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SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WORK - LIFE BALANCE AMONG WOMEN ORGANIZATION: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the ways in which working life balance among women organization and their work and family life. There has been a growing concern over work-family issues and the notion of balancing these two domains due to an increasing number of women entering the world of paid employment. Such a discussion rarely comes into the picture in the case of men. A clear-cut demarcation between work and home is made with men being less involved in chores at home. The concept of work-family balance has been used to explain the equilibrium between responsibilities at work and responsibilities outside paid work. Having a balance in the work and family domains implies that this equilibrium is in the required proportion for the concerned individual. Several studies have been conducted on work-family issues in Western countries, but findings from these studies cannot be projected to other countries since work and family roles are perceived differently in different countries. Work-family experience is not universal, but rather culture-specific which is evident in the literature. Thus, there is a need to analyse how working women balance work-family issues across different countries.

Keywords: Demarcation, Responsibilities, Equilibrium, Literature, Metaphor.

Introduction

The Work-family balance metaphor is a social construct located within a particular period of time and originating in the Western world as a response to dilemmas regarding the management of work and family life. Research in this domain emerged at a time when the number of women entering the labor market grew and resulted in a focus on working mothers and dual-earner families. It is also known as work-family interaction, work-family fit, work-life balance and work-family integration. Initial research on the family in Western countries emerged during World War II, when women were encouraged to join the paid workforce in U.S. and U.K. However, in order to provide jobs to troops returning from the War, women were asked to resume their family roles. Scholars began to show interest in the intersection of work and family roles because of the flux in gender roles resulting from these social dynamics.

There are several problems that a woman encounters when she decides to undertake a job in India. The root cause of the problem is the patriarchal structure of the society, where women are expected to give the highest priority to the needs of the family irrespective of whether they work outside the house or not. Their primary role is considered to be looking after the home and children, and their employment outside the home is still regarded as secondary (Arora, 2003). Women's pregnancy and maternity leave might result in a delay in their promotions as compared to their male counterparts. They also face sexual harassment and exploitation in their workplace (Shukla, 2003). When working women try to manage both home and job along with the demands of childcare, they are bound to experience role conflict. One of the greatest drawbacks which resulted from being focused on their career is the high chances of disharmony in their family life, where the modern educated husbands too expect their wives to serve them and the household despite the women working outside the homes. Studies also revealed that the discrimination which a woman faced at the workplace was related to the lower job commitment which was acquired through the socialisation process. When women consider work as an additional role and do not set career goals, they are likely to face problems at work. A low representation of women in higher posts has been considered as a reflection of discrimination in recruitment policies or prejudices as well as the lack of orientation and commitment of women towards their careers. In addition, there are also studies that focused on the changes taking place in women's lives as a result of their employment. Women were able to create a bigger space for themselves by emerging out of the traditional role (Abraham, 2002; Mahajan, 1996).

Family Related Issues

Even when they were equally well-educated as their husbands, Chinese women gave more priority to family responsibilities over their own career, either voluntarily or involuntarily, as a result of traditional Chinese cultural influence. The traditional norm of a family was that the husband would deal with external matters such as earning a livelihood, while the wife was expected to look after the household chores even though she was working outside (Cooke, 2007). The main source of work-family conflict for Chinese employees was long working hours, and limited or no leisure time. The worst offenders of work-life balance were government



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organisations because they did not have any formal work-life balance policy. Moreover, government employees were expected to come to office during non-working hours to attend to urgent meetings or for other tasks assigned by their superiors. Another important reason for work-family conflict was the heavy workload, where employees had no choice but to work overtime in order to complete their tasks.

Balance Related Issues

Several factors are responsible for affecting the personal and professional lives of women in Western countries which was demonstrated by a study conducted on female medical practitioners in Australia, Britain and Denmark. The study revealed that balancing job and family, job satisfaction, autonomy, fair remuneration, availability of flexible work schedules and having an edge over the decision-making process were some of the factors that affected the lives of women. In addition to these, some of the personal issues were self-care, quality time with spouse, children, family and friends and time- management in order to pursue interests which were non-medical in nature. The conflicts arising out of these demands reduced the job satisfaction of female professionals which in turn led to imbalances and stress in their lives. In order to achieve a balanced and successful personal and professional life, what was required was a supportive family, a flexible work environment and changes in culturally based expectations of female professionals (Kilmartin, 2002).

Role of Organizations in Work-life Issues

Organizations across cultures are known to implement various work-life balance practices which are beneficial in reducing work-life issues as well as in enabling employees to be more effective at work and in the performance of various roles. Organizations are increasingly pressurised to design various kinds of practices which will facilitate the efforts of employees to fulfil their personal and professional commitments. Several work-life balance initiatives have been taken up by organizations to assist employees to balance their work and family responsibilities efficiently, further their well-being and provide organizational benefits. There are a variety of family-friendly policies such as flexible working hours, part-time work, job-sharing, compressed work weeks, telecommuting, parental leave, and on-site child-care facility (Lazar et al, 2010).

Historical Background / Evolution of the concept of WLB

The work-leisure dichotomy was invented in the mid-1800s, as a result of industrial capitalism. In anthropology, a definition of happiness is to have as little separation as possible "between your work and your play." The expression "Work-life balance" was first used in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. In the United States, this phrase was first used in 1986. The history of work-life balance begins in the latter half of the 19th century when reformers successfully campaigned against long factory hours and were able to demonstrate that reductions in working hours had no impact upon levels of output. During the early part of the 20th century the campaign to reduce working hours continued through a series of pioneering studies that demonstrated the relationship between time spent at work and the level of output was a complex one. These studies also took account of the importance of motivation and morale, fatigue, concentration, and attention to reveal that there were conditions under which a reduction in working time led to increased production, and there were optimum arrangements for the length of working time and intervals for rest pauses, in particular circumstances.

What is Work Life Conflict?

There occurs conflict between life inside and work outside. This is mentioned in table below.

Table – 3.1 Classification of Work Life Conflict

Type of Work Life Conflict	Meaning	Example
Role Overload	Role overload occurs when an individual has too much to do and too little time to do it.	Overloaded people constantly feel rushed an "time crunched".
Work interferes with family	Work interferes with family occurs when work demands and responsibilities make it more difficult to fulfill family role responsibilities.	Where long hours in paid work prevent a parent from attending child's sporting event. Where preoccupation with work prevents someone from enjoying family time. Where work stresses spill over into the home and increase conflict with the family.



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Family interferes with work	Family interferes with work occurs when family demands and responsibilities make it more difficult to fulfill responsibilities at work.	A child's illness prevents attendance at work. Conflict at home makes concentration at work difficult.
Caregiver Strain	Caregiver strain occurs when an employee experiences physical, financial or emotional strain which can be attributed to the need to provide care or assistance to an elderly dependent.	The need to help parents bath, dress etc, imposes physical strain on many. Watching loved ones mental health deteriorating can emotionally overwhelm the caregiver.

Work Life Conflict and women employees

Women have to perform several roles in their families and work place (see Figure No 05). These roles include being a spouse, caretaker and parent; managing daily household chores; and providing services to the community and society. Women also must take care of their own health and other personal activities, which are often neglected because of role overload as well as time limitations. All of these situations lead to the absence of WLB and manifestation of many WLB issues. The demands originating from the work and personal life of women are quite often mutually exclusive, rendering it very difficult to strike a balance between the role demands.

What is Work Life Balance?

The term 'work-life balance' is most frequently used to describe the equilibrium between responsibilities at work and responsibilities outside paid work; having a work-life balance means that this equilibrium is in the right position for the individual concerned. There is no one-size-fits-all definition for work-life balance. For some people it means spending more time in paid work and less time at home, while for others it means ensuring that work in running the business does not encroach on time needed for other responsibilities. People have always integrated the different parts of their lives and work-life balance has long been of concern to those interested in the quality of working life and its relation to the broader quality of life.

Work-life balance is a form of metaphor; but a metaphor of what? In the English language "balance" is a complex word with a variety of meanings. As a noun, a balance is a set of scales, a weighing apparatus; it is also the regulating gear in clocks. If we use the scales, then balance occurs when there is "an equal distribution of weight or amount" but this presents problems for work-life balance since both sides may be very heavy or very light. Furthermore, the type of work-life balance sought by many may not imply equal weight on both sides. However, balance also has a physical and psychological meaning as "stability of body or mind" so that suicide is sometimes officially recorded as taking one's life "while the balance of the mind was disturbed". Work-life balance is a broad concept including proper prioritizing between career and ambition on one hand, compared with pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development on the other. Work/Life Balance is a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal.

3.7 Work Life Pyramid

SELF: One cannot exist in harmony without the other and it all starts with the self. This is the foundation of any woman's legacy. 'Who am I?' 'Why do I do what I want to do?' are the guiding questions to the journey as a person, daughter, sister, wife, mother, and friend. It is not about the destination and all about the journey. The self is the whole package of spirituality, health, personal grooming and education. The sense of wellbeing then reflects on every facet of life – family and work. The secret is to put your own oxygen mask on first to be empowered to support and nurture the people around you. Happy, healthy women make great role models for their families and the resulting support drives them to be successful employees. It is like a stack of building blocks forming a pyramid.



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FAMILY: It's an interesting to note that majority of women employees are married; obviously pointing to a trend that financial and emotional support is required not only to ensure success, but also to provide meaning to life. Strong family relationships are the foundation for most career women and they form great role models for their children and social network. All relationships need nurturing with time, love and a constant effort to fulfill needs and expectations. Happy healthy individuals have happy and healthy relationships and this then spills over into their work.

WORK: “When you’re passionate about what you do, would rather give their business to you than to your competitor,” explains Richard Nelson Bolles, author of the bestselling book ‘What Color is Your Parachute?’ The intrinsic feminine qualities of multi-tasking, networking, and communication results in a workplace which motivates and empowers. Their more worker-friendly policies boost morale and lead to less turnover, less absenteeism and higher productivity. A supportive circle of family and friends is the platform available to seek advice and assistance and a major factor in the success of women employees.

Life Balance among Women

As globalization has turn out to be the norm of the day, issues like these seem to have taken a back seat for quite a while. Work life “imbalance” has over the time attracted apprehension because of the over increasing troubles related to worker health declining levels of efficiency and productivity at the employee level, and boredom at work place. The difference also has a off putting impact in the personal life of working people some of which has developed to be social hazards like infertility due to high stress levels, growing number of divorces, beginning of nuclear families. Professional of the present day appears to be more involved in work that gives them bigger elasticity at work. Working community has diverse needs at different stages of their life. As a result, people strive for balance in their working hours and their personal commitments. Work life balance has now become a sensitive issue because it offers obvious benefits to organizations and its employees. Organizations can now focus on grooming their employees who these days are not merely regarded as work but considered as the human capital of the organization. This can go to a large extent help in retaining employee which may also be seen as an important driving force.

Major Challenges at Women’ Works Place

Significantly, the Women are given equal importance and rights these days in the society. It is necessary for a woman to be independent these days. Women are given the status of work after long years of struggle. But the struggle is not yet completed as her status is socially not equal to men. So the struggle is still on in the work place, house, and society. Majority of the working women are not supported by family or husband. Women undergo pressure on both sides which eventually becomes stress on them. They can be given more support and confidence from family and social background. It is necessary that women work these days and earn a status equal to that as men and be given the necessary rights, freedom to take decisions and challenges as she is no less than men these days. For financial conditions and living standards these days it is very important that women work and support the family from her side. These days it is well aloud said that women are given equal importance to men and share equal rights everywhere as men do. But in



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70-80% of the situations it turns out to be only a mere statement. It doesn't seem to work practically as women are treated Women everywhere. In the sense, they are treated very unfair in every place.

Conclusion

In this conclusion, the majority of women are facing number of challenges in various organizations which is based on “Work-Life Balance”. It becomes highly important to study what women undergo in their career path as they will be handling their family as well at the same time and the stress and work pressure is far more than others as a lot of time management, job management, kid management, house management everything is put under criteria. It is critical for work and family research to fully understand the conditions under which the married women employees experience conflict between their roles. There is a need to consider working environment, job satisfaction, family support and number of working hours in the future research. Future studies should also continue to refine the methodology used in the area of work–life balance research. In order to attain in-depth understanding of one's work and family life, researchers who study work–family roles should include multiple perspectives such as job stress, quality of life, mental health, and work demands.

In adding up, it is necessary to explore multiple waves of data collection over a longer period of time to better understand the changing nature of work family roles over time and work balance. The Several studies need to be conducted to examine how the stages of life (e.g., marriage, child birth, and child rearing) affect work and family concerns. It is clear from the current study that married women employees indeed experience with work- life balance while attempting to balance their work and family lives. Thus, organizations need to formulate guidelines for the management of work- life balance among women's since they are related to job satisfaction and performance of the employees.