



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.01.78>

WORK - FAMILY BALANCE OF INDIAN WOMEN SOFTWARE PROFESSIONALS

M. Swathi

Research Scholar

Department of Business Management, Osmania University
Hyderabad, Telangana State, India

Abstract

One of the significant changes witnessed in the labour markets in India has been the entry of women IT professionals in the rapidly growing software services sector. As the women take on the role of working professional in addition to their traditional role of the homemaker, they are under great pressure to balance their work and personal lives. This study attempts to understand how work and family related factors influence the work-family balance of Indian women IT professionals. The study is based on an exploratory qualitative study of 13 women IT professionals in the software sector in Bangalore, India. The narratives reveal six major themes: familial influences on life choices; multi-role responsibilities and attempts to negotiate them; self and professional identity; work-life challenges and coping strategies; organizational policies and practices and social support. The changing social structures arising out of dual career couples, single parent families, an increasing number of parents with dependent care responsibilities for children, and ageing parents have all contributed to increasing research in the area of work-life balance. There is a glaring under representation of samples from developing economies in the research literature on work and family.

Keywords: IT Professionals, Homemaker, Exploratory.

Introduction

Work and family are the two most important domains in a person's life and their interface has been the object of study for researchers world-wide. There is a felt need to balance and integrate family needs and career requirements (Sturges & Guest, 2018) and research in the field of work-family interface has increased dramatically in the past two decades (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). Increased globalization coupled with the recognition that balancing work and family is a challenge for employed parents in almost all modern societies, suggests that a chapter of this research should be conducted in different cultural contexts (Ayree, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005). In a transitioning society like India, where the traditional roles of women as homemakers and caretakers are deeply entrenched, the work-family balance becomes a challenge for women and their employers. Over the last decade, Indian society has witnessed a surge in the participation of women in the workforce. The growing number of women in the Indian IT workforce has led to an increasing interest from academia and practitioners in the topic of work-life balance, specifically of working women in the IT industry. In the light of the increasing number of women in the IT industry, there is a need to examine the phenomenon of the work-life balance of Indian women IT professionals in greater depth. The main research question of this study is: How do work and family related factors influence the work-family balance of Indian women IT professionals? What challenges do they face and what coping strategies do they use to achieve work-family balance? The paper is structured in three parts. The first part looks at the literature on work-life balance and the phenomenon of Indian women professionals in the IT industry. The second part explores the life histories, work-life issues, and choices of 13 women captured through in-depth semi structured interviews. The final part discusses the emerging themes from the narratives in the light of the literature on work-family balance and draws conclusions on how working women software professionals in India manage their lives.

Women professionals and the work-family balance: literature review

The work-family balance has been conceptualized as an individual's orientation across different life roles, an interrole phenomenon (Marks & MacDermid, 1996), 'satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict' (Campbell-Clark, 2000, p 349), and 'a satisfying, healthy and productive life that includes work, play and love, that integrates a range of life activities with attention to self and to personal and spiritual development, and that expresses a person's unique wishes, interests, and values' (Kofodimos, 1984, p.xiii; Shaffer, Francesco, Joplin & Lau, 2003) The facilitation takes place when the gains obtained in one domain are transferred to and enhance the functioning in the other domain. One way a person can be facilitated in the work domain is by support in the home and work domains. The role of social support has consistently emerged in literature as an important factor that influences work-family balance in a positive manner. Social support outside of work labeled by Marcinkus, Whelan-Berry, and Gordon (2007) as personal social support may come from an employee's spouse or partner, parents, siblings, children, extended family, and friends. Numerous studies have demonstrated that personal social support is positively associated with the work-family balance. Of particular importance is support from the husband who contributes in a variety of areas including earnings and personal financial management (Kate, 1998), home and family responsibilities (Baron, 1987), career management and support (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2004; Hertz, 1999), and interpersonal support (Becker & Moen, 1999). Family support also includes the exchange of



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.01.78>

support among relatives (Voydanoff, 2002). The personal social support can be further conceptualized as emotional and instrumental support (Wayne, Randel, & Stevens, 2006). Instrumental support refers to behaviors and attitudes of family members aimed at assisting day-today household activities, such as relieving the employee of household tasks or otherwise accommodating the employee's work requirements (King, 1997). This allows the family member to focus his/her time and preserve energy for work when it might otherwise be scarce; suggesting that it positively influences the individual's functioning at work. Emotional support refers to the expression of feelings to enhance others' affect or behaviour (Erickson, 1993). Emotional support contributes to positive affect that helps the individual in the work domain (Wayne et al., 2006). The role of workplace support, i.e., the support received from supervisors and co-workers (Voydanoff, 2002)] is another critical element of work-family balance. Ezra and Deckman (2006) found that organizational and supervisor understanding of family duties are positively related to satisfaction with the balance between work and family life. Workplace support via an organizational approach involves the implementation of family friendly policies, which are associated with satisfaction with the work-family balance (Ezra & Deckman, 1996). Organizations offer a wide range of work-family benefits and programmes to their employees, such as job sharing, telecommuting, job protected parental leave, part-time return to work options, flextime, resource and referral services, unpaid family leave, dependent care assistance, shorter standard work weeks, improvement in job conditions, on-site childcare, support groups for working parents, sports facilities, day-care facilities, laundry facilities, and canteen facilities (Lobel & Kossek, 2009; Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). Research shows that flexible work arrangements allow individuals to integrate work and family responsibilities in time and space and are instrumental in achieving a healthy work and family balance (Bond, Galinsky, Lord, Staines, Brown, 1998; Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 2008). While much of the literature review presented above could be gender neutral, literature recognizes that all of the above-mentioned variables have a greater impact on women at work.

The authors suggested that the reasons for the salary gap might be both structural and social in nature. The reasons presented include the observation that women did not enter the IS field in large numbers until the early 2000s.

Nature of the software services sector and its impact on the work-life balance

A study one of the significant changes witnessed in the labour markets in India in the last decade has been the entry of women professionals. The percentages of females in regular employment in urban India, increased from 25.8% in 1983 to 33.3% in 2000 and the labour force participation rates is projected to reach 361 per 1000 females in the year 2026 (McNay, Unni, & Cassen, 2004). In the organised sector, women workers constituted 18.4% as on March 31, 2003, of which about 49.68 lakh (4.96 million) women were employed in the public and private sectors (The Financial Express, 2006). In fact, the largest numbers of women employees are in the IT/ITES sector (Wakhlou, 2008). The 'phenomenon of Indian Women IT professionals' is the term used to describe the enormous rise of women in the IT/BPO industry (The Indian programmer, 2000). Women accounted for 26.4% of the total India-based workforce in the IT industry in 2007, up from 24% in 2005 and women comprise 25% of the employee strength of the major Indian IT companies (Ali, 2006). Women's participation in the IT workforce is seen as a critical enabling factor for the continued growth of the industry (The Economic Times, 2017). The characteristics of the software services industry in India and the nature of the work pose some unique challenges for professionals in the industry. The challenges are aggravated in the case of women professionals. The software industry in India is characterised by a project-oriented organization and as the industry has matured, more complex and strategic projects have been outsourced to India (Ethiraj, Kale, Krishnan, & Singh, 2015). Software professionals are faced with an environment of uncertainty and instability with consequent pressures to work longer hours (Scholarios & Marks, 2016). Women who aspire to play a bigger role in technology need to maintain a consistently high learning curve. It is evident that the nature of the sector and the changing aspirations and roles of women in Indian society create challenges for their work-family balance, which this study puts under further scrutiny. The present study was designed to explore, document and analyze the factors that influence the work-family balance of women software professionals in India and also to understand the support they receive both in their personal and professional lives.

Methodology

Since, to the best of our knowledge, there are no other studies in the context of the Indian software industry, which attempt to capture the unique dimensions of women's participation in work and their experiences in managing life and work, we felt that an exploratory study such as ours was needed. A semi-structured interview protocol was used, which covered the following topics: educational, work- and family background, career development, expectations at work and experiences of success and failure, definition of their roles at home, the relationships with the family, the organizational and personal support received, and aspirations and dreams. Women were encouraged to illustrate the manner in which they arrived at decisions or the manner in which they coped with conflicts and challenges through specific examples. Women described their decisions to embark on their careers, the life changes they experienced and the decision that they had to make along their career journey. They also shared their dreams and their aspirations about where they saw themselves in the future. They were frequently asked additional follow-up questions to clarify their feelings and



Cover Page



DOI: http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.01.78

their points of view towards the issues addressed. The clarifications for conflicting or unclear answers were sought either during the interviews or afterwards via informal email exchanges and telephone conversations. Extensive handwritten notes were taken, which were transcribed at the earliest possible time after the interviews. Judgment sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to locate information-rich key respondents and care was taken to ensure that the sample represented women with varying marital status and parental status. Women were identified for interviews through the professional and personal network of the second author and their participation was voluntary. The sample included 13 women who were drawn from various life stages from the software industry. Eight of the women worked for multinational corporations and the remaining worked with Indian companies. All the women in the sample were engineers with an average experience of eight years. Three women were married with two children, four women with one child, two married with no children, three were single women, and one woman was engaged to be married. Nine of the respondents were managers and had about seven to nine people reporting to them. The remaining were technical or domain experts. Three of the respondents had children who were in middle school while the others had children in primary school. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the women’s demographic profile. Despite the fact that divorces and single motherhood are gradually emerging trends in urban Indian society, the mothers in our sample represent the majority of Indian women who have children after marriage and who are still married. Since this was an exploratory study, the researchers used inductive analysis to identify categories, themes, and patterns that emerge from the data (Janesick, 1994). To draw meaning from the data, a range of tactics was used, such as comparison/contrast, noting of patterns and themes, clustering, use of metaphors, confirmatory tactics, and following up surprises, and checking results with respondents (Miles & Huberman, 2004). The coding procedures of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were followed which resulted in identification of themes from the narratives that are presented in the section on findings. Findings of the exploratory study six broad themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews which are relevant to the understanding of work family balance of women IT professionals in India: familial influences on life choices; multi-role responsibilities and attempts to negotiate them; self-identity; work-life challenges and coping strategies; organizational policies and practices; and social support. Table 1 illustrates the themes, categories and dimensions that emerged from these interviews; each of the themes is elaborated upon. Familial influence on life choices

Table 1 Themes, categories and dimensions concerning work–family balance of women IT professionals in India.

| Theme | Category | Dimension |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| Familial influences on life choices | Role models | Father and brother |
| | Life decisions | Education Career Marriage Children |
| Multi-role responsibilities and negotiating them | Role conflict | Taking care of the children |
| | | Taking care of dependent parents or parents-in-law |
| | | Being a homemaker |
| Self-identity | Work-identity | Hierarchy of role identities |
| | Family identity | |
| Work–life challenges and coping strategies | Nature of the IT industry | Working hours |
| | Prioritising commitments | Tight deadlines |
| | Personal self-management | Setting priorities in work and family |
| | | Pursuing life interests |
| Organisational policies and practices | Work–family programmes | Flexible working hours |
| | Women friendliness | Child-care facilities |
| | | Working from home |
| Social support | Family/spouse support | Instrumental |
| | Domestic help | Emotional |
| | Supervisor/co-worker support | |

Work-life balance challenges and strategies

The nature of the IT industry emerged as a general category within the theme of the work-family balance challenges, with the majority of women emphasizing that the projects with tight deadlines, extensive travelling and long and/or odd working hours, affected the work-family balance. This is consistent with the findings from Teagarden et al.’s (2008) study that identified holding conference calls outside the traditional 8e6 workday or fast-tracking a software project in shifts. Some excerpts: ‘In the past there were incidences where I would work until I got the release out. This meant working until the next day without any sleep or working on weekends. I developed Repetitive Strain Injuries, had severe pain and I suffered quite a bit.’ (Ra) ‘In my spare time I like to watch TV



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.01.78>

or a movie, but I cannot do that for too long, because my eyes start hurting after having looked at a computer system all day. It is sometimes hard to cope when at 10.00 pm I have to log in for 1 to 1 ½ hours for meetings with US people. This leaves me with less spare time during the week. It is the disadvantage of this job but in most IT firms you would have to put in these working hours.’ (Lk) ‘My job required travelling. This made life very hectic and had its impact on the work-family balance: I started dumping household stuff on my husband and was not taking care of my share of work.’ (Js) Additional working hours were at the expense of home time, while high work intensity or work pressure may result in fatigue, anxiety or other adverse psycho-physiological consequences that can affect the quality of home and family life (White, Hill, McGovern, Mills, & Smeaton, 2016).

Discussion

The initial question that guided our research was: How do work and family related factors influence the work-family balance of Indian women IT professionals and what are their challenges and coping strategies to achieve work-family balance? We sought to understand how work and family related elements influence the work-family balance of these women. Six themes emerged from the narratives: familial influences on life choices, role responsibilities and negotiation, self-identity, work-life challenges and coping strategies, organizational policies and practices, and social support. In line with the findings from Fouad et al.’s (2008) study, the career and life choices of most of the women were influenced by the family, but women integrated parental direction with their personal choices. In India, women’s wishes and desires are expected to conform to those of their family’s traditions, honor, and welfare (Rana, Kagan, Lewis, & Rout, 1998) that create tension between the development of personal interests and family expectations, thus affecting the work-family balance of the women. Pocock (2003) rightly argues that with the current patterns of work and labour market participation and the stasis in the domestic relations and roles between men and women, work and family collide. Given the multiple roles that working women play, they usually do not get adequate time to participate in leisure and recreational activities and still carry the responsibility of housework (Roy, 2003). This was emphasized in all the interviews. Married women acknowledged that they have less time and energy to spend on their husbands due to their multiple roles that require time and involvement. Women reported to have less time to spend with relatives due to their busy work schedules combined with the fact that, in some cases, relatives live far away. Lastly, five women reported less leisure time because they are currently enrolled in an MBA program which takes a substantial amount of time and inhibits a desired work-life balance. De Marneffe (2004) found that decisions about motherhood created tension around a woman’s point of identity and its relationship to other aspects of herself, such as her need for other aspirations, her need to work, and her need for solitude.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis highlighted the pervasive factors that impact the work-family balance. The societal role expectations, women’s career ambitions, and the nature of the IT industry challenges the way they manage their professional and personal lives. While their self-identities primarily lie in their work, they are strongly influenced to perform the roles of homemaker and dependent care provider given the societal expectations; this does require negotiation both at home and at work in terms of how and when work can be done. Furthermore, women who had taken a slow track in their career growth, mentioned that this was a conscious choice as they felt their families needed them more at that point in time. An implication is that organizations may not be effectively utilizing their talent; however, implementing HR policies and practices would facilitate women in pursuing their career goals and dependent care responsibilities. With an increasing number of women entering the workforce and the Indian IT industry facing a talent shortage, it appears that understanding the role of work and family in the lives of women professionals will become an important HR concern. Indian women IT professionals can achieve the work-family balance by setting priorities in their work and personal lives and by having support systems both at work, formally through HR policies and programs, and informally through supervisor and co-worker support and at home. The data raised issues that need to be addressed both from an academic and practice point of view. The identified dimensions could serve as a platform for further research on women IT professionals and the work-life balance which will serve as a guide for organizations to address the work-family balance issues of working women by designing and implementing HR policies and practices for facilitating the work-family balance. This, in turn, would go a long way in enabling women to perform better at work, be more committed to the organization, and ultimately contribute to the growth of the economy and positively impact society as whole.



Cover Page



DOI: http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.01.78

Appendix

Demographic data of interviewees.

| Name | Age group | Job designation | Years of Employer exp | | Educational degree | Marital/parental status |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Sr | 26–30 | Project manager | 6 | IT company | B.E. Computer Science | Married, 1 daughter |
| Sh | 31–35 | Senior Project Manager | 11 | IT company | Masters in Computer Application (M.C.A) | Single |
| Ra | 26–30 | Project Manager | 7 | IT company | B.E. MBA | Single |
| An | 26–30 | Senior Software Engineer | 4 | Telecommunications company | B.E Computer Science | Single |
| Ta | 31–35 | Project Manager | 9 | IT company | M.S. Electronics and Communications | Married, 1 son |
| Mj (Privately owned) | 36–40 B.E. Instrumentation | Project leader Married, 2 daughters | 8 | IT company | | |
| Mh | 26–30 | Applications engineer | 4 | IT company | B.E. Mechanical | Married |
| Rs | 20–25 | Software developer | 3 | IT company | B.E. Electronics & Electrical | Engaged to be married |
| Lk | 36–40 | Project manager | 16 | IT company | B.E. Electronic & Communications | Married |
| Js | 36–40 | Senior project manager | 15 | IT company | B.E Instrumentation | Married, 2 daughters |
| Pr | 31–35 | Senior project manager | 11 | IT company | Masters of Computer Applications (MCA) | Married, 1 daughter, 1 son |
| Sa | 31–35 | Project manager | 9 | IT company (hardware) | B.E. Civil Engineering. | Married, 1 daughter |
| Um | 31–35 | Drop out | 8 | n.a. | B.E Computer Science | Married, 1 daughter |

Note: All women work full-time except for Mj who works part-time and Um who has dropped out of the workforce.

References

- Armstrong. (2021). “Women at work: differences in IT career experiences and perceptions between south Asian and American women”. Human Resource Management, 47(3), 601e635.
- Dr Naveen Prasadula & Dr Porika Bharath Kumar (2021). Babies and bosses. Reconciling work and family life. A synthesis of findings for OECD countries. (pp. 1–213.) Paris, France: OECD. “Women in Information Technology profession: a literature review, synthesis and research agenda”. European Journal of Information Systems, 11, 20e34. Ali, N. (2020, July 17). Hi-Tech Women, The Asian Age. Retrieved from. <http://www.nasscom.in/Nasscom/templates/NormalPage.aspx?idZ49604>.
- Armstrong, D. J., Riemenschneider, C. K., Allen, M. J., & Reid, M. F. (2019). “Advancement, voluntary turnover and women in IT: a cognitive study of work-family conflict”. Information & Management, 44, , E. S., & Tan, H. H. (2018). “Rhythms of life: antecedents and outcomes of work-family balance in employed parents”. Journal of Applied Psychology, 90(1), 132e146.
- Banerjee, R., & Dutta Sachdeva, S. (2008, 5 May). Working moms want careers too. The Times of India. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/3010380.cms>.
- Baron, A. (2018). “Working parents: shifting traditional roles”. Business, 37(1), 36e37. Becker, P., & Moen, P. (2018). “Scaling back: dual-earner couples work-family strategies”. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61(4), 995e1007.
- Berney, T. P., & Jones, P. M. (2017). “Manic depressive disorder in mental handicap. Australia and New Zealand”. Journal of Developmental Disability, 14, 219e225.
- Bhatnagar, D., & Rajadhyaksha, U. (2017). “Attitudes towards work and family roles and their implications for career growth of women: a report from India”. Sex Roles, 45(7/8), 549e565. Bond, J. T., Galinsky, E., Lord, M., Staines, G. L., & Brown, K. R. (2009). Beyond the parental leave debate: The impact of laws in four states. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute.
- Brett, J. M., & Stroh, L. K. (2015). “Women in management: how far have we come and what needs to be done as we approach 2000?”. Journal of Management Inquiry, 8(4), 392e398.