Balancing Teaching, Research, and Life: Work–Life Balance of Female Faculty Researchers in Region I

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Abstract

Work–life balance (WLB) remains a persistent challenge in academia, particularly for women who juggle teaching, research, administrative service, and caregiving roles. This study examined WLB among female faculty researchers across state universities and colleges (SUCs) in Region I, Philippines. It focused on their current WLB levels, associated demographic and professional factors, challenges encountered, coping strategies, and perceptions of institutional support. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, researchers gathered data from 300 female researchers through a structured survey and from 10 purposively selected participants via semi-structured interviews. Quantitative findings revealed generally positive perceptions of institutional flexibility and career development, alongside neutral ratings for childcare support, mentoring, and scheduling flexibility. Faculty reported low work–life conflict and high enrichment, suggesting professional and personal roles can be mutually reinforcing. However, qualitative narratives exposed hidden strain, including exhaustion, health issues, and guilt over unmet family or work expectations. Respondents described invisible labor related to accreditation, student mentoring, and administrative tasks, while sustaining productivity through boundary-setting, prioritization, family support, and spiritual practices. Integrated findings underscore the paradox of visible enrichment and invisible strain, highlighting how individual resilience often compensates for structural gaps. The study recommends strengthening policy implementation and communication, recognizing invisible labor in performance evaluations, enhancing dependent-care and mentoring support, and redefining academic success to prioritize sustainability, well-being, and gender equity. These insights provide evidence for gender-responsive reforms in Philippine higher education and contribute to the global discourse on WLB in academia.

Keywords: work–life balance, female faculty researchers, state universities and colleges, invisible labor, gender equity, higher education

Introduction

Work–life balance (WLB) refers to how individuals allocate time and energy across work and non-work roles in ways that sustain performance and personal well-being. Early usage of the term rose in the UK in the 1970s and the USA in the 1980s, reflecting growing recognition that employees need to harmonize paid work with caregiving, leisure, and self-development (Gambles et al., 2006). Contemporary definitions emphasize the capacity to meet multiple role demands with

minimal conflict while maintaining satisfaction in both domains (Clark, 2000; Hill et al., 2001; Bella et al., 2023). Although the optimal balance shifts over the life course, persistent overload or inflexibility can impair health and productivity (Kelly et al., 2020).

For women in higher education, WLB is shaped by intersecting expectations: research productivity, high-quality teaching, administrative service, and culturally embedded caregiving roles. The ideal-worker culture in academia—which privileges long, uninterrupted hours—rarely aligns with caregiving realities and can produce a 'double bind' for women striving to advance professionally while sustaining family responsibilities (Moors et al., 2022; Strauß & Boncori, 2020). Philippine studies similarly document tensions between role expectations and resources: parenting burdens may suppress research productivity (Dapiton et al., 2020), yet many women report moderate balance and job satisfaction anchored in intrinsic commitment to students and teaching (Mercado, 2020); school commitment coexists with only moderate WLB and calls for stronger policy supports (Marmol, 2019).

Region I (Ilocos Region) hosts several state universities and colleges (SUCs) where female faculty commonly shoulder multiple designations—program coordination, chairship, quality assurance, and committee work—alongside teaching and research. Informal consultations and preliminary scoping suggest recurrent pain points: designation paperwork crowding out research time; difficulty attending conferences due to caregiving; and stress spikes during accreditation cycles. Reports of fatigue, hypertension, and guilt over missed family events underscore the salience of WLB for this group.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates WLB among female faculty researchers across SUCs in Region I, focusing on (a) current WLB levels, (b) demographic and appointment correlates, (c) challenges encountered in balancing teaching, research, and family roles, (d) personal coping strategies, and (e) perceived institutional supports and gaps. By integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews, the study seeks to generate evidence-based recommendations to strengthen gender-responsive policy and practice in higher education (Clark, 2000; Kelly et al., 2020; Moors et al., 2022; Strauß & Boncori, 2020; Dapiton et al., 2020; Mercado, 2020; Marmol, 2019; Bella et al., 2023).

Objectives

• Assess the current level of work–life balance among female faculty researchers across Region I SUCs.

• Examine associations between WLB and demographics (age, marital and parental status), appointment characteristics (rank, tenure status, academic discipline, administrative designation), and workload.

• Identify key challenges in balancing teaching, research, administrative service, and family life.

• Document personal strategies used to manage competing role demands.

• Assess availability and perceived effectiveness of institutional supports (e.g., flexible scheduling, mentoring, childcare, research time protection).

• Develop evidence-based recommendations for individual strategies and institutional policy/practice.

Significance of the Study

Findings inform SUC leaders and policymakers on concrete levers to enhance WLB and retention of women in research tracks, including recognition of invisible labor, protection of research time, and gender-responsive supports. The study adds Philippine evidence to global WLB scholarship and provides a baseline for monitoring equity-oriented reforms in Region I.

Methodology

Design

A convergent mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data were collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and integrated at the interpretation stage to compare convergence and divergence across datasets.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted among state universities and colleges (SUCs) in Region I (Ilocos Region), Philippines.

Participants were female faculty researchers across disciplines and ranks. Stratified sampling by institution and rank was used to ensure representation.

Sample sizes: Quantitative component—n = 300 female researchers recruited from different SUCs in Region I; Qualitative component—n = 10 purposively selected participants representing varied ages, family situations, ranks, and administrative designations.

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion: full-time faculty; self-identified female; active research responsibilities (e.g., ongoing or recent projects/grants/publications).

Exclusion: part-time/adjunct faculty; on sabbatical or extended leave during data collection.

Measures

Quantitative: A 25-item instrument assessed Work–Life Balance and Institutional Support. The Work–Life Balance Scale (15 items adapted from Hayman, 2005) captured time, strain, and behavior components using a 5-point Likert response format (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The Institutional Support Inventory (10 self-developed items) assessed policy availability and practice (flexibility, mentoring, childcare, research time protection, career development).

Qualitative: A semi-structured interview guide explored challenges in balancing roles, coping strategies, and experiences with institutional supports and gaps; brief reflective journaling was invited to enrich context.

Procedures

Recruitment was coordinated with SUC offices through email invitations and announcements. After e-consent, participants completed the online survey (~20–30 minutes). A subset consented to interviews (~20–30 minutes) conducted in person or via secure video conferencing; sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance was secured prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time. Data were de-identified; transcripts used pseudonyms. Files were stored on password-protected drives accessible only to the research team.

Data Analysis

Quantitative: Descriptive statistics summarized item responses and participant characteristics. Group differences were examined (e.g., by marital/parental status, rank, designation) using appropriate tests; associations were explored with multivariable models treating WLB as the dependent variable.

Qualitative: Thematic analysis followed iterative coding, constant comparison, and theme refinement. Credibility steps included coder agreement checks and audit trails.

Integration: Joint displays compared quantitative patterns (e.g., neutral mentoring scores) with qualitative themes (e.g., invisible labor) to identify convergence, complementarity, or divergence; integrated insights informed recommendations.

Limitations

Cross-sectional, self-report measures limit causal inference and may be subject to social desirability. Despite stratification, results generalize to Region I SUCs and similar contexts rather than all Philippine HEIs.

Results, Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Results and Discussion

Objective 1: Assess the Current Level of Work–Life Balance

Survey findings indicated that female faculty researchers generally perceived a favorable level of work–life balance. Respondents disagreed that work interfered with personal life (M = 2.00;

M = 2.08) and strongly agreed that personal life enriched their work roles (M = 4.08). They also affirmed that their jobs contributed positively to personal activities and well-being (M = 3.83). These results suggest that, at the quantitative level, enrichment outweighed conflict, and professional and personal domains were viewed as mutually reinforcing.

However, qualitative narratives revealed a more nuanced picture. While many participants found meaning and motivation in balancing multiple roles, they also reported the hidden costs of maintaining this balance. Experiences of exhaustion, stress-related eating, hypertension, and persistent guilt over unmet family or work expectations were frequently mentioned. As one participant expressed: "When I focus on work, I feel guilty about my child. When I prioritize home, I feel guilty about pending reports." Another added: "Sometimes I wake up already tired—not just sleepy tired, but soul tired."

The findings highlight a paradox in the current level of work–life balance among female faculty researchers in Region I. On one hand, quantitative results show low conflict and high enrichment, consistent with Clark's (2000) work–family border theory and McIlongo and Strydom's (2021) observation that women in academia often derive satisfaction from balancing family and career.

On the other hand, qualitative accounts complicate this picture. Reports of exhaustion and guilt echo Kelly et al.'s (2020) findings on stress and burnout as outcomes of role overload. The phrase "soul tired" illustrates the depth of strain often invisible in survey measures. Together, these results demonstrate that while enrichment is visible in quantitative data, it is sustained through invisible labor and emotional endurance.

Objective 2: Analyze Differential Experiences of WLB by Demographics, Appointments, and Workload

Work–life balance outcomes varied across demographic and professional profiles. Married faculty with children reported lower satisfaction with scheduling flexibility (M = 3.40) and higher strain compared to single or childless peers. One explained: "When I focus on work, I feel guilty about my child. When I prioritize home, I feel guilty about pending reports."

Younger faculty (below 35 years old) expressed optimism about institutional flexibility (M = 4.15) but described career pressures: "I have to prove myself in research while still adjusting to motherhood—it feels like a race I cannot pause. "Senior faculty cited health concerns and fatigue linked to administrative overload.

Faculty with administrative designations described invisible labor from paperwork and advising, with one noting: "Every faculty with a designation needs a teacher assistant, *kasi hindi wonderwoman si teacher* (because teacher is not a wonderwoman)." Those without designations scored higher on enrichment measures.

Faculty with heavy teaching plus research responsibilities reported exhaustion and role conflict, while those with research time protection described more sustainable balance.

These patterns confirm that WLB is not uniform but stratified. Married faculty experienced more strain, echoing Dapiton et al. (2020) on caregiving's impact on research. Younger faculty faced optimism mixed with tenure anxieties (Moors et al., 2022), while older faculty highlighted cumulative strain.

Administrative designations emerged as critical fault lines, consistent with Allen et al. (2023) on women's disproportionate service load. The "wonderwoman" remark illustrates the normalization of unrealistic expectations. Workload disparities also align with Kelly et al. (2020) and Kossek and Lautsch (2018), showing that flexibility benefits are unequally distributed.

Objective 3: Identify Key Challenges in Balancing Roles

Survey items on caregiving and mentorship policies received neutral ratings (M = 3.87 and M = 3.83), hinting at underlying difficulties.

Qualitative data revealed extensive responsibilities beyond teaching and research, including accreditation paperwork, committee work, extension projects, and advising. "I spend hours on documents that don't count toward research, but if I don't do them, the system collapses," one shared.

Participants also described emotional labor: mentoring, conflict mediation, and informal counseling. Family caregiving added further pressure: "Deadlines don't consider that I also have a child with assignments and parents who need care."

Challenges arose from the convergence of visible and invisible roles. The neutral survey ratings mirror Drew and Marshall's (2020) note that policies often exist in name only. Narratives of invisible labor reflect Strauß and Boncori's (2020) concept of women carrying organizational maintenance tasks. Emotional mentoring burdens mirror Allen et al. (2021). Family caregiving strains echo Dapiton et al. (2020) and Sumra & Schillaci's (2015) "superwoman" effect. Together, these results highlight how multiple overlapping roles intensify women's workload beyond institutional recognition.

Objective 4: Document Coping Strategies

Survey responses revealed that faculty strongly disagreed with the statement that personal life interfered with work (M = 1.50), suggesting that despite multiple responsibilities, productivity was largely maintained.

Qualitative narratives, however, uncovered the strategies that enabled this outcome. Faculty described prioritization frameworks, focusing only on tasks that demanded immediate attention: "I learned to choose battles every day; not everything can be done at once.(P1)"

Boundary-setting also emerged as a recurring strategy. Several participants highlighted the importance of limiting additional responsibilities: "I've learned to say no politely. Otherwise, work will consume me.(P2)"

Others turned to micro-breaks and hobbies for stress relief, such as brief rest periods, recreational activities, or time spent with family.

Family support systems proved vital, particularly spousal and extended kin assistance in caregiving and household tasks: "I can only survive because my husband shares the load at home.(P4)"

Finally, spiritual practices were described as a source of resilience. Prayer, reflection, and church activities provided emotional grounding: "When I am exhausted, I find strength in prayer—it resets me."(P8)

Together, these accounts reveal that female faculty actively adapted to competing demands by employing a mix of practical, relational, and spiritual coping mechanisms.

The strategies identified reflect a multidimensional approach to coping. Prioritization frameworks and boundary-setting align with Ward and Wolf-Wendel's (2012) findings that academic mothers actively renegotiate tasks to sustain productivity. These practices demonstrate agency but also highlight how women must individually manage institutional overload.

The reliance on family support resonates with Mercado's (2019) conclusion that Filipino educators sustain balance through kinship and spousal assistance, reflecting the cultural value of *pakikipagkapwa* (shared responsibility). Similarly, spiritual practices reinforce Ghodsee and Connelly's (2011) observation that faith-based meaning-making offers women in academia a critical source of resilience, particularly in contexts where institutional supports are limited.

While these coping strategies sustain productivity, they also risk masking structural deficiencies. Kelly et al. (2020) cautioned that an overemphasis on self-care and resilience can normalize overwork, shifting responsibility from institutions to individuals. In this study, participants' reliance on personal, familial, and spiritual resources underscores the gap between institutional commitments and actual faculty experiences.

Thus, coping strategies among female faculty researchers in Region I reflect creativity, cultural grounding, and resilience. Yet they also reveal a deeper imbalance: the burden of maintaining work–life balance often falls on individuals, while systemic reforms remain insufficient.

Objective 5: Assess Institutional Supports

Surveys showed positive ratings for institutional flexibility (M = 4.00), career development (M = 4.00), and institutional commitment (M = 4.04). Neutral scores appeared for childcare (M = 3.43), scheduling flexibility (M = 3.52), parental-leave clarity (M = 3.87), and mentorship (M = 3.83).

Interviews revealed a policy–practice gap. One noted: "The policy exists, but in reality, you still hesitate to use it because the workload will be waiting for you." Others lamented insufficient mentoring: "You're expected to be productive as if you don't have kids or family."(10)

These findings reflect the disjuncture between formal policies and actual access. Positive ratings support Lester & Sallee (2023), but neutral scores echo Morain et al. (2019) on uneven family policy use. Hesitation to use supports reflects Moors et al.'s (2022) "ideal worker" culture. Mentorship gaps confirm Shen et al. (2022) on barriers to advancement. The need for administrative relief reinforces Allen et al. (2023) on women's service burden. Thus, supports exist but remain inconsistently applied and insufficiently responsive.

Objective 6: Develop Evidence-Based Recommendations

Thematic Clusters of Recommendations

From the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, three major clusters of recommendations emerged:

1. Policy and Structural Supports

Faculty emphasized the need for clearer and consistently enforced institutional policies. While policies on flexibility and leave existed, participants hesitated to fully utilize them for fear of backlog or judgment. Strengthened communication, more explicit parental-leave programs, and formal mentorship systems were recommended to address these gaps.

2. Workload and Role Recognition

Respondents called for recognition of invisible labor—mentoring, accreditation work, and service responsibilities—that disproportionately fell on women. They recommended that such tasks be formally acknowledged in evaluation and promotion frameworks. Faculty also suggested redistributing administrative and teaching loads and providing coordinators or chairs with research time protection or assistants.

3. Well-Being and Academic Culture

The emotional and physical toll of balancing roles, described as "soul tiredness," underscored the need to prioritize well-being. Participants proposed institutional wellness programs such as counseling and stress management workshops. They also urged institutions to redefine academic success beyond research outputs, incorporating sustainability, health, and equity to create a more inclusive academic culture.

The recommendations reinforce the importance of shifting from individual resilience to structural reform. Strengthening policy implementation and communication responds to Morain et al. (2019), who found that family-friendly policies are often underutilized due to weak communication. Recognition of invisible labor aligns with Allen et al. (2023), who showed that women disproportionately absorb service and mentoring responsibilities in academia. Calls to redistribute workload and provide research protection resonate with Strauß and Boncori (2020), who highlighted the structural inequities tied to administrative roles.

Prioritizing well-being and redefining success reflect Lantsoght's (2025) advocacy for inclusive post-pandemic academic practices that center sustainability and health. The findings also echo Mercado's (2019) insight that Filipino educators draw resilience from cultural and family supports, but highlight that institutional systems must evolve to prevent burnout and normalize balance.

Taken together, these recommendations emphasize that sustainable work–life balance cannot be achieved through coping strategies alone. Systemic reforms are essential to redistribute workload, strengthen mentoring and caregiving supports, and reshape academic cultures toward gender equity and long-term sustainability.

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary

This study examined the work–life balance (WLB) of female faculty researchers across state universities and colleges (SUCs) in Region I. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, data were gathered from 300 female faculty researchers through a structured survey and 10 purposively selected participants via interviews.

Findings revealed that, at the quantitative level, respondents generally reported low levels of work–life conflict and high levels of enrichment, indicating that professional and personal roles were mutually reinforcing. They expressed positive perceptions of institutional flexibility and career development opportunities. However, neutral ratings were recorded for caregiving support, mentorship, and scheduling flexibility.

Qualitative narratives complicated this optimistic profile by exposing the hidden strain of balancing multiple roles. Participants described exhaustion, health concerns, stress-related habits, and feelings of guilt when demands at home and work conflicted. Invisible labor—such as accreditation work, student advising, committee service, and informal counseling—further intensified workload.

To cope with these challenges, faculty relied on personal strategies (prioritization, boundary-setting, micro-breaks), relational supports (spouses, extended kin), and spiritual practices (prayer, faith-based renewal). While these enabled sustained productivity, they also underscored how individual resilience often substituted for structural support.

Integrated findings highlighted a paradox: WLB appeared positive on the surface yet concealed significant emotional and physical strain. This revealed that WLB is differentially experienced depending on demographic background, administrative designation, and workload intensity.

Conclusion

The study concludes that female faculty researchers in Region I experience work–life balance as a dynamic interplay of visible enrichment and invisible strain. While quantitative measures reflected low conflict and high enrichment, qualitative accounts revealed exhaustion, hidden labor, and persistent guilt. Enrichment, therefore, was not effortless but achieved through constant personal adaptation.

Institutional supports were recognized in principle, especially flexibility and career development policies, but caregiving support, mentoring, and workload redistribution remained inadequate. Consequently, faculty compensated through personal, familial, and spiritual coping strategies, which sustained productivity but risked normalizing overwork and masking systemic gaps.

Overall, WLB among female faculty researchers is not uniform but **stratified**—shaped by caregiving responsibilities, administrative roles, and workload intensity. This underscores the urgent need for institutions to move beyond symbolic policies toward practical, equitable, and culturally responsive reforms.

Recommendations

Based on the integrated results, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthen Policy Implementation and Communication.
Ensure that existing family-friendly and flexible-work policies are clearly communicated, consistently enforced, and accessible to all faculty.

2. Recognize Invisible Labor.
Incorporate service, mentoring, and accreditation-related tasks into evaluation and promotion frameworks to acknowledge the disproportionate burden carried by women faculty.

3. Enhance Dependent-Care and Administrative Support.
Provide reliable childcare programs, clarify parental-leave provisions, and assign administrative assistants or reduce teaching loads for coordinators and chairs.

4. Prioritize Faculty Well-Being.
Institutionalize stress management programs, counseling services, and wellness initiatives to address the emotional and physical toll of invisible labor and role conflict.

5. Promote Equitable Career Advancement.
Redistribute workloads, protect research time, and ensure promotion criteria account for caregiving and life-stage differences among faculty.

6. Redefine Success in Academia.
Shift institutional definitions of success beyond research outputs to include sustainability, health, gender equity, and fulfillment, fostering a culture that values long-term well-being.

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