



Gender Differences In Work-Life Balance- An Analytical Approach

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Abstract

This analytical approach examines the gender differences in work-life balance, highlighting the distinct challenges men and women face in managing professional and personal responsibilities. Utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, the study explores how societal expectations, job demands, income disparities, and individual choices contribute to these disparities. It delves into the impact of traditional gender roles on the distribution of domestic duties and the implications for career advancement and personal well-being. By identifying key factors influencing work-life balance for both genders, the study provides insights for promoting equity and supporting diverse needs within the workforce. This comprehensive analysis underscores the importance of fostering a balanced and inclusive work environment that accommodates the unique demands of all employees.

Keywords: Gender Differences, Gender Disparity, Gender Roles, Gender Gap, Work-Life Balance

Introduction

Work and personal life form the central aspects of an individual's social existence (Leslie et al., 2019), and achieving a balance between them has become essential in today's world. Work-life balance has gained growing importance among employers due to the rising significance of this aspect of employment in recent years (Beigi et al., 2019). As women have become more engaged in the workforce and the number of dual-income families has increased (Karkoulou et al., 2016), it has become increasingly challenging for both men and women to balance work and family life, making work-life balance more demanding (Sisodia and Rocque, 2023). Achieving a satisfactory work-life balance for employees has been a primary concern for human resource professionals, policymakers, and scholars (French and Johnson, 2016). This academic focus has inspired numerous scholarly journal reviews and special issues (Goel, 2017; Sirgy and Lee, 2018; Powell et al., 2019). The growing interest is partly due to the substantial societal changes over the past few decades

toward greater gender equality in education and labor market achievements (Kitterød and Nadim, 2020). In contemporary developed nations, the conventional paradigm of a male breadwinner and a female homemaker is now pertinent to only a small minority of households with children (Powell et al., 2019). Although men are increasingly involved in family life and childcare, substantial responsibilities related to homemaking and childrearing continue to rest with women (Alqathani, 2020). In this evolving context, women typically shoulder the dual burden of both paid employment and unpaid domestic labor (Rao et al., 2022). Consequently, the gender disparity in work-life balance satisfaction has attracted considerable academic attention (Chung and Van der Lippe, 2018; Starmer et al., 2019; Reverberi et al., 2021).

Employee roles are characterized by a wide range of expectations, which include not only coordinating the tasks and relationships of others (Derue et al., 2011) but also overseeing one's tasks and relationships in both work and personal domains (Feeney and Stritch, 2017). The body of research exploring the work-life intersection for managers has predominantly focused on gender within particular role contexts (Thrasher et al., 2022). Despite the growing presence of women in the workforce and increasing emphasis on promoting gender equality in both the workplace and society, the issue of gender disparities in career advancement remains unresolved (Mayya et al., 2021). Even though gender roles no longer distinctly specify who handles home care and job responsibilities, some research indicates that the conflict between family and work life remains a more significant issue for women compared to men (Alqathani, 2020; Chapman and Mishra, 2019). A literature review by the authors reveals that gender differences are closely linked to work-life balance.

The current study aims to explore how work-life balance differs between genders and the underlying factors that contribute to these variations. Through an analytical approach, this study offers a detailed insight into the gender-specific challenges that affect individuals' capacity to achieve a balanced life. The objective of this study is to explore how gender influences work-life balance, considering variables such as job demands, workload, income disparities, occupational segregation, societal expectations, and personal responsibilities. This research is pivotal because it not only reveals the disparities faced by different genders but also provides insights into how organizations and policymakers can foster more equitable work environments. By addressing these gender differences, the study seeks to advance the creation of more inclusive and supportive frameworks that boost overall well-being and productivity for all employees.

Research Methodology

An analytical approach was employed to analyze studies and develop an understanding of gender differences in work-life balance. This involved a detailed search on each aspect after reviewing 65 theoretical and empirical studies concerning gender differences and their impact on work-life balance. To ensure a thorough literature analysis, several scientific databases were utilized, including Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, and EBSCO. A search string was used to filter publications in these databases using specific keywords like gender differences, gender bias, gender discrimination, gender gap, work-life interface, and work-life balance. The collected information was then compiled and analyzed.

Work-Life Balance

A substantial body of literature in the social sciences has examined the interplay between the work and life domains (Goel, 2017; Powell et al., 2019). Work-life balance is defined as the extent to which an employee is consistently content with their roles in family, work, and personal life (Adkins and Premeaux, 2019; Kakar et al., 2022). Work-life inputs such as demands, resources, and behaviors, impact the interconnections between work and personal life experienced by individuals or organizations (Leslie et al., 2019). The work-life balance represents a social construct that often emphasizes a comprehensive perspective, aiming to address fundamental challenges concerning gender equality and the utilization of family-friendly policies encountered by individuals striving to attain economic autonomy and establish their intrinsic value (Rashmi and Kataria, 2021). An individual's or organization's cognition and priorities vary as beliefs and preferences are shaped by contextual factors such as family, organization, community, and society (Mayya et al., 2021). Work-life balance is conceptualized as a state of equilibrium in which the demands of an individual's professional and personal life are evenly matched (Sharma and Vahini, 2022). Work-life balance is acknowledged as a crucial emotional and psychological indicator of whether employees remain engaged and motivated amidst global diversity and intense competition within an organization (Panda and Sahoo, 2021). Achieving WLB extends beyond mere flexibility in working hours; it involves harmonizing work responsibilities with personal and family obligations while acknowledging the brevity of life and the imperative to derive enjoyment from it (Jayasingam et al., 2023). Work-life balance derives satisfaction from professional life only when the essential expectations regarding an employee's workplace and role are adequately met (Panda and Sahoo, 2021).

Gender Roles and WLB

Recently, many gender-focused studies have concentrated on the impact of gender on work-life balance, particularly investigating whether men encounter the same level of difficulty in managing work and family responsibilities or if they possess a distinct advantage over women. (Karkoulian et al., 2016; Adisa et al., 2018). Despite the growing participation of women in the workforce, research indicates that women still shoulder the majority of household responsibilities (Kundra et al., 2023). Moreover, there is scant evidence to suggest that men's relative contribution to domestic tasks has significantly altered over the past decade. Notably, a heightened perception of the unequal distribution of household responsibilities has been linked to adverse health outcomes for women (Portela et al., 2014). Various studies have explored gender disparities in household responsibilities and contentment with work-life balance (Baptiste et al., 2017; Sisodia and Rocque, 2023).

Gender disparities persist in work culture, as evidenced by phenomena such as the gender pay gap, the glass ceiling in senior organizational roles, job segregation by gender, and harassment. (Ramos and García-de-Diego, 2022). The evidence regarding gender disparities in work-life balance remains inconclusive. Certain studies that have analyzed both Western and Eastern cultural contexts reveal no substantial or noteworthy gender differences (Sav and Harris, 2013; Milkie and Peltola, 1999). These studies indicate that the experience of work-life balance correlates equally with job and life satisfaction for both men and women. Conversely, other cross-cultural research suggests that gender continues to play a significant role. Men report

greater levels of work-life balance compared to women (Morgenroth et al., 2021), while women encounter higher degrees of conflict between their professional and family responsibilities (Cerrato and Cifre, 2018). Women report considerable challenges in reconciling their professional and familial responsibilities, attributed to insufficient time, inadequate support from their spouses, cultural norms, and gender biases within the workplace (Mahida and Chauhan, 2023; Karkoulou, 2016; Meeusen and VanLaar, 2018). Work-life balance challenges can adversely impact women's health, leading to stress, depression, muscle tension, and weight gain (Uddin, 2021) and these issues may hinder their career progression relative to their male counterparts.

Work-life research has yielded conflicting findings concerning the impact of gender on the work-life interface (Dilmaghani and Tabvuma, 2019; Drummond et al., 2017). Consequently, studies advocate for examining other gender-related factors, such as gender role orientation, instead of merely focusing on biological sex, as these variables can more accurately capture the nuances within gender variation (Minnotte et al., 2016; Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault, 2017; Rajadhyaksha et al., 2015). Research suggests that gender roles shape individuals' identities, behaviors, the roles they opt to assume, and how they perform these roles (Reverberi et al., 2021). Once a norm of gender role expectations is established and institutionalized by society, individuals begin to self-regulate their behaviors in alignment with these societal gender roles (Eagly and Wood, 2012). This implies that an individual's gender role identity may impact their work-life balance.

Traditional Gender Roles

Historically, men and women have assumed distinct social roles concerning the allocation of time between work and family responsibilities; traditionally, men are seen as working full-time outside the home, while women are typically responsible for domestic tasks (Pace and Sciotto, 2021). Gender-based role divisions are embedded within the societal cultural framework (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Females were commonly associated with attributes such as nurturing, empathy, and compassion, whereas males were linked with traits like authority, assertiveness, dominance, and independence (Cinamon and Rich, 2002). Men are traditionally expected to be the primary financial providers for their families, which may necessitate longer working hours resulting in role overload (Evans et al., 2013).

Changes in Gender Role Overtime

In modern society, gender roles have undergone significant transformations, driven by shifting cultural norms, economic changes, and advancements in technology and communication (Shah et al., 2018). Traditionally rigid distinctions between male and female roles have become more fluid, reflecting a broader acceptance of diverse identities and a more equitable distribution of responsibilities and opportunities (Chung and Van der Horst, 2020). One of the most notable changes is the increased participation of women and dual earners in the workforce (Shah and Barker, 2022). In the past, women were often relegated to domestic duties and caregiving roles, while men were expected to be the primary breadwinners (Makama, 2013). Today, women are found in nearly every profession and industry, often holding leadership positions and excelling in fields once dominated by men (Cortes, 2018). This shift has been facilitated by improved access to education and legal protections against gender discrimination, empowering women to pursue careers of their choosing (Klasen et al., 2021).

On the other hand, the roles of men are also evolving. Modern fathers are more involved in parenting and household chores than previous generations (Chao, 2022). The traditional notion that men should focus solely on their careers is giving way to a more balanced view of shared responsibilities within the family (Tahir et al., 2022). This change is partly driven by a growing recognition of the importance of paternal involvement in child development and the benefits of work-life balance for both men and women (Abendroth, 2022).

Despite these advancements, several challenges still remain, such as gender pay disparities, with women often earning less than men for the same work (Parker and Funk, 2017), insufficient mentorship, prejudiced promotion practices, limited awareness, and predominantly male networks (Khan et al., 2021). Women, particularly those from minority backgrounds, still face barriers to career advancement and representation in leadership positions (Katekhaye and Dhone, 2023). Moreover, societal expectations and stereotypes continue to pressure individuals into conforming to traditional gender roles, impacting personal and professional choices (Uunk and Lersch, 2019).

Factors Influencing WLB by Gender

- **Job Demands:** Job demand, encompassing the physical, mental, and emotional requirements of a job (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), significantly influences work-life balance across different genders (Claes et al., 2023). While both men and women face the pressures of job demands, these pressures often manifest differently due to societal roles and expectations (Karkoulian et al., 2016). Understanding these differences is crucial for developing strategies to improve WLB for all employees.

For men, traditional roles have often emphasized the importance of being the primary breadwinner (Cinamon and Rich, 2002), leading to a higher acceptance of long hours and high job demands. With the growing acceptance of shared responsibilities in families, many men struggle with balancing these demands, leading to a compromised WLB (Tahir et al., 2022).

Women, on the other hand, often face a dual burden of professional responsibilities and domestic duties (Bansal and Agarwal, 2019). This dual role can exacerbate job demands, as women strive to meet the expectations of both their employers and their families (Rehman & Roomi, 2012). The challenge of balancing these demands can lead to heightened stress and a lower quality of life. Additionally, women in high-demand jobs may experience more acute WLB issues, as they navigate the pressures of career advancement while managing household responsibilities (Prithi and Vasumathi, 2020).

- **Occupational Segregation:** Gender-based occupational segregation, is, “the separation of men and women into different occupations is a globally observed phenomenon of the workforce” (Maji, 2019). Women's occupational advancement has been restricted vertically by a "glass ceiling" and horizontally limited to specific occupations (Hulme, 2006). The increase in women's educational achievement has gradually lessened vertical gender segregation, yet horizontal occupational segregation remains notably persistent (Hunt, 2016; Dilmaghani and Tabvuma, 2018). Horizontal segregation, involving the disproportionate presentation of genders in specific occupations with similar educational requirements, is evident in the contrast between female-dominated fields like

clerical work, teaching, and nursing, and male-dominated fields like truck driving and engineering. (Dilmaghani and Tabvuma, 2019).

Women often select certain occupations due to attributes such as shorter working hours, flexible schedules, and lower penalties for work separation (Stier and Yaish, 2014). This argument aligns with Hakim's (2002) 'preference' theory, which posits that women choose occupations that enable them to uphold the lifestyle they value. According to this argument, most women prefer a balanced work-family life and therefore choose occupations that better facilitate this balance. Since different occupations vary in the time and effort they require from employees, women tend to select roles that accommodate both professional and personal responsibilities (Valcour, 2007; Haar et al., 2014). Work-life balance can be defined as the satisfaction with how well a job meets the personal life needs of workers (Dilmaghani and Tabvuma, 2019).

- **Gender Pay Gap:** Scholars consistently provide evidence that female employees receive lower pay compared to their male counterparts (Parker & Funk, 2017; Joshi et al., 2015), even when occupying executive positions (Bertrand & Hallock, 2001). Women encounter significant disparities in both compensation and advancement opportunities, receiving only 56% of the remuneration received by their male counterparts despite exerting equivalent effort (CII Scaling of Parity, 2018). As per the UN Women Report (2022), women predominantly occupy positions in low-status and low-paying roles. The gender pay gap persists as a significant issue, devaluing the contributions and worth of women in professional work environments. Despite possessing equivalent qualifications, experience, and skills to their male counterparts, women frequently receive lower compensation for similar work (Kumar et al., 2023). The wage gap not only impacts women's immediate financial security but also hinders their career advancement and overall economic autonomy in the long term (Chinara, 2018).
- **Social and Cultural Norms:** Gender stereotypes exert a considerable influence on work values, delineating societal norms dictating appropriate behaviors based on gender (Muskat & Reitsamer, 2019). Discrepancies in these work values stem from ingrained perceptions of gender roles and societal standards, which mold individuals' perspectives on factors pertaining to their employment. (Sousa & Colauto, 2021). Significantly, women place considerable emphasis on achieving work-life balance, motivated by their myriad roles and obligations (Pita & Torregrosa, 2021).

Traditional gender roles enforced by societies prioritize women's household duties over their professional goals, resulting in an unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities (Parida and Sahu, 2021). These societal expectations frequently cause clashes between career and family obligations, posing challenges for women in achieving a balance between their professional pursuits and societal expectations (Gurjar, 2021). In the Indian context, gender-role expectations tend to associate men primarily with work-related roles and women primarily with familial responsibilities (Rajadhyaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000).

Conclusion

Gender differences in work-life balance reveal significant disparities influenced by societal norms, income disparities, work demands, and individual responsibilities. Women often face greater challenges in achieving work-life balance due to traditional gender roles that assign them a larger share of domestic and caregiving duties. This imbalance can lead to increased stress and reduced career progression opportunities for women. Conversely, men might experience pressure to prioritize work over family life, limiting their involvement in domestic responsibilities. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including implementing more flexible workplace policies, promoting shared household responsibilities, and progressing societal norms. Organizations can enhance employee well-being, productivity, and overall job satisfaction by creating an environment that supports both genders in balancing their professional and personal lives.

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