that perceived stress strongly predicted outcomes with regard to work-life balance. To enhance psychological health, the findings showed that work-life balance among part-time students was important to promote the practice.

Vernet (2025) tested the impact of work-life balance on the health-related quality of life of college students and selected those students who must balance between work and college life. The researchers have found that students who work and those who have quite contrasting work-life balance and quality of life had no difference. There was a difference in demographic variables such as gender, age, majors at school, work schedules, place of work, and sleeping patterns. The findings showed that the overall mental and physical well-being of students results are highly dependent on their ability to integrate their professional, academic, and personal requirements.

Córdova Olivera et al. (2023) studied the connection between mental health and academic anxiety of undergraduate university

students. The findings revealed that languishing mental health and poor mental health outcomes were strongly associated with a lot of academic stress. Self-inflicted stress was the most vital stressor that was driven by too much self-demand and self-efficacy. The paper has highlighted the severe adverse effects of academic stress on the psychological well-being of students and the need to implement stress-reduction or mental health promotion programs in post-secondary education.

Zheng et al. (2023) sought to explore the connection between test anxiety and academic stress among college students with particular attention to the moderating role of parental expectations and the role of regulatory emotional self-efficacy as a mediator. The study has shown that test anxiety and academic stress have significantly positive correlations. Whereas the effects of stress were controlled by parental expectations, such an event was mediated through regulatory emotional self-efficacy. The findings discussed the importance of family relations and emotional regulation skills in managerial exam anxiety and academic stress.

Maqsood et al. (2022) tested the ways in which day scholars and hostel college students cope with peer pressure, stress of academics and goal readjustment. The survey indicated that day scholars were likely to experience direct peer pressure and academic stress as compared to hostelites. Disparities between genders were also reported in techniques of goal adjustment and stressful experiences. Based on the results, the social and environmental factors influence academic stress significantly. This explains the importance of supportive learning settings in promoting support coping and relapse of goals.

Fino and Sun (2022) explored the mediating role of creative self-efficacy among university students in their connection of the personality characteristics to their mental health. These findings indicated that the relationship between diligence and the state of mental well-being partially depended on creative self-efficacy, whilst the relationship between openness and mental well-being completely depended on it. The research suggested the potential application of the creative self-efficacy in the mental wellness intervention and highlighted it as a very important psychological instrument, which links personality characteristics to well-being.

Yusuf, Saitgalina, and Chapman (2022) studied the graduate student well-being and work-life balance of various student demographics and academic history. Besides the contextual factors such as program climate, stress, and social support, the research addressed other well-being factors such as quality of life, physical wellness and mental health. Social mental structuration and border theories were the concepts applied by the authors to explain the effects of work-life boundaries on the well-being of students. The findings revealed that a promotion of learning conditions and effective management of boundaries contributes greatly to the well-being of graduate students.

Sprung and Rogers (2021) interrogated the association between work-life balance and symptoms of anxiety and depression among college students. In the paper, which employed a cross-sectional survey design, it was found that higher levels of reported anxiety, depression, and stress were associated with a poor work-life setup. Importantly, the reinforcement between work-life balance and anxiety and depression symptoms was completely mediated by perceived stress, which means that the imbalance has an indirect effect on mental well-being via the stress channels. The findings highlighted the need to have institutional support systems in order to enable students to balance between competing demands and a strained work-life balance as a decisive precursor of a healthy psychological condition of college students.

3. METHODOLOGY
3.1 Aim of the Study
The present study aims to examine the impact of academic pressure and work–life balance on the mental well-being of emerging adults in India. Specifically, the study investigates how academic workload and work–life imbalance influence psychological health among young adults. It also seeks to determine whether academic pressure and work–life balance act as significant predictors of mental well-being.

3.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The main objectives of the study are:
1. To examine the relationship between work–life balance and mental well-being among emerging adults.
2. To investigate the impact of academic pressure on mental well-being.
3. To determine whether academic pressure and work–life balance significantly predict mental well-being.

These objectives aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological factors influencing mental health in emerging adults.

3.3 Hypotheses
Based on the objectives and existing literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:
1. Poor work–life balance will be significantly associated with lower levels of mental well-being.
2. Higher levels of academic pressure will significantly predict poorer mental well-being.
3. Academic pressure and work–life imbalance will significantly predict variations in the mental well-being of emerging adults.

3.4 Variables of the Study
Independent Variables

Work–Life Balance
Work–life balance refers to the ability of individuals to manage academic, professional, personal, and social responsibilities effectively without experiencing excessive role conflict or stress.

Academic Pressure
Academic pressure refers to the psychological strain experienced by students due to academic demands such as

examinations, deadlines, workload, competition, and expectations for performance.

Dependent Variable
Mental Well-Being
Mental well-being refers to overall psychological functioning, including positive mood, emotional stability, ability to cope with stress, sense of purpose, and overall life satisfaction.

3.5 Research Design
The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design. This design allows the researcher to examine relationships between variables at a single point in time without manipulating any variables. The correlational approach is appropriate for identifying associations and predictive relationships between academic pressure, work–life balance, and mental well-being among emerging adults.

3.6 Sample
The sample consisted of 121 Indian emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 28 years. Participants were primarily college students, interns, or working students.

A combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques was used. This approach enabled the researcher to reach a diverse group of participants through online platforms and social networks.

Inclusion Criteria
Participants were included in the study if they met the following criteria:
- Indian nationality
- Age between 18 and 28 years
- Currently enrolled as college students, interns, or working students
- Ability to read and understand English
- Willingness to participate voluntarily and provide informed consent

Exclusion Criteria
Participants were excluded if they had:
- Diagnosed with severe mental illness
- Serious physical or neurological disorders
- Inability to understand the questionnaire language
- Incomplete or inaccurate responses

These criteria helped reduce confounding variables and improve the internal validity of the study.

3.7 Description of Tools Used
Apparatus 1: Demographic Information Sheet
A self-designed demographic questionnaire was used to collect basic participant information, including age, gender, educational year, field of study, employment status, and weekly work hours.

Apparatus 2: Work–Life Balance Scale
The Work–Life Balance Scale is a self-report measure based on the framework proposed by Fisher, Bulger, and Smith (2009). It assesses individuals' satisfaction with balancing personal and work-related responsibilities.

The scale consists of 15 items divided into three dimensions:
- **Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL):** Measures how academic or work demands disrupt personal activities and emotional well-being.
- **Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW):** Assesses how personal responsibilities affect academic or work performance.
- **Work/Personal Life Enhancement (WPE):** Measures positive spillover effects such as personal growth and improved coping abilities.

Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher WIPL and PLIW scores indicate greater imbalance, while higher WPE scores reflect better integration between work and personal life.

Apparatus 3: Academic Pressure Scale
Academic pressure was assessed using an adapted Academic Stress Scale based on the framework developed by Roy and Ghosh (2020). The scale contains 15 items measuring various aspects of academic stress, including:
- Pressure to achieve high academic standards
- Examination anxiety
- Stress related to deadlines and workload
- Mental exhaustion from academic demands
- Difficulty balancing academic and personal responsibilities

Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater academic pressure.

Apparatus 4: Mental Well-Being Scale
Mental well-being was measured using an adapted version of the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) developed by Tennant et al. (2007).

The scale contains 14 positively worded items assessing aspects of psychological functioning such as optimism, emotional stability, confidence, coping ability, and social connectedness. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Higher scores indicate better mental well-being.

3.8 Procedure
Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committee. All ethical guidelines for research involving human participants were followed.

A structured Google Form questionnaire was developed containing an informed consent section, demographic questions, and standardised scales measuring work–life balance, academic pressure, and mental well-being. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw at any time.

A pilot study involving approximately 20–30 emerging adults was conducted to ensure clarity and reliability of the questionnaire. Based on participant feedback, minor modifications were made to improve readability.

The final questionnaire was distributed online through email, WhatsApp groups, social media platforms, and college networks. Participants were encouraged to share the survey link with peers to facilitate snowball sampling. All responses were collected anonymously and stored securely.

3.9 Data Analysis
The collected data were analysed using the following statistical techniques:

- **Descriptive statistics** (mean and standard deviation) to summarise the data
- **Pearson's correlation** to examine relationships between variables
- **Multiple regression analysis** to identify predictors of mental well-being

3.10 Ethical Considerations
The study followed standard ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Participation was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any stage. Mental health support resources were provided if participants required assistance.

4. RESULT
4.1. Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis 1: Work–Life Balance and Mental Well-Being

Correlation Matrix

Correlation Matrix

		AWLBS_TOTAL	AMWBS_TOTAL
AWLBS_TOTAL	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
AMWBS_TOTAL	Pearson's r	-0.292***	—
	df	123	—
	p-value	<.001	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

The correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship between work–life balance and mental well-being (r = –0.292, p < .001), indicating that poorer work–life balance is associated with lower mental well-being among participants.

4.2. Regression Analysis for Hypothesis 2: Impact of Academic Pressure on Mental Well-Being

Linear Regression

Model Fit Measures

Model	R	R²
1	0.357	0.128

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=125

Model Coefficients - AMWBS_TOTAL

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	58.290	4.3539	13.39	<.001
AASS_TOTAL	-0.332	0.0782	-4.24	<.001

The regression analysis revealed that academic pressure significantly predicted mental well-being (β = –0.332, p < .001), explaining 12.8% of the variance. Higher academic stress was associated with lower mental well-being, confirming the hypothesis.

4.3. Regression Analysis for Hypothesis 3: Work–Life Balance and Academic Pressure as Predictors

Linear Regression

Model Fit Measures

Model	R	R²
1	0.358	0.128

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=125

Model Coefficients - AMWBS_TOTAL

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	57.7495	4.650	12.421	<.001
AWLBS_TOTAL	0.0554	0.163	0.340	.734
AASS_TOTAL	-0.3765	0.153	-2.460	.015

The multiple regression showed that academic pressure significantly predicted lower mental well-being (β = –0.3765, p = .015), while work–life balance was non-significant (p = .734). Together, both predictors explained 12.8% of the variance in mental well-being.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study provide important insights into how academic pressure and work–life balance influence the mental well-being of emerging adults. This stage of life is characterised by multiple responsibilities, including academic demands, early career development, family expectations, and social relationships. Managing these responsibilities can be challenging, making it essential to identify the factors that most strongly affect students' mental health.

The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between work–life balance and mental well-being (r = –0.292, p < .001). This indicates that participants who reported greater difficulty balancing academic, personal, and social responsibilities were more likely to experience poorer psychological well-being. When individuals struggle to manage different life roles, they may experience stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced life satisfaction. These findings suggest that work–life imbalance can negatively affect emotional functioning and overall psychological health among emerging adults.

However, the regression analysis provided a more detailed understanding of these relationships. In the first regression model, academic pressure alone significantly predicted mental well-being and explained 12.8% of its variance. The negative regression coefficient indicates that higher levels of academic stress were associated with poorer mental health. Students experiencing intense academic demands, frequent evaluations, and heavy workloads were more likely to report psychological strain, reduced motivation, and lower life satisfaction. This finding highlights the strong influence of academic pressure on students' emotional well-being.

When both predictors—academic pressure and work–life balance—were included in the second regression model, academic pressure remained a significant predictor while work–life balance became statistically non-significant. This suggests that academic pressure accounts for most of the variance related to mental well-being. In other words, difficulties in maintaining work–life balance may partly arise from academic demands rather than acting as an independent factor affecting mental health.

These results imply that academic stress is the dominant psychological challenge faced by emerging adults in educational settings. Heavy workloads, competitive environments, strict deadlines, and high expectations may contribute significantly to emotional distress. As academic demands increase, students may find it difficult to maintain healthy personal routines, social interactions, and self-care practices.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of addressing academic stress within higher education institutions. Interventions such as academic counselling, stress-management programs, and supportive learning environments may help students develop effective coping strategies and maintain better mental well-being.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the influence of academic pressure and work–life balance on the mental well-being of emerging adults. The findings indicate that both variables are related to mental health, but academic pressure emerged as the strongest predictor. Correlation analysis showed that poor work–life balance was associated with lower psychological well-being, suggesting that difficulties in managing academic, personal, and social responsibilities may lead to stress, fatigue, and emotional strain. However, regression analysis revealed that academic pressure had a more direct and significant impact on mental well-being. When both variables were considered together, academic pressure remained significant while work–life balance lost its predictive power. This suggests that academic stress may be the underlying factor influencing both work–life imbalance and reduced mental well-being. Overall, the study highlights that heavy academic demands, frequent evaluations, and high expectations can significantly affect students' psychological health. These findings emphasise the importance of developing supportive academic environments, stress-management programs, and counselling services to promote better mental well-being among emerging adults.

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