



A STUDY ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Work life balance is a term to describe the balance between an individual's personal life and professional life. A healthy work-life balance assumes great significance for working women particularly in the current context in which both, the family and the workplace have posed several challenges and problems for women. The dynamics of the work environment have exerted enormous pressure on working women as they need to cope with virtually two full time jobs – one at the office and the other at home.

KEY WORDS: *Women employee, work life balance*

INTRODUCTION

The history of women in India is distinguished. In the transitioning society like India, where the traditional roles of women as homemakers and caretakers are deeply entrenched. The women of India have always experienced hindrances comparative to men. Social, cultural and religious factors have reduced the number of women entering the job market. Now in modern India there are lots of changes in women's life. Present life of the working women is quite challenging. They face lots of problem regarding their personal and professional life because of which they are not able to give proper time to their family and to the organization. Today work-life balance has become an increasingly pervasive concern for all women working in any sector.

A good balance in life and work can play a vital role for attaining personal and organizational goals. The imbalances of work and family life have an adverse impact in the personal life of working people, therefore, maintaining a balance between work and life is very vital. There is no question that compared to the earlier decade, women today are better educated and hold more jobs worldwide. The influx of women entering the job market has brought about a certain level of change in public attitudes and promoted acceptance of women's professional potential. Work life balance means the balance between the personal and professional life of the working employees. A woman in professional life is very important domain of discussion among researchers in the last few decades.

EVOLUTION OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

The concept of work-life balance is not new to our generation or unique to our profession. The idea that one should limit the amount of time spent at work dates back to manufacturing laws of the late 1800s when the work hours of women and children were restricted.

The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1980s brought work-life balance back to the forefront. To accommodate women in the work force, flexible working schedule and maternity leave were popularized. Initially, this concept was only for women, expected to both hold down careers and continue primary management of the family and home. Soon, these benefits and ideas were expanded to encompass professional men and women. The idea that people would want to have balance between their professional and personal lives, more flexibility in managing their schedule, and presumptively increase satisfaction from work *and* life became a key concept in the late 21st century.

Work-life balance means something a little different to everyone. Over the years, the knowledge and approach of work-life balance has been constantly evolving, and it might be helpful for employers to identify the difference in opinion among the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials.

Baby Boomers and Work-Life Balance

Born between 1945 and 1960, around the time of World War II, this generation was exposed to a lot of hardships at a very young age. Making a decent living was no small task, and in turn, this generation craved stability in the workplace and valued the opportunity for employment.

Gen X and Work-Life Balance

As the children of the Baby Boomers, Gen Xers (typically born around the years of 1961 and 1980) grew up witnessing the long hours and poor work-life balance of their parents. Many Gen Xers were exposed to the effect such a relationship with work had on the family unit. As a result, this generation put more emphasis on creating work-life balance in their own lives. Many of these employees prioritize spending time with their family and were better than the Baby Boomers. Because of this, Gen Xers tend to think of work-life balance as a necessary prerequisite to a company of employment.

Millennials and Work-Life Balance

Being a millennial comes with its fair share of stereotypes. Generally, for those born between the years of 1981 and 2000, work ethic is thought to be secondary, or 'just a part of life.' The millennials were more interested in finding a career path that will support their "lifestyle", which in this context means their life outside of work.

Meaning of Work Life Balance

Work-life balance is a term commonly used to describe the **balance** that a working individual needs between time allocated for **work** and other aspects of **life**. Areas of **life** other than **work-life** can include, but it is not limited to personal interests, **family** and social or leisure activities.. Work-life balance refers to the level of prioritisation between personal and professional activities in an individual's life and the level to which activities related to their job are present in the home.

Wikipedia defines it as "a concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) and "lifestyle" (health, pleasure, leisure, family, and spiritual development/mediation).

"Work Life Balance is the extent to which an individual equally engaged in-an equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role purpose three components of work-life balance i.e. Time balance, Involvement balance, Satisfaction balance"

- **Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw,2003.**

"Work Life Balance, the quality relationship between paid work and unpaid responsibilities is critical for success in today's competitive business world."- **Ioan Lazar et al, 2010.**

ROLES PLAYED BY WOMEN

Traditionally, women have been looked upon as nurturers and care givers and assigned all roles related to maintaining and managing a family. Men perceive themselves as breadwinners and society also expects them to perform work roles to earn and support the family. However, the nature of work-force has been changing and the percentage of men as wage earners and women as housewives has been rapidly declining. In urban India, the percentage of dual-earner couples is gradually increasing and for most women and men today, their work environment and the family have become the two important institutions in life. Changes in the workforce are accompanied by changes in values, creating a new emphasis on the balance between work-life and family life . Work-life balance assumes great significance for women as they

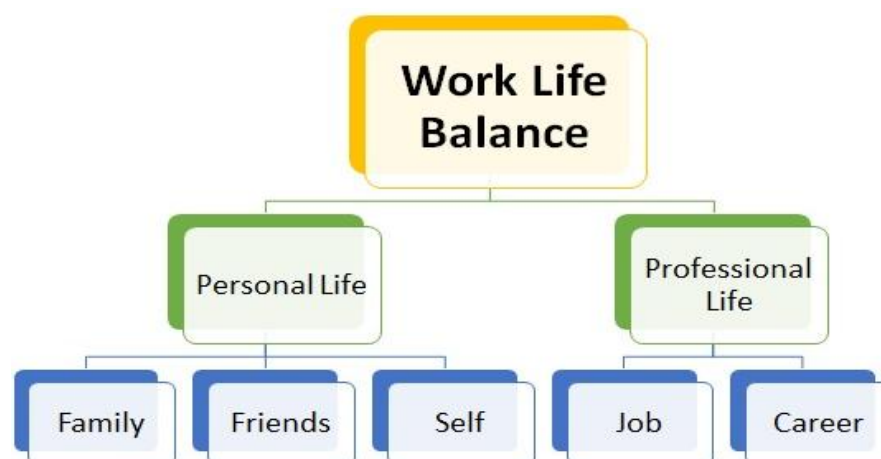
are virtually in two full time jobs - one at home and the other at office. Working mothers often have to challenge perceptions and stereotypes that evolve as a working woman becomes a working mother... When a woman seeks a position of power within an organisation, she must consider the toll on other facets of her life, including hobbies, personal relationships and family. Most executive jobs require a substantial amount of time and effort, which a working mother may not be able to devote due to family obligations. So also, it may be nearly impossible for a working mother in a top management position to be the primary care giver of her child. Women often find it more difficult to maintain balance on account of the competing pressures of work and demands at home. Working women have to carefully handle their personal balance and skilfully blend their roles, so as to optimise their potential in all quadrants of life.

Professional women in the 21st century have the exceptional challenge of balancing the multiple tasks associated with their homemaker and work roles, namely, fulfilling the responsibilities of mother, caregiver, spouse and employee simultaneously. It is also clear that women's ability to balance these roles has a direct bearing on their physical and mental well-being, as well as their career performance and success. It is more difficult than ever to manage a balanced commitment to one's work and personal life. As a result of organisations being faced with heightened competition globally, employees experience increasing performance pressures. The hours spent in the workplace, especially for managers and professionals, are increasing. High performance organisations have raised their expectations regarding time, energy and work commitment. The dual role women have to play makes it difficult for them to meet these higher organisational expectations .They are thus faced with a unique challenge to balance the competing expectations of work and home, along with all their other roles.

IMPORTANCE OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

A successful career is important to many people, but it's also important to maintain a healthy balance between competing priorities in our jobs and personal lives. In an increasingly connected world it can be especially difficult to separate the two.

Work life balance is extremely important for women and increases their motivation to work for the company. The below image depicts a work life balance scenario, where a woman has to balance her life between personal (family, friends & self) and professional (job, career) commitments.



BENEFITS OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

There are several advantages of work life balance. Some of them are as follows:

1. Work life balance increases the motivation of women and helps them perform better at job.
2. It helps women to relieve their stress as they can spend leisure time with their near and dear ones.
3. Companies can maximise productivity from a woman who is rejuvenated and refreshed as compared to others.
4. Healthy lifestyles can be maintained by having a work life balance. This includes a good diet, regular exercises for women.
5. Women who are highly motivated can help the business grow as they are more attached to their job and careers.
6. Work life balance helps the overall well being of women.
7. Work life balance attains greater enjoyment in job.
8. Work life balance helps in building strong and healthier relationship which helps the women to reach greater success in achieving goals.

FACTORS AFFECTING WORK LIFE BALANCE FOR WOMEN

Burden of excessive work: Working women are often confronted with tasks involving children, home, in-laws, parents and their social circle. To add to this they must also take up multiple roles in their personal lives. With the increasing demands on the job, working women have to spend long hours of work and sometimes even carry their work home. Therefore majority of them are burdened with excessive work in both their personal and work spaces. This is a contributing factor to work life imbalance and may lead to conflict.

Interference of work with family life: Women's work is interfered with family life. This may be attributed to the fact that mostly work hours are not limited to 7 or 8 hours a day and the private sector employees spend 12-16 hours at work. This leaves them with very little time for family. It is evident that women who are employed in the private sector, there may be interference of work with family life due to long hours spent in completing official work.

Fulfill others' expectations: A large majority of women are working under pressure to fulfil other's expectations. As working women are constantly juggling between two full time jobs, taking multiple roles in both domains, there is a lot of work pressure resulting in work life conflict. While, there is a lot of expectation from family to fulfil social roles, the organisation also expects them to perform effectively. Both domains expect the working women to do full justice to all their roles thereby exerting tremendous stress and strain. In trying to fulfil others' expectations, working women are often left with very little space for themselves to pursue their personal interests.

Longer work hours: Working women have to put in longer hours of work as they need to compete with their male counterparts in their work domain so as to remain in the race for advancement and promotions. In the Indian context, women remain the sole caretakers of children and older dependents which will entail longer hours of work at home thus jeopardizing their work life balance. It is observed that working women are left with hardly any time to pursue personal interests.

No time for oneself: Women have no time for themselves. Many women have to commute long distances everyday to work. This steals their precious time that could be constructively spent for their personal growth or spiritual pursuits. Working women in India are not exempt from fulfilling their social obligations. As women are aware that certain social obligations must be met whether they are working or not, they may be consciously setting aside the time to fulfill such obligations. The younger generation Indian men today are more tolerant of non-traditional lifestyles of the working women in their homes, they are still fairly conservative and expect women to manage household work and childrearing tasks. Often, working women are expected to make career sacrifice by restricting themselves to limited work at the workplace. This may cause anger and frustration which has the potential to spill over to the various roles women play in their work and family lives.

CONSEQUENCES OF POOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

High level of stress and anxiety : Working women not only have to manage the tasks involved in bearing and raising children but also have to deal with high levels of anxiety in having to compete in a man's world. Besides, they have to constantly juggle between the family and work preventing them from aspiring to progress in their career beyond a particular level. Some working women may choose to prioritize career over family. In such cases, they may experience frustration and guilt in compromising on the time to be spent with family. In either situation, working women are forced to make a difficult choice or compromise resulting in stress and anxiety thereby adversely affecting their health .

Disharmony : Indian societal norms prescribe that women must perform certain household chores whether they are employed or not. In case of working women, their work responsibilities may prevent them from conforming to societal norms causing displeasure among family members resulting in discord and disharmony at home. Unwillingness on the part of other family members to share work exerts pressure on the working women .Moreover, the tendency to belittle a workingwoman's career and conferring a higher status as the primary breadwinner's role for the man, results in the dumping of all household responsibilities upon the woman. This biased treatment of working women results in imbalance which could lead to frustration and disharmony at home.

Job burnout: The working women who work under middle level management have to lead teams and fulfill higher level responsibilities. At this stage of their lives, they are also likely to be engaged in the upbringing of teenage children and caring for elderly dependants. All this exerts tremendous strain as, often the working women are torn between the demands of their personal and professional lives. In the workspace, they need to compete with younger colleagues and keep themselves updated of developments in their areas of work. Beyond a point, it becomes very difficult for working women to cope with the pressures at work. Many of them are also affected by deteriorating health which further aggravates their problems both at work and at home.

Inability to realize full potential: Most Indian women are not encouraged to prioritize career over family. Therefore quite often they forsake their chances for career advancement in the early stages of their work lives. In the process, they lose many opportunities and by the time they are in a position to accept greater responsibilities, no such

position may be available. Moreover assignments of repetitive and monotonous nature assigned to women also inhibit their creativity and prevents them from realizing their full potential. This builds frustration and resentment among working women which impacts their various roles causing imbalance. Thus it may be inferred that poor work-life balance inhibits ability of working women to realize their full potential. As women play multiple roles, very often, the roles overlap preventing them from delineating their workspace from family space. The working women therefore, make compromises in one or the other space in order, to manage situations momentarily. Therefore, they are unable to realize their full potential in both domains. Therefore, it can be inferred that working women experience job burnout and high levels of stress and anxiety as a result of poor work life balance. Their inability to realize their full potential both at work and home can also be frustrating causing resentment and negative emotions towards their immediate environment. This could be causing disharmony at home thereby affecting their quality of life.

STEPS TO IMPROVE WORK LIFE BALANCE

Spend some time reflecting on current priorities in your professional and personal life. Consider what you should be doing and what you want to be doing. With this in mind, try these tips to achieve greater work-life balance:

Set boundaries: There will almost always be work you can do to fill time, so it's important to define clear boundaries that will help you keep your work and personal life separate. Whether it's not checking emails out of office hours or scheduling dedicated break time throughout your day, do your best to respect the boundaries you set for yourself.

Manage your time: This goes for both in and out of the office. Priorities the tasks and events that are most important or time sensitive, always focusing on the essentials first. Is there anything you can do to streamline your work responsibilities? Can you save some time by eliminating unproductive meetings or delegating minor tasks? Are you spending too much time watching TV when you could get some social time or reading in? Can you do more to limit distractions or interruptions?

Take breaks: It can be tempting to work through your lunch or break time when you're busy. Not only is it this counterproductive, but the quality of your output will start to suffer too. Do your best to take some time for yourself every day; whether that be reading, catching up with friends or going for a walk. You'll come back re-energised and more focused.

Take time off: When was your extended break? Vacations are fun, but you don't need to hop on a plane to get some much-needed rest and relaxation. Use your annual leave to recharge so you don't burn out.

Invest in personal development: Work isn't the only place to learn and develop. Devote some time to learning a new language, volunteering, taking up a hobby or mastering a new skill. Having interests outside of work will make you a more rounded and interesting individual.

Know when to say no: Do your best to avoid accepting tasks or invitations because you feel obligated or guilty. You'll find that you have more time for activities that are meaningful for you.

Advocate for change: There's nothing wrong with respectfully sharing your suggestions for increasing the

support for work-life balance in your workplace. This could be around flexible working, wellness programs, encouraging healthy activities in the office or setting more reasonable expectations around communication outside of office hours.

1. Creating a work leisure plan: Where an individual has to schedule his tasks, and divide time appropriately so that he has allocated appropriate time to his work and his career development goals and at the same time allotted time for leisure and personal development. Employees also use a compressed work week plan to build a balance.

2. Leaving out activities that waste time and energy: Individual should judiciously avoid wasteful activities which demand large time and energy and in return not produce output for either the work life or the leisure life. Effective time management can help an employee be less stressed.

3. Outsourcing work: Delegate or outsource time consuming work to other individuals.

4. Set enough time for relaxation: Relaxation provides better work life balance, and tends to improve productivity on the professional or the work front along with providing ample scope to develop the life part of the balance.

5. Prioritizing work: Often employees do not give priority to work and end up doing a lot of work at the last minute. Better planning can help employees save unnecessary time delays, which can be utilized by employees for personal work.

CONCLUSION

The study of work life balance presented in this conceptual paper is an attempt to understand factors affecting work life balance of working women and consequences of poor work life balance. In the Indian context, women remain primarily responsible for their family and career is rarely given top priority. This paper shows that burden of excessive work, the need to fulfil others' expectations and not having time for themselves are the prime factors affecting work life balance of working women. As a consequence women suffer from job burn-out, experience high levels of stress and anxiety, are unable to realize their full potential and also do not enjoy harmonious family life. Informal discussions with working women revealed that those who had family support and flexible work schedule enjoyed better work life balance. It also provides insights into finding solutions to maintain healthy work life balance.

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