



The Moonlight Mandate: A Review Paper on Why Academics Juggle Jobs, Job Satisfaction Dynamics, in Higher Education Institutes

Neha Rathore ¹, Dr. Rohit Sinha ²

¹ Research Scholar, St. John's College, Agra, U.P

² Associate Professor,, St. John's College, Agra, U.P

ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical research from 2000 to 2025 on moonlighting practices among academics and their nexus with job satisfaction. Drawing on studies across diverse contexts, including higher education institutions in India and foreign settings, the analysis reveals moonlighting defined as supplementary employment alongside primary academic roles to be driven by financial exigencies, skill diversification, blocked promotions, and job autonomy deficits. Key findings indicate a complex, often positive association: while excessive moonlighting correlates with burnout and diminished primary job performance (e.g., reduced lesson preparation and syllabus coverage), moderate engagement enhances satisfaction through additional income and professional freedom. Antecedents like skill variety and autonomy bolster motivation, yet organizational commitment mediates negative intentions toward secondary work when satisfaction rises.

Keyword: Moonlighting, Academics, Job Satisfaction, Full Moonlighting, Half Moonlighting, Quarter Moonlighting, Blue Moonlighting.

1. INTRODUCTION

Moonlighting, defined as the practice of holding secondary employment outside one's primary job, has emerged as a pervasive phenomenon in the contemporary era, particularly within the academic sector. In higher education institutions, academics increasingly engage in moonlighting activities—ranging from private consulting and freelance teaching to

entrepreneurial ventures and content creation—to supplement income, pursue intellectual passions, or mitigate financial insecurities (Ara & Akbar, 2016). This trend is especially pronounced in developing economies like India, where stagnant salaries, rising living costs, and limited research funding compel faculty to seek external opportunities. Yet, while moonlighting offers potential economic relief, its impact on job satisfaction remains a contentious issue, warranting systematic inquiry.

Job satisfaction, a multidimensional construct encompassing affective responses to one's work environment, is pivotal to academic performance, retention, and institutional productivity (Spector, 1997). Core facets include intrinsic rewards (e.g., autonomy, intellectual stimulation), extrinsic factors (e.g., compensation, promotion prospects), and relational elements (e.g., collegiality, work-life balance). Theoretical frameworks such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory posit that hygiene factors like pay dissatisfaction can propel moonlighting, while motivators like achievement may either sustain or erode primary job commitment (Herzberg et al., 1959). Empirical evidence reveals a dual-edged sword: on one hand, moonlighting can enhance satisfaction by alleviating financial stress and fostering skill diversification (Sinha et al. 2024); on the other, it risks burnout, role conflict, and diminished loyalty to the primary institution, thereby undermining overall fulfillment (Jamal & Badawi, 1996).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sinha et al. (2024) investigated motivations for moonlighting among faculty in Delhi NCR higher education institutions and its impacts on faculty, employers, and primary employment. Empirical data from 64 respondents, analyzed via descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and chi-square tests, highlight financial constraints as the chief driver, followed by skill enhancement and passion pursuits. Moonlighting, though rare during office hours, undermines lesson preparation, syllabus coverage, and student evaluation, fostering burnout, reduced productivity, and job dissatisfaction. Institutions show lax enforcement due to weak policies. Recommendations include transparent guidelines, better pay, and workload management to safeguard educational quality.

Seema et al. (2021) explored job satisfaction's influence on moonlighting intentions, mediated by organizational commitment, amid Industry 4.0. Using PLS-SEM on IT professionals' data, findings confirm that commitment fully mediates the link, curbing moonlighting when satisfaction rises.

Raju and Unni (2019) conceptualize moonlighting as the pursuit of supplementary employment alongside a main position, incorporating both structured and unstructured roles, freelance opportunities, platform-based gigs, and business initiatives.

Dasgupta, D., & Sahai, A. K. (2019) investigated the impact of organisational (culture, commitment) and psychological (work motivation, self-esteem) factors on job satisfaction among professors in private universities in Northern India. Utilising a descriptive design and regression analysis on data from 307 faculty members across 18 institutions, results affirm significant positive relationships for all factors ($p < 0.01$), with organisational elements exhibiting stronger correlations ($\beta = 0.56-0.64$) than psychological ones ($\beta = 0.38-0.43$). Organisational culture and commitment thus emerge as dominant predictors, underscoring the need for robust institutional environments to enhance academic job satisfaction despite challenges like poor working conditions.

Reza and Omar (2016) evaluated freelancing's effects on public sector job satisfaction. They pinpointed four drivers—skill variety, impeded growth, professional independence, and supplementary income—shaping academic teachers' freelance pursuits, with notable repercussions for overall job satisfaction.

Ramaswamy & Jayaraman (2016) assessed moonlighting's toll on Indian workers' mental health and work-life balance. While acknowledging career and financial gains, the study identified elevated stress and burnout, exacerbated by inadequate regulations and family demands.

Ara, K., & Akbar, A. (2016) their research primarily examines moonlighting's impact on job satisfaction among academics in Pakistan's public universities. In her 2016 study with Aisha Akbar, surveying 533 faculty across 17 institutions, moonlighting—motivated by extra income needs, stalled promotions, skill utilization, and job autonomy—shows a strong positive correlation with overall job satisfaction ($p < 0.001$). Regression results highlight significant effects on satisfaction facets: pay ($R^2 = 0.259$), promotion ($R^2 = 0.067$), supervision (positive), coworkers (varied), and workload ($R^2 = 0.147$). Her related thesis further links moonlighting to enhanced satisfaction and commitment, despite workload pressures.

Shweta Comes (2014) analyzed diverse dimensions of professional freelancing, underscoring the need to address low staffing levels. The work offers guidance for individuals and organizations on prevention strategies, noting influences like monetary and non-monetary rewards, hours spent on secondary jobs, and family size on freelancing extent.

Parham (2006) observed that recent initiatives to overhaul public schooling have overlooked the widespread moonlighting among public school instructors, despite concerted efforts to elevate educational standards.

Henderson (2004) documents an array of secondary occupations undertaken by Texas educators, such as bartending, tutoring, coaching, sales, real estate, and diverse service roles, underscoring the breadth of their extracurricular work.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to comprehensively analyze peer-reviewed research on academic moonlighting and job satisfaction spanning 2000–2025. The process commenced with targeted searches across academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Semantic Scholar, JSTOR, and ERIC, utilizing keywords such as "academic moonlighting," "faculty multiple jobs," "teacher job satisfaction," and "higher education secondary employment."

Inclusion criteria encompassed empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods) focused on academics in higher education, published in English between 2000 and 2025, explicitly examining moonlighting's impact on job satisfaction. Exclusion applied to non-academic contexts, opinion pieces, and pre-2000 works. Initial screening yielded a huge number of articles; after title/abstract review, 156 full-texts were assessed, resulting in a few important studies for synthesis.

Data extraction captured study design, sample demographics (e.g., faculty from India and other countries), variables (antecedents like financial need, mediators like organizational commitment), and findings. Thematic analysis identified patterns, such as positive satisfaction from skill variety versus negative effects from burnout.

Objective-

- To systematically review and synthesize empirical evidence from 2000 to 2025 on the relationship between moonlighting practices among academic faculty and their job satisfaction levels, identifying key antecedents, mediators, outcomes, and gaps for future inquiry.

4. FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

Moonlighting often stems from economic pressures like stagnant wages and job insecurity, yet it can enhance satisfaction through financial relief, skill diversification, and greater autonomy in secondary roles. Positive outcomes emerge when resource gains (e.g., reduced stress, new networks) outweigh depletion (e.g., time poverty, burnout), per the Conservation of Resources theory, though temporal and psychological strains frequently erode primary job performance. Studies consistently show contingent effects moderated by institutional support, contract stability, and work nature, with some evidence of positive correlations between moonlighting drivers (e.g., blocked promotions) and overall satisfaction. Policymakers and universities should shift from punitive bans to transparent policies fostering regulated moonlighting, such as workload adjustments and equity in rewards, to harness synergies while safeguarding well-being. This approach aligns with calls for supportive frameworks amid academia's precarity, potentially boosting retention and performance.

5. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Longitudinal studies are needed to track long-term satisfaction trajectories, alongside interventions testing flexible policies in diverse global contexts, particularly in emerging economies. Future research should prioritize mixed-methods approaches to unpack contextual nuances, such as cultural attitudes toward moonlighting in academia. Additionally, experimental designs could evaluate policy interventions like capped moonlighting hours or incentive-aligned contracts, measuring their impact on satisfaction metrics over time.

Finally, integrating emerging data sources from academic forums offers promise for real-time insights into moonlighting dynamics

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