



IS STRESS CAUSE TO IMBALANCED WORK LIFE BALANCE IN CORPORATE WORLD?

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Abstract:

Life becomes tiring and meaningless when there is no time either for our self or for our family and friends. This leads to feeling of loneliness, frustration, anger and anguish. Chances of life going through a tough phase are high if one does not divide time between work life and personal life. Human life is a gift of God and one should endeavour to live this life happily and contented. But in this era of globalization, life is becoming stressful for a variety of reasons. Increased expectation of the employers from their employees is a major reason of stress among the employees. Expectation of promotion at workplace, maintaining high standard of living, etc are the other causes of stress among office goers. Peaceful domestic life with ample time for pursuing personal goals and spending adequate time with family and children are other anxiety areas. This calls for proper planning of day's activity schedules at home and office and prioritizing them. This will help in doing justice to both work life and personal life. There should be proper scheduling of work at office. Spending quality time with loved ones and taking breaks from office work and holidaying with family help remove tensions and reduce stress. Organizations on their part should implements good human resources policies and best practices which can help staff to balance both aspects of life viz., personal life and work life.

Key Words: Work Life Balance, Stress, Personal Life

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Introduction

In Modern world, the concept of work life balance is gaining importance because now a day's both men and women go to work due to high cost of living, financial demand and to fulfill the requirements of the family members and to pursue their own goals. In traditional social system only men were allowed to step out of the house for earning purposes.

After independence the situation changed; women have got freedom of right to education by the grace of social reformers and constitution of India. They started to go out of the house for earning purposes, education and equally supporting men for household expenses. Due to this social change, today both men and women are working and shouldering equal responsibilities at workplace and in the family. No doubt, as compared to

men, women face many challenges and difficulties to maintain the fine balance between work and family life. In post-independence era particularly during 1960s and 1970s, women started to step out of home to earn money and to support their family to improve their standard of living. Earlier they were restricted and busy with household activities like cooking and looking after elders and children.

After globalization, corporate and semi government sectors witnessed sea change in work environment. As a result the employers' expectations from the employees have been increasing day by day causing disequilibrium in work - life balance.

Liberalization, privatization and globalization brought significant changes in the Indian economy. Competition within and outside the industries and services sectors increased. To sustain competition,

productivity has to be increased. Long hours of work in offices resulted in stress and burnout. Soon companies realized the importance of developing and sustaining their human resources. Caring for the employees besides increasing productivity gained importance. Several welfare measures were initiated. Employers took different initiatives to maintain good work - life balance.

Albert Einston says “Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep our balance we must keep moving”. This is true for all employees who are struggling with work - life balance especially for working employees who are facing many challenges leading to stress in their work and in their family life.

Objective of the study:

The objectives of the Study are

- 1) To understand the concept of work life balance
- 2) To identify the causes and problems related to work life imbalance
- 3) Suggest strategies to reduce work life imbalance.

Research Methodology:

Secondary data was collected from various sources like research articles, reference books, journals, newspapers, websites, and encyclopedia keeping in mind the objectives of the study.

Literature Review:

This literature review analyses the research done in the area of work - life balance by a cross section of research scholars.

Farooq Mughal and Mansoor Ahmad (2010) in their research article titled “Repercussions of stressors on employee work-life balance: Analyzing the banking industry of Pakistan” in the Journal for Global Business Advancement focused on identifying a correlation between job stressors and employee work life balance in banks in Pakistan. The objective was to find out the whether stress factors affect an employee’s job and personal life. The factor considered included task method, role demand, organizational structure,

organization leadership, interpersonal demand and job security on work life balance. The paper concluded by giving suggestions which would be beneficial for banks to rectify and improve their organizational system besides some stress management programs to remove stress among the bank employees.

The Forum on the Workplace of the Future (2005) has highlighted the disadvantages of flexible working arrangements for employees which include less company sponsored training, less participation in organizational structures, and less information from management. As women are more likely to take up flexible working arrangements, they are also more likely to experience the negative aspects of flexible working policies. Drew *et al.*'s (2003) survey of employees' attitudes to and experiences of work-life balance policies reveal both positive and negative experiences.

Jennifer Redmond, Maryann Valiulis, Eileen Drew examined issues related to work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity / childcare issues. Their research demonstrated that while important knowledge has been produced thus far, more information is needed in all these three thematic areas. It is unclear as yet to what extent work-life balance policies - or the lack of them - in the workplace impact the decision-making process, but it is clear they influence perceptions of being able to cope with an unplanned child. Similarly, the extent to which workplace cultures promote work-life balance - particularly in relation to the needs of working parents – may influence the decision of whether or not to continue with a pregnancy. The provision and cost of childcare services in the workplace or local area may also have an impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy as they try to judge their ability to manage parental responsibilities. Research is also needed on those who do not currently have children and are not facing a crisis pregnancy, in order to establish general trends in

current non-parent workplace behaviours and attitudes. In all, according to the authors while there has been significant research already conducted, this needs to be built upon and extended to fill the gaps that exist in the literature.

Amanda S. Bell, *et al*, in their paper titled “Job Stress, Wellbeing, Work-Life Balance and Work-Life Conflict among Australian Academic” investigated correlation relationships between job-related stress, health, work-life balance and work-life conflict among academics. Job stress in universities globally has been increasing over the last few decades and has important implications for academic staff performances and student outcomes. Despite its importance, there has been lack of research conducted in this area of academia. As academics impact the lives of many students and other faculty members, monitoring and managing job stress in universities is extremely important. Even with the availability of employee assistance programs in universities such as stress management and flexible work arrangements, the complex nature of stress still seems to influence academics’ health and work-life balance negatively. Further research is required in the area of stress, health and work-life balance in order to better understand the relationships between these variables and help universities on how to effectively improve academic work life.

In the article “Work life balance of women employee with reference to teaching faculties”, K.Santhana Lakshmi highlighted issues connected with work life balance of women in educational Institutions and the factors that determine work life balance. Article focused on the issues like consequences of imbalance, advantages of a good work life balance where students will suffer if teacher performed poor due to psychological and physiological stress. Teacher should maintain good balance in their personal and work life. If there is good balance definitely it will benefit the

students as well as teacher to improve their academic performance. Teacher can be successful if she maintains good balance, sets her priorities in personal life as well as in her work life. Awareness also calls for understanding her current position, her work and family environment and the resources available for her work towards her goal. Her goal needs to be realistic and achievable and the steps to achieve it have to be smart. She needs to have an understanding of her strengths and areas of improvement and should be open to ask for help and assistance wherever required. She should be willing to share her views and take suggestions from other faculty members and also other online resources and build up her capabilities.

In the article “Impact of stress on work life balance of women employees with reference to BPO and Educational sector in Bangalore”, the researcher has taken two sectors and tried to compare the impact of stress as a factor to analyze. The study is mainly based on primary data collected from a cross section of respondents from BPO and Educational Sector at Bangalore. The study revealed that there is impact of stress on employees in BPO and Educational sector are different due to the differing work environments in the two sectors.

“Work stress experienced by the teaching staff of University of the Punjab, Antecedents and consequences” by Ahmed Usman, Dr.Zulfiqur Ahmed, Isfaq Ahmed focused on the relationship between role conflict, role ambiguity and attitudinal outcomes of the job i.e job satisfaction and organizational commitment of teaching staff in the largest and most populated university of Pakistan i.e. University of Punjab. Data were collected from teachers teaching in five different faculties of the university by using personally administered questionnaire. The findings of the study suggest that there is positive and significant relationship between role and stress i.e., role conflict and role ambiguity and work stress.

Yosuf (2002) found that role ambiguity and role conflict have a direct and negative relationship with job satisfaction. Also job dissatisfaction was a cause of work stress, while higher job satisfaction reduces the effect of work stress. Wee and Norman (2006) found that there was a negative relationship between job satisfaction and role stress (Role conflict and Role ambiguity). Netemeyer, *et al*, (1990) and Teas (1983) found that role conflict affected job satisfaction stronger than that of role ambiguity

According to Cooper and Marshal (1970), stress and job satisfaction are increased when employees are on job in which there were conflicting and multiple demands or in which there was an ambiguity about jobholder's responsibilities, duties and authorities.

In the studies of Bradley and Cart Wright (2002), Davi D Son, *et al*, (1997), De Jonge and Schavefeli (1998), de Jonge *et al*, (1995), job satisfaction was negatively related to work overload in these different studies.

According to Sociologist, Kathleen Gerson, young people are searching for new ways to define care that do not force them to choose between spending time with their children and earning an income and are looking for definition of personal identity that do not pit their own development against creating committed ties to others. Regarding home life, men and women have similarities with work and home life. Today, home is not a heavenly place in which men and women could rest and feel comfort as before, but home is an additional place of work.

Texas Quick, an expert witness at trials of companies who were accused of overworking their employees, states that when people get worked beyond their capacity, companies pay the price. Although some employers believe that workers should reduce their own stress by simplifying their lives and making a better effort to care for their health, most experts feel that the chief responsibility for reducing stress should be management.

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

According to Sylvia Hewlett, President of the Center for Work-Life Policy, if a woman takes time off to care for children or an older parent, employers tend to see these people as less than fully committed. It's as though their identity is transformed. Mental health is a balancing act that may be affected by four factors viz., the influence of unfavourable genes, by wounding trauma, by private pressures and most recently by the stress of working. Many people expose themselves unsolicited to the so-called job stress, because the "hard worker" enjoys a very high social recognition. These aspects can be the cause of an imbalance in the areas of life. But there are also other reasons which can lead to such an imbalance.

Brett Graff, Nightly Business Report correspondent states that because a woman may have trouble re-entering the market or, if she does find a position, it will likely be a lower position with less pay. If you thought choosing a baby name was hard, you have yet to wrestle with the idea of leaving your career to be a full-time mom or take care of an older parent. Most will want to re-enter, but will do so accepting lesser positions or lower wages.

In the past, women often found it more difficult to maintain balance due to the competing pressures at work and demands at home. For many employees today, both male and female, their lives are becoming more consumed with a host of family and other personal responsibilities and interests. Therefore, in an effort to retain employees, it is increasingly important for organizations to recognize this balance.

Increase in non-occupational activities with obligation character, which include mainly house and garden work, maintenance and support of family members or volunteer activities, etc. can contribute to the perception of a chronic lack of time. This time pressure is, amongst others, influenced by own age, the age and number of children in the household, marital status, the profession and level of employment as well as the income level. The psychological strain, which in turn affects the health increases due to the strong pressure of time, but also by the complexity of work, growing responsibilities, concern for long-term existential protection and more.

Findings of the study:

Review of literature reveals that work life balance amongst workforce is a concern of not only the employees but also of organizations across verticals. Several initiatives are taken by organizations to improve work environment, employee motivation with a view to reducing their anxiety and stress, reduce employee turnover and improve productivity.

1. Work Life Balance Concept

The work life balance concept is that which support the individuals to split time and energy between work, family and personal lives. He or she should split the time in such way that he would be able to make justice to his personal activities and demands at workplace. Personal activities may involve childcare, care of old age parents, time for friends, community participation, self-care while the demands at workplace involved better performance, quality work, skill development, up to date knowledge, keeping pace with advancing technology, etc.

An individual's success in balancing both the activities is called good work life balance. Work life balance defined in simplest form is "satisfactory level of involvement or fit between the multiple roles in personal life". Work life balance has always

been concerned with quality of working life and its relation to broader quality of life.

2. Causes of Work Life Imbalances

There are number of causes of work life imbalance and stress among the office goers like health problem, excessive work, long working hours, competition among the staff to gain recognition and promotion, higher expectations from employer to improve the efficiency of the organization, etc. These lead to work life imbalance and stress. A few are highlighted here.

- **Long working hours:** Long working hours at workplace results in work life imbalance. In India, the employees working in IT and BPO sectors face the problem of work life imbalance due to long working hours. The increment in salary depends on the good performance at workplace. This adds to stress and anxiety.
- **Dual working couples:** With single income not sufficient to meet family needs both parents go out to work. While this has resulted in empowerment of women and pursuing career options, this has resulted in lesser time for parents to spend with their children and between themselves.
- **Competition at workplace:** Due to increased competition and urge to move up in the organization, it becomes inevitable to respond fast at workplace to fulfill the expectation of employer and to gain promotion all at the cost of personal life.
- **Dual Roles:** With both husband and wife going out for work, they face the problems of dual role of family commitments and career aspirations. This is more pronounced for working women as they perform multiple roles of household work, taking care of children, elderly parents, etc.

- **Technology:** Technology has changed the 9 am to 5pm jobs into 24/7 employment. People not only spend more time in their offices due to their job requirements but continue the same at home as communication technology enables reaching staff at their home.

Measures to overcome the problems of imbalance in work life: Some suggestions for organizing work so as to balance personal life and work are given below.

- Prepare and plan for the day:** One sure way to strike a balance between the two is by making sure those activities (both at home and office) are planned in advance.
- Schedule work at office:** Prepare the ‘to do’ list, complete tasks on time and list out how the tasks are going to be done.
- Delegation:** Effective delegation (both at home and in office) helps complete tasks efficiently and in time.
- When at Home, don’t think about work:** It is important that office work is not carried home. There is nothing more annoying or frustrating for the family and friends.
- Love and care for the family:** There is nothing better to relieve stress other than communicating to near and dear ones after a hard days work.
- Make holidays memorable:** Whether on a vacation or at home on the weekends, do something with the family every time and spend quality time with them.

Organization Interventions for Good Work Life

Balance: Since human resource is a vital ingredient for success of an organization, to meet the emerging competition, organizations must initiate steps to remove work life imbalance and stress amongst its work force and thereby increase their productivity and stickiness. This becomes more important with women entering the job market in large numbers. Some emerging best practices and initiatives of organizations are listed below.

- **High quality child care:** Arranging child care for the children of staff will help women staff and single parent. This will reduce tension among staff and will result into higher efficiency.
- **Health Insurance coverage:** Family health insurance covering the staff and his / her dependent family members and help the staff feel secured about the job and motivate them to perform better.
- **Tie up with doctors / hospitals:** Organization should arrange for tie ups with doctors / hospitals where the staff go and get treated. This will help the employee who are going through the phase of stress and make them physically fit to perform better at workplace.
- **Flexi working:** Flexible working hours reduces the rigors of commuting and help increase productivity. It facilitates balancing personal life and work life.
- **Justice in promotion:** Fairness in rewards, recognition and promotion helps easing office pressure on the work force and enhances quality of work and work environment.
- **Work from home facility:** Whenever possible organization should provide the facility to employee to work from home. This will boost employee morale and benefit them in attending to household activities and but office work with dexterity.
- **Training for skill development:** A major anxiety are of the employees is re-skilling and keeping pace with technology developments. Proper training (in-house or external) will help employees to work speedily and efficiently thereby spending lesser time in office than required to complete tasks. This releases more time for personal and family life.

Conclusion:

The concept of work life balance came into existence in 1970's when women stepped out to earn money and support the family members to improve their standard of living. The study of work life balances of office goers helps to identify the problems faced by the office goers especially the women. Imbalance in work life of office goers is definitely harmful to the individual as well as to the organization. This study through secondary sources highlights some innovative suggestions so that the office goers can maintain good work life balance. Organization can do their best for their employees to promote a good work life balance by providing them free health check up facility, stress management programs, counseling centers, flexi timings, conducive working environment, permitting staff to work from home, training and development, etc.

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