

# Gender Differences in the Perception of Work-Life Balance

NIHARIKA DOBLE and M.V. SUPRIYA  
*Anna University, India*

This paper addresses work-life balance across genders. Both men and women reported experiencing work life imbalance. Organisational efforts at providing a supportive work environment are appreciated as they go a long way towards enhancing work-life balance. In the post liberalisation context, Indian organisations are trying to enable work life balance through initiatives including flex times, part time work, provision of child care facilities. These initiatives are quite similar to those that are provided in other countries. No doubt, this is a promising trend. Yet, the respondents in this sample have reported their inability to balance work and home. In the light of this observation, the paper suggests the need to improve work life balance practices to enable employees to balance their lives. This will ensure a congenial work place for employees and make work more meaningful to them.

*Key words:* work life balance, gender difference, chi-square, work family spillover, supportive work environment

## Introduction

Chennai, the most traditional metropolis in India is seeing a sea change in its values and beliefs. This city is currently booming with employment opportunities mostly in the service sectors, more particularly in the IT and BPO, offering jobs equally to men and women (Pradhan and Abraham 2005; Varma and Sasikumar 2004). The working groups are predominantly youngsters, but due to the increased job opportunities people in middle age are also shifting into these jobs (Sachitanand et al. 2007). These jobs often come with a fair share of problems, such as work pressure, extended working times, over arching goals, non supportive work environments etc (Upadhyya and Vasavi 2006). Consequently, employees report work life pressures.

The current study attempts to ascertain gender differences, if any, on the work life balance issues and is directed at narrowing the existing research gap in this context. Surprisingly, the literature review did not reveal any study of this nature in India. Results of the study may be useful to organisations designing gender specific measures

to address work life imbalance, as expectations and coping styles appear to be different across genders (Baick and Drew 2006; Parker 2007).

### **Review of the Literature**

The recent past is a witness to changes in work schedules. A larger part of the IT sector is hence moving from a standard eight-hour a day to operating twenty four hours a day for seven days of the week (Bharat 2008). Many employees need to work on Saturdays and Sundays too. Moreover, there is a changing pattern in the working hours which is quite different from the standard one, which normally operates from 9 am to 5 pm (Bharat 2009). While some employees work in the standard time some others need to be available for work that normally starts early in the evening and continues well through the night. Sometimes they need to even work beyond the normal eight hours (Rai 2009).

Increasing workloads have pressurised employees to demonstrate their commitment to work in more obvious ways (Ishaya and Ayman 2008). Consequently, a larger part of them have tended to be present at their work place for longer periods of time, thereby reducing the time for which they are available at home. The internet and mobile phones have made it possible for the organizations to keep in constant touch with the employees both during the day and at night (Morgan 2003). This has further intensified the work demands on employees. Consequently, there are growing reports of stress and work imbalance (Bhagwagar 2009).

To a large extent in the IT sector, the employee is expected to be engaged on the job almost at all times. So the traditional distinctions between work-life and family-life have disappeared. Even during selection of employees for an organization, emphasis is placed on the attitudes the person exhibits, more particularly, whether the employee is flexible enough to be available for work at any time (Yasbek 2004).

Simultaneously, family life is also becoming more complex. The extended family, even in India, is slowly disappearing (Patel 2005). Small nuclear families have come to stay, where both the spouses go to work. In addition, there are an increasing number of single parent households due to increase in divorces (Amato et al. 2003). Although this problem is not as serious in India as in the West, yet, it could become a serious issue some time in the future. Participation by women in employment continues to grow since the past decade. In spite of more women going out to work, there has been little change in pat-

terns of household responsibilities (Singh 2004). Women continue to undertake the majority share of domestic chores, and child rearing.

These synchronous changes in working and family life result in a need for employees to continuously attempt a balancing act. Quite often the work intrudes on the family and social life, while at other times family pressures affect the work performance (Fu and Shaffer 2001). Hyman et al. (2003) observed that organizational pressures, combined with lack of work centrality, result in work intruding into non-work areas of employees' lives. Such intrusions often manifest themselves differently depending on the type of work, extent of autonomy and organizational support (Hyman et al. 2003; Atkinson and Meager 1986). Fisher and Layte (2003) consider three distinct sets of measures of work-life balance, viz. proportion of free time, the overlap of work and other dimensions of life, and the time spent with other people. Several reviews have highlighted other issues such as age, gender, life-cycle stage, ethnicity, citizenship, and childcare arrangements which also merit attention (Wallace and Cousins 2004; Jager 2001).

Jenkins (2000) observe that issues like child rearing, the need to balance multiple roles etc. have consequences on health and family relationships. Securely attached individuals experienced positive spillover in both work and family (Summer and Knight 2001). These are pointers that there are gender differences in coping with work-family issues. Women still primarily take care of domestic tasks, irrespective of their employment status. So, many women employees continue to face difficulties in balancing these two forces (Hyman and Summers 2004). Work based support to women is positively associated with job satisfaction, organisational commitment and career accomplishment (Marcinkus et al. 2007). The home working can lead to greater flexibility and independence, but it can make people work for longer periods of time, including weekends and evenings. Home environment also plays a very important role in the quality of life. Home working could be stressful, if young children have to be managed (Valcour and Hunter 2005). Gender has an important effect on home working (Gunkel 2007).

Both women and men prefer working in organisations that support work-life balance. Men appeared to benefit more than women (Burke 2002). Men feel more satisfied when they achieve more on the job even at the cost of ignoring the family. On the other hand, women stress that work and family are both equally important and both are the sources of their satisfaction. For them the former is more important. When work does not permit women to take care of their

family, they feel unhappy, disappointed and frustrated. They draw tight boundaries between work and family and they do not like one crossing the other (Burke 2002).

Valcour and Hunter (2005) premise that new trends like tele-working attempt to address work-family issues. In India too there is a rising trend towards tele-working (Morgan 2003).

These reviews highlight that there are work life balance issues that need to be addressed. The work-life balance problem is fairly similar across countries (Humphreys 2000). Most countries have put in place some measures to address the work-life balance (Todd, 2004). However, there are differences in practices to address it (Lewis, Gambels, and Rhona 2007). Reviews also indicate that the perception of work-life balance is observed to be different across genders (Connell 2005; Smithson and Stokoe 2005; Duxbury and Higgins 1991).

### **Methods**

A questionnaire was designed to collect data on issues related to work life balance. Variables in the questionnaire were selected based on the studies published by Hyman et al. (Hyman et al. 2003; Hayman 2005). The questionnaire was distributed at work places and the responses of employees were collected. A total of one hundred and ten employees from the IT sector responded to the survey. Convenience sampling was resorted to here since this is a preliminary study.

### **Results and Discussion**

The demographic profile of the sample is shown in table 1. The respondents were predominantly men. Of the sample, 30% of the respondents were less than 25 years, and 51% of them were between 26–35 years of age. More respondents were married (58%) than unmarried. About 44% of the respondents were parents with one or more children. The majority of the respondents had 5–15 years of experience (58%), followed by those with 5 years experience (34%).

#### **PERCEIVED IMPROVEMENT IN WORK LIFE BALANCE**

Five factors that are considered to contribute to work life balance are assessed. While three of these are work related, two are family related factors. Work based factors are, flex time, option to work part time and freedom to work from home. The family related factors considered in this survey are, availability of child care facility and flexibility to take care of emergencies at home.

Gender Differences in the Perception of Work-Life Balance

TABLE 1 Demographic profile of the respondents

Variable	Number	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
Less than 25 years	33	30
26–35 years	56	51
Above 36 years	21	19
Total	110	100
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	71	65
Female	39	35
Total	110	100
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	64	58
Unmarried	46	42
Total	110	100
<i>Parent</i>		
Yes	48	44
No	62	56
Total	110	100
<i>Experience</i>		
Less than 5 years	37	34
5–15 years	63	58
Above 15 years	10	8
Total	110	100

There is a strong belief by both men (97%) and women (92%) that those flexible working hours will enhance the work life balance. About 83% of men and 95% of women perceived that work life balance would improve if they were able to work part time. Similar views were expressed in the case of freedom to work from home, namely 87% of men and 84% of women favoured it. More women (89%) felt more strongly than men (75%) that there should be an option to take care of emergencies at home, while 76% men and 92% women felt that child care facilities must be available as they believed that these will improve the work life balance. Table 2 shows the differences in perceived improvement in work life balance across genders.

Women, more than men see options such as part time work, availability of child care facility and flexibility to meet emergencies at home, will improve their work life balance. The Chi square test indicates that there is a significant association between these variables

TABLE 2 Perceived improvement in work life balance

Variable		Men	Women	$\chi^2$	Sig.
Flexible time	Yes	70	35	1.50	NS
	No	2	3		
Option to work part time	Yes	60	36	2.91	$p < 0.05^*$
	No	12	2		
Option to work from home	Yes	63	32	0.20	NS
	No	9	6		
Availability of child care facility	Yes	55	35	4.13	$p < 0.05^*$
	No	17	3		
Flexibility to meet emergencies at home	Yes	54	34	3.25	$p < 0.05^*$
	No	18	4		

NOTES \* Significant at 95% confidence level, degrees of freedom = 1. NS – not significant.

TABLE 3 Perceived adverse impact of work

Variable		Men	Women	$\chi^2$	Sig.
Health	Yes	39	17	0.88	NS
	No	33	21		
Sleep	Yes	23	17	1.75	NS
	No	49	21		
Exhaustion	Yes	38	13	2.20	NS
	No	34	25		

NOTES NS – not significant.

and gender. Hyman et al (2003) observed that employees world wide with access to family friendly arrangements often report greater satisfaction in their jobs. This is because such measures were found to improve the work life balance (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Lewis 2000). The results of the current study are in tune with those reported.

#### PERCEIVED ADVERSE IMPACT OF WORK

Three factors were identified and analysed in order to understand the adverse impact of work. About 54% of men and 43% of women felt that the work affected their health. About 32% of men and 43% of women felt that the work affected their sleep. About 52% of men and 34% of women reported exhaustion due to work. Table 3 shows the results pertaining to the analysis across genders.

From the table it can be observed that there is no significant association between the genders and the perceived adverse impact of work. It can be concluded that both genders perceived that their

TABLE 4 Spill over of work into family life

Variable		Men	Women	$\chi^2$	Sig.
Reduced time with the family	Yes	53	25	0.74	NS
	No	19	13		
No clear leisure time	Yes	39	18	0.50	NS
	No	33	20		
Recurring thoughts of work	Yes	28	19	0.26	NS
	No	44	19		
Decrease in quality of family life	Yes	40	19	0.58	NS
	No	32	19		

NOTES NS – not significant.

health and their physical well being is affected because of their work. The Chi square results indicate that these perceptions are independent of gender. The results confirm the findings of Hyman et al. (2003).

#### SPILL OVER OF WORK INTO FAMILY LIFE

Four factors were identified and analysed to understand the spill over of work into family life. About 73% of men and 52% of women admit that they are not able to spend enough time with their families due to work related activities. About 54% of men and 47% of women believe that they have no clear leisure time since work overlaps into this period. Moreover, 38% of men and 50% of women have recurring thoughts of work, even after they leave their place of work. Surprisingly, 55% of men and 50% of women feel that work pressures have affected the quality of family life.

Work-family conflicts leading to health issues have been discussed by several researchers (Grandey and Cropanzano 1999; Polanyi and Tompa 2004). Table 4 lists the results pertaining to the analysis across genders.

The majority of men and women (without any gender differences) admit that they are not able to spend enough time with their family. Also both the genders observe that the boundary between work and leisure is blurred, which concurs with the findings of others (Moen and Yu, 2000). There is an increased pressure due to recurring thoughts of work. Women admit more than men that the quality of their home life is affected. The Chi square results however indicate that there is no significant association between these variables and gender, implying that both genders believe that there is a negative spillover from work on to family life.

TABLE 5 Supportive work environment

Variable		Men	Women	$\chi^2$	Sig.
Support from colleagues	Yes	43	27	1.38	NS
	No	29	11		
Support from boss	Yes	39	24	0.36	NS
	No	33	14		

NOTES NS – not significant.

#### SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Two forms of supportive work environment are assessed, viz. support from boss and support from team members and colleagues. A supportive environment is instrumental in reducing work life conflict. Many of the respondents admit that they get support from their team members (60% male and 71% women) at the work place. 54% of the men and 63% of women acknowledge the support from their boss. Table 5 shows the results of the analysis.

The Chi square test shows that the impact of a supportive work environment is independent of gender, thereby indicating that a supportive work environment reduces work life imbalance across genders.

#### Contribution

Our findings suggest that both men and women have a strong belief that flexible working hours will enhance the work life balance. This is consistent with the previous studies (Tausig and Fenwick, 2001). Home working was also another factor which was preferred by both men and women and it was believed that it would enhance work life balance. This observation supports the findings of Felstead et al. (2006). Women felt that child care facilities should be available in working places to ensure work life balance. This is consistent with the findings of Hogarth et al. (2000). Work has an adverse effect on both men and women, as it affects their health and even their sleep. The findings were consistent with the previous studies (Harrington 2001).

The spillover of work into family life showed that both men and women did not have enough time to spend with their families and moreover work pressures affected quality the of family life. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Pocock and Clarke 2005; Greenhaus 2003). Both genders opined that a supportive work environment is helpful in achieving work life balance, which is consistent with the previous findings (Laursen 2005).



## Conclusions

This survey brings out some of the issues related to work life balance in the Indian context. The study indicates that work life balance issues here are quite similar to those in the West. While most countries in the developed world have put in place family friendly work practices (Moen and Yu 2000; Dougherty and West 2000), the same is yet to be seen in good measure in India.

With the increase in number of dual career couples, it is but natural that such practices must be adopted here too, as they would go a long way towards improving productivity and enhancing quality of work and family life. Flex time, home working, child care facilities and the option to work part time are facilities that need to be introduced. Building a supportive work environment is yet another important initiative to be addressed.

The study relies on the responses of the sample employees. The results of the study are affected by these responses and are subject to varying in a bigger or different sample. These limitations need to be addressed in future studies. Future research must focus on a wider sample in order to get more generalized results. Moreover, it must be directed at understanding individual differences so that employee specific initiatives to improve work life balance could be initiated by organizations

## References

- Amato, P. R., D. R. Johnson, A. Booth, and S. J. Rogers. 2003. Continuity and change in marital quality between 1980 and 2000. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65 (1): 1-11.
- Atkinson, J., and N. Meager. 1986. *Changing working patterns: How companies achieve flexibility to meet new needs*. London: Institute of Manpower Studies; National Economic Development Office.
- Baick, I., and E. Drew. 2006. Struggling with juggling: Gender and work life balance in the legal professions. *Women's studies International Focus* 29 (2): 9-22.
- Bhagwagar, H. 2009. Need for workplace counseling in India. [Http://prod.bolohealth.com/healthzones/21-total-health/article/165-need-for-workplace-counseling-in-india](http://prod.bolohealth.com/healthzones/21-total-health/article/165-need-for-workplace-counseling-in-india).
- Bharat, B. 2008. Longer working hours for computer software engineers, India. [Http://www.saching.com/Article/Longer-working-hours-for-Computer-Software-Engineers-India/1088](http://www.saching.com/Article/Longer-working-hours-for-Computer-Software-Engineers-India/1088).
- Blair-Loy, M., and A. S. Wharton. 2002. Employees' use of work-family policies and the workplace social context. *Social Forces* 80 (3): 813-845.

- Burke, R. J. 2002. Organizational values, job experiences and satisfaction among managerial and professional women and men: Advantage men? *Women in Management Review* 17 (5): 5–6.
- Connell, R. W. 2005. A really good husband: work/life balance, gender equity and social change. *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 40 (3): 369–383.
- Dougherty, B. A., and D. West. 2000. Our aging world: A global comparison of formal and informal care giving. *Journal of Health Sciences Management and Public Health* 45:198–208.
- Duxbury, L. E., and C. A. Higgins. 1991. Gender differences in work-family conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 76 (1): 60–73.
- Felstead, A. 2006. Opportunities to work at home in the context of work-life balance. *Human Resource Management Journal* 12 (1): 54–76.
- Fisher, K., and M. Layte. 2002–2003. Measuring work-life balance and degrees of sociability: A focus on the value of time use data in the assessment of quality of life. Working Paper of the European Panel Analysis Group 32.
- Fu, C. K., and M. A. Shaffer. 2001. The tug of work and family: Direct and indirect domain-specific determinants of work-family conflict. *Personal Review* 30 (5): 502–522.
- Grandey, A. A., and R. Cropanzano. 1999. The conservation of resources model applied to work-family conflict and strain. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 54 (2): 350–370.
- Greenhaus, J. H. 2003. The relation between work-family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 63 (3): 55–61.
- Gunkel, M. 2007. Gender-specific effects at work: An empirical study of four countries. *Gender, Work and Organization* 14 (1): 56–79.
- Harrington, J. M. 2001. Health effects of shift work and extended hours of work. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 58 (1): 68–71.
- Hayman, J. 2005. Psychometric assessment of an instrument designed to measure work life balance. *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management* 13 (1): 85–91.
- Hogarth, T., C. Hasluck, G. Pierre, M. W. Botham, and D. Vivian. 2000. *Work-life balance 2000: Results from the baseline study*. Warwick: Institute for Employment Research.
- Humphreys, P. C., S. Fleming, and O. O'Donnell. 2000. *Balancing work and family life: The role of flexible working arrangements*. Dublin: DSCFA.
- Hyman, J., C. Baldry, D. Scholarios, and D. Bunze. 2003. Work-life imbalance in the new service sector economy. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 41 (2): 41–55.
- Hyman, J., and J. Summers. 2004. Lacking balance. *Personal Review* 33(4): 418–429.
- Ishaya, N., and R. Ayman. 2008. *Predicting work-family conflict via perceived involvement and overload*. Boston, MA: American Psychological Association.

- Jager, A. 2002. *Household's, work and flexibility; Literature review: The Netherlands*. HWF Research Report 1. Critical review of literature and discourses about flexibility. Ed. C. Wallace. Vienna: HWF Research Consortium, Institute for Advanced Studies.
- Jenkins, M. P. 2000. Work and family in the 1990s. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62 (4): 981-989.
- Laursen, E. K. 2005. Rather than fixing kids: Build positive peer cultures. *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 14 (3): 137-142.
- Lewis, J. 2000. *Employers, lone parents and the work-life balance*. Sheffield: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Lewis, S., R. Gambles, and R. Rhona. 2007. The constraints of a 'work-life balance' approach: An international perspective. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 18 (3): 360-337.
- Marcinkus, W. C., K. S. Whelan-Beny, and J. R. Gordon. 2007. The relationship of social support to the work family balance and work outcomes of midlife women. *Women in Management Review* 22 (2): 86-111.
- Moen, P., and Y. Yu. 2000. Effective work/life strategies: Working couples, work conditions, gender and life quality. *Social Problems* 47 (3): 291-326.
- Morgan, H. 2003. The challenges of a global marketplace. In *Human resources in the 21st century*, ed. M. Goldsmith, R. Gandossy, and M. Efron. New York: Wiley.
- Parker, C. C. 2007. Generational differences in work life balance Attitudes. A thesis submitted to the Department of Psychology of the State University of New York for the degree of ms.
- Patel, T. 2005. *The family in India: Structure and practice*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Pocock, B., and J. Clarke. 2005. Time, money and job spillover: How parent's jobs affect young people. *The Journal of Industrial Relations* 47 (1): 62-76.
- Polanyi, A. M., and E. Tompa. 2004. Rethinking work-health models for the new global economy: A qualitative analysis of emerging dimensions of work. *Work* 23 (1): 3-18.
- Pradhan, J. P., and V. Abraham. 2005. Social and cultural impact of outsourcing: Emerging issues from Indian call centers. *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 9 (3): 22-30.
- Rai. S. 2009. India outsourcing workers stressed to the limit. [Http://www.zdnet.com/news/india-outsourcing-workers-stressed-to-the-limit/334715](http://www.zdnet.com/news/india-outsourcing-workers-stressed-to-the-limit/334715).
- Sachitanand, R., D. Khanna and K. Shamra. 2007. Beckoning careers. *Business Today*, January 28.
- Singh, B. 2004. *Working women in India*. New Delhi: Anmol.
- Smithson, J., and E. H. Stokoe. 2005. Discourses of work-life balance: Negotiating 'genderblind' terms in organizations. *Gender, Work and Organization* 12 (2): 147-168.

- Summer, H. C., and P. A. Knight. 2001. How do people with different attachment styles balance work and family? A personality perspective on work-family linkage. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86 (4): 653–663.
- Tausig, M., and R. Fenwick. 2001. Unbinding time: Alternate work schedules and work life balance. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 22 (2): 101–118.
- Todd, S. 2004. *Improving work-life balance: What are other countries doing?* Ottawa: Labour Program / Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.
- Upadhyya, C., and A. R. Vasavi. 2006. Work, culture and sociality in the Indian IT industry: A sociological study. Final report submitted to the Indo-Dutch Programme in Development Alternatives (IDPAD), National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.
- Valcour, M., and L. W. Hunter. 2005. Technology, organizations, and work-life integration. In *Work and life integration: Organizational, cultural and individual perspectives*, ed. E. E. Kossek and S. J. Lambert, 61–84. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Varma, U. K., and S. K. Sasikumar. 2004. *Information and communication technology and decent work: Study of India's experience*. Noida: V. V. Giri National Labour Institute.
- Wallace, C., and C. Cousins. 2004. Households, work and flexibility (HWF). [Http://www.hwf.at/downloads/open\\_area/publications/forum\\_publications\\_04.pdf](http://www.hwf.at/downloads/open_area/publications/forum_publications_04.pdf).
- Yasbek, P. 2004. *The business case for firm-level work-life balance policies: A review of the literature*. Wellington: Labour Market Policy Group.