

A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON WORK- LIFE BALANCE OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance has become a subject of concern for both research scholars and business leaders in view of the contemporary demographic, technological, market, and organisational changes associated with it. However, there has been little academic attempt to provide a holistic picture of work-life balance benefits and programmes (WLBP) offered by various organisations in India. With the basis of extant literature, primary and secondary data, the present paper has made an effort to understand the current status of WLBP in Indian organisations and to identify its future prospects. The paper has discussed the challenges for effective implementation of such policies, which can help HR managers to be cautious before introducing WLBP in their respective organisations. Analysis of literature and available data suggests that family-friendliness of employers in India have been reflected in various welfare provisions which has been a matter of concern for employers since industrialization. With time, the scope and coverage of such initiatives have broadened and have become more individual growth and family well-being oriented. However, these policies and practices are more prominent in new economy organisations such as software and services organisations. Moreover, the range of WLBP varies across organisations and there is still a long way to go when WLBP will become strategic HR initiatives in most organisations.

Keywords: Stress Management, Work-Family Balance, WLB, Work-Life Balance, Work Place Stress

1.INTRODUCTION

Today work-life balance has become an increasingly pervasive concern for employers as well as employees. Demographic changes as seen in the increasing number of women in the workplace and dual career families have generated an increasingly diverse workforce and a greater need of employees to balance their work and non-work lives (Bharat, 2003). In response to these employers have innovative practices that allow employees to find greater work-life balance (Friedman, Christensen, & De Groot, 1998). Increasing attrition rates and increasing demand for work life balance have forced organisations to look beyond run of the mill HR interventions. As a result, initiatives such as flexible working hours, alternative work arrangements, leave policies and benefits in lieu of family care responsibilities and employee assistance programmes have become a significant part of most of the company benefit programmes and compensation packages.

2.REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Such policies, practices and benefit programmes are generally referred as 'family-friendly policies' (FFPs) or 'work-life benefits and practices' (WLBP) in literature (Kopelman et al., 2006; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). The significance and implications of such HR interventions are many.

Research findings suggest that WLBP not only help employees better manage their work and family roles, but also affect employee attitude and behaviours such as organisational commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995), job satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998) and intention to quit (Lobel & Kossek, 1996). Provision of WLBP also contributes to organisational performance and effectiveness (Sands & Harper, 2007).

However, employers' concern for employees' family lives is not a recent phenomenon. Employers have been providing various welfare measures such as good working conditions, health, safety, and security provisions to employees since industrialization. These welfare practices became norms of most factories and organisations either as a result of employers' pragmatic concern for employees and their families or unions' conscious bargain for employee welfare. In true sense, World War II brought a considerable interest in employee work-family issues worldwide because of the increase of women employees in defence industries which led the federal government to provide facilities such as child care facilities. Post war era saw the increase of government mandated provisions being offered to employees such as health and life insurance, social security like pension plans, and disability protection in forms of worker's compensation for accidents, and diseases institutionalizing the notion that employers had at least some obligations to provide security to employees families (Glass & Estes, 1997). In due course of time employers family friendliness has gone beyond providing mere welfare provisions.

WHAT IS WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.

IMPORTANCE OF WORK LIFE BALANCE TO WOMEN

Today's career women are continually challenged by the demands of full-time work and when the day is done at the office, they carry more of the responsibilities and commitments at home. When survey is conducted (Osmania University, Hyderabad), discovered that the majority of women are working 40- 45 hours per week and 53% of the respondents report that they are struggling to achieve work/life balance. Women report that their lives are a juggling act that includes multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life and home. "Successfully achieving work/life balance will ultimately create a more satisfied workforce that contributes to productivity and success in the workplace."

WHY IS IT AN ISSUE FOR WOMEN IN SET

In academic science, engineering and technology (SET), one of the most common points at which women abandon their careers is around the level of post-doc/researcher. This career stage correlates with the time at which many female researchers are raising young children. As women still do the majority of childcare and domestic work, a lack of flexible working provision and a long-hours culture will disadvantage more women than men, as they will be unable to put in the hours required to advance their careers. If universities are serious about retaining these highly skilled women in their workforce, they need to provide a supportive working environment so that both women and men can forge a more sustainable balance in their careers and their personal lives.

If women cannot effectively balance their responsibilities, it is likely that in the long term they will change their employer, or change their career altogether.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN PRACTICE

It usually means more choice about the time and location of work. The most common examples are flexi time and part-time working for the timing of work, and home working for the location of work. The move towards flexible working is not only a practical change, but is also a significant cultural shift. It involves trusting staff and measuring outputs and achievements, rather than process. In reality, many academics have long had freedom about the location and timing of their work. However, in SET disciplines, particularly at the early career stages, this is not always possible as much of the work can be lab-based, site-based or field-based and therefore does not offer much location flexibility. Athena SWAN award-winners have introduced some creative solutions to address the particular challenges in SET so that working practices can be made more inclusive, to the benefit of both men and women. Some of these are outlined below.

FLEXIBLE WORKING:

Offer a range of flexible working and part-time working arrangements such as extended lunch breaks to enable care of elderly relatives, variable hours to enable staff to complete school pick-up, and a gradual change in hours to facilitate the return to full-time working for parents of young children.

MATERNITY AND CHILDCARE:

Recruit a dedicated childcare and work–life balance adviser to provide specialist guidance to staff and students, to help them find appropriate childcare solutions or working practices to suit their individual family circumstances. (King’s College London) Create a support group to link women planning maternity leave with those who have recently returned from maternity. (University of Reading) Allow maternity leaves with research grants to place them in abeyance while the school employs contract research staff (CRS) from the grant as temporary teaching fellows. Re-employ the CRS once the grant is resumed on the staff member’s return. (University of Nottingham, School of Ps) Extend contracts for fixed-term research staff to cover maternity leave and enable the individual to return and complete the outstanding months on the original contract. (University of Reading) Ensure lighter teaching and administrative loads for women returning from maternity leave to enable them to achieve a work–life balance and re-establish their research base. (University of Nottingham and University of Bristol)

WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN INDIA

As a strategic response to the significant changes that have taken place in work and family spheres, Intel India is committed to provide tools and work environment solutions to reduce work and personal life challenges, maximizing employee contributions and enhancing Intel's —Great Place to Work value. Apart from providing five day working and flexible working hours, it also provides certain benefits for employees and their families. Such benefits include;

- Hospitalization Insurance Policy, which covers reimbursement of hospital expenses, incurred due to illness/injury where all employees and their nominated dependants (spouse, children, parents or in-laws) are covered under a floater policy of Rs. 500,000 per annum. Intel pays 100 percent of the premium for employees and 80 percent of the premium for dependents.

- Under Business Traveler Medical Plan, Intel provides medical coverage to full-time and part-time Indian employees, at no cost, while they travel on business outside of India for a period of up to 90 days.
- Group Term Life Insurance ensures payment of a lump sum to the employee's legal heir in the event of the insured employee's death and Intel pays the whole 100% of the premium.
- Intel India's Hospitalization Insurance covers maternity insurance for employees and their spouse from day one. In the case of pregnancy, Intel India allows each female employee a paid maternity leave of 84 days.

Under Annual Leave Time employees in their first two years with Intel, receive 15 working days of leave per calendar year. After two years with Intel, employees receive 20 days of leave per calendar year excluding 12 paid public or festival holidays in a calendar year. Other programs are claimed to be global and they are specifically tailored according to the needs of a specific country, and are based upon the market needs and statutory requirements of each location. The range of options includes flexible work schedules, compressed workweeks and alternate work schedules, telecommuting, home office, part-time employment, childcare assistance, resource and referral services and health and wellness benefits etc.

To best address the unique childcare needs of their employees, Intel takes a site-based approach to childcare. For example, in Israel, Intel has partnered with the community to support childcare centers located near Intel facilities providing services that match the needs of its employees. In Ireland, Intel has implemented an on-site resource and referral service to help employees locate childcare. In the United States Intel offers resource and referral services, a pretax dependent care spending account and discounts to national childcare chains.

IBM India offers its employees options such as flexible workweek schedules, working from home, part time employment, family counseling, and leave of absence programmes under WLBP. IBM's policy manual says that the organisation is serious about helping employees achieve career balance. Other provisions include study reimbursements, global opportunities, recreational activities, clubs and helping employees deal with life events, from getting married to taking a career break. Work/Life balance is a strategic initiative that helps IBM to attract, motivate and retain the very best talent in the technology industry.

The TATA Group is one of India's oldest, largest and most respected business conglomerates. Generally known as the most people-focused company, TATA scores high on almost all the welfare parameters. Employees of different strata work in TATA and hence, the initiatives are tailored towards their unique needs and requirements. For example, since a larger proportion of workforce in manufacturing plants of TATA is illiterate and belongs to the lower strata of society, the company has introduced adult education programmes and education about family planning as a part of welfare programme for them. Crèche facility is provided where the percentage of female employees is more than 20. TATA group of companies has extended the domain of welfare practices to outside the workplace by involving their employees in social responsibilities like community development programs. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is an emerging new economy organization under Tata group which has a pool of educated executive class employees. TCS provides the options to its employees to work flexi time with certain mandatory hours of work and five-day working provisions. It conducts regular seminars on nutrition, better living and stress management. Realizing the impact of long working hours, extensive travel and

desk-bound jobs that skew the delicate work-life balance of many a TCSers, the company has encouraged the formation of groups with similar interests to come together to conduct various activities like book reading. ‘Maitree’ is an initiative for the spouses of employees and it has helped in bringing together the families of the employees.

Zensar Technologies provides child care arrangements such as crèche facility to its employees. It arranges —Pizza and Coke an informal meeting where associates (they refer employees as —associates) can meet their seniors and discuss anything and everything. It has a facility called —Madat Online a 24/7 service which is available for employees to take care of some of their personal day-to-day activities (e.g. dropping cheques, drawing cash, pay telephone bills and school fees of employees’ children). It provides information services such as information regarding housing/education facilities for children. It organises stress management programmes, arranges social events such as family day and fun days at work regularly.

WORK LIFE BALANCE OF WOMEN

KEY STRENGTHS OF INDIAN WOMEN AS MANAGERS

- Ability to network with colleagues
- Ability to perceive and understand situations
- Strong sense of dedication, loyalty and commitment to their organizations
- Ability to multitask
- Collaborative work style—solicit input from others, with respect for ideas
- Crisis management skills
- Willingness to share information (interactive leadership style)
- Sensitivity in relationships (e.g., compassionate, empathetic, understanding)
- Behaving in a gender-neutral manner.

3.RESEARCH STUDIES

The Indian literature on Indian women managers highlights challenges and opportunities for women and for organizations. A number of studies, spanning the years 2002 to 2008, document positive progress for women in the Indian management space as well as barriers to their progress. Research shows that the economic development of India has been positively influenced by entrepreneurial enterprises. A 2005 study of senior women in public and private sector firms, titled *Women in Management in the New Economic Environment: the Case of India*, found that women look for work from economic necessity and for personal goals. Women in lower to middle socioeconomic status seek income opportunities, and those in the upper middle class pursue a career for professional ambitions. Women with higher education have more interest in independence, are career-oriented and interested in quickly moving up the organizational ladder. At the time of this study, 40% of female students attended management institutes in India. The key challenge for women managers is managing both their traditional role as housewives and their career. Women experience great pressure to work hard to prove themselves in the workplace, and one of the greatest obstacles is how women managers are treated by men. They often receive differential treatment, reinforcing the stereotypical view of being inferior and less important than men, resulting in not being offered challenging jobs and not being part of important organizational issues. Yet, despite social and attitudinal barriers, Indian women have gained some equality. Indian organizations are beginning to realize that women can do the same work as men, although in some cases, they have different needs. Finally, a 2006 study *Women Managers in India* explored key issues for women managers in corporate India in service and manufacturing sectors and considered perspectives of men and women managers. The study found that when it comes to hiring practices,

most men and women managers see employment as based on merit, not gender (90% men and 79% women), but only about one third think that organizations look for ways to increase the number of women in senior management roles. In terms of organizational perceptions of importance of gender issues, overall, Indian organizations lack sensitivity about these issues and under appreciate women's capabilities and talents. The study also examined management skills and leadership style and found that generally, men tend to want women to act like men, and most men are not comfortable working for a woman manager. Overall, women prefer an interactive style, and men prefer a command and control style. To be successful in business, women develop management styles that make it more comfortable for men to work with and/or report to a female manager. Lastly, the study concluded that major barriers to women's advancement to corporate leadership include lack of mentoring of women, lack of awareness by women of company politics and an inhospitable corporate culture. The 2007 study Women Entrepreneurs in India notes that nonprofit and for-profit Women in Indian organizations felt that such stereotypes result from not being given challenging assignments. Yet, male managers saw women as being treated more leniently than men when making mistakes. A 2008 study Gender Stereotypes in Corporate India: A Glimpse explored existing gender stereotypes in corporate India. According to this research, Indian men managers held similar managerial gender stereotypes as found in earlier Western studies. That is, they associate managerial success with men more than with women (—think manager—think male). In contrast, Indian women managers did not project gender stereotypes on managerial positions.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE (WLB) ISSUES OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

After overcoming many inherent disadvantages related to the deeply embedded traditional mindset and stringent etiquette, today we find Indian women engaged in different types of traditional (e.g., garment-making, beauty care, fashion design) as well as non-traditional (e.g., founding financial institutions, educational institutions, entertainment companies) entrepreneurial activities. In addition to their challenging entrepreneurial work, many of these women must also perform several roles in their families. These roles include being a spouse, caretaker and parent; managing daily household chores; and providing services to the community and society. Women also must take care of their own health and other personal activities, which are often neglected because of role overload as well as time limitations. All of these situations lead to the absence of WLB and manifestation of many WLB issues.

In contrast, a study by CIBC (2004) revealed that women entrepreneurs in such developed countries as Canada are able to better balance their family life with work than those employed by someone else. The demands originating from the work and personal life of women are quite often mutually exclusive, rendering it very difficult to strike a balance between the role demands. Presently, even though the topic of WLB issues among female entrepreneurs commands urgent attention, studies pertaining to the WLB of entrepreneurial women in India are extremely scarce (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2009). In this context, the current work is a step towards analyzing the WLB issues confronted by the women entrepreneurs of South India. To accomplish this aim, the paper incorporates an extensive literature review to identify gaps in the field of research into female entrepreneurship, followed by a discussion of our study's major objectives; methodology, involving various statistical analyses and the development of a psychometric instrument to measure WLB issues, findings, managerial implications and limitations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

As cultural mores change and Indian society more broadly supports Indian women in managerial positions, organizations need to be more open and make appropriate changes in their

workplace. From the Indian research study Women in Management in the New Economic Environment: the Case of India, the following are recommendations for Indian organizations to promote a supportive workplace for women.

- Develop policies that create a women-friendly workplace environment.
- Establish training programs for women, such as mentorships, career guidance and leadership development.
- Promote awareness initiatives that highlight the value of women managers.
- Elicit input from women employees regarding policies, promotion and performance review processes.
- Make accommodations for women in areas such as need-based postings. That is, as done in civil services, have a policy to post both spouses to the same district or state.
- Have a true commitment to hire and promote women and include women in the annual business strategy

3.CONCLUSION

Work/life programs have the potential to significantly improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and retain organizational knowledge, particularly during difficult economic times. In today's global marketplace, as companies aim to reduce costs, it falls to the human resource professional to understand the critical issues of work/life balance and champion work/life programs. Classify the working women based on age (25-35, 35-45 and above) the organization concentrate on 25-35 age group because in that age women's have more responsibilities in home as well as in working place. Work life balance programmes create win – win situation for employees as well as employer.

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