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# Work-Life Balance of Homestay Operators in Jammu and Kashmir

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## Abstract
This study investigates the work-life balance of homestay operators in Jammu and Kashmir, a region renowned for its cultural richness and natural beauty and heavily reliant on tourism for economic stability. As homestays grow in popularity, understanding the challenges faced by operators in balancing professional and personal responsibilities becomes critical. A qualitative approach using thematic analysis was adopted to identify key issues influencing work-life balance. In-depth interviews with 25 homestay operators provided rich insights into their lived experiences and coping strategies. The analysis identified themes such as excessive workload, family involvement, emotional stress, and the quest for autonomy. Operators face unique challenges due to seasonal demand fluctuations and cultural expectations. Effective coping mechanisms included setting boundaries, leveraging community support, and practicing time management. The findings emphasize the need for strategies that sustain the economic viability of homestays while safeguarding operator well-being. Policy recommendations include fostering supportive environments, providing mental health resources, and adopting flexible operational practices. These insights are crucial for tourism stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers aiming to enhance the quality of life for homestay operators and promote sustainable tourism in Jammu and Kashmir.

## 1  Introduction

Work-life balance has emerged as a critical concept in modern discourse, particularly in industries characterized by high emotional and physical demands. Defined as the equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life, it significantly influences job satisfaction, mental health, and overall well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). In the hospitality and tourism sectors, where employees often face irregular working hours, emotional labor, and guest-centered service, maintaining this balance is paramount (Wong & Ko, 2009). Homestay operators, who simultaneously manage their businesses and act as cultural ambassadors, experience unique challenges in this regard.

Theoretical perspectives, such as emotional labor theory, provide a lens through which the work-life balance of homestay operators can be understood. Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labor highlights the psychological effort involved in managing emotions to meet professional expectations—especially relevant for homestay operators who must balance guest interactions with personal well-being. Additionally, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) offers insights into how operators navigate the balance between demanding conditions (e.g., seasonal tourist flow, high guest expectations) and available resources (e.g., family support, community engagement).

In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, the complexity of work-life balance is further intensified by socio-political instability, security concerns, and cultural expectations. While tourism is a significant contributor to the region's economy and livelihoods (Khaki et al., 2016), the unstable environment—marked by seasonal disruptions, limited infrastructure, and shifting tourist behavior—complicates the efforts of homestay operators to maintain balance between work and family life. The burden of emotional labor, coupled with the unpredictability of tourism flows, often leads to stress, role conflict, and burnout (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

Although homestays have gained recognition as a sustainable tourism model, existing research primarily focuses on economic and sociocultural outcomes at the community level, rather than the lived experiences of the operators themselves. There remains a distinct research gap regarding how homestay operators in politically sensitive and conflict-prone areas like Jammu and Kashmir manage their personal and professional roles (Sood et al., 2017). This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the strategies homestay operators employ to achieve work-life balance, the stressors they encounter, and the structural challenges they face within the local tourism framework.

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To explore the lived experiences of homestay operators regarding work-life balance in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To identify the personal strategies adopted by operators to manage dual responsibilities.
3. To examine the systemic and contextual challenges that hinder their work-life balance.

By employing thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, this research sheds light on the coping mechanisms and resilience of operators in navigating a complex and demanding environment. The findings aim to inform policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and researchers about the support structures needed to enhance operator well-being while sustaining the homestay sector. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on sustainable tourism by advocating for inclusive, human-centered policies that prioritize both economic viability and personal welfare in fragile regions like Jammu and Kashmir.

## 2   Literature Review

### 2.1 Homestay Tourism in India: A Contextual Overview

Homestay tourism has gained momentum across India, with significant socio-economic and environmental impacts highlighted in various studies. Dar et al. (2024) investigate the role of homestay tourism in Jammu and Kashmir, emphasizing its contributions to local development and sustainability. Bhat et al. (2024) focus on the Anantnag District, identifying homestays' positive influence on income generation and cultural exchange. Danish et al. (2024) highlight economic constraints and lack of government support as barriers to local participation, advocating for financial assistance and infrastructure upgrades.

In North Kashmir, Shah (2020) emphasizes the potential of homestays to generate employment and promote sustainable tourism through minimal infrastructural investments. Similarly, Dar et al. (2024) assess tourist satisfaction, highlighting cultural immersion and host interactions as key motivators for choosing homestays. Joshi and Bahuguna (2023) and Imran and Nguyen (2018) address operator challenges in Uttarakhand, including financial limitations, poor promotion, and bureaucratic hurdles, despite the potential for economic upliftment.

Patwal et al. (2023) and Chatterjee et al. (2023) underscore homestays' contributions to income generation, entrepreneurship, and cultural preservation. Kumar et al. (2023) provide a national-level analysis, citing empowerment and heritage conservation while identifying persistent infrastructural and policy-related challenges. Rai et al. (2021) introduce lean management strategies to enhance homestay operations.

Tourist satisfaction studies by Pradhan (2021, 2024) in Darjeeling emphasize service quality, safety, and environmental sustainability, while also pointing out bureaucratic delays. Joshi and Dhaigude (2021) focus on revenue management efficiency using TODIM and EMSR-b techniques. Singh et al. (2024) assess homestays' roles in sustainable development in Madhya Pradesh, stressing the importance of privacy and cultural sensitivity.

Satia et al. (2024) explore synergies between agro-biodiversity and homestays in the Garhwal Himalaya, proposing integrated models for rural development. Bansal et al. (2024) link homestays to Sustainable Development Goals, while Lakhera et al. (2024) critique policy gaps in Uttarakhand's homestay scheme implementation. Thakur et al. (2024) emphasize community participation and technological integration for inclusive growth in Himachal Pradesh.

## 2.2 Work-Life Balance in Homestay Operations

Despite a wide body of research on the economic and cultural impacts of homestay tourism, the work-life balance (WLB) of homestay operators remains underexplored, particularly in the Jammu and Kashmir context. Homestay operators navigate a hybrid role, simultaneously managing household responsibilities and business operations, often in emotionally demanding and time-intensive conditions. This reality aligns with Emotional Labor Theory (Grandey, 2000), which posits that workers in service industries regulate emotions to meet organizational expectations, often at the cost of personal well-being. In the homestay setting, continuous guest interactions and hospitality demands require operators to suppress stress and project warmth, contributing to emotional exhaustion and role conflict.

Greenhaus and Allen (2011) define work-life balance as the ability to meet both work and personal demands effectively. This becomes particularly relevant in homestays, where the physical workspace is also the domestic space, creating blurred boundaries that can strain familial relationships, mental health, and overall life satisfaction. These issues are intensified in rural or conflict-sensitive regions like Jammu and Kashmir, where socio-political uncertainties further challenge operators' ability to maintain balance.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model is a useful framework to understand this context. The model suggests that high job demands (e.g., irregular hours, multitasking, emotional strain) must be counterbalanced by sufficient resources (e.g., time management, social support, financial security) to avoid burnout. In many cases, homestay operators lack these resources, resulting in chronic stress and diminished quality of life.

Although empirical studies on this subject are limited in the Indian Himalayan context, broader hospitality research indicates that structured scheduling, role delineation, and external support systems—including governmental or cooperative assistance—can improve WLB among small-scale tourism stakeholders. Recognizing and addressing the specific challenges of homestay operators is essential to ensure not only

their well-being but also the sustainability of homestay tourism as a model of community-based development.

## 3    Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the work-life balance of homestay operators in Jammu and Kashmir. A qualitative approach is particularly suited for this type of inquiry as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, challenges, and strategies in managing their professional and personal lives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). By utilizing qualitative methods, the research captures the complex and context-specific nature of work-life balance in a unique cultural and socio-political environment.
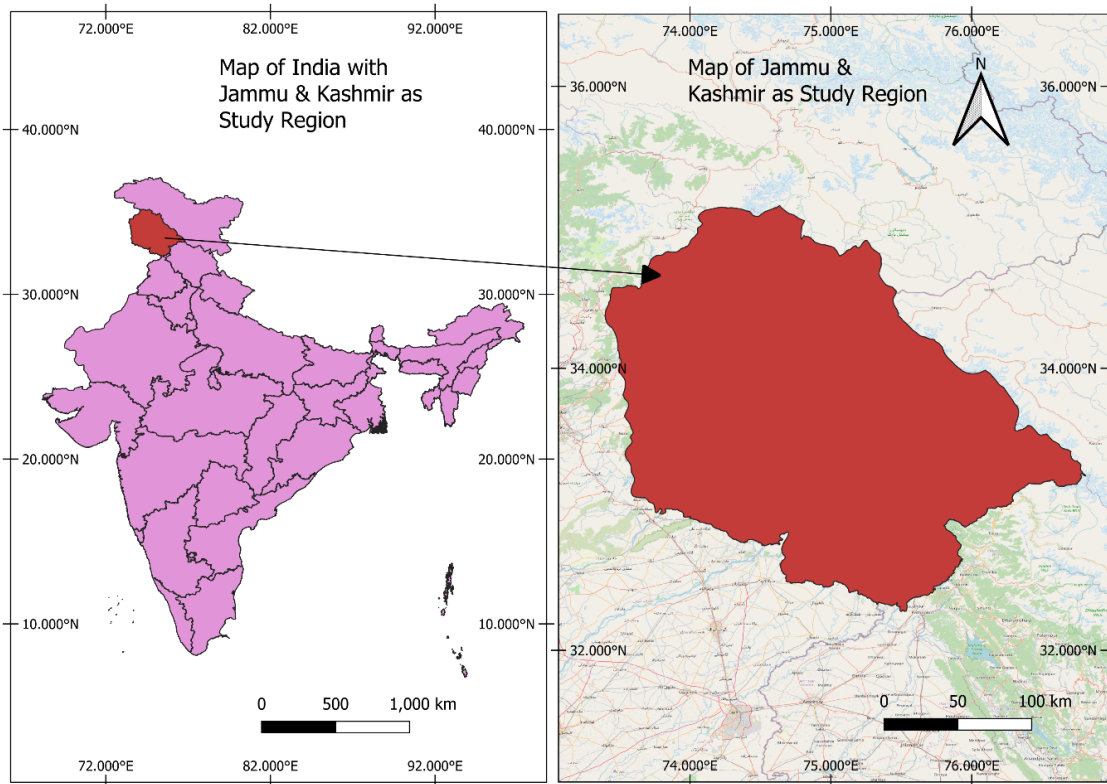


Figure 1: Jammu and Kashmir has been taken as the study area
Source: Author Generated using QGIS

### 3.2 Determining the Sample Size

The sample size for this study was 25 homestay operators. This number was chosen based on the principle of data saturation, which suggests that data collection should continue until no new information is emerging from the interviews (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). A sample of 25 operators was deemed sufficient to ensure a comprehensive dataset, offering a diverse range of experiences while providing

meaningful insights into the work-life balance of homestay operators in the region (Palinkas et al., 2015).

### 3.3 Selection Criteria

The criteria for participant selection included the following:

- **Experience:** Participants were required to have at least two years of experience as homestay operators to ensure they possessed sufficient practical knowledge and could provide valuable insights into their work-life balance.

- **Location:** Participants were selected from various geographical areas within Jammu and Kashmir to ensure a broad representation of regional tourism dynamics and to reflect the diversity of experiences across different districts.

- **Ownership:** Only homestay operators who owned or directly managed their properties were included, as this provided firsthand perspectives on the challenges and strategies related to work-life balance.

### 3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexibility and in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for open-ended questions and follow-up probes, facilitating a detailed understanding of the participants' work-life balance dynamics. Each interview was conducted in a comfortable setting for the participants, either in person or via video conferencing, depending on their preference and availability. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved six steps:

1. **Familiarization with the data:** The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and initial ideas were noted during repeated readings of the transcripts.

2. **Coding:** The data were manually coded, with segments of text being labeled with short, descriptive phrases. Codes were then reviewed and refined.

3. **Generating themes:** Similar codes were grouped to form broader themes that represented key patterns across the data.

4. **Reviewing themes:** Themes were refined and reviewed by comparing them with the original data to ensure consistency and relevance.

5. **Defining and naming themes:** The final themes were clearly defined, capturing the essence of each pattern in the data.

6. **Writing the report:** The analysis was written in a way that highlighted the most significant findings related to work-life balance, supported by direct quotes from participants.

## 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their right to confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The interviews were conducted with respect for participants' privacy, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing personal information and using pseudonyms for all participants.

## 4  Findings

The qualitative analysis of interviews with 25 homestay operators in Jammu and Kashmir revealed several prominent themes related to their work-life balance experiences. These themes are High Workload, Family Involvement, Emotional Stress, Cultural Expectations, and Coping Strategies. These themes represent the key challenges and strategies identified by the operators in managing their professional and personal lives.

Table 1: Themes of Work-Life Balance Challenges

| Theme | Number of Participants | Percentage of Participants |
| --- | --- | --- |
| High Workload | 20 | 80% |
| Family Involvement | 18 | 72% |
| Emotional Stress | 22 | 88% |
| Cultural Expectations | 15 | 60% |
| Coping Strategies | 16 | 64% |

### 4.1 High Workload (80% of Participants)

A significant portion of participants (80% of 25 participants) reported experiencing excessive workloads, particularly during peak tourist seasons. As one participant stated:

*"During the peak season, I work over 60 hours a week. There's always something to do—booking guests, checking in, maintaining the rooms. I often feel like I'm always on the clock."*

Operators typically described working late evenings and weekends, handling maintenance tasks, ensuring guest satisfaction, and overseeing daily operations, which

contributed to long working hours. This workload often led to physical and mental exhaustion, making it difficult to find personal time. As another operator put it:

*"It feels like there's no time for myself. You're constantly on your feet, and when you finally sit down, there's more work to do. It really affects your health and your personal life."*

### 4.2 Family Involvement (72% of Participants)

Family involvement emerged as a significant theme, with 72% of participants noting that their family members played an essential role in the daily operations of the homestay. As one operator shared:

*"My wife and kids help out, especially during busy times. It's not just the business, but it feels like everything in my life is connected to the homestay."*

Family support was particularly crucial during high tourist seasons when the workload was overwhelming. However, family involvement also led to blurred boundaries between work and personal life. As one participant explained:

*"Sometimes it's hard to separate work from home. We're always talking about guest issues even when we're supposed to be relaxing together."*

### 4.3 Emotional Stress (88% of Participants)

Emotional stress was a prevalent theme, with 88% of operators mentioning the emotional labor involved in their roles. As one participant put it:

*"You always have to be happy, always have to be available. Even if you're exhausted, you have to put on a smile for the guests."*

The emotional demands were particularly challenging during peak seasons, when operators had to manage high guest expectations. Many participants spoke about feeling emotionally drained, with one noting:

*"There's always the pressure to keep guests happy. Sometimes I feel like I'm running on empty. It's emotionally exhausting."*

This emotional burden, combined with long hours, often led to burnout and frustration, further complicating their work-life balance.

### 4.4 Cultural Expectations (60% of Participants)

Cultural expectations in Jammu and Kashmir were also identified as contributing factors to the challenges faced by homestay operators. Approximately 60% of participants reported that the strong cultural emphasis on hospitality and the

expectations of local communities around guest treatment intensified their workloads. As one operator shared:

*"In our culture, hospitality is everything. You feel a deep sense of duty to treat your guests well, sometimes beyond what's expected. But this also puts a lot of pressure on you."*

This cultural expectation added pressure to provide exceptional service, which compounded the physical and emotional demands of the role, further impacting the operators' ability to maintain a balance between work and personal life.

**4.5 Coping Strategies (64% of Participants)**

To manage the various challenges of work-life balance, approximately 64% of operators reported using a range of coping strategies. These strategies helped them navigate the physical, emotional, and cultural pressures associated with running a homestay. The main coping strategies identified were:

1. **Setting Boundaries**: Many operators emphasized the importance of setting clear boundaries between work and personal life. As one participant stated:

*"I try to set boundaries—no calls after 8 PM, no work on Sundays. It helps me to disconnect, at least for a little while."*

2. **Utilizing Community Support**: Operators frequently relied on local communities for support, whether through assistance with tasks, shared responsibilities, or moral support during stressful periods. One operator described:

*"The local community is always there to help. If I need someone to clean or cook, they'll step in. It really helps ease the pressure."*

3. **Prioritizing Tasks**: Operators employed task prioritization as a way to manage their time and energy efficiently. As one participant explained:

*"You focus on what's most important. Guests come first, but I try to delegate other tasks like maintenance to family members or neighbors."*

In addition to these strategies, some operators also emphasized the importance of **self-care**, including taking regular breaks, exercising, and maintaining social connections outside of work. As one operator shared:

*"Taking time for myself is crucial. Even if it's just a walk or a quick lunch break, I need it to stay sane."*

While these strategies helped mitigate stress, the participants acknowledged that the balance between work and personal life was a continuous challenge, requiring constant adjustments to their routines. As one participant concluded:

*"It's an ongoing struggle. Some days are better than others, but you always have to find ways to adjust and cope."*

## 5  Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the work-life balance of homestay operators in Jammu and Kashmir, highlighting the complex interplay of professional responsibilities and personal lives. The major themes—high workload, family involvement, emotional stress, cultural expectations, and coping strategies—shed light on the diverse challenges these operators face in balancing the demands of running a homestay with their personal well-being.

### 5.1 Workload and its Impact on Well-being

The high workload reported by 80% of participants emerged as a primary concern, especially during peak tourist seasons. The extensive working hours, often exceeding 60 hours per week, can result in physical and emotional exhaustion, leading to burnout. This finding resonates with Kelliher and Anderson (2010) and Bakker and Demerouti (2017), who identified workload as a significant contributor to burnout in the hospitality sector. The study's findings suggest that interventions to manage workload could benefit operators' well-being. This could include improving operational efficiency, providing seasonal assistance, and exploring support systems to alleviate the physical and emotional strain placed on homestay operators.

The socio-political context of Jammu and Kashmir, marked by its unique tourism dynamics, further complicates these challenges. The region's growing tourism sector, influenced by its rich cultural heritage and geopolitical status, places added pressure on homestay operators to meet high expectations, both from tourists and local communities.

### 5.2 Family Involvement: A Double-Edged Sword

Family involvement was another prominent theme, with 72% of participants reporting that family members played a crucial role in the day-to-day operations. While family support eased the burden, it often led to blurred boundaries between personal and professional lives. The interplay of work and family responsibilities is consistent with findings by Palinkas et al. (2015), who noted that family dynamics could both support and complicate work-life balance. The family's role in running the homestay can enhance operational efficiency but can also lead to stress, as operators struggle to disconnect from work. The absence of clear boundaries can affect personal well-being and relationships, adding an emotional layer to the operational challenges.

The findings, when viewed within the socio-political context of Jammu and Kashmir, also illustrate how family involvement is shaped by cultural norms and the socio-economic demands of the region. The concept of extended family support is embedded in the cultural fabric of the region, where local communities often share responsibilities to manage economic and social expectations.

## 5.3 Cultural Expectations and Emotional Labor

The cultural expectations surrounding hospitality, reported by 60% of participants, add another layer of complexity. Operators feel the pressure to meet or exceed local norms regarding guest care, which often extends beyond basic service expectations. This emotional labor, a hallmark of hospitality work, can be taxing, particularly when operators feel compelled to maintain a welcoming demeanor despite their own stress or fatigue. This finding aligns with Deery (2008), who noted that cultural expectations in hospitality intensify work-life balance challenges. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, these pressures are heightened by local customs that demand a high level of personalized care for guests, which can blur the boundaries between professional and personal life.

The socio-political context of Jammu and Kashmir also exacerbates these pressures, as the tourism industry is often viewed as a significant economic driver in the region. Consequently, operators may feel an added sense of responsibility to uphold the region's image and meet the expectations of both tourists and local communities, which can further intensify emotional stress.

## 5.4 Coping Strategies: Resilience in the Face of Challenges

Coping strategies emerged as a key theme, with 64% of participants adopting a variety of approaches to manage their work-life balance. The strategies reported by participants, including setting boundaries, utilizing community support, and prioritizing tasks, reflect the resilience of operators in the face of substantial challenges. These strategies align with the work of ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012), who found that social connections and support networks are critical in buffering stress and improving well-being. The reliance on community support networks, in particular, highlights the importance of social cohesion within the homestay sector. Operators frequently sought assistance from their local communities, which helped them mitigate stress and maintain a more manageable work-life balance.

The context of Jammu and Kashmir plays a pivotal role in shaping these coping mechanisms. The strong sense of community within the region fosters cooperation, with operators drawing on familial and neighborhood networks to cope with the stresses of the industry. These social networks serve as a critical resource for operators, providing both emotional and practical support.

### 5.5 Theoretical Implications and Contributions

This study contributes to the broader literature on work-life balance in the hospitality industry by highlighting the unique challenges faced by homestay operators in a politically and culturally distinct region. The findings confirm the theoretical understanding that work-life balance is a dynamic and complex process, shaped by both individual and contextual factors. The study extends the work of Kelliher and Anderson (2010), Bakker and Demerouti (2017), and Deery (2008) by emphasizing the role of cultural expectations and community support networks in shaping operators' experiences.

Moreover, the study extends the existing literature by offering a nuanced understanding of how socio-political factors in Jammu and Kashmir influence work-life balance. The tourism sector's rapid expansion in the region, combined with cultural expectations and family involvement, presents unique challenges for homestay operators. This context underscores the need for targeted interventions and support systems that consider the region's socio-political and cultural realities.

In conclusion, this study provides an in-depth exploration of the work-life balance dynamics among homestay operators in Jammu and Kashmir. The interplay of workload, family dynamics, emotional labor, and cultural expectations creates a challenging environment for these operators. Policymakers, tourism boards, and stakeholders in the hospitality industry must consider these findings when developing strategies to improve work-life balance and ensure the sustainability of the homestay sector in Jammu and Kashmir.

## 6  Conclusion

This study has illuminated the intricate dynamics of work-life balance among homestay operators in Jammu and Kashmir, revealing a multifaceted array of challenges and strategies adopted by these individuals within a culturally rich yet environmentally and politically complex context. As tourism continues to be a vital component of the region's economy, understanding the factors that influence the work-life balance of homestay operators becomes increasingly essential.

The findings indicated that high workloads significantly impact the ability of operators to manage both their professional responsibilities and personal lives effectively. During peak tourist seasons, operators reported working extended hours, often exceeding 60 hours weekly, leading to physical exhaustion and emotional weariness. The tourism industry's demand for near-constant availability further exacerbates this, aligning with literature on burnout and dissatisfaction in the hospitality sector (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Emotional labor also emerged as a critical component of operators' daily experiences. The consistent need to present a cheerful and composed demeanor, regardless of personal stress or fatigue, takes a psychological toll and contributes to long-term emotional depletion (Grandey, 2000). Given that emotional exhaustion was a

prevalent concern among participants, support mechanisms tailored to emotional well-being are crucial.

The study further highlighted the complex role of family involvement. While family support is essential in managing homestay operations, blurred boundaries between work and domestic life often lead to a continuous work cycle, diminishing personal and leisure time. This is especially relevant in Jammu and Kashmir, where extended family structures are integral to both social life and business (Žnidaršič & Marič, 2021).

Cultural expectations surrounding hospitality, deeply rooted in the ethos of the region, add another layer of pressure. Many operators expressed a deep obligation to uphold traditional standards of service, sometimes at the expense of personal well-being. These insights underscore the need for culturally sensitive approaches to work-life support that respect and align with the values and expectations of the region.

In light of these findings, it is evident that the challenges faced by homestay operators in Jammu and Kashmir are deeply intertwined with emotional, familial, cultural, and contextual factors. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of local realities and the development of targeted, sustainable support strategies. The following region-specific recommendations are therefore proposed.

## 7  Recommendations

### a.  Season-Based Workload Management:
Tourism peaks in Jammu and Kashmir place immense strain on homestay operators. Local tourism authorities and community organizations should promote the adoption of flexible work schedules and collaborative hosting during peak periods. This could include encouraging job-sharing models between neighboring homestays or introducing temporary seasonal help through local youth employment schemes.

### b.  Accessible Mental Health Services:
Given the stigma around mental health in many parts of Kashmir, emotional support systems must be designed to be both culturally acceptable and easily accessible. Local NGOs and health departments can be engaged to provide confidential counseling, stress-relief workshops, and peer support networks for homestay operators.

### c.  Family Engagement Workshops:
Workshops should be organized to sensitize family members to the psychological and physical pressures faced by operators. These workshops can offer practical strategies for setting boundaries and sharing responsibilities, helping families create a balanced home-work environment.

d. **Contextualized Training in Hospitality Ethics:**
Training programs should not only cover professional skills but also reflect regional values and cultural expectations around hospitality. Modules should integrate local case studies and emphasize managing guest satisfaction alongside personal well-being.

e. **Infrastructure and Safety Improvements:**
Government and local bodies should address infrastructural shortcomings—such as power cuts, road access, and sanitation—which disproportionately burden homestay operators. Improvements in these areas can reduce operational stress and enhance both the guest and host experience.

f. **Digital Empowerment and Marketing:**
Many operators in the region struggle with visibility in the tourism market. Region-specific digital training programs should be launched to help homestay owners promote their services online, access larger markets, and manage bookings more efficiently—saving both time and effort.

g. **Recognition and Reward Initiatives:**
Community-level recognition programs can serve as a powerful motivator. Local tourism boards should implement awards that acknowledge not just guest satisfaction but also efforts made by operators to maintain a healthy work-life balance amidst challenging conditions.

h. **Policy Advocacy for Region-Specific Support:**
Policymakers and tourism stakeholders must advocate for targeted support policies that address the realities of operating homestays in a post-conflict, mountainous region. This includes subsidies for operational stress relief programs, region-specific tourism calendars, and consultation frameworks involving operators in policy decisions.

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