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Work Life Balance in Context of Indian Women

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Abstract:

Increasing women work force in all walks of life and all organizations in India in the last decade has made Work Life Balance amongst Women employees as a very important subject. Women play a very pivotal role in the Indian Family structure and are taking on responsible positions in many organizations, and women have struggled a lot to establish their identity in the male dominated corporate world, both in terms of social life and corporate life. With increasing industrialization, explosion of IT & ITES sectors and Services & Hospitality Sectors, there are ever increasing opportunities for Women to excel. The increased availability and access to higher education and vocational education to women has also made them ready to en-cash on these opportunities. In the background of fast growing competitive world, ever expanding globalization, and intense internal and external competitiveness, organizations need to create a congenial and positive Work Life Balance environment to foster good talent and enhance the productivity of Women Employees. The Organizations need to be aware of the Indian Family expectations of Women to provide intensive parenting, highly involved childbearing and child development, and play multiple roles of an ideal wife, and adoring parent and also a caring daughter in-law in the family. The contradictions of the multiple role demands have to be balanced by the organizations supporting women with policies that are encouraging and friendly to foster an healthy environment for enhanced productivity. This article has explored the various bodies of study conducted in the recent past and compiled relevant suggestions to organizations to deliver a positive WLB for women.

1. Introduction Work Life Balance

All men and women who are employed in various fields of life are engaged in multiple roles throughout their life. The roles include that of an employee at the work place, a family role as a husband or wife / father or mother, social roles and roles in the religious way of life as well. Conflicts occurs when the employee has to devote time and energy to these roles, and also justify the various roles and be able to balance them. Work Life Balance is this phenomenon where in the employees who have multiple such roles have to manage the conflicts of demand on their time and energy from their multiple roles and yet be able to maintain an equilibrium. Work Life balance is the daily achievement and enjoyment in all spheres of life viz-work, family, friends, health and social networks. The ideal Work Life Balance is a dynamic parameter and can vary from day to day and has to be re calibrated and re set with the changing situations and demands.

There are distinctly defined four quadrants of every person's life. These are Work, Family Friends and Self. These four quadrants have varying demands at various phases of an individuals' life and the individuals' career path. The ability to manage the contradicting demands of time and effort from these 4 quadrants is the real challenge of Work Life Balance.

For the better understanding of the concept of Work Life Balance two key concepts are to be clearly defined – Achievement and Enjoyment

Achievement can be defined as a career based achievement, personal achievement of a child's good performance at school or college or a social position or status achieved. These achievements tend to get overshadowed by the next emerging responsibility or next demanding task from one of the quadrants of life. This is where the next concept gains importance:

Enjoyment means the sense of pride of achievement (shared with family and friends), it also means the wholesome satisfaction, complete happiness, celebration of the event, and a sense of well-being of life in general. It can be best summed up as the celebration of life.

Based on above two concepts a more wholesome working definition of Work Life Balance is Meaningful Daily Achievement and Enjoyment in each of the four quadrants of life: Work, Family, Friends and Self

2. Work Life Balance Specific to Women

Women in Indian Society have very rigidly defined family roles and social roles, and in that context the status of a working woman becomes very challenging. The Work Life Balance for women is very dynamic phenomena, as family role demands and social role demands on Indian women are seasonal / erratic and have no room for a compromise in a matriarchal society set up. Women have the additional responsibility of childbirth and parenting which is physically and emotionally very demanding.

Women have taken positions in all walks – teaching profession, IT & BPO Sector, Medical Field, All Professional Fields, Entrepreneurs and Industrialists as well. The work demands from all these fields are varied and since women have occupied positions at all levels they are subject to work pressures of all levels.

There are three important factors that have contributed to renewed interest of all organizations to Work Life Balance. These are:

- **Global Competition:** The MNC's and other corporate in India are bringing in their Global HR practices that are followed in Europe a USA, which provide very meaningful and supportive policies to working women.
- **Focus on Family Values:** Across the country there is a resurgence of the Family Values and thereby a lot of values about parenting and family relations within the family have been actively revived. Social demands on women to focus on intrinsic family values have been re-ignited.
- **Ageing Work Force:** Women in the Indian Industry have been around for the last 2 decades, and they have larger family responsibilities coupled with increased organizational demands. Balancing these demands on time and energy have been more intense in the last few years.

3. Review of Literature

Work Life Balance studied in Women, effects the family life and strains family relationships on one end, and on the other end can lead to a drop on women's job performance and change towards work attitudes. Hence it was imperative to examine the existing studies and papers published in this related subject.

Considerable body of work has been done on the field of Work Life Balance with specific reference to various categories of working class. Several studies have confirmed positive relationship between personalities, emotional support and well-being. Multiple studies with specific reference to Work Life Balance challenges faced by IT Professionals have been examined. There are fewer studies relating to the challenges and problems that are faced by Working Women. There are specific studies focused on challenges of working women entrepreneurs and working women in the teaching faculty. The Work Life Balance – Executive Briefing Series by Boston College – Centre for Work and Family has clearly stated the genesis of the Indian Family structure and its relevance in Work Life Balance related issues in India. It has also outlined the several measures taken by Indian Organizations to improve the WLB status of working women in India.

There are a few Web Sites that have also been a good source of information in the same www.worklifebalance.com and www.cio.com had yielded valuable insights and information

4. Findings: Importance of Work Life Balance for Working Women

Families in India are predominantly patriarchal where the woman is expected to be an epitome of self-sacrifice and be an Ideal Mother, Ideal Wife & an Ideal Daughter in Law Women are expected to provide intensive parenting, highly involved childbearing and child development, and also provide for the general well-being of everyone in the family.

With increasing access to higher education, Indian women are getting better qualified and better trained to deal with work place challenges. There are a plethora of roles and industries where women excel in their areas and are surpassing men in their achievements. Thus working women tend to get torn between multiple roles in the family and its corresponding demands of time and also the increased demands for performance and efficiency from the workplace. This tend to lead to two forms of Imbalance led conflicts viz – Work Family Conflict and Family Work Conflict

4.1. Work Family Conflict: WFC

This occurs when the women experiences at Work interference with her family life, like extensive travel, irregular or inflexible working hours, work over load and other forms of job stress, which interferes with the woman's family roles being discharged effectively. Interpersonal conflict at work, unsupportive supervisor or un caring organization often lead to work family conflicts. An illustration is an un expected meeting late in the day may prevent a parent from picking up her child from school.

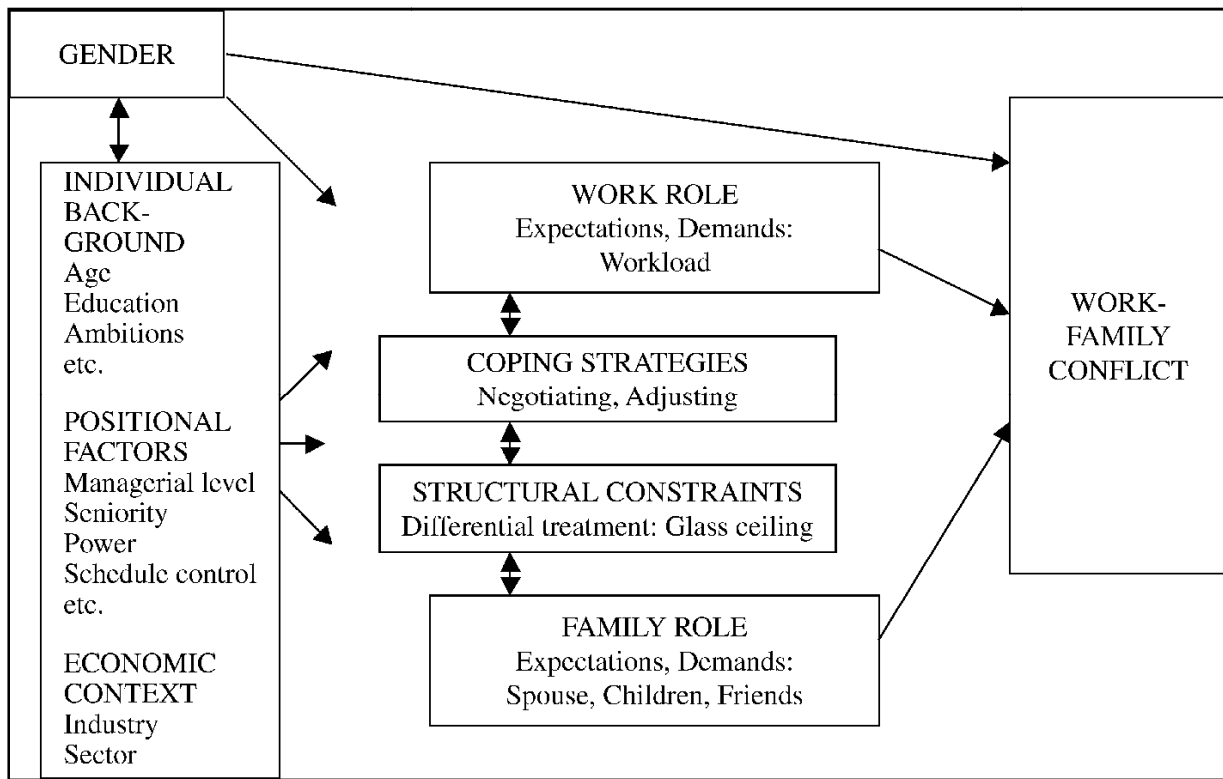


Figure 1: A Diagrammatic Illustration of a Work- Family Conflict – Factors and Situations

4.2. Family to Work Conflicts

FWC: Working Women face Family to Work Conflict when experiences / demands in the family interfere in the work life for example the presence of young / small children in the family, or the health care related issues with elders in the family, or interpersonal strained relationships or conflicts or unsupportive family members. For example, a Working woman may take a day off to take care of ailing child.

Both these kinds of conflicts can be resolved by proper and timely facilitation. The work place has to provide for better support policies and systems to deal with both the types of conflicts.

An Illustration of how both Work to Family Conflicts and Family to Work conflicts can be resolved by proper facilitation is given below.

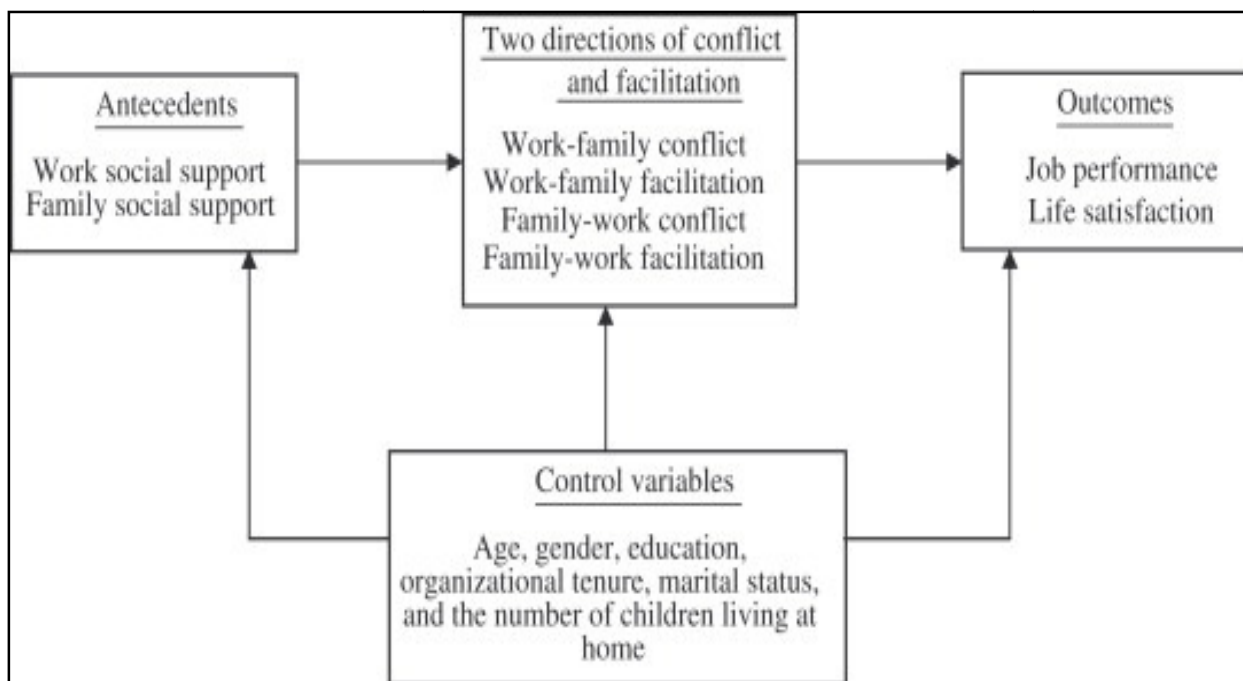


Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of Facilitation of WFC and FWC for working women

5. Importance for Work Life Balance for Women

Women play an extremely pivotal role in the Indian Family Structure. They carry the all-important role of child bearing, intensive child upbringing, the role of a dutiful wife and a caring daughter in law, along with managing the household chores and not to mention the social religious roles that are also expected. Hence the Work Life Balance is very essential for Indian Working Women as they have to deal with multiple role demands and manage the stress and strains generated by these multiple roles at Work and at Family.

Work place characteristics can play a very important role in contributing to the higher levels of Work Family conflict. The number of working hours per week, the amount and frequency of overtime work required, inflexible work schedules, frequent travel requirements, unsupportive supervisor, inhospitable organizational work culture increase the likelihood that Women employees will experience conflict between their work role and family roles. Researchers Baruch and Barnett found that women who had multiple life roles were less depressed and had higher self-esteem than women who were more satisfied in their marriages and jobs compared to women who were home makers only and were not employed. However, Researchers Baruch and Barnett argued that the quality of the role rather than the quantity of roles that really matters. WFC and FWC are generally considered as very distinctly different conflicts, however there exists researched evidence to show that they are related constructs. Research to date has primarily investigated how work interferes or conflicts with family.

6. Initiatives by Organizations to Promote WLB for Working Women

General Electric Technology Centre at Bangalore has started an initiative called RESTART, oriented at hiring women technologists who are on a career break.

Procter & Gamble India: Offers work from home options for women employees, and has reduced work schedules, and both these initiatives have been a great enabler in maximizing productivity and helping manage work life balance.

Price water house Coopers Pvt Ltd. offers support for commuting and have programs covering fun at work, health and stress reduction. Gymnasium facilities are provided at major office locations.

IT & ITES Major Companies like Infosys technologies, Wipro Technologies, Cognizant technologies and Tata Consultancy Services have multiples initiatives to support women employees, -a portal for online dissemination of information on stress related issues, a hotline number where employees can directly receive counseling and expert opinions, Day Care facilities for children, Flexi working schedules, work from home, telecommuting and part time work options are offered to most women employees.

Cisco – Set up a Women's Action Network – WAN India. WAN India also runs the Role Model Leadership Series (RMLS) workshops, community initiatives such as Girls in technology, adopting charities focused on education and bring your child to work day – to create a more harmonious working environment for women.

Johnson and Johnson India established the Women's Leadership Initiative WLI in 2002 with the support of the top.

7. Conclusion: Striving for a WLB for Working Women in India

Based on the current cultural situation, family structures, societal factors and the economic status in India the Organizations and Corporations in India may need to work on many of the following initiatives to improve the Work Life Balance for Working women.

- Flexibility: Employers must have flexible timings, work from home, less stress full work places, low work interruptions and congenial environment to improve their productivity.
- Stress Reduction: Organizations must create a collegial atmosphere at work, with multiple forums and opportunities for colleagues to interact informally, they must be encouraged to interact on a casual mode and have common interest groups to pursue hobbies / interests. There must be CSR Initiatives / NGO Initiatives where all the interested employees can contribute to the cause.
- Commuting: Organizations must invest in transportation resources (own or outsourced) to assist women employees with long commutes or to return after longer working hours from work to home. In the event of any home emergency organizations must provide commuting support.
- Training: Organizations must conduct ongoing training programmes periodically based on the working women's needs, these are to include time management, usage of technology to simplify their work load, use of teleconferencing and video conferencing and webinars to improve connectivity and reduce travel requirements of women.
- Elder Care: Employers must seriously consider providing elder car support facilities to such women who need support. This could be in terms of extended health insurance / health care, contracting with well-known health care providers / hospitals for such support.
- Child Care: Day care facilities, resting rooms for mothers to be, and play facilities for toddlers may be provided by the employers to support women employees. This can be done through outsourced service providers within the proximity of the organization.
- Health Care: Employees need to increase health consciousness by providing information regarding good exercise, health eating habits, healthy living practices and providing periodic checkups. Facilities such as Gymnasium, Yoga hall and Sports facilities also can be included.
- Gender Equality: Employers must maintain highest forms of transparency in promotions and career moves, and must recognize that equal opportunities must be made available for talent transformation, development, retention and satisfying career growth. There must be online portals and listening posts established in organizations for women to air their professional grievances and seek counseling on the same.

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