

“A study of work-life balance among women executives in MNCs with specific reference to Bangalore”

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Abstract

The impact work has had on family constantly changes over time. Even though some consider work and family separate domains, in which a person's role alternates between husband or wife and employee, it is significant to see how the impact of work has carried over to the social life outside of the office and changed the relationships amongst family members. According to the National Study of the Changing Workforce the question that stands open is: –If the job culture of contemporary workplaces in the new economy is constantly increasing its demand for longer hours at work, what does this mean for current and future familial relationships of employees.

Although there are positive reasons and fulfillment one can gain from work, such as “self-worth or dignity” the focus in this paper is on the negative consequences of increasing weekly work hours on the family sphere as well as the solutions that can be taken by affected families to balance the conflict between work demands and family. Many social researchers have investigated this work-family relationship and turned to various theories to explain the consequences that follow from work-family conflicts, and these can also be applied to the correlation between longer work hours and family life.

KEYWORDS: Job culture, work- family relationship, conflicts, women employees

Introduction

The impact work has had on family constantly changes over time. Even though some consider work and family separate domains, in which a person's role alternates between husband or wife and employee, it is significant to see how the impact of work has carried over to the social life outside of the office and changed the relationships amongst family members. National Study of the Changing Workforce [NSCW], 1997, p. 8), the question that stands open is: –If the job culture of contemporary workplaces in the new economy is constantly increasing its demand for longer hours at work, what does this mean for current and future familial relationships of employees.

Although there are positive reasons and fulfillment one can gain from work, such as “self-worth or dignity” (Reich, 2001), the focus in this paper is on the negative consequences of increasing weekly work hours on the family sphere as well as the solutions that can be taken by affected families to balance the conflict between work demands and family (p. 56). Many social researchers have investigated this work-family relationship and turned to various theories to explain the consequences that follow from work-family conflicts, and these can also be applied to the correlation between longer work hours and family life.

Background: Work-family Study

Work and family literature mostly examines the role of work and studies its connection to the family. Wharton and Blair-Loy (2006) refer to work-family conflict as a situation, in which “the demands of the work interfere with fulfilling family responsibilities” (p. 417). The role of researchers is to explore the relationship between both domains in order to make sense of the correlation and consequences that can follow when both interact with one another. In connection to family, many predictors of work-family conflict have been researched, including demands, resources, and accommodations of employment (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000, p. 123). Stress, health-related problems, job dissatisfaction, and lower psychological well-being may result when work demands, resources, and employment accommodations are in negative context, and they may influence the worker’s efficiency to fulfill family responsibilities (Milliken & Dunn-Jensen, 2005, p.45). One of the many theories to explain how work actually can interfere with family life is based on the spillover theory, which emphasizes that people in higher demanding jobs “experience substantially higher levels of negative spillover from work into their lives off the job—jeopardizing their personal and family well-being” (National Study of the Changing Workforce [NSCW], 1997). Dual-income families are ...characterized as being overextended, overworked, overwhelmed and over the top” (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2006, p.67). The number of families headed by single parents has increased 25 percent since 1990, to more than 7.5 million households (Sloan Work and Family Research Network, 2005). These trends show that it is even more important that scholars analyze ways to alleviate work-family conflict to make both spheres even more compatible and less distressing for working Americans with children since balancing work life and family is getting harder to do. By constructing better solutions for workers facing work-family conflict, single parents especially can learn how to manage work and family domains effectively.

Trend of the 21st Century: Increased Work Hours

The working world has changed dramatically over the years. More people in the workforce are more educated, workers are left with higher expectations and about gaining fulfillment at work, and people are working longer hours. Stebbins (2001) points out that the women and men’s roles changed in the workplace and at home (p. 9). The decrease in marriage rates may be positively correlated with greater work demands in the new economy since some might feel that increasing demands would make it harder to maintain prospective family obligations. Advancement in technology is just one factor that contributes to the cause people to work longer and at a faster pace, and for others it is the “ways that contemporary work is becoming more satisfying and compelling” (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2006, p.48-51). For some, paid work can provide people with a sense of meaning of purpose, satisfaction, dignity, and even allows one to express a heart-felt commitment, while others just seek to make money or make a living to support their family (Reich, 2001, p. 56-61). Although work may offer a psychological or tangible satisfaction to some, Gambles et al. (2006) notes that others are physically drained from working longer hours because they “feel obliged or compelled to give more energy, emotional labor, or ‘more of themselves’ to their paid work activities” (p. 51).

The Predicament: An Imbalance Between Rising Work Hours and Family

As Reich (2001) pointed out, "Paid work is becoming far more intrusive on the rest of our lives" (p. 57). How much time workers have for family responsibilities depends largely on the amount of hours they worked (Hein, 2005, p. 129). As the amount of hours have increased over the years, and are still continuing to do so, it becomes harder to create a balance between work and family life, since demands and availability for family life obligations are not getting any less. Hein (2005) also argued that for many employees in American, longer working hours have also been shifted to "asocial hours," which are hours not standard to their regular working schedules and include night or weekends times (p. 134). This suggests that longer working hours are not only carried out during daytime, but also at nighttime at irregular time periods. Negative personal experiences that employees get from work can easily carry over into the family sphere, and even if not all Americans come to find themselves in a rut trying to balance work and familial obligations, it is still important to analyze the cause and effects of the conflict that increased work hours may exhibit on family life, as well as solutions to make balancing both domains easier. The burning question is about the consequences that might follow from an advancing and continuously developing economy, whose working hours are on the rise. Will the implications of work-family conflict get worse for future generations? If how, what can be done to lessen this conflict?

Theories: An Explanation for Imbalance

Milliken & Dunn-Jensen (2005) confirmed that a great amount of evidence from conducted research indicate that number of hours worked is positively correlated with amount of work-family conflict experienced in the family at home (p. 43). They also argued that recent research suggests that "the more hours people work, the higher the level of work interference with family and the lower the psychological well being (p. 44). Aspects of work that have been made evident to "limit success and fulfillment" in the family sphere include resources such as "money, time, and flexibility" (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000, p.125). Various theories have been established to explain the reasons for the conflict that work can deflect into family life. Some main theories are: role theory, spillover theory, and conflict theory, all which can be applied towards the current issue of increasing work hours and family life imbalance.

Role theory refers to the social role an employee plays in the work domain, and how their experienced strain can negatively affect the performance in the familial domain (Googins, 1991, p. 23). Resources at work, such as job authority, hours worked, and job satisfaction affect this social role the worker plays, and depending on whether the employee is provided these resources in a positive way (satisfactory job authority and work hours), s/he will have more or less work-family conflict (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000, p. 122-124). Edwards and Rothbard (2000) confirmed that "added work expectations and job involvement [are] predictors of work conflict and family expectations" (p.213).

Spillover theory, according to Fredriksen-Goldsen and Scharlach (2001), revolves around the conceptualization that the work sphere can have a positive or negative impact on the family sphere, meaning that attitudes and behaviors (such as distress from working long hours) can create distress at home with family members (p.55-56). Googins (1991) termed this process "negative spillover," and elaborated that "negative interference resulting from a person's experiencing problems in [the work domain] affect the

performance in [the familial domain]" (p.23). However, work can also literally spill into one's family life when one has to take home amounts of work to complete them for a deadline.

Conflict theory implies that there is an inevitable conflict between work and family because both spheres are "generally incompatible, given their differing demands, responsibilities, expectations, and norms (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001, p. 56). It is assumed that anything at work will create some kind of conflict at home.

All three theories revolve around work aspects that can psychologically influence a worker to experience work-family conflict at home, but the *spillover theory*, as well as the *conflict theory* also brings out the issue of physical aspects of work that can cause conflict, such as having to bring incomplete work assignments home to the family to get them done. *Role theory* is mostly about how resources at work can psychologically influence the worker to exhibit negative emotions or attitude at home. The *conflict theory* on its own is a more extreme version of how resources from work can psychologically and literally cause the worker to experience conflict with family, whether it be hours spent at work or being under stress. Although these theories all have a different take on how work-family conflict occurs, they all have something in common: they show that there is a conflict between work and family spheres. The consequences that are described in the theories call for a method to lessen role strain, negative spillover, and family conflict such that a healthy balance can be established between work and family life.

Nature of the Problem: Consequences of Longer Hours on Family Life

In Googins' (1991) Job and Home Study conducted in 1991, around 46 percent of parents "wished they had more time to do things for the family," while nearly 30 percent of parents felt they had more on their plate than they could handle (p.134). Wharton and Blair-Loy (2006) point out that amount of hours worked is one of the predictors of work-family conflict and creates increased concern with "juggling work and family obligations" amongst business people throughout the industrialized world (p. 415-416). Results of Wharton and Blair-Loy's research survey amongst business managers and professionals showed that "for every additional hour worked, the odds that a respondent will express concern about the effect of long hours on his or her family and personal lives increases by 7 percent (p. 426). Consequences that follow from increased work hours may be physical or psychological, depending on the circumstances and demands the worker has to deal with on the job. Moreover, the extent of the consequences varies from person to person. An individual who faces less work demands is likely to experience less work-family conflict.

Physical Consequences

"Family absence and poor family-role performance" may result from time-based demands at work, such as number of hours worked and the conditions under which this time is spent (Voydanoff, 2005, p.707, 709). This is most likely to occur to working parents that work long hours or asocial shifts and are often stuck in the office. The fact is that when a parent is at work, they are not at home and are thus not able to attend to family obligations, whether it is taking care of kids or fulfilling other duties at home. The increased hours that people are working now are likely to increase the absences of parents with their children or spouses. Poor family-role performance is possible to result because of increased absence between the role model parent and the child they are separated from.

The less often a child is able to see its parents, the less likely the child is able to learn from them.

Marital discord and decreased life satisfaction are likely to occur to individuals that try to combine work with and family roles and feel intense commitment towards both domains (Perrone, Aegisdottir, Webb & Blalock, 2006, p.288). A study that analyzed work-family conflict and marital outcomes found that conflict that occurred in the marital-familial sphere was "positively related to psychological distress, which is related both directly and indirectly to marital outcomes through marital interactions, e.g., greater hostility, less warmth and supportiveness (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001, p.57). This consequence can occur from negative spillover or even because of absence of the family member because of work demands. Dissatisfaction with life is on a more personal level and can happen to those that struggle to balance their work and familial obligations.

Caregiving strain is possible to occur to parent workers who have a hard time balancing childcare obligations with work demands. Working for extended hours may prohibit mothers or fathers from attending to their children's needs (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001, p.83; Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006, p.67). This means that a child may not be able to receive the necessary care it requires, thus negatively affecting its development.

Psychological Consequences

Family dissatisfaction and distress are strain-based demands from work that are due to time and workload pressures, and it can "create psychological spillover from the work domain to the family domain" (Voydanoff, 2005, p. 709). Pressures and overload at work have also been associated with greater withdrawal, anger, and arguments at home (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001, p.57). Thus longer working hours can influence a person to bring home stress, energy depletion, or negative emotions, which may in turn negatively influence relations with family members or even hinder the oppressed worker to participate in family life activities. A father whose physical capacity is drained from working excessive hours on the job may not be physically capable of playing with his child after work.

Sense of loneliness and disconnection may enter the life of individuals who work excessively and can moreover lead to depression and conflict with family members (Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006, p.64). When one works many hours in the office because of work demands, it can be hard to keep up with the duties at home. Asocial hours can contribute greatly to this sense of disconnection because one is obligated to work hours outside of the regular schedule. The absence at home because of the increased work hours can also contribute to the literal disconnection with family members.

With all these physical and psychological consequences that result from increased work demands, one can see that the effects of work-family conflict are more serious than one would think. Some workers go through days thinking their stress, disconnection, sense of loneliness, or other psychological factors are 'normal' or typical for people and thus don't read much into it. But one should take these factors more seriously, since they may affect the worker and his/her family's health. Both physical and psychological consequences may also bleed into the rest of an employee's social circle and world. For example, if physical absence or decreased life satisfaction plague a person, it can negatively influence the way he/she interacts with friends, co-workers, and family

members around them. Although work-family conflict might not affect workers that do not experience these consequences, there is still potential for these to creep into one's life in the future. So what can someone do who is experiencing these problems with work and family life?

Work life balance is not a problem, it is an ongoing issue which needs to be managed by adopting positive work and family practices because it mutually benefits both the employees and the employers.

Various studies have been conducted on work life balance in the Indian as well as in the international context.

From the literature review, it is evident that different studies have explored that dual career couples are increasing nowadays, as more women are entering into the workforce in India, therefore they are believed to perform multiple roles throughout their lives. As a result, it has become difficult for them to manage both the work and personal life effectively. There are various studies on work life balance practices adopted in public sector organizations, but none of the studies focus on work life balance of women executives in MNCs in Bangalore.

Objectives:

- 1) The objective of the study is to examine the status of work life balance among the women employees.
- 2) To identify the various factors which bring about an imbalance in the work and family life of women employees.
- 3) To suggest the remedial measures to overcome the work life conflict.

Research Methodology:

This is a descriptive study based on survey method. Data has been collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been collected from women executives from a cross section of the employees from various MNCs located in Bangalore with the help of a structured questionnaire and through discussions. The total sample size is taken as 200 employees. The data is classified and analyzed using mathematical and statistical tools like percentages, averages standard deviation and chi-square test. The variables used for analysis are nature of work, operating procedures contingent rewards, job freedom, opportunity for future development social relevance of work life, etc.

Table 1:
Demographic profile of the study Group (N=200)

Age group (Years)	No. of respondents	Percentage
<30 years	30	15%
30-40 years	65	32.5%
40-50 years	60	30%
>50 Years	45	22.5%
Marital Status		

Married	140	70%
Single	60	30%

Work- related factors that interferes with personal life

Sl.No	Parameter	No.	%
1.	Check your mail from home after returning from work	160	80%
2.	Volunteer for special projects in addition to your normal job duties	142	71%
3.	Work on your days off (Weekends)	145	72.5%
4.	Check back with your office even when you are on a vacation	164	82%
5.	Work late in the night at home	173	86.5%
6.	Participate in community activities for the benefit of the company	135	67.5%
7.	Attend work related functions on personal time	151	75.5%
8.	Go to office before normal business hours	178	89%

The above table shows that the women executives are not extended adequate facilities for facilitating work-life balance. It is observed that majority of the respondents find that there are many work related factors that interfere in their personal life. The following table explains about the extent of interdependence.

Table 2:

Level of interdependence of work-related factors with the given variables:

Variables	Associated Factors	Work related factors interfering in personal life			
		Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Age	<30 years	14	8	6	2
	30-40 Years	30	25	7	3
	40-50 Years	24	30	5	1
	>50 Years	16	12	10	7
Qualification	Graduate	16	6	2	1
	P G	35	18	5	2
	Professional	30	22	9	4
	Others	28	18	3	1
Marital status	Married	85	40	12	3
	Single	35	20	3	2

The above table shows that work life balance and marital status are dependent. Whereas it was independent with age and qualification. It is also clear that worklife balance is dependent on different levels of management.

Conclusion:

Work-life Balance has ever been a concern and hot issue for discussion among researchers. The reason could be an unjustifiable attrition rate, stressful nature of job, frequent health problems, job switching talent pool etc. The importance of work-life balance in dual in nature-it provides motivation, job satisfaction, productivity etc. to an employee and controlled attrition and improved retention rates, reduced absenteeism, high performance and efficiency, high commitment to an organization. The study reveals that some of the work demand has provided negative interferences in the family lives of employees and has wide differences across nature of job and the level of management. The study confirms that a proper work-life balance will provide job satisfaction of employees which in turn will create organizational success and develop competitive advantage for organizations. Thus the company's human resource team along with the active cooperation of the employees should take initiatives to facilitate proper work-life balance policies and see to it that the employees are benefited from such policies. The employee side should practice self-management so as to reduce some of the work-life imbalances arising out of stress, burnout, family commitments etc. They can probably make use of meditation techniques, yoga, extracurricular events, proper self-appraisal of jobs, adequate training for improvement etc. Organisational leaders should focus on developing, formulating, implementing and reviewing better work-life balance policies in order to build a sustainable and enriching organization. Thus a better work -place as well as a secured and happy family life is possible.

SUGGESTIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

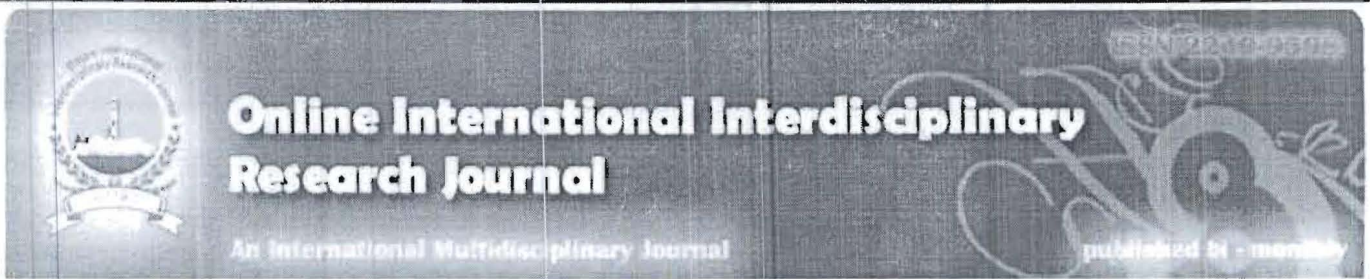
Work Life Balance is a significant factor leading to overall performance of the executives. If an individual have both physical and emotional signs of unhealthy work life balance, they cannot easily recognise the reason for that, but it is important to know what they are. Work life balance is a fit between work and personal lives. It implies that the individuals have to make efforts to maintain a healthy balance between work and their personal life. They have to control their own behaviour and expectations regarding work life balance. Research shows that if the work places enable better work life balance, the individuals will be happy, more productive and more loyal towards the organisation. Companies should have the ability to measure this and it will help to attract the individuals and can increase the retention of performing talents. Organisations can practise work life balance policies like flexible working time arrangements, care of children and family members, paid leave, insurance schemes, etc.

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