

WORK-LIFE BALANCE: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE, “HER” CHALLENGES AND “HIS” COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on work- life balance scenario in the Indian perspective keeping in mind the conflicts and challenges working women face. Organizations in emerging Indian economy play a pivotal role to providing better balance to the lives of working women between work and non-work domains. Support provided by organizations won't be so effective unless husbands play their part as a support pillar to these working ladies. More studies are required to highlight the caring and empathetic role of these millennial young husbands and fathers. These men make a balance between old socio cultural mindset and progressive gender-neutral attitude. These responsible and caring dads of today would raise equally empathetic dads for tomorrow.

KEYWORDS: Work-Life Balance, Work-Family Conflict, Family-Work Enrichment, Spillover, Crossover.

Introduction

Human is a social animal. In a life spell we play variety of roles. A child, sibling, cousin, friend, spouse, parent, relative, peer, superior, subordinate, citizen and what not (Mohanty & Jena, 2016). Everyone must play each role and relation with full perfection maintaining complete balance in one's own life and others too. This is work-life balance (WLB). Researchers define it as a skill to enjoy both work and family roles. At work it's important to be efficient and competitive while at the same time relish quality time with loved ones, family and friends (Cruz, 2017). Some can manage to play while others may face some challenges.

In changing socioeconomically trends percentage of Indian women contributing in financial well-being of families is ever increasing (Rastogi *et al.*, 2017). With increase in working couples, single parents (Bhalla & Kang, 2018) due to divorces, and nuclear families the role of woman has gradually modified from homemaker to career woman (Batra & Reio, 2016) who is ready to face dual responsibilities. But it is always easier said than done. India though is going through a socio cultural transition but deep roots of traditional mindset which sees women in kitchen doing household chores (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2015) would take time to get uprooted completely. Women in India, day in day out are trying to prove their mettle as perfect wives, daughters-in-law, mothers and promising professionals. With all these daily adventures how difficult it is to balance so many roles.

Surveys across the world show concern upon deteriorating WLB worldwide due to long work hours. Organizations too have realized effects of these conflict on the on-the-job performances and started adopting WLB policies (Kumarasamy *et al.*, 2016) that would make both work and life easy, relaxed, and fun for the employees especially for these career women (Halinski *et al.*, 2018). But one can never underestimate the support extended by family especially by better halves. In fact, supportive organizational culture would make family life better and happy family space would certainly make work fun and not a burden (Jain and Nair, 2017).

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Research background

Some interesting researches on working women WLB, their conflicts, challenges and the redressal, are as under:

Bharathi and Mala (2016) studied changing Indian socio cultural along with economic picture, role of women as an efficient worker and caring family person. They discussed various personal and professional factors disturbing WLB in Indian working ladies and explored factors which can reduce the conflicts. They emphasized on the role of sympathetic and considerate husbands in the lives of these working angels. Leading to poor WLB women attrition rate is quite high in India (Memon & Satpathy, 2017; Ranganathan, 2017; Batra & Reio, 2016). Organizations have to offer women friendly workplace to make them more committed and feel attached (Bhalla & Kang, 2018; Memon & Satpathy, 2017). More than attrition low women representation in top management in Indian companies is a concern and gender biasness along with poor WLB are responsible (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2018; Batra & Reio, 2016). Most of the studies consider conflicts between work and family domain but Sampath and Baral (2017) emphasised enrichment between the two domains. Their study explained spillover and crossover phenomenon and placed WLB in a different dimension. Support of the family and organizations creates positive spillover and enrich both domains positively (Jain & Nair, 2017) especially for working women. Lot of studies on WLB issues of working women but role of their husbands in maintaining that balance is not covered by many in detail. Image of Indian men is changing, and these millennial (Williams, 2017) husband-father are more concerned to help their working spouses in dealing with challenging roles at work and in family (Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2013; Sriram & Navalkar, 2012). These new age men play equal role in elderly care (Dhar, 2012) and healthy lifestyle of their working spouses (Naqvi, 2011).

Work-Life Balance- An Indian Perspective

Work- life balance initially called as work-family balance was coined somewhere in 70s in United Kingdom (Pradhan *et al.*, 2016). West being an individualistic society has different connotation for work-life balance vis-à-vis to Indian society which is collectivist (Sampath & Baral, 2017).

Our parents or grandparents hardly face this problem of balancing work and family, reason being limited hours of work, joint families and defined roles of men and women. Men going out to work and women look after the family (Pradhan *et al.*, 2016). Life was simple, and people were contented. With the modernization and rapid urbanization, impact of MNC (multinational company) culture, and changing socioeconomic trends (Valk *et al.*, 2014) there was a sharp increase in dual-earning couples (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016) with women working in diverse work environment (Pattusamy & Jacob, 2015). This has made Indian families financially strong (Valk *et al.*, 2014) but with the collapse of joint families (Rastogi *et al.*, 2017) managing demanding work along with family is challenging for working women (Garg, 2016).

While dealing with WLB there are two models which generally researchers study- conflict and enrichment. Conflict models says if too much time and energy spend in one domain i.e. either work or family, then it's difficult to be efficient in another domain and causes conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Sampath & Baral, 2017). One can have conflicts from either work to family or family to work; work-family conflict (WFC) or family-work conflict (FWC), more time at work then family is affected or more time for family then work get affected. Enrichment model says positivity of one domain has positive effect on the another one. Positivity at work will enhance family life vice versa (Sampath & Baral, 2017). This would be work-family enrichment (WFE) and family-work enrichment (FEW) (Jain & Nair, 2017). All these conflicts and enrichments have spillover or crossover effects. *Spillover* happens when stress or positivity of one domain affects roles in another domain for the same person while *crossover* would have impact of stress or positivity on closely related individual in a pair, in either of the domains. Husband wife forms one such close pair at home while subordinate and senior is one pair at work (Sampath & Baral, 2017).

WLB studies have become need of an hour as human resource is the main asset of service sector which plays a significant role in Indian economy presently (Mehta, 2015). With stressed employees' organizations lose on productivity and efficiency. To compensate they need to adopt policies supporting work-life balance specially for women as they face double the pressure (Memon & Satpathy, 2017). Attrition which is one of the main issue in service sector with talented women employees (Pradhan *et al.*, 2016) could also be checked by implementing WLB policies. It is not only the matter of concern for organizations but also for families of these employees. Positive vibes from work make things easier in family, similarly supportive family makes work more interesting (Jain & Nair, 2017). In present scenario role of husbands have become pivotal with working wives. In this study role of millennial men (Williams, 2017) to maintain WLB in the lives of their better halves is being focused.

"Her" Challenges and Conflicts

Scholars of sociology have emerged with the consensus that middle-class working women continuously juggle (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016) between two roles; ideal mother and an ideal worker (Williams, 2017). Dilemma of managing work and family together with full perfection by working women is not only felt in India but also in rest of the world.

Career Break, Conflicts, and Interference

It has been studied by scholars that in India retaining talented women are a major challenge among organizations (Ranganathan, 2017). As per Klugman *etal.* (2014) from 1991 to 2012 percentage of Indian women in workforce had declined (Batra & Reio, 2016). Reasons for women leaving lucrative job profiles in between are both from work and family domains. Working women need to work hard to prove themselves at par to their male counterparts in addition to the playing a role of accommodative wife, loving and responsible mother (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016), obedient daughter-in-law, and hospitable housewife. So many roles and limited time in hand. Dedicating proportionate time, efforts, and emotions in work and family domains often leave these working women puzzled and lead to confusion and conflict (Rastogi *etal.*, 2017) which are termed as *work-family conflict* and *family-work conflict* (Pattusamy & Jacob, 2015). Bhalla and Kang (2018) explained the thoughts given by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) that excessive devotion of all the efforts, energy, time, and emotions in work would hamper one's performance in family role that's what *work-family conflict* (WFC). Similarly, excessive time and efforts devoted for family can affect work performance thus creating *family-work conflict* (FWC). Work challenges that could lead to WFC to millennial (Williams, 2017) working women are long working hours, add on jobs apart from the routine ones, non-empathetic attitudes of peers and seniors, long commute time, conference calls at home, interference of work on vacations, official travel (if involved), pursuance of trainings or courses for career growth, and many more (Bharathi & Mala, 2016).

Family challenges that could lead to FWC are travelling job profile of husbands, child care and responsible upbringing, quality time to be spend with growing children, looking after of ailing or dependent elders (Valk *etal.*, 2014), apathy shown by family members, time for self-care, constant feeling of not paying proper attention to family needs etc (Naqvi, 2011). These conflicts have two-way interference and can create stress, hampers work performance, personal health, marital gratification and adversely affect partner's psychological health and well-being (Sampath & Baral, 2017). Work meddling in with family and life in general while family obligations can meddle work. This is termed as *spillover* by the scholars (Prakash, 2018). *Spillover* is affecting the concerned person's mental peace and physical well-being (Sampath & Baral, 2017). While in a marriage with dual earning couples there is always a chance to get affected by partner's psychological state. Spouses carrying work stress to home disturb the family peace. This aspect of affecting partner psychologically is termed as *crossover* effect of dual-earning couples (Sampath & Baral, 2017). Both spillover and crossover can be positive and negative but with all these misadventures it is affecting negatively.

Career Re-entry

Due to these conflicts and various family and social obligations working ladies after marriage or after child birth generally leave their jobs or change it to less intense work profiles (Collins & Abhichandani, 2016). Some never join it back while some try to return to the active workforce prominently to improve financial condition of their family and sometimes to prove their existence (Gwal, 2016). But re-entry for these ladies after long work breaks is not that easy. The career breaks make few skills obsolete especially in competitive technical sectors and needs training to match with latest skill set (Gwal, 2016). Organizations at times prefer young updated professional females then talented returnees (Collins & Abhichandani, 2016) which is creating issue in gender disparity at middle and top-level management (Gwal, 2016).

Health

In fact, work and family demands leave no space in the lives of these working women to give attention to their own health (Garg & Lal, 2016). Lack of physical exercise, long working hours, travel for work (Mahapatra, 2015), pressure to prove against men colleagues, unhealthy eating due to lack of time, child care (Ranganathan, 2017), elderly care, children's education, social commitments (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016), and similar issues lead to number of physiological and psychological disorders. Obesity, sleeping and digestion disorders; back, neck and eye problems (Mehta, 2015) are very common in working women. Apart from body disorders loneliness, insecurity of losing job, and other psychological disorders (Mehta, 2015) cause mental stress which create issues like infertility at young age, hypertension, diabetes, early menopause and many more complexities.

Organizational Role: WLB and Womanhood Beyond

The millennial generation (Williams, 2017) is hard working and want to enjoy all flavours of life. For them keeping balance is not only work and family but some more non-work domains (Prakash,2018). Weekend excursions with friends, adventure trips, selfless society services (Williams, 2017), health and fitness (Cruz, 2017), celebrating festivals, attending weddings, and lot more. Organizations too have realized the secret of keeping employees motivated. Providing them balance between work and life would have better chance to retain talented employees (Pradhan *et al.*, 2016) as in surveys people were more inclined to work for organizations which are more sensitive towards WLB of employees' (Sampath & Baral,2017).

Policies to Enrich Balance

WFC and FWC create havoc in anybody's life and people feel strained between multiple roles and expectations. WLB issues can be handled swiftly if organizations can create positive work environment for women workers. Studies talk about *work-family enrichment* and *family-work enrichment* which is a part WLB dynamics. Enrichment in simple words be a positive effect of work on family and family on work (Jain & Nair,2017). It includes all sort of support from the superiors, gender unbiased, to various policies and practices supporting WLB. Organizations are adopting policies like flexible working hours, part-time work options, job sharing (Memon & Satpathy, 2017), work from home (Bharathi & Mala, 2016), government schemes like maternity and paternity leave (Mehta, 2015) policies, medical benefits, sick leaves (Bharathi & Mala, 2016), recreational activities specially designed for women, policies against sexual harassment, women rest rooms (Batra & Reio, 2016), special leave provisions like career break leave or sabbatical, in-house creche for toddlers (Memon & Satpathy, 2017) etc. When organizations give support to women workers in balancing their work and family life they become committed to the organizations, work hard to climb ladders of success, and have long association with the organizations (Memon & Satpathy, 2017).

Retention and Representation

Working women, their WLB issues, retention and appropriate representation (Batra & Reio, 2016) at top level is a present focus of organizations to become part of a gender-neutral (Batra & Reio, 2016) society. Women are considered good leaders due to their rationality, commitment, trust, crisis management ability but due to male chauvinism they face a lot of trouble to grow (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2018). To retain talented women employees' companies are providing supportive environment by encouraging leaders to talk about WLB issues openly with women staff (Mahapatra, 2015). For due representation of women at the top level in Indian companies, Bhattacharya et al. (2018) in their study suggested factors that could help to improve the scenario a bit. Few are family-friendly practices along with support from management, gender parity, career mentoring, flexibility in work schedules, capacity building modules, giving visibility to talented women employees and developing their potential.

Smooth Re-entry

Corporates are making re-entry of women into an active workforce much easier than ever as a part of gender-neutral policies (Collins & Abhichandani, 2016) but still there is long way to go as only big organized organizations follow re-entry policies. These organizations provide skill enhancing training to women returnees and attitude changing trainings to men in management to avoid any sort of biasness, opting for counseling sessions for WLB and zero tolerance for gender discrimination (Collins & Abhichandani, 2016).

Well-being Practices

For physiological well-being organizations are coming up with in-house recreational cells where employees can come and play few indoor games like table tennis, small gym area (Bharathi & Mala,2016), rest rooms especially for women employees (Batra & Reio,2016). There is a psychological aspect of work well-being which is linked more to the inter personal relationships among employees (Sandilya & Shahnawaz, 2018). Women employees feel valued if they are treated fairly by the men superiors and colleagues (Sandilya & Shahnawaz, 2018). Organizations make sure to create a cordial, harmonious and gender- neutral environment for such psychological connect and belongingness. These types of support help employees especially women to perform well as they feel more committed to the organization (Garg & Lal,2016).

“His” Role in Family Support – Pillar of Empathy

Parents of Indian girls are putting so much efforts to give best education to their daughters so that they can lead their life independently and can fulfill their dreams, ambitions, and aspirations (Gupta & Sharma, 2003). But in India after marriage these highly educated working ladies either leave their jobs, change from highly demanding corporate jobs to academic jobs, or look for less challenging and demanding work profile (Gwal, 2016). In such scenario role of husbands becomes important.

Enriching Life

Without the support of family nobody either man or woman achieves professional success. As discussed earlier in the paper, the positive effect of family’s support, love and care is termed as *family-work enrichment* (Jain & Nair, 2017). The best gift for a married working woman would be the support of her better half in fulfilling her family obligations. The image of Indian men from a disciplinarian, a protector, and a breadwinner is changing to a supportive, caring, and nurturing spouse and a father (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012). These millennial (Williams, 2017) spouses and fathers are empathetic and against the traditional patriarchal normsmaking efforts to make life easier for their working wives.

Child Care

It is about their emotional support during pregnancy, child birth and nurturing infants or looking after daily household chores, elderly care or childrearing (Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2013). These millennial husbands are extending their help in all possible ways. The definition of fatherhood is changing in new progressive India. Fathers are getting close to their children in terms of care, playfulness, mentoring, and motivation (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012). This modern educated empathetic new lot of caring millennial men (Williams, 2017) is putting every single bit to provide a carefree life to their working spouses, healthy options to their ailing parents, and secured future to their children. Studies talk about conflicts of working ladies, their problems, their struggle, their sacrifices but very few studies have highlight the sacrifice, struggle, care, love, support, and guidance these young concerned men, equally occupied with work and its complications. The role of these husbands increases many folds if they are staying in extended families with parents. Despite the dislike of their parents about the help they extend in household chores to their working partners (Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2013), they must maintain a balance between the expectations of their parents, wives, children and obviously work.

Elderly Care

Elderly care is also a concern for dual earning couples in big cities along with the child care. Despite of paid domestic helps available adult children (Dhar, 2012) must look after their ailing parents as in Indian culture it is supposedly a duty of grownups. While generally parents of men live with their sons but these days due to small families and at times out of choice women too want to look after their old parents (Dhar, 2012). Financial independence makes things little easier, but personal care and time is what make situations little stressed specially when both the partners are working (Naqvi, 2011). Women are always being studied for the care they offer to their in-laws, but men who look after their old parents also play multiple roles at one time. As a son, husband, father, care giver, and as an employee (Dhar, 2012).

Health and Well-being

Husbands play an important role in well-being of their wives as well. Both husband and wife if live together, share daily chores, and spend quality time together, that would have a deep impact on psychological health of both. Women who have supportive husbands feel less stressed (Valk *et al.*, 2014) as they can share their work pressures and sort out personal problems with somebody who understands them and care for them. It is also felt that if couples do some sort of workout together that would also have an impact on physiological and mental health. Yoga, meditation, chanting, walk, gym visits, jogging, and similar activities can reduce psychological stress and maintain their mental health (Bharathi & Mala, 2016). While recreational activities with children like visit to zoos, parks, or theatres over the weekends, adventurous holidays, and family outings with grandparents would help to build strong emotional bonds within the family members. Role of husbands with working partner is equally sensitive, responsible, and empathetic as role of working women in any dual earning household. Ahlawat (2018) in her books review mentioned that between 1980s and 1990s daughters belonging to elite families of educated men were send for higher professional education compared to the rest. Today’s empathetic husband-father (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012) would raise concerned and socially responsible children who would be the independent mothers and empathetic husbands of tomorrow.

Conclusion

Reports show that among BRICS nations India has the lowest percentage of women participation in paid employment and needs millions of skilled workers to cater the demand over next decade (Collins & Abhichandani, 2016). This void is created by attrition of professional married women who takes career break or leave their lucrative jobs due to marriage or motherhood. As a progressive society we need to bridge this gap and should be more responsible to share the family responsibilities of working women. Old traditional patriarchal norms should be side lined, and women should be provided with more relaxed and cordial environment both at home and at work so that we can have the best of professionals in the workforce to face the world with excellence. Organizations have started adapting work- life balance policies for working women owing to international clientele and need for more skilled professionals. But efforts of these organizations would go in vain if women won't get support from their families. Family is not only husband and children but also in-laws and close relatives. Although role of husbands holds an important place in providing all sort of emotional and behavioral support so that these working ladies won't feel strained between work and family. Men need to understand this, and more and more men should participate in making the lives of their working wives balanced who leave their families behind to be the part of these men's lives.

Recommendations

Men play an important role in the lives of their working partners as they can be strong pillars of support and make feel the ladies wonderful. But if working ladies follow few practices they can reduce stress in their as well as in their husbands' lives. There has been a lot of fuzz about long working hours in the corporate sector these days. People normally work for long and carry their work to home as well. Stop that. Don't carry work to home for the weekends or holidays (Hamilton Skurak *etal.*, 2018). Try to finish it in the working hours. Some people get engrossed so deeply in their work that they can't come out of that psychologically and keep thinking about it. Try to get detached from the work and develop habit to enjoy life with the loved ones. This is termed as psychological detachment by the scholars and researchers. Enjoying life with the family would take away a lot of stress out of the mind (Hamilton Skurak *etal.*, 2018). Spend some time in pursuing any hobby. Spend time with children (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016). Spend some quality time with elders in the family. They too would feel better and understand your conflicting situations. Attend family functions and meet with friends as social gathering makes the mood better and person feels reenergized. One can also do some physical activity to keep the hormone levels up and high.

Limitations and Future Scope

The present study provides theoretical perspective of WLB of working women and role of Indian husbands in the lives of their working wives. Further a descriptive analysis can be made keeping this as a base and opinions of dual working couples can be formulated. India being a diverse country socio cultural environment keep changing with the region. In present study a general opinion is being studied further a study considering specific geographical area can be performed. Women with children in different age groups can be considered. In present study general opinion on private sector is considered. In future both public and private sectors can be covered. Sectoral study can also be made, primary, secondary, and tertiary. WLB for women working in blue collar jobs can also be studied. Entrepreneur women and their WLB can also be covered. Success stories of women leaders could be covered along with the role of their husbands behind their success.

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