Nature of support system and care giving aspects of Dual career couple families in IT- An exploration

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Abstract

Work and Family are two central and independent spheres of life for dual career couples and an imbalance in one system may subsequently influence the other as well. Husbands of the house that used to be "bread winner" makes himself a "bread partner" with the wife in order to cope with the economic hardship and financial obligation at the home front. Working couples not only look for their own career prospective but also attend to their family demands like house cleaning, catering for ageing ones, attending family parties nurturing of children and contribute to their future prospects as well. In dealing with multiple roles and work pressure and for enhancing well-being, working couples use coping strategies depending on their individual experiences and organisational policies. The present researcher has examined the work -life balance of IT couples against a wide variety of social and cultural transformations. The researcher followed a mixed method research design. A sample of 32 dual career couples working in IT sectors in Kolkata have been used. Findings reveal diverse transformations not only in work and workplaces, but also in terms of culture, family re-constitution and subjectivity as experienced by couples.

Key words: Dual career couples, Information Technology (IT), Organizational policies, Reconstitution of family, Work-life balance.

Introduction

Work and Family are two central and independent spheres of life for dual career couples (from here DCC's). DCC's that were exceptions to the norm in the 1960s, are today, facing the demands of work and family as critical challenges especially those coming from Information Technology (IT)sector. Large part of IT sector is moving from a standard eight-hour a day regime to operating 24x7.This has impacted the behavioural and interactional pattern and social ties among and within the families. The traditionally accepted gender roles are facing crisis and this created the need to understand how families with DCC meet their work and family responsibilities. DCC's who are on the rise presently, have stimulated significant transformations in forms of life-styles, sociality and family structures. Working couples not only look for their own career prospective but also attend to their family demands like housecleaning, catering for ageing ones, attending family parties, visiting recreational centres, attending religious programmes, nurturing of children and contribute to their future prospects as well. Work and family responsibilities along with long working hours in professional setup is likely to result in conflict which in turn may affect the overall well-being of individuals. This is why work

life balance is a pertinent issue today, with special reference to individual experiences and organizational policies.

DCC's causes changes to both work and life environments, impacting family relationships. Family relationships refer to relationships with spouses, children, parents, and siblings and are among the most critical personal relationshipshttps://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.782217/full#:~:text=Stamp%20GH.%20Theories%20of%20Family%20Relationships%20and%20a%20Family%20Relationships%20Theoretical%20Model.%20editor%2C%20Vangelisti%20AL.%20Mahwah%3A%20Lawrence%20Erlbaum%20Associates%20(2004).Many IT professionals appear to be experiencing a process of social fragmentation due to their busy working lives and frequent travel and change of jobs. An important feature of work in the 'new economy' is the blurring of the line between work time and private time, office and home: this is due to the nature of work itself, which sometimes requires telephone calls at odd hours; the extension of working hours; and the fact that everyone is 'wired' through their laptops and cell phones (http://ephttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/358415043_Impact_of_Organizational_and_Family_Support_on_Work-Life_Balance_An_Empirical_Researchrints.nias.res.in/107/2/idpadfinalreport.pdf). Frequent travel and long working hours also put strains on nuclear family systems. Childcare is a major issue for many IT couples, who employ various strategies to manage their domestic situation, from heavy dependence on servants and crèches, to inviting one or the other set of parents to live with them. More so, in times of Pandemic the configuration of work and family systems altered drastically. With no clear division of labour between paid work and housework, dual-career couples faced a host of new and unfamiliar challenges. Thus, there is a major contradiction between the imperative introduced by the new corporate culture to succeed in one's career by devoting long hours to work, and the maintenance of family relationships as a central cultural value.

In this context, the researcher intends to study the following *objectives*:

(1) To study the influence of IT work on personal, family, and social lives of working couples.

(2) To understand the nature of support and assistance provided by families and organizations to these couples.

(3) To examine the impact of family members and organizations, support on work-life balance of couples.

Review of Literature

Work-Life Balance (WLB) is defined by Kirchheimer (2000) as the achievement of fulfilling experiences in the different aspects of life that require various resources, like energy, time and commitment and these resources are spread across all the domains. Work-life balance is often times compared to a similar term work-family balance, but the former term incorporates other roles like community, social, religious and leisure roles taken up by an individual. Among men and women alike, the frustrating search for work/life balance is a frequent topic of conversation, usually translated into not enough time and/or support to do, to handle, to manage … our work commitments or personal responsibilities (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262923701_Work_-_Life_Conflicts_of_Working_Couples_and_Their_Management_A_Theoretical_Framework). "Juggling competing demands is tiring if not stressful and brings lower productivity, sickness, and absenteeism, so work/life balance is an issue for all employees and all organizations" (Swift, 2002).

Work-Life balance is increasingly challenging in the modern context and the challenge arises from the fact that it is very difficult to strike the balance between work and other domains of life. In addition to being a challenge to the individuals, the WLB as a concept has been taken up by the organizations and human resource departments across the board, in lieu of which many policies and strategies have been formulated to

alleviate the conflict between the domains of work and life (https://seaopenresearch.eu/Journals/articles/CMJ2021_I1_3.pdf).

Clark's (2000) work/family border (WFB) theory is adapted by demonstrating the influence of corporate support and family support on an individual's work-life balance. The WFB theory takes individual (border-crosser) preferences into account. The theory attempts to clarify the multifaceted interaction between individuals and their (professional and personal) lives and for providing the proper guidelines for achieving balance upon forecasting the possible imbalance (Clark, 2000; Ogunbor, 2021). The WFB theory defines 'balance' as an individual's satisfaction and doing better both at work and at home (Ogunbor, 2021). In the concept of 'work-life balance', both the domains of home and work have a significant influence on employees' professional and personal lives, while the organizational and family support assist them to effectively balance both their lives (Asiedu-Appiah & Zoogah, 2019). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358415043_Impact_of_Organizational_and_Family_Support_on_Work-Life_Balance_An_Empirical_Research

As corroborated by Roopa & Neha (2015), work and family responsibilities along with long working hours in professional setup have resulted in conflict which in turn affected the overall well-being of individuals. This majorly can be traced to the fact that the Nigerian society has witnessed a shift in traditional gender roles to non- traditional gender roles due to women empowerment and increase in dual career couples with young children. With this, variations in family structure have resulted in corresponding change in work and family accountabilities for husbands and wives (Allen, Herst, Bruck and Sutton, 2000). Conceptualising work-life balance, Ramya (2014) states that it includes proper prioritizing between work (career and ambition) and lifestyle (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation). It is the degree to which a person is engaged in and satisfied with, in equal measure, his or her work and non-work roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). Kalliath & Brough (2008) offered a broader definition of work life balance; which is explained as an individual's perception that their work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with their current life's priorities.

Family support and work-life balance

Family support (FS) comes from an employee's parents, siblings, spouse, partner, children, and so on. Depending on the nature of the professional demands of an individual, his/her family demands may change and, in some cases, family members assist him/her to solve his/her life issues (Chavan, Murthy & Reddy, 2021). Research demonstrated that support from home/family results in employee satisfaction at work, their physical and psychological wellbeing that in turn resolves the conflicts between work and non-work life of employees (Chavan et al., 2021; French, Dumani, Allen & Shockley, 2018). When people find family pressure instead of support, they cannot do better in their family and serve efficiently in their jobs too (Chavan et al., 2021). Reasonably, family support plays a vital role in reducing job stress, which consequences employee wellbeing (Nayak & Sharma, 2018). Research indicated that family support is associated with an individual's well-being and life satisfaction (Chavan et al., 2021; Schnettler, Miranda-Zapata, Lobos, Saracostti, Denegri, Lapo&Hueche, 2018). Sharma, Gangwani, and Fryan (2019) opined that an employee with full support from the organization, but until and unless having family support cannot enjoy a balanced life. Besides, people can manage their professional as well as personal lives with the assistance of their family members (Maragatham et al., 2017). Scholars have found the influence of family/home support on the work-life balance (Chavan et al., 2021; French et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2019; Sripo, Kaewpan, Kalampakorn &Sillabutra, 2019). Therefore, Sripo et al. (2019) suggested 'family support' to the development of WLB programs for employees.

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Organizational support and work-life balance

Organizational support (OS) refers to organizational (managerial) sympathetic views, and assistance received from other organizational members (e.g. supervisors and co-workers) in the context of the institutional job performance. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) defined the term as "employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being". Generally, an institution is responsible for providing its staff with a healthy and peaceful working life (Akter et al., 2021), whereas organizational WLB policies and practices can reduce their occupational stress and job burnout, thereby, adequate organizational support helps people to balance their professional and personal life (Asiedu-Appiah &Zoogah, 2019; Geevarghese& Devi, 2018; Nayak & Sharma, 2018; Solís García et al., 2021). Institutions and departments can assist people to perform their family (personal) obligations easily as well as to be compatible with their careers (Akter et al., 2021). Research empirically revealed that the more an individual's perceived organizational support, the greater his/her balanced work-life (Putri et al., 2021).

There has been an increased interest of researchers to change perception from the traditional focus of work family interface based on the negative outcomes and to the concept of work and family facilitating each other. (Lauring& Selmer, 2010). Among the several proposed theoretical concepts include positive spill over (Demerouti, Geurts, &Kompier, 2004), enhancement and enrichment (Greenhaus& Powell, 2006), and facilitation (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, &Kacmar,2007). The facilitation occurs when the gains earned in one sphere are conveyed to and develop the functioning in the other sphere. One way a person can be facilitated in the work sphere is by support in the home and work domains.

Literatures related to work life balance has always highlighted that social support plays an important role in influencing work life balance in a positive manner. Social support beyond work is regarded as (Marcinkus, Whelan-Berry, and Gordon 2007) as personal social support that is extended as a support from an employee's partner or spouse, parents, extended family, siblings, kids, and friends. Abundant researches have established that personal social support is positively related with the work life balance. Out of all kinds of social support, in case of women, support from the husband is of particular importance as he is the one who contributes sincerely in an array of areas that includes incomes and management of personal finances (Kate, 1998), house and children/elder responsibilities and interpersonal support. Along with family support personal social support can be further divided into two segments viz., emotional support and instrumental support. Family support also includes the exchange of support among relatives (Voydanoff,2002).

The social support can be further linked to emotional and instrumental support. Instrumental support that the human being is looking for. It has a direct response towards behaviour of employees who are directly involved in day-to-day household activities, such as relieving the employee of household tasks or otherwise accommodating the employee's work requirements. This allows the family member to ample opportunities to focus on his/her time and preserve energy for work when it might otherwise be scarce; suggesting that it positively influences the individual's functioning at work. The role of workplace support is another dimension which can't be ignored. Each employee is working in a specific working environment and it is the duty and responsibility of the supervisors to correctly understand the specific balancing requirement between professional and family life and adequate modifications can be made to accommodate any particular employee to fulfil his or her family commitment. The group should be active enough in this regard so that the said mechanism should not disturb the work schedule of the organization but can provide sufficient value addition in terms of work life balance and employee motivation. This may have a long-term impact where the satisfied employees may stay with the organization for a long period of time. To implement the work life balance programme the organizations, need to think cautiously to understand the specific requirement of employees. Older and more recent studies have pointed out the need for longitudinal research and the importance of a life cycle perspective when studying dual-career couples. At some stages of a relationship (e.g., during career-building), the allocation of tasks and responsibilities is very different from other stages

(e.g., during the early years of child rearing). The shifts from more to less traditional types among married couples, however, are understandable when viewed within a long temporal framework.

Individual preferences may not be entertained but most of the employees may opt for some common benefits which the organization can provide easily without incurring much cost. Some of the benefits which the organization offers may be like job sharing, part time return to work option, flexitime, unpaid family leave, parental leave dependent care services, child care leave etc.

Methodology

The researcher has examined the work -life balance of IT couples against a wide variety of social and cultural transformations. The researcher followed a mixed method research design involving survey, in-depth interview. This enabled the researcher to explore the personal stories and lived experiences of the participants in a culturally diverse context. An Interview schedule having both closed and open-ended questions has been used for data collection from a sample of 32 dual earner couples working in IT sectors in Kolkata. This is to be followed by a face-to-face interview. Also, secondary data has been used for analytical purpose to understand the issues in question.

Table-1 Demographic profile of respondents				
Employment category (IT)	Age range	Years of marriage	Number of children	Monthly income
Developer	20-30	1-7	0-1	40,000-80,000
Ops Manager	30-40	8-15	1-2	80,000-1,10,000
Quality Evaluator	40-50	More than 15years	0-2	Above 1,10,000

As Table-1 represents, the respondents worked in different sectors of IT industry reflecting variety of job profiles and responsibilities. The category of developers was much younger (20-30 years) than the OPS Managers and Quality Evaluators. The tenure of marriage also varies accordingly. Participants from the category of Developers earned a monthly income of range 40,000-80,000, while OPS Managers earned in between a range of 80,000-1,10,000 monthly. This data however, represented a hike in monthly salary of employees depending on work experiences and exposures. The numbers of dependent children were lower for couples working as Developers (0-1), while for couples working in the roles of Ops Managers and Quality evaluators ranged from 0-2 children.

Table-2 Nature of support and care giving aspects (family and organization)

Nature of support and care giving aspects

32 responses
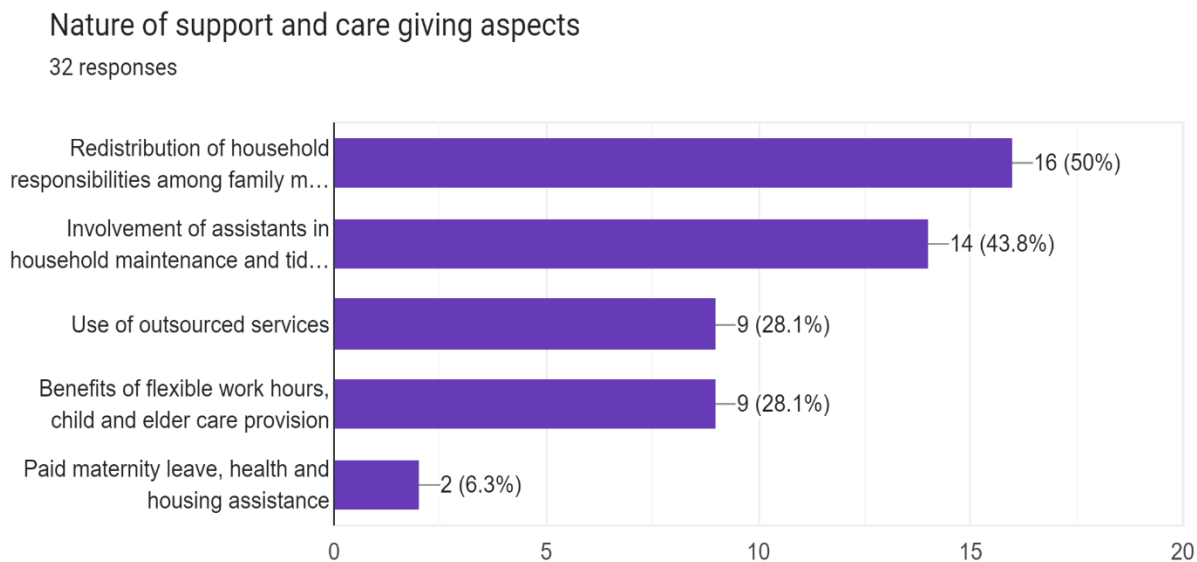
As Table-2 represents, respondents working in different domains of IT industry receive variety of support and care giving services from time to time at both ends (family as well as organization). The above data set reveals that in case of redistribution of household responsibilities among family members, 50% of respondents receive household help and assistance in forms like house cleaning, doing homework with children, babysitting etc. While 43.8% of couples highlighted on the fact that assistants are involved in household maintenance and tidying work; only 28.1% of them used outsourced services (for example- delivery food and ready meals, baby sitter services). In view of organizational support too, corporate houses are coming with work-life balance policies to facilitate their employees which includes flexible work hours, child- and elder-care provisions (28.1%), paid maternity leave, adoption assistance, leave/time off, education assistance, health and housing assistance (6.3%).

Discussion

Work is important for people in order to lead a happy and comfortable life. But the primary group of any person is his/her family members. If he/ she get the required support from spouse and parents, it becomes easy for anyone to maintain a balance in their life. Competing and multi-faced demands between work and home responsibilities have assumed increased relevance for employees in recent years, due in large part to demographic and workplace changes, such as: a greater number of couples in the workforce (dual-career couples), transformation in family structures (joint family is being reconstituted to perform new functions), a growing reluctance to accept the longer hours culture, and technological advancements. Working couple of today try to fulfil family responsibilities and also try to remain fully involved in their careers coping up with the competing demands of their multiple roles. The caring responsibilities that working couple have laid a heavy stress on them when it is combined with their professional duties. The attempt of working couple to integrate, organize and balance the various problems and activities in their different roles simultaneously puts them under tremendous pressure. As a result, the family becomes an organizational stakeholder and this powerful social trend marked the beginning of the work/life balance paradigm shift. While the research findings do point to important social and cultural transformations among IT professionals, they are not all in the direction expected. For instance, working in a global industry seems to have given rise to a certain kind of cosmopolitanism, while at the same time reinforcing 'traditional' identities and cultural values. Similarly, the social lives of IT professionals (compared to their parents' generation) have become fragmented due to lack of time and the high level of mobility. However, these young professionals profess devotion to the family,

including caring for the older generation, and stress the importance of maintaining their culture and values through the medium of the family.

Within the family as well, relationships tend to become instrumental, as for instance when elderly parents are invited to live with working couples primarily to look after their children (of course under the guise of the adult children wanting to take care of their parents). This has emerged as a pattern where it is common for aged parents to circulate among their several married children living in India, and elsewhere, often in order to take over childcare duties from other sets of parents. As a result, grandparents experience a second round of parenting. These reconstituted 'joint families' do not represent adherence to the traditional joint family so much as a convenient solution to the domestic problems of working couples (cf. Lamb 2002).There is, however, a social support system through family, which is especially important for IT workers due to their long working hours and frequent travel. Far from liberating employees or leading to greater 'individuation' at a personal level, IT appears to be shoring up family structures as employees depend heavily on these networks for social support.

That the joint family is being reconstituted to perform new functions and with new structural features, is indicated by the fact that within some of the three-generation households interviewed, there has been an inversion of the inter-generational authority structure. There is a tendency for the younger generation to challenge the beliefs and values of their parents in matters such as childrearing and food habits. This inversion is reinforced by the fact that the children usually earn more than their parents ever did: although dependence of aged parents on their children is a cultural expectation, in previous generations this did not undermine their authority. The significant inter-generational changes that occur in families after children have entered the IT profession may lead to conflicts over cultural or religious practices, spending habits, childrearing practices, lifestyle, and so on.

Frequent travel and long working hours also put strains on family obligations and responsibilities. Childcare is a major issue for many IT couples, who employ various strategies to manage their domestic situation, from heavy dependence on servants and crèches, to inviting one or the other set of parents to live with them. Some couples even revealed that they had to leave their children with grandparents in India when they are working abroad. Further, speaking about the various organizational policies that is practiced now a days is a major breakthrough for working couples. In response to these changes and the conflict they generate among the multiple roles that individuals occupy, organizations are increasingly pressured to design various kinds of practices, intended to facilitate employees' efforts to fulfil both their employment related and their personal commitments. Flexible work hours, telecommuting, and job sharing also may encourage work-life balance, and for some organizations may help reduce costs for non-work-related absences. *Flexi time* allows employees, to determine (or be involved in determining) the start and end times of their working day. This can allow them to meet family or personal commitments/emergencies (enable employees to respond to both predictable and unpredictable circumstances). *Telecommuting* is becoming more and more common for people to do at least some of their regular work from home instead of going into the office. *Job sharing* is an arrangement which allows two (or sometimes more) employees to jointly fill one fulltime job, with responsibilities and working time shared or divided between them. However, findings clearly shows that regardless of what the organization promotes, direct supervisors/managers greatly influence the work-life balance of their subordinates. Managers, who focus on the desired work product, rather than requiring "face time" or logging overtime hours, can better enable their employees to balance work and life demands. Also, important to note, the menu of work-life balance supports should be broad enough to meet the needs not only of parents with children, but also childless couples. In addition to this, modern technologies, providing constant accessibility to internet and mobile devices, is likely to blur the boundaries between work and non-work. Some employees' workplaces are portable—traveling in the car or airplane, and residing at home or other locations –thus pushing work activities into what were traditionally non-work spaces. Conversely, employees easily can import personal activities (e.g., online shopping, videos, music, texting family and friends) into the workplace. This new capacity created by technology appears to be a mixed blessing for employees and their organizations. By creating pressure for employees to be "always on," technology's constant accessibility may lower employee satisfaction and productivity, which defeats its purpose. If employees feel obligated and are rewarded for responding to incoming technological communications, they

may develop a compulsion to instantly check their messages, which interrupts the flow of their personal lives. Low balance may result into employee attrition, high absenteeism and sometimes may lead to health problems. Thus, it is evident that there is a major contradiction between the imperative introduced by the new corporate culture to succeed in one's career by devoting long hours to work, and the maintenance of family relationships as a central cultural value.

Conclusion

The present study of IT based working couples points out to the diverse transformations not only in work and workplaces, but also in terms of culture, family re-constitution and subjectivity. While the 'joint family' is being reconstituted as a child care provider for busy working couples, the content of family and gender relations within the family has been substantially altered, giving rise to inter-generational tensions and other kinds of conflicts. For instance, the apparent 'emancipation' of women working in the IT industry has not been matched, in most cases, by liberation in the domestic sphere. Rather, the hectic lifestyle of IT professionals tends to reinforce traditional gender equations as one spouse (always the woman) is constrained to stay home and cover for the absence of the other. Thus, a new form of conservatism is emerging within this group of global professionals, in spite of their claims to being more 'liberal', 'aware', and 'tolerant' than their own parents. It is to be noted here that Indian culture has been redefined in specific, rather simplistic ways, for instance in terms of 'family values' – yet most IT professionals who espouse devotion to family are unable to fulfil what they regard as their social obligations. A sense of loss and nostalgia for an earlier form of sociality, dense with networks of family, kin and friends, pervades the self-reflective narratives of IT workers and points to a real shift in the nature of sociality in this class.

Another sociologically significant feature of IT professionals' lives is the amount of time they have to spend at work. This not only transforms the workplace into a place that becomes at times more socially meaningful than home, it also reduces their ability to perform the social obligations that are expected of them, such as maintaining relations with family and community. The fact that IT professionals move frequently only exacerbates this problem, but they do seek ways of maintaining relations from a distance.

In summary, a successful convergence between work and non-work aspects can be a win-win situation for employees and employers alike. This involves changing the way people think and talk about their work and about work-life balance so that using flexible working options and other work-life initiatives becomes accepted and normal for everyone regardless of their gender, seniority within the organizational or personal commitments. The ability to achieve satisfying experiences in all life domains enhances the quality of personal relationships and a range of organizational outcomes.

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