
Implications of women work life challenges: a review

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Abstract

Life is a complex phenomenon which is hardly understood by any. This statement itself is quite complex, and so is the life of a woman who is both employed and married. It means one of the partners of the dual career heterosexual couple is in dire need of a focus from researchers. Although a lot of hard work has been done by researchers in this regard, but there is still a lot of scope for this hardworking super creature, namely "woman". This paper attempts to explain the implications of the everyday challenges of work-family life of a woman.

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to examine the implications of the challenges faced by women workers in work and family lives.

Keywords Work life balance, Implications, Women workers, Part time, Lesser paid.

Introduction

Today's techno savvy world is a challenge in itself for all the worker at workplace. It may be male members, female workers, dual career couples, physically challenged workers or employees belonging to any racial or minority group. The challenge is how to keep up pace with this dynamic world full of opportunities and challenges, especially when it comes to women workers who are belonging to a heterosexual married couple. In the entire day at work one would imagine a lot of hard work at work place and a peaceful home coming from work. What if the first part of this statement is true and the latter is quite opposite to what is stated. This is to say that women workers cannot simply enjoy a peaceful home coming rather a complete set of household chores and other responsibilities is awaiting them. Studies have focused a lot on the challenges faced by working women and so is needed a deep focus on the implications and coping strategies needed to assist these warriors, fighting at both home and office fronts. The present paper is focused on identifying and discussing the implications of women work life. Understanding these implications is necessary for the success of present day organizations, as has been quoted by Kundu and Malhan, (2006) in their study on Indian and multinational banks, where multinational banks emerged stronger on the factor flexible work system as compared to Indian banks, and stated "how people are managed, dealt with and lead, and how the organization organizes its operations, determines the success of the organization".

We would start with describing what is work life balance. Khallash, S. & Kruse, M. (2012) expressed work life balance as "Work-life balance is based on the assumption of the separation of work and private life, and that balance can be achieved when there is equal division between the two". To balance means reaching life, work, family with almost similar level of focus, attention, care, commitment, responsibility, involvement, or time.

A work-life balance supports staffs who wish to have a greater involvement in public life & in the community (Manfredi, S. & Holliday, M., 2004). According to Greenhaus et. al.(2003), "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in- and equally satisfied with- his or her work role & family roles is work family balance". Work-family balance is defined as "satisfaction & good functioning at work & at home with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000). Whereas Kofodimos (1993), expressed work life balance as "a satisfying, healthy, & productive life that includes work, play, & love".

"Work-life balance is an integral & important part of Corporate Social Responsibility. Good organizations need to recognize that part of their obligation to their employees are to ensure that they are not working so hard so as to damage their lives outside of work or lead to health problems. Companies need to understand that long hours may lead to lower motivation, moral, turnover & productivity of employees and reputation in the market. There has been recognition that happy employees are more productive and less likely to leave" (Mahtani, S. & Welford, R., 2004).

It is widely recognized that employees who achieve a work life balance that suits them work more efficiently, are more committed to their organization & are less likely to become ill as a result of stress (www.athenaswan.org.uk).

"Work-life balance is now a heavily researched area of interest. 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).

Few more researchers have given their definitions on work life balance. "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 "(Boers, 2005). Dundas (2008) argues that "work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and all other activities that are important to people such as family, community activities, voluntary work, personal development and leisure and recreation".

In any society that is flooded with lots of overlapping responsibilities, duties and commitments, work/life balance is a dominant issue at workplace. There are few major factors that are responsible for taking keen interest in work/life balance, they are global competition, increased aspiration, more interest in personal lives and family values, increased use of technology, aging workforce, dual earners, increased recreation and leisure opportunities, and, family expectations.

People believe that it is very difficult to maintain work life balance as they don't have a healthy balance between their personal and work lives.

In order to maintain work life balance women at work life balance women at workplaces are compromising their careers, money, rewards, awards and health. The implications of difficulty in maintaining a work life balance for a female are many. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Implications of a challenging "women work-life balance"

Lesser females in top management

According to a study by Hospitality Training Foundation (2001) "women make up 67 per cent of the total UK hospitality workforce and two thirds of them work on a part-time basis. Whilst they are under-represented in management, women do hold 53 per cent of posts as hotel/accommodation managers and 42 per cent of posts as restaurant/catering managers". More studies (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990; Doherty and Stead, 1998) have clearly shown that "women predominate in the least well paid jobs as canteen and kitchen hands, domestic staff and cleaners". In the private sector also it is found that women consist of nearly 28 per cent of the total employed managers (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2002). Moreover, further surveys have shown "women only hold 39 per cent of managerial jobs in French hotels, 37 per cent in Spain and 24 per cent in Italy (Burrell et al., 1997)". Doherty et al., 2001 and Guerrier, 2001 suggest women are not holding most senior management jobs and their representation is merely around twenty percent.

As we have just seen, women have made significant in-roads into middle management specifically in the hospitality industry, but women have failed to reach at the helm of affairs. The possible reasons for this could be firstly, "gender-blindness of the human resource policies as have been quoted by Roper et al., (2001) in their study of existing senior managers who tend to be white, western men". "This influences the values and management style of managers which leads to a form of indirect discrimination". Several studies suggest that "managerial awareness about the process of discrimination is poor and that the development of equal opportunity policy and initiatives is at an immature stage" (Doherty, 1997, 2001; Roper et al., 2001). Secondly, formal policies and procedures are by-passed by informal processes and networking which is not worthy of in organizations. "Even in the largest organizations in contract catering where there are well developed, systematic procedures for appraisal and promotion, managers have talked about the need to shout to make themselves visible and thereby seen as suitable promotion material. Others have referred to the need for sponsorship by senior managers in order to secure key positions on the route to the top" (Doherty, 2001). In a study it is shown that "junior managers tend to see this kind of behaviour as not very nice, self-confident to the point of aggression, politically adept, single-minded and selfish", Liff and Ward's (2001). This indicates that the people in senior management are generally males where women feel uncomfortable, undignified and might result in counter identity behaviours. Finally, the long hours required for senior management, combined with lack of flexi hours at the higher levels do not permit women managers to reach to the top levels in management.

Some studies have found that "male executives commonly regarded women, even those with high qualifications, as responsible for supporting their husbands' careers through the provision of childcare. This is because the senior men who espouse such gendered views dominate the majority of gate-keeping organizational positions, retaining power to directly affect work-life policies, promotion opportunities and organizational culture (Tracy and Rivera, 2010)".

Part time and lesser paid

A woman has to perform numerous roles for her family, These roles are "being a spouse, caretaker and parent, managing daily household chores, and, providing service to the community and society". Since their priorities are higher towards their family, which makes them work for lesser time meaning part time, and, as a result of this they are paid less as compared to other (full time) usually male members. Salary for a particular job is directly proportional to time devoted to the organization. Research in corporate sector dictates that "working conditions, managerial practices and family work arrangements support the continued double burden for women" (Hochschild, 1989). The available array and uptake of

flexible working practices have increased dramatically since the early 1990s with the four most common being: part-time work, flexible hours, job sharing and working from home (Burnett et. al., 2010).

According to the research by Frey (2001), "in dual-earner families in Hungary, women spend 3-10 per cent less time on paid work than men, but more than 200 per cent more time on domestic work and childcare. Women therefore work 30 per cent longer altogether". "In families with men as the single earner, women do 80-85 per cent of the housework, while in families with women as the single earner, women still carry out 60-65 per cent of the household work" (Sík and Szeép, 2001). Work by Gatrell in 2005, also supports the research findings regarding care of children by working women and their domestic responsibilities in UK.

Women are generally considered to be second earners or support earners of families. Hence, flexibility options are generally explored by women workers. They need to spend more time at home than at work , as is considered by traditional social concepts, therefore, many of them settle with part time jobs, paying less. Many studies have supported this belief. "Many flexible working practices from the past 15 years were developed in order to be utilized primarily by women and are primarily associated with mother – rather than fatherhood" (Burnett et al., 2010; Lewis and Cooper, 1999; Lewis et al., 2007). "Whilst many fathers, particularly in professional and managerial roles, are expected to commit to long working hours cultures, mothers, typically deemed to be second-income earners, are more likely to take advantage of flexibility and part-time working initiatives in order to facilitate their family commitments" (Lewis and Cooper, 2005; Gatrell and Cooper, 2008).

Late careers and turndown job after marriage

"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" (Malhan, et. al. 2016). Due to this tendency stated by these researchers women chose to work only after their children get independent, which gets too late. Not only this, some women put halt to their jobs after marriage as they begin new responsibilities, which require more time than usual, and, also they have to make themselves adjust into new family. "The use of flexible work arrangements is very limited in certain countries and also shows huge gender segmentation specifically in manufacturing industries and lower level jobs" as stated by Kelly, (1991). The jobs in the service sector generally provide less flexible working arrangements. A survey by Frey (2001) showed that "almost half of the women (48.8 per cent) would prefer to work part-time, while only about 5.3 per cent of women (and 2.1 per cent of men) are actually engaged in part-time work". "The European Union average is 33.3 per cent for women" as indicated in DTI, (2001). Some studies have shown that "it is the women themselves who would sometimes like the opportunity to work on a part-time basis, but, organization decision makers are reluctant to hire workers, even women on shorter-hours contracts". "Companies not only offer little opportunity for flexible work patterns, but many women cannot return to work after maternity leave or are not offered the opportunity to do so" (Nagy, 2001). In another study it was observed that "only 46 per cent of women managed to return to their workplace after maternity leave (Pongra'cz, 2001)". Corporates are generally not motivated to seriously think and implement various alternatives of working. Reasons for this could be job insecurity, not familiar and knowledgeable of flexi-work practices. It may also be because of certain other factors like absence of trade unions which can be impactful and less focus on diversity management at state level as well as company level. "Evidence suggests that the state's role is largely marginal and it is reluctant to push for moves to establish institutional structures to support work-life balance reforms" (Frey, 2001).

Having lesser children to cope with work life balance

As we have discussed so far that women have to play many roles in their lives, out of which child care is very important and crucial, so, more the children more will be the responsibility. This leads to women

having a preference for less number of children so that she can better manage both work and family lives. Another reason for the families especially women preferring less number of kids is that more number of kids would delay her joining back on job. Studies have further strengthened this notion. "Nagy (2001) reported that it was a far greater challenge for women top managers than for men to reconcile work and family life. She found that successful women tended to be single, more than likely divorced, as well as having fewer children. The women in her survey emphasized that they wanted to have both a family life – always including children – and a career". "While not supporting the dual burden and superwoman thesis of managing a family and a career" (Hewlett, 2002), there are many studies which seem to share the same old and traditional views about the role of women in jobs, and these studies did not approve of not having children.

In UK, "companies offer more employee-oriented flexibility than many European countries as stated by Burrell et al., 1997; Doherty and Manfredi, 2001; Purcell et al., 1999". But, "this practice is not common at senior levels in organizations". "This was demonstrated clearly in researches by Doherty, 1997 and Doherty et al., 2001". "In both of these studies it was found that very long hours were required at senior levels and no forms of flexible work were available. This deterred many women from applying for senior positions and, in some cases, caused them to ask for lower level posts once they had children".

Role confusion and role burden

Women have to perform several roles in their families. These roles are " spouse (wife), caretaker (parents and parents-in-laws) and parent (mother) managing daily household chores (house wife); and providing services to the community and society (worker). Because of these roles there arises role confusion or role burden as to which role to be assumed first and at higher priority, which at last with lower priority. It is due to this role burden women forget to take care of their own health and other personal activities, which are often neglected because of time limitations.

Researchers have demonstrated that "an individual's sense of their personal well being, or lack thereof, is intimately influenced by the landscape of work (Haworth and Roberts, 2008) and that there is a causal correlation between poor work-life balance, heightened stress and a deterioration in the social fabric of their familial relationships" (Burnett et al., 2010; Worrall and Cooper, 1999; Lewis and Cooper, 2005). "Dewe and Kompier (2008) stated that each year stress from work is estimated to cost employers an estimated £3.7 billion, and around 13 million working days are lost". Also in the survey by "Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2003) it was reported that working long hours resulted in 25 per cent of those employees surveyed reporting some negative impact on health; 40 per cent reporting a negative impact on their relationships; and most reporting a negative impact on their job performance".

To add more to the burden of multiple roles of women, researches consistently show , "among heterosexual parent couples, even where fathers share some tasks, working mothers continue to take lead responsibility for the domestic care agenda (Bianchi et al., 2000; Gatrell, 2005, 2007; Maushart, 2002)". Particularly, "mothers carry the burden of core housework duties that include cooking meals, meal clean up, housecleaning, laundry and ironing, are not gender-neutral" (Bianchi et al. 2000). Such tasks can only be ironically called as ancillary to the raising of children, indicating they are necessary but indirect. The word ancillary originates from Latin, meaning "having the status of a female slave".

In studies by "Bianchi et al. (2000), Delphy and Leonard (1992), Dryden (1999), Gatrell (2007, 2008), Hochschild (1997), Seagar (2005) and others, they have consistently demonstrated that women also continue to carry the main burden of ancillary domestic labour or housework within the majority of heterosexual partnerships, irrespective of their employment status and no matter how many hours they spend in paid work". The Australian gender culture has proven particularly resilient, with contradictory norms that support women's increased employment participation yet insist that mothers' primary responsibilities are to their families (van Egmond et al., 2011).

Conclusion

The paper has discussed that work and family life of a female is quite challenging. There are numerous implications of the women work life. Some implications have been identified as lesser females in top management, part time and lesser paid, late careers and turndown job after marriage, having lesser children to cope with work life balance, and role confusion/role burden. Further researches may also identify the strategies needed to cope up with these implications as the coping strategies would be the real help and devotion rendered to the lady.

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