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The Impact of after-hours Academic Work on the Wellbeing of College of Pharmacy Faculty in Iraq: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: This study highlights the detrimental effects of after-hours academic work on pharmacy faculty members' social, mental, and physical wellbeing. The objective of this study was to explore in-depth the impact of after-hours academic work at home on the wellbeing of college pharmacy faculty members.

Methods: This qualitative study was conducted through face-to-face individual-based interview with faculty members at the College of Pharmacy, University of Baghdad in Iraq. A purposive sampling was used to enroll faculty with different levels in their academic carrier. Interviews were conducted until reaching the point of saturation. The interviews were conducted from Nov 7 through December 6, 2023. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated and analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's framework.

Results: Twenty faculty members participated in the study: 16 have a Ph.D. while four with master's degree. The faculty experience years ranged from 8 to 31 years. Pharmacy faculty members must manage a diverse array of academic responsibilities from home, including lecture and exam preparation, grading assignments, conducting research, supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students, and fulfilling administrative duties. These academic duties require extensive daily hours, extending beyond official work time and negatively impacting faculty members' physical, mental, and social wellbeing. It also limits time for family, social interactions, exercise, and hobbies.

Conclusions: After-hours work at home is perceived to heighten the risk of burnout and fosters a negative insight of pharmacy faculty profession. In response, the faculty are calling for increased financial, moral, and logistical institutional support and workload regulations. Potential improvements identified by participants include administrative support, research funding, increased salaries, and regulating workloads by limiting student admissions.

Key words: After hours work, burnout, wellbeing, Pharmacy faculty.

1. Background

The duties that university faculty members perform, such as conducting scientific research, writing articles, teaching, supervising and performing other forms of administrative work, are becoming more and more burdensome with time [1, 2] The graduate system, which includes master's and doctorate degrees, has experienced tremendous expansion in recent years. Yet there is a hidden expense to these advancements. Since COVID-19, college of pharmacy encourages hybrid- education model and electronic communications with students. While these tools were intended to streamline operations, they have enabled university administrations to dispatch a continuous stream of notifications and administrative duties that must be completed within very short timeframes. [3] When coupled with the university's recently elevated requirements for research publication, this constant 'digital load' has created immense pressure on academics to perform more effectively under increasingly tight constraints [4].

Additionally, the workday never stops for many employees because they carry home tasks, answer emails, prepare reports, take calls, and conduct research. Using technology to resolve work-related issues by after-hours work represents a serious issue that impacts the wellbeing of faculty members [5] According to research, working after hours is becoming increasingly prevalent [6–8]

On the other hand, faculty's elevated stress levels have been correlated with mental health issues, burnout syndrome, and a decreased quality of life (QoL) [9] Burnout is a consequence of depersonalization, reduced personal achievement, and emotional depletion [10] Although there is evidence that burnout is common among pharmacy faculty and that it negatively impacts both individual and institutional wellbeing, there are not much evidence-based approaches that address how to minimize burnout in pharmacy academia [11]

On the contrary, strong wellbeing among faculty members may increase their organization, profession, and community engagement and productivity. Promoting success among individual faculty, schools, and colleges of pharmacy, as well as the academy overall, requires maximizing the wellbeing of pharmacy faculty members [12] .

Pharmacy education is structured around a five-year Bachelor of Pharmacy (BSc Pharm), the standard entry-to-practice degree [13, 14]. In 2020, a PharmD program was introduced at two universities; however, it is considered equivalent to the BSc in clinical pharmacy and remains an undergraduate degree. Graduates of both BSc and PharmD programs must pursue postgraduate MSc or PhD training to qualify for teaching theoretical courses and supervising graduate students. MSc holders typically teach practical sessions, while PhD holders lead lectures, research, and postgraduate supervision [15, 16]. Faculty promotion follows a British-style ranking system, with progression tied to publications, scientific activity, and service [17].

This is the first study in Iraq exploring the impact of the after-hours work at home on university faculty. The objective of this study was to explore in-depth the impact of after-hours academic work at home on the wellbeing of college pharmacy faculty members.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design

This qualitative study was conducted through face-to-face individual-based interview with faculty members (academic pharmacists) at the College of Pharmacy/ University of Baghdad in Iraq. The interview was guided by semi-structured open-ended questions (appendix A). Probes and follow-up questions were used to elicit further comments when necessary. The interview guide was prepared by study authors and validated by four academic pharmacists experienced in publishing qualitative studies. The experts had received a draft of the interview guide, provided their feedback, and modification was done by the authors according to experts feedback to ensure that the interview guide complies with the research objectives.

2.2. Setting and participant recruitment

The study sample included faculty members at the University of Baghdad College of Pharmacy with lecturer, assistant (associate) professor and professor academic title with at least six years academic experience as this study targets faculty with full duties. It is worth noting that the title of Lecturer in Iraq is equivalent to an Assistant Professor in the United States, while the rank of Assistant Professor corresponds

to that of an Associate Professor in the U.S. system. All faculty included in this study are licensed pharmacists. Junior academic pharmacists (with assistant lecturer title) and those with academic experience of less than six years were excluded from this study as they are not allowed to deliver theoretical lectures nor supervise postgraduate students according to the university policies.

A purposive sampling (“individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest”) was used to enroll faculty with different levels in their academic career [18].

The recruitment strategy utilized a purposive sampling approach intentionally designed to select for diversity in disciplines, academic degrees, and academic titles. This approach ensured that the findings captured a broad breadth of experiences and perspectives from a wide variety of the pharmacy faculty. While the authors are familiar with the faculty body at the institution, the recruitment process was strictly guided by a maximum variation strategy to ensure diversity across disciplines, academic degrees, and titles.

The participants were contacted before the study to schedule adequate time for the interview. All participants were interviewed in their offices at the college during office hours.

2.3. Data collection

Interviews were conducted until reaching the point of saturation. In particular, we stopped data collection when no new data was being collected (i.e. data saturation was reached when no new insights evolved from successive interviews). After 17 interviews, repetitive responses emerged, and three additional interviews were done to ensure saturation. The 20 participants in this study represent 20% of the approximately 100 faculty members holding postgraduate degrees (MSc or PhD) with the title of lecturer or higher currently employed at the participating college. The interviews were conducted over one month (from Nov 7 through December 6, 2023). All interviews were audio-recorded. The interviews were mostly conducted in Arabic (native language) to express the full participants’ feeling and experience. Thereafter, the Arabic transcripts were translated to English by two bilingual authors. All interviews were coded manually and used for qualitative data sorting. Codes were grouped to generate themes. The coding

procedure was established by the study authors and started by a thorough reading of each interview transcript. The interviews were between 15-30 minutes.

2.4. Thematic analysis

Qualitative interview data were examined manually using thematic analysis. The researchers adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure, which included familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and naming themes, and producing the final report [19]. In line with this framework, we conducted a systematic analysis by iteratively refining and clustering codes into candidate themes and validating them through team discussions and consensus to ensure rigor and credibility.

Coding was performed by two researchers on the translated English transcripts, with cross-checking against the original Arabic to ensure accuracy. To resolve interpretive differences or disagreements during the coding process, a structured mechanism was followed: the researchers returned to the raw data to review the context, cross-checked the code against the original Arabic wording, and compared the trends across all transcripts through repeated analytical cycles. Discrepancies regarding candidate themes were subsequently adjudicated through the wider research team during two formal peer-checking and debriefing sessions. Through these team discussions, candidate themes were iteratively adjusted, merged, or separated, and only finalized once a unanimous consensus was achieved based on sufficient supporting evidence. All thematic analysis was ultimately conducted on the English versions to maintain consistency in coding and interpretation across the research team. An inductive, data-driven approach within a constructivist paradigm was employed [20], meaning that themes were derived from common trends emerging from participant comments rather than from a pre-existing framework.

Qualitative coding was conducted manually without the use of specialized software, ensuring close engagement with the data throughout the analytic process. Themes were refined through repeated cycles of reviewing coded data, comparing across transcripts, and team discussions. Candidate themes were adjusted, merged, or separated as needed, and finalized once consensus was achieved and sufficient supporting evidence

was identified. To enhance credibility, peer checking and debriefing were conducted twice. Finally, the most illustrative responses were selected as quotations to exemplify the themes.

Ethics approval and participants' consent

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection (the interviews). Participation was entirely voluntary, including the decision to record the interviews, and no incentives were offered. To ensure confidentiality, interviewees remained anonymous and the names of their work settings were deidentified. The study also received approval from the Central Ethical Committee at the University of Baghdad College of Pharmacy before data collection commenced.

Results

Twenty faculty members participated in the study to reach saturation: 16 have a Ph.D. while four have a master's degree. They had different academic titles including one professor, 11 assistant professors, and eight lecturers. The faculty experience years ranged from 8 to 31 years (Table 1).

2.5. Faculty duties in the college

Teaching is the main duties for almost all participating faculty members (N=18): Teaching undergraduate (BS pharm), PharmD students and postgraduate. Faculty with professor and assistant professor titles or PhD degree can teach post-graduate students, while lecturers and assistant lecturers with MS degree can teach undergraduate (BS Pharm and PharmD) students only (see Table 2).

The participants' quotations:

“Teaching both undergraduate and postgraduate students, responsible for the Scientific Affairs Unit, participating in four ongoing committees, member of the Scientific Promotions Committee,

member of the Scientific Committee in the Clinical Pharmacy Department, in addition to other committees” (Faculty 2).

They also supervise 5th year graduation project, master’s and doctoral students. The faculty serve in several administrative scientific committees including the Scientific Promotions Committee, departmental scientific committees, summer training committees, the scientific central committee, post-graduate comprehensive exam and thesis defense committees, Examination committees, and various ministerial committees at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) and the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Nine of the participants are involved in administrative duties such as head of the department, deputy of department head or the chief of the college media unit. The faculty conduct their own research in addition to supervising fifth year BS students and post-graduate (master's and doctoral) students.

2.5.1. Academic duties of faculty at home

The faculty have seven main duties at home including lecture preparation (N=19), grading exams (N=18), electronic communication with students (N=13), supervising undergraduate (N=20) and postgraduate (N=15) students, conducting/writing research (N=15), administrative duties (N=8) and preparing workshops/seminars (N=15).

The participants’ quotations are the followings:

“Preparing lectures, preparing questions, evaluating scientific research, reading theses and dissertations for graduate studies” (Faculty 5).

“Preparing lectures and regularly updating them, monitoring the research of postgraduate students, reading books and scientific publications to stay informed on developments in the field, correcting exams, and keeping up with continuing education workshops” (Faculty 16).

Long hours working daily at home to finish college work

On average, the participating faculty spend 4-5 hours daily at home finishing the college work on working days and 10 hours on holidays/weekends. On average the faculty members sleep six hours daily, from 12:00 to 6:00 AM.

“It varies from time to time, sometimes a lot and others a little. I am currently supervising a doctoral student who is submitting his thesis, and I take between 3-4 hours daily for this student only because he must submit it within a specific period. For example, within the last two weeks, I could not stay in front of the computer for a long period of time, and sometimes I had to wear a neck collar and work, the average was between 2-5 hours a day” (Faculty 1).

2.5.2. Increased Responsibilities with Higher Titles

Academic responsibilities increase at higher levels include supervision, administrative tasks, committees, and teaching graduate studies (N=19).

“Certainly, the more your academic degree increases, the more responsibilities will increase, especially supervision, administrative tasks, and the assignment of organizing conferences and seminars” (Faculty 8).

“Sure, the higher your academic title, the more specific the tasks will be in terms of teaching and supervision, such as teaching graduate studies and also supervision” (Faculty 3).

2.5.3. Variation in duties based on the department

A few participants (N=3) suggest that the pressure and responsibilities may vary depending on the department since the college developed new PharmD program which is more of its courses are taught in the Clinical Pharmacy Department.

“The duty is also varying across difference in departments because we at the Department of Clinical Pharmacy are more involved with Pharm D program, which is a new approach, and we, as members of the department, are obligated to give new lectures and courses” (Faculty 1).

2.5.4. Half of the faculty receive family support to conduct academic work at home

Half of the faculty receive family support to conduct academic work at home. However, some of their families are tired from the faculty work inside home. However, some of them do not receive support due to their long-term after-hours tasks.

“No support, because of the long working hours, my family complained about working at home as well “ (Faculty 6).

“Yes, because my wife is in the same framework as my work and is aware of all matters, so support is available to a large extent” (Faculty 3).

“Yes, especially my husband supports me a lot, and even when I reach a stage where I want to leave everything, he is my first supporter and tells me, “Don’t waste the achievement that you built”(Faculty 1).

2.5.5. Suitable work environment is not always available at home

Some faculty struggle to find an adequate work environment at home (N=7) particularly women due to their family/children’s responsibilities.

“I do not have a supportive environment, and all my work is done in the kitchen” (Faculty 19)

“Not always, because you are inside the house and may be exposed to interference while working after working hours, but we are forced to provide a complete environment for work in terms of table, chair, and Internet power (Faculty 1)

“No, there is no ideal environment due to the abundance of sounds, general and surrounding conditions, and the pressures of daily life” (Faculty 3).

“Yes, I have a supportive environment, but I usually don't work at home because I have a child” (Faculty 15).

2.5.6. There is demanding motivation in the academic profession

The majority indicated the positive challenge in their academic work (N=17). They found their work motivating but need too much effort (N=7). One participant indicated that academic work is more motivated than the work in the healthcare sector (N=1), while another participant referred to no appreciation in return (N=1).

“Yes, I enjoy being a teacher and especially the good reactions I get from the students, but it takes a lot of work to get ready for these lectures” (Faculty 4).

“Yes, frequently. However, the overwhelming amount of work and the inability to finish it during typical working hours make things difficult and have a bad effect” (Faculty 2).

“Yes, when I compare it to the work I used to work in the Ministry of Health, I find that my work is distinguished in terms of creativity, and there is no routine” (Faculty 9).

“Yes, I enjoy my work despite the fatigue” (Faculty 10).

2.6. Negative consequences of after hour working on faculty:

2.6.1. College work at home has negative impact on mental health

According to all participants, academic work at home has negative impact on faculty mental, social and physical health (see Figure 1). The after-hours academic work among pharmacy faculty has negative effect on mental health, wellbeing, work-life balance, family and free time. Some even think about early retirement due to the workload and stress.

“It had a big effect because there wasn't enough time and I had to work at night after finishing family and home chores, which makes me always tired and under pressure” (Faculty 6).

“Yes, it definitely affects the psychological state, especially when you have uncooperative postgraduate students, and their academic project is incomplete” (Faculty 1).

2.6.2. Work has negative impact on physical health (eyes and joints)

According to 12 faculty members, after hours working has negative impact on eye causing strain and vision problems in addition to pain in joints, neck, and back.

“It affects my physical health mainly in terms of sight, as well as headaches due to frequent use of the computer” (Faculty 5).

“Yes, sitting for long hours in front of a computer screen weakens vision and causes damage to the vertebrae” (Faculty 14) .

“Working after work hours has impacted my physical wellbeing since it interferes with my time for exercise” (Faculty 2).

2.6.3. Feel tired before starting their working day

The majority of participants feel tired before starting their working day because of traffic congestion and staying up late to get work done [N=19].

“Sure, sometimes on the first day of the week I arrive at work exhausted” (Faculty 3).

“Yes, especially the days after long hours of staying up late” (Faculty 10).

“Yes, this condition is sometimes brought on by sleep deprivation and having a lot of duties” (Faculty 12).

“Yes, because of traffic congestion and staying up late to get work done” (Faculty 20).

2.6.4. Feel bored and dislike mandatory administrative duties

Five faculty members mentioned feeling bored due to workload and responsibilities and the other three participants disliked administrative tasks that are considered mandatory.

“Of course, I get bored sometimes, because of the daily routine, and we often have things that frustrate us at work, and adverse things happen” (Faculty 3).

“Boredom comes from routine administrative duties, but scientific duties are more tiring than boring” (Faculty 5).

2.7. Negative impact of after hour work on faculty social life

2.7.1. No enough time to practice hobbies

More than half do not have time for hobbies due to college after hours work (N=13).

“I have specific hobbies, but we sacrifice them for work, and they are starting to disappear” (Faculty 3).

“I have a lot of hobbies, but because of the working hours after work, I was not able to practice them on a regular basis” (Faculty 9).

“I used to have hobbies like reading and crafts, but at the moment I don't have much time for them” (Faculty 19).

2.7.2. After hours work commitment negatively impacts social life

The majority agreed that their work pressure after working hours negatively impacts their social life inside and outside home (N=16).

“I have stayed away from family obligations a lot because I have many academic obligations that I must fulfill, and during exams also become a lot of pressure, as the family is completely neglected” (Faculty 1).

“Relationships both inside and outside the home are significantly impacted” (Faculty 4).

“Yes, the lack of time and the heavy workload had an impact on social interactions” (Faculty 12).

“At the level of friends, it is affected a lot, and we cannot meet for long periods of time, and at the level of the family, it is also affected a lot because of too much work pressures” (Faculty 15).

2.7.3. Sometimes faculty lose passion in work

Some faculty indicated that sometimes they lose passion due to workload and students (N=8). Other part indicated they do not lose passion (N=7).

“Sometimes, I lose passion because of things that discourage us from working, and the reason is the students’ lack of seriousness, commitment, and respect for the professor. They do not have a desire to learn, but their objective is to obtain a transcript only” (Faculty 7).

“Yes, because there are things beyond the control of professors and even the college, for instance the development of generations; it is difficult for a senior professor to adapt changes, on top of all the burden of work” (Faculty 4).

“Inside me, I generate passion for myself because I love my work, but the surrounding circumstances sometimes force us to get frustrated” (Faculty 3).

2.7.4. Some faculty regret to be in academia due to after-hours-working

Some may regret it due to after-hours work demand and inadequate incentives (N=4). They noted that the overwhelming workload began after COVID-19, driven by increased requirements, virtual communications, and after-hours notifications to the faculty. In contrast, more than half of the participating faculty members did not regret being faculty (N=11).

“Yes, it makes you regret it to see those colleagues outside of the academic sector who have no obligations after official business hours. Moreover, faculty members feel as though their efforts are not appreciated and that they are not granted certain privileges, including being required to check in and out on a scheduled basis” (Faculty 2).

“Things had been going well since I started working at the College of Pharmacy and up until the time before the COVID-19 pandemic, but after the pandemic everything changed. The university increased its requirements for research, committees, and constant communication with students—even outside of working hours—which puts a lot of pressure on professors and presents a significant challenge” (Faculty 12).

“No, I do not regret it, but only one aspect stresses me out, which is neglecting my family’s rights (Faculty 5).

2.7.5. Occasionally, they may talk about faculty career in a negative way

Some participants indicated that they occasionally may talk about faculty career in a negative way due to work stress/environment and no work-life balance (N=8). However, the majority do not speak in negative way about their work (N=12).

“I do not speak negatively, but sometimes due to psychological pressures, we may utter bad words” (Faculty 15).

“Yes, I may talk negatively about my work because of being too busy to attend family events, which necessitates justifying work and busyness which subsequently leads to unfavorable conversation” (Faculty 2).

“Yes, we are talking [negatively] because of some ministry or university decisions, such as expanding seats for graduate and undergraduate students” (Faculty 5).

“No, I never speak negatively, and I always tend to see the pot as half full” (Faculty 16).

2.8. The Recommendations of the Participating Faculty:

2.8.1. Faculty members seek financial, moral, and logistical support from officials and institutions

The faculty expressed concerns about their monthly salary and benefits as government employees, as well as the lack of financial support for research. They request financial help in terms of funding research, increase monthly salary (N=15) and provide subsidized residential housing (N=5). They request easing the grant funding with external organization such as pharmaceutical companies/industries to get fund to their research and post-graduate students (See Figure 2 and Table 3).

“Certainly, it includes: 1) Providing financial support in order to fulfill research requirements 2) Calculating transportation hours for coming and going 3) Stopping the receipt of all messages from various social media outlets after working hours 4) Giving letters of thanks as moral support” (Faculty 19).

“I hope the institution will assist in simplifying the criteria for research publications and provide funding for carrying out scientific research especially in light of the recent dollar exchange rate fluctuations. For instance, it is nonsensical to publish four to five research papers a year, each costing between \$1000 and \$2000” (Faculty 14).

“Certainly, financial support will have an impact because it will spare us from overtime work in the afternoon, and the reason is that we are a government institution in which the monthly salaries are moderate and not good, especially if you have a family, you need more income” (Faculty 9).

“We hope that the support will be for the basics of life, such as providing a house or a piece of land” (Faculty 5).

"To maximize the benefits of college research for all parties, contracts are established with pharmaceutical companies and laboratories that provide support for professors' and graduate students' research." (Faculty 18).

"From logistic standpoint, it is possible to provide people to assist in completing the tasks assigned to us, especially the administrative functions" (Faculty 17).

2.8.2. Faculty seek to obtain full summer break, more organizational socialization and recreational support

Some faculty members seek to obtain their full summer break, time for socialization as faculty staff.

"Professors are entitled to a summer vacation, which is one of their most fundamental rights. Exam committee members lack this privilege, and the relevant authorities have not made up for the lost time because of a staffing deficit" (Faculty 12).

"It is possible to organize trips and recreational activities for teachers, in addition to providing housing close to the universities" (Faculty 10).

2.8.3. Improve work environment by hiring qualified administrative staff, providing required tools/technology, respecting faculty privacy after hours and reducing the number of admitted students

The faculty recommend improving work environment to be more effective by hiring qualified administrative staff that can help them in administrative duties and providing necessary tools and resources. They also recommend respecting faculty privacy by not sending post-hour notifications.

"Lowering the number of students admitted to the college each year will relieve the burden on the faculty and improve the caliber of instruction that can be offered" (Faculty 18).

“The institution should respect the privacy of the teacher. When I was in Britain, the system was that the professor would not receive emails, messages, directions, or decisions after five o’clock in the evening, and until the second day at nine in the morning. This is respect for the teacher’s privacy, and in this way, they will guarantee the academic right. Secondly, restrict the number of accepted students, especially when the number of courses assigned to the professor doubled (Faculty 1).

“Reducing the tasks directed to the teaching staff, providing qualified people to carry out administrative duties, and limiting the teaching staff to supervision only (Faculty 17).

“I once worked in an environment outside of Iraq where, despite the long workdays, you were given the necessary tools to finish all tasks during working hours (Faculty 4).

“Stopping the receipt of all messages from the college via various social media outlets after working hours” (Faculty 19).

3. Discussion

3.1. After hours duties of pharmacy faculty

Given the scarcity of several qualitative research into the nature of academic staff members' wellbeing. This study provides insights into Iraqi academic faculty experiences and perceptions, which contributes to available resources on academic workload and wellbeing. . The findings of this research provide an understandable overview of the challenges that academic work brings in relation to faculty wellbeing. The uniqueness of our study lies in its institutional and national context, as pharmacy faculty in Iraq face distinct challenges—including resource limitations, evolving educational structures, and underexplored issues of faculty well-being—that differentiate this setting from the broader literature on burnout and workload stress.

In Iraq, pharmacy faculties operate within a hierarchical academic structure in which responsibilities vary according to academic degree and title. Junior faculty members, often holding a Master’s degree,

typically assist in laboratory instruction and practical training but do not deliver theoretical lectures. Senior faculty members, usually with a PhD, are responsible for designing curricula, teaching theoretical courses, supervising graduate students, and leading research activities [15]. Most faculty are licensed pharmacists by training, with many simultaneously engaged in clinical practice or community pharmacy work alongside their academic roles [21]. This dual professional–academic identity reflects the broader structure of pharmacy education in Iraq and provides important context for interpreting the distribution of responsibilities and experiences reported in this study.

Thematic analysis of this study addressed the workload perceived by faculty is represented by several academic and administrative duties in the college which include teaching, supervising, research, and mandatory administrative tasks in addition to numerous committee assignments. All these duties need to be completed after hours and together with the accompanying stress have led to tiredness, disliking these duties, urging some faculty to consider early retirement, and resulted in burnout and exhaustion for the faculty.

These results come along with the findings of several research [10, 22–25] According to research, faculty members in the fields of pharmacy, medicine, and nursing are especially susceptible to burnout because they must handle a number of demanding duties, such as teaching, research, committee work, and patient care in many cases [10]. This aligns with the historical evolution of pharmacy in Iraq, where growing demands in education and practice have consistently increased the burden on academic staff [14]. Recent international assessments suggest that while the academic environment requires moderate resilience, the relentless pressure of high-performance expectations often tests the limits of faculty wellbeing [26]. In Iraq, this is compounded by the tremendous expansion of the graduate system (master's and PhD programs), which has turned research and postgraduate supervision into a massive, around-the-clock undertaking for faculty members [15].

Additionally, the extra administrative responsibilities may have a detrimental impact on position, promotion, productivity, wages, and other organizational benefits [24] According to Iraqi studies, electronic communication with students at home is also time consuming and add burden on pharmacy faculty [23, 25]

Three hallmarks of professional burnout have been identified in a previous study conducted in the U.S.: depersonalization, psychological exhaustion, and a sense of insufficient personal work accomplishments [22]. Academics generally have a high degree of autonomy and flexibility, which lets them decide where, how, and when to work. However, flexibility is not without obstacles, such as heavier workloads and longer after-hours work, which reflects the two simultaneous realities of increased professional demands and independence [27].

3.2. Clinical Pharmacy Faculty has extra-duties

The participants involved in this study revealed the fact that the responsibilities assigned to faculty members increased with higher academic titles which include postgraduate students teaching and supervision, non-academic duties such as administrative and committee assignments. Additionally, they complained that the duties of faculty members vary according to the department to which they affiliated with the Clinical Pharmacy Department being the most work loaded as the academic staff are assigned to hospital clinical training supervision of the undergraduate, postgraduate in addition to the recently commenced Pharm-D program students, and this represents an extra work burden that consumes their energy and time. The 2020 introduction of the PharmD program alongside the traditional BSc track at the University of Baghdad heavily escalated the academic and logistical workload for Clinical Pharmacy faculty. This strain was further exacerbated by student-reported challenges, as the inaugural cohort faced intense curriculum stress due to an overwhelming volume of lectures [28].

While Iraqi faculty face unique departmental pressures, research in China highlights that technological pedagogical knowledge and cognitive engagement are vital predictors of well-being. Furthermore, stress levels in these environments often vary significantly based on professional position and age [29]. Additionally, research in the region highlights that while teacher support significantly reduces student stress levels [30], the educators themselves—particularly younger teachers—experience higher stress as they adapt to demanding administrative and technological expectations [29]. A Chinese study indicates that the degree of work-related stress experienced by faculty members varies depending on their age, professional position, and teaching duration [1]. Academic standing and income are all influenced by professional

ranking in universities [1]. Since many academic and non-academic assignments in Iraq need an academic level of assistant professor or higher, higher academic ranking also means increasing obligations and responsibilities.

However, the results of numerous research have shown the opposite, revealing that faculty with younger ages and lower academic rank have a higher degree of work-related stress and burnout [1, 10, 31]. A study conducted in China stated that faculty under 40 years face high occupational stress from teaching-research demands and financial burdens [1]. Furthermore, another research found that assistant professors endure greater stress and lower job satisfaction compared to professors and associate professors [31]. A study in the U.S. found that emotional exhaustion was higher in assistant professors [10]. This was explained by the fact that faculty members' professional stress has increased as a result of pursuing promotions in order to improve their pay and status [1]. In contrast, a Brazilian study showed no significant differences in workload burnout across faculty from different fields, suggesting that burnout may stem more from the work environment and individuals' relationship to their roles than specific job demands or disciplines. This implies that widespread burnout among faculty could be tied to systemic workplace factors rather than field-specific challenges [9].

Another main theme in this study highlights that faculty members extensively perform academic duties at home, including lecture preparation, student interaction, postgraduate supervision, administrative duties, conducting research, and preparing workshops, which take an average of 4-5 hours daily on weekdays and 10 hours on weekends/holidays. This workload leads to chronic sleep deprivation (averaging 6 hours nightly), leaving them fatigued before each workday. Persistent exhaustion is compounded by stressors like lengthy commutes due to traffic congestion, draining time and energy and blur work-life boundaries, intensifying physical and mental strain. The cumulative effect of prolonged at-home work hours, sleep deficits, and daily stressors exacerbate faculty burnout.

Additionally, faculty showed that they are struggling to maintain a suitable work environment at home, and that their families complained about the long working hours at home which led to a decrease or even absence of family support to work at home. This is consistent with the findings of an American study that examined

the effect of working time on the level of emotional exhaustion and life satisfaction. Research involved pharmacy practice faculty showed that there was a linear relationship between the number of hours worked and growing emotional exhaustion [10]. Furthermore, a study in a large American university demonstrated that work time of pharmacy professors is positively associated with role conflict and negatively associated with overall life satisfaction [32]. Furthermore, they complained that the duties of faculty members vary according to the department to which they affiliated with the Clinical Pharmacy Department being the most work loaded. This represents an extra work burden that consumes their energy and time. The shift toward hybrid education models at the University of Baghdad has intensified electronic communication, creating an expectation for faculty to remain perpetually connected for student support [3]. While innovative tools like video assignments improve engagement, they add a substantial grading and feedback burden that often spills into after-hours work [33]. This is part of a broader five-year trend in Iraqi healthcare colleges where the increased usage of informational technology for academic purposes requires constant faculty oversight and intervention [34].

3.3. Negative impact of after-hours work on faculty's social, mental and physical health

Faculty members reported that academic work done at home negatively impacts their work-life balance, family/free time and social, mental and physical health. Our study revealed that prolonged after-hours work has caused physical health issues like eye strain, joint/neck/back pain, and disrupted sleep. Additionally, social lives and hobbies have suffered, as work demands leave little time for personal interests or social activities. Many faculty noted that their hobbies, once cherished, are now abandoned due to relentless work pressures, further diminishing their overall wellbeing.

Student academic entitlement is a significant stressor for pharmacy faculty in the region, particularly when students expect 24/7 accessibility and immediate responses [35]. Navigating these behaviors and managing unreasonable student demands adds a significant emotional and time burden on faculty during their personal hours [36]. Additionally, the high prevalence of depression and anxiety among healthcare

students requires faculty to provide more intensive emotional support and advising, further extending their academic duties beyond official hours [37].

In the U.S., academics who indicated working more than 48 hours a week or engaging in work-related activities on the evenings, weekends, vacations made it harder for them to be the spouse or parent they desired since they were spending less time with their families [10, 32]. Likewise, academic work commitments outside of office hours have had a detrimental effect on faculty social lives, resulting in a lack of social life and leisure time [38]. Additionally, relationships with family, friends, and daily life can all be impacted and changed by overwork [9]

This study aligns with Canadian research highlighting faculty mental health challenges, where productivity amid excessive workloads is prioritized over wellbeing [39]. Academic culture often promotes independence and competition while perpetuating the harmful stigma that mental health struggles or seeking support hinder performance and signal weakness [39]. Exhausted faculty, particularly those needing medical care, report diminished life satisfaction, difficulty finding purpose, and inability to enjoy non-work activities. Dissatisfaction spans sleep, focus, daily task performance, and physical health, compounded by despair, anxiety, and depression. These systemic issues reflect a toxic cycle where institutional demands erode holistic wellbeing [9]

All these responsibilities have resulted in losing passion to work either due to students or due to workload. Occasionally, they regret being involved in academic career, and talk about faculty career in a negative way due to work stress and environment, and lack of work-life balance together with lack of appreciation. However, the participating pharmacy faculty revealed that their job has positive, but demanding motivation under pressure which makes it a positive challenge. Desselle *et al* revealed that lack of productivity, a desire to change jobs or careers, an overall negative perspective, and scientific insecurity are just a few of the numerous consequences of burnout. A faculty member's ability to recharge might be hindered by scientific insecurity, which can also influence their teaching quality and collaboration potential. Additionally, the sense of dissatisfaction, feeling worthless, and purposelessness may spread easily, especially when there are no effective management and an encouraging environment [11].

Maintaining resilience is often compromised by heavy workloads and the disruption of healthy habits—such as regular exercise and sleep—due to work-life overlap [40]. Furthermore, workload and the quality of the work environment are primary predictors of job satisfaction in the Arab world, where excessive professional demands can lead to significant scientific insecurity and exhaustion [41].

3.4. Faculty Recommendations

The faculty members uncovered the urgent need for more financial, moral and logistic support from the college, the university, and the ministry. They suggested various means to improve their work environment which involve providing administrative assistants, the required tools and resources, respecting faculty privacy after hours, and reducing the number of admitted students yearly.

Numerous research has investigated the sources of burnout and the ways to mitigate it [11, 38, 42–44]. Serrano *et al* in Canada stated that shortages of employees and a lack of resources exacerbated sentiments of inadequacy and incompetence [38]. Additionally, Bruce addressed stress and burnout in pharmacy faculty by advocating personal health maintenance, social networks, clear role expectations, time management, and mentoring programs [42]. Moreover, faculty wellbeing relies on work-life balance and organizational gratitude, while burnout mitigation requires policies fostering communication, resilient culture, and supportive environments. Together, these strategies strengthen individual and institutional resilience to address workplace challenges [11, 43, 44].

Previous studies also indicated that institutional support for faculty includes mentoring, gratitude, clear expectations, equitable rewards, workload adjustments, flexible schedules, and annual evaluations help mitigate burnout [10, 11, 45]. Additional strategies like mandatory time off, job sharing, and wellness programs can promote wellbeing and reduce sedentary strain and sustain faculty engagement and institutional success [46, 47].

Additionally, faculty should acknowledge stress's potential benefits while mitigating excessive stressors, yet many administrators mistakenly believe intensified workloads and strict quantitative evaluations boost productivity. In reality, these practices amplify stress, hinder academic performance, and diminish research engagement and professional fulfillment [1].

The faculty also emphasized the urgent need for financial support for their research, as no such funding is currently available. While the college provides instruments and some chemicals, additional resources are required to advance their work effectively. Similarly, a recent qualitative study involving pharmacy faculty revealed that the lack of financial support is a critical barrier to pharmaceutical research in Iraqi universities, preventing researchers from publishing in high-ranked open-access journals [4].

3.5. Study Limitations

The study had some limitations. First, it was limited to one public college of pharmacy. However, the work conditions are similar in all public college of pharmacies. The findings from a public college may not cover all challenges facing faculty in private colleges. Second, the study qualitative design relied on self-reported data according to participants perceptions and experience, rather than using wellbeing objective measures, which may contribute to bias. Third, participants selection and sample size could result in bias as the sampling strategy was purposive rather than random, based on selecting diversity according to the participant's disciplines, academic degrees, and academic titles. Additionally, the sample size may result in high risk of identifying participants as they belong to one institution. Further future research could involve multiple institutions, mixed-method strategy, and a larger sample size to enhance the study generalizability and provide a thorough understanding of faculty wellbeing.

4. Conclusion

Pharmacy faculty members are required to complete a broad range of academic tasks from home. These tasks include preparing lectures and exam questions, grading, writing research papers, supervising both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and handling administrative responsibilities. Such duties demand extensive daily hours even after official work time, which they perceived to adversely affect their physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Moreover, the heavy workload was sensed to heighten the risk of burnout and foster a negative insight of their profession. These findings are based on exploratory qualitative self-reported experiences. In response, the faculty are calling for increased financial, moral, and logistical support from the college, university, and ministry. They also recommend enhancing the work environment

by providing administrative assistance, raising salaries, funding research, providing technology, expanding social activities, reducing after-hours electronic communications, and easing workloads by limiting the annual number of admitted students.

List of abbreviations: QoL, quality of life; MOHESR, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research; MOH, Ministry of Health.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Prior to the interviews, participants provided verbal consent. Participation was entirely voluntary, including the decision to record the interviews, and no incentives were offered. To ensure confidentiality, interviewees remained anonymous and the names of their work settings were deidentified. The study also received approval from the Central Ethical Committee at the University of Baghdad College of Pharmacy before data collection commenced.

Consent for publication: Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials: The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Authors' contributions: **FA:** Methodology, Writing - original draft, Writing- Reviewing and Editing. **AA:** Data curation; Formal analysis. **AJ:** Conceptualization, Project administration, Writing - original draft. **DJ:** Data curation; Formal analysis. **SF:** Data curation; Formal analysis. **WD:** Writing - original draft, Writing- Reviewing and Editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Table 1: Summary of the Participating Faculty Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	N (%)
Academic Title	Professor	1.0 (5%)
	Assistant Professor	11 (55%)
	Lecturer	8.0 (40%)
Highest Degree	PhD	15 (75%)
	Master's Degree (MSc)	5.0 (25%)
Years of Experience	8–15 years	10 (50%)
	16–25 years	9.0 (45%)
	26–31 years	1.0 (5%)

Table 2: Main themes, subthemes and representative quotations of the findings

Main theme	subthemes	quotations
Faculty has several duties inside the college	Teaching, supervising, administrative services, and research	<i>Teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students, supervising graduation research for fifth stage students, supervising master's and doctoral students, temporary committees such as examination, comprehensive examination, and thesis defense committees (faculty 1)</i>
Academic duties done at home	Lecture preparation, student interaction, postgraduate supervision, administrative duties, conducting research, and preparing workshops	<i>Preparing test questions and lectures, correcting reports and tests, communicating with students and delivering online lectures, when necessary, in addition to administrative work that requires long hours ranging from working on the laptop to constantly communicating with professors, and working on my own research (Faculty 10).</i> <i>Preparing lectures, going over them, updating them, checking and revising the work of graduate students, giving notes, and finally conducting my own research (faculty 8).</i>
Long hours working daily at home to finish college work	On average, the participating faculty spend 4-5 hours at home finishing the college work on working days and 10 hours on holidays/weekends.	<i>I typically work six hours a day on average. In general, I try to spend holidays with my family and myself, but if there are significant events coming up after the vacation, I might have to put in 10 or 12 hours daily for work (Faculty 4).</i>
Inadequate sleep hours	On average the faculty members sleep six hours daily, from 12:00 to 6:00 AM.	<i>We often sacrifice our rest and sleep in order to complete our work. In general, I sleep for 6 hours at night, but these are rare cases. My sleep time is after 12 AM and I wake up at 6:00 AM (faculty 3).</i>

Increased Responsibilities with higher academic titles	Specific responsibilities increase at higher levels include supervision, administrative tasks, committees, and teaching graduate studies.	<i>There is no doubt that the higher one's academic title corresponds with an increase in responsibilities. Examples of these responsibilities include supervising graduate students, evaluating research, and engaging in thesis defense and comprehensive exam committees at other colleges (Faculty 4)</i>
Variation in duties based on department	Faculty of Clinical Pharmacy Department feel more pressure	<i>Lately, especially since the PharmD program opened, the college has put more responsibilities on our [Clinical Pharmacy] Department." (Faculty 13)</i>
Some faculty receive partial family support to work at home	Receive partial support from their families	Yes, my wife understands that this is my life and my duties, but sometimes they get bored because of the nature of my work at home (Faculty 11).
	No family support due to working at home	No support, because of the long working hours, my family complained about working at home as well (Faculty 6)
Struggle to find optimal work environment at home	Many interferences inside house	No, there is no ideal environment due to the abundance of sounds, general and surrounding conditions, and the pressures of daily life
Faculty job has positive, but demanding motivation	Motivation, but under pressure	Yes, I enjoy when I see the work being done accurately, but in the end, I am under a lot of pressure (Faculty 11)
	Positive challenge	Indeed, I find that both teaching and research bring positive challenges (Faculty 6).
	No appreciation	It was a positive challenge, but over time, apathy began to occur due to the lack of any appreciation in return (faculty 19)

Table 3: Recommendations of the participating faculty

More financial, moral and logistic support are needed from college/ university and/or ministry	Support research financial	I hope the institution will assist in simplifying the criteria for research publications and provide funding for carrying out scientific research, especially in light of the recent dollar exchange rate fluctuations. For instance, it is nonsensical to publish four to five research papers a year, each costing between \$1000 and \$2000 (Faculty 14).
	Increase salary	Certainly, the financial support will have an impact because it will spare us from overtime work in the afternoon, and the reason is that we are a government institution in which the monthly salaries are moderate and not good, especially if you have a family, you need more income (faculty 9).
	Facilitate receiving grants from external organization to their research	In order to gain from the research done by the college and benefit both sides, contracts are made with pharmaceutical companies and laboratories that support the professor's and graduate students' research (faculty 18).
	Provide subsidized residential housing/land	Absolutely, assigning professors to specific residential complexes or land parcels can help to positively motivate them and make them feel that their efforts are valued (faculty 8).
	Provide recreational and social activities during academic year	It is possible to organize trips and recreational activities for teachers (Faculty 10).
Improve work environment	Provide administrative assistants	It is possible to provide people to assist in completing the tasks assigned to us, especially the administrative functions (faculty 17).
	Provide required tool and resources	I once worked in an environment outside of Iraq where, despite the long workdays, you were given the necessary tools to finish all tasks during working hours. This allowed you to resume your regular life after work and avoided having any additional responsibilities during the holidays. Perhaps in the future, a comparable strategy could be implemented in Iraq (faculty 4).

	Respect faculty privacy after hours	Stopping the receipt of all messages from the college via various social media outlets after working hours (faculty 19)
	Reduce the number of admitted students yearly	Lowering the number of undergraduate and post-graduate students admitted to the college each year will relieve the burden on the faculty and improve the caliber of instruction that can be offered (Faculty 18).

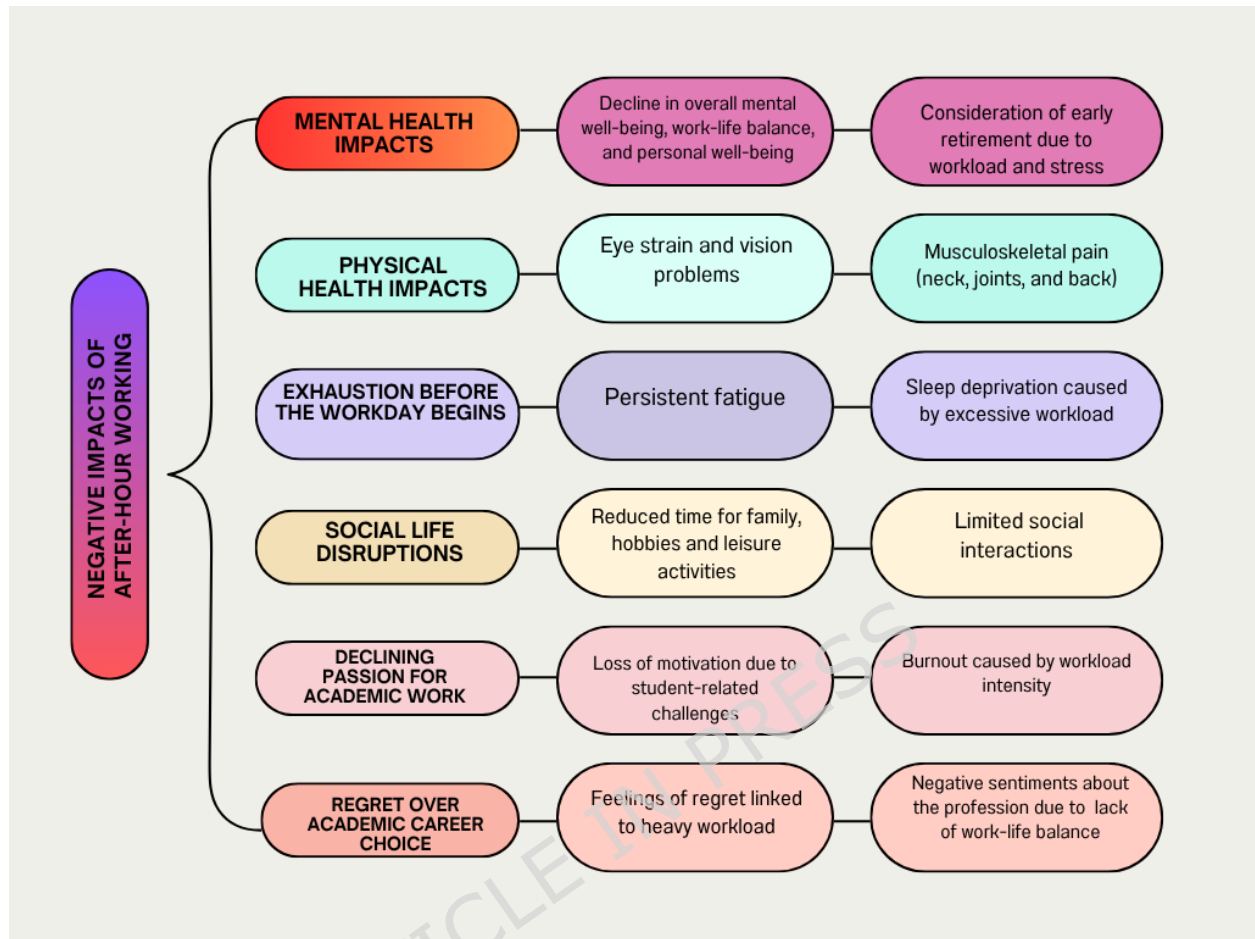


Figure 1 The negative impact of after-hours working on pharmacy faculty members

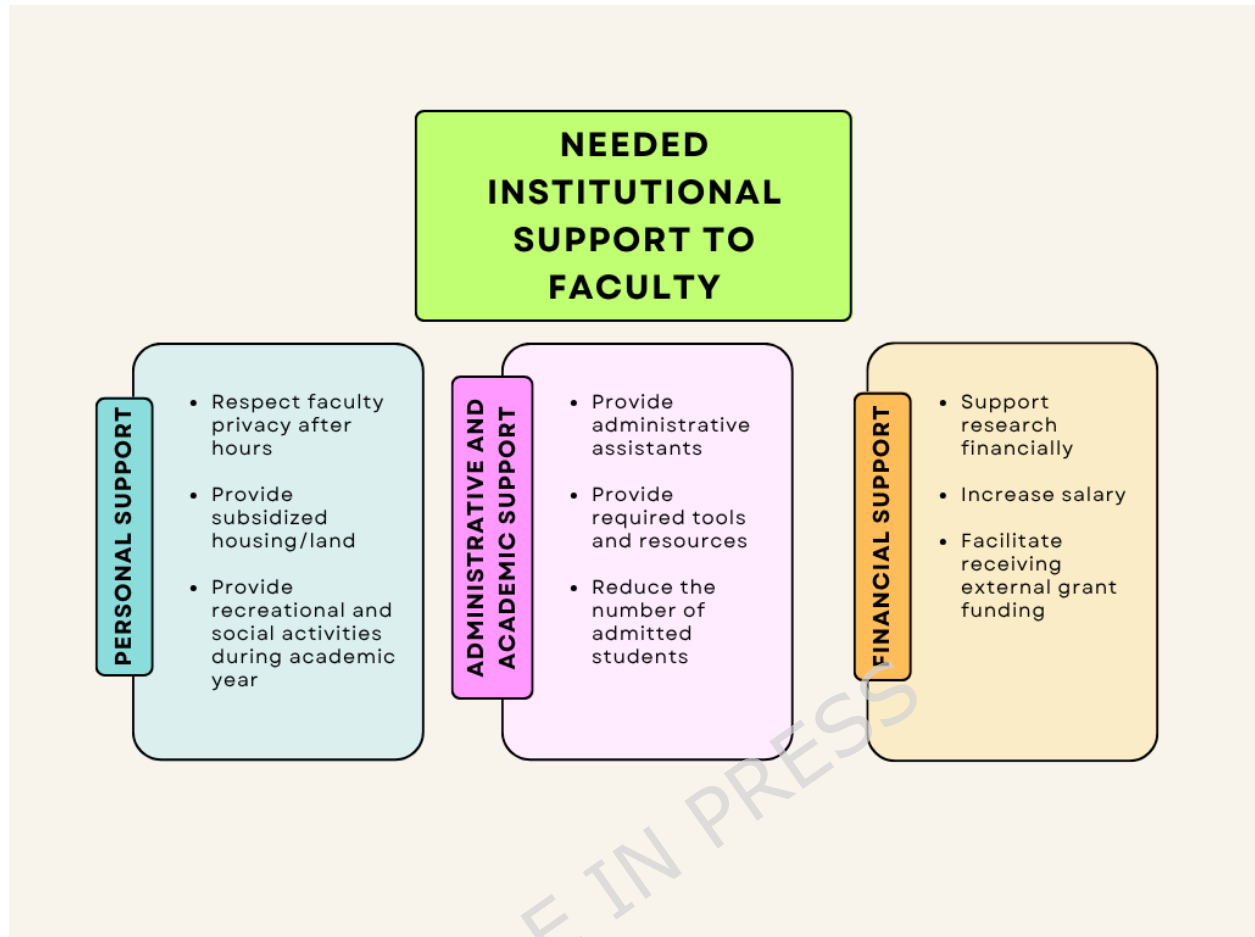


Figure 2: The recommended institutional support requested by the participating pharmacy faculty members

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