

CHAPTER-19

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE: SUPPORTIVE POLICIES FOR WORKING WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Family and work are the dual parameters and maintaining an equilibrium between both is vital for individual's health with wealth; but the changing nature of competitive world has made this task as daunting. In such scenario there are some policies prepared by welfare state especially for women but still ironically the female workers who constitute more than 90% of informal sector are deprived of any such policies which are available to women in unorganised sector. This chapter highlights various policies initiated by private sector conglomerates for female employees so that they can uphold proper work life balance but at the same time highlights the issue of Women workers in unorganised sector where females are deprived of such benefits.

Keywords: *Women Worker, Female Work Life Balance, Policies, Health.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Customarily, women are perceived to be caretakers and nurturers and solely responsible for family management. On the other hand, Men are held responsible for earning bread and butter for self and family. With the advent of industrialisation, the nature of work-force has varied and the role of females is not restricted to household chores rather they are playing the dual role of bread earners as well as family managers. In urban India, the percentage of dual-earner couples is progressively escalating and for most of the earning couples, their work environment and the family both are equally valuable and essential for life (Sundaresan, S. 2014). Work-life balance is a core concern for working couples especially without compromising with the recital at the workplace (Aksakal, N. Y. (2021). A healthy work-life steadiness assumes great significance for working women predominantly in the existing context in which both, the family and the workplace have posed numerous confrontations and exertion for women.

The precise phrase “work-family balance” was first used in UK in late 1970s to define an individual's vigour for maintaining balance amid professional and personal life. Additionally, the expression has been modified in the wake of changing roles and multi-tasking approach of employers from employees in the wake of realising their goals.; in the wake of such scenario revised term “work-life balance (WLB)” is still at farce defined (Mohanty, A., & Jena, L. K. 2016).

The subtleties of the work environment have wielded colossal stress on working women as they need to cope with virtually both the full-time jobs one at the office and another at home. Goal Number 5 of Sustainable Development aims to achieve gender equality and achieving a satisfactory role balance is demanding for women as they have to perform a lopsided number of domestic roles as well as workplace responsibility. Conventionally gendered outlook, societal and family norms, and

marriage primarily constitute the concept of Work Life Balance. A female employee is bearing the brunt of balancing work and life more in comparison to their male counterparts.

There are vivid challenges that women encounter when it comes to achieving work-life balance:

- **Gender Roles and Expectations:** Women often face societal and cultural expectations that they should prioritize family and care giving responsibilities over their careers, making it difficult to balance work and personal life. Flexibility and home working, family and spousal support, and organisational support as key driving forces for women's work-life balance (Uddin, M. 2021) socio-cultural context posed the biggest challenge for women's desired work-life balance (Kurowska, A. 2020).
- **Lack of Support at Work:** Many workplaces do not provide desirable support for working mothers, such as flexible work hours, on-site childcare, or waged parental leave, which can make it challenging for women to balance work and family responsibilities.
- **Unequal Division of Household Labour:** Women often take on a disproportionate share of household and care giving responsibilities, which can make it difficult to manage these responsibilities alongside a demanding career.
- **Career Advancement Barriers:** Women may face barriers to career advancement, such as limited opportunities for promotion or bias in hiring and promotion decisions, which can influence their capability to achieve a healthy work-life balance.
- **Work-Related Stress:** Balancing work and personal life can be particularly challenging for women who experience high levels of stress in the workplace, which can impact their overall well-being and ability to juggle multiple responsibilities
- **Financial Constraints:** Women may face financial constraints that limit their aptitude to access support services, such as childcare or household help, which can affect their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.

Addressing these challenges requires a blend of supportive workplace policies, societal changes, and individual empowerment to create a more equitable and balanced environment for women in the workforce.

2. INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS RELATING TO WORK LIFE BALANCE

- The first ILO Convention (Convention No. 1 of 1919) the Hours of Work (Industry) concerning working time
- European Union's Directive (European Parliament. 2019).
- Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 2023 was rolled out in Ireland, with certain elements of the new legislation coming into force from July 2023

3. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS RELATING TO WORK LIFE BALANCE

Fundamental Rights - Under Chapter III of Indian Constitution (Articles 16, 19, 23 & 24) are enshrined which protects rights and dignity of the workers.

Directive Principles of State policy - Under Chapter IV (Articles 39, 41, 42, 43, 43A & 54) of the Constitution of India have enshrined the relevance of the dignity of human labour and the need to protect and safeguard the interests of labour as human beings.

Apart from this there some Statutory Provisions in India that helps in maintaining Work Life Balance. Such as:

- **The Factories Act, 1948:** Section 66 of the Act stipulates that the working time for an adult worker may not exceed 48 hours for a week and 9 hours a day. It restricts working for women and adolescents between 7 pm and 6 am. This provision was purposely meant for Work-Life Balance aspect but now in IT Industries females are working in Night Shifts as well. Creche Scheme - (Factories Act 1948, Mines Act 1952, Plantation Act, 1951, Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1980 and NREGA 2005 has made day care provision mandatory). On the other hand, the women working in the un-organised sector are deprived of this benefit.
- **The Maternity Benefits Act:** It ensures maternity leave of 26 weeks for women working in the organized sector. It also allows for flexible work arrangements; prohibiting from assigning women to night shifts. For working mothers special concern is taken in Amendment Act that permits work from home, the employer may that the employer and woman may mutually agree for such period and on such conditions. However this act is applicable only to organised sector for women in unorganised sector there is only provision under the Food Security

Act, 2013 but no other maternity benefits such as paid leave etc are available to them.

- **Work from Home Policies:** Many companies have implemented work-from-home policies, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, to sustain women and help in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. Flexible Work Arrangements: Many companies in India offer flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting, part-time work, job-sharing, and flexible hours to help women balance work and family responsibilities.
- **Flexible Working Hours:** India's legal system does not have specific laws or regulations that individually support flexible work practices such as work from home, remote working, hybrid module of working, flexi-hours, etc. Tamil Nadu passed factories bill for flexible working hours. According to this bill workers who opt for four-day week will have to work 12 hours per day; but later owing to opposition the bill was put on hold; as it was alleged that it was meant to lure MNCs.
- **Supportive Organizational Culture:** Some companies have adopted supportive policies and practices to create an inclusive and supportive work environment for women, including mentorship programs, leadership development initiatives, and employee resource groups.

These policies and initiatives aim to create a more conducive work environment for women in India and help them maintain a healthy work-life balance.

4. THE WOMEN'S SEXUAL, REPRODUCTIVE AND MENSTRUAL RIGHTS BILL, 2018

It was introduced by Shashi Tharoor which aimed to guarantee menstrual equity for all women by the State''; still it has not been enacted. Moreover, even if enacted and enforced will benefit only women in organised workforce. Women in rural India are discriminated and lack labour security and a maternal-centric health system, are even compelled to remove the uterus or undergo hysterectomy threatening their work life balance (Desai, S. 2016). Many women in Maharashtra who are employed as cane cutters have done hysterectomy so they can get work as sugarcane harvesters (Pandey, G. 2019).

5. FOUR LABOUR CODES

Recently the Government of India has come up with four new labour codes namely:

- The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code, 2019;
- The Industrial Relations Code, 2020;
- The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020; and
- The Social Security Code, 2020.

These Codes sets out the maximum number of hours that a worker can be required to work in a week, which is 48 hours. This provision is designed to ensure that workers have adequate rest and can maintain a healthy work-life balance; also provides for various types of leave, including annual leave, sick leave, and maternity leave. Workers are entitled to a certain number of days of each type of leave, depending on their length of service and other factors.

6. THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT BILL 2018

The Member of Parliament *Supriya Sule* introduced this bill in the Parliament. The bill provides for flexibility in the right-to-disconnect rules and leaves it to the individual company to negotiate the terms of service with their employees. It seeks to respect the personal space of the employees by recognising their right to disconnect and not respond to their employer's calls and emails during out-of-work hours. Bill is still pending to see the light of the day.

7. WLBS IN PRIVATE SECTOR IN INDIA

Major Private Companies in India have adopted several policies which help its employees in maintaining work life balance:

- **State Bank of India:** State Bank of India is the largest bank in India with around 250,000 employees while having 24,000 branches. It has gone an extra mile in ensuring work life balance as it has provisions for leave extensions for visiting in-laws, leaves for helping out children for exams, and choosing the location for work transfer, among others (Singh, A., & Sharma, A. 2021).
- **TATA Group:** TATA Group is one of the oldest companies in India was set up in 1868 known for its Employee-friendly policies and the major WLBS provided by the company include 8-hour workday, free medical aid, workers provident fund and leave with pay. Since 2016, the company is also providing seven months

maternity leave and new mothers have an option of availing 18 months of half-day half-pay working day after the maternity leave ends (Bansal, N., & Agarwal, U. A. 2017).

- **Tech Mahindra:** Tech Mahindra is one of the top-ranked IT-firms in India Tech Mahindra which has around 125,000 employees across 90 countries has a very proactive Work Life Balance Policy framework. It includes provisions for paid leaves for public holidays, dependent care leave, flexi-time and work from home. The company also has provisions for financial support including advance salary, retirement plans, repatriation allowance, relocation allowance and extended family support. Work life *balance* is rated 3.6 out of 5 by its employees as per the survey.
- **Tech Mahindra:** Tech Mahindra has envisaged a program by the name of JOSH which enables the employees to access to yoga and salsa clubs, sporting events, adventures and other social activities (Sindhuj, K., & Subramanian, S. S. 2020).
- **Flipkart:** Flipkart is an e-commerce portal in India operational since 2007 and presently employs around 30,000 employees. Flip kart has introduced a novel policy framework by the name of Flex-Ben program in 2019 wherein the employees are allowed to choose their own benefits including insurance and non-insurance benefits (Prasad, C. S. D., & Rao, S. S. 2015).

The benefits that the company provides include 6 months of maternity leave and 4 months of flexible hours of work post childbirth. Fathers are given 15 days of paternity leave and 3 months of unpaid leave. In addition to this the company also has an adoption program wherein female employee can avail 6 months paid leave for adopting a child under 12 months whereas male employees can avail 6 weeks of paid leave (UPADHYAY, A., & MISHRA, P. 2023).

There is also a provision for indefinite bereavement leave.

- **SAP Labs:** SAP Labs follows the rule of taking a day off per week to spend some time from home. So, an employee is allowed to take a single work from home day a week which again is flexible depending on the manager (Shah, R., et al 2023).

- **KPMG India:** KPMG India permits to work from anywhere you want virtually, as long as it is implemented, completed and efficiently done. Every year, the employees can spend 25 days on vacation, including three days of firm-wide leave, traditionally between Christmas and New Year's. It is possible to extend one's holidays by taking compensatory leave for overtime. Study leave is also granted to employees for preparing for professional exams and certifications.
- **RCVJ Media: It is an award for the best employee who utilizes the work from home privilege the best.** Work from home option in RVCJ Media allows employees to invest as many work hours as they want and logout at their own convenience (Abid, S., & Barech, D. K. 2017).
- **Future Group:** It allows employees to come to work between 8.30 am-10.30 am, leaving enough latitude for flexibility. 8 working hours after reaching work rule. *Work-life balance is rated 4.1 out of 5.0 at Future Group.*

The list is not Exhaustive and many corporates such as: Intel India; citi-India, HCL Technology; Hindustan lever ltd. etc. (Parida, S. S. 2016).

8. STATISTICAL DATA OF WORK LIFE BALANCE AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN INDIA

The major corporates have established system of Work Life Balance Policies, but the reality is totally different for workers working in small or medium enterprises.

According to monster.com survey, 60 per cent of Indians rate their work- life balance from average to terrible and the trend is almost same throughout the country (Riyaz, K. F. Work-Life Balance Policies in India).

Later on, a survey which was conducted in 2021, about of the female professional's 37 percent stated that they were on the verge of quitting their present job owing to poor work-life balance in India. On the other hand, merely 28 percent of the male respondents gave a similar reply relating to work-life balance in the country. According to the report, presented by the 'Women@Work', on the effects of COVID-19 on the women workforce in the formal sector in India, over 80 per cent of working women participants opine that during COVID-19 the work-life balance has become worse. Additionally, 38.5 per cent of working women have been adversely affected due to the increased burden of added housework, childcare and eldercare while 43.7 per cent thereby had a negative impact on work-life balance.

9. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Chief Justice of India, Justice Chandrachud, emphasized the importance of supporting female employees in managing health issues related to menstruation by allowing them to work from home during the 31st Convocation of NLSIU-Bangalore in August 2023. While some private sector companies are implementing new policies to attract and retain employees, there remains a significant gap in providing adequate work-life balance policies, both in formal and informal sectors. The evolving workplace dynamics, coupled with socio-cultural changes, have led to an imbalance between work and individual lives for many employees. Despite efforts, existing policies primarily target the formal sector, leaving the majority of India's female workforce in the informal sector without adequate support. Given that women often contribute significantly to both the formal and informal economies, it's crucial for organizations to prioritize family life. Merely earning a wage without time for family undermines the purpose of work. Therefore, organizations should strive to create flexible environments that enable employees to effectively manage both work and family responsibilities. In a mixed economy like India, addressing work-life balance is essential for the well-being of all female workers, irrespective of their sector of employment.

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