Can Women Manage it All - Work, Family and Life: ERA of being a Superwoman? A Review of Literature

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Abstract

Working women constitute a significant part of our workforce and they are expected to manage all the roles in their lives perfectly, creating a balance between work and family responsibilities. Our social set-up is still traditional wherein women are majorly responsible for home responsibilities even if they are contributing significantly to household income. This study is an attempt to see how aptly they juggle all these roles and the repercussions on their health, productivity, family commitments, etc. Also, the various factors contributing to maintain a healthy work life balance are studied by various researchers.

Keywords: Work Life Balance, Multiple role balance, Work Life Conflict of working women.

1. Introduction

In a recent interview on the world famous Oprah Winfrey’s show “Oprah’s Next Chapter”, Sheryl Sandberg, currently Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, having held esteemed positions like Vice President of Google and chief of staff for U.S. Department of the Treasury talked about the perplexes of being a successful businesswoman along with being a working mom. She says “Having it all” is a dangerous phrase for women. “Having it all is the worst,” she tells Oprah. “No matter how much we all have and how grateful we are for what we have, no one has it all, because we all make tradeoffs every single day, every single minute.”

We all have come across situations in life when we have to juggle between work commitments and personal commitment or struggle to find out time for leisure
activities due to work pressures. Ever feel stressed out because you could not make it to your best friend’s wedding, or you missed your child’s annual function at school because of never ending work deadlines? Do you feel guilty at some point of time that you have not been devoting enough time to your family and health due to the blurred boundaries between work and home? When was the last time you took some time off and did something just for yourself? If you have a positive reply to any of these questions, you need to maintain a healthy Work-Life Balance in your life by having a proper understanding of your priorities and purpose of life.

Work-life balance, in its broadest sense, is defined as a satisfactory level of involvement or ‘fit’ between the multiple roles in a person’s life (Hudson, 2005). Work Life balance has always been a concern of those interested in the quality of working life and its relation to broader quality of life (Guest, 2002). The articulation of work and life, cast as work-life balance, has become a key feature of much current government, practitioner and academic debate (Eikhob, Warhurt & Haunschild, 2007). It is believed that balancing a successful career with a personal or family life can be challenging and impact on a person’s satisfaction in their work and personal life’s roles (Broers, 2005). Dundas (2008) argues that Work Life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and all other activities that important to people such as family, community activities, voluntary works, personal development and leisure and recreation. Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) define work-life balance as the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role. Thus, employees who experience high work-life balance are those who exhibit similar investment of time and commitment, to work and non-work domains (Virick, Lily & Casper, 2007).

Significance of the study: It is widely recognized that employees who achieve a work–life balance that suits them work more efficiently, are more committed to their employers and are less likely to become ill as a result of stress. It also helps in immediately and consistently creates more value and balance every day for the individual. It also helps in driving personal commitment and accountability to the organization, providing greater job satisfaction, growth potential and job security, in turn providing greater organizational profitability. It helps to increase productivity at the organizational level. It results in reduced absenteeism through decreasing work-family conflict; and positively impact on the organization’s image as perceived by the general public. A failure to address work–family conflicts has negative impacts not only on the employment opportunities and job quality, health and productivity of the workers concerned, but also on their families, children and adults alike, both in developed and developing countries.

Scope of the study: Work-life balance policies and practices can assist all people, not just women or those with young children. They assist people who are responsible for the care of elderly parents, people who have study commitments, those older employees who simply want to ease themselves into retirement or people with other personal and lifestyle commitments.
2. Review of Literature

Supriti Dubey, Ruchi Saxena and Neetu Bajpai (2010) in their study *Work Life Balance: Can Women be Both Bearer and Manager* have stated that a successful work life balance helps in achieving personal as well as professional goals of a person. The nature of work has changed as earlier it was perceived as necessity in order to survive but now it is a source of personal satisfaction for employees. Work Life Balance creates healthy synergy in the working environment of an organization and its most important asset i.e., employees. A balanced life is when we are able to devote enough time to all spheres of life and neglect none of them. Organizations need to create congenial conditions in which employees can balance work with their personal needs and desires. Similar efforts from family are also desirable. It was analyzed that variables like age, working environment, training programs, fringe benefits and family support have statistically significant relationship with Work Life Balance of female employees. Respondents who were above 40 years of age were able to balance work and life much better than their younger counterparts. It was also observed that motivating work environment significantly affects the ability to create a better work life balance. Suggestions like sharing the load, time management, communication with boss and coworkers and having a positive approach were given to aid in a better balance.

Dr. B. Aiswarya and G. Ramasundaram (2011) in their study *Working Hours as an Influencing Factor towards Work Family Conflict of women employees in IT Sector in Chennai City* pointed out that there is a direct proportional relationship between the working hours and the Work Life Balance. Out of the sample size of 598 respondents, majority of the high conflict segment comprised of respondents who work ten hours per day while very few respondents who work eight hours per day were found to have high conflict. The study was conducted on women employees in IT sector and it shows a wide gap between Work Life Conflict levels of females who work for 8 hours and those who work for 10 hours.

Dr. Navjot Kaur and Parminder Walia (2010) in their study *Emotional Intelligence as a Factor in Creating work Life Balance* found out that Emotional Intelligence of IT Professionals was found to be significantly and positively correlated with Personal Life Interference with work (r=0.28), Work Personal Life enhancement (r=0.26) and overall Work Life Balance (r=0.25) at 0.1 level of significance. Scores of Emotional Intelligence range between 91 and 171 while mean score of EI was 131.57. Scores of work Life Balance ranged between 48 and 105 while mean was 70.77. Emotionally intelligent individuals are able to successfully cope up with stressors in personal and work life and therefore they are able to minimize interference of personal life in work. Persons with high Emotional Intelligence are better focused, pursue goals in a consistent manner, they seldom lose their cool and are more organized. The study indicates that emotionally intelligent people tend to create a better work life balance and increase the productivity as well as the ability to adjust in all conditions of employees.
A Study on Work Life Conflict and Flexible Work Arrangements that Aid Work Life Balance: Perception of Working Women in Dual Career Families by Uma Seshadri and Debendra Kar (2012) involved gathering of opinion of working women in dual career families on work life balance variables and support required from employers. It concluded that working women perceive that organizational policies that promote flexible work arrangements have positive direct association with work life balance. Thus, time flexibility is the most important factor considered by women employees to balance their work and family life. Particularly the following factors affected this perception: ability to interrupt office work to attend family matters and return to work, ability to arrange a convenient work schedule, provision to work partially from home, provision of leave when required, provision of child care as well as elderly care facilities, etc. An overwhelming 93% of the respondents agreed that they would work hard to manage both work and family while 88.6% said they would not mind spending more time on fulfilling family’s responsibilities, thus indicating importance of family in women’s lives. A majority of women (90% of respondents) indicated that they expect support from organizations to give them permission to attend advanced courses/conferences, etc, suggesting strong desire to continuously advance their knowledge and skill set. Also, the study point out that organizational support is very crucial in selecting job opportunities and in achieving a desired level of work life balance.

P. Kavitha, Dr. V. Kavitha and P. Arulmurugan (2012) in their study on Role Of Stress Among Women Employees Forming Majority Workforce At IT Sector in Chennai and Coimbatore, Tier I and Tier II centres concluded that women professionals in IT Sector are experiencing high Organizational Role Stress. Significant difference was observed between married (mean score of 9.14) and unmarried females (mean score of 6.59) on Inter Role Distance i.e. conflict between organizational and non-organizational roles, especially relevant for dual career couples. As long as one member of family stays at home to take care of family, Inter-Role Conflict is expected to be less. Married women have also shown more Role Expectation Conflict than unmarried women as married women generally respond to a bigger set of significant others i.e. conflicting expectations and demands by different role senders. Married females also reported higher stress due to Role Overload i.e. too much is expected from the role than they can cope with. Also, the study indicates that Resource Inadequacy has emerged as the most potent stressor which means non-availability of resources required for effective performance of the role. The mean score for Resource inadequacy was 9.66 followed by Role Overload (mean score of 9.57) and Personal Inadequacy (mean score of 8.71).

Leena B. Dam and Sudhir Daphtardar (2012) in their study on Work Life Balance by Women Faculty Members: The Conundrum Within made an attempt to examine the Work Life Balance of faculty members in Management Colleges in Pune and found out that a majority of women faculty members find it difficult to balance work and life. The stress from job spills over in their personal life and it is hard to take out time for self development and activities of self interest. Also, it has severe impact
on their physical and mental health. Working beyond the official working hours and spending too much time on household chores also disturbs the thin line of balance between work and life, as females are generally more responsible for child care, elderly care and household responsibilities. Also, the time taken to travel to the workplace has been reported by 89% of respondents to be a major inhibitor to work life balance. Designation wise difference was also studied in the various parameters of work life balance, it was concluded that higher designation respondents had much more need to extend duty hours. Lower designation faculty members spent maximum time in preparing lecture (45% of respondents agree to this) while higher designation members spent maximum time in teaching (50% respondents agree to this), while lowest time was spent on students’ project related work among all designations.

Jean E Wallace (1999) in the study Work-to-Nonwork Conflict among Married Male and Female Lawyers examined various factors related to work which contribute to time-based and strain-based work to non-work conflict among married female and male lawyers. Three major factors considered for this study were Work Involvement, Work Role Stressors and Work Context. It was found out that Work Overload was the sole significant contributor to work – nonwork conflict for both male and female lawyers. For male lawyers, contributors to work-nonwork conflict were completely different as working for longer hours; working with firms having more women; and their partner being the major source of income i.e. partner being bread earner had effect on work-nonwork conflict as compared to females being affected by Work Context as they reported higher work-nonwork conflict if they joined a law firm vis-à-vis other law employment opportunities. Also, females preferred to work in firms having more number of female lawyers. Domestic status variables like preschool children and working status of partner had little effect on females’ work-nonwork conflict as their strain based conflict was reduced by additional family roles.

Lindsay A. Martin (2012) in her study Multiple Role Balance, Professional Quality Of Life, And Wellness among Women Employed As Professional Counselors examined whether there exists a relationship between factors like Multiple Role balance, Number of dependents, Professional Quality of Life, Age, Experience and Wellness among women professional counselors as they face risk of Compassion fatigue, Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress due to nature of their work being emotionally demanding. Data Analysis revealed that the Mean Total Wellness scores were quite high (81.13) with possible scores ranging between 25–100, Mean Multiple Role balance was moderate (25.13) with possible range of 8-40, Professional Quality of Life was good, with High Mean Compassion Satisfaction (41.61, with scores between 5-50), Low Mean Burnout (20.71, with scores between 5-50) and low Secondary Traumatic Stress (19.17, with scores between 5-50). The study confirmed that a woman’s overall wellness level if significantly affected by a higher score on being able to successfully balance multiple roles in her life. 77% of respondents had moderate Multiple Role Balance scores, 18% had high MRB while only 4% had low MRB indicating that majority women could balance multiple roles in their life. But moderate Multiple Role Balance could be interpreted in various ways, it might mean
that women just accept their multiple roles rather than feeling positive about it, they might be content with various roles as they feel they are responsible for them. The results show that Professional Quality of Life and demographic factors also had significant relationship with overall wellness but number of dependents did not affect wellness levels. Also, the study emphasizes that both personal life and professional life should be considered while analyzing and evaluating overall holistic wellness. (Capella University, Dissertation, Doctorate of philosophy, UMI Number 3509173, Proquest, May 2012, UMI Dissertation Publishing)

Elizabeth Krymis (2011) in her study Women and Work Life Balance: A Phenomenological Qualitative Analysis of Identity, Relational Style, Adaptive Style, and Drive and Motivation, and the Role of Faith from the Narrative Life Story Framework found out that women, who value and believe in faith, connect it to work element also. Such women believe that such work is a purpose of their life set by god; hence their work is significantly meaningful to them. These women highly value professional and personal lives and values are an indispensable part of coping strategies for them. The study also found out that cultural background and cultural identity also have an impact on experiences and hardships faced by women. Also, faith helped women to understand their work and personal life in a much better way. Women also confessed that having multiple roles had a positive effect on both work and family; several factors of personal life, for example: being a mother affects several aspects of work life and various facets of being a career oriented woman affect personal life in a positive way. As proven by most of the studies on Work Life Balance, Flexibility was considered to be the most important factor for attaining a healthy Work Life balance. Women said they desired having their own business to achieve flexibility; they preferably wanted a flexible work schedule at work in order to attain a better work life Balance. Another important factor was the sense of being self dependent in all facets of life felt by career women, which gives them a feeling of elation. It was thereby concluded that faith is an important factor in achieving Work Life Balance, in choosing the field of career and it also plays a very important role in relationships for women. Faith also affected their Adaptive Style i.e. how they cope up with change and it also was a factor in deciding where they would like to spend their time.

Melissa K. Byington (2010) in her study Principal Balance: Life Role Balance among Women in Secondary School Administration studied the various perspectives of female secondary school administrators on how to balance multiple roles in life and the difficulties and social barriers they face in doing the same. A whopping 71% of respondents agreed that their work commitments interfered with home commitments and a meager 41% agreed that home commitments conflict with work commitments. 55% disagreed with the statement that home commitments interfere with work commitments. Surprisingly 70% of respondents agreed that the districts in which they are working support them to have an optimal work life balance and 73% feel that they are supported by their supervisor. 77% agree that they have major responsibilities at home and childcare and 65% agree that another adult at home shares these duties with them. Only 43% of respondents agreed that they had a healthy life balance and
35% disagreed with this. Although a majority of 64% of respondents feel they are able to negotiate between their multiple roles, still a majority of respondents i.e. 78% feel that conflicting multiple roles creates stress in their lives. Only 45% of respondents feel that they are good at balancing multiple roles while 42% believe they are not good at it. Regarding the effect of stress on health, 71% agreed that stress arising out of multiple role demands affects their health and 80% agreed that such stress affected their family and personal life. On the contrary, only 38% agreed that it affected their work performance. The women confessed that it was a tough and challenging task to achieve a balance and some even admitted it being a weakness for them while others were striving to achieve it by new coping strategies.

Kerri Health (2012) in her study Women in Leadership: Strategies for Work-Life Balance has conducted a phenomenological study among 22 women leaders using a narrative life-course framework created by Giele. It was found out that meaningful and fulfilling careers helped women in managing multiple roles and creating a positive balance between work and life. 96 strategies emerged out of the study and they were grouped into 18 themes. The most important strategy was to find meaningful work, followed by the second theme which was to ‘Obtain a Mentor’ as these mentors help, support and motivate in striking the right balance. Other important themes were to ‘Work Hard’ i.e. being competitive and productive; ‘Prioritize’ i.e. to schedule important family events in advance making sure they do not clash with work commitments; ‘Increase Confidence’ i.e. to believe in oneself; ‘Faith’ i.e. being religious helped them cope with stress; ‘Support system’ i.e. being supported by spouse, extended family, partner, outsourcing for childcare and elderly care, etc.; ‘Work Life Balance Philosophy’ i.e. letting go of perfection and taking one step at a time; ‘Intentional Parenting’; ‘Self care, Play Hard and Hobbies’; ‘Work Strategies’ like work from home, etc.; ‘Proximity of work to School/Home’; ‘Technology’; ‘Break from Work’; and ‘Managing emotions’. Coping strategies vary from woman to woman and there are various sub-themes under the above mentioned broad themes.

Susan Elizabeth Mangels (2008) in her study Does Balance Matter? The Relationship between Work-life Balance and Success for Women College Presidents conducted a study at private and public institutions in U.S. to find out the relationship between Work life Balance and Success of Women as College Presidents. It was found that there is significant relationship between Work Life Balance and presidential success and the Presidents’ time of life also affected his/her success (Work Life Balance devoid of conflict/dissonance and time of life of presidents explained 43% variance in success of presidents). But the study does not reveal or define what is meant by the right time of life for a perfect balance, neither does it explain what should be there for Work Life Balance, rather it sates what should not be there i.e. absence of conflict and dissonance. No of years in presidency i.e. tenure also affected their success levels. Also, Work life balance is personal and everyone has different perspectives and aspirations in life so female presidents should evaluate their career paths and goals at regular intervals of time in order to evaluate balance in their lives. The right time of life refers to the fact that women should be aware of their maturity
level, capabilities and competencies to take on a presidency job and that the job is in fit with their personal commitments.

Parminder Walia (2011) in her thesis on *Work Life Balance of Working Professionals: A Study of IT & ITES Industry* examined the relationship between Individual related variables (Emotional Intelligence, Work Centrality, Age, Gender and Marital Status), Family related variables (Household Responsibility, Spouse Support and Parental Demands) and Work related variables (Task Variety, Task Autonomy and Work Schedule Flexibility) and overall Work Life Balance. The Work Life Balance scores could vary between 15 to 105 and the actual scores of IT & ITES Professionals varied between 48 to 105. The Average Work Life Balance score was 70.77 and Median score was 70.50. It was found out that the mean work life balance was above average for IT & ITES Professionals. Emotional Intelligence (r =0.25), Work Centrality (r=0.20), Gender (r =-0.13), Spouse Support(r = 0.29) Task Variety (r = 0.21) Task Autonomy (r = 0.38) and Work Schedule Flexibility (r = 0.17) were found to be positively correlated with Work Life Balance with r values being significant. Higher the EI, higher is Work Life Balance, higher is the Work/Personal Life Enhancement and lesser is the interference of Personal Life with work and vice versa. Also, women showed more Interference of Work with Personal Life as compared to men. However, surprisingly there was no significant relationship between Number of children, Age, Household responsibility, Marital Status and the Work Life Balance of It & ITES Professionals. It was stated that women gain satisfaction and happiness out of a feeling of motherhood, so it does not affect their Work Life Balance.

Saroj Parasuraman and Claire A. Simmers (2001) in their study *Type of Employment, Work-Family Conflict and Well-Being: A Comparative Study* did a first of its kind comparative analysis of the relationship between work role characteristics and pressures, family role characteristics and pressures, work-family conflict, and indicators of well-being for self employed persons vis-a-vis persons employed in organizations. It was found out that employment type (F=10.53, p < 0.001) and gender ((F=11, p < 0.001) had significant impact on the above stated variables. It was concluded that self-employed individuals enjoyed more autonomy (Mean 4.47 as compared to mean 3.61), more flexibility of schedule (Mean 0.20 as compared to mean 0.06) and higher levels of involvement (Mean 3.09 as compared to mean 2.45) in their work as compared to individuals employed in organizations. Surprisingly, self-employed individuals reported greater work-family conflict, greater family role pressures due to parental demands, job satisfaction, but lower satisfaction from family as compared to organizationally employed individuals. The reason for the same is that self employed individuals devote more time and commitment to work as the responsibility for business is solely on their shoulders. Women reported less autonomy, less work involvement, less time commitment to work, less work family conflict and less job satisfaction(Means 3.75, 2.47, 2.97, 2.69 and 3.59 respectively) as compared to men (3.93, 2.76, 3.74, 2.86 and 3.78 respectively). Women displayed more schedule flexibility (mean = 0.08 versus - 0.07), family involvement (mean = 4.17 versus 3.89),
time commitment to home (mean = 2.27 versus 1.64) and life stress (mean = 2.93 versus 2.73) than men. The possible reason for the same could be that women are more committed to home and spend more time with family while men want to spend time with family but are unable to do so. But women suffer from life stress more than men because of the multiple role demands of work and family.

3. Conclusion
A lot of research has been carried out on the topic of whether women are able to maintain a healthy work life balance and how they end up juggling multiple roles in life, sometimes sidelining their own health and personal interests in life. The studies cover mostly all the aspects of work life balance issues that women face. An important research gap to be noticed here is that work to non work conflict has been studied but the effect of non work to work conflict has significantly been ignored. Also, more in depth research about implications of blurred lines between home and work on the mental and physical health of women is needed to have a holistic view of impact of a positive or negative work life balance.

References


