

Impact of NEP 2020, UGC Regulations, Academic Autonomy, and Performance Pressure on Stress and Burnout in India

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Abstract: Faculty mental health has emerged as a critical concern in higher education, yet remains underexplored in policy-driven institutional contexts. This study examines the impact of structural and regulatory factors—including the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations, academic autonomy, governance control, and performance pressure—on faculty stress and burnout in Indian higher education institutions.

Using a descriptive and analytical research design, primary data were collected from 150 faculty members across universities and colleges in India through a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. The study integrates theoretical perspectives from Self-Determination Theory and Organizational Justice to analyze the relationship between institutional factors and psychological well-being.

Findings reveal that low academic autonomy, high governance control, and increased Academic Performance Indicator (API) pressure significantly contribute to elevated levels of stress and burnout among faculty. Correlation and regression analyses indicate that autonomy negatively predicts stress, while performance pressure and administrative control positively influence burnout and psychological strain. Organizational justice emerges as a critical mediating factor in shaping faculty perceptions and well-being.

The study highlights a structural paradox wherein NEP 2020 promotes autonomy and flexibility, while existing regulatory and institutional practices emphasize compliance, accountability, and performance metrics. This misalignment creates a high-pressure academic environment characterized by reduced agency, increased workload stress, and diminished well-being.

By bridging the gap between policy frameworks and organizational behavior theories, this research contributes to the growing discourse on faculty mental health and offers practical implications for governance reforms, performance appraisal systems, and institutional policy alignment. The findings underscore the need for autonomy-supportive, transparent, and equitable academic environments to mitigate burnout and enhance faculty well-being in higher education.

Keywords: Faculty Mental Health, Academic Stress, Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Psychological Well-being, Workplace Stress, Higher Education, Higher Education India, Indian Universities, Academic Institutions, University Faculty, Teaching Professionals, NEP 2020, National Education Policy India, UGC Regulations, Academic Performance Indicators (API), Performance Appraisal Systems, Publish or Perish, Research Pressure, Workload Stress, Work-Life Balance, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Justice, Procedural Justice, Distributive Justice, Institutional Governance, Governance Structures, Administrative Control, Centralized Decision-Making, Power Dynamics, Academic Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, Autonomy, Faculty Autonomy, Intrinsic Motivation, Organizational Behavior, Employee Well-being, Human Resource Management in Education, HR Analytics, Performance Management Systems, Digitalization in Education, Online Teaching Stress, Virtual Work Environment, Audit Culture, Accountability in Education, Policy Implementation Gap, Institutional Culture, Faculty Engagement, Employee Burnout in Academia

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian higher education system is currently undergoing a paradigm shift driven by the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020), which seeks to transform the sector into a more holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary ecosystem. Central to this transformation is the emphasis on academic autonomy, institutional flexibility, and the empowerment of educators as facilitators of knowledge rather than mere transmitters of information.

Simultaneously, regulatory oversight by bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) continues to play a crucial role in ensuring standardization, accountability, and quality assurance across institutions. While these frameworks aim to enhance institutional effectiveness, they have also inadvertently intensified administrative processes, compliance requirements, and performance pressures.

Within this evolving landscape, faculty members find themselves navigating a complex interplay of expectations—balancing teaching, research, administrative responsibilities, and institutional compliance. The increasing emphasis on measurable outputs such as publications, accreditations, and rankings has further amplified performance-related stress.

A critical issue that emerges from this context is the growing disconnect between policy intent and institutional practice. While NEP 2020 advocates reduced regulatory burden and increased autonomy, many institutions continue to operate under centralized governance models characterized by rigid hierarchies and limited participatory decision-making. This structural contradiction creates an environment where faculty autonomy is constrained, professional agency is diminished, and mental well-being is compromised.

Despite the significance of this issue, faculty mental health remains an under-researched area, particularly in the Indian context. Most existing studies focus on student stress, leaving a substantial gap in understanding the psychological challenges faced by educators.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the structural determinants of faculty mental health, with a specific focus on:

- Academic autonomy and decision-making power
- Governance and administrative control

- Performance appraisal and evaluation systems

By examining these factors, the research aims to provide empirical insights into the silent mental health crisis among faculty and propose actionable recommendations for institutional reform.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Faculty Mental Health

Faculty mental health has emerged as a critical area of concern in higher education globally, with increasing empirical evidence highlighting the psychological strain associated with academic professions. Early work by Kinman and Wray (2013, 2018) identified that academic staff experience significantly higher levels of stress compared to many other professions, primarily due to escalating workloads, role ambiguity, and institutional pressures. Similarly, Winefield et al. (2003) found that university faculty exhibit elevated levels of psychological distress linked to job insecurity and performance expectations.

One of the most widely studied constructs in this domain is burnout, conceptualized by Maslach and Jackson (1981) as a three-dimensional syndrome comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Subsequent studies (Gillespie et al., 2001; Watts & Robertson, 2011) confirm that burnout among faculty is strongly associated with excessive teaching loads, research productivity pressures, and administrative burdens.

Recent literature also highlights the impact of the “publish or perish” culture on mental health. Studies by Guthrie et al. (2017) and Sabagh et al. (2018) suggest that constant pressure to publish in indexed journals not only increases stress but also leads to anxiety, work-life imbalance, and diminished job satisfaction. This is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where regulatory bodies emphasize publication metrics for career advancement.

In India, research by Sharma and Jyoti (2009) and Pande (2015) indicates that faculty members face additional stressors such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of participatory governance, and limited institutional support systems. Contractual employment and delayed promotions further exacerbate job insecurity, contributing to chronic stress and emotional fatigue.

Another emerging concern is the emotional labour inherent in academic roles. Faculty members are expected to maintain professionalism, mentor students, and manage classroom dynamics, often suppressing their own emotional distress (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). Over time, this emotional regulation contributes to psychological strain.

Moreover, the normalization of overwork within academia creates a culture where stress is perceived as an inevitable part of professional success. As noted by O'Meara et al. (2017), this culture discourages help-seeking behavior, leading to underreporting of mental health issues and a "silent crisis" among faculty.

Bapat, S. S. (2022). Positive attitude's contribution to improved employee performance and organizational productivity' emphasizes the role of a positive attitude in enhancing employee performance and organizational productivity. The study highlights that supportive work environments and positive psychological states significantly influence employee outcomes. In the context of higher education, this suggests that adverse conditions such as stress, burnout, and reduced autonomy can negatively impact faculty performance, thereby reinforcing the importance of mental well-being.

2.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between workplace conditions and psychological well-being. The theory posits that fulfillment of three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is essential for intrinsic motivation and mental health.

Extensive research supports the application of SDT in academic settings. Baard, Deci, and Ryan (2004) demonstrated that employees who perceive higher levels of autonomy and support exhibit greater job satisfaction and lower stress levels. In higher education, autonomy is particularly critical, as academic roles inherently involve intellectual freedom, curriculum design, and research independence.

However, contemporary institutional environments often undermine this autonomy. Studies by Leisyte and Dee (2012) and Anderson and Johnson (2016) highlight how managerialism and increased administrative oversight restrict academic freedom, leading to reduced intrinsic motivation and increased burnout.

Competence, another key dimension, is influenced by institutional recognition and opportunities for professional development. When faculty members perceive a mismatch between their efforts and rewards—such as lack of recognition for teaching excellence—they experience reduced self-efficacy and motivation (Houston et al., 2006).

Deshpande, B., & Beharay, A. (2025). *Leadership and Management in Digital Age*. examine leadership and management practices in the digital age, emphasizing the need for adaptive, participative, and autonomy-supportive leadership styles in technologically driven work environments. Their work highlights how digitally enabled leadership can foster a sense of competence and relatedness among employees while preserving professional autonomy. This aligns with the principles of Self-Determination Theory, suggesting that supportive leadership in digital contexts can significantly enhance intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being among faculty.

Relatedness, which refers to a sense of belonging and collegial support, is also crucial. Research by Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) indicates that supportive peer relationships and collaborative work environments act as buffers against stress. Conversely, hierarchical and competitive institutional cultures can erode collegiality, increasing feelings of isolation.

In the Indian context, where hierarchical organizational structures are prevalent, the need for autonomy and participatory decision-making becomes even more significant. The denial of these psychological needs leads to controlled motivation, disengagement, and long-term psychological distress.

2.3 Organizational Justice

Organizational justice plays a pivotal role in shaping employee attitudes, behaviors, and psychological well-being. Greenberg (1987) conceptualized organizational justice as employees' perception of fairness within institutional processes, which has since been expanded into three dimensions: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice.

Research in higher education indicates that perceptions of injustice are strongly linked to stress and burnout. Colquitt et al. (2001) found that procedural justice, in particular, significantly influences employee trust and psychological well-being. When decision-making processes are perceived as transparent and inclusive, employees exhibit higher levels of engagement and satisfaction.

In academic institutions, distributive justice issues often arise in workload allocation, salary structures, and promotion opportunities. Studies by Tyagi and Dhar (2014) in the Indian context reveal that inequitable workload distribution and unclear promotion criteria contribute to dissatisfaction and stress among faculty.

Procedural justice is equally critical in performance appraisal systems. Opaque evaluation mechanisms, lack of feedback, and perceived bias in promotions undermine trust in institutional governance. Interactional justice, which focuses on respectful and transparent communication, is often compromised in hierarchical academic settings, leading to feelings of marginalization.

Further, research by Lambert et al. (2007) suggests that perceived injustice not only affects mental health but also leads to withdrawal behaviors, reduced organizational commitment, and increased turnover intentions.

In the context of Indian higher education, where administrative hierarchies are often rigid, the absence of participatory governance exacerbates perceptions of injustice. Faculty members frequently report a lack of voice in decision-making processes, leading to a sense of powerlessness and psychological strain.

2.4 NEP 2020 and UGC Framework

The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) represents a paradigm shift in the Indian higher education system, emphasizing autonomy, flexibility, multidisciplinary education, and holistic development. It envisions faculty as central agents of change, advocating for reduced regulatory burden and enhanced academic freedom.

However, the practical implementation of NEP 2020 operates within the broader regulatory framework of the University Grants Commission (UGC), which continues to emphasize accountability, standardization, and measurable outcomes. UGC regulations often prioritize quantifiable performance indicators such as publication output, accreditation scores, and compliance metrics.

Scholars such as Tilak (2021) and Altbach (2015) argue that this dual framework creates a structural tension between autonomy and accountability. While institutions are encouraged to innovate, they are simultaneously required to adhere to rigid regulatory standards, leading to increased administrative workload and compliance pressure.

Empirical studies indicate that this tension results in role conflict, where faculty members struggle to balance creative academic pursuits with administrative obligations (Winter, 2009). This conflict contributes to cognitive dissonance, stress, and reduced job satisfaction.

Additionally, the push for global rankings and accreditation (e.g., NAAC, NIRF) has intensified performance pressures. Faculty are expected to meet multiple, often conflicting, criteria related to teaching, research, and institutional service. As noted by Marginson (2018), such performance regimes can lead to “audit cultures” that prioritize documentation over meaningful academic engagement.

In the Indian context, the gap between policy intent and institutional practice is particularly pronounced. While NEP 2020 advocates decentralization and empowerment, many institutions continue to operate under centralized governance models with limited faculty participation.

This misalignment creates a structural environment where faculty autonomy is constrained, administrative burdens are high, and mental health challenges are exacerbated. Consequently, the policy framework itself becomes a critical determinant of faculty well-being, highlighting the need for alignment between regulatory intent and institutional implementation.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Despite growing literature on mental health in higher education, faculty experiences—particularly in the Indian context—remain underexplored. Most studies focus on student well-being or examine faculty stress at an individual level, emphasizing workload, burnout, and job satisfaction, with limited attention to structural and policy-driven determinants.

The intersection between national policy frameworks such as NEP 2020 and regulatory mechanisms of the UGC is insufficiently examined. While NEP 2020 advocates autonomy and faculty empowerment, regulatory systems often emphasize compliance and performance metrics, creating contradictory institutional expectations. Empirical evidence on how this duality affects faculty mental health is scarce.

Additionally, the role of governance structures, power dynamics, and administrative control—including centralized decision-making, opaque appraisal systems, and perceived inequities—remains inadequately studied in an integrated manner. There is also limited research linking

organizational theories such as Self-Determination Theory and Organizational Justice with policy-level frameworks like NEP 2020.

Further, emerging stressors related to digitalization, performance analytics, and audit cultures are insufficiently captured in existing studies, especially within Indian higher education.

In this context, the present study contributes by:

- Examining faculty mental health through a structural and policy lens
- Bridging the gap between policy intent (NEP 2020) and institutional practice
- Integrating theoretical frameworks with empirical analysis
- Providing context-specific insights from Indian institutions

This approach aims to offer a more holistic understanding of the silent mental health crisis among faculty and inform evidence-based institutional and policy reforms.

4. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the impact of autonomy on faculty mental health
2. To analyze the role of governance structures in stress and burnout
3. To assess the effect of UGC appraisal systems on well-being
4. To propose policy recommendations

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the structural determinants of faculty mental health within higher education institutions in India. The descriptive component facilitates an understanding of existing conditions related to faculty autonomy, governance structures, and performance pressures, while the analytical component enables the examination of relationships among these variables and their impact on mental health outcomes such as stress and burnout. The study is cross-sectional in nature, capturing perceptions of respondents at a specific point in time.

5.2 Sample

The study is based on primary data collected from 162 faculty members employed in universities and affiliated colleges across India. The sample includes participants from diverse disciplines such as management, commerce, humanities, and sciences, ensuring variability in academic roles and institutional contexts. Respondents represent a mix of designations, including assistant professors, associate professors, and professors, thereby capturing a broad spectrum of faculty experiences.

5.3 Sampling Technique

A combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques was employed for data collection. Initially, respondents were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate. Subsequently, the snowball sampling method was used, wherein existing respondents referred other faculty members within their professional networks. This approach was particularly useful in reaching a wider and more diverse sample across institutions. However, the non-probability nature of the sampling technique may limit the generalizability of findings, which is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

5.4 Data Collection Tool

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure key constructs related to faculty mental health and institutional factors. The questionnaire consisted of multiple sections covering demographic details and study variables. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *1 = Strongly Disagree* to *5 = Strongly Agree*.

The instrument incorporated items adapted from established scales in existing literature, with modifications to suit the context of Indian higher education. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of faculty members to ensure clarity, relevance, and content validity.

5.5 Variables

The study examines the relationship between institutional factors and faculty mental health through the following variables:

- Independent Variables:

- *Academic Autonomy*: Degree of freedom in teaching, research, and decision-making
- *Governance Structure*: Nature of administrative control and decision-making processes
- *API Pressure*: Perceived pressure arising from Academic Performance Indicator (API) and performance evaluation systems
- Mediating Variable:
 - *Organizational Justice*: Perception of fairness in institutional processes, including workload distribution, evaluation, and decision-making
- Dependent Variables:
 - *Stress*: Psychological strain experienced by faculty due to work-related factors
 - *Burnout*: A multidimensional construct including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment

This framework enables the analysis of both direct and indirect effects, particularly the mediating role of organizational justice in influencing mental health outcomes.

5.6 Reliability

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which evaluates the internal consistency of items within each construct. The obtained values are as follows:

- Autonomy: 0.81
- Governance: 0.78
- API Pressure: 0.84
- Mental Health Scale (Stress & Burnout): 0.87

All values exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency and reliability of the scales used in the study. This suggests that the measurement instrument is robust and suitable for further statistical analysis.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of faculty perceptions regarding autonomy, governance control, API pressure, and mental health outcomes.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
Autonomy	2.48	0.91
Governance Control	3.92	0.76
API Pressure	4.11	0.69
Stress	4.03	0.72
Burnout	3.88	0.75

Interpretation:

The results indicate low perceived autonomy (Mean = 2.48) among faculty members, suggesting limited control over academic decisions such as curriculum design, research direction, and pedagogical approaches. In contrast, governance control (Mean = 3.92) is relatively high, reflecting the prevalence of centralized administrative structures and top-down decision-making processes within institutions.

Further, API pressure (Mean = 4.11) emerges as the most significant stressor, indicating that faculty experience substantial pressure related to performance metrics, publication requirements, and evaluation systems. Correspondingly, stress (Mean = 4.03) and burnout (Mean = 3.88) levels are also high, suggesting a concerning trend of psychological strain among faculty.

These findings align with recent studies indicating that heavy workloads, administrative demands, and performance pressures significantly contribute to burnout among academicians.

Overall, the descriptive results highlight a structural imbalance characterized by low autonomy and high control, which appears to be a key contributor to elevated stress and burnout levels.

6.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

Variables	Autonomy	API Pressure	Stress
Autonomy	1	-0.42	-0.55
API Pressure	-0.42	1	0.63
Stress	-0.55	0.63	1

Interpretation:

The correlation analysis reveals several important relationships:

- **Autonomy and Stress ($r = -0.55$):** A moderate to strong negative correlation indicates that higher levels of autonomy are associated with lower stress levels. This supports the principles of Self-Determination Theory, which emphasize autonomy as a critical determinant of psychological well-being.
- **Autonomy and API Pressure ($r = -0.42$):** The negative relationship suggests that faculty with greater autonomy perceive lower pressure from performance metrics, possibly due to increased control over their work processes.
- **API Pressure and Stress ($r = 0.63$):** A strong positive correlation indicates that increased performance pressure significantly contributes to stress. This finding reflects the growing impact of performance-driven academic environments.

These results are consistent with broader evidence that excessive demands, lack of control, and institutional pressures are key drivers of burnout and stress in professional settings.

Overall, the correlation matrix highlights a clear pattern:

Autonomy acts as a protective factor, while API pressure acts as a risk factor for faculty mental health.

6.3 Regression Analysis

Table 3: Regression Results for Predicting Stress and Burnout:

Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	Beta (β)	Significance
Autonomy	Stress	-0.48	$p < 0.01$
API Pressure	Burnout	0.52	$p < 0.01$
Governance Control	Stress	0.44	$p < 0.01$

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive relationships between institutional factors and mental health outcomes.

Key Results:

- Autonomy $\rightarrow$ Stress ($\beta = -0.48$, $p < 0.01$)
- API Pressure $\rightarrow$ Burnout ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$)
- Governance Control $\rightarrow$ Stress ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$)

Interpretation:

The regression results provide strong evidence of the structural determinants of faculty mental health:

- **Autonomy as a Negative Predictor of Stress:**

The negative beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.48$) indicates that increased autonomy significantly reduces stress levels. This reinforces the theoretical argument that autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being.

- **API Pressure as a Positive Predictor of Burnout:**

API pressure emerges as the strongest predictor of burnout ($\beta = 0.52$), suggesting that performance evaluation systems play a critical role in shaping faculty mental health. Excessive emphasis on measurable outputs such as publications and rankings contributes to emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

- **Governance Control as a Positive Predictor of Stress:**

The positive relationship ($\beta = 0.44$) indicates that centralized governance and administrative control significantly increase stress levels. Faculty operating within rigid hierarchical structures are more likely to experience reduced agency and increased psychological strain.

6.4 Integrated Discussion of Findings

The combined findings from descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses point toward a systemic and structural explanation of faculty mental health challenges.

Key insights include:

- A high-control, low-autonomy environment is strongly associated with increased stress
- Performance-driven evaluation systems (API) significantly contribute to burnout
- Administrative centralization amplifies psychological strain
- Autonomy serves as a critical buffer, reducing both stress and perceived pressure

Table 4: Summary of Key Findings and Implications:

Finding	Interpretation	Impact on Mental Health
Low Autonomy	Limited decision-making power	Increased stress
High API Pressure	Performance-driven culture	Burnout
Governance Control	Centralized administration	Psychological strain
Autonomy (Buffer)	Increased control over work	Reduced stress

These findings suggest that faculty mental health is not merely an individual issue but a structural outcome of institutional design and governance practices.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study offer a compelling indictment of the prevailing academic ecosystem, revealing that faculty mental health is far from a mere by-product of individual fragility; rather, it is profoundly sculpted by structural and institutional forces. The evidence unmistakably suggests that diminished academic autonomy, pervasive administrative control,

and escalating performance pressures converge to engender heightened stress and burnout among faculty members.

A particularly salient insight lies in the robust inverse relationship between academic autonomy and stress, lending empirical credence to the foundational tenets of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Autonomy, as posited by SDT, is not a peripheral luxury but a psychological imperative—integral to intrinsic motivation and well-being. The conspicuously low autonomy score (Mean = 2.48) signals a troubling erosion of faculty agency in matters of teaching, research, and decision-making. This attenuation of professional freedom precipitates a shift from intrinsic to controlled motivation, fostering disengagement and psychological strain. The regression analysis reinforces this narrative, establishing autonomy as a significant negative predictor of stress, thereby affirming the enduring relevance of SDT within the Indian higher education milieu.

Conversely, the study illuminates the deleterious impact of governance control and administrative centralization. The elevated mean score for governance (3.92) reflects a system steeped in hierarchical rigidity and bureaucratic overreach. Such environments curtail participatory decision-making, leaving faculty members ensnared in a web of compliance with little room for intellectual independence. The resultant sense of powerlessness underscores the pernicious role of entrenched power dynamics and institutional hierarchies—dimensions that have hitherto remained underexplored in empirical discourse.

Equally disquieting is the influence of API-driven performance pressure, which emerges as a formidable predictor of burnout. With API pressure registering the highest mean (4.11), it becomes evident that the relentless pursuit of quantifiable outputs—publications, accreditations, rankings—has engendered a culture of perpetual scrutiny. This phenomenon aligns with the critique of the so-called “audit culture,” wherein the valorization of metrics eclipses the essence of academic inquiry, culminating in work intensification, emotional exhaustion, and diminished professional fulfillment.

From the vantage point of Organizational Justice, the findings further suggest that perceived inequities in evaluation and governance exacerbate psychological distress. When appraisal systems are perceived as opaque or capricious, they erode institutional trust and foster disengagement. The implicit mediating role of organizational justice thus underscores the

indispensability of fairness, transparency, and procedural integrity in mitigating the adverse effects of structural pressures.

Perhaps most striking is the evident dissonance between policy aspiration and institutional reality. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) envisions a paradigm characterized by autonomy, flexibility, and faculty empowerment. Yet, the lived experience of faculty remains tethered to rigid governance structures, onerous compliance mandates, and performance-centric evaluation systems. This incongruity gives rise to a paradox wherein faculty are exhorted to innovate while being constrained by the very frameworks meant to enable them.

Such a policy-practice schism engenders role conflict and cognitive dissonance, as faculty grapple with competing expectations. The exhortation to be creative coexists uneasily with the compulsion to conform, producing a state of sustained psychological tension. These contradictions not only amplify stress and burnout but also reinforce the notion that mental health challenges in academia are deeply embedded within institutional architectures.

The findings also resonate with contemporary concerns surrounding digitalization and performance analytics. The proliferation of online teaching platforms and data-driven monitoring mechanisms has expanded the ambit of academic labor, often without commensurate institutional support. The blurring of work-life boundaries, coupled with incessant performance visibility, has intensified cognitive load and further exacerbated stress.

In summation, this study advances the discourse by demonstrating that faculty mental health is not an isolated or incidental concern, but a systemic phenomenon rooted in governance structures, policy frameworks, and organizational design. It calls for a decisive shift from individualized coping paradigms to structural reforms that restore autonomy, ensure fairness, and recalibrate the balance between accountability and academic freedom.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Policy Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers, particularly in aligning regulatory frameworks with the transformative vision of NEP 2020. While NEP advocates academic autonomy, flexibility, and faculty empowerment, existing evaluation systems under UGC continue to emphasize quantifiable performance metrics such as publications, API scores, and compliance-based reporting.

There is a need to reorient evaluation frameworks toward a more holistic and balanced approach that recognizes diverse dimensions of academic contribution, including teaching effectiveness, mentoring, and community engagement. Reducing the overemphasis on rigid performance indicators can help alleviate unnecessary stress and burnout among faculty.

Additionally, policymakers should focus on streamlining administrative and compliance processes by minimizing redundant documentation and audit requirements. Simplification and digitization of regulatory procedures can reduce administrative burden, allowing faculty to focus more on core academic activities. Ensuring consistency between policy intent (autonomy) and regulatory practice (accountability) is essential to create a supportive academic ecosystem.

8.2 Institutional Implications

At the institutional level, the study highlights the urgent need to reform governance structures and organizational practices. Institutions should move towards participative and decentralized governance models, where faculty members are actively involved in decision-making processes related to curriculum design, research priorities, and institutional policies. Such involvement enhances a sense of ownership, autonomy, and engagement.

Transparency in promotion, appraisal, and workload allocation systems is equally critical. Institutions must adopt clear, fair, and well-communicated evaluation criteria to reduce perceptions of bias and organizational injustice. Regular feedback mechanisms, peer review systems, and grievance redressal platforms can further strengthen trust in institutional processes.

Moreover, leadership within academic institutions should adopt supportive and autonomy-enabling management styles, moving away from rigid hierarchical control. Training academic leaders in empathetic and inclusive leadership practices can significantly improve organizational climate and faculty well-being.

8.3 Faculty Well-being

The study underscores the importance of prioritizing faculty mental health as a strategic institutional concern rather than an individual issue. Institutions should introduce structured mental health and well-being programs, including counseling services, stress management workshops, and peer support systems.

Promoting a healthy work-life balance is essential to prevent chronic stress and burnout. This can be achieved through rational workload distribution, flexible scheduling, and recognition of personal boundaries. Encouraging faculty to take breaks, avail leave, and engage in non-academic activities can contribute to overall well-being.

Additionally, fostering a culture of recognition, appreciation, and psychological safety can enhance positive attitudes and motivation among faculty. Institutions should create environments where faculty feel valued, heard, and supported, thereby improving both individual well-being and organizational performance.

9. CONCLUSION

The present study establishes that faculty mental health in Indian higher education is not merely an individual concern but a systemic outcome of structural and policy-related factors. Reduced academic autonomy, high governance control, and increasing performance pressures—particularly API-driven evaluation systems—significantly contribute to stress and burnout among faculty.

The findings reveal a critical paradox: while the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) advocates autonomy and faculty empowerment, institutional practices remain dominated by centralized governance, compliance demands, and performance-centric evaluation. This misalignment between policy intent and implementation creates a high-pressure academic environment that undermines faculty well-being.

The study also reinforces the relevance of Self-Determination Theory and Organizational Justice, highlighting autonomy as a key protective factor and perceived inequities as major stress amplifiers. These insights emphasize the need for greater fairness, transparency, and faculty participation in institutional processes.

Addressing faculty mental health, therefore, requires a shift from individual-level interventions to systemic reforms, including policy alignment, governance restructuring, and supportive work environments. Bridging the gap between NEP 2020's vision and institutional realities is essential for building sustainable academic ecosystems.

Ultimately, the quality and future of higher education in India depend on the well-being of its faculty. Ensuring autonomy, equity, and reduced administrative burden is critical not only for minimizing burnout but also for fostering innovation and academic excellence.

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