

Work-Life Balance in the IT Sector: A Case Study of Delhi*

Nidhi Tewathia

¹ Research Scholar, Discipline of Economics, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi 110068, India. Email: tewathian@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Abstract: Excessive pressure leads to stress. Many of the stressful life events are related to the workplace. Employees who start to feel the pressure to perform are likely to get caught in a downward spiral of increasing effort in order to meet rising expectations but no increase in job satisfaction. Many organisations in Delhi are trying to promote Work Life Balance (WLB) through initiatives which include flex times, part time work, provision of child care facilities etc. Yet, the respondents of this study have expressed their inability to balance professional and personal life. Gender aspect has also been considered vis-à-vis the variables of the study. Primary survey was conducted with a sample size of 150 IT employees of Delhi. The paper concludes by pointing out that WLB policies need to be implemented as much as possible in all industries, and on a wider basis in organisations that are currently using them in order to sustain the business performance.

Keywords : Work, Work-Life Balance, Delhi, IT sector.

1 Introduction

THE conventional wisdom indicates that a happy worker is a better worker. But it seems that the employers find it difficult to understand this fact. We all experience pressure on a daily basis. We need it to motivate us and enable us to perform at our best. However, when the pressure becomes excessive, it leads to stress. Many of the stressful life events are related to the workplace, e.g. lack of job security, changes in working hours, changes in working conditions, layoffs, downsizing, organizational readjustments, etc. IT industry in India has long been exempted from labour regulations in order to facilitate its rapid growth and competency in the global market. Although this is a sound argument in the wake of our developing economy struggling to sustain and expand economic growth, yet it needs to be checked whether the burden is not being borne by the industry's labour force.

The recent past is a witness to changes in work schedules. A larger part of the IT sector is hence moving from a standard eight-hour a day regime to operating twenty four hours a day for seven days of the week [1]. Many employees need to work on Saturdays and Sundays too. Moreover, there is a changing pattern in the working hours which is quite different from the standard one, which normally operates from 9 am to 5 pm. While some employees work in the standard time some others need to be available for work that normally starts early in the evening and continues well through the night. Sometimes they need to even work beyond the normal eight hours. Increasing workloads have pressurised employees to demonstrate their commitment to work in more obvious ways [2]. Consequently, a larger part of them have tended to be present at their work place for longer periods of time, thereby reducing the time for which they are available at home.

Employees who start to feel the pressure to perform are likely to get caught in a downward spiral of increasing effort in order to meet rising expectations but no increase in job sat-

isfaction. The internet and mobile phones have made it possible for the organizations to keep in constant touch with the employees both during the day and at night. To a large extent in the IT sector, the employee is expected to be engaged on the job almost at all times. Consequently, there are growing reports of stress and work imbalance [3]. The constant requirement to work at optimum performance takes its toll in job dissatisfaction, employee turnover, reduced efficiency, illness and even death in some cases. Absenteeism, alcoholism, bad or snap decisions, indifference and apathy, lack of motivation or creativity are all by-products of an over stressed workplace. So the distinctions between work-life and family-life have vanished.

The extended family, even in India, is slowly disappearing [4]. Small nuclear families have come to stay, where both the spouses go to work. In addition, there are an increasing number of single parent households due to increase in divorces [5]. Although this problem is not as serious in Delhi as in the West, yet, it could become a serious issue some time in the future.

In spite of more women going out to work, there has been little change in patterns of household responsibilities [6]. Women undertake the majority share of domestic chores, and child rearing. It has been suggested that the observed gender segregation at work may be voluntary as women seek non-pecuniary benefits, such as flexible hours [7] due to family responsibilities. Quite often the work intrudes on the family and social life, while at other times family pressures affect the work performance.

Jenkins (2000) observes that issues like child rearing, the need to balance multiple roles etc. have consequences on health and family relationships. Securely attached individuals experienced positive spill-over in both work and family [9].

These are pointers that there are gender differences in coping with work family issues. Work based support to women is positively associated with job satisfaction, organisational commitment and career accomplishment [10].

The work from home concept can lead to greater flexibility and independence, but it can make people work for longer periods of time, including weekends and evenings. Home working could be stressful, if young children have to be managed [11]. Men feel more satisfied when they achieve more on the job even at the cost of ignoring the family. On the other hand, women emphasise that work and family are both equally important and both are the sources of their satisfaction. For them the former is more important. When work does not permit women to take care of their family, they feel unhappy, disappointed and frustrated. They draw tight boundaries between work and family and they do not like one crossing the other [12].

Valcour and Hunter (2005), say that new trends like teleworking attempt to address work-family issues. In India too there is a rising trend towards tele-working [14]. The WLB problem is fairly similar across countries [15]. Reviews also indicate that the perception of WLB is observed to be different across genders [16, 17].

According to Barden (2001), negative stress is becoming a major illness in the work environment, and it can debilitate employees and be costly to employers. Lucy Barnes Foster (2002), a professional speaker on stress-management, surveyed mid-level managers and found stress to be a major determinant in worker productivity. According to the study, the primary areas affected by stress are employee morale, absenteeism, and decision making abilities. By recognizing that a problem exists and by addressing the issue, managers can reduce stressful activities and increase worker performance in the business organization.

Overall, management of stress has become an urgent business strategy for many companies. Many IT leaders agree with the view that labour regulations as such are not a requisite for this industry because of its flexi-time work culture and globally standardised workplace. In fact, there has been a proposal from the industry experts to allow them to formulate and regulate their own employment and labour policies. This paper brings out some of the issues related to WLB in the context of IT employees working in Delhi. Such a study for Delhi IT employees has not been done earlier. While most countries in the developed world have put in place family friendly work practices like WLB family friendly work arrangements (FFWA), alternative work arrangements (AWA), V-Time, Zero hours contract, E-working, Tele-working, the same is yet to be seen in good measure in Delhi.

2. Methodology and Database

A non-random and purposive sample of 150 IT employees has been collected on the basis of questionnaire regarding the issues related to WLB. The study is conducted during the

year 2013. The respondents belong to Delhi and NCR. Variables in the questionnaire were selected based on the studies published by Hyman et al [20, 21]. The questionnaire was distributed at work places and the responses of employees were collected. The questionnaires were also sent via e-mail. Snowball sampling technique is employed. Sample data has been classified into various socio-demographic categories such as gender, marital status, age-group and academic-professional categories such as- maximum attained qualifications and size of the IT Company.

Five factors which contribute to WLB are assessed. While three of these are work related, two are family related factors. Work based factors are, flex time, option to work part time and freedom to work from home. The family related factors considered in this survey are, availability of child care facility and flexibility to take care of emergencies at home. Three factors i.e. health, sleep and exhaustion were identified and analysed in order to understand the adverse impact of work. Four factors (Reduced time with the family, No clear leisure time, Recurring thoughts of work, decreased quality of family life) were identified and analysed to understand the spill-over of work into family life. Chi-square test is undertaken in order to indicate the association between the variables and gender.

A major problem that occurs in collecting data related to WLB is the reluctance of the respondents. Lack of cooperation from the employees occurs due to company's policy on the confidentiality of such data. Employees are also asked not to disclose any data related to their work experience and company affairs and policies at the time of their recruitment. Lack of stability and security of their employment tenure is another reason for the same.

3. Results and Discussion

The demographic profile of the sample is shown in Table 1. The respondents were predominantly men. Of the sample, 30% of the respondents were less than 25 years, and 51% of them were between 26-35 years of age. Marital status of an employee has an important bearing for a study on work-life balance because responses on few indicators like, stability of work, etc. would be different from the married and unmarried sections of the society. More respondents were married (58%) than unmarried. About 44% of the respondents were parents with one or more children.

In this sample, 56% of IT employees were graduates and 43% of the employees were post-graduates. The average age of an IT employee with an engineering background of entry in the workforce is 22 years. In the sample, 80% of the employees worked in a large-scale IT firm, 17% in medium-scale IT firms and only 2% in small-scale firms. It was found that 91% of the employees had regular employment and only 9% had contractual employment.

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Variable	Number	Percentage
Age		
Less than 25 years	45	30
26-35 years	77	51
Above 36 years	28	19
Total	150	100
Gender		
Male	98	65
Female	52	35
Total	150	100
Marital status		
Married	87	58
Unmarried	63	42
Total	150	100
Parent		
Yes	66	44
No	84	56
Total	150	100

Factors contributing to WLB: About 83% of men and 95% of women perceived that WLB would improve if they were able to work part time. Similar views were expressed in the case of freedom to work from home, namely 87% of men and 84% of women favoured it (refer Table 2). More women (89%) felt more strongly than men (75%) that there should be an option to take care of emergencies at home, while 76% men and 92% women felt that child care facilities must be available as they believed that these will improve the WLB.

TABLE 2

PERCEIVED IMPROVEMENT IN WLB

Variable		Men	Women	χ^2	Sig.
Flexible time	Yes	96	48	2.74	ns
	No	2	4		
Option to work part Time	Yes	81	49	3.93	p < 0.05*
	No	17	3		
Option to work from Home	Yes	85	44	0.125	ns
	No	13	8		
Availability of child Care facility	Yes	74	48	6.29	p < 0.05*
	No	24	4		
Flexibility to meet emergencies at home	Yes	73	46	4.05	p < 0.05*
	No	25	6		

Notes: *Significant at 95% confidence level, degrees of freedom = 1. ns - not significant.

Women, more than men see options such as part time work, availability of child care facility and flexibility to meet emergencies at home, will improve their work life balance. The Chi square test indicates that there is a significant association between these variables and gender.

Adverse impact of Work: The respondents were given a Copyright © 2014 SciResPub.

list of work performance areas that might be affected by stress and were asked to identify whether stress increased, decreased, or had no change on their work performance. Only respondents who indicated stress negatively affected an area, were considered in these findings (refer Fig.1). Six such areas were identified (accuracy, productivity, alertness, creativity, job satisfaction and decision-making abilities). Harrold and Wayland established that increasing stress and anxiety are having a negative influence on an individual's organizational efficiency and productivity.

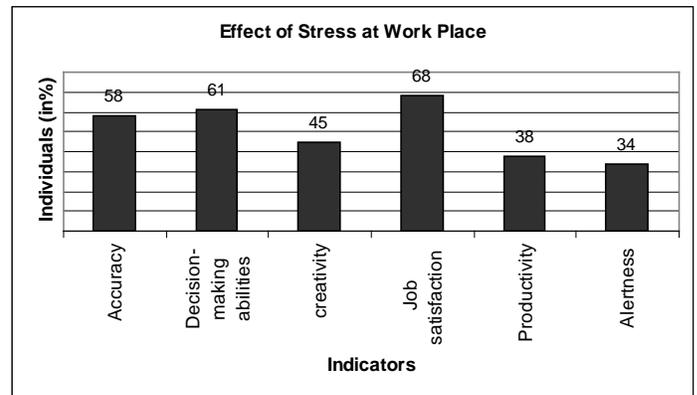


Fig. 1: Effects of Work-place Stress

About 54% of men and 43% of women felt that the work affected their health. About 32% of men and 43% of women felt that the work affected their sleep. About 52% of men and 34% of women reported exhaustion due to work (refer Table 3).

TABLE 3

PERCEIVED ADVERSE IMPACT OF WORK

Variable		Men	Women	χ^2	Sig.
Health	Yes	53	23	1.36	ns
	No	45	29		
Sleep	Yes	32	23	1.59	ns
	No	66	29		
Exhaustion	Yes	51	17	3.88	ns
	No	47	35		

Notes: ns - not significant

The Chi square test indicates that there is no significant association between these variables and gender.

Spill-over of work into family life: About 73% of men and 52% of women admit that they are not able to spend enough time with their families due to work related activities (refer Table 4). About 54% of men and 47% of women believe that they have no clear leisure time since work overlaps into this period. Moreover, 38% of men and 50% of women have

recurring thoughts of work, even after they leave their place of work. Surprisingly, 55% of men and only 50% of women feel that work pressures have affected the quality of family life.

TABLE 4
SPILL-OVER OF WORK INTO FAMILY LIFE

Variable		Men	Women	χ^2	Sig.
Reduced time with the family	Yes	72	28	5.85	ns
	No	26	24		
No clear leisure time	Yes	53	24	0.845	ns
	No	45	28		
Recurring thoughts of work	Yes	37	26	2.089	ns
	No	61	26		
Decreased quality of Family life	Yes	54	26	5.53	ns
	No	44	26		

Note: ns - not significant.

It can be observed from Table 4 that there is no significant association between the genders and the perceived adverse impact of work. It can be concluded that both genders perceived that their health and their physical well being is affected because of their work. The Chi square results indicate that these perceptions are independent of gender.

4. Contribution and Conclusion

The findings suggest that both men and women have a strong belief that flexible working hours will enhance the WLB. Home working was also another factor which was preferred by both men and women and it was believed that it would enhance WLB. Women felt that child care facilities should be available in working places to ensure WLB. Work has an adverse effect on both men and women, as it affects their health and even their sleep.

The spill-over of work into family life showed that both men and women did not have enough time to spend with their families and moreover work pressures affected quality the of family life. Both genders opined that a supportive work environment is helpful in achieving work life balance.

This survey brings out some of the issues related to WLB in the context of Delhi. The study indicates that WLB issues here are quite similar to those in the West. While most countries in the developed world have put in place family friendly work practices [23, 24] the same is yet to be seen in good measure in India. With the increase in number of dual career couples, it is but natural that such practices must be adopted here too, as they would go a long way towards improving productivity and enhancing quality of work and family life. Flex time, home working, child care facilities and the option to work part time are facilities that need to be introduced. Building a supportive work environment is yet another important initiative to be addressed.

The study relies on the responses of the sample em-

ployees. The results of the study are affected by these responses and are subject to varying in a bigger or different sample. These limitations need to be addressed in future studies. Future research must focus on a wider sample in order to get more generalized results. Moreover, it must be directed at understanding individual differences so that employee specific initiatives to improve WLB could be initiated by organizations. Social and political debates notwithstanding, the problem of stress in the workplace requires concrete responses from employers and policy makers. The paper concludes by pointing out that WLB policies need to be implemented as much as possible in all industries, and on a wider basis in organisations that are currently using them in order to sustain the business performance.

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