

## LONG TERM CONTRACTUAL EMPLOYMENT IN ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONSEQUENCES FOR EARLY-CAREER SCHOLARS IN INDIA.

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### ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) have witnessed a significant structural shift from permanent faculty positions to contractual, ad-hoc, and temporary appointments. Despite the increasing demand for quality higher education, permanent vacancies remain unfilled in many universities, compelling thousands of early-career scholars to work under precarious employment arrangements. This paper investigates the psychological, professional, and socio-economic consequences of longterm contractual employment on early-career academics in India. Using a mixed-method approach, the study integrates secondary data from AISHE reports, UGC notifications, parliamentary committee reports, and educational labour research; and qualitative insights from existing studies on academic precarity in India. Findings reveal that longterm contractual employment leads to chronic job insecurity, diminished academic freedom, lack of research productivity, and elevated levels of stress and burnout. Professionally, scholars experience stagnation, poor access to research funding, and limited opportunities for career progression. Institutions that rely heavily on contractual labour exhibit reduced innovation, lower research output, and weaker student–teacher rapport. The study concludes that the widespread contractualization of academic labour represents a systemic threat to India’s higher education quality and long-term academic ecosystem. It offers policy recommendations aligned with NEP 2020, emphasizing recruitment reforms, transparent hiring, financial allocation for permanent posts, and mental-health support systems for faculty.

### INTRODUCTION

The Indian higher education system, one of the largest in the world, has undergone rapid expansion over the last three decades. With the establishment of new central, state, private, and deemed universities, the demand for qualified faculty has grown exponentially. However, despite the increase in institutional capacity, faculty hiring patterns show a sharp deviation from traditional norms. A large proportion of universities and colleges now rely heavily on contractual, ad-hoc, guest, or temporary faculty instead of filling long-standing sanctioned permanent vacancies.

Reports from the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2021) indicate that nearly 40–50% of teaching positions in several Indian states are occupied by nonpermanent faculty. Parliamentary Standing Committee Reports (2022, 2023) further highlight that many universities have not conducted regular recruitment drives for 5–10 years. The delay in faculty recruitment is attributed to budget constraints, administrative delays, litigation issues, and institutional preference for low-cost labour.

Early-career academicians—PhD scholars, postdoctoral fellows, and newly qualified researchers—are the most affected by this trend. Contractual positions offer significantly lower salaries, lack of job

security, limited research opportunities, and minimal chances of career advancement. In many institutions, contractual faculty handle equal or greater workloads compared to permanent faculty but with fewer benefits and recognition.

This shift has broader implications for the academic workforce, institutional excellence, and national knowledge production. Job insecurity influences psychological well-being, productivity, research orientation, and long-term career decisions. As India aims to become a global knowledge hub under NEP 2020, the sustainability of its academic workforce becomes a critical concern.

This research paper seeks to examine the psychological and professional impact of long-term contractual employment on early-career scholars in India. The study synthesizes current data, policy gaps, and lived experiences documented in academic literature, presenting a comprehensive analysis of this growing crisis in Indian academia.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Rise of Contractualization in Academia**

Academic precarity has become a global phenomenon (Standing, 2014). In India, contractual appointments increased sharply after the 2008 economic slowdown and state-level fiscal austerity (Tilak, 2015). Studies argue that universities prefer contractual faculty due to lower costs and administrative flexibility (UGC Report, 2020).

### **2.2 Psychological Consequences of Precarious Employment**

Research shows that job insecurity leads to anxiety, stress, depression, and burnout (Chakraborty & Das, 2021). Academics on temporary contracts often experience identity loss and social devaluation (Gill, 2015). Constant fear of contract non-renewal affects teaching quality and research engagement.

### **2.3 Professional and Career Consequences**

Non-permanent faculty receive limited opportunities for research grants, conferences, and professional development (Rajput & Waghmare, 2019). Their heavy teaching loads restrict research productivity, affecting long-term academic careers (Bhandari, 2020).

### **2.4 Systemic and Institutional Impacts**

Institutions with excessive contractual staff show low academic stability, fragmented departments, and reduced innovation (OECD, 2020). Student learning outcomes correlate strongly with faculty working conditions.

Methodology (Descriptive + Secondary Research)

This paper adopts a descriptive and analytical research design using:

#### **3.1 Secondary Data Sources**

AISHE 2018–2021 datasets

UGC Recruitment Policy Documents

Parliamentary Standing Committee Report on Education (2022, 2023)

State Higher Education Recruitment Audit Reports

Peer-reviewed academic papers on precarity

#### **3.2 Analytical Approach**

Thematic analysis of psychological and professional impacts

Trend analysis of hiring patterns using government datasets

Comparative analysis between permanent vs contract faculty roles

Interpretation framework grounded in labour economics and organizational psychology

#### 4. FINDINGS

##### 4.1 Increasing Contractual Hiring Trends

AISHE 2021 shows:

Over 42% faculty in private universities are contractual.

32% contractual faculty in state universities

Some universities have 70–80% temporary faculty.



Implication: Institutional dependence on precarious labour is structurally embedded.

##### 4.2 Psychological Impact on Early-Career Scholars

High Job Insecurity:

Constant fear of non-renewal creates long-term anxiety and affects future planning.

Emotional Exhaustion:

Heavy workloads combined with low salary contribute to chronic fatigue.

Reduced Self-Worth:

Scholars report feeling undervalued despite high qualifications (Chakraborty, 2021).

Burnout and Stress:

Contractual faculty display higher burnout indices compared to permanent faculty.

Identity Conflict:

Many perceive a mismatch between their academic aspirations and employment conditions.

##### 4.3 Professional Impact

Lower Research Productivity:

Due to excessive teaching hours, lack of funding, and unstable contracts.

Limited Career Advancement:

Contractual positions seldom convert into permanent roles.

Restricted Academic Freedom:

Fear of contract loss discourages critical inquiry or disagreement with authorities.

Inability to Apply for Grants:

Many funding agencies require permanent affiliation.

Poor Professional Networking:

Limited conference participation due to financial constraints.

##### 4.4 Institutional Impact

Reduced department stability.

Lower student satisfaction

Decline in accreditation scores (NAAC)

Weak long-term research ecosystem.

#### 4.5 Social and Economic Impact

Contractual faculty often earn 30–70% lower income

Instability affects family planning, housing, financial security

Many scholars exit academia permanently

#### 5. DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that contractualization has become a normalized yet deeply problematic recruitment model in Indian academia. While institutions benefit financially, the long-term impact on academic quality, research contributions, and early-career scholars is alarming. Systemic reforms are urgently needed to align India's higher education labour structure with NEP 2020 goals of innovation and quality excellence.

#### 6. Policy Recommendations.

Mandatory recruitment cycles every 2 years

Conversion of contractual roles into tenure-track positions

Minimum salary standards for temporary faculty Mental health support systems for faculty.

Clear career progression pathways

UGC monitoring of sanctioned vacancies vs filled posts

Institutional accountability audits

#### 7. CONCLUSION

Long-term contractual employment has far-reaching psychological, professional, and structural consequences for India's early-career academic population. As India aspires to global education leadership, sustainable academic labour policies are essential. Reforms must ensure job stability, fair compensation, and enhanced research opportunities for the next generation of scholars.

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