Original Manuscript

Journal of Studies in International Education
1–17

DOI: 10.1177/10283153251356210
journals.sagepub.com/home/jsi


Understanding Work-life Balance Through the Experiences of Academics Who are International Migrants

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Abstract

Work-life balance in higher education has received coverage due to unmanageable workloads and unsustainable working practices in various countries. We highlight some of the evident and less evident impacts of the neoliberal university on the experiences of academic researchers. We gathered qualitative data at an institution of higher education in the UK by undertaking 55 qualitative interviews and soliciting two forms of written feedback. Analysis of these data suggested that academic researchers who stated they were international migrants may be particularly likely to encounter barriers to work-life balance. We conducted a narrative analysis focusing specifically on these accounts. Loneliness away from close family and friends, a lack of support networks, and a perceived need to impress new employers were all detrimental to work-life balance. We make recommendations for onboarding processes and mentorship opportunities for employees from overseas and enhanced support for international migrant academics who may struggle with work-life balance.

Keywords

work-life balance, work-life conflict, international migration, higher education, narrative analysis

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Introduction

Research has highlighted unreasonable and unsustainable working practices in higher education. In the UK in 2019, heavy workloads within higher education were identified as contributing to an epidemic of poor mental health (Morrish, 2019). Workload within higher education refers to the allocation of professional activities and the hours required to successfully complete them. The time dedicated to workloads is shaped by workplace incentives, union agreements, and legislation (Soliman & Soliman, 1997).

Academics are under pressure to exhibit commitment to work beyond contracted hours, which can lead to reduced productivity and health problems (Hadjisolomou et al., 2021). Additionally, academic roles are becoming less clear, usually with greater expectations placed upon employees (Morrish, 2019). These expectations, combined with a culture that has normalised overworking, have taken a mental and physical toll on academics (Bartlett et al., 2021; Strauß & Boncori, 2020). A lack of family-friendly policies, inflexible promotion requirements, a push for productivity, and job insecurity have also contributed to heightened mental and physical health issues among academics (Nicholls et al., 2022).

Work-life balance can be defined as an absence of conflict between work, family, and personal roles (Bell et al., 2012). It refers to simultaneous balance between emotional, behavioural, and time demands of paid work, alongside family, and personal duties (Bell et al., 2012; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Personal duties may comprise community responsibilities, professional development, leisure, and non-work-related interests (Rosa, 2022). Work-life conflict occurs when work and personal life interfere with each other (Bell et al., 2012); for example, experiencing pressure not to use annual leave (Chalmers, 2013). In terms of positive impacts, work-life balance can boost job satisfaction and performance (Perlow & Porter, 2009; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Employees who regularly take time off from work and establish work-life boundaries have been shown to be more productive and to experience greater job satisfaction than those who do not (Perlow & Porter, 2009).

Within higher education, increasing disparities in career opportunities and dissatisfaction with work environments and policies may be driving migration among academics (Van der Wende, 2015). Yet, the neoliberal university may be exploiting international migrant academics who seek to become integrated into new and unfamiliar work environments (Strauß & Boncori, 2020). The neoliberal university prioritises contracts and performance over collegiality and profit generation over knowledge creation (Ball, 2012). An example of this is academic promotion. Heffernan and Smithers (2024) have described a practice termed "wage theft" whereby academics may be expected to undertake additional work-related tasks, without additional pay, to prove their worth for promotion. International migrant academics may feel pressure to meet neoliberal demands for productivity, often at the expense of overcoming challenges such as language barriers and cultural differences (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018; Dyer et al., 2018; Strauß & Boncori, 2020). There are stark global differences in higher education funding, policies, and research programmes (Teichler, 2015) but universities are not always attuned to the needs of migrant academics during academic

acculturation, at times leaving them to "sink or swim" (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018). Academic acculturation refers to the process of joining a new, usually unfamiliar, group or institution and becoming integrated with its members and processes (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018; Jiang et al., 2010).

Attracting international talent can support a university to play a leading role in research and innovation. Research is increasingly a global activity for academics from most parts of the world (Teichler, 2015; Van der Wende, 2015). Recruiting from abroad can help to attract leading researchers and postgraduate students (Van der Wende, 2015). Members of socially disadvantaged groups may migrate to cultivate an international reputation and to seek career opportunities, material benefits, and personal fulfilment (Huang et al., 2024; Morley et al., 2018; Richardson & McKenna, 2002). However, moving around the world with continued access to education may be possible only for a wealthy elite with freedom of movement (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014), especially white male westerners (Sang & Calvard, 2019).

Given this study took place in England (UK), we use the term '*higher education'* to refer to institutions where it is possible to study for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, most commonly universities (Atherton et al., 2024). Nevertheless, it should be noted that understandings of what constitutes higher education differs by country. An international migrant is defined as someone who relocates to a different country, either to settle temporarily or permanently (Anderson & Blinder, 2019; Brown & Bean, 2005; Pustelnikovaite & Chillas, 2023), but usually for at least one year (Brown & Bean, 2005). In this paper, we use the term '*international migrant academic*' to refer to someone who describes having moved to the UK to work at a higher education institution. Use of the term '*international migrant academic'* is perhaps bound to a "nation-state perspective" that reproduces power relations and omits discussion of regional or local perspectives, and how experiences may differ at a national and/or city level (Zapata-Barrero, 2024). However, we do reflect upon power relations and socio-economic factors that may influence decisions to migrate tor work abroad. We sought to highlight impacts of the neoliberal university on individual academics by addressing these research questions:

- How did international migrant academics reflect upon their experiences of work-life balance?
- Why might international migrant academics find it challenging to establish work-life balance?
- What are characteristics of international migrant academics who may struggle to establish work-life balance?

Literature Review

The neoliberal university has been characterised as an environment of "work-centric organizational cultures" in which the ideal worker prioritises meeting quantified standards of productivity (Rosa, 2022). In the UK, the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

is an assessment framework with objectives to provide accountability for public investment in research, to establish reputational yardsticks, and to inform the selective allocation of funding for research (UKRI, 2022). Due to pressure to publish, some academics are struggling to complete their workloads and to meet institutional expectations (Pustelnikovaite, 2021; van Dalen & Henkens, 2012). Academics invest significant time outside of standard work allocations to meet institutional expectations and this time is often undercounted or not counted at all (Morrish, 2019; Stratford et al., 2023). Due to pressures within higher education to be productive, the contemporary academic is rarely able to switch off from work (Gornall & Salisbury, 2012).

International migrant academics may be particularly under pressure to overachieve in a short period of time and to prove themselves in a new country through their productivity (Strauß & Boncori, 2020). However, they may not recognise or raise issues about unsustainable workloads or poor work-life balance due to unfamiliarity with work processes in a new country (Mäkelä et al., 2011). Academics may avoid seeking help due to worry that personal frailties will be interpreted as a lack of resilience (Arday, 2022) and they may fear that admitting fatigue will be perceived by colleagues and management as a lack of willpower (D'Hoest & Lewis, 2015). International migrant academics may also feign contentment when experiencing work-related stress (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018). Harmful beliefs about failure can contribute to poor work-life balance (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018), yet work-life balance and perceptions of institutional support are fundamental for flourishing in academia (Denson et al., 2018) which should be a supportive and compassionate environment (Lemon et al., 2024).

The experiences of international migrant academics may intersect with other demographics such as gender and ethnicity (Morley et al., 2018; Sang & Calvard, 2019). Staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly females, may be expected to engage in disproportionately more administrative work than white male counterparts (Denson et al., 2018; Hanasono et al., 2019) and to be token members of university committees (Bhopal, 2022; Hanasono et al., 2019; Osho & Alormele, 2024). Across Europe, academics who are assigned additional administrative responsibilities, such as staff recruitment, may experience worry about workload (Pace et al., 2021). Academics may also experience tensions balancing work and personal life commitments due to cultural expectations. For example, Kamenou (2008) found that South Asian women are expected to regularly provide hospitality for family and friends, and this negatively impacts their work-life balance.

Life and career stages may be relevant for explaining work-life balance among international migrant academics, especially among women (Mäkelä et al., 2011; Strauß & Boncori, 2020; Wendt et al., 2022). Some women in academia sacrifice personal careers and work-life balance to prioritise family needs and the careers of a partner (Dyer et al., 2018; Mäkelä et al., 2011; Sang & Calvard, 2019). Women may prioritise work and career progression early on in their career and focus on their personal life later (Mäkelä et al., 2011). Women usually have to adapt their lives to meet work expectations within higher education, for example by securing

assistance with childcare (Siegel et al., 2018). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growing exodus of academics from higher education due to increasing demands of universities and their managers (Watermeyer et al., 2024) and women are around 12% more likely than men to leave academia (Kwiek & Szymula, 2024).

International migrant academics have described a lack of support structures after arriving in a new country (Richardson & McKenna, 2002). Personal relationships may also suffer after migrating to a new country because of the demands of balancing work and home life (Mäkelä et al., 2011). Academics who are single may be especially likely to suffer from loneliness and social isolation (Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010). Onboarding programmes, cross-cultural training, and mentoring by colleagues who are international migrant academics have been suggested as ways to cultivate more healthy approaches to work (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018). New hires to a university, especially employees who predominantly work remotely, could be invited to social events and provided with networking opportunities to build professional relationships (Negar et al., 2022). Supervisors and mentors within higher education could be informed of the importance of the "whole life" experience that accompanies international migration so that new recruits feel supported (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018; Vo & Fischetti, 2024).

Methods

This study was granted full ethical approval by a research ethics committee of an institution of higher education (UK). This institution was selected for study due to it being a recipient of research culture funding to investigate aspects of research culture, such as healthy working environments (UKRI, 2024). 500 staff were contacted, via their institutional email.Potential participants were provided with a study information sheet that explained the study purpose and that participants would receive a £10 shopping voucher as a small token of appreciation. The criteria for inclusion were that participants were in roles that required them to undertake research and that they were willing to provide informed consent. 55 individuals agreed to take part in a one-to-one online interview and two people provided written responses to questions asked within the interview. The option of submitting written responses was made available to those who did not want, or were unable, to schedule an online interview.

Participants completed a pre-interview registration form that asked for demographic information (e.g., ethnicity) and university-related information (e.g., job role). Table 1 provides an overview of the study sample. Information about migrancy status was not collected. The analysis of this study focuses on instances where participants self-referred to migration within an inductive inquiry. One-to-one interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45–60 min. Interviews were undertaken, in English, by a researcher working at the same institution as participants. Insider research of this nature has advantages such as deeper levels of understanding and rapport building but also shortcomings such as assumed knowledge

Table 1. Information About the Study Sample (n = 57).

Age Category	Age 26-35 = 26%	Age 36–45 = 32%	Age 46–55 = 33%	Age 56–65 = 9%
Gender	Female = 66%	Male = 31%	Prefer not to say = 3%	
Ethnicity	White = 76%	Asian = 9%	Mixed = 7%	Black = 2%
	Any other = 3%	Prefer not to say = 3%		
Mode of Employment	Full-time = 79%	Part-time = 21%		
Job Role	Academic Research = 52%	Academic Research & Teaching = 47%	Academic Teaching = 1%	
Career Level[a]	Level 4 = 42%	Level 5 = 12%	Level 6 = 5%	Level 7 = 41%

[a]At the university where this study was conducted, Research Fellows start at Level 4; Senior Research Fellows and Lecturers (mixed Teaching and Research) are situated within Level 5. Level 6 is comprised of Senior Lecturers and Associate Professors. Most Professors are employed at Level 7.

(Taylor, 2011). A point of information saturation was identified through an iterative process of assessing new topics emerging with each additional collection (Hennink et al., 2011).

Qualitative data were pseudonymised and thematically coded by two researchers using NVivo. Initial coding identified that some participants had referred to being an international migrant and that migration was relevant for explaining their attitudes towards work and work-life balance. One of these two researchers, and a third researcher, then conducted a narrative analysis of the transcripts in which participants had alluded to being an international migrant. A narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the complex trajectories of human participants and unpacks and conveys the richness of qualitative data (Riessman, 1993). The qualitative transcripts that were collected contained detailed accounts and to fracture these by presenting short extracts within a thematic analysis would have been to lose context and sequence (Riessman, 1993). Therefore, we sought to focus in-depth on personal accounts through an experience-centred approach (Riessman, 2008).

We used a narrative mapping technique (Richmond, 2002) to showcase individual experiences through storymaps and to provide in-depth description of work-life balance after international migration. Our inductive analytical approach focused on data excerpts that best reflected how international migration had shaped experiences of work within higher education or how experiences were distinct from those of academics who had not experienced migration. We selected four narratives that had common elements and sufficient detail about incidents, conflicts, and resolutions (Richmond, 2002) in relation to work-life balance as an international migrant academic, but they were not starkly different to the narratives of international migrant academics not included in our analysis.

Table 2. Lindsay's Storymap.

Self	Family / Friends	Background	Work
Limited hobbies	No family or partner close by	Low socio-economic status	Additional role(s) outside of work
Intrinsic reasons for working hard	Independent	Fear of financial insecurity	Woman in male-dominated field
Resilient		First generation to attend university	Cultural 'work ethic' i.e., hard work will pay off
		Migrated from outside Europe	Has a reputation of working too hard

Findings

Tables 2–5 At the time of interview, Lindsay had been working in academia in the UK for a couple of years. Lindsay referred to her socio-demographic background and described being a woman in a male-dominated academic field (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Lindsay stated that she had to take on more at work, and sacrifice work-life balance, to be as successful as male colleagues:

> I'm a first-generation person to ever attend university. My parents didn't attend university and I'm a woman in a very male-dominated field. I come from low socio-economic status. I grew up really poor compared to UK standards … quite impoverished. So, I've been overcoming these barriers for so long. (Lindsay)

Lindsay mentioned how fear of financial insecurity influenced her attitude towards work. Due to this fear, she had taken on additional part-time roles and had become accustomed to having multiple workstreams. Working simultaneously on different jobs provided Lindsay with financial stability and opportunities to enhance her socio-economic status.

Lindsay stated that her relationship status was also relevant for explaining her approach to work. Not having a family or a partner with her in the UK allowed Lindsay to undertake academic-related work when she wished and to devote additional time to work. Lindsay mentioned that her passion for sport facilitated work-life balance because it provided a distraction and prevented her from overworking. This was a welcome distraction for Lindsay who had built up a reputation among colleagues for overworking:

> I do see a lot of lecturers and postdocs [post-doctoral researchers] working way too hard and I don't think I would stand out amongst those folks. The other thing is that … I don't tell anyone how late I work. I did get a few comments that people saw my green dot on

Table 3. Fran's Storymap.

Self	Family / Friends	Background	Work
Work-life balance was difficult during COVID-19	Felt isolated in a new country during COVID-19	Migrated from Europe	Worked in countries with differing work cultures
Frustrated by the impact work has on her personal life	Family lives in another country		Works during evenings, weekends, and holidays
Described mental health impacts of work-life balance	Struggles to meet friends		
Human interaction as crucial to mental wellbeing			

> [Microsoft] Teams and so I just turned it off so they couldn't see it anymore … there's this bit of me making an actual effort to turn off and walk away from the computer and turn off Teams and sit at the telly or something, I think that's a new approach … I made a comment last year to one of my mentors, I said, 'I'm going to take the weekend off' and she was utterly shocked. (Lindsay)

A defining feature of Fran's narrative was the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulties she faced as a recent migrant who did not have a network of family or friends close by. Moving to a new country during a pandemic meant that Fran was unable to find or build new social relationships. Instead, Fran spent personal time focusing on work-related tasks:

> I need strict boundaries otherwise I'm gonna go crazy and work poorly … in my past UK university, I was there working on my own. The majority of the time I was in a new country, in a new city where I knew basically nobody and where I could not meet anybody because of COVID. If you don't have a structure, you kind of lose yourself which makes you not only less productive, but it's not good for you as a person. (Fran)

Fran described how a passion for work might be particularly detrimental to the work-life balance of an international migrant academic. Instead of communicating with her friends and family that were based outside of the UK, sometimes Fran felt she had to focus on academic work. Fran described sacrificing time with family and friends as one of the forfeits that must be made to fulfil the duties of an (international migrant) academic:

> my family's in Europe which makes it more complicated to go and visit them. My parents are getting older and maybe, I wanna spend a weekend in Europe or visit friends in

Table 4. Gayle's Storymap.

Self	Family / Friends	Background	Work
Struggles with work-life balance	Has young children	Migrated from outside Europe	Leaves work early due to childcare
Had to sacrifice work for her family	Partner works away		Childcare prevents engagement with professional development
Feels she is managing 'everything'	No family support with childcare		Challenging as a woman in a male-dominated environment

> Europe but that's not gonna happen because I have to correct an exam … so what you're basically asking is a big sacrifice that's not giving back to you. It's gonna give you some satisfaction because it's work you're passionate about, but I do think on a certain level that's the catch, right? You like it so much that you're gonna do it. This is the price you pay for the job you like. It's like a hidden price. (Fran)

Fran found it difficult to truly switch off from work and was disadvantaged as an international migrant academic because it was easier for her to succumb to the temptation of meeting deadlines out-of-hours than someone who was around family and friends.

Gayle's narrative revolved around balancing childcare responsibilities with work commitments. Gayle also considered out-of-hours working as a necessary component of academia. However, as an international migrant academic who did not have immediate family around to assist with childcare, Gayle had to maintain strict start and finish times at work so that she could drop-off and pick-up her children from school. There were times when Gayle would stay on after her normal finish time at work and her partner would take over caring responsibilities, but this was the exception rather than the norm:

> I wasn't doing anything out-of-ours because I have a young family with two kids. I don't have my own family around [to help] so it's not possible for me to be working out-of-hours … maybe a couple of times I was working like after 5PM. For example, 6PM or 7PM if my partner was around to mind the kids; other than that, no, I wasn't able to because of my family commitments. (Gayle)

Gayle undertook additional university-related work, such as applying for promotion, at unsociable hours because of childcare responsibilities. Gayle ended up working through the night to complete a promotion application so that she did not miss the deadline. Other work-related activities, such as academic conferences, Gayle had to decline because of her caring responsibilities. Gayle described not

Table 5. Dennis' Storymap.

Self	Family / Friends	Background	Work
Going to the gym is a distraction from work	Partner lives abroad; they communicate before/after work	Previously studied and worked outside Europe	Workload is reasonable compared to previous role(s)
Acknowledged a need to 'slow down'	Communicates virtually with friends/family	Feels 'bad' when taking time off.	
Experienced illness. Now prioritises health/ well-being	Has not established social connections post-migration	Recently started a research role in the UK	

having family around, apart from her husband, to care for their children and that this sometimes took a mental toll on her. When her children experienced difficulties, such as illness, Gayle reported a blurring of her work-life boundaries and felt that she was not able to perform optimally at work:

> Men are very different to women … for example, if something happens to my child. I am very upset about it, and it takes me a couple of hours or maybe a day or two to resolve it, but he [my partner] is okay … maybe he sees things differently so he can resolve it much easier, or it may not even be a problem for him … sometimes I find it difficult to separate things from my work life. For example, it might be a day that my child is upset or something has happened in my family and I come to work and I don't feel well mentally to work. So, I am here personally and physically, but I cannot do my job or I do something wrong and I know that it is because of my thinking. (Gayle)

Dennis was new to a research role in the UK and described how working in other countries had shaped his approach to work. His work-life balance was improving but sometimes he worked instead of taking all of his allocated annual leave. His decision to prioritise work over annual leave was possibly due to previously working in another country where allocation for annual leave was less than in his new role. Dennis mentioned an intrinsic pressure to be successful in his new role, and that taking time off from work could stall his momentum:

> I don't know if it's because of my background because I never had it [much holiday] and I feel it is wrong or is it because I'm leaving my supervisor with the deadlines … I don't know if it's me or if I'm making someone feel bad. … It's like … my supervisor doesn't give me pressure … they don't say these things … I think sometimes it's in your head, the pressure, the things that you want to accomplish; you don't want to take time off because you need more time [to work on tasks] together. (Dennis)

Dennis did not have any caring responsibilities that might detract from accomplishing his research goals, and his partner lived abroad. He described being very focused on work:

> It's a strange one for me because I don't like people too much so I don't have too many friends … I like to talk to my family, but not everyday. I like to have time alone. I don't really need this interaction with family and friends … two days a week or one day a week I meet someone to talk to but all the other days I like to be alone. (Dennis)

Dennis described a daily routine comprised of few non-work-related commitments, much independence, and a relentless drive to succeed as an (international migrant) academic.

Discussion

The participants for this study had different characteristics, e.g., in terms of age, relationship status, and caring responsibilities, yet there were commonalities in the way international migration shaped their work-life balance. Lindsay provided insight into how being from a low socio-economic background made her determined to be successful at work and to blur work-life boundaries. Lindsay's willingness to take on additional work may also have been influenced by being female in a largely male academic discipline as well as a desire to prove herself in a new work environment. The culture of the neoliberal university has been described as work centric. Lindsay fitted the expectations of an ideal worker within this workplace by prioritising work outputs at the expense of other aspects of her personal life (Rosa, 2022). Lindsay perhaps exemplified a perception among international migrant academics, particularly women, that they must work overtime to meet expectations for productivity (Pustelnikovaite & Chillas, 2023; Rosa, 2022; Strauß & Boncori, 2020).

Fran experienced loneliness and isolation away from friends and family and prioritised work over her personal life. Fran felt that this imbalance made her less productive which suggests that support networks may be imperative for counteracting unhealthy approaches to work (Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010; Gornall & Salisbury, 2012). Human Resources within institutions of higher education could implement onboarding processes that advise upon, and facilitate, the establishment of academic peer networks for new recruits from overseas (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018; Dyer et al., 2018; Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010). Job induction information could be accompanied with endorsement of healthy approaches to work-life balance and encouragement to be open about work experiences within an honest and supportive academic environment (Lemon et al., 2024; Watermeyer et al., 2024).

Gayle stated that she had a young family to care for and that she had to restrict work to confined periods unlike Lindsay and Fran who did not have caring responsibilities. An application for promotion was a notable experience that prevented Gayle from establishing work-life balance. Gayle reported having worked at the expense of

sleeping to prepare a promotion application which an example of how institutional policies can require staff to take on additional unpaid tasks to prove themselves worthy for promotion (Heffernan & Smithers, 2024). Family-friendly workplace policies and flexible promotion requirements (see Nicholls et al., 2022) may have reduced the possibility of Gayle feeling she had to compromise her mental and physical health to fulfil perceived expectations.

Dennis provided insight into how work-life balance within higher education can differ by country and he described having a better work-life balance in the UK where he was allocated more annual leave. However, Dennis did not use all of this leave because of a perceived need to dedicate as much time as possible to work (Chalmers, 2013). Like Lindsay, Dennis conveyed an internalised pressure to prioritise success at work over other aspects of his life post-migration (Strauß & Boncori, 2020). Yet, unlike other participants, Dennis did not feel that his social life had suffered after migrating. Additional support may not be beneficial for all international migrant academics, but it could be helpful to those with caring responsibilities and those applying for promotion (Mäkelä et al., 2011; Strauß & Boncori, 2020; Wendt et al., 2022). Furthermore, higher education institutions could facilitate healthy acculturation (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018) by reiterating to all new recruits, the importance of setting work-life boundaries and understanding their workplace rights.

There were limitations of this study. Data was collected from self-selected participants who volunteered to take part in the study after receiving an invitation. It is taken on trust that participants felt comfortable disclosing their true experiences of higher education to another colleague. The study sample may have comprised academics with time to offer the study, whereas those experiencing high workloads did not feel able to give up time to participate. Some responses of participants may have been subject to recall error – that is inaccurate or incomplete recollection – within the confines of a single data collection session (see Khare & Vedel, 2019). Lastly, the topic of international migration, as introduced by participants, was identified as relevant for explaining work-life balance, after data collection. This was a limitation because our data analysis relied solely on self-reported references to international migration. Migrant status was not systematically collected.

Future research could build upon this inductive inquiry by recording relevant information for contextualising experiences of work post-migration such as details about previous country/countries of employment, relationship status, and number of dependents. Migration status and ethnicity could be investigated to ascertain if healthy work-life balance is more unachievable among academics who face expectations to act as cultural representatives at their university (Bhopal, 2022; Hanasono et al., 2019; Osho & Alormele, 2024). Furthermore, this study was undertaken at only one university. Future research could include multiple institutions, in multiple countries, and longer-term tracking of career trajectories (see Huang et al., 2024) to ascertain if experiences of work-life balance differ based on where academics have migrated from and to. Possible recall error could be overcome by inviting participants to keep a time diary (Robinson, 2002) as a new recruit. A longitudinal approach could capture granular

details about types of tasks being undertaken, the time that they took, and when they were undertaken. Time diaries could also capture participants' immediate impressions of onboarding processes which could provide evidence-informed strategies for Human Resources to induct academics from overseas.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that international migrant academics, may be especially likely to be impacted by unhealthy work practices. This was primarily because international migrant academics felt loneliness away from close family and friends, they described not being close to support networks, and they experienced expectations to work more than necessary to impress new employers. We found that experiences of loneliness could influence decisions to spend additional time on work-related tasks and that an absence of support with caring responsibilities could disadvantage academics, particularly women. Finally, a perceived need to impress at a new institution negatively impacted individual health in situations where work was prioritised over rest. There may be a culture within higher education that explicitly or implicity encourages unhealthy work practices and that continually reinforces expectations for personal and institutional productivity.

Some of the issues raised about the work-life balance of international migrant academics could be rectified by offering tailored guidance. Improved onboarding for international migrant academics could help them to build social networks and to avoid focus only on work-related tasks. Where international migrant academics are early in their careers, mentoring from more senior academics who have successfully transitioned to a new country and established healthy work-life balance could help to provide guidance. Female international migrant academics should be a priority for support given pressures that they face meeting perceived expectations to be successful in academia. Focusing on specific groups of academics who have experienced difficulties establishing work-life balance, may help to promote healthier and more sustainable approaches to work. Doing so may also challenge neoliberal practices that seem to prioritise personal productivity over work-life balance within higher education.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the UKRI's enhancing research culture fund, the CHEP researcher work-life balance study team, and all participants who made this study possible. The authors thank Jack Addison for assistance coding the qualitative data that were collected for this study.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Reseach England: Enhancing Research Culture funding (UKRI).

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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