



Work life balance among women employees: A study of service sector in India

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Abstract

The changing economic conditions and social demands have changed the nature of work throughout the world. Now female workers carry not only the load of domestic work but also carry a significant part of the load of economic activity. Today women form an important part of the Indian Workforce. According to the information provided by the Registrar General of India, the work participation rate for women was 25.68 per cent in 2001. This is an improvement from 22.73 per cent in 1991 and 19.67 per cent in 1981. Their contribution to economic activity is in fact on the higher side than what is revealed by the different Indian Censuses. According to the nation-wide sample survey on Employment & Unemployment undertaken by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in India during 1999- 2000, female workforce is estimated at 124 million.

Today, India has more working women majorly in service sector than any other country in the world, according to a paper commissioned as part of NASSCOM's on-going gender inclusivity initiative in association with Mercer Consulting. The demand for women employees will grow with the continued growth of this sector.

The concept of Work Life Balance (WLB) is becoming more and more relevant in an ever dynamic working environment. This Paper provides a study on this aspect conducted recently with special reference to women employees in service sector. The study covers the causes of WLB imbalance and its impact as well as lists some remedial actions and their benefits.

Keywords: women employees, work life balance, female workers

1. Introduction

Work Life Balance (WLB) is a global topic of growing importance and frequent discussion. The expression WLB was first used in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. 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. The challenge of work-life balance is without question one of the most significant struggles faced by modern employee. The challenge of balancing one's work and personal life is experienced around the globe. The reality is that most of us are facing increasing competition for our time and energy.

Women work force now constitutes a significant percentage of the total work force in any organization today. The female workforce participation rates are 29.5% for rural areas and 12.4% for urban locations. A vast majority of women are working in agricultural or land based occupations.

The pressure of career and family hits women at the mid-level especially hard. Mid-level career women face more challenges when balancing work and life, leading to more difficulty in career growth. Work-life balance is an integral and important part of Corporate Social Responsibility. Good employers need to recognize that part of their obligation to their workers is to ensure that they are not working so hard so as to damage their lives outside of work or lead to health problems.

2. Objective of the study

- To investigate out present practices followed by women employees for Work Life Balance.

- To suggest the current policies by the organizations to facilitate best Work Life Balance.
- To suggest ways and means for improving effective Work Life Balance.

3. Review of literature

A comprehensive review was made on the views expressed by earlier researchers, both in India and abroad, on the aspect of WLB. Some of the prominent findings are being reproduced below:

Sarena Kallian (2009) "Women have traditionally been associated with nurture, care giving and less aggressive roles. Only in the 18th and early 19th century, during the Industrial revolution, did women begin to compete with men for jobs.. However they mostly opted for traditionally women centric jobs, which were less paid and less valued"

Kartikeya Batra (2011) Economies across the world are finding it increasing difficult to ignore women, rather it has become next to imperative to treat them as crucial components of the global system"

Meira Kumar (2011) Women constitute nearly half of the world population. Growth development and progress in any society are intimately linked with the development and empowerment of women. No nation can afford to neglect such a precious segment of human resource."

According to ILO (International Labour Organisation) report, 75 % of the world's activities are executed by women, but they own mere 0.01 % of the total assets. ILO (2009) the share of women in wage and salaried work grew from 41.8 percent in 1997 to 45.5 percent in 2007, but the status group of female

own-account workers saw a stronger increase”.

Stephen P. Robbins, (2003) suggest that organizations should spend less effort helping employees with time management issues and more effort at helping them clearly segment their lives.”

Jennifer Smith, Dianne Gardner (2007) WLB initiatives give employees flexibility and help ensure that dependents are cared whilst employees are at work. Both work to family conflict and family to work conflict can be reduced when employees use WLB initiatives”

Florian Pichler (2009) WLB scales conceptualize the work component more specifically than the life component, what ‘life’ means remains rather intangible apart from general references to the ‘home’, ‘housework’ and ‘family responsibilities.’”

Muhamad Khalil Omar (2010) A good work-life balance is when employees having the ability to fulfil both work and other commitments (family, hobbies, art, travelling, studies and so forth)”

Kathleen P. Myra D (2008) Women all over the globe are dealing with the same balance issues and trying to understand how to “have it all” – both the successful family and home and the successful career.”

Sanghamitra Buddhapriya, (2009) Women employees thus face a dual burden—work and family- which creates a lot of stress and strain and role conflict”

Madhuri Dixit, Sulajja Firodia Motwani (2011) “Women who are professionals would not be able to succeed without family support. Generating economic value for my country is as important to me as having a happy personal life”

4. Theoretical framework of work - life balance

Work-life balance enables employees to feel as if they are paying attention to all the important aspects of their lives. Good employers need to recognize their obligations so that they can ensure employees are not working so hard to damage their lives outside of work or lead to health problems. When employers target good work-life balance, they can see that reducing stress and frustration resulting from poor work-life balance can be beneficial to both parties. Changes in the social, political and economic fabric of societies have influenced and continue to influence both the nature of employment and its relationship to life outside work.

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. Work-life balance is a concept that supports the efforts of employees to split their time and energy between work and the other important aspects of their lives. 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.

5. Work-Life Imbalance

Steven L. Sauter, Chief of the Applied Psychology and Ergonomics Branch of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati, Ohio, states that recent studies show that "the workplace has become the single greatest source of stress". According to a survey conducted by

the National Life Insurance Company, four out of ten U.S. employees state that their jobs are "very" or "extremely" stressful. Those in high-stress jobs are three times more likely than others to suffer from stress-related medical conditions and are twice as likely to quit. The study states that women, in particular, report stress related to the conflict between work and family. In the study, Work-Family Spillover and Daily Reports of Work and Family Stress in the Adult Labor Force, researchers found that with an increased amount of negative spillover from work to family, the likelihood of reporting stress within the family increased by 74%, and with an increased amount of negative spillover from family to work the likelihood to report stress felt at work increased by 47%

5.1 Causes of work - life imbalance

Family characteristics include single employers, married or cohabiting employers, parent employers and dual-earning parents. Parents who are employed experience reduced family satisfaction due to their family duties or requirements. Gender differences could lead to a work life imbalance due to the distinct perception of role identity. It has been demonstrated that men prioritize their work duties over their family duties to provide financial support for their families, whereas women prioritize their family life. Psychological strain is also affected by the complexity of work, the growing responsibilities, concerns for long-term existential protection and more. The mentioned stresses and strains could lead in the long term to irreversible, physical signs of wear as well as to negative effects on the human cardiovascular and immune systems.

5.2 Impact of work life imbalance

- **Fatigue or Low Energy Levels:** At the same time when employees feel fatigue due to tiresome work at professional front, when they return home they are left with no energy to interact with family members.
- **More pressure on household work:** Due to excessive pressure at home front female employees complaint getting late very frequently to job.
- **Lost time with friends and loved ones.** This can leave you feeling left out and may harm relationships with your loved ones. It's also difficult to nurture friendships if you're always working.

6. Improving work-life balance

According to Esther M. Orioli, President of Essi Systems, a stress management consulting firm, "Traditional stress-management programs placed the responsibility of reducing stress on the individual rather than on the organization-where it belongs. No matter how healthy individual employees are when they start out, if they work in a dysfunctional system, they'll burn out."

Work-life balance has been addressed by some employers and has been seen as a benefit to them. Indeed, employees report increased job satisfaction, greater sense of job security, better physical and mental health, reduced levels of job stress and enhanced control of their environment. According to Hartel *et al.*, a variety of policies could be implemented to help manage work life balance just as "flexible working hour, job sharing, part-time work, compressed work weeks, parental leave, telecommuting, on-site child care facility".

Although employers are offering many opportunities to help their employees balance work and life, these opportunities may be a catch twenty-two for some female employees. Even if the organization offers part-time options, many women will not take advantage of it as this type of arrangement is often seen as "occupational dead end".

7. Benefits of work life balance

Improved work-life balance reflects a reduction in the impact of work on home and family life. It reduced stress levels. This control over time management in meeting work-life commitments. It also benefits autonomy to make decisions regarding work-life balance. It increased focus, motivation and job satisfaction knowing that family and work commitments are being met. It increased job security from the knowledge that an organisation understands and supports workers with family responsibilities. It results into decreased healthcare costs and stress-related illnesses. Company focusing on the high cost of healthcare, work/life programs is becoming an intelligent choice to help lower the number of healthcare claims.

8. Recommendations

Work-life balance has always been a concern of those interested in the quality of working life and its relation to broader quality of life. Work Life Balance initiatives can assist employers and employees to be productive and healthy in their work and community lives. Organizations can give employees greater flexibility in how they work. Extension of 'Right to Request Flexible Working' to all employees is needed to be incorporated by the organizations. Employers need to keep any application process for flexible working simple.

Organizations need to develop policies that create a women-friendly workplace environment. Removing core hours and implementing self-rostering – demonstrating trust; Assisting managers to manage remote workers by agreeing targets and deadlines; Promoting core team meetings where time off is negotiated and agreed between all staff – are some of the suggested steps.

Employers need to establish training programs for women, such as mentorships, career guidance and leadership development. Train Managers and staff in the use of WLB policies. Make accommodations for women in areas such as need-based postings. That is, as done in civil services, have a policy to post both spouses to the same district or state. Monitor and evaluate the process regularly to ensure that what you're doing is working and benefiting the business and staff. Keep WLB 'live' by continuously monitoring, evaluating and changing where appropriate.

9. Conclusion

The researcher recommends that the proposals should be put forward for debate and intervention by various organised groups, especially by the social partners, for the creation of a targeted policy aiming to strengthen work-life balance. Work-life balance policies are most likely to be successfully mainstreamed in organizations which have a clear understanding of their business rationale and which respect the importance of work-life balance for all employees,

especially their female employees.

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