

WOMEN EXECUTIVES ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract *Women executives regularly try to fulfill the demands of their offices and once the day is over, they carry a greater amount of obligations and duties at home. Life is a balancing act for them. The balance between work and an individual's life is significant in modern society. In organisations and on the home front, the challenge of work-life balance is rising. Human resource professionals are trying to retain the employees by providing them the highest level of job satisfaction. The present paper examines the role of work-life balance practices in context of women executives in different sectors. The researcher has analysed the different stressors that arise due to improper work-life balance and the different policies adopted by the organisations to make their women employees more flexible, satisfied and productive.*

Keywords: *Women, Stress, Work Life Balance, Cooperation*

INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance (WLB) is a term that refers to the desire on the part of both, employees and employers to achieve a balance between workplace obligations and personal responsibilities.

John Lennon once said, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." Yes, sometimes life happens. And when it does, it's critical to have understanding employers who acknowledge and accommodate your needs. Occasionally, we all need to neglect work a bit to focus on life and vice versa. If both parties respect that fact, everyone benefits.

WLB is an issue because work-life conflict (WLC) brings about a variety of undesirable consequences. Many of the consequences are health-related, but not exclusively so. The effects on employee health are well-documented. In addition to the effects on individual health; there are also significant corporate health impacts. WLC has been shown to contribute to higher absenteeism and/or attrition rates, low morale, a greater number of work-related compensation claims and productivity losses.

Work can be organised in such a way as to reduce work life conflict and to promote work-life balance; for instance, giving employees more control over working time through flexible hours, telework and so on. In larger organisations, there are Employee Assistance Programmes organised to counsel and assist employees experiencing difficulties.

Human Resources Management (HRM) best practices can be shared and organisations can gain an understanding of how other organisations have successfully managed.

On the government side, possible responses include social employment or labour policies and programmes. Employment insurance is an example of a mechanism that provides temporary income support for employees who must be away from work to care for a terminally ill family member. Individual counseling, disability benefits and the government-sponsored medical insurance system are other government supports when individuals are in crisis. The focus of most works however is to reduce work-related stress, work-life conflict and thereby prevent breakdown. Employers (and some employees) are seeking more employment flexibility. Factors leads to dissatisfaction or stress needs to be taken care of.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pleck's (1977) research suggests that family-to-work spill-over is stronger for women and the work-to-family spill-over is stronger for men. Research suggests that female respondents in all parts of the world are pressured for time, rarely have time to relax, and feel stressed and overworked most of the time, but women in emerging countries feel the strain even more so than women in developed countries.

Grossman (1981) opines that the knowledge economy has created greater access for women coupled with factors such

as changes in marital patterns and smaller families. This has led to an increase in the number of working women and, hence, working mothers.

Marks and MacDermid (1996) state that work-family balance reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles, an inter-role phenomenon.

The issue of work-life balance has been stimulated by writers advocating the arrival of Generation X (Tulgan, 1996), a cohort of workers who give greater priority to seeking a balance between work and the rest of life.

Scott, Moore, and Miceli (1997) have linked it to three relatively stable personality types, the achievement-oriented, the perfectionist and the compulsive-dependent.

Clark (2000) has dissected the concept of "family friendly" to distinguish practices associated with temporal flexibility which give workers some control over the work, operational flexibility which give control through autonomy over the content of work, and supportive supervision which allows for rules to be flexible in the case of family crises, illness and so on.

There are some organisations who need to create Human Resource policies which create positive, developing and cooperative environment so that work-life balance can be well taken care of. Perry-Smith and Blum (2001) report a US study on "bundles" of family-friendly practices and corporate performance. They find, in line with other research on HRM, that isolated family-friendly practices will have little impact but that a comprehensive bundle of practices are associated with superior ratings of corporate performance. Research has concentrated on the demands of work rather than home.

Hochschild (1997) suggests that the use of progressive human resource practices to generate commitment to work can risk making work almost too attractive. In contrast, the life of the American parent is increasingly programmed to meet a series of time-based obligations to transport children, meet specific needs and set aside "quality" time. Nowadays human resource practices are needed to be designed in such a manner that the employee could meet the demands of office and home simultaneously. This type of environment will make the job attractive and retention of employee will become easy.

Study by Kossek, Colquitt, and Noe (2001), building on some of Kossek's earlier work, has examined the influence of both work and family climate on aspects of work-life balance and related outcomes. The main focus of the study was based on the fulfilling the requirement of dependent family members. The key issues are where they should be cared for and by whom.

The work climate needs to be cooperative and cordial. The employee should take into consideration the need of other

employees and extend the helping hand whenever required.

Bharat (2003) postulates that work-life balance is a key issue in all types of employment as dual-career families have become common and high work demands with long working hours have become the norm. The importance of helping employees achieve a balance between the demands of their work and their home lives has been emphasized. Demographic changes as seen in the increasing number of women in the workplace and dual career families have generated an increasingly diverse workforce and a greater need of employees to balance their work and non-work lives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ADOPTED FOR CURRENT STUDY

Research Design

Analytical Research Design

This type of research emphasizes on the analysis of certain points/theories/issues to find out the facts about given situation. Analysis helps to clarify certain facts and to react on it accordingly.

Sample: 272 questionnaires were selected out of 350 respondents.

Collection of Data

Primary data have been collected through questionnaire.

Analysis of Data

The collected data have been suitably classified and tabulated in the form of table and graph with the appropriate statistical technique SPSS 15 software has used for necessary statistical test. The data analysis and conclusion were drawn on the basis of parametric test at 5% level of significance.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the benefit of work-life balance for women employees and the organisations.
2. To find out the relation of work-life balance with the productivity of employees.
3. To find out the role of employer in creating a balance between career and personal life of the employee.
4. To find out the different ways of managing stress arise due to improper work-life balance.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

350 respondents gave response on the questionnaire but few questionnaires were incomplete, that’s why only 272 was selected and others were excluded. Maximum respondents are under the age of 30 and least number of respondents are above 50. Table 1 shows the detail of age of respondents. To find out the level of work-life balance among female employees the respondents were asked to give their response to most of the questions based on the 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). These questions covered statements consisting of following parameters:

1. Efficiency and Effectiveness at Work
 - I usually meet all my targets.
 - I am an effective and efficient employee.
 - I am satisfied with my job.
 - My performance is as per the expectation of my boss.
2. Time for self
 - My job gave me enough time to take rest and have sufficient sleep.
 - My job gave me enough time for entertainment.
 - My job gave me enough time for hobbies.
 - My job gave me enough time for personal care.
3. Family commitments
 - My job gave me enough time for the routine work of home.
 - My job gave me enough time for teaching and playing with my child.
 - My job gave me enough time for shopping.
 - My job gave me enough time for outing with my family.
 - My job gave me enough time for attending the family functions.
4. Social Commitments
 - My job gave me enough time for attending the social functions.
 - My job gave me enough time to take care of my relatives and friends, when required.
 - My job gave me enough time for the welfare of the society.

The responses of the respondents were statistically analysed. The higher mean score indicates more time is available for that task. If the overall average score is more than 3, it is presumed that the person is able to balance her work and life otherwise not.

Table 1: Age of the Respondents

Age	No. of respondents	Percentage
under 30	97	36
30-39	82	30
40-49	74	27
above 50	19	7

Source: Questionnaire

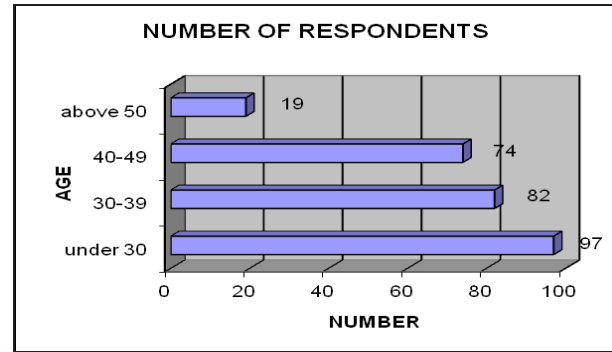


Fig. 1: Chart Showing Age-Wise Distribution of Respondents

For the purpose of comparison depending upon their age, the respondents were divided into four groups. First group-under 30, second group-30-39, third group-40-49 and the last group was above 50.

Table 2: Factors that Hinders Work-Life Balance (in Percentage)

Factors / Rank	Long working hours	Meetings after office hours	Travelling Away
1	58	56	16
2	27	34	21
3	15	5	20
4	-	5	20
5	-	-	23

Source: Questionnaire

From Table 2, it is clear that irrespective of the age, long working hours is the foremost impediment in balancing the life of a female employee. Meeting after office hours is the second most factor that causes imbalance and the last rank goes with travelling away. It doesn’t effect much as travelling happens once in a while for most of the female employees.

Table 3: Factors that Help in Work Life Balance (in Percentage)

Factors / Rank	Vacations/paid holidays	Maternity leave/ child care leave	Support from Colleagues and superiors	Family support	Other external support like crèches, maid etc
1	17.25	21.5	46	38	14.87
2	15.48	35.5	25	27	10.67
3	17.27	15	29	26	24.02
4	25	14		9	25.21
5	25	14			25.23

Source: Questionnaire

About 46% female employees feel that the support of their colleagues and boss/ superior is the foremost required factor which helps in balancing their work life. Second rank goes to the family support with 38 %.third, fourth and fifth rank goes to maternity leave/child care leave, vacations or paid holidays and other external support with 21.5 %, 17.25 % and 14.87% respectively.

Table 4: Work Life Balance on the Basis of Family Type

Type of Family	No. of respondents	A balanced life	Percentage
Nuclear	180	72	40
Joint	92	73	79

Source: Questionnaire

Work-life balance is also judged by the type of family. out of 272 respondents 180 are staying in nuclear families and 92 in joint family. Respondents with joint family are able to balance their work life more in comparison to nuclear family. 79% of the respondents belongs to joint family is able to cope up with the work and able to maintain balance in their job and home. As per respondents the joint family system provide support to working ladies and make her feel tension free relating to her household task and especially children.

Based on the response to the questions under each parameter, the mean score of the female employees irrespective of their age is given in Table 5.

Table 5: Work-life Balance on Different Parameters

S.No.	Parameters	Mean Score
1	Efficiency and effectiveness at work	3.89
2	Time for self	1.23
3	Family commitments	2.35
4	Social Commitments	2.12

Source: Questionnaire

Table 6: Health Effects Due to Improper Work-Life Balance

Health Effects	Percentage
Stress	80
Lack of exercise	72
Insomnia	36
Exhaustion	58
Depression	27
Poor health	32
Others	9

Source: Questionnaire

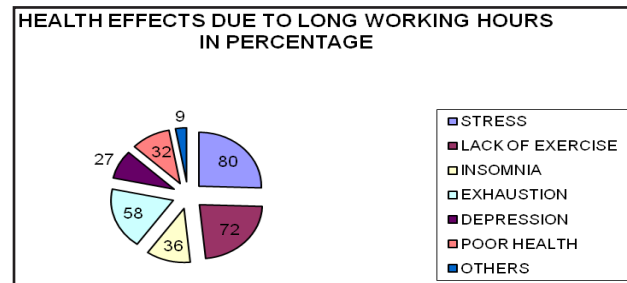


Fig. 2: Health Effects Due to Long Working Hours

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study has tried to find out the work life balance of female executives on the basis of their age, family type, office etc.

The respondents were divided into different category as per age, under 30, 30-39, 40-49, and above 50. 36% responders come under the first category of under 30, 31% respondents are in between 30-39 age bracket, 27 % below 40-49 age bracket, and only 7% respondents are above 50. It was found that the work-life balance is quite better in first two groups as they are working in comparatively lower positions with less responsibilities.

It is found that the majority of females are not able to maintain work-life balance. Long working hours are the foremost

impediment in balancing the life of a female employee (58%). Meeting after office hours is the second most factor that causes imbalance (56%) and the last rank goes with travelling away. It doesn't effect much as travelling happens once in a while for most of the female employees (16%).

On four parameters of work-life balance viz. efficiency and effectiveness at work, time for self, family commitments, and social Commitments, three parameters are not getting adequate time (mean Score 1.23, 2.35, 2.12 respectively) except the activities under "efficiency and effectiveness at work" (mean score-3.89).

Among the different work-life balance factors, support from colleagues is the most important (46%) and second most important factor is support from family that helps in balancing the work life (38%), third, fourth and fifth rank goes to maternity leave/child care leave, vacations or paid holidays, and other external support with 21.5 %,17.25 % and 14.87% respectively.

There are different health effects due to improper work-life balance. The study has shown that the respondent has marked not only one effect, but more than one effect on health due to improper work life balance. These are stress (80%), lack of exercise (72%), insomnia (36%), exhaustion (58%), depression (27%), poor health (32%), and other problems (9%).

BENEFITS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE TO EMPLOYEES AND ORGANISATION

- A well-designed and well-managed plan offers some advantages to both, women employees and organisations. Women employees can work effectively when she carry less burden from the home front. Ladies are looking for work environments that permit them adaptable hours, longer maternity leave and low maintenance alternatives among different contemplations. This allows them to improves their morale and sense of belongingness, career progression, energised, more fulfillment from work, higher productivity due to peace of mind as their own well-being and that of their families is assured, improved social relationships, btter physical and mental health, making choices about your priorities, rather than sacrifices among them, more leisure time to spend with loved ones, or time for yourself, flexibility to meet family needs, personal obligations, and life responsibilities conveniently and all this leads to work-life balance and job satisfaction.
- While organisations advantage from reducing stress, low absenteeism, low health and recruitment cost, lower staff turnover, more faithful and dedicated employees with high morale and higher productivity

and profitability, cordial working relationships among employees, and between employee and employer, building diversity in skills and personnel, more team work, reduction of loads, improved customers services, it also improves recruitment and retention of employees So, it is necessary for organisations to take up this issue seriously because work-life balance would ensure many benefits.

ROLE OF ORGANISATION IN CREATING BALANCE BETWEEN CAREER AND PERSONAL LIFE OF EMPLOYEES

After getting response from different respondents, researcher felt that there is a need of some programme in organisations which can help in maintaining good work-life balance. Here are some of the steps which can be adopted and make women employee's life simple.

1. Assessment of organisational objectives, both short-term and long-term.
2. Assess the manpower inventory.
3. Find out the need/requirement of employee. Create a policy or guideline to fulfill the need.
4. Set realistic goals. Address fears and apprehension expressed by employees.
5. Make clear the methods of monitoring the hours, productivity and deadlines to employees.
6. Create awareness among all the employees of the company about the benefits and challenges.
7. Monitor and make necessary adjustments.
8. Act on recommendations for modification or for further enhancements.

STRATEGIES FOR REMOVING STRESS DUE TO IMPROPER WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The respondent suggested the following strategies which may put some impact on stress. Stress is one of the major problems of females in India. Many working women in India are not able to balalnce their work life as they are not able to fulfill the commitment on both sides and this leads them to stress. It is urgently required to overcome that stress and beat the depression.

1. The workload of elderly women can be reduced by sharing their household work with the family and official works with the colleagues and subordinates at the workplace.
2. Long working hours increase stress in females. It can be reduced by giving good number of breaks between the working hours or shift timings can be framed to

reduce the working hours.

3. The females can deal with stress by providing the facility to work from home, telecommuting, job sharing, realistic workload, part time employment or by adopting flexible working hours.
4. Child care arrangement is a big issue in front of working mothers. The organisations can help them by opening the crèche in the office premises or making their time flexible to reach the office daily.
5. Family support can be created by explaining them the expectation of the employer from the employee.
6. Women executives are required to set realistic goals, prioritising the things, flexibility, avoiding excessive competition and scheduling one's work properly can give a satisfied work life balance.
7. Yoga, meditation, entertainment, family time, and time for self are some of the ways by which women executives can reduce her stress level.

Thus, in general, stress in married working women is caused due to long working hours, various family and official commitments, harassments, and improper work-life balance. Negative outcome creates stress and it not only affects our behaviour but it also puts impact physiologically and psychologically. Stress can be relieved with the support from institutions and family.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study, it is observed that the majority of the female employees are not able to balance their work and personal life. It is because of long working hours, meetings after working hours and outstation trips. It is very important to plan the work and personal life properly, otherwise it leads to different health issues like stress, depression, insomnia, exhaustion, poor health etc.

Work-life balance can be managed by implementing different female friendly policies. Some of them are

- Family dependents care (childcare and elder-care programmes)
- Flexible or alternative work schedules (flextime, compressed work weeks, telecommuting, job sharing, realistic workload, work at home and part time employment)
- Leaves (paid and unpaid family care leaves, maternity leave and protection for female employees to prevent loss of their jobs)
- Health programmes and insurance plans- medical and hospital insurance, group life insurance

CONCLUSION

For women executives, balancing work-life will always remain a challenge. Women professionals find it difficult to fulfill demands of the family and society and at the same time do justice to the demands of their profession at the workplace. This issue becomes even more pertinent in a country like India, where most of the familial roles are gendered. Planning, prioritising, delegation, and efforts will help women executives to increase the degree of balance in their work life and they will be able to justify the work not only in office but in home too. As one respondent summarised, "Plan, prioritize and schedule as efficiently as possible and don't be afraid of hard work!".

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