
All in a day's work: women work life challenges

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Abstract

Dynamic world, dynamic organizations and dynamic relationships are the buzz words of today's environment. In this environment women workers from the dyad of dual career couples are facing tremendous challenges. There is a need to understand that it is the women who binds together both worlds. This hard worker must be given a thorough attention from both work and home fronts by understanding the challenges that she faces. In this review paper we found that the challenges faced by working women are multiple active roles for women, taking care of elders, prioritizing (setting priorities), prime responsibility of child care is of female in a social setup.

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to examine the work-life challenges of women in everyday work and family life.

Keywords Work-life balance, challenges, women workers, child care, elder care, prioritizing.

Introduction

The Indian women in families are undergoing a change in their work place representation. The traditional Indian families are changing at a very fast pace due to urbanization, modernization, globalization and demonetization. Whether it is lower class, middle class or upper class, that is to say, that women from any strata are increasingly now-a-days participating in many paid occupations. This kind of exposure is leading to an increase in awareness and a raise in aspirations of personal growth of women. Here comes what is known as the balancing act. Just as in funambulism, an age old tradition in India, a woman also juggles her family and work life roles in daily life. The challenges are not just limited in knowing what is the challenge rather in understanding in depth the social and economic structure, organizational structure, family structure, organizational culture, demographic realities and the women capabilities in maintaining a balance.

Actually life itself is a balancing act as life has chameleon characteristics. It means different things to different people. Ultimately it may mean anything but must lead to a satisfied and happy life to an individual especially a woman as this paper is concerned with women workers. The individual in general, and the woman in specific need to be a happy worker and a happy home maker. With this back drop we proceed further to introducing what actually is work life balance, later on the paper moves to explain the challenges that the present day women work force are encountering. The study will be of great importance to the organizations as dual career couples are forming a large part of the workforce. Any organization that focuses on good HR practices like work life balance will be successful in today's competitive world as expressed by Kundu, Malhan and Kumar (2007) in their study on shipping companies, work force diversity and flexi-work system emerged as a strong practice in these companies.

The term "work-life balance" was used for the first time in late 1970s and it described the concept as balance between an individual's work and personal life. This term was first used in U.K., where as in U.S., this terminology was first introduced in 1986. Now-a-days work and home life have become almost inseparable, hence this concept is holding more relevance than ever before. Modern day households are a carryover of work at office to home and sometimes at home to office. When we talk about work-life balance we measure it as a control over when, where and how we work. It is both in the benefit of an individual as well as the organization, in turn this would benefit the society as whole since fulfilled expectations of individuals would lead to happier organizations and a wholesome society. As quoted by McCarthy et al; 2010, work-life balance is receiving increasing attention from policy makers, organizations, management, employees & their representatives globally being an important area of human resource management. When we look at work/life balance from the employee point of view it can be viewed as the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities. The work/life balance as viewed from the employer's perspective the challenge of creating a supportive company culture where employees can focus on their jobs while at work.

As per the report of EHRC, 2009, women working in Britain are approaching in numbers the men (in the year 2008, there were 14.3 million women compared to 16.9 million men), "women's

skills are being seriously underused” and, also the desire of fathers to spend more time with their children is “being frustrated”.

Here we need to know why women perspective regarding work life balance is needed. The critics have argued that in literature study of work does not include women, and that, when women are studied, sexist assumptions have changed or distorted the analysis (Acker, 1977; Acker and Van Houten, 1974; Brown, 1976; Kanter, 1975, 1977; Oakley, 1974) and women’s relationship to employment is treated as derivative of personal characteristics and relationships to family situations (Oakley, 1974; Laws, 1976). In a study by Gatrell, et. al., 2010, which focused on dual career couples who are professionally white collared parents and heterosexual having dependent children, and in studies by Lewis and Cooper (1999) and Lewis et al. (2007) it has been observed that women are responsible for the family, work family conflict is thus a problem for mothers not fathers. In studies by Blair Loy (2003) and Tracy and Rivera (2010) they have further strengthened this belief by indicating that organizations assume that mothers in professional roles can leave their promotions aside but will keep on working flexibly or part time to support their families. Moreover, work-life balance is far from gender-neutral women retain a much closer tie with family care and domestic responsibilities linked to current manifestations of the gender order (Lewis et al., 2007).

The study by van Egmond et al.(2011) has proven particularly resilient, with contradictory norms that support women’s increased employment participation yet insist that mothers’ primary responsibilities are to their families in the Australian gender culture.

Challenges of women work force

Multiple active roles for women

Women perform several roles in their families. These roles include being a spouse, caretaker and parent; managing daily household chores; and providing services to the community and society (Mathew and Panchanatham, 2011). Women play multiple roles as a mother, sister, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law and worker. Delphy and Leonard, 1992 and Sullivan, 1997 posited that when it comes to the domestic chores a working women on an average considerably do more domestic chores as compared to their partners. In further studies by Gatrell, 2005; Scott, 1999 and Dryden, 1999 it was suggested that working women are spending more hours than men for routine activities. Women need to focus on personal health, their recreational activities, personal care which they tend to ignore to balance work and family life (Mathew and Panchanatham, 2011).

Further, more results from studies by Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Dryden, 1999; Scott, 1999; Gatrell, 2005 indicate that women employed part or full time, working mothers undertake more domestic chores than their partners.

Taking care of elders

Every household is somehow linked with aged people. Especially in developed countries the traditions suggest it is moral responsibility of kids to take care of their elders in old age. Elder care is one of the most important factor for a person as it is the time to repay the parents for their efforts they had made in the child's life. This favor cannot be repaid but it can be compensated somewhat by extending care at old age.

Bhatnagar and Rajadhyaksha, 2001 have put forward that western theorists are of the view that many women, particularly those who are in extended or traditional joint families, especially in Indian context are wholly solely responsible for senior member care in the family. This makes them next to impossible to come back to work with complete involvement and enthusiasm, this is because of the absence of elder care institutions whether private or state-funded.

Prioritizing (Setting priorities)

Women are the best managers as per the Ancient Indian literature (Doha) but it becomes hazy when it comes to setting priorities, whether childcare, family or profession. The priorities set before marriage are fluffed up after the marriage. Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Fielden and Cooper, 2002; Worrall and Cooper, 1999 have found that both at managerial and professional fronts, women have to work long hours especially in full time engagements or jobs, this results in disturbance of family life. Lewis and Cooper (1999) and Lewis et al. (2007) in different studies have ascertained that this is primarily a problem for mothers but is less of a concern for fathers in managerial and professional occupations.

Examining results of research by Bhatnagar and Rajadhyaksha, (2001), from women's career development perspective, the absence of a reversal in the attitudes towards the work roles in particular can be better understood in light of the unique experiences of professional women in India. Studies have indicated that in India children in the teen age are living with the parents and do not leave home to study and work. Hence, women in their middle ages are still involved in house hold activities even though the children do not directly need their help for their daily chores. Indian women do not indeed lower their involvement in the parenting role in their midlife phase (Bhatnagar and Rajadhyaksha, 2001).

In the traditional concept of marriage in India it is considered a very pious and holy bond shared between two heterosexual partners, who are made to believe since childhood that it is insoluble and permanent in nature. Both partners therefore take it for granted that once partners always partners. It is no longer believed by any of them that even after marriage the relationship needs to be nurtured and they need to take care of each other along with fulfilling other responsibilities. Moreover, traditional Indian families treat kids as gods and goddesses who need special treatment from their parents and grandparents. Hence, they are treated as top priority and some times over shadowing the spousal priority.

Prime responsibility of child care is of female in social setup

In ancient time women used to be staying at home and particularly taking care of house hold chores, elder care and child care. As times have changed, traditions are changing but pattern of care towards children and elders remain same. As argued by Burnett et al., 2010, "flexible working policies intended to facilitate a balance between work and family life, tend to be steeped in presiding socially embedded assumptions regarding the embodied roles which fathers and mothers are oft-expected to play". "Whilst they may typically refer to parents as though written from an ideological gender-neutral stance, many are formulated on the traditional model of fathers as the primary earner and mothers the primary caretaker" (Gatrell and Cooper, 2008; Lewis et al., 2007; Lewis and Cooper, 2005).

"With regard to parenting and paid work, the literature on motherhood and employment indicates that it is usually mothers, even if they are employed (and even if fathers are involved) who take the lead responsibility for direct, child-facing care" (Dienhart, 1998; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis et al., 2007; Maushart, 2002).

Dryden (1999) in her study observed "how regardless of whether women were working full time, part time or were full-time care givers and whether men were working full time or were unemployed, across every case it was typically the women who shouldered the major responsibility for the children". Similarly, while researchers have found that some fathers are much more involved with children's upbringing now-a-days than in the past, (Sayer et al. 2004) observe "how the increase in mothers employment has not been met by an equivalent increase in fathers' investment in direct childcare activities. They thus report that the pressures to be a good employee and a caring mother mean that women are more often stretched and have little or no time remaining to spend away from both, resulting in a situation increasingly divorced from the ideal of a satisfactory balance between paid work, domestic labour and enjoying family life".

(Burnett et al. 2010, are of the view "some fathers in the UK and the USA, referred to as trailblazing flexible fathers, are undertaking notably more childcare now than in the past". Although the majority of married, working, co-habiting fathers spend considerably less time raising kids than their women counterparts as per research work done within the last decade.

"At present, policies intended to improve the mediation between employees' work and non-work life among dual-earner parents tend to focus upon the provision and distribution of direct childcare and paid work" (EHRC, 2009).

"The work-care regime incorporates the departments or institutions that shape the labour market and employment relations, social welfare and child care infrastructure as well as the gender culture with its assumptions about the gendered division of labour" (Pocock, 2005).

Conclusion

This paper concludes that work life challenges faced by a working woman all in a day's work are multiple active roles for women, taking care of elders, prioritizing (setting priorities), prime responsibility of child care is of female in a social setup. It is found that in women workers from times immemorial continue to suffer from the added responsibility per se double burden of family and professions resulting in an everyday workload. Challenges could be faced partially or completely by women more as traditions also create barriers to success of women in professional or managerial life. Woman plays many roles in her life, however it is the prime and important objective of a woman's life irrespective of citizenship, to take care of first the child, this is not only role which make her life complex and more than busy but taking care of her elders (parents-in-laws) and parents is also a tedious task for her. As per Indian regional idioms kids and old people have similar state of mind and psyche, which means both have to be handled with care which again is considered that woman has to take care of it. While playing multiple roles during a day woman forgets about the priorities set by her before marriage and gets herself surrounded with a plethora of multiple roles and her priorities get abruptly changed. After marriage woman's first priority becomes child care, then elder care, then comes the soul mate and at last herself. In this context this paper stands relevant in realizing that work-life balance is though considered both for men and women equally, but in a deeper sense it is the woman who is shouldering more responsibilities if she is married and also is working. This paper brings forth the challenges faced by working women, further researches could lay focus on addressing these challenges.

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