

Does the Work-Life-Balance of Resident and Expatriate Women Employees Differ?

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ABSTRACT

Work-life-balance and expatriation are phenomena that have evinced keen interest among Social scientists. Though the two topics have been researched separately, studies that examine the relationship between the two are scarce. Further, there are far less studies that have examined these among women employees. The present work intends to fill this gap in the literature. Using a randomly collected sample of 201 female employees from India and the Middle East, the study examined the difference in work-life balance between them. The study has brought out some interesting results, which will be of high utility to social scientists and researchers. It has been found that female Indian employees enjoy better work-life balance than expatriates.

Keywords: Expatriates, work-life balance, work-family conflict, work-life conflict

INTRODUCTION

Empirical examination about work-life-balance (WLB) among working mothers started receiving focus in the 1960s. The earlier studies emphasized on working mothers and

members of dual-earner families. During this time, researchers considered work and family life as two separate segments and often failed to examine the personal life of the respondents. It was in the 1970s that social scientists started exploring the effect of family life on work and vice-versa. This was based on the premise that individuals usually reside in different life domains – work and private. There could also be

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multiple sub-domains, which vary based on individuals. Thus arose the “Spill-over Theory” (Pleck, 1977), which postulates that there are asymmetrically permeable boundaries between the life domains of work and family. Thereafter, there is a general consensus that work and family influence each other. Studies started examining how women had to suffer from the effects of spill-over as a result of the family to work roles; and how men had to suffer due to spill-over from work to a family role (Naithani & Jha, 2009). By the end of the 20th-century focus started shifting towards “Work-life Conflict Theory”. By the turn of the century, WLB started receiving the required focus and attention from diverse social science fields including Psychology, Sociology, and Management.

Now literature is replete with evidence pertaining to diverse aspects of WLB (Biswas et al., 2015; Harju & Yliopisto, 2015; Pradhan, 2016).

Review of Literature

Though scholarly attention in Work-life balance (WLB) is decades old, interest in expatriate WLB gained interest only recently (Harju & Yliopisto, 2015; Harris, 2004; Kempena et al 2015; Mäkelä et al., 2011). Though many social scientists examined expatriate WLB, however, very few attempted it among women expatriates (Fischlmayr & Kollinger 2010; Harju & Yliopisto, 2015). It has been empirically proven that women employees in general and expatriate women, in particular, have to undergo innumerable hardships to balance

work and life. Social scientists have evinced interests in studying expatriation and associated phenomenon. Expatriation is always on the agenda of most multinational companies as employees are required by them at host countries for various purposes (Mäkelä et al., 2011). Expatriates have to be assigned to international assignments for facilitating control, coordination, and integration of operations in their host countries, and to transfer knowledge as well as organisational practices (Suutari, 2003). International assignments are a challenge to expatriates. The most important is the need for relocating families to host nations. At times situations warrant relocation without the family too. This creates a lot of adjustment problems.

The behavioural patterns of expatriates have been explained in the backdrop of cultural studies done by Hofstede (1982). According to Hofstede (1982), culture is deep-rooted in any individual, and cultural norms are learned from family settings from early childhood. These norms are carried to their respective adulthood, and even to host countries. Lewis and Ayudhya (2006) opined that though WFC could be universal in nature, the individual responses differed, and was governed by culture. Pradhan (2016) drew a clear differentiation between the WLB of developed and developing countries. Developed countries offer multiple working options like work from home and other family-friendly work policies (Lewis & Ayudhya, 2006). These are not applicable in developing countries (Joplin et al., 2003). Working for long hours

is a feature in developing countries. This is likely to create conflicts and imbalances in work-family situations (Pradhan, 2016). This is all the more intense among women expatriates. A review of the literature revealed that only limited studies have examined the WLB of expatriates (Harju & Yliopisto, 2015), and still lesser that of women expatriates. Table 1 presents the details of the studies that have been done in these areas.

The female expatriate workers in the Middle-East have certain unique features. Though there is a paucity of statistics regarding the exact quantum of women expatriates, it is estimated that females constitute an estimated 30% of the workforce. This is the lowest rate globally. Most female expatriate workers are engaged in non-professional and semi-skilled jobs (Keane & McGeehan, 2008; Malecki & Ewers, 2007). There are many social scientists like Shaffer and Joplin (2001) who loathed that only a little attention was given to this area of research.

The issues that affect work-life balance in the home and host countries could be different and vary drastically. If the purpose for which expatriation is done is to succeed, due and adequate attention needs to be provided to the successful management of work and private life of the employees (Kempena et al., 2015). Vashishtha and Mishra (1998) found that, among other factors, support from respective families could positively impact work-life balance. Some of the issues associated with expatriate work-life balance include probable new position and/or role at workplace, cultural practices, and languages that are unfamiliar, the indispensable absence of the extended family members and friends at the destination nation (Kempena et al., 2015). Further, Pandey and Srivastava (2000) found that members of nuclear families experienced higher levels of interpersonal work stress. For expatriates, since they are away from their extended families and are members of nuclear families, it can be presumed that they could be having lower

Table 1
Studies of expatriates work-life balance

No	Variable	Authors
1	Expatriates' work-life balance	Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) Harju and Yliopisto (2015) Kempena et al. (2015) Mäkelä et al. (2011)
2	Female expatriates work-life balance	Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) Harris (2004) Khokher and Beauregard (2014) Mäkelä et al. (2011)

levels of work-life balance. Based on this the first hypothesis is formulated:

H₁ : Indian Resident Female employees have better work-life balance than expatriates

The demographic factors of the respondents have been a subject matter of empirical examination (Leger, 2004; Naithani, 2016). Studies, for instance, Naithani (2016) had found that various demographic factors, including health and recreation factors, had a direct bearing on the work-life balance of expatriate employees. Other demographic factors studied include the health of the respondents, their financial position, spiritual/religious aspects, hobbies. (Naithani & Jha, 2009). Leger (2004) found that female employees aged between 35 and 55 years tended to experience higher levels of depression and anxiety disorders leading to work-life conflicts. In line with these findings the second hypothesis is formulated:

H₂ :There is no significant difference in WLB with respect to the demographics of women employees.

A few subsidiary hypotheses were also formulated:

H_{2a} : There is no significant difference in WLB of female employees based on their marital status

H_{2b} :There is no significant difference in WLB of female employees based on the employment of their spouses.

H_{2c} :There is no significant difference in WLB of female employees based on their ages

H_{2d} :There is no significant difference in WLB of female employees based on their years of experience

Objectives of the Study

Based review of literature, the following objectives were identified for the study:

1. To explore if Resident and Expatriate female employees differ with respect to WLB;
2. To explore if there is a significant difference in WLB of female employees based on their demographic profiles.

METHOD

For the collection of data for the study, a modified version of a standardized tool, the “WFC questionnaire” developed by Carlson et al. (2000); modified by and cited in Jayaweera (2005) was used. The tool consists of a total of 12 items under two factors – Work-life conflict (WLC) and Work-family conflict (WFC). The questionnaire is such that the two factors measure WLF. The measure was of Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The coding of the response for analysis was done such that strongly disagree was provided a point of 5 and strongly agree was provided a point of 1. Thus, a high score on the questionnaire denoted a high level of WLB. The questionnaire was randomly administered online over google docs.

Towards this, the link to the questionnaire was mailed to the respondents. As all the items were made compulsory, there was no missing data and none of the responses warranted rejection, and all the responses were used for analysis

Data was collected online, from a sample of 201 female employees using convenient sampling. 107 respondents were residents in India and 94 were expatriates working in Saudi Arabia. The respondents belonged to various industries like the Service sector, IT/ITeS, Teaching, and Hospital. Respondents varied drastically regarding demographics. The ages of the respondents ranged from 20 to over 55 years. Fifty-one (51) were married, 53 unmarried, and 3 divorced. Their experiences varied from less than a year to over 15 years. There existed diversity regarding qualifications, which ranged from undergraduate to doctorate. Based on the diversity it can be assumed invariably that the data is representative in nature. Sampling adequacy was assessed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure. The KMO value was 0.877 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value was 1273.257. Since the values are significant (0.000), there is adequacy with respect to the sample.

Reliability and Validity

Due to the uniqueness of the study, factor analysis was conducted. Based on Eigen values, two factors emerged, with a cumulative variance of 61.86%. The first factor (Work-life conflict – WLC) had eight items, and the second factor (Work-family conflict – WFC) four items. The

loadings of WLC ranged between 0.778 and 0.572; and that of WFC between 0.896 and 0.755. The loadings are well above the stipulated value of 0.40. This value is as per the standard stipulations provided by Ford et al. (1986), Hinkin (1995), and Thompson (2004), which are widely used (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Field, 2009; Matsunaga, 2010; Samsudeen & Sulphrey, 2017; Sandhya & Sulphrey, 2019; Sulphrey & Upadhyay, 2019). The reliability of the tool was assessed with Cronbach's Alpha. The Alpha of WLC was .880 and that of WFC was .873. The two values are above the rule of thumb of .70 (Nunnally, 1978). In line with Churchill (1979), the inter factor correlations were assessed and the r-value was .522 (significant at 0.01 level). These results established the reliability and validity of the tool.

RESULTS

In tune with the first objective and to test the tenability of the H1, *t*-test was done and the results are presented in Table 2.

It can be seen from the table that for both the factors the *t*-values (2.765 and 7.541 respectively) are significant at 0.01 level. This signifies that there was a significant difference between female resident and expatriate employees. An examination of the mean values shows that WLC was higher (37.103) for residents than expatriates (24.745). This pattern was visible for WFC. The mean for residents was 15.430, and that of expatriates was only 12.117. This reflected in the overall WLB too. The mean value for residents was 42.533, and

Table 2

Data and t-values

	Residence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-value	Sig.
WLC	Resident	107	27.103	6.2976	0.6088	2.765	0.006
	Expatriate	94	24.745	5.7154	0.5895		
WFC	Resident	107	15.430	2.6816	0.2592	7.541	0.000
	Expatriate	94	12.117	3.5313	0.3642		
WLB	Resident	107	42.533	8.0673	0.7799	4.985	0.000
	Expatriate	94	36.862	8.0236	0.8276		

expatriates was 36.862. Based on these findings the H₁ that “Indian Resident Female employees have better work-life balance than expatriates” is accepted. This finding substantiates the studies of Kempena et al. (2015), and Vashishtha and Mishra (1998). This difference in WLB could be due to the support that employees in India receive from their extended families. Expatriate employees have nuclear families and are devoid of this support from extended families (Pandey & Srivastava, 2000).

The second objective was to find the impact of demographics on WLB. Demographics were studied in a multitude of studies (Krishnan & Sulphey, 2009;

Sulphey & Faisal, 2017). The demographics studied were marital status, employment of spouse, age, and years of experience. The findings based on marital status (Table 3) showed that the factors and overall WLC did not differ significantly based on marital status.

Based on this, the hypothesis that “There is no significant difference in WLB of female employees based on their marital status” is accepted. This finding validates earlier studies by Mjoli et al. (2013) and Panisoara and Serban (2013).

The details of the t-test with respect to the employment of spouse is presented in Table 4.

Table 3

Data and t-value based on marital status

	Marital status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-value	Sig.
WLC	Married	116	26.23	6.141	0.570	0.470	0.639
	Unmarried	82	25.82	6.108	0.675		
WFC	Married	116	13.79	3.630	0.337	0.525	0.600
	Unmarried	82	14.06	3.393	0.375		
WLB	Married	116	40.03	8.592	0.798	0.120	0.904
	Unmarried	82	39.88	8.408	0.929		

Table 4

WLB based on the employment of spouse

	Residence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-value	Sig.
WLC	Employed	117	26.179	6.5530	0.6058	0.489	0.625
	Not employed	84	25.750	5.5208	0.6024		
WFC	Employed	117	13.966	3.6411	0.3366	0.405	0.686
	Not employed	84	13.762	3.3496	0.3655		
WLB	Employed	117	40.145	9.0328	0.8351	0.519	0.604
	Not employed	84	39.512	7.7700	0.8478		

While the spouse of 117 respondents were employed, 84 did not have any employment. It can be observed from the Table that there exists no significant difference in both WLC and WFC as well as overall WLB, based on the employment status of spouse. The mean values were very close and did not show any difference. This signifies that the employment status of spouses does not exercise any impact on the WLB of women employees. Delina and Raya (2013) had found that working women found it challenging to balance their work and personal life, irrespective of the employment of their spouses. Anitha and Muralidharan (2014) also found that the employment of spouse had an influence on the WLB. The present study is thus making a significant contribution to the literature by stating that the employment status of spouses does not impact WLB.

To test the tenability of the hypothesis that “There is no significant difference in WLB of female employees based on their ages”, ANOVA was conducted (Table 5).

The results of the analysis show that there were no significant differences in WLB between the various groups based on age. As such the hypothesis H_{2c} is accepted. Many studies have examined the role of age on WLB (Delina & Raya, 2013; Makabe, 2015). Earlier studies, for instance, Crompton and Lyonette (2005) had found younger employees experience work-life disruptions. Similarly, Yeandle (2005) had found that older workers were capable of obtaining the desired level of WLB due to various factors. The finding of the present study is in contra to these earlier studies, as it has found that there is no relationship between age and WLB among women employees. This may be due to the cultural differences with respect to the sample studied.

It was also hypothesized that “There is no significant difference in WLB of female employees based on their years of experience”. This hypothesis is also accepted as the ANOVA was not significant (Table 6). It was not significant either

Table 5

ANOVA of the sample based on age

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
WLC	Between Groups	338.338	5	67.668	1.837	0.107
	Within Groups	7181.662	195	36.829		
	Total	7520.000	200			
WFC	Between Groups	46.050	5	9.210	0.741	0.594
	Within Groups	2425.085	195	12.436		
	Total	2471.134	200			
WLB	Between Groups	365.206	5	73.041	1.008	0.414
	Within Groups	14129.928	195	72.461		
	Total	14495.134	200			

for WLC and WFC. The F value of the overall WLB is also not significant which signifies that years of experience have no impact on the WLB of the respondents. This finding goes contra to the finding of Anitha and Muralidharan (2014) who found that experience of the respondents had the influence of WLF. However, there is a need

for a more in-depth study with a larger sample to generalise the finding.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study have many theoretical and practical implications. A high level of WLB has the potential to reduce turnover intention and reduce task

Table 6

ANOVA of the sample based on experience

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
WLC	Between Groups	170.190	5	34.038	0.903	0.480
	Within Groups	7349.810	195	37.691		
	Total	7520.000	200			
WFC	Between Groups	97.239	5	19.448	1.598	0.163
	Within Groups	2373.895	195	12.174		
	Total	2471.134	200			
WLB	Between Groups	478.984	5	95.797	1.333	0.252
	Within Groups	14016.151	195	71.878		
	Total	14495.134	200			

performance. Another aspect of importance is that support from respective families could positively impact work-life balance. The present study has found that women expatriate employees have issues related to WLB. This could be overcome with support from family members. Further, the findings of Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) that balanced leisure time with appropriate activities is of significant importance. Setting priorities and proper definition of clear goals regarding leisure time would help in this direction. This balancing of leisure time and the required cross-cultural adjustments would be areas that could be of interest to social scientists for empirical examinations.

CONCLUSION

Though WLB is a topic that has been researched oft repeatedly, it is still a hot topic as it throws out challenging, interesting and intriguing results; each time an empirical examination is done. The present work focused on identifying the difference in WLB with respect to female Indian residents and expatriate employees in the Middle-east. The study has provided some interesting results, which is partly in tandem with earlier studies. It has established that expatriate female employees have a lesser amount of WLB than resident employees. This could be due to the lack of support from the extended family that is readily available when in the home country.

A probable limitation of the study is that the data for the study has been collected solely from respondents in the

Middle-east countries. There may be certain socio-cultural issues that are unique to the region, which could have influenced the results. This can be confirmed only after conducting a study in other regions of the world. Indian diaspora is now working across the globe in countries ranging from Australia and Malaysia to UK, Canada, and the USA. A cross-national study that considers samples from these countries are sure to have interesting results. This will also open the opportunity of comparing the WLB of female expatriates in developing and developed nations. It is expected that the present study will stimulate social researchers to conduct further studies in this challenging area.

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