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Work-Life Balance of Women Employees

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Abstract

Work-life balance is a term used to describe the balance between an individual's professional and personal life. A healthy work-life balance assumes great significance for working women particularly in the current context in which both, the family and the workplace have posed several challenges and problems for women. In this literature review, several studies related to the subject have revealed that women usually face role conflict more than men. Work-family conflict occurs when an individual experiences incompatible demands between family and work roles, causing participation in both roles to become more difficult. This imbalance creates conflict at the work-life interface. Many family-friendly organizations feel the need for work-life balance which includes recruitment and retention of valuable work force, reduced employee stress, job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, health benefits, and better life balance, by applying some interventions in the area of working hours which have been successful in improving work-life balance, such as, flexible working hours.

[Keywords]: Work-Life Balance, Working Women, Role Conflict, Personal Life, Professional Life, Stress.

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INTRODUCTION

Research over the past decades established that, work life balance has increased considerable concern and attention among trade unions, employers and scholars (CIPD, 2017; Dreher, 2003; Clarke, Koch, and Hill 2004; Greenhaus, and Powell, 2006). Work-life balance is broadly defined as "*an equally satisfied level of involvement or 'fit' among the multiple roles in a person's life*" (Konard, and Mngel, 2000: pp.1225). In simple words, work life balance is all about people having a control over the work when, where and how they do (Kamau et al., 2013). An effective work life balance assists a person in achieving both personal and professional goals (Oludayo et al., 2015).

This paper explores the literature related to work-life balance of women employees. Work-life balance confirms to be a necessity for personal satisfaction. Moreover, work-life balance has grabbed even more attention, as women increasingly enter to the business world (Ojo et al., 2014; Oludayo et al., 2015). This is because for women, it is important but difficult to balance both their professional and the personal life.

Literature Review

Based on earlier research and findings (for example, Schieman, and Glavin, 2008; Kamau, et al., 2013; Ojo et al., 2014; Oludayo, et al., 2015), there seems to be a relationship between work-life balance and different variables. Researchers around the world have carried out the studies on job satisfaction, role conflict, involvement, stress, commitment, workload, absenteeism, burnout, motivation, turnover, intention to leave, and so on, and directly or indirectly linked with professional and personal life balance (Schieman, and Glavin, 2008; Kamau, et al., 2013; Oludayo, et al., 2015).

Work-life balance is responsible for shaping the attitude of employees and their personal lives (Oludayo, et al., 2015). Out of various factors which affect the efficiency of workers at the workplace, work-life balance is one of them (Kamau, et al., 2013). Those having balanced career and life most probably seem to be more effective in the work and vice versa. One of the challenges is to achieve a balance between family and personal life as it has greater influence on employees' work and life (Oludayo, et al., 2015).

Omar et al. (2015) argued that role conflict and workload are the foremost factors affecting the work-life balance. Moreover, they found out that both factors were significantly associated with work-life balance in the form of negativism. It indicates that greater degree of role conflict and workload experienced by the workers could lead to lessen work-life balance among the employees.

Role conflict proposes that family and work domains are incompatible due to their different norms and responsibilities (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Omar et al., 2015). Thus, one could say that exposure to stressors in a given domain, for example, work, might lead to fatigue, irritability, or preoccupation with those problems, thereby limiting one's ability to meet the demands of other domains of life, for example, family, therefore, leading to work-family conflict (Ojo, et al., 2014).

In most societies, work-life conflict seems to be quite high especially in case of working women. This is because in majority of societies worldwide, women have traditionally shouldered the bulk of family responsibilities and remain primarily responsible for their children and the care of the elderly (World Bank, 2016). Thus, work life balance is seen more as women issue due to the traditional mindset, where the woman is considered primarily responsible for the smooth running of the day to day affairs of the family irrespective of her job profile and official responsibilities. This explains why managing work and family responsibilities can be very difficult for working women (Omar et al., 2015; World Bank, 2016).

Schieman and Glavin (2008) found that, despite the fact that men also face this challenge of balancing work and other priorities, it affects women more since they do most of the work associated with the household activities, apart from taking care of older family members, children, and other dependents. Although multiple roles in family and work can be the source of multiple satisfactions for employed women, a combination of family and career roles is often associated with conflict and stress. In addition, Rendon (2016) discussed that women usually suffer from the guilt-complex of not spending enough time during the tender age of their children and being forced to leave them for work. Thus, women employees face a dual burden of work and family which creates role conflict and stress (Rendon, 2016). Similar findings were reported in a study done by Hantrai (1990) that shows the importance to working women being available for their children as much as possible. The price paid was the lack of personal time and the feelings of guilt, if any, free time was not used to

be with their children. Most women studied stated that they would sacrifice their own free time and reduce the amount of sleep they had so that their children did not feel the adverse effects of having a working mother (Hantrai, 1990; Schieman and Glavin, 2008).

Furthermore, not only does work-family conflict cause problems for individuals, but it is also detrimental to organizations (Baral and Bhargava, 2010). There can be many knock-on effects for organizations in many areas as a result of employees experiencing work-family conflict. Work-life conflict has been found to be associated with decreased employee job satisfaction, increased staff turnover and absenteeism, lower performance, increased job stress levels and intention to leave the organization (Rendon, 2016). It is important to mention that turnover is costly and disruptive since employees are both their greatest asset and expense. Employees are the single greatest resource for organizations, and it takes time to train new workers to become effective at their jobs (Rendon, 2016; Baral and Bhargava, 2010). Moreover, there are direct and indirect costs associated with hiring a replacement for an employee who has left (Baral and Bhargava, 2010). Hence, work-family balance is theoretically and practically important for both individuals and organizations.

Moreover, work-family conflict causes problems at home for women employees. These problems can lead to increased frustration and stress for the person, which in turn can result in a decreased satisfaction with life. Likewise, when family issues follow the employee to the workplace, the worker can become preoccupied with these problems, causing new difficulties. (Hantrais and Walters, 1990). Consequently, conflicts in work-life balance of working women affects their health as they tend to report more stress, muscle tension, headaches, weight gain and depression than their male counterparts (Oludayo, et al., 2015). Juggling between the obligations towards the families and expectations of the organization and constant struggle to maintain a balance between family and work can have serious implications on the life of an individual by affecting their well-being as well as overall quality of life (Ojo, et al., 2014). There is a widespread demand from workers on the right to balance home life and work in today's busy world where finding time for oneself seems impossible (Dreher, 2003).

Wellness and health programs can, for sure assist working women in balancing their personal and professional life (Roberts, 2005). However, these alone cannot be the answer to addressing the

problems of imbalance (Dreher, 2003). The difficulties and problems of women are multidimensional as evident from the literature reviewed; therefore, they require more probing to assist working women in balancing their family and work life (Roberts, 2005). There are many family-friendly organizations that feel the need for work-life balance which includes recruitment and retention of valuable work force, reduced employee stress, job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, health benefits, and better life balance (Baral and Bhargava, 2010). By applying interventions in the area of working hours which have been successful in improving work-life balance, such as flexible working hours (Roberts, 2005). Flexible working hours or self-rostering covers flexible start and finish times and a possibility for employees to request specific working hours on a regular basis. Consequently, increased choice and control by the employee is enabled (Ojo, et al., 2014). Such increased influence has in several cases shown to increase work-life balance (Ojo, et al., 2014). An effectiveness of work-life balance practices and policies must incorporate the effects of workplace culture and supervisor support of employee's efforts to balance family and work responsibilities (Baral and Bhargava, 2010).

Conclusion

Work life balance is concerned as a vital issue nowadays for individual as well as organizations. Several factors are involved in determining the work life balance and imbalance of any individual which plays a critical role in women's personal and professional life. It is clear from the literature above that many antecedents of work life balance are found in many studies carried out in this area. Moreover, it has been explained that better work life balance creates several positive consequences whereas imbalance between work and family of an individual holds a negative effect which is responsible for some serious issue for individual as well as for the organizations. Additional future studies are needed in non-western places using samples that are often overlooked in the literature, as well as more cross-cultural research should be conducted on this topic in the future.

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