

The Influence Of Work Life Balance On Intention To Leave Among Staff In Public Universities In Kenya

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ABSTRACT: *Work-life balance (WLB) has emerged as a critical determinant of employee retention in higher education institutions. This study investigated the influence of work-life balance on intention to leave among staff in Kenya's public universities. Grounded in Schaffer's (1953) Fulfillment Theory and Clark's (2000) Work/Family Border Theory, the research employed a cross-sectional survey design with 412 participants drawn from 30 public universities using stratified purposive sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires employing five-point Likert scales for work-life balance and six-point scales for intention to leave, achieving reliability coefficients above 0.70. Results revealed moderate work-life balance challenges ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.02$) with pronounced work-to-life interference. Staff reported high levels of job-related personal life difficulties ($M = 4.50$) and struggles juggling work-life demands ($M = 3.74$). Intention to leave scores were concerned ($M = 4.34$), with the highest mean for feelings of inadequacy and hypersensitivity to criticism ($M = 5.65$). Simple linear regression analysis established a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and intention to leave ($R = .421$, $p < .001$), with work-life balance explaining 17.7% of variance in intentions to leave. The study concludes that poor work-life balance significantly contributes to staff intentions to leave in Kenya's public universities, though other organizational factors also play important roles. Recommendations include implementing flexible work arrangements, reducing administrative burdens, establishing mental health support programs, and developing emotionally intelligent leadership to improve staff retention and institutional effectiveness.*

Keywords: work-life balance, intention to leave, university employees, and public universities, Commission for University Education

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

In contemporary human resource management, work-life balance (WLB) has emerged as a fundamental aspect influencing employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The evolving nature of modern workplaces characterized by increased digitalization, heightened performance expectations, and inflexible institutional structures has made achieving WLB increasingly difficult (Murithi, 2017). In Kenya's public universities, these challenges are further compounded by systemic issues such as resource limitations and bureaucratic inefficiencies. These structural barriers often result in role conflict and strain-based interference, culminating in high levels of stress, burnout, and a growing intention among staff to leave their jobs currently estimated at 30% (Abirigo, 2023; Makori et al., 2019; Otieno, 2020).

Academic staff in Kenyan public universities face unique work-life integration challenges due to the multiplicity of roles they are expected to fulfill, including teaching, research, community engagement, and administrative duties (Gundi, 2024). This leads to role overload, which diminishes job satisfaction and contributes to declining staff retention rates. Numerous studies have linked poor WLB to negative institutional outcomes such as decreased employee performance (Otieno, 2020), weakened organizational commitment (Mogeni, 2020), and heightened turnover intentions (Karuhi & Aila, 2023). Despite these findings, public universities in Kenya have been slow to implement formal WLB policies or initiatives aimed at supporting employee well-being, leaving academic staff without adequate institutional support mechanisms (Abirigo, 2023; Muasya & Nzengya, 2021). As such, this study aims to address this gap by empirically analyzing the extent to which WLB affects academic staff's intention to leave, thereby offering evidence-based insights for policy reform and institutional improvement.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Work-life balance has increasingly become a critical factor influencing employees' intention to leave organizations globally. Studies such as Karuhi and Aila (2023) highlight that work stress, workload, and an imbalance between work and personal life significantly contribute to employees' turnover intentions. In the context of public universities in Kenya, where academic and administrative staff face demanding workloads and blurred boundaries between work and personal time, the challenge of maintaining a healthy work-life balance is evident. Reports from the Commission for University Education (CUE, 2024) show a high turnover rate of 20%, reflecting dissatisfaction among university staff, which is often linked to poor work-life balance and an unsupportive work

environment. These factors not only affect staff wellbeing but also impair the universities' ability to retain skilled employees, thereby compromising institutional effectiveness.

Despite the growing concern about work-life balance and its impact on employee retention, there is limited empirical research focusing on public universities in Kenya. Existing studies reveal that only 30% of employees perceive their work environment as positive, with 70% indicating an intention to leave due to factors such as poor work-life balance and workplace stress (Abirigo, 2023; Muasya & Nzengya, 2021). The consequences of such high turnover rates are significant, including reduced productivity, low morale, and increased costs related to recruitment and training (Gundi et al., 2024). This study seeks to fill the gap by examining how work-life balance influences the intention to leave among staff in Kenyan public universities and by identifying strategies that institutions can implement to foster a supportive work environment. The findings are expected to contribute valuable insights to improve employee retention and enhance organizational performance in the higher education sector.

1.3 Research objective

The research objective was to establish the influence of work life balance on intention to leave among staff in Public Universities in Kenya.

1.4 Research hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no relationship between work life balance and intention to leave among staff in Public Universities in Kenya.

2. LITERATUR REVIEW

The theoretical grounding of this study draws from Schaffer's (1953) Fulfillment Theory and Clark's (2000) Work/Family Border Theory. Schaffer (1953) posits that job satisfaction stems from the degree to which employees' psychological and personal needs are met within the workplace - needs that are often unmet in rigid institutional environments. Clark's (2000) theory emphasizes the importance of flexible and permeable boundaries between work and family domains, which are often lacking in academic settings. While these frameworks provide useful lenses, significant research gaps persist, particularly concerning the direct influence of WLB on intention to leave within the Kenyan public university context. Most existing studies either generalize findings across the public sector or focus on peripheral aspects such as perceived organizational support, without delving into the specific predictors of employee exit intentions (Agunda et al., 2024; Gundi et al., 2024).

The preceding review of theoretical and empirical literature informs the development of the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 below.

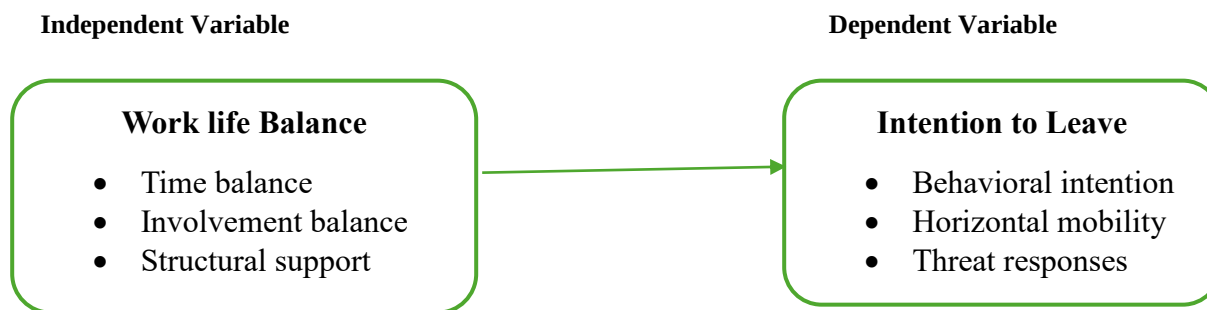


Figure 1: Conceptual framework (Author, 2025)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by the positivist research philosophy, which emphasizes using scientific methods to objectively observe and measure social phenomena, thereby generating empirical knowledge (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Positivism was appropriate as it allowed for a systematic, quantitative examination of the relationship between staff perception of workload and intention to leave, maintaining objectivity throughout hypothesis testing. A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data at a single point in time from public university staff in Kenya, facilitating efficient hypothesis testing and the analysis of variable relationships (Saunders et al., 2019). The target population included both academic and non-academic employees across 30 public universities, totaling 30,492 individuals, selected for their direct experience with workload challenges. A sample of 491 respondents was determined to be statistically sufficient, using established sampling techniques to ensure proportional representation of staff categories and purposive selection of individuals in key roles exposed to workload variations. Data were collected via a structured

self-administered questionnaire using Likert scales, with measures adapted from validated instruments, including the Turnover Intention Scale (Irving, Coleman, & Cooper, 1997). Instrument validity and reliability were confirmed through a pilot study, expert reviews, and statistical tests such as Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis, ensuring the clarity and consistency of the tools used. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0, applying descriptive statistics to summarize the data and inferential statistics, particularly regression analysis, to test the influence of work-life balance on intention to leave. Prior to analysis, diagnostic tests confirmed the suitability of the regression model, with significance assessed at the 0.05 level to determine the strength and nature of the relationship under investigation.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study examined the relationship between work life balance and intention to leave among staff in Public Universities in Kenya.

4.1 Distribution of work-life balance

The respondents were asked to rate the statements provided on a scale of 1-5 where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree, on work life balance after which the response obtained was analyzed into frequency of response, mean score and standard deviation.

Table 1 Distribution of work-life balance

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode	CV	Kurtosis	Skewness
My personal life suffers because of work	3.48	0.497	3.02	2.89	14.28	4.19	2.78
My job makes personal life difficult	4.5	0.339	4.15	3.96	7.53	4.59	3.10
I neglect personal needs because of work	3.67	0.29	3.2	3.01	7.90	5.28	4.86
I put personal life on hold for work	2.01	0.39	1.86	1.54	19.40	4.21	1.15
I miss personal activities because of work	2.92	0.173	2.53	2.11	5.92	7.68	6.76
I struggle to juggle work and non-work	3.74	0.155	3.47	3.28	4.14	5.97	5.23
I am unhappy with the amount of time for non-work activities	1.73	0.271	1.55	1.12	15.66	5.25	1.99
My personal life drains me of energy for work	2.41	0.085	2.32	2.24	3.53	5.00	3.18
I am too tired to be effective at work	3.23	0.242	3.06	2.95	7.49	4.16	2.11
My work suffers because of my personal life	4.33	0.003	4.05	3.89	0.07	149.67	280.00
It is hard to work because of personal matter	4.46	0.252	4.28	4.17	5.65	4.15	2.14
My personal life gives me energy for my job	3.12	1.287	2.98	2.57	41.25	3.43	0.33
My job derails my personal life	3.62	0.132	3.25	3.02	3.65	7.55	8.41
I have a better mood at work because of personal life	2.38	1.341	2.11	1.96	56.34	3.31	0.60
Overall mean score	3.26	1.02					

The analysis of work-life balance among staff in Kenyan public universities provides empirical evidence regarding the relationship between work-life balance and potential intention to leave. The overall mean score of 3.26 (SD = 1.02) indicates that respondents report moderate levels of work-life balance challenges across the measured dimensions

4.2 Distribution for intention to leave

The respondents were asked to rate the provided statements on a scale of 1-5 where 1=Never, 2= Very Rarely, 3= Rarely, 4 = Occasionally, 5 = Very Frequently after which the response obtained was analyzed into frequency of response, mean score and standard deviation.

Table 2 Frequency distribution on intention to leave

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode	CV	Kurtosis	Skewness
I am considering leaving my current job within the next year.	5.23	1.084	4.89	4.25	20.73	3.90	0.94
I have unstable and intense relationships alternating between idealization and devaluation	4.5	1.142	4.24	3.97	25.38	3.46	0.68
I am unwilling to do this job again.	1.2	1.363	1.04	0.87	113.58	3.24	0.35
I will seek another job at another institution	4.59	1.021	4.01	3.95	22.24	3.63	1.70
I would like to leave my current job and seek a long-term job opportunity elsewhere.	4.79	1.172	4.24	4.01	24.47	3.67	1.41
I am not satisfied with my current wage and am therefore unwilling to continue in the job.	3.9	0.78	3.47	3.08	20.00	4.05	1.65
I am not satisfied with the current content of my job and am therefore unwilling to continue in the job.	3.85	0.518	3.46	3.11	13.45	4.43	2.26
I am not satisfied with the system in my current work unit and am therefore unwilling to continue in the job	4.77	0.442	4.25	4.03	9.27	4.67	3.53
I have a feeling of inadequacy and hypersensitivity to criticism or rejection therefore unwilling to continue in the job	5.65	0.168	5.14	4.98	2.97	6.99	9.11
I have emotional coldness and detachment from social relationships therefore unwilling to continue in the job	4.57	0.416	4.1	3.98	9.10	4.42	3.39
I often feel indifferent to praise and criticism therefore unwilling to continue in the job	4.69	0.347	4.25	3.97	7.40	5.07	3.80
I feel my boss has arrogance and haughty behaviors or attitudes therefore unwilling to continue in the job	3.61	0.455	3.21	2.98	12.60	4.38	2.64
I often experience exaggerated emotional expression therefore unwilling to continue in the job	4.65	0.371	4.25	4.09	7.98	4.51	3.23
I do have difficulty expressing disagreement out of fear of loss of support or approval therefore unwilling to continue in the job	4.77	0.556	4.52	3.94	11.66	4.49	1.35
Overall mean score	4.34	1.084					

The study findings in Table 2 gives a concerning picture of workforce stability in Kenyan public universities, with strong evidence of widespread intention to leave among staff members. The overall mean score of 4.34 on the intention-to-leave scale, which falls between "occasionally" and "very frequently," suggests that intention to leave considerations are not merely passing thoughts but persistent concerns for a significant portion of the academic staff.

4.3 Regression analysis findings on work-life balance

The regression analysis provides empirical evidence concerning the relationship between work-life balance and intention to leave among academic and administrative staff in Kenyan public universities. Statistical analysis systematically examines the null hypothesis, which posited that:

H0₁: There is no relationship between work life balance and intention to leave among staff in Public Universities in Kenya

Table 3: Model summary on work life balance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.421 ^a	.177	.175	.09409

a. Predictors: (Constant), Work Life Balance

The model summary (Table 3) reveals a moderate positive correlation coefficient between work-life balance and intention to leave ($R = .421$), indicating a substantial linear association between the predictor and criterion variables. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .177$) demonstrates that work-life balance accounts for 17.7% of the systematic variance in intention to leave among the university staff population. This finding suggests that while work-life balance constitutes a statistically meaningful predictor of intentions to leave, additional organizational, individual, and contextual factors contribute to the remaining 82.3% of variance in the dependent variable. The adjusted R^2 value of .175 substantiates the model's explanatory capacity after adjusting for the degrees of freedom, while the standard error of the estimate (.09409) quantifies the precision of predictions generated by the regression model.

Table 4: ANOVA^a on work life balance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.782	1	.782	88.370	.000 ^b
	Residual	3.629	410	.009		
	Total	4.412	411			

a. Dependent Variable: Intention to Leave

b. Predictors: (Constant), Work Life Balance

The analysis of variance (Table 4.13) establishes the statistical significance of the overall regression model through examination of the F-ratio. The computed F-statistic of 88.370 with an associated probability value of .000 ($p < .001$) provides compelling evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis at the conventional Type I error rate of $\alpha = .05$. The partitioning of total sum of squares demonstrates that the regression sum of squares (.782) represents the portion of criterion variable variance systematically related to the predictor, while the residual sum of squares (3.629) reflects random error variance.

Table 5: Coefficients^a on work life balance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.286	.141		23.387	.000
	Work Life Balance	.537	.057	.421	9.401	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Intention to Leave

The coefficients table (Table 5) delineates the specific parameters characterizing the predictive relationship between work-life balance and intention to leave. The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B = .537$) indicates that each unit increment in work-life balance challenges corresponds to a 0.537-unit increase in intention to leave scores, *ceteris paribus*. This coefficient represents the expected change in the criterion variable per unit change in the predictor variable while maintaining constant conditions for all other potential influences. The standardized regression coefficient ($Beta = .421$) facilitates interpretation of effect magnitude by expressing the relationship in standard deviation units, thereby indicating a moderate positive association between the constructs. The associated t-statistic of 9.401 with probability value of .000 confirms that this regression coefficient differs significantly from zero at conventional significance levels. The intercept parameter (3.286) represents the predicted intention to leave score when work-life balance is held at its theoretical minimum value.

The derived regression equation $Y = 3.286 + 0.537X_1$ constitutes a predictive model for estimating intention to leave based on work-life balance assessment scores. This linear function indicates that a baseline level of intention to leave exists independently of work-life balance considerations, as evidenced by the positive y-intercept, with work-life balance challenges contributing additively to intention to leave. The positive slope parameter confirms that deteriorating work-life balance conditions are systematically associated with elevated intention to leave scores among the study population. The statistical evidence necessitates rejection of null hypothesis H_{01} , thereby establishing the existence of a relationship between work-life balance and intention to leave among staff in Kenyan public universities.

4.4 Discussion

The study aimed to determine the influence of work life balance on intention to leave among staff in Public Universities in Kenya. The study showed that the overall mean score of 3.26 indicates a moderate perception of work-life balance, with considerable variation across specific dimensions. This evidence demonstrates that both academic and non-academic staff perceive tangible interference between their work roles and personal lives, suggesting that work-life balance challenges are pervasive across different employee categories within these institutions. The most pronounced areas of concern emerge in work-to-life interference patterns. The highest levels of interference were recorded for items such as "My job makes personal life difficult" ($M = 4.50$) and "I struggle to juggle work and non-work" ($M = 3.74$), underscoring the presence of both strain-based and time-based conflicts. These results align closely with prior research within the Kenyan context. Agunda et al. (2024) found that rigid institutional schedules and under-resourced departments contribute significantly to employee difficulty in managing professional and personal responsibilities. This institutional rigidity appears to create structural barriers that prevent staff from achieving optimal work-life integration. Similarly, Makori et al. (2019) identified a strong association between work-life balance and perceptions of organizational support among university faculty, suggesting that institutional responsiveness directly influences how staff manage competing demands between work and personal domains.

In addition, the variability in staff experiences of positive work-life interaction, highlighting the heterogeneous nature of work-life balance within these institutions. Items such as "My personal life gives me energy for my job" and "I have a better mood at work because of personal life" showed high coefficients of variation (41.25% and 56.34%, respectively), indicating that perceptions of beneficial spillover from personal to work domains are highly uneven across respondents. This finding provides strong support for Work/Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000), which posits that work-life outcomes depend heavily on the permeability and flexibility of institutional boundaries. In Kenya's public universities, where job autonomy and flexibility vary considerably across roles and departments, such variance in positive spillover experiences reflects the differential impact of organizational structures on individual work-life integration.

Regarding the emotional and physical toll of work-life imbalance on university staff, statements such as "I am too tired to be effective at work" ($M = 3.23$) and "My personal life suffers because of work" ($M = 3.48$) reflect the debilitating effects of excessive work demands. These outcomes align with findings by Murithi (2017), who identified fatigue and insufficient recovery time as key barriers to productivity in Kenyan universities. The physical exhaustion experienced by staff appears to stem from systemic issues including administrative overload, limited delegation opportunities, and unclear job demarcation conditions that create unsustainable workload pressures. Despite these challenges, the study showed that staff engagement with multiple roles remains limited, with only 10.2% of respondents reporting that they perform multiple roles simultaneously. This finding suggests that the work-life balance problems experienced by university staff may not necessarily result from role multiplicity but rather from the intensity and poor management of existing roles.

These findings must be interpreted within the broader context of systemic challenges that have long characterized Kenya's public higher education system. Gundi et al. (2024) identify several structural factors contributing to staff dissatisfaction, including limited career progression opportunities, static remuneration structures that fail to keep pace with inflation, and institutional rigidity that stifles innovation and professional growth. These systemic issues create an environment where talented individuals feel compelled to seek opportunities elsewhere, potentially leading to a significant brain drain within the sector. In addition, the finding suggests that intentions to leave are primarily institutional rather than occupational in nature, supporting research by Mogeni (2020) who found similar patterns among bank employees in Kenya.

The psychological dimensions of staff dissatisfaction emerge as particularly concerning within the dataset. The finding suggests that there is significant psychological strain and emotional vulnerability among respondents. This elevated level of emotional distress indicates that the work environment may be contributing to feelings of professional inadequacy and heightened sensitivity to feedback, conditions that can severely undermine both individual well-being and organizational effectiveness. The prominence of emotional distress in the intention to leave profile aligns with findings by Karuhu and Aila (2023), who report that emotional disengagement plays a pivotal role in intentions to leave within high-pressure sectors. Their research demonstrates that when employees experience chronic emotional strain, they become increasingly likely to disengage from their roles and seek alternative

employment. This emotional dimension of intention to leave reinforces the critical importance of psychological climate and emotional support systems in developing effective retention strategies for Kenya's public universities.

The regression analysis provides compelling evidence for the predictive relevance of work-life balance in shaping intentions to leave among university staff. The model demonstrates a statistically significant relationship between work-life balance and intention to leave ($R = .421$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of .177. This relationship indicates that approximately 17.7% of the variance in intention to leave can be directly attributed to work-life balance challenges, establishing WLB as a significant predictor of employee retention outcomes. While this relationship is statistically robust, the moderate effect size suggests that work-life balance represents one important factor within a more complex constellation of variables influencing intentions to leave. This finding aligns with Fulfillment Theory (Schaffer, 1953), which posits that employee dissatisfaction arises when individuals are unable to fulfill their psychological, economic, and social needs within their work environments. In this theoretical framework, work-life balance constitutes one critical unmet need that contributes to overall job dissatisfaction and subsequent intention to leave.

The fact that 82.3% of variance in intention leave remains unexplained by work-life balance alone highlights the multifaceted nature of employee retention challenges in Kenya's public universities. Other organizational factors likely exert meaningful influence on intention to leave decisions, including compensation fairness, job content satisfaction, career development opportunities, leadership effectiveness, and overall organizational climate. Future research should incorporate these additional constructions to develop more comprehensive models of intention to leave that can inform holistic retention strategies. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.537$) provides practical insight into the magnitude of the work-life balance effect. This coefficient indicates that for every unit increase in work-life balance challenges, with the intention to leave increases by more than half a point on the measurement scale. This substantial effect size underscores the practical significance of work-life balance interventions and reinforces the importance of institutional support mechanisms in employee retention efforts.

The linear relationship identified in the regression analysis provides strong empirical support for Work/Family Border Theory's emphasis on institutional structure and support in mediating conflicts between personal and professional roles. Within the context of Kenya's public universities, where institutional governance has been characterized by limited responsiveness and outdated human resource structures (Gundi, 2024), the presence of such a direct effect is both theoretically coherent and practically concerning. These findings also resonate with research by Makori et al. (2019), who demonstrated that perceptions of fairness and flexibility in work arrangements serve as important mediating factors in the relationship between work demands and intentions leave. Their research suggests that institutions can mitigate the negative effects of demanding work environments by implementing supportive policies and practices that enhance work-life integration.

However, the moderate effect size also indicates that improving work-life balance alone will not comprehensively resolve retention problems within Kenya's public universities. This insight supports Murithi's (2017) argument that while work-life balance serves as a core predictor of organizational attachment, sustainable long-term retention strategies must be multifaceted and comprehensive. Effective retention approaches must simultaneously address multiple organizational factors including competitive compensation packages, effective leadership development programs, positive institutional culture transformation, and robust professional development opportunities.

Findings call for a strategic re-evaluation of HR policies in Kenya's public universities. Targeted interventions to enhance work-life balance are essential, especially for academic staff burdened with teaching, research, and administrative duties. These demands, paired with limited resources, create significant imbalance. High emotional distress particularly feelings of inadequacy and hypersensitivity to criticism signals an urgent need for comprehensive mental wellness programs and emotionally intelligent leadership training. Addressing these issues requires both individual-level solutions (e.g., counseling, stress management) and organizational reforms (e.g., leadership development, cultural change). The variability in work-life experiences across roles highlights the importance of differentiated role-specific HR strategies. Additionally, employee's intention to leave appears rooted in institutional not professional dissatisfaction, underscoring the need to improve working conditions rather than altering career paths. To retain committed professionals, universities must implement systemic reforms addressing structural barriers while reinforcing academic vocation and professional identity.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study demonstrates that work-life balance significantly influences staff intentions to leave in Kenya's public universities. Staff experience pronounced work-to-life interference, emotional exhaustion, and institutional dissatisfaction, especially due to rigid schedules, administrative overload, and lack of support. Despite these challenges, many remain committed to their academic professions, indicating that dissatisfaction is largely directed at institutional conditions rather than the nature of academic work. The statistically significant relationship between work-life imbalance and intentions to leave underscores the importance of supportive institutional policies. However, the moderate effect size highlights that employee retention is multifaceted, requiring holistic reform beyond WLB alone.

To address employee's intention to leave in Kenya's public universities, institutions should ease workload pressures by reducing administrative burdens, clarifying roles, and offering flexible work arrangements, particularly for academic staff managing multiple responsibilities. Promoting staff well-being through mental health programs, stress management, and emotionally intelligent leadership is essential to counter the high levels of emotional strain. Finally, retention strategies must be tailored to departmental needs, with reforms focused on fair compensation, career progression, and transparent governance to improve institutional climate and retain committed professionals.

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