

Work- Life Balance of Women Employees – A Challenge for The Employee and The Employer In 21st Century

K.Thriveni Kumari*
Dr.V.Rama Devi**

*Research scholar at JNTU-Hyderabad,
Assistant Professor, Department of
Management Studies, S.E.A. College of
Engineering and Technology, Bangalore-49.

** Professor, School of Management
Studies, Vignan University, Vadlamudi
Guntur District, A.P

Abstract

The concept of work life balance has stemmed from the fact that an individual's work life and personal life may put forth conflicting demands on one another and the demands from both the domains are equally important. Work life balance refers to maintaining the balance between responsibilities at work and at home. Work life balance is one of the most challenging issues being faced by the women employees in the 21st century because of the type of roles they play at home and the spill over of personal life over work life.

The present article is based on the review of literature of previous studies addressing different aspects like conceptual framework of work life balance, work life balance of women employees, factors of work life balance, impact of demographic variables on work-life balance, relationship between work life balance and stress, relationship between work life balance and job satisfaction, absenteeism, organizational commitment, turnover, and organizational policies addressing work-life balance.

Keywords:

Work Life Balance, Women Employees, Challenging.

Introduction

Women struggle with balancing work and personal life demands to a greater extent than their male counterparts (Kamenou, 2008). Compared to men, women were found to undertake the majority of the household duties and therefore more likely to suffer from role overload and moreover women were more likely to have made sacrifices with regard to having children (Bridge, 2009). Some studies have found evidence of gender differences in work-life balance, the predominant observation being that women experience higher work-to-family conflict than men (Berntsson, Lundberg, & Krantz, 1994; Duxbury Higgins, & Lee, 1994; Franakenhaeuser, Lundberg, Fredrikson, Melin, Tuomisto, Myrsten et al., 1989; Greenglass & Burke, 1988; Lundberg, Mardberg, & Frankenhaeuser, 1994, Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Williams & Alliger, 1994). But there are certain studies which have shown contradictory results. A Swiss general population sample (Hämmig & Bauer, 2009) did not show differences in women's and men's work-life balance across the sample. But when occupation was considered differences were found, with women working in full-time or higher occupational positions expressing higher levels of conflict than men.

Conceptual framework of work life balance

Clark (2000) defines 'balance' as "satisfaction and good functioning at work

and at home, with a minimum of role conflict”, stating that “though many aspects of work and home are difficult to alter, individuals can shape to some degree the nature of the work and home domains, and the borders and bridges between them, in order to create a desired balance”.

Work-life balance of women employees

Women employees' personal and professional lives are just like the two sides of the same coin. Compromising one for the other or spending more time pursuing one as opposed to the other can have serious negative repercussions (Nair, 2010). According to Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker and Schaufeli (2005), pressures from the job and family domains are often incompatible, giving rise to imbalance. Previously, the female workforce in India was mainly employed in non-managerial, subordinate or low-profile positions. Now, they occupy almost all categories of positions in the workplace. These changes in work culture have added to women's duties and responsibilities to their family as well as to society (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2009). Therefore, the concept of WLB, along with its implications, is a core issue that must be investigated.

Work family conflicts are likely to increase in international working scenarios which may involve the physical relocation of entire family for female employees due to the combined effect of role and culture novelty (Garris, 2004).

Factors of work life balance

Major factors that affect work family conflict among women executives are harmony in home and office, organisational support, family expectations, parenting effect and professional skills, nature of organisation, education (Sandhu and Mehts, 2006). In another study, five factors that are considered to contribute to work life balance are assessed. Three are of work related and two are family related factors. Work based factors are flexi time, option to work part time and freedom to work from home and the family related factors considered in this survey are availability of child care facility and flexibility to take care of emergencies at home (Niharika and Supriya, 2010).

Role overload, dependent care issues, quality of health, problems in time management and lack of proper social support are the major factors influencing work life balance of women employees in India (Mathew and Panchanatham, 2011). The major factors that affect are education, incoming ratio, professional experience, spouse stress and work load and stressors of professional women's work family conflict (Fan Wei and Liangliang, 2009).

Family and work conflict (FWC) and work family conflict (WFC) are more likely to exert negative influences in the family domain, resulting in lower life satisfaction and greater internal conflict within the family variables such as the size of the family, age of the children, work hours and the level of social support impact the experience of WFC and FWC (Krishna Reddy and Vranda, 2010).

Impact of Demographic variables on work life balance of employees

Socio-economic factors are also found to play a role in work-life balance. Demographic variables such as age, income, experience, marital status influence the women employees in their work-life balance. Various studies were conducted in this direction to

determine the impact of demographic variables on work-life balance of women employees. Changes in the workplace and in employee demographics in the past few decades have led to an increased concern for understanding the boundary and the interaction between employee work and non-work lives (Hochschild, 1997 and Hayman, 2005).

As the age increases there is a juggling in variety of roles that have to play irrespective of having children. Therefore age is one of the constraints for work life balance (Carol Emsile, 2009). Work-life balance captured management's attention in the 1980s, more due to the growing number of women with dependent children entering the workforce (Hamilton et al., 2006). The study concluded that women with dependent children are finding it more difficult to balance their life than those who do not have dependent children. . Women who have dependent children would like to spend most of the time with them and their education (Sanjiv Gupta, 2009). Women are prone to be super mother or super manager in an effort to balance with both career and children and these demands diminish markedly when children reach school age (Sarah Moore, 2007). Being married and having children have an affect with the satisfaction level of work and personal life (Nathalie & Philippe, 2006).

Social support from spouse relatives, friends, supervisors and colleagues can reduce family and work conflict (Geertije, 2006). Never married women without children do experience conflict specifically work to life conflict and often at similar levels to that experienced by other groups of working women. Work life benefits typically provided organisations are frequently regarded as less important and used less often by never married women without children than by other working women (Elizabeth & Judith, 2006).

The major factors - education, income ratio, professional experience, spouse stress and work load are stressors of professional women's work family conflict. More number of women are leaving workforce to stay at home with their children (Cabrera, 2007). 60% of women who quit their jobs were between the age of 25-39, primary child bearing and raising them. (Walker, 2007).

A mixed method study of men working across a range of occupations in several European countries (Halryno, 2009) revealed that participants with higher levels of job security were more likely to outsource life to achieve work-life balance, through employing cleaners or childminders, whereas those with low income, low job security and poorer career opportunities tended to have greater care responsibilities, possibly due to limited access to resources.

Relationship between Stress and Work-life balance

Stress is termed to one of the major factors that affects the work life balance and leads to physical and mental disturbances there by affecting the productivity of the employees. (Aiswarya and Ramasundram, 2012). 87% of Indian women are more stressed than compared to other countries and have not time to relax. Moreover family support of most Indians doesn't seem to be holding up for most of the women (Shefalee Vasudev, 2011).

Women entrepreneurs have suffered or are suffering by three kinds of stresses. There are 1) Gender Pressures

2) Professional pressures 3) Societal pressures. (Shalini Gupta, 2012).

It was found that work stress and work life imbalance correlated with workaholic, regardless of gender. Women may be taking a more career-minded view, while men are becoming more family oriented (Shahnaz & Jamie, 2008). The personal attribute, role conflict and ambiguity were correlated positively with symptoms of psychological distress (Rosemary and Jon, 2010). The greater the interference between work and family, the more women felt emotionally exhausted, less committed and more likely they were to consider changing jobs or opting out of the market (Lucie & Olga, 2009).

Work-life balance of women employees in different sectors

In IT career, women felt pressure of work life balance. Differences also are evident in perception of IT work, mentoring relationships and coping mechanisms relied upon (Monica, 2008). Sachitanand, Rahul (2007), presented work-life balance as the new incentive for women in the IT sector. As more and women are coming into the workforce, child-friendly policies are gaining importance in these organizations. Spector et al (2004) argued that new technologies are creating more demands on many working people. Employees can be reached on a 24/7 basis and this 24/7 access may intrude into their personal time.

Amita Singh (2010), based on their study on work-life balance in IT sector in India suggested that Flex time, home working, child care facilities, option to work part time are facilities that need to be introduced and recommended for building a supportive work environment in the organizations.

Ramadoss (2012) conducted a study in IT enabled services in India and observed that high job control, supervisor support for family-related issues and one's own coping resources were significantly related to positive spillover from work-to-family and the direction of the relationships were positive. In IT work force women says that many women sacrifice their career over family priorities and this is the reason why IT industry has a high proportion of women at lower levels and the number at the top remain relatively much lower (Phandnis, 2013). There are 3 important organisational factors that affect women's retention in the IT field. They are work life balance, organisational climate and mentoring (Eileen & Jeria, 2009).

Work-life balance is a challengeable one even for hospital nurses (Lakshmi and Ramachandran, 2012). Patwa (2011) conducted a study to understand work-life balance in banking & insurance sector in India. The findings revealed that in spite of certain policies & provisions provided by their organizations for helping them to maintain their work-life balance; they still lack in doing so, and are not able to manage their professional life along with their personal life well. It was still observed that the respondents from the banking sector enjoyed better work-life balance as compared to the respondents from the insurance sector.

Gunavathy (2007) in the study among married women employees of BPO companies outlined the causes, consequences of work life imbalance and interventions for work life balance. The study revealed that more than two-third of the respondents reported work-life imbalance primarily on account of work interference with personal life. The factors that were attributed for work life

imbalance were classified as organizational and personal factors. The organizational factors comprised work-related factors, time-related factors and relationship-related factors. The personal factors constituted lack of family support, marital conflicts and frequent change in sleeping patterns. The study also concluded that the three main consequences of work-life imbalance were stress and burnout, ill-health and poor work performance.

Lingard and Francis (2005) observed that the construction industry not only has a culture of working long hours, but also weekend working. The situation is similar in many industries, which include real estate, travel and hospitality. It is quite obvious that people who work in those industries may experience work-life imbalance as spending time on one domain reduces available time for the other, namely, personal life.

Karatepe, Osman, and Mehmet (2006) found that work-family conflict increased emotional exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction among the frontline bank employees; this finding is consonance with past research (Boles and Babin, 1996; Hyman and Summers, 2004). Female faculty member's current employment household management is influenced by the complexity of their family and employment career (Karla.M.Damiano, 2006).

Relationship between work-life balance and variables such as absenteeism, turnover, job satisfaction and organisational commitment

The benefits of work-life balance initiatives, for employers, are better talent attraction, enhanced productivity, better talent engagement, reduced work stress, reduced absenteeism, reduced costs, better motivation, employer branding, talent retention and efficient work practices (Byrne, 2005; Pocock, 2005; and McPherson, 2007). The home-base work was linked to higher levels of performance and lower absenteeism (Kopelman et al., 2006). Arthur (2003) reports a positive relationship between the announcement of organizational work-life benefits and shareholders returns. Work-based social support was positively associated with job satisfaction, organisational commitment and career accomplishment; personal social support was also associated with job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Job satisfaction, physical health problem, work life conflict and turnover intentions are some identified outcome factors of work life balance of women employees. (Sang and Dainty, 2007).

No demographic or family variables are correlated with organizational commitment and neither did organizational commitment differ significantly between women with dependent children and childless women or women with non dependent children (Helen Lingard and Jasmine Lin, 2004). Jyothi & Jyothi (2012) opine that human resources policies designed to help employees balance their work and family lives can also affect turnover, performance, absenteeism, organizational commitment and employee willingness to go the extra mile on behalf of their employers.

Work family conflict is an inter role conflict that has arisen due to conflicting roles required by the organization and family. This issue is of great importance as far as employee's performance and ultimately organizational performance is concerned. Sometimes severe contradictory roles resulted in turnover of most precious asset of the organization that is human resource (Rabia Aslam,

2011).

As observed more percentage of the women are leaving the workforce to stay at home with their children and some had stopped working at some point in their career for numerous reasons of which the basic reason is finding difficult to balance their lives, barriers that make difficult to move across organisations (Elizabeth, 2007). Turnover intent was predicted only by organisational variables as perceived by the individual and not individual differences (Patricia, 2006). Organisations that seek to recruit talented professional must provide opportunities for advancement and balance in- order to retain them (Nancy, 2005).

Work-life balance is one of the factors that affect women employees' retention in the company (Trauth, Quesenberry and Huang, 2009). Balancing work and family has overtaken benefits and compensation as a key factor in employee job satisfaction (Lewison, 2006).

It is important for the organisation to understand problems that impact on women in working life that can disturb their job satisfaction, their performance and willingness to give their best to the organisation (Makela, 2005). Lack of balance between work and non-work activities is related to reduced psychological and physical well-being (Frone *et al.*, 1997; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Ma; Felstead *et al.*, 2002). Empirical research in the UK (Hyman *et al.*, 2003) indicated that intrusion of work demands into personal life (e.g., working during the week-end) was related to the reports of heightened stress and emotional exhaustion for employees. Furthermore, employees perceived that intrusion of work obligations into their personal lives negatively affected health (Hyman *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, the participants made a clear connection between problems with work-life balance and withdrawal behaviours, including turnover and non-genuine sick absence. Work -life programmes offer a win-win situation for employers and employees (R.J.Blomme & Tramp 2010).

Quality of work life is being used these days by the organizations as a strategic tool to attract and retain the employees and more importantly to help them to maintain work-life balance with equal attention on performance and commitment at work (Shalini and Bhawna, 2012).

Organisational policies addressing work-life balance of employees

Strategies for structurally reducing work family conflict were manipulated on 3 basic strategies

1. Role elimination
2. Role reduction
3. Role sharing (Louis.M.Shelton, 2006).

Employers need to take account of changing orientation in work and life stage in formulating effective recruitment

and retention strategies for high qualified workers (Nick Wilton & Kate Purcell, 2010).

Organisational support offered by the organisation in the form of HR practices does influence work life balance that is experienced by the employees. If employees experience high level of organisational support in the form of benefits then they exhibit less work life conflict and so more work life balance is experienced

(Shripra, 2013).

Multinational organisations are found to have provided more work life balance practices. In Indian government companies, interventions to protect employees from exploitation work place terms and conditions are made by employers. In some cases, employer's pragmatic concerns for their employees' health, safety and welfare can be considered as the major reasons behind introduction of such policies like canteen facilities and employee friendly office interior, programs for family and children of employees. Yoga and stress management workshops are conducted on a regular basis as a part of employee well- being (Karamvir Singh and Priyanka, 2013). The work and family outcomes such as role interference, stress strain and life satisfaction are related to several strategies and orientation (Louise Heslop, 2005).

The conventional package of family-friendly public policies involves benefits designed to reduce the tensions between work and family life such as parental leave, family services and day care which would harmonize to balance work and family life (Neil Gilbert, 2005). The impact of work related injury on women's ability to meet the physical recovery or job security is to educate them in ergonomic techniques related to vocational as well as vocational tasks which would be beneficial for them to manage family life career (Maynard. 2005).

Family friendly policies at work place are becoming a challenge for the employers to provide. They commonly refer to policies that enable employees to balance the demands of paid work and personal life which can be in the form of workplace flexibility or work time flexibility (Subramaniam, 2010). Flexible working practices can enable child care for women employees beyond the working time (Doris Ruth and Axel, 2009). Leisure time, social networks, sports and personal confidence play a major role to balance their work and family life (Fischimayr and Lollinger , 2010).

There is a positive influence of work life balance policies and practices on women's career advancement into senior management positions only in the case of payment of additional amount for maternity leave (Caroline Straub 2007). Achieving work family balance can be improved through training (Eugenia Petridou & Niki, 2008). By offering work place flexibilities, employers can accommodate the diverse goals and objectives of their employees. Moreover organisations should build loyalty thereby improving retention of key staff members (Katheri Hudson, 2007). HR department of the organisation and the employees together must work out strategies to help attain work-life balance which makes the organisation the happiest place to work in (Priscilla, 2011).

Many women encounter difficulties in the course of their occupational career linked to organisation aspects, informal norms related to management positions and social and cultural representations attached to leadership (Ceccile & Sophie, 2009). If women want to be a good mother and have a bright career there should be better managing of work practices that are imposed by the whole team and adapt their work life balance (Claire Dambrin, 2008).

Policies centred on extending parental leave and child care provision promotes a greater flexibility in employment (Lan Day, 2006). Mothers can achieve a balance between their family

responsibilities and the demands of paid work through flexible working practices and child care provisions (Shan Ashton, 1994). Flexible work arrangements do not support working mothers seeking advancement (Lorra Brown, 2010). The flexible work schedules and work at home is more common among women, married and parents. Therefore organisational policies should be focused to spread flexible work arrangements more towards those who value it and back it. (Lonnie Golden, 2008).

The increased job role autonomy, fewer hours worked, and increased managerial support are associated with less overall work interference with family. Managers can play an essential role in helping reduced work interference with family (Tracy & August, 2006). Managerial women reports that organisational values which are more supportive for work personal life balance has a greater job and career satisfaction, less work stress, less intention to quit, greater family satisfaction, fewer psychosomatic symptoms and more positive emotional well being (Ronald. J. Burke, 2001).

Work conditions are found to play a larger role than family characteristics for work family conflict. Therefore organisational policies should be emphasised on improving work conditions which are likely to have major leverage in reducing work family conflict (Duncan Gallie, 2009). As more women enter the work force, the need for counselling to help these women explore how work and family issues influence career choices will increase (Sullivan and Sherry, 1992). Effectiveness of work life balance initiatives are helping women to progress to senior management (Liz Doherty, 2004). Family policy, welfare state provision and labour market structure behave jointly to determine distinct models of work family balance and the financial consequences associated with them (Frances and Patricia, 2007).

Conclusion

Work-life balance initiatives designed to help employees balance their work and personal lives are not only an option, but also a necessity for many employers today. There is a need for organizations to adopt human resource strategies and policies that accommodate the work-life needs of a diverse workforce in the current business environment (Manisha Purohit, 2013). Understanding of some of the choices and constraints of women might lead to improve organisational policies for women to better accommodate work life balance issues (Adelina Broad Bridge, 2010).

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