

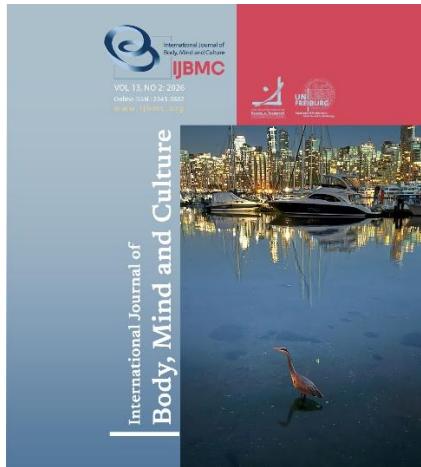
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# Work-Life Balance and Psychological Well-Being in Married Female Doctoral Students: A Phenomenological Study in Indonesian Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Married female doctoral students often face complex challenges in balancing academic responsibilities with domestic roles, which may impact their psychological well-being. This study investigates how these women experience and manage work-life balance within Indonesian public universities.

**Methods and Materials:** A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed, involving 10 purposively selected participants from various Indonesian state universities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted between June and October 2024, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

**Findings:** Three primary themes emerged: (1) the strain of academic pressure and domestic expectations; (2) the lack of institutional and social support; and (3) the role of adaptive strategies, including time management, emotional regulation, and spousal support. Despite facing significant demands, participants developed personal coping mechanisms that fostered a sense of balance and psychological resilience.

**Conclusion:** The findings underscore the importance of institutional policies that recognize the dual roles of female doctoral students and provide targeted support mechanisms. This study contributes to scholarship on gender and higher education by highlighting the intersection of academic life and personal identity. It offers implications for educational policy, counseling services, and future research on gendered academic experiences.

**Keywords:** Work-Life Balance, Psychological Well-Being, Female Students, Phenomenology, Dual Roles.



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## Introduction

The issue of balancing academic responsibilities with domestic roles has gained increasing attention in academic discourse, particularly concerning women who simultaneously navigate professional duties and household management. (Lee et al., 2024) This complexity intensifies when the subject is a woman pursuing a doctoral degree while also fulfilling her roles as a wife and mother. In such cases, the combination of high academic pressure, cultural expectations regarding women's domestic roles, and limited institutional support creates significant psychological challenges. High academic pressure, socio-cultural expectations of women's domestic roles, and limited social and institutional support create significant challenges to their psychological well-being. In the Indonesian context, women pursuing doctoral studies at public universities face unique challenges that are not well documented in the academic literature. (Yustika & Iswati, 2020) Despite the increase in women's participation in higher education, particularly at the postgraduate level, there is a gap in understanding how they navigate academic workloads and family responsibilities simultaneously. (Ratnasari & Suleeman, 2017) The imbalance between academic and personal life often impacts psychological conditions, such as stress, mental fatigue, and decreased study motivation.

Women pursuing advanced degrees often face dual roles as students and managers of domestic responsibilities, creating an imbalance between academic demands and personal life. This imbalance not only affects their academic performance but also has a direct impact on their psychological well-being, manifesting in prolonged stress, mental fatigue, and a decline in study motivation. The situation is further exacerbated by a lack of structural support from higher education institutions, including the absence of childcare facilities, inflexible class schedules, and academic policies that fail to incorporate gender-responsive approaches. As a result, many women are forced to rely on personal coping strategies to manage these pressures, which, in the long run, may compromise both their academic continuity and mental well-being (Yustika & Iswati, 2020).

Previous research has examined the relationship between *work-life balance* and psychological well-being

in various groups of women, such as career women who marry young (Pratiwi et al., 2024), Married Female Teachers (Mohamad et al., 2025), and Toraja women who are married and working (Kurnia et al., 2025). However, there is a gap in the literature on the subjective experiences of married female doctoral students in Indonesia, particularly at public universities. It is important to explore this context given the unique challenges this group faces, including intense academic pressure, complex domestic roles, and limited institutional support.

Key concepts such as role conflict, dual-role strain, and psychological well-being are often mentioned in related studies. Still, they are rarely operationalized in ways that critically engage with the lived realities of this demographic. To address this gap, this study is grounded in three theoretical perspectives. First, Carol Ryff's theory of psychological well-being highlights dimensions such as autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth. Second, Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory, which explores how individuals appraise and respond to stress through specific coping mechanisms. Third, feminist standpoint theory centers women's lived experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge and a lens for understanding power relations and structural inequality, particularly within higher education institutions.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to explore in depth how married female doctoral students at Indonesian public universities manage the balance between personal and academic life, and how these experiences affect their psychological well-being. It also aims to uncover the coping strategies they employ and to examine how these lived realities reflect broader dynamics between dual roles, academic identity, and institutional structures within Indonesia's higher education landscape. The academic contribution of this research lies in enriching the discourse on work-life balance and mental health in higher education, particularly for women pursuing doctoral studies while also carrying out domestic roles. This study offers new perspectives that can enrich gender studies, educational psychology, and inclusivity-based higher education policies. The findings also serve as a basis for developing institutional policies that are more responsive to the specific needs of female students, as well as a reference for further research in similar fields.

## Methods and Materials

### Study Design

This study employed a qualitative approach (Bungin, 2003) using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of married female doctoral students as they navigate work-life balance and its psychological impacts. IPA is particularly suited to studies that aim to understand how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith, 2016). Unlike descriptive phenomenology, which aims to bracket researcher bias, IPA allows for interpretive engagement with participants' narratives, recognizing that meaning-making is co-constructed between researcher and participant (Van Manen, 2016). This approach enables an in-depth understanding of the

emotional, relational, and structural dimensions of the participants' dual roles.

### Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) married women; (2) currently enrolled in a doctoral program at a public university in Indonesia; (3) actively managing both academic and domestic responsibilities; and (4) willing to share personal experiences openly. A total of 10 participants were recruited, representing diverse backgrounds in terms of age, academic disciplines, number of children, and duration of marriage. Sampling was continued until data saturation was reached, indicated by redundancy in emerging themes across participant narratives. The participants' demographic details are presented in Table 1.

Participant Code	Age	Field of Study	Marital Duration (Years)	Number of Children	Mode of Interview
P1	34	Educational Psychology	10	2	Online
P2	39	Islamic Studies	13	3	Face-to-Face
P3	32	Public Health	6	1	Online
P4	36	Linguistics	12	2	Online
P5	41	Law	15	4	Face-to-Face
P6	33	Education Management	8	2	Online
P7	38	Sociology	14	3	Online
P8	35	Islamic Family Law	9	2	Face-to-Face
P9	40	Environmental Science	16	3	Online
P10	30	Psychology	5	1	Online

### Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Miles et al., 1996), guided by an interview protocol that included open-ended questions such as: "Can you describe a typical day managing your studies and family responsibilities?" and "What strategies have you used to maintain your well-being during your doctoral journey?" Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted either face-to-face or via secure online platforms, depending on participants' preferences and availability. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee, and informed consent—both verbal and written—was secured from each participant before data collection began.

### Data Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using IPA's thematic process as outlined by Smith (2016), rather than relying on general thematic analysis frameworks such as those outlined by

Miles et al. (1996). The analysis involved multiple readings of each transcript, initial noting (descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual), the development of emergent themes, and the construction of superordinate themes across cases. A coding audit trail was maintained, and NVivo was used to organize the data.

### Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied Lincoln's (1985) criteria. Credibility was addressed through member checking and peer debriefing with fellow qualitative researchers. Transferability was ensured by providing thick descriptions of participants and settings. Dependability was supported by a clear audit trail of methodological decisions, and confirmability was reinforced through the researcher's reflexive journaling, which acknowledged positionality and potential bias. The researcher maintained a reflexive stance throughout the study, recognizing her identity as a female academic and acknowledging that shared

gendered experiences could influence how she interpreted the data.

### Findings and Results

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of married women pursuing doctoral education,

particularly in balancing academic and domestic responsibilities. Using a phenomenological approach, five core themes emerged from in-depth interviews with ten participants, reaching thematic saturation. These themes are presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1**

*Main Themes, Sub-Themes, and Representative Quotes*

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Representative Quotes
<b>1. Dual Role Conflict</b>	a. Physical and mental burdens b. Social expectations	"During the day, I'm a housewife; only at night can I be a student." (P1)
<b>2. Coping Strategies</b>	a. Time management b. Use of technology c. Spirituality	"I make a daily checklist. I start writing at 4 a.m. before the kids wake up." (P2)
<b>3. Emotional Support from Husband</b>	a. Validation and emotional presence b. Non-practical support	"My husband doesn't do dishes, but he always checks on my dissertation progress." (P5)
<b>4. Lack of Institutional Support</b>	a. Inflexible schedules b. Absence of gender-sensitive policy	"There's no schedule flexibility, no daycare on campus." (P6)
<b>5. Meaning of Balance and PWB</b>	a. Self-regulation b. Inner peace despite imperfection	"I feel at peace when I can fulfill all my roles without guilt." (P7)

The findings of this study reveal five main themes that illustrate the experiences of married female doctoral students as they balance domestic and academic roles. The first theme is *dual-role conflict*, the tension experienced by participants who must simultaneously fulfill responsibilities as wives, mothers, and students. This theme consists of two sub-themes: physical and mental burdens, and social expectations. Most participants reported feeling physically exhausted because household chores filled their days, leaving nighttime as the only time to study. One participant expressed, "During the day, I'm a housewife; only at night can I be a student" (P1), highlighting how domestic obligations often displace their academic time. Additionally, societal expectations from family and community add emotional pressure, as these women are often expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their academic pursuits.

The second emerging theme is *coping strategies*, which capture how participants navigate their dual responsibilities. Sub-themes include time management, technology use, and spirituality. Some participants developed daily checklists, utilized early morning hours to write, and relied on digital tools to boost productivity. One participant noted, "I make a daily checklist. I start

writing at 4 a.m. before the kids wake up" (P2), emphasizing the importance of planning and discipline in maintaining balance. In addition, spiritual practices such as night prayers and supplications served as emotional anchors, strengthening their psychological resilience. The third theme is *emotional support from the husband*, highlighting the importance of spousal support in sustaining emotional well-being. This support takes the form of emotional validation, psychological presence, and non-practical support. While some husbands may not assist with household chores, they offer encouragement by showing interest in their wives' academic progress. As one participant shared, "My husband doesn't do dishes, but he always checks on my dissertation progress" (P5). This emotional involvement fosters appreciation and reinforces the women's motivation to continue their studies.

The fourth theme, *lack of institutional support*, reveals significant structural barriers within the academic environment. Sub-themes include inflexible class schedules and the absence of gender-sensitive policies, such as on-campus daycare or academic leave for mothers. One participant remarked, "There's no schedule flexibility, no daycare on campus" (P6), indicating that academic systems often lack

accommodations for students with family responsibilities. The final theme is the *meaning of balance and psychological well-being (PWB)*, which explores how participants define these concepts. Sub-themes include self-regulation and achieving peace despite imperfection. Participants came to understand that balance does not mean perfection in every domain, but rather a sense of peace from fulfilling their roles without guilt. "I feel at peace when I can fulfill all my roles without guilt" (P7), stated one participant. This perspective reflects psychological maturity in accepting limitations while celebrating personal achievements.

#### *Dual Role Conflicts: Between Academic Dedication and Domestic Obligations*

One of the key findings of this study is the role tension experienced by participants as wives and doctoral students. This double burden often causes ongoing stress and fatigue. One participant stated: *"During the day I have to be a housewife, at night I can be a student. Sometimes I'm too tired to focus on reading or writing."* (P1)

This conflict reflects the structural imbalance experienced by women in a social system that is still patriarchal. Even with higher education, people's expectations of domestic roles remain strong, so household responsibilities do not necessarily decrease. This role tension is consistent with the concept of role strain, which is the pressure that arises from the simultaneous demands of various social roles. In this context, role strain theory is highly relevant (Damanik et al., 2025). This theory explains that when individuals perform multiple social roles that demand simultaneous commitments of time and energy, psychological distress is difficult to avoid (Berger & Bruch, 2021). The female doctoral students in this study are at the crossroads of the competitive academic world and the domestic world full of amateur demands. The tension between these two worlds not only creates physical exhaustion but also feelings of guilt and anxiety if one of the roles is not executed optimally.

Patriarchal social and cultural norms also exacerbate the psychological burden they experience (Putri & Suherman, 2024). Some participants said that, even though they were pursuing doctoral studies, they were still expected to be the primary housekeepers by extended families and the surrounding community. This expectation is a source of pressure because they feel they

must "prove" that higher education does not make them negligent in carrying out domestic roles. As a result, a few participants felt their academic motivation decreased because they failed to meet these social expectations. This role conflict also has a real impact on academic focus and productivity. Many participants had difficulty maintaining consistent writing and reading due to erratic schedules and emotional states that were easily affected by family dynamics. Some even admitted that they had considered postponing or stopping their studies because they could not complete two roles simultaneously.

#### *Adaptation Strategies: Self-Management as a Key Coping Mechanism*

To overcome these conflicts, participants developed various adaptive strategies, both problem-focused and emotion-focused, as categorized in coping theory by Lazarus & Folkman (1985). The most prominent strategies are time management, technology use, and spiritual practice. Some participants devised a strict daily schedule to separate time between domestic and academic activities. As P2 states: *"I make a daily to-do list. At 4 a.m., I start writing before the kids wake up."* (P2)

Digital technology is also used, such as calendar apps and reminders, to set priorities. On the other hand, some participants relied on spirituality to maintain inner peace. Prayer, self-reflection, and journaling become *emotion-focused coping mechanisms* that support their psychological resilience.

In the face of the complexity of their dual roles as wives, mothers, and doctoral students, the participants in this study did not adopt a passive attitude or give in to the pressures they faced. Instead, they actively develop various adaptive strategies to maintain continuity in their studies and stability in their personal lives. These findings demonstrate the capacity of women's agencies to address the structural and personal challenges women face in higher education. One of the key strategies developed by participants is structured and realistic time management. They compile a detailed daily schedule that accounts for the rhythm of family life, such as children's school hours, cooking time, and moments of rest with their partner. One of the informants mentioned that "no time is wasted; every hour is already plotted for a specific activity." (P2) This reflects how they created a personal control system to balance academic and domestic demands.

In addition to manual scheduling, technology is an integral part of a participant's coping strategy. Reminder applications, digital calendars, and to-do list applications are tools they use to record academic assignments, meeting schedules, and family agendas. Technology serves as a technical tool and a psychological reminder to keep them focused and motivated in carrying out various roles. This shows how digital technology can help shape efficient work patterns, especially for women with multiple responsibilities. (P2)

Beyond the technical aspects, many participants rely on spiritual practices as coping mechanisms. Prayer, dhikr, and spiritual reflection are regular practices they use to maintain inner peace. Some participants confessed that spirituality gave them strength in dealing with fatigue, anxiety, and guilt for not being able to divide their time perfectly. One participant stated, "In prayer, I feel understood without explaining anything." (P2) This shows that spirituality serves as a space for emotional recovery and strengthening life's meaning. Reflective practice is also carried out through daily journal writing. Some informants say that recording daily experiences, feelings, and small accomplishments helps them understand their processes and maintain motivation (P2). This activity is an important form of self-awareness that involves evaluating one's academic progress and emotional dynamics. Thus, journaling becomes a form of emotion-focused coping that complements their problem-solving approach.

These findings align with the coping theory framework of Lazarus and Folkman (Oktonika, 2024). Specifically, problem-focused coping involves managing sources of stress by changing strategy or taking concrete actions (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). In this context, the participants sought to adjust internally and re-engineer routines and environments to be more conducive to academic success. This strategy shows how the individual's active role in creating psychological balance becomes vital, especially when structural support is limited (Sugitanata et al., 2024).

However, this coping strategy also has limitations, especially when external demands exceed personal adaptive capacity (Arishanti & Kakiay, 2024). Some participants reported that, despite managing time and emotions well, there are still moments when pressure comes simultaneously—for example, when a child is sick, and an academic deadline looms. This situation

tests the limits of their resilience and shows the need for external support from educational institutions and the wider social network. (P2)

Thus, the adaptation strategy employed by female doctoral students reflects their ability to survive and the form of psychological resilience cultivated through conscious, reflective, and spiritual practices. Although this strategy is personal, it clearly shows that a balance between academic and domestic life can be achieved through careful self-engineering. However, the success of this strategy still requires systemic support to reduce structural burdens and strengthen individuals' capacity to manage stress over time.

#### *Emotional and Functional Support from a Partner: The Pillars of Psychological Resilience*

Another important finding was that emotional and functional support from couples helped participants juggle dual roles. This support is not always physical help with homework; it also takes the form of emotional validation. One of the participants said:

*"My husband doesn't help me with dishes or take care of the kids, but he always asks me how my dissertation is progressing. I feel cared for and appreciated." (P5)*

This support strengthens *perceived social support*, which plays a major role in maintaining participants' emotional balance. In many cases, the husband's role as a supportive partner is a key determinant of the sustainability of doctoral studies for married women.

Support from partners is one of the most significant determinants of how well female doctoral students can manage their dual roles (Mardliyah et al., 2024). In this study, most participants reported that a supportive husband is the primary source of strength for carrying out academic activities and domestic responsibilities. This support is emotional, encouraging, empathetic, and functional, including help with childcare and housework. The participants revealed that the husband's involvement in domestic activities greatly reduced their burden. One participant mentioned that her husband regularly dropped off and picked up the children and helped prepare meals when he had to take online classes or write a dissertation. (P5) This shows that a more equal division of domestic roles can create a more conducive learning space for women pursuing further studies.

Emotionally, peer support also serves as a "psychological anchor," helping participants manage academic stress and fatigue (Anvari & Lakens, 2021).

Some participants said they felt more confident and motivated just by knowing that their husbands understood the situation and appreciated their academic struggles. One of the informants said, "My husband cannot always help with homework, but he always asks me about the progress of my dissertation. That means a lot." (P5)

These findings reinforce the concept of perceived social support, where perceptions of emotional support can majorly impact an individual's mental stability and motivation (Fathyadiva & Safitri, 2025). Among female doctoral students, the perception that their spouses support and value their academic role becomes a source of emotional energy that strengthens resilience to study-related challenges. However, not all participants received an ideal level of partner support. Some of them say their partners are less engaged because of work commitments, cultural norms, or a lack of understanding of the dynamics of doctoral studies. (P5). In this situation, the participants reported heavier double burdens and misunderstandings that often trigger

### Discussion and Conclusion

#### *Lack of Institutional Support: Structural Gaps in Higher Education*

From the institutional side, almost all participants complained about a lack of campus support. The absence of policies that address the needs of married and married female students is another source of stress. One participant said: *"There is no schedule flexibility, no daycare, and even the supervisor is insensitive to our situation."* (P6)

This condition indicates institutional neglect, namely the absence of gender-friendly facilities and regulations, which ultimately widens the gap in women's access to and participation in higher education.

The lack of institutional support emerged as a recurring issue in the participants' narratives. Most believe that colleges have not fully addressed the needs of married and domestically responsible female doctoral students. This insensitivity is reflected in academic policies that are rigid, lack scheduling flexibility, and do not provide support services such as childcare centers or affordable psychological counseling. Some participants reported difficulty accessing campus services because the operational hours did not align with their free time.

emotional conflicts within the household. This absence of support exacerbates the psychological isolation they feel in the course of their studies.

This support inequality indicates that the husband's role cannot be treated as a fixed variable; it is highly dependent on communication factors, shared views, and gender construction within the family. Female doctoral students who receive full support from their partners tend to maintain emotional stability and academic productivity. In contrast, those with less support must develop additional survival strategies to maintain the continuity of their studies. (P5) Some participants also stated that educating couples is an important part of their struggle. They need to explain their academic challenges so the couple can better understand and engage. In this case, domestic relations become a dynamic arena for role negotiation, where support is not merely present but is shaped through intensive communication and both parties' willingness to share the burden fairly.

Some feel isolated from the academic community because they can rarely attend in-person discussions or scientific activities due to household responsibilities. "We are invisible," (P6) said one of the informants, describing the experience of invisibility experienced by female students with dual roles. This situation creates an emotional distance between individuals and institutions, exacerbating stress and decreasing academic engagement.

The absence of inclusive academic policies, such as family-based study leave, an easy system for deadline extensions, or flexible learning methods, is an additional burden for participants. When the system supports students only under ideal conditions (not married, childless, and fully focused on studies), those who fall outside this category have to fight twice as hard to meet the same academic standards. This not only creates an inequality of opportunity but also creates a sense of injustice and frustration. From a psychological point of view, the lack of institutional support has a direct impact on the decline in participants' mental well-being. Many of them experience symptoms of chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and even mild depression, especially when they feel there is no room to complain or discuss their condition openly in an academic setting. This condition is exacerbated by an academic culture

that values high performance without considering the complexity of students' backgrounds.

This phenomenon aligns with institutional neglect, the systemic absence of attention, and the facilities that institutions should provide to vulnerable groups (Charpentier & Soulières, 2013). In this context, female doctoral students with family responsibilities are an often overlooked group in the design of the higher education system. They have academic aspirations and potential that are not inferior to those of other groups, but only require a more empathetic, needs-based approach. Some participants expressed hope for more family-friendly system changes, such as providing lactation rooms, childcare facilities, and flexibility in task assignments or guidance schedule preparation. They also hope for a forum or official community where female students can share experiences and build solidarity. This kind of initiative is considered to help reduce mental pressure and increase the feeling of belonging to the institution.

The lack of institutional intervention affects not only individuals but also academic performance overall (Nurhadi & Rosdini, 2025). When certain groups constantly face structural barriers, access to academic mobility and scientific careers is restricted. In the long run, this can affect the campus environment's diversity and quality of academic contributions. Therefore, the institution's alignment with female students with dual roles is a form of empathy and an investment in a more inclusive academic future.

Thus, institutional policy reform is needed that places student welfare as a top priority. Universities need to adopt a gender-sensitive approach in policymaking and create a support system that allows all students to develop optimally without sacrificing other important roles in their lives. This awareness is important for bridging the gap between academic idealism and students' social reality.

#### *The Meaning of Balance and Its Impact on Psychological Well-Being*

Despite facing many challenges, most participants interpreted balance not as a perfect distribution of time between studies and family, but as an inner state in which they still feel in control of their lives. As stated by P7: "It's not a matter of time, but I feel at peace when I can play all the roles without guilt." (P7)

This meaning intersects with the dimensions of *Psychological Well-Being* (Ryff, 1989), which include *self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth, and positive relations with others*. Participants who felt they had a better balance in their roles showed higher levels of PWB—they were able to accept themselves, feel a sense of control over their environment, and derive meaning from their roles.

In contrast, participants who failed to find balance tended to experience symptoms of stress, guilt, emotional exhaustion, and even a desire to quit the study. This confirms the close relationship between role balance and psychological well-being.

The participants do not interpret work-life balance narrowly as a precise division of time between domestic and academic affairs (Wastito & Wulandari, 2025). Instead, they see balance as a subjective condition created when each role can be performed functionally (Salsabilla et al., 2025) without causing prolonged internal conflicts (Fathulaela et al., 2025). In this case, balance is seen not as a fixed point but as an adaptive process that changes with their living conditions and study pressures (Rahmiyati et al., 2024; Sosonev, 2024). Most participants emphasized the importance of empowerment in making daily decisions—such as prioritizing a mentoring schedule and family needs—as a key indicator of balance. Personal autonomy is key: when people feel they have control over their own time and choices, distress tends to decrease. Conversely, stress and self-alienation increase dramatically when they feel locked into a non-negotiable routine.

This balance is also greatly influenced by contextual factors, such as the child's age, partner support, and the supervisor's flexibility. One participant said she felt more "balanced" when her children started school, and that she could use the mornings to read literature or write a dissertation. (P7) This suggests that the experience of balance is temporal and cannot be standardized between individuals. Therefore, the approach to work-life balance must consider each student's life phase and specific needs. When the equilibrium condition was achieved, even if only briefly, the participants reported significant improvements in confidence, enthusiasm for learning, and a more positive perception of their academic future. They feel better able to manage pressure, more optimistic about academic achievement, and more connected to their current study goals. This reinforces

the assumption that role balance directly correlates with improved psychological well-being.

From the perspective of Carol Ryff's theory of Psychological Well-Being, this state of balance reflects several important dimensions, such as self-acceptance, purpose in life, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989). Participants who felt able to balance both domestic and academic roles without losing direction in life showed higher levels of self-acceptance and a deeper sense of meaning in their work. They not only feel "surviving" but also feel "alive" and growing amid challenges (Fadhil et al., 2025). Interestingly, this balance also protects against the negative impact of academic stress. When participants can feel the harmony between roles, they are less likely to experience extreme burnout, even in high-pressure situations such as qualifying exams or dissertation deadlines. Some stated that small moments, such as playing with children or being supported by a partner while writing, become a huge source of psychological energy. (P7) Balance is not only a technical condition but also an emotional experience.

In contrast, when the balance was disturbed continuously, participants reported the appearance of symptoms of psychological well-being disorders such as emotional exhaustion, excessive guilt, and decreased self-esteem (Amanda et al., 2025). They feel they are not good enough as mothers, wives, or students. This phenomenon underscores the importance of recognizing that failure to strike a balance is not a sign of personal weakness but often results from systemic pressures and a lack of structural support. Thus, the meaning of balance in the lives of female doctoral students cannot be reduced to time management alone. It reflects a deep contemplative process regarding identity, values, and purpose in life. When balance is achieved, even in the simplest forms, the impact on mental health and academic motivation is palpable. Therefore, creating an academic ecosystem that supports this balance is important and urgent.

This study highlights the multifaceted experiences of married female doctoral students as they navigate the demands of academic life alongside domestic responsibilities, and how this interplay affects their psychological well-being. The findings reveal that dual role conflict—marked by physical, emotional, and social pressures—is a central source of strain. However, participants demonstrate notable resilience through personal coping strategies, such as structured time

management, spiritual practices, and emotional support from spouses. While their ability to adapt is evident, institutional rigidity and a lack of gender-sensitive policies present ongoing structural challenges.

Despite its insights, this study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to a specific cultural and geographical context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, participants' responses could be influenced by social desirability bias, particularly in self-reporting coping mechanisms or emotional experiences.

Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to examine changes over time or by comparing the experiences of married and unmarried doctoral students across different cultural contexts. Further studies could also investigate institutional practices that effectively support gender equity in academia and assess their long-term impact on student well-being. By centering the voices of married female doctoral students, this study contributes to the growing discourse on gender, higher education, and psychological well-being, while encouraging more nuanced and inclusive explorations of work-life balance in academic environments.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. An ethical consideration in this study was that participation was entirely optional.

### Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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