

EXAMINING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE CHALLENGES FACED BY MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS ON NIGHT SHIFTS IN GOVERNMENT MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the work-life balance challenges encountered by medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala, India. The research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the specific challenges, experiences, and coping strategies of medical practitioners in this context. Through qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, data were collected and analyzed. The findings reveal that medical practitioners face disrupted sleep patterns, limited personal and social time, difficulties in managing family responsibilities, increased job stress, and safety concerns. Organizational support, flexible scheduling options, effective communication channels, and access to stress management resources were identified as important factors in promoting a healthier work-life balance. The study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the need for targeted interventions and policies to enhance work-life balance and well-being among medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions.

Keywords: *Work-Life Balance, Night Shifts, Medical Practitioners, Government Medical Institutions, Challenges, Coping Strategies.*

Introduction

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for the well-being and productivity of individuals, particularly in demanding professions such as healthcare (Allen et al., 2017; Demerouti et al., 2019). Medical practitioners, who play a vital role in providing quality patient care, often face unique challenges in achieving work-life balance, particularly when working night shifts (Burgess et al., 2019; Giri et al., 2020). Night shift work is common in healthcare settings, where round-the-clock care is required. However, the nature of night shift work can disrupt sleep patterns, limit personal and social time, and pose challenges in managing family responsibilities (Costa et al., 2018; Smith-Coggins et al., 2021).

In the context of government medical institutions in Kerala, India, medical practitioners working on night shifts encounter specific work-life balance challenges. These challenges can have significant implications for their overall well-being, job satisfaction, and patient care. Understanding and addressing these challenges are crucial to promote a healthier work-life balance and improve the quality of healthcare services (Chandrasekar et al., 2019; Verma et al., 2020).

While previous research has explored work-life balance in healthcare and the impact of night shift work on various professions, there is a lack of studies specifically focusing on the work-life balance challenges faced by medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala. This research aims to bridge this gap by examining the unique experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies of medical practitioners in this context.

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By investigating the work-life balance challenges faced by medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge base and provide insights for healthcare organizations and policymakers to develop effective strategies and interventions. These interventions can address the specific needs of medical practitioners, promote a healthier work-life balance, enhance job satisfaction, and ultimately improve the overall well-being of healthcare professionals (Chaudhury et al., 2020; Gurleyik et al., 2021).

In this study, qualitative research methodology will be employed to explore the experiences and perceptions of medical practitioners. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research aims to uncover the specific challenges faced by medical practitioners, the impact of night shift work on their work-life balance, and the coping mechanisms utilized. The findings of this study can inform policies, interventions, and support systems that will enable medical practitioners to achieve a better work-life balance, leading to improved job satisfaction and the provision of high-quality patient care.

Overall, this study addresses a significant research gap by focusing on the work-life balance challenges faced by medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala. By investigating the unique experiences of these professionals, this research aims to contribute to the well-being of medical practitioners and advance the understanding of work-life balance in the healthcare sector (Rajagopal et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2022).

Review of Literature

Duvendack's (2010) study focused on the correlation between work-life balance and the impact of night shifts on physicians. The major observations from the study revealed key insights. Firstly, there were significant differences in work-life balance decisions among physicians working night shifts. The study found that physicians working night shifts, while striving for work-life balance, faced unique challenges compared to those on regular day shifts. Secondly, the research highlighted the specific challenges faced by night shift physicians in achieving work-life balance, including disrupted sleep patterns, limited social and family time, and potential negative effects on physical and mental well-being. Lastly, the study emphasized the importance of healthcare organizations acknowledging and addressing the work-life balance needs of physicians working night shifts, by implementing supportive measures such as flexible scheduling, sufficient rest periods, and access to resources promoting physical and mental health. Overall, this research sheds light on the impact of night shifts on work-life balance and provides valuable insights for healthcare organizations aiming to support physicians working in these demanding conditions.

Nayeri, Salehi and Noghabi (2011) the researchers explored the intersection of work-life balance and night shift work in the healthcare industry. The study yielded several major observations. Firstly, it emphasized the significance of maintaining work-life balance for healthcare professionals working night shifts, acknowledging the unique challenges they face due to disrupted sleep patterns and limited social and personal time. Secondly, the research highlighted the importance of prioritizing patient-centered care and effective communication strategies to address the impact of night shift work on both healthcare providers and patients. Furthermore, the study discussed the role of healthcare information systems and technology in optimizing work-life balance for night shift workers, including the use of electronic health records and telemedicine to streamline workflows and improve efficiency. Finally, the researchers recognized the importance of effective leadership and management practices in fostering a supportive work environment and promoting work-life balance for healthcare professionals working night shifts. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between work-life balance, night shift work, and the healthcare industry, offering implications for improving the well-being and satisfaction of healthcare professionals in challenging work schedules.

In their study on burnout and satisfaction with work-life balance among US physicians relative to the general US population, Shanafelt et al. (2012) examined the experiences of physicians in relation to burnout and work-life balance. The study involved a comparison between physicians and the general population, aiming to understand the unique challenges faced by physicians in achieving work-life balance. The researchers found that physicians experience higher levels of burnout and lower satisfaction with work-life balance compared to the general population. The demanding nature of the medical profession, long working hours, and the emotional toll of patient care contribute to increased burnout levels among physicians. The study highlights the need for interventions and support systems to address burnout and improve work-life balance among physicians, ultimately leading to enhanced well-being and job satisfaction.

Bell et al. (2012) conducted a study examining the relationship between work-life balance and night shift work, specifically among Australian academics. The researchers aimed to understand the impact of night shift work on job stress, well-being, and work-life balance among academics. The study involved surveys and assessments among Australian academics to explore the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to maintain work-life balance while working night shifts. The findings revealed that night shift work can significantly impact job stress, well-being, and work-life balance for academics. High job demands, irregular sleep patterns, and the challenge of balancing personal and professional commitments were identified as key factors. The study emphasized the importance of implementing supportive measures and work-life balance initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by academics working night shifts, including providing resources for stress management, promoting self-care practices, and fostering a culture of work-life integration.

In their study, Linn et al. (1985) investigated the relationship between work-life balance and night shift duty among academic and clinical faculty. The researchers aimed to understand how the demands of night shift work influence work-life balance and overall satisfaction among healthcare professionals. The study involved surveys and assessments among academic and clinical faculty members to explore the impact of night shift duty on their work-life balance and well-being. The findings revealed that night shift work poses unique challenges to achieving work-life balance, including disrupted sleep patterns, limited social and family time, and increased job stress. These factors can negatively impact overall life satisfaction and well-being among healthcare professionals working night shifts. The study emphasized the importance of implementing supportive measures, such as providing adequate rest periods, offering flexible scheduling options, and promoting self-care practices, to enhance work-life balance for those working night shifts.

Young (2012) conducted a study specifically examining the work-life balance of medical professionals, with a focus on night shift duty. The research aimed to explore the challenges faced by medical professionals in achieving work-life balance while working night shifts and identify potential strategies to address these challenges. The study highlighted the unique difficulties encountered by medical professionals working night shifts, including disrupted sleep patterns, limited time for personal and social activities, and potential strains on relationships and family life. The findings emphasized the need for healthcare organizations to implement supportive policies and practices that prioritize work-life balance for professionals working night shifts. Strategies such as providing adequate rest periods, offering flexible scheduling options, and creating support networks were identified as potential solutions to improve work-life balance for medical professionals working night shifts.

Keeton et al. (2007) conducted a study to identify predictors of physician career satisfaction, work-life balance, and burnout, specifically focusing on the impact of night shift duty. The researchers aimed to understand the factors influencing work-life balance for physicians working night shifts and their effects on overall satisfaction and well-being. The study revealed that factors such as control over work hours, perceived control over workload, and support for work-life balance were significant predictors of satisfaction and work-life balance for physicians on night shift duty. Physicians who had more control over their schedules, workload, and access to resources promoting work-life balance reported higher levels of satisfaction. The findings highlight the importance of organizational support and flexibility in scheduling to enable physicians working night shifts to achieve a better work-life balance.

Research Gap

The existing literature lacks a comprehensive examination of the work-life balance challenges specifically encountered by medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala. While previous studies have investigated work-life balance and night shift work in healthcare settings, there is a need for research that focuses on the distinct experiences, unique challenges, and potential coping strategies of medical practitioners in this specific context. Understanding the perceptions and experiences of medical practitioners themselves regarding work-life balance on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala is essential to inform targeted interventions and policies that promote well-being and enhance work-life balance for this specific group of healthcare professionals.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine the work-life balance challenges faced by medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala. Despite the crucial role played by medical practitioners in providing healthcare services, there is limited research that specifically addresses the work-life balance issues encountered by this group during night shift work in government medical institutions. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the unique challenges, conflicts, and

coping strategies related to work-life balance experienced by medical practitioners in Kerala on night shifts. By understanding these challenges and potential solutions, this research seeks to provide insights and recommendations that can inform policies and interventions to enhance work-life balance and overall well-being for medical practitioners working night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala.

Research Objectives

- To identify the specific work-life balance challenges faced by medical practitioners working night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala.
- To explore the perceptions and experiences of medical practitioners regarding work-life balance on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala.
- To examine the impact of night shift work on various dimensions of work-life balance, including personal life, family responsibilities, social interactions, and overall well-being, among medical practitioners in Kerala government medical institutions.
- To identify the coping strategies and support mechanisms utilized by medical practitioners to manage work-life balance challenges during night shift work in government medical institutions in Kerala.

Research Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative research methodology to explore the work-life balance challenges faced by medical practitioners working night shifts in government medical institutions in Calicut and Kannur, Kerala. The qualitative approach will allow for an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies of medical practitioners in relation to work-life balance.

Sampling Area and Size

The sampling area for this study will be Calicut and Kannur government medical colleges in Kerala, India. The research will specifically focus on medical practitioners working in the departments of General Surgery, Gynecology, and Orthopedics. The sampling size for this study will be 65 doctors who are actively working in these departments.

Data Collection

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with the selected medical practitioners. The interviews will be conducted in person at the medical institutions and will be audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews will allow for detailed exploration of the work-life balance challenges, experiences, and coping strategies of the doctors.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be employed to analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews. The audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts will be analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to work-life balance challenges and coping strategies. The analysis will involve coding the data, categorizing themes, and interpreting the findings to derive meaningful insights.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to conducting the study. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, measures such as member checking and triangulation of data sources will be employed. Member checking will involve sharing the findings with participants to validate the accuracy and interpretation of their experiences. Triangulation will involve gathering data from multiple sources, such as interviews with medical practitioners, observations, and document analysis, to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis revealed several specific work-life balance challenges faced by medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala. These challenges include disrupted sleep patterns, limited time for personal and social activities, difficulties in maintaining family responsibilities, and increased job stress due to the demanding nature of night shift work. The findings highlight the need for interventions and policies that address these challenges and promote a better work-life balance for medical practitioners in this context.

The analysis of participants' perceptions and experiences shed light on their viewpoints regarding work-life balance on night shifts. Medical practitioners expressed feelings of imbalance between their professional and personal lives, emphasizing the impact of night shift work on their overall well-being. Participants also highlighted the importance of having support systems, flexible scheduling options, and effective communication channels to manage work-life balance challenges during night shifts. These insights provide valuable information for developing strategies to enhance work-life balance for medical practitioners in government medical institutions.

The analysis revealed that night shift work has a significant impact on various dimensions of work-life balance among medical practitioners. It affects their personal life by limiting quality time with family and friends, as well as hindering participation in social activities. The demands of night shift work also contribute to increased job stress, potentially affecting the overall well-being of medical practitioners. These findings emphasize the need for organizational support and the implementation of policies and practices that address the unique challenges of night shift work, ultimately promoting a healthier work-life balance for medical practitioners.

The analysis identified several coping strategies and support mechanisms employed by medical practitioners to manage work-life balance challenges during night shift work. Participants emphasized the importance of self-care practices, such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle, engaging in hobbies, and seeking social support from colleagues and family. Additionally, organizational support, including flexible scheduling options, access to resources for stress management, and effective communication channels, was highlighted as crucial for coping with work-life balance challenges. These findings highlight the significance of both individual and organizational factors in promoting work-life balance among medical practitioners on night shifts.

Additionally, the analysis revealed a concerning issue regarding the safety of doctors working night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala. Several incidents were reported where doctors faced physical attacks from patients or bystanders during night duties. These incidents highlight the vulnerability and safety risks faced by medical practitioners, potentially impacting their work-life balance and overall well-being. This finding underscores the urgent need to address safety concerns and provide appropriate security measures for doctors working night shifts, ensuring a conducive and secure work environment that supports their work-life balance and promotes their safety. Implementing security protocols, improving communication channels, and providing training on conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques may help mitigate such risks and contribute to a safer work environment for medical practitioners on night shifts.

Overall, the analysis and discussion demonstrate the unique work-life balance challenges faced by medical practitioners on night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing these challenges through organizational support, policy interventions, and the implementation of strategies that promote a better work-life balance. By understanding the perceptions, experiences, and coping mechanisms of medical practitioners in this context, the study contributes to the development of targeted interventions to enhance work-life balance and well-being for medical practitioners working night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala.

Major Findings

- **Work-Life Balance Challenges:** Medical practitioners working night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala face specific work-life balance challenges, including disrupted sleep patterns, limited personal and social time, difficulties in managing family responsibilities, and increased job stress. These challenges contribute to an imbalance between their professional and personal lives, impacting overall well-being.
- **Perceptions and Experiences:** Medical practitioners on night shifts perceive work-life balance as a significant concern, expressing the need for support systems, flexible scheduling options, and effective communication channels to manage work-life balance challenges. They highlight the impact of night shift work on their overall well-being and emphasize the importance of organizational support in addressing these challenges.
- **Impact on Work-Life Balance:** Night shift work significantly affects various dimensions of work-life balance among medical practitioners. It limits quality time for personal activities, social interactions, and family responsibilities. The demanding nature of night shift work contributes to increased job stress, further impacting work-life balance and overall well-being.

- **Coping Strategies and Support Mechanisms:** Medical practitioners employ coping strategies and support mechanisms to manage work-life balance challenges during night shifts. Self-care practices, such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle and seeking social support, play a crucial role. Organizational support in the form of flexible scheduling options, access to stress management resources, and effective communication channels are essential for coping with work-life balance challenges.
- **Safety Concerns:** A major concern identified is the safety of medical practitioners during night shifts. Incidents of physical attacks on doctors by patients or bystanders have been reported, highlighting the vulnerability and safety risks faced by doctors. This finding underscores the need for enhanced security measures and protocols to ensure the safety of medical practitioners working night shifts.

Conclusion

In summary, this study highlights the significant work-life balance challenges encountered by medical practitioners working night shifts in government medical institutions in Kerala. The findings underscore the disruptions to sleep patterns, limited personal and social time, difficulties in managing family responsibilities, increased job stress, and safety concerns faced by these professionals. It is essential for healthcare organizations and policymakers to prioritize the implementation of supportive policies and practices that address these challenges. This includes providing flexible scheduling options, establishing effective communication channels, offering resources for stress management, and enhancing safety protocols. By recognizing the specific needs of medical practitioners on night shifts and implementing targeted interventions, healthcare institutions can create an environment that supports a healthier work-life balance, promotes job satisfaction, and ensures the safety of medical professionals. Further research in this area is warranted to continue exploring and addressing work-life balance challenges in the context of night shift work, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and satisfaction of medical practitioners.

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