

The well-being of female administrative staff in managerial positions in Polish Higher Education Institutions

The well-being
of female
admin staff

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of the paper is to theoretically and empirically explore the issue of well-being (WB) of female administrative employees who work on managerial positions at higher education institutions (HEIs).

Design/methodology/approach – This study is based on both literature studies and explorative empirical research conducted in Poland with the use of snowball sampling. It adopted a questionnaire authored by Parker and Hyett and covered 121 respondents.

Findings – Literature studies show that invisibility of work, low level of empowerment, increased stress, workload and expectations, reduced resources, high level of anxiety, fatigue and low level of vitality negatively impact the WB of HEIs' administrative staff. The presented research provides insight into the internal structure of the administrative staff's WB. Both the main construct (i.e. employees' WB) and its subconstructs are on moderate level. Respondents' age and tasks performed are correlated only with the subconstruct of WB in the form of intrusion of work into private life.

Research limitations/implications – Although the research is not based on large sample, it provides both practical and theoretical implications.

Originality/value – Most of studies discuss the issue of WB of scholars. The paper fills the research gap in terms of examining female administrative employees who work on managerial positions at HEIs.

Keywords Well-being, Job satisfaction, Poland, Administrative staff, Women, HEIs

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Well-being (WB) is fundamental to the overall health of an individual. Higher levels of WB enable people to overcome difficulties in private and professional life successfully and achieve goals (Aked, Marks, Cordon, & Thompson, 2008; Fisher, 2014). Therefore, the concept of WB has been explored by scientists representing different fields of knowledge, and the WB of employees in various types of organizations was measured, including those in the

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manufacturing industry (Wang *et al.*, 2017) and hospitals (Stelnicki, Carleton, & Reichert, 2020). Workplace WB – also called work-related WB, employees' WB and WB at work – is related to having a sense of purpose at work and a passion for it (Sahai & Mahapatra, 2020).

In the case of higher education institutions (HEIs), most research covers the problem of the WB of students (e.g. Rosentha, Russell, & Thomson, 2008; Joshanloo, Rastegar, & Bakhshi, 2012) or academic teachers (e.g. Tomàs, Lavie, Duran, del, & Guillamon, 2010; Larson *et al.*, 2019; Putwain, 2019). However, there is also another significant occupational group at HEIs, namely the administrative staff. The intersecting work and WB of these employees lead to two opposite claims. The first one is that working in HEI administration results in a high level of WB because the job is secure, has fixed working hours and does not consist of demanding tasks (De Witte, Vander Elst, & De Cuyper, 2015). The other is that administrative staff are considered noncore, and thus their work is valued less than one of academics (Adams, 2019) and is considered an unnecessary bureaucratic burden.

Such a binary opposition, with one being ranked significantly higher than the other in terms of power relations, exists not only in academia but also in other occupational groups (e.g. doctors and nurses). We believe that the academic setting makes these boundaries even stronger and more unique. The subordinate occupational group (administration) performs a controlling function over the dominant one (academia), which seems to undermine the power hierarchy. However, the administrative staff exercises this function not as subjects but as “messengers of bureaucracy” (Allen-Collinson, 2006, p. 178). They only deliver the bureaucratic message to the academics, which often puts them in an uncomfortable position. This bureaucratic surveillance is often juxtaposed with the longing for academic freedom and unrestricted ability to create expressed by academics (Szwabowski, 2013).

Many scholars remark that contemporary universities need professional administrative staff who will manage complex university affairs, which far exceed traditional research and teaching (Gornitzka, Kyvik, & Larsen, 1998; Sebajl, Holbrook, & Bourke, 2012). It is still the academics who perform strategic core functions, deliver value to external customers, design and perform research, and teach students. However, the administrative staff delivers value to internal customers (students and academics) and assists in value-delivering core processes (i.e. research and teaching). This is especially the case of administrative staff in middle-management roles, who display characteristics of multiprofessionals. They often work in different domains outside of their functional silos and express strong commitment to their projects, and they are often perceived as navigators and pathfinders in the institutional framework (Whitchurch, 2006, pp. 168–169). In other words, the university's success depends not only on the quality of academic work but also on the support the researchers receive.

As indicated above, although administrative staff plays an important role in HEIs, studies on the WB of this occupational group are scarce. Moreover, previous research has approached this WB from various theoretical perspectives, focusing mainly on job satisfaction (e.g. Jung & Shin, 2015; Aldaihani, 2019). Because according to the “part whole theory,” job satisfaction is a subconstruct of WB (Sironi, 2019), a more complex approach is needed; one that includes also other components of WB beyond work satisfaction (WS).

Furthermore, when examining the WB of administrative staff in HEIs, we should consider that it is very likely the majority are women. In fact, according to statistics Poland, 68% of the administrative staff working at Polish HEIs are female (Statistics Poland, 2021). As women have become more assimilated into the workforce in recent decades, they have realized considerable changes in their work roles and experience heavy workloads, which may contribute to health problems (Gjerdingen, McGovern, Bekker, Lundberg, & Willemsen, 2001). Moreover, women continue to face challenges in terms of climbing the management ladder (Chawla & Sharma, 2019). Therefore, it is worth exploring women's work-related WB, especially if they are managers. On one hand, higher job positions are characterized by a

higher level of WB compared to lower positions (Matud, López-Curbelo, & Fortes, 2019). However, on the other hand, it has been proven that women in managerial positions experience a high level of stress at work (Nelson & Burke, 2000). This justifies an examination of WB in women who work in managerial positions in HEIs.

The paper aims to fill the above research gaps in terms of measuring the WB of administrative employees at HEIs and in focusing on women in managerial positions within university administration. Moreover, we considered that administrative staff is not an internally homogenous group in terms of the tasks performed and that the job duties may impact WB (Volkwein & Zhou, 2003). Another important variable that needs attention is the age of respondents. Literature shows that younger women with more family responsibilities need family-friendly employers' policies to cope with both work and nonwork activities (Gervais & Milllear, 2014). Taking the above into account, the aim of this study is to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1.* What is the level of WB and its components among female administrative staff in managerial positions at Polish HEIs?
- RQ2.* Which issues related to WB need special attention and improvement?
- RQ3.* Do age and the type of tasks performed influence the level of WB and its main component (job satisfaction)?

The research used for preparing this article is based primarily on literature studies and an online survey conducted in Poland in 2021. Being the first devoted to the problem of the workplace WB of women in administrative managerial positions in HEIs, this study is explorative in nature. At this point it is worth mentioning that the need for the exploration of female managers' experiences was emphasized during the "Women in Management: Experiences from Central and Eastern European Countries" symposium organized by Kozminski University in 2021. This paper was presented during the symposium. The findings of this study will particularly contribute to the literature concerning the facilitation of female managers' WB in organizations.

The remaining part of this study is structured as follows. The ensuing section will review the literature that focuses on administrative staff's roles at universities and conveys previous research on WB among the analyzed occupational group. The next section will characterize materials and methods. Subsequently, we will present and discuss the results of the survey. The final part will summarize the main findings, acknowledge the limitations of this study and propose directions for future research.

Literature review

Our article analyzes the WB of administrative staff in managerial positions at HEIs. Out of these constructs, the first one – WB – has been already well studied, including the issues of gender, work and workplace (e.g. Bartels, Peterson, & Reina, 2019). The other notion has received only marginal interest: administrative staff at HEIs in general and specifically in regard to gender differences or managerial positions. For example, the use of the following search strategy in the Scopus database (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("employee well-being" AND "university") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("employee well-being" AND "HEI") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("employee well-being" AND "higher education institute")) AND (EXCLUDE (PUBYEAR, 2022)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English")) resulted in only 60 articles, few mentioning the problem of WB among administrative staff. In the following literature review, we will focus on the characteristics of administrative staff's roles at universities and previous research on WB among administrative staff in HEIs. A brief definition of the WB notion will be provided as well.

Characteristics of administrative work in HEIs

The term “administrative staff” describes a broad and diversified category that has been formally labeled “employees who are not academics” (i.e. nonacademics) by the Polish Law on Higher Education and Science. While the term “non-academics” could better represent the complexity of this occupational group, it not only is considered derogatory by the members of the group (Sebajl *et al.*, 2012) but also contains a semantic exclusion. Namely, it defines a group of people only by referring to another group and highlighting what they are missing or what they are not (Conway, 2000, p. 14). The hierarchical and, to a great extent, patriarchal university culture (Wieneke, 1995) positions the administrative staff at the lower end of the occupational limbo which is defined by Bamber, Allen-Collinson, and McCormack (2017, p. 1) as “*always-this-and-never-that*, where *this* is less desirable than *that*.”

Most of the existing studies related to the different groups of stakeholders in academia focus on either students or academics. This seems to be a natural choice for the academics who create the academic output: they are interested in their environment and have easy access to students. The administrative staff remains outside of scientific interest or inquiry, not only in Poland but also in other countries (Szekeress, 2006). This is not due to the lack of access to this occupational group, but rather the peculiar and fragile relationship between the academics and the administrative staff. The academics perform the core functions and their work is visible. The administrative staff is invisible, provided they are efficient and effective; they only become visible if something does not work (Szekeress, 2003).

According to Allen-Collinson (2006, p. 273), this lack of visibility excludes the administrative staff from being considered valid actors in the decision-making process. They are, in fact, often institutionally excluded from university governance by the faculty members, who act as gatekeepers (Henkin & Persson, 1992). As Trowler (2014, p. 46) argues, this is due to the invisibility and structural ignoring or devaluing of what the administrative staff contributes to knowledge in academia.

In tune with their definition – as nonacademics – administrative staff is often studied in relation to academics, focusing on the boundaries between these two groups. Dobson (2000) calls it a “binary divide.” Several studies analyze how administrative staff positions itself against the academics (Allen-Collinson, 2006) and the strategies it uses in their relationships with academics, including avoidance of credibility problems (Allen-Collinson, 2006, p. 277) and resistance (Górak-Sosnowska, Markowska-Manista, & Tomaszewska, 2020). Kuo (2009) identified three possible relationship patterns between academic and administrative staff. Depending on mutual perception, its relationship might become professional (collegial and open to dialog), differential (based on differences between these two occupational groups) or fragmentary (in cases of lack of understanding and mutual skepticism). Syed (2000) highlights different loyalties (subject vs. institution) and work priorities (individual, research- and teaching-oriented vs. collective, related to procedures), but also identified commonalities such as commitment to excellence and the purposes of higher education.

Allen-Collinson (2006, p. 297) found no gender differences between male and female research administrators regarding their occupational identity; both groups believed that their work is invisible and gender did not play any role. This is also reflected in a study quoted by Dobson (2000, p. 206), according to which female general staff working at an Australian university believed that it was their occupational group rather than gender that limited their aspirations. In other words, if gender and occupational group are compared, it seems that the latter limits WB much more than the former, though the issue of WB has not been studied specifically in the above research.

Previous research on WB among administrative staff in HEIs

Before presenting previous research on WB among administrative staff, we should define the concept of work-related WB. One can state that there is neither a commonly accepted

definition nor a measurement scale for WB. It can be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon that covers both hedonic (feeling good) and eudemonic qualities (functioning well; [Aked *et al.*, 2008](#)). Some authors associate workplace WB with psychologically subjective WB, while others with job satisfaction, job affects or even with life WB ([Pradhan & Hati, 2019](#)). Moreover, individual WB depends on both job features and nonjob features as well as external and internal (personal) factors ([Warr, 1999](#)). As [Bowling, Eschleman, and Wang \(2010\)](#) state, life satisfaction affects job satisfaction more than job satisfaction affects life satisfaction. As far as organizational factors are concerned, the issue of job demands and support (from a supervisor, organizational support) is strongly emphasized ([De Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman, & Bongers, 2004](#)). There is also a factor in the form of job stress, which is often studied in the context of WB ([Griffin & Clarke, 2011](#); [Mensah, 2021](#)). However, job stress is influenced by both organizational practices and personal resilience ([Hirschle & Gondim, 2020](#)).

The WB of administrative staff in HEIs was measured before considering issues such as job satisfaction and work-related stress. [Jung and Shin \(2015\)](#) analyzed the job satisfaction of administrative staff at a Korean university. They revealed that satisfaction is strongly related to inner motivation and the external reward system, as well as interpersonal skills. Administrative staff with high self-esteem expressed higher job satisfaction ([Blackburn, Horowitz, Edington, & Klos, 1986](#)). [Aldaihani \(2019\)](#) studied administrative empowerment and job satisfaction among Kuwait University staff and found a positive correlation between the two. The Kuwaiti administrative staff enjoys a medium level of empowerment and a high level of satisfaction with their jobs. According to [Smerek and Peterson \(2007\)](#), women working in business operations at an American university express higher job satisfaction than men, and job satisfaction increase with age. [Górak-Sosnowska, Gigol, and Pajewska-Kwaśny \(2020\)](#) support the latter finding in the context of Polish HEIs, in which job satisfaction also increases with age. Moreover, administrative staff holding managerial positions is more satisfied with their jobs than line employees.

These results provide only a fragmented picture of the factors influencing job satisfaction. The reason for this seems to lay not only in the fact that each researcher approached job satisfaction from a different angle, but also in different perceptions of job satisfaction according to the type of administrative work performed by administration. This is the case in the study conducted by [Volkwein and Zhou \(2003\)](#), which provides the most complex and comprehensive picture of job satisfaction among administrative staff. They divided the occupational group into several categories: institutional research, academic affairs, business, human resources and student services. These divisions impacted their perception of the work environment with, e.g. those who work in academic affairs reporting the highest level of satisfaction with teamwork, while those who work in student services the highest level of stress and pressure.

Work-related stress is another dimension of the WB of administrative staff. [Szekeres \(2006\)](#) identified several changes in the workplace related to the corporatization of the university which has severely impacted the work of the administrative staff, including increased stress, workload and expectations, and reduced resources. Stress is prevalent among administrative staff at Ethiopian universities, and the list of stressors includes workload, facilities, student management, administration and professional development ([Uzoachina & Onuselogu, 2009](#)). A study conducted among administrative staff at Japanese universities indicated a high level of anxiety and fatigue while showing low levels of vitality ([Iwata, Koya, & Shosuke, 2006](#)). Similar results were obtained by [Górak-Sosnowska, Gigol *et al.* \(2020\)](#) who found the administrative staff at Polish HEIs experiences low levels of vitality and high levels of work-related fatigue. In terms of perceived work climate, gender seems to be a significant factor with women being more stressed and feeling more pressure than men ([Volkwein & Zhou, 2003](#)).

Several studies compare the work-related stress of academics and administration. A comparative study conducted in the United States of America (USA) setting indicated that administrative staff reported fewer stress-related problems than academics (Blackburn *et al.*, 1986). Pignata, Winefield, Privis, and Boyd (2016) found that Australian administrative staff reacted more positively to perceived organizational support than academics. Their study focused on the awareness of stress-reduction interventions at work and indicated that in the case of administrative staff, it predicted job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, perceived procedural justice and trust in management. However, in the case of academics, organizational commitment and perceived procedural justice were lacking.

The above considerations reveal a research gap to be filled. First, research is scarce on the WB of the female administrative staff at HEIs, including women working in managerial positions. Second, previous research approached WB from various theoretical perspectives, focusing only on, e.g. job satisfaction and work-related stressors. Different methods to measure variables were used (e.g. Lifestyle Analysis Questionnaire, Blackburn *et al.*, 1986; General Health Questionnaire, Pignata *et al.*, 2016), which makes the obtained results incomparable. Therefore, we require more complex, explorative research that will focus strictly on WB.

Methods

The data for this study was collected through an online survey that was conducted between March and June 2021. In this study, questions related to workplace WB were adopted from Parker and Hyett (2011) because the scale built by these authors includes many of the factors of WB mentioned in the theoretical section, and it was positively validated before. In particular, this scale includes job satisfaction and the issues of support and job demands. The latter is related to the intrusion of work into private life and is important in the context of examining women's workplace WB. In addition to job responsibilities, the family and household are also sources of continuous work responsibility for women. On average, women invest considerably more time into the work of the family and household than men do. Women's work is more diffusely distributed between childcare, housework and their formal job, whereas men's work is more concentrated in their paid employment. This multiplicity of work roles may negatively influence women's health and WB (Gjerdingen *et al.*, 2001).

The measurement instrument was divided into sections related to the subconstructs presented in Table 1. The detailed items related to every subconstruct were measured with the use of the five-point Likert scale, from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree."

Since research questionnaires are not always translated appropriately before they are used in new linguistic or cultural settings (Gjersing, Caplehorn, & Clausen, 2010), we conducted a pilot study of 16 representatives of the analyzed group. As a result, both the language and the technical side of the instruments were verified and improved. The link to the final version of the questionnaire was sent to women working in managerial positions in administrative departments at HEIs which cooperate with the authors of this study, with a request to complete the questionnaire and send the link to their colleagues. The snowball sampling method was justified by the need to locate a specific group of participants for the survey (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). It was also impossible to construct a random representative research sample (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018) because there were no official statistics covering the number of administrative staff working at HEIs.

In total, 121 valid questionnaires were collected. Table 2 presents the characteristics of respondents. The research sample consisted mostly of experienced employees working in higher managerial positions in small departments in public HEIs.

Considering the explorative nature of this study, we decided to use descriptive statistics in the analyses, based on medians and means. A variable measured using the Likert scale is by

| Formative construct | Subconstructs | Items |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Employees' WB | Job/Work Satisfaction (WS) | WS1. My work is fulfilling WS2. My daily work activities give me a sense of direction and meaning WS3. My work brings me a sense of satisfaction WS4. My work increases my sense of self-worth WS5. My job allows me to recraft my job to suit my strengths WS6. My work makes me feel that I am flourishing as a person WS7. I feel capable and effective in my work on a day-to-day basis WS8. My work offers challenges to advance my skills WS9. I feel I have some level of independence at work WS10. I feel personally connected to my organization's values |
| | Organizational Respect for the Employee (OR) | OR1. In general terms, I trust the senior people in my organization OR2. I believe in the principles by which my organization operates OR3. I feel content with the way my organization treats its employees OR4. I feel that my organization respects its staff OR5. I'm satisfied with my organization's value system OR6. The actual work values are in line with my organization's "ideal values" OR7. People at my work believe in the worth of the organization |
| | Boss Care (BC) | BC1. At difficult times, my boss would be willing to lend an ear BC2. My boss is caring BC3. I feel that my boss is empathetic and understanding about my work concerns BC4. My boss treats me as I would like to be treated BC5. My boss shoulders some of my worries about work BC6. My transactions with my boss are, in general, positive BC7. My boss cares about their staff's WB |
| | The intrusion of Work into Private Life (I) | I1. My work eats into my private life* I2. I feel stressed about organizing my work time to meet demands* I3. I feel excessively pressured to meet targets at work* I4. I find it hard to wind down after work * I5. I find myself thinking negatively about work outside of work hours* I6. I can separate myself easily from my work when I leave for the day I7. My work impacts my self-esteem negatively * |

Note(s): * reversed score item
Source(s): Own elaboration
 Based on [Parker and Hyett \(2011\)](#)

Table 1.
 Main constructs, subconstructs and detailed items used in the research process

| Criterion | Items | Number of respondents (<i>n</i> = 121) | % of respondents in the sample |
|----------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Respondent's age | 31–40 | 33 | 27.27 |
| | 41–50 | 58 | 47.93 |
| | 51–60 | 23 | 19.01 |
| | Over 60 | 7 | 5.79 |
| Origin of HEI's capital | public HEI | 107 | 88.43 |
| | nonpublic HEI | 14 | 11.57 |
| Specialization of HEI | economics | 39 | 32.23 |
| | technical | 33 | 27.27 |
| | multiple specializations | 22 | 18.18 |
| | other | 27 | 22.31 |
| Type of unit | administrative units (no faculties at HEI) | 26 | 21.49 |
| | administrative units at the central level | 50 | 41.32 |
| | administrative units at the faculty level | 45 | 37.19 |
| Tasks performed | student services | 72 | 59.50 |
| | other | 49 | 40.50 |
| Job position | director | 11 | 9.09 |
| | manager | 110 | 90.91 |
| Unit size | Up to 10 employees | 77 | 63.64 |
| | 11–20 employees | 27 | 22.31 |
| | More than 21 employees | 8 | 6.61 |
| Seniority | less than 10 years | 29 | 23.97 |
| | more than 11 years but less than 15 years | 23 | 19.01 |
| | more than 15 years but less than 20 years | 23 | 19.01 |
| | more than 20 years | 46 | 38.02 |

Table 2.
Characteristics of the
research sample

Source(s): Own elaboration

definition an ordinal level of measurement, hence a mean could not be calculated (Jamieson, 2004). Therefore, the analyses of individual items were based on medians. In turn, subconstructs can be treated as continuous variables; the subconstructs were obtained by calculating the mean of the items that constituted a given subconstruct and as such served as measures of broader, latent variables. In consequence, they were analyzed using mean statistics. On the five-point Likert scale, mean values are considered low if they are equal to or less than 2.99, moderate if they range from 3 to 3.99 and high when equal to or greater than 4 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Results

First, we measured Cronbach's alpha to assess if the scale used in this research is fit for the purpose. When the values of this indicator are 0.7 or higher, it means that the research has acceptable internal consistency (Taber, 2018). The data presented in Table 3 indicates that the research instrument used in this study is reliable.

Second, to answer RQ1, the mean values for the main construct and its subconstructs were calculated. This study revealed that employees' WB is at a moderate level ($M = 3.33$). Table 4 also presents means for subconstructs related to WB. WS and organizational respect (OR) are at a moderate level. The same opinion can be stated for the intrusion of work into private life (I). Boss care (BC) is on a higher level than the other subconstructs but is still moderate.

Third, to recognize which detailed issues must be improved to increase the general assessment of employees' WB (RQ2), the medians calculated for all detailed items were presented in Figure 1.

As presented above, several areas should be improved. As far as WS is concerned, work in administration neither increases nor do decreases employees' sense of self-worth, but it also does not make them flourish. Similar results were obtained in terms of recrafting the job to suit individual strengths and to offer challenges to advance respondents' skills.

Organizational respect for employees obtained the lowest total value in this research. This indicated that there are problems and challenges related to how HEIs authorities treat their employees and respect the staff, as well as the organizational culture associated with the organizational values. In fact, 50% of respondents were satisfied, whereas the remaining 50% were not satisfied with their organization's value system. The statement related to the

| Construct | Alpha |
|---------------|-------|
| Employees' WB | 0.84 |
| WS | 0.82 |
| OR | 0.91 |
| BC | 0.93 |
| I | 0.86 |

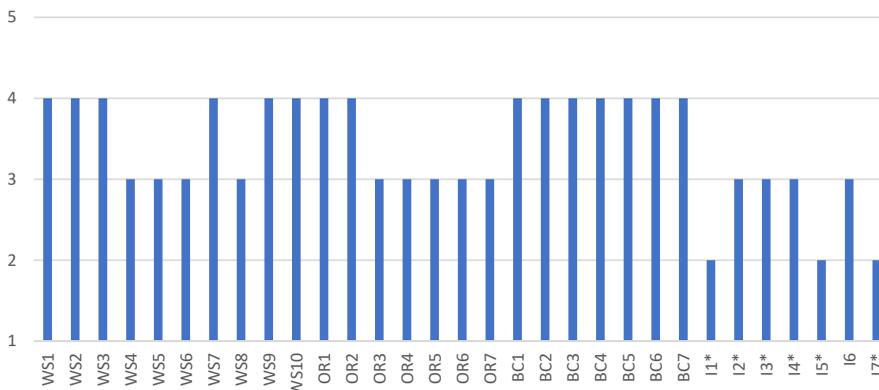
Source(s): Own elaboration

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha for the main construct and subconstruct used in this study

| Construct | n | min | max | median | iqr | mean | sd | se | ci |
|---------------|-----|------|------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Employees' WB | 121 | 2.12 | 4.25 | 3.34 | 0.44 | 3.33 | 0.40 | 0.04 | 0.07 |
| WS | 121 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 3.30 | 0.80 | 3.12 | 0.70 | 0.06 | 0.13 |
| OR | 121 | 1.14 | 4.86 | 3.14 | 1.00 | 3.20 | 0.68 | 0.06 | 0.12 |
| BC | 121 | 1.43 | 5.00 | 3.86 | 1.00 | 3.82 | 0.77 | 0.07 | 0.14 |
| I | 121 | 2.85 | 3.15 | 3.00 | 0.15 | 3.02 | 0.09 | 0.01 | 0.02 |

Source(s): Own elaboration

Table 4. Descriptive statistics



Note(s): *Reversed score item

Source(s): Own elaboration

Figure 1. Medians obtained for the detailed items

relationship between the actual work values and ideal organizational values illustrates a similar case. Employees of HEIs neither believe nor do not believe in the worth of their organization.

Finally, 50% of respondents feel stressed while organizing their work time to meet demands and feel excessively pressured to meet targets at work. They also have problems with separation from job duties after work and when they have a day off.

Fourth, since previous research proved the difference in job satisfaction level depending on respondents' age and tasks performed, which corresponds with RQ3, we conducted additional calculations based respectively on the Spearman coefficient and the Mann-Whitney *U* test to check these regularities. Their results are presented in Tables 5 and 6. This study revealed that a significant relationship exists only between age and I. Women who are older feel a lower level of intrusion of work into their private life than their younger colleagues. As far as the impact of tasks performed on the level of WB is concerned, this research showed a significant correlation only between these tasks and I. Women who are responsible for student services experience more of an intrusion of work into their private lives.

Discussion and conclusions

As Szekeres states, contemporary universities are complex and need professional staff that suits their mission as a "cooperative community based on trust and respect for each other's roles" (Szekeres, 2011, p. 289). While many publications highlight the prevalent role of academics in the success of universities, both scholars and students need support from administrative staff. However, the WB of this staff will affect the value they deliver to the internal and external stakeholders of HEIs.

This study provides an in-depth analysis and synthesis of prior research conducted in HEIs, which is the first contribution to the theory. The presented literature review demonstrates that the WB (associated mainly with job satisfaction) of administrative personnel may be decreased by such factors as the invisibility of their work (Adams, 2019; Dobson, 2000), low level of

Table 5.
Results of the Spearman test regarding the relationship between the respondents' age and the level of the employees' WB and its subconstructs

| Construct | Respondents' age |
|---------------|------------------|
| Employees' WB | 0.065 |
| WS | -0.024 |
| OR | 0.12 |
| EC | -0.063 |
| I | -0.23* |

Note(s): * - $p < 0.05$
Source(s): Own elaboration

Table 6.
Results of the Mann-Whitney *U* test regarding the relationship between the type of tasks performed by respondents and the level of the employees' WB and its subconstructs

| Construct | Type of tasks performed | | <i>U</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------------|---|--|----------|----------|
| | Other (<i>n</i> = 49) <i>M</i> (SD) | Students service (<i>n</i> = 72) <i>M</i> (SD) | | |
| Employees' WB | 3.33 (0.35) | 3.33 (0.43) | 1684.0 | 0.674 |
| WS | 3.12 (0.8) | 3.12 (0.63) | 1887.0 | 0.517 |
| OR | 3.21 (0.62) | 3.19 (0.72) | 1769.0 | 0.981 |
| BC | 3.73 (0.69) | 3.88 (0.82) | 1536.0 | 0.228 |
| I | 3 (0.09) | 3.03 (0.09) | 1326.5 | 0.017 |

Note(s): *M* – mean; *SD* – standard deviation; *U* – result of Mann-Whitney *U* test
Source(s): Own elaboration

empowerment (Aldaihani, 2019), increased stress, workload and expectations, and reduced resources (Szekeres, 2006), high level of anxiety, fatigue and low levels of vitality (Iwata *et al.*, 2006; Górak-Sosnowska, Gigol *et al.*, 2020). However, our study that covered women in managerial positions revealed that both employees' WB and the job satisfaction of administrative staff (as a major component of workplace WB) are at a moderate level.

The presented research revealed that the level of WB was moderate, which indicates that there is room for improvement. Moreover, the conducted analyses provided information about specific areas that require improvement. The findings provide practical implications for HEIs' authorities. These cover issues ranging from matching tasks with individual competencies and advancing respondents' skills through fostering organizational respect and values to promoting work-life balance. University authorities should focus on these areas and undertake actions directed toward human resource development and organizational culture. In turn, this requires a methodological approach to the identification of individual developmental needs as well as the identification of cultural values (official and actual). It is worth reemphasizing that employers have to develop their employees' competencies taking into account not the short-time needs but the future changes and corresponding organizational challenges (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). To ensure work-life balance, employers should regularly review workloads and increase support for parents; the latter is of utmost importance in times of the Covid-19 pandemic, because the pandemic has forced women into an impossible juggling act between career and childcare (Seedat & Rondon, 2021).

The main theoretical contribution of this paper lies in developing existing theory with new facts. Although Volkwein and Zhou (2003) reported that people working in student services had the lowest level of employee WB among other groups, our findings contradicted this finding. Moreover, our research did not confirm the findings obtained by Smerek and Peterson (2007) and Górak-Sosnowska, Gigol *et al.* (2020) that job satisfaction increases with age. The level of job satisfaction (the main subconstruct of WB) was not significantly associated with the variable in the form of respondents' age. This indicates there are other factors that significantly impact job satisfaction. These factors may also moderate the relationships between age and job satisfaction as well as the types of tasks and job satisfaction.

This study has some limitations. First, the shape of the research sample disallowed conducting more sophisticated statistical analyses, e.g. correlations between job position and the level of employees' WB and its components. Therefore, future research should cover larger samples. Second, this study did not analyze gender differences in the context of WB in HEIs, although it revealed discrepancies in theory, as some authors claimed that women either showed lower (Volkwein & Zhou, 2003), higher (Smerek & Peterson, 2007) or equal levels of WB between the genders (Dobson, 2000). Consequently, we recommend further exploration of this issue. Third, our study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Among all components of WB, intrusion of work into private life obtained the lowest score in our study. The literature shows that the pandemic resulted in a higher level of stress at work among women than among men (Gandhi & Robinson, 2021). Women to a greater extent than men responded to the closure of schools and daycare facilities, along with the unavailability of home help (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). Therefore, researchers in the future should conduct similar research in the post-Covid time.

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