CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A META-ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *The paper explains the hardships women employees face in their professional and personal lives. The territories of work and life are completely entangled due to cellular phones, laptops, and tablets. High-connectivity networks and easy availability of broadband are major contributors to the disturbing balance between personal and professional lives. Availability of secondary data enables in analysing the impact of lack of work-life balance on women's careers, personal well-being, job performance, turnover intentions, organisational culture, and family life. A recent statistic highlighted that 60% of Indians ranked their quality of work-life balance from awful to average. Most of them have a medical condition resulting from work stress; 17% were insomniacs, 16% were fighting depression, 9% were struggling against anger issues and anxiety, while 4.5% had hypertension. Non-existence of a proper balance derails women's careers, affects their job performance, intrudes into family space, and degrades mental and physical health, resulting in high turnover rates. Moreover, long working hours, the corporate culture, and inefficient organisational policies has worsened the situation for them.*

Keywords: *Working Women, Job Performance, Well-Being, Career Hindrances*

INTRODUCTION

Today's work scenario has changed drastically in terms of workplace, technology usage for communication, and even in the style of working. Earlier, employees used to work within the office premises, performing activities manually, with the least use of computers and laptops. New and advanced technology, however, has entangled the personal and professional spheres of life. Work life has suppressed personal life to such an extent that either the employees have no time for vacations; even if they are on vacation, they are not completely free, due to work commitments and because of the far-reaching mobile networks and Internet connections. Increased domination of work over employees' lives has destroyed time spent with family, friends, and self-care activities, consequently escalating clashes between work and other spheres of life (Rao & Indla, 2010). Statistics from Randstad Employer Brand Research 2019 highlighted that almost 50% of women and 46% of men contemplate work-life balance policies embedded in an organisation as the third prominent decisive factor when accepting a job offer. The above survey helped in concluding that all employees are attracted towards organisations offering flexible employment and other benefits. However, women employees are more fascinated with these organisations, as ideally, male employees have their wives managing their home, children, and other dependents, while women's responsibilities towards their family are totally ignored (Sinclair, 1998). It is assumed that an ideal employee is one who works full time dedicatedly and is fully committed to work roles, forgetting all other responsibilities outside the organisation (Rao & Indla, 2010). The presence of an employee in office premises is more predominant than performance. 'Work till you drop' is believed to be a magic mantra for the success of an organisation; however, this work culture was originally designed to suit men and has a negative impact on women employees (Drew & Murtagh, 2005). Moreover, female career graphs were found to be more uneven, disorganised, and interrupted because they leave their careers behind and focus on their families, while a majority of men have a career that climbs upwards (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Women are more family-oriented. They give due attention to the needs of family members, be it a basic need for good food, a well-organised home, or spotlessly ironed clothes. Even for the safety and satisfaction of social needs, most members of a family rely on the women of the household. However, spending more time and energy in the work place leaves them with less time and energy for other life roles, which negatively reflects in their performance (Goode,

1960), resulting not only in conflicts but contributing to severe ailments. A survey conducted on 2,000 working professionals by monster.com postulates that 60% of the Indians ranked their quality of work-life balance from awful to average. Most of them have a medical condition resulting from work stress; 17% were insomniacs, 16% were fighting depression, 9% were struggling against anger issues and anxiety, while 4.5% had hypertension. The numerous demands of work and family, associated with multiple roles played in both these arenas, are injurious to an individual and invokes anxiety, stress, and tension, causing mental and emotional distress (Rothbard, 2001). The culture of working long hours and increasing work hassles has intruded into the personal/social lives of employees, emphasising that greater attention needs to be given to issues concerning work-life balance.

Defining Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance may be a multidimensional concept (Frone, 2003) having multiple meanings attached to it. Frone (2003) defined it as lack of conflict or interference between work and family roles. According to Greenhaus (2003), it is shortening work hours to spend more time with family. Clarke et al. (2004) described work-life balance as an equilibrium between the amount of time and effort somebody devotes to work and personal activities, in order to maintain an overall sense of harmony in life. Wheatley (2012), interprets it as the capacity of an individual to amalgamate their work and non-work duties successfully, irrespective of age and gender. Diverse explanations are given by researches, which assists us in concluding that work-life balance is a subjective term; it varies from person to person. Even for an individual, the definition of the term might fluctuate on temporal grounds. Moreover, Clarke et al. (2004) disclosed that balance describes the emotional aspects of work and family life and it can be boosted by doing those things which are salient, prominent, and important for an individual. For instance, increased family activities and interactions assist in unburdening themselves from the excessive loads of work and family roles, which will enhance psychological well-being and ultimately contributes towards improved work-life balance. Likewise, Greenhaus et al. (2003) identified three pivotal components for balancing work and other arenas of life: time, involvement, and satisfaction. Each factor contributes, corresponding to the presence or absence of balance between personal and professional lives. Time balance indicates an almost equal amount of time spent in different roles. Uneven distribution of time among different roles leads to temporal issues. Involvement balance signifies the same level of dedication in fulfilling responsibilities towards work and family. Active participation in one role

and ignorance of other roles increases conflict in the ignored sector. Satisfaction balance is concerned about equivalent satisfaction gained from work and non-work roles. Excessive inclination towards one role in terms of time, involvement, or satisfaction prompts frequent disagreements and makes it difficult to strike a balance between the different areas.

The dualistic nature of work-life balance represents work-life conflict and work-life enrichment as two separate constructs, whose origin and end results vary. Work-family conflict results in detrimental outcomes in all areas of work, family, as well as on an individual level, such as job dissatisfaction, job withdrawal, family dissatisfaction, poor performance, and poor mental and physical health (Frone, 2003). On the contrary, work-life enrichment describes how work and family experiences increase overall well-being or reduce deteriorations in well-being (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Facilitation can be seen in terms of social support from personal as well as from professional spheres, in the form of a loving mother-in-law, caring husband, supportive colleagues, and an understanding boss. Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1994) highlight the importance of support/assistance in reducing the negative outcomes of a stressor.

Work-Life Balance and Career

An insight into existing literature determines that there is a significant relationship between work-life balance and career progress, especially for working women. Numerous workplace and home-/personal-/individual-based variables are responsible for slowing down the pace of career development. Guillame and Pochic (2009) identified these obstacles and categorized them as temporal issues, resettlement obstructions, leadership constraints, and societal discrimination. Promotion always comes with a greater hassle regarding time, workload, responsibility, and sometimes even relocation. A majority of the time, the criteria for promotion depends on time spent at the office, and not on performance (Peus & Mattausch, 2008). Generally, it is observed that woman employees often refuse those opportunities of career progression which lengthens commuting hours and involves migration to another place. Moreover, career aspirations and work schedules of the spouse affects career advancement decisions, particularly in the case of women (Sperandio & Devdas, 2015). Commitments towards family, uncooperative family environment, and difficulty in managing house and work greatly influence career choices (Syifa et al., 2018). The emotions attached to each role played by working women/mothers forces them to line up their schedules according to the schedules or needs of family members. Women with jobs outside the office end up making career compromises

and altering their field or area of work (switching to lower demanding jobs, part-time, or work-from-home options) to cope with the needs of the family. Moreover, preferential treatment and the chauvinistic viewpoint of male co-workers and the organisational culture are the biggest hurdles in the path of career advancement for women employees (Burke, 2008). Organisational environment acts as a driving force in career expansion; however, it seems like it has an adverse effect for the female staff. According to Schein (2007), "think managers, think male" attitude still persists while recruiting senior executive/managers.

Work-Life Balance and Personal Well-Being

Evidence from various studies indicates that an unbalanced work-life scenario is associated with detrimental health effects and degrades the quality of life. Lallukka et al. (2010) observed that time spent on work (home + office) each day compromises the hours of sleep, i.e., more work increases sleep deprivation. The workload of the working women is often two-folded; after completing their official duty they have to carry out their household tasks and child rearing, which leaves them with little time to take care of their own health. Ahmad et al. (2011) in their study explored that uneven distribution of official and household work instigates strong negative behavioural reactions such as anger, hatred, and helplessness. Moreover, rise in exhaustion and fatigue levels, resulting from overwork and non-job duties affects work and self-satisfaction of the employees (Fan & Smith, 2018). In addition, Rothbard (2001) highlighted that women personnel were observed to experience reduction in psychological wellness arising out of transitions in multiple roles. Switching of roles hurriedly from wife, mother, employee, and colleague can be grueling, simultaneously making them lose their grip over other activities. A study conducted by Thomas and Ganster (1995) proposed that employees who had negligible control over official and familial zones were often involved in many incidences of disagreements and were assessed with high cholesterol, depression, and physical health issues. Not being able to regulate personal and professional lives and the burden of household chores makes them physically ill, emotionally impulsive, and psychologically drained.

Work-Life Balance and Job Performance

An individual plays different roles in their professional and personal lives; these multiple roles affect their performance in one or all the roles they play, considering the limited time and energy resources, which results in disagreements, followed by incapability in performing the roles (Goode, 1960). Peus and Mattausch (2008) observed a negative relationship between work-life imbalance and job performance. A good work-life balance enhances job satisfaction and ultimately job performance. Kant (2018) revealed that women lag behind men in striking a balance between work and non-work areas. Further, Ahmad (2008) proposed a model which suggested that the consequences of conflicts between personal and professional lives result in increased emotional exhaustion, which lowers job satisfaction, ultimately affecting employee performance. Involvement in a disagreement either with a family member or a peer disturbs the frame of mind, causing energy depletion. It has been proved that entanglement between family and work specifically affects the work performance of the female staff (Lilly et al., 2006). Personal life intervenes during work time mainly due to time constraints, dependent care concerns, safety worries, and the societal/cultural obligations on women.

Work-Life Balance and Turnover Intentions

An employee's decision to leave an organisation depends on a multitude of influences. Numerous work-related and non-work-related variables trigger intentions to quit. Limited career opportunities, followed by work-life balance clashes, poor remuneration, faulty/deficient flexible work policies, and unacknowledged hard work/efforts are some of the grounds on which employees resign (Randstand Survey, 2019). Work-family conflict is the prominent cause behind the intention to leave a job; this is the leading cause among the female employees. (Rasheed et al., 2018). A woman's decision to quit or stay depends on the spouse's career decisions and their children's needs. Huffman et al. (2014) proposed that spouses who are not supportive provoke women to resign, especially when relocation is important for career growth. The irony is that women often compromise their career if their spouses have to relocate; however, when it comes to female employees, they refuse the opportunity to relocate so that they could be with their families. Further, unpredictable conditions, such as a sick child or family intervention in work, contribute to conflicts; in this case, walking out seems to be the possible solution to resolve conflicts (Rasheed et al., 2018) as peace in the family is priority for women. Lilly et al. (2006) emphasised that occupational stress is associated with both conflicts, i.e., family interfering in work and work interfering with family time, which results in turnover. Job-induced tensions and family interference in work are two significant contributors triggering turnover intentions among women (Lilly et al., 2006). Expectations arising out of different

roles played by women, such as 'caretaker', 'home maker', 'employee', 'mother', 'colleague', and 'wife', make them feel overburdened, exhausted, and trapped, and quitting their work responsibilities seems to be the only way out for them.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Most of the organisations adopt a culture of stretching work timings, which were designed particularly to suit men (Drew & Murtagh, 2005) because of their roles as sole bread earners in the past, as per societal and cultural norms. With the participation of women in the workforce, the organisational culture needs to be modified to accommodate them in it. However, it is witnessed that working long hours is mandatory to prove your commitment towards work, and women employees easily become prey to it (Drew & Murtagh, 2005). Moreover, organisations think twice before appointing a woman with children. Peus and Mattausch (2008) propounded that women with children, especially new mothers, experience injustice concerning employment because the management feels that their input to the organisation would be reduced. Management perceived that employing a mother will lead to increased parental leaves, emergency leaves, early exits, and the availing of telecommuting facilities. However, female personnel at the managerial positions fear that availing these benefits might tarnish the status of the post they hold, indicating that they were less committed towards the organisation (Wajcman, 1999). Some employers believed that the use of flexible employment opportunities by a few placed pressure on others in meeting the companies' objectives, and that commitment levels could be evidently judged by this (Drew & Murtagh, 2005). Abundant work-life balance options exist; however, obsolete organisational culture, faulty knowledge, and the psychological blocks of employers, colleagues, and even employees themselves, restrict their effective implementation.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FAMILY

The assimilation of women in the workforce not only uplifts the economy, but lifts the cultural veil, which can be witnessed through increased productivity, family income, independence of women, and gender equality (Rao & Indla, 2010). Alternatively, family time and family life is affected; this is an invitation for disputes. Imbalance in the professional life further leads to a dissatisfied personal life, as mentioned in the study conducted by Suchet and Barling (1986); that is, work-family conflict has severely affected verbal communications among couples, resulting in

marital discord. In a majority of cases of spouse disputes and divorces, unmanageable work-life was found to be the major cause. Increased incidences of marriage split-ups and divorces were witnessed (Rao & Indla, 2010). Conflicts in a marriage deteriorates marital satisfaction and happiness, at the same time intensifying parental burden, which is a result of sole parenting. Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al. (2016) proposed that single parents, especially women, felt that a hectic day at the office not only affects the parent-child conversations, but widens the gap in their relations due to missing out on significant events in the child's life. Further, the findings of Cinamon et al. (2007) highlighted that most women doubt their capabilities and feel that they are unable to do justice to the various roles that they are forced to play. Moreover, clashes concerning unmanageable work and family life of a partner appears to spill over to the other partner, resulting in family-work conflict and lower self-efficacy of parents.

REPERCUSSION OF ABSENCE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

A careful analysis of the above mentioned factors assists in identifying the negative reactions arising out of a lack of balance in professional and personal roles. It is observed that absence of work-life balance results in deterioration of mental and physical well-being, family disharmony, high turnover rates, career setbacks, and lower job performance. An employee feels pressurised due to increased/inflexible working hours, deadlines, unsupportive corporate culture, and rigid organisational policies, resulting in sleep deprivation, fatigue, frustration, adoption of unhealthy and untimely eating habits, and increased conflicts with spouse and children. All these factors affect their mental peace, concentration, and willingness to work, which ultimately forces them to either change their careers or drop out of the workforce completely.
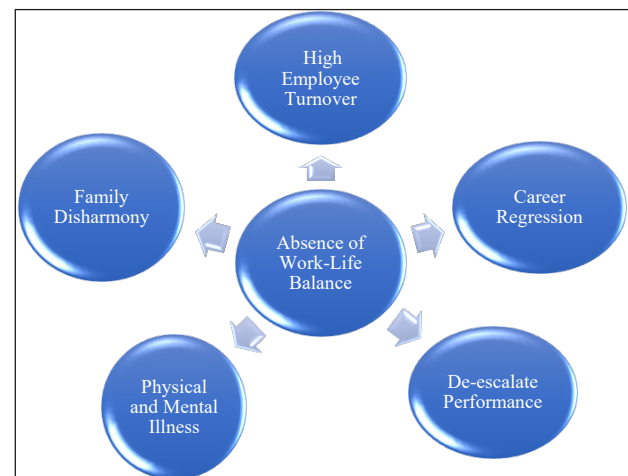

Fig. 1

SUGGESTIONS TO STRIKE A BALANCE AT THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

- *Adopting Family-Friendly Policies:* Embracing workplace policies, namely flex-time, telecommuting, on-site childcare, maternity benefits, and dependent care leaves for employees; creating awareness by using these facilities by the upper-level management, which will reduce reluctance among other employees.

- *Inequity and Discrimination must not be Overlooked:* Discrimination on the basis of gender must be avoided. Opportunities for development should be given on the basis of performance, regardless of gender.

- *Workplace Wellness Programmes:* Including fitness in the employee's daily routine by providing free memberships to gyms or by organising fitness programmes in the office.

- *Building a Culture of Care and Concern:* Supportive supervisor and colleagues act as a life safer for working women in times of emergency. Monetary appraisal, lending an ear, early exits, work-from-home, advancing or postponing meetings due to staff emergencies, and having strict work-free holidays can be some examples for showing that employees and their families matter to the organisation.

- *Offering Flexibility and Autonomy:* Decisions regarding the place and time of work should be given to employees. Rigid time schedules are things of the past now. Companies adopting flexible employment are more attractive to many employees.

- *Employee Assistance Programmes:* Organising counselling and training sessions for developing a positive attitude and coping strategies for striking a perfect balance between professional and personal lives. Formal and informal interactions between employees of different age groups gives rise to tested ideas for balancing the two lives, thus reducing the anxiety that the younger employees face.

- *Safe and Healthy Work Environment:* Increased crimes against women has been an influential variable regarding their decision to resign. By guarding them against discrimination, exploitation and harassment, embracing strict policies against it, and their effective implementation enables employers in providing a healthy and safer work environment.

SUGGESTIONS TO STRIKE A BALANCE AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL

- *Learn the Art of Time Management:* Segregating the tasks assigned and fulfilling them on the basis of priority. Dodging distractions such as mobile phones and gossiping with colleagues can save time.

- *Share the Burden:* Involving husband and children in household chores not only reduces the burden, but enhances family bonding.

- *Communication is the Key for All Disputes:* Share your daily struggles with your family, friends, colleagues, and boss. Conversing with dear ones resolves misunderstandings, and acts as a stress buster and uplifts your mood.

- *Meditate, Exercise or Start a Hobby:* Take time out for yourself by either indulging in a physical activity or pursuing a hobby. It will help relax the body and mind.

- *Avoid Multi-Tasking:* Concentrating on one thing at a time helps in saving time and helps you complete the task with full dedication.

- *Fixing a Boundary/Drawing a Line:* Segregating personal and professional life is a must in today's technology-driven society. Several strategies such as having separate contact numbers for work and home, not checking official e-mails during family time, and not attending official calls after 8pm can be adopted, based on suitability.

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