

Work-life Balance of Working Women

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance, a concept popularized in modern times, is the way people juggle and balances the numerous responsibilities at work place and at home, while also making time for personal or recreational activities. This study tries to understand the concept of work-life balance in the context of working women. The research is a descriptive study that is qualitative in nature and uses Multi-Stage Sampling and Random Sampling for selecting respondents, it uses an interview schedule for collecting data. The balance of work and home life presents working women with a variety of challenges, each influenced by a unique set of circumstances. Working women often face obstacles including stress, unrealized expectations, and a lack of resources, which negatively affects their general wellbeing. These difficulties are made worse by financial limitations and stress brought on by technology; major worries include work spill over and availability of employment at all times.

Keywords: Responsibilities, Working Women, Work-life balance, Work-life conflict, Work-life Integration

INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance was never considered an important idea or concept, today work-life balance goes far beyond than just a concept or a myth, with millennial's entering into the work force, work-life balance is an ideal goal and an aim for every industry who wish to retain and promote the well-being of their employees. The concept of work-life balance incorporates with it the relation it has with workers' job satisfaction, work conflict and role conflict. Life domain entails multiple roles where numerous demands are placed on the individual often resulting in conflict (Kahn. et. al., 1964).

Work-life balance is a daily effort to make time for family, friends, community participation, spirituality, personal growth, self-care, and other personal activities, in addition to the demands of the workplace (Heathfield, 2017). With the changing trend brought about by modernization and industrialization where women are entering into the workforce, major changes that are visible or not are occurring at either a rapid speed or a slower pace. These changes if not properly handled can escalate into a major problem that can affect both the worker and the family. Work-life balance is all about integrating demands and resources of all the roles without a dysfunctional conflict (Warrier 2013). The dilemma faced by many working women in adjusting these competing demands in life and work without exhausting and conflicting between the roles has cause a lot of stress and tension. A state where an individual manages real or potential conflict between different demands on his or her needs for well-being and self-fulfilment is referred as work-life balance (Clutterbuck, 2003).

Work-life balance, far from being some kind of perfected equilibrium, is about making deliberate, incremental and intentional choices aimed at having more control in life. Thinking of it in this way and taking the time to do something about it can make a person happier, healthier, and more productive. In the end, the pursuit of balance can itself be exhausting. For people who work a lot of hours, even trying to achieve work-life balance can be a source of imbalance itself. Work-life balance is a satisfactory level of 'fit' between the multiple roles in a person's life.

Historically, for Indians and Indian society, 'work is worship' and that has reflected in the way Indians have worked. Asians, particularly Indians, are considered to be very hardworking and willing to work for long hours. But that is changing. It's not all doom and gloom, though, when it comes to working conditions in India. In fact, India is being proactive in trying to help its workers achieve work-life balance. India is one of the top five nations in the world to offer paternity leave to its workers. And maternity leave can be extended up to six months (in the U.S. new mothers are guaranteed up to 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave). (Parris, 2016) In this respect, India is trying to make things easier for its working parents. However, with the growing population and the pressure of work, the stress and strain involved in balancing between work and life can become more challenging. It is estimated that an additional 300 million people will be living in India's already overflowing cities by 2050. Despite the fact that India is also one of the world's fastest expanding economies, it will definitely put an additional strain in ensuring a satisfactory work-life balance. According to a survey of 2,000 working professionals, more than half of Indian working professionals rate their current work-life

balance average to terrible and collectively, 67% of India's working professionals either sometimes, often or always thinks about work when not at work (Basu, 2019).

Objectives

1. To find out the opinion of Work-life balance among the respondents.
2. To find out the Work-life conflicts faced by the respondents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Opinion on Work-life Balance:

Brough et. al. (2008) considers the evidence as to why work-life balance should not simply be considered to be an individual's concern. Singh & Gowgi (2015) also agrees that issues pertaining to work/life balance and stress and their redressal are not only responsibility of an employer. Vanitha (2015) points out that managing work-life balance is channelized by only the psychological makeup of an individual's especially women and that is purely an attitude based issue. Abendroth & Dulk (2011) however argue that emotional support and instrumental support in the workplace have a complementary relationship. Emotional workplace support appears to have a complementary relationship and that both are needed for a high level of work. Reddy et. al. (2010) emphasized the need to formulate guidelines for the management of WFCs at organizational level as it is related to job satisfaction and performance of the employees.

Fagnani (2011) demonstrate that improving work/family life balance requires more than a simple reduction of hours worked for parents to feel comfortable with their work and family life balance. Gornick & Hegewish (2010) indicates that other conditions are required, such as a conscientious organization of working time that is compatible with family needs and childcare arrangements. Mazerolle et. al. (2015) found out that organizational factors influence WLC and WLB. Supervisors should support and encourage the concept of job sharing, whereby colleagues help one another when feasible to provide opportunities to attend personal and family obligations and outings. Muhammad (2015) flexible work arrangement influence employee performance.

Increase in flexible work arrangement would positively influence employee performance. Kumar & Devi (2015) says that striking a healthy work-life balance is imperative for all the employees irrespective of the industry to which they belong. It is the joint responsibility of the employer and the employees to ensure strong work-life balance that can bring in fruitful results to organization as well as employees also. Abendroth & Dulk (2011) stated that work-life balance satisfaction has a direct and moderating effect and the results suggests that support has a direct and buffering effect on work-life balance satisfaction, emotional support, i.e. having a good relationship with family and friends and little or no spousal conflict regarding domestic chores, has a positive impact on work-life balance satisfaction.

Work-life Conflict:

Ryan et. al. (2009) indicated that as role ambiguity and work hours worked per week increased the level of work-family conflict increased, and role ambiguity was the strongest contributor to work-family conflict. Some role conflict has a negative influence on, but too many roles can be detrimental. Ryan et. al. (2009) also indicated that role conflict is negatively related to work-family Conflict, which implies that multiple roles are actually good for a better balance between work and life. Mathew & Panchanatham (2011) stated that work interference in personal life (WIPL) and personal life interference in work (PLIW) are quite, leading to role overload, work-life imbalance and overall stress.

Reddy et. al. (2010) indicates that dual role demands and expectation from working women by husbands was significantly related to high WFC and FWC among the working women, Family-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. Mehta & Kundnani (2015) found out that Work-life balance and stress affects employee's satisfaction.

Kaur & Mahajan (2017) pointed out that there exists a positive correlation between work-life balance and job satisfaction.

Melissa et. al. (2010) identified cultural imperatives for "good" parenting include spending time with children and ensuring that they do well in life. Several authors pointed out that gender differences in parenting practices remain strong remain strong, with mothers more likely than fathers to spend time with children (Bianchiet. al., 2006), to orchestrate children's leisure time to cultivate their talents (Lareau, 2003), and to regard themselves as accountable for ensuring children's well-being (Hays, 1996) Singh (2004) stated that given mothers' greater responsibility for developing children's talents and for overcoming children's problems, time with children and satisfaction with how children are doing may matter more for mothers' sense of balance than for fathers' sense of balance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study and Population:

The study is a descriptive study and it is qualitative in nature. The population of the present study comprises of the working women population in Shillong City.

Sample:

Determination of the sample size for the study has been done through the sample size formula by Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Formula (1970), the total number of samples to be taken for the purpose of this study is 381.

From the population of the study, it is seen that Shillong Urban Agglomeration is divided into three categories of Urban Settings; the Shillong Municipality having 27 wards, the Shillong Cantonment having 7 wards and 10 Census towns.

Using Multi-Stage Sampling, the researcher intends to randomly select 4 wards / census towns from each urban setting. Thus, the total number selected will be 12 from all the 3 urban settings.

Tools used

The researcher developed a standardized interview schedule according to the objectives of the study for collection of data. The tool is structured in nature. The data collected through a face-to-face interaction with each respondent.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Objective – 1 - To find out the opinion of Work-life balance among the respondents

- Among working women, 35.9% prioritize treating every aspect of life equally, 1.3% emphasize no spillover of roles, 25.5% focus on setting boundaries, while 37.2% prioritize and deal with things based on importance, with a significant majority opting for the latter.
- When asked about aspects outside of work, 59.4% of working women prioritize family commitments, 13% prioritize leisure, 21.4% emphasize social engagement, and 6.3% focus on personal pursuits, with a significant majority highlighting family commitment.
- Among employed women, 40.6% stress the importance of self-care, 18% emphasize avoiding overworking, 9.4% focus on reducing family stress, and 32% rely on daily planners, with a significant majority highlighting the importance of giving importance to oneself for achieving realistic work-life balance.
- Of working women, 54.2% identified 'having clear-cut responsibilities at home and at work' as crucial, with a significant majority opting for this option.
- For working women, 64.6% identified 'time' as the most important factor, showing a significant preference for time management in maintaining work-life balance.
- Among working women, 47.1% identified 'time' as the most influential hindrance, with a significant majority facing challenges related to time management.
- Of working women, 50% identified 'dual responsibilities' as the primary factor, with 'household chores' at 24.5%, 'child care' at 21.4%, and 'elderly care' at 4.2%, showing a significant preference for 'dual responsibilities.'
- When asked about the benefits, 50.3% of working women mentioned it helps 'reduce stress and enhance mental health', while 22.9% cited it as 'fuel for productivity', 16.7% as 'helps prevent burnout', and 10.2% as 'enhancing physical health', with a significant majority emphasizing stress reduction and mental health enhancement.
- "Unclear responsibilities" was cited as a key indicator by 42.2% of working women, followed by "personal and professional space entangle," at 34.1%, "a person's patience is wearing thin," at 16.7%, and "persistent fatigue," at 7%. This indicates that a sizable majority of working women are focused on "unclear responsibilities."
- Working women prioritize various areas, with 11.5% focusing on work, 16.4% on family, 22.1% on self, and 50% considering all aspects equally important.
- Burnout affects working women differently, with 33.6% experiencing physical exhaustion, 11.7% emotional fatigue, 23.7% excessive stress, and 31% mental fatigue highlighting a significant majority in physical exhaustion.
- Employed women prioritize different aspects, with 34.4% valuing equal time in each domain, 5.2% prioritizing leisure time, 29.2% quality time with family, and 31.3% a well-paying job.
- To achieve work-life balance, 46.4% of working women emphasize realistic expectations, 14.6% advocate for set work hours, 15.4% suggest defining roles to avoid spillover, and 23.7% recommend prioritizing time management.

Objective – 2 - To find out the Work-life conflicts faced by the respondents

- Working women report various responsibilities causing conflict, with 14.1% citing care for children, 47.7% household chores, 9.4% personal care, 13% care for elders, and 15.9% social responsibility, with household chores significantly prevalent.

- When it comes to life conflicts, 33.3% of working women attribute issues to hours of work, 11.7% to overtime work, 12.8% to too much workload, 21.4% to the nature of work, and 20.8% to pressure from employers/superiors, with hours of work being the most significant factor.
- Employed women spend varying durations at work, with 57.3% spending 5-7 hours, 2.6% below 3 hours, 8.3% 3-5 hours, 4.2% over 12 hours, and 27.6% 7-12 hours, with 5-7 hours being the most common.
- Regarding commute times, 29.4% of working women take 10-15 minutes, 43.8% take 15-30 minutes, 18% take 30 minutes to 1 hour, and 8.9% take 1-2 hours, with 15-30 minutes being the most frequent.
- When it comes to lunch, 71.6% of working women bring lunch packed by self, 7.3% visit tea stalls, 6.5% use the canteen, and 14.6% have their lunch packed by their spouse/family, with lunch packed by self being the most common practice.
- Women in workforce have access to various types of leaves, with 35.9% able to take casual leaves, 10.2% earned leaves, 31% sick leaves, 4.9% maternity leave, and 18% cited to avail all of the mentioned types of leave, with casual leaves being the most common.
- For working women, consequences of taking leaves vary, with 29.9% facing deduction of available leaves, 6% wage deduction, 16.9% compensating for the day, and 47.1% experiencing no consequences in majority.
- Additional benefits for working women include retirement benefits (23.4%), medical reimbursement (15.9%), professional development (24%), and for 36.7%, there are no additional benefits, with a significant majority reporting no additional benefit.
- Among working women, 48.2% spend 2-3 hours, 0.8% spend 0-1 hour, 9.9% spend more than 4 hours, 20.3% spend 1-2 hours, and 20.8% spend 3-4 hours, with a significant majority spending 2-3 hours on domestic activities.
- Amidst employed women, 22.1% spend quality time with themselves, 19% with their child/children, 40.4% with their spouse and other family members, 14.3% with friends, and 4.2% do not spend quality time with anyone, with a significant majority prioritizing quality time with spouse and family members.
- Working women deal with misunderstandings by 27.9% accepting differences, 6% ignoring the situation, 10.2% not having a specific resolution, 28.6% through adjustment, and 27.3% through forgiveness, with a significant majority opting for adjustment.
- Of working women, 33.1% experience stress, 3.9% report no consequences, 23.7% have a confused mind, 16.7% face conflicts in performing work roles, and 22.7% feel anger, with a significant majority citing stress as a consequence.
- In the context of employed women, the main factors causing conflict include working overtime (31.8%), working on Sundays and holidays (23.7%), and bringing work home (26.8%), with working overtime being the most significant factor.
- The majority of working women (50%) report that family members assist with household activities, followed by help/maid (30.2%), spouse (12.5%), and children (7.3%).
- When it comes to the major share of household activities, 49% of working women indicate they handle it themselves, while others report spouses (7%), mothers (21.9%), children (10.4%), or help/maids (11.7%).
- A significant number of working women (32.6%) report having no spouse, while others share responsibilities such as grocery shopping (15.6%), household chores (8.9%), taking care of children (8.1%), or cooking (5.2%).
- Among working women, 19.8% cite family expectations, 31.5% work roles and conflict, 24% work overload, 15.4% family responsibilities overload, and 9.4% health issues, with a significant majority citing work roles and responsibilities as the primary pressure point.
- Women in workforce experience various stressors, with 17.7% feeling irritable at home due to work stress, 14.8% irritable with others outside work, 9.6% irritable at work due to home stress, 31% experiencing all, and 26.8% none, with a significant majority experiencing all stressors.
- Amidst employed women, 41.9% stress due to lack of personal time, 13.5% deprivation of social life, 14.8% experience time pressure at work, 18.5% have time constraints at home, and 11.2% too much workload, with lack of personal time being the most significant stressor.
- Women in workforce women report various impacts of stress, with 28.4% experiencing fatigue, 20% depression, 17.7% anxiety, 26.6% feeling frustrated, and 7.3% experiencing all of the mentioned effects, with fatigue being the most common.
- When considering conflicts between work and family demands, 12.8% of working women find family responsibilities challenging in meeting work demands, while 34.9% struggle with work responsibilities conflicting with family demands, 24.7% face challenges with personal/social responsibilities conflicting with work and family demands, and 27.6% deal with conflicts between work and family responsibilities and other life demands, with work responsibilities posing a significant challenge in meeting family demands.
- Employed women identify various domains in work-life conflict, with 25.3% highlighting work, 8.3% family, and 12% personal/social aspects, while 35.9% acknowledge conflicts in all mentioned domains and 18.5% state none, with work, family, and personal/social aspects being dominant in their work-life conflicts.

DISCUSSIONS

Objective 1: The pursuit of work-life balance stands as a paramount challenge for today's working women, requiring a delicate balance of priorities, strategies, and coping mechanisms. There are multifaceted reasons and approaches employed by women in navigating the intricate interplay between professional aspirations and personal well-being (White & Maniam, 2020).

Primarily, the order in which obligations and duties are prioritized highlights the variety of approaches that employed working women to balance conflicting demands. The vast majority's pragmatic approach—which emphasizes the strategic utilization of time and resources to efficiently meet varied demands—reflects their prioritization and handling of tasks based on significance. This emphasizes the requirement of adaptable solutions for balancing several responsibilities and a comprehensive knowledge of workload management (Newman et al., 2020). The importance of family duties and connections becomes apparent outside of the job, underscoring the crucial role that families and obligations play in the lives of women. This emphasizes how personal and professional lives are intertwined, with family obligations frequently dictating lifestyle preferences and time management. Family responsibilities are prioritized, which reflects a firmly held value system and emphasizes the necessity of social support networks in building resilience in the face of conflicting demands (Carli, 2020).

Women's techniques for striking a work-life balance increasingly include self-care, a reflection of the rising acknowledgment of the significance of holistic well-being. The importance of self-care is multifaceted, ranging from mental health to physical health, and emphasizes the necessity of taking preventative action to reduce stress, avoid burnout, and build resilience. This indicates a change in perspective toward a more holistic definition of success, wherein accomplishments in the workplace are viewed as important as personal fulfillment and wellbeing (Gragnano et al., 2020).

There are many different kinds of obstacles in the way of attaining work-life balance; they include unclear duties, enduring time limits, and having two jobs. When it comes to reducing role conflicts and spillover between domains, the frequency of ambiguous duties emphasizes how crucial defined roles and efficient communication are. According to Uddin (2021), women face structural impediments that impede their capacity to successfully balance conflicting demands due to the widespread influence of time restrictions and multiple obligations.

Employed women use a range of strategies to address these issues, including as clarifying roles, prioritizing time management, and setting reasonable expectations. These approaches highlight the value of autonomy and resilience in negotiating complicated work-life interactions and show a proactive approach to overcoming both personal obstacles and structural constraints.

Hence, a complex interaction of values, difficulties, and coping mechanisms is shown by the qualitative investigation of methods and priorities in establishing work-life balance among working women. Gaining an understanding of these interactions is crucial for establishing encouraging work cultures, carrying out focused interventions, and advancing gender parity both within and outside of the workplace. The varied demands and experiences of women may be acknowledged and addressed, allowing society to pave the way for a more inclusive and long-lasting approach to work-life integration.

Objective 2: Working women have to balance a wide range of responsibilities, including personal and professional obligations that frequently collide and cause complicated tensions and conflicts. The complex processes at work are clarified by a qualitative investigation of their experiences.

Within the domain of domestic responsibilities, women are faced with balancing a variety of obligations, with housework standing out as a significant obstacle. The vast majority struggle with the never-ending responsibilities of house ownership, highlighting the persistent weight those women in conventional gender roles bear. Their time and energy are further taxed by these duties, which go beyond the walls of the home and include taking care of children, the elderly, and social commitments.

Working women have significant challenges in the professional realm due to the temporal limitations of their labor. The fact that lengthy hours and demanding trips are commonplace highlights the sacrifices people make in order to support their livelihoods. Nevertheless, the nature of their employment and employer expectations become major sources of stress, emphasizing the fine line individuals have to walk between advancing their careers and maintaining their personal lives (Siltanen, 2021).

Amidst these challenges women grapple with the consequences of taking time off, navigating a system where penalty frequently takes prominence over the need for relaxation and recovery. Their situation is made worse by the lack of significant benefits, which highlights structural shortcomings in assisting women in the workforce. Among the chaos,

women try to find moments of calm in their quest for balance. Their well-being is based on spending quality time with their family, which provides comfort in the face of the constant pressures of both job and home. However, stress remains a constant threat, showing up in a variety of ways that affect both their personal and work life (Alon et al., 2022).

Ultimately, the complex interactions between their responsibilities to their families and their jobs define the features of their lives and mold their experiences and goals. Working women are resilient in the face of hardship, forged by their empowerment as they navigate the confusing complexities of modern life.

CONCLUSION

The research offers a thorough examination of the complex relationships encompassing the lives of working women, revealing a variety of lifestyle, socioeconomic, and demographic elements that influence their experiences. Married women with graduate degrees who are mostly between the ages of 26 and 35 make up a significant proportion of the working population in a variety of occupations. Their lives are impacted by common issues including unreasonable expectations, financial constraints, and stress from technology, which frequently cause conflicts between work and personal responsibilities, even when their salary levels and types of jobs differ.

These difficulties are exacerbated by parenthood, marital status, and income; single parents and those with lesser incomes encounter particular difficulties in striking a work-life balance. Navigating these issues consistently revolves around valuing family support, no matter the circumstances. Coping skills including time management, seeking emotional support, and practicing self-care are essential for reducing stress and building resilience in the face of conflicting demands. It is impossible to underestimate the critical role employers play in promoting work-life balance, with measures like flexible work schedules and maternity benefits functioning as vital catalysts that help women successfully manage their multiple responsibilities. Organizations may create inclusive and empowered work cultures that enhance employee well-being and productivity by recognizing the varied demands and problems encountered by women in the workforce and adopting supportive initiatives in place.

Therefore, attaining work-life balance for employed women requires a comprehensive and diverse strategy that includes efficient time management, social support systems, and personalized interventions based on unique situations. Stakeholders may work together to build a more equal and long-lasting workplace where women can succeed on all levels, personally and professionally, by adopting these principles.

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