

Gender Differences In Work-Life Balance In The Corporate Sector: A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract:

The balance between work and personal life is a crucial factor in overall well-being and productivity, particularly within the demanding corporate sector. This article examines gender-based differences in work-life balance in corporate settings, with a particular focus on the Information Technology (IT) sector. Using a meta-analytical approach, the study synthesizes research findings on the disparities in work-life balance experiences between male and female employees. The article also explores the unique challenges faced by women influenced by societal expectations and organizational structures, particularly in male-dominated environments like IT. The article highlights the role of corporate policies and personal strategies in improving work-life harmony, offering recommendations to support gender equity and enhanced productivity.

Background: In today's corporate world, achieving a balance between professional responsibilities and personal life is more challenging than ever, especially for employees in the high-demand Information Technology (IT) sector. Work-life balance (WLB) is defined as the effective management of personal and professional responsibilities to reduce stress and enhance quality of life (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). As corporations increasingly emphasize productivity and flexibility, the strain to maintain a balanced life has intensified, impacting employees differently based on their gender. Research indicates that gender plays a significant role in WLB, as men and women often face distinct challenges rooted in cultural expectations, familial roles, and organizational structures. The article aims to delve into these gender-based differences, focusing on the experiences of employees in the IT sector where work demands are high, hours are long, and flexible scheduling is often critical yet insufficient.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Gender Differences, Corporate Sector, Employee Well-being, Organizational Policies, Gender Equity

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I. Introduction

Gender-based disparities in Work-life balance (WLB) reflect a broader societal framework where men are generally seen as primary earners, while women are expected to manage both work and household responsibilities. According to a research by Emslie and Hunt (2009), women reported significantly higher levels of stress related to WLB than men, largely due to their dual roles as employees and primary caregivers. This dual burden is particularly evident in corporate sectors like IT, where the high demand for productivity often leaves little room for personal life. For example, Hewlett and Luce (2005) found that women in technology-intensive sectors were more likely to experience "time poverty," where long working hours interfere with personal responsibilities, leading to heightened stress and burnout. Moreover, women in IT often feel the need to "prove" themselves in male-dominated environments, which can exacerbate WLB challenges (Ashcraft et al., 2012). Research indicates that the IT sector requires continuous skill updates, which places added pressure on employees to invest time outside of work to stay competitive. For men, this demand is often mitigated by social and familial support that allows them to focus on work, whereas women frequently juggle additional domestic responsibilities, creating a disproportionate impact on their personal well-being (Nath, 2011).

II. Review Of Literature

The body of research on work-life balance (WLB) highlights the significant influence of gender on the ability to harmonize professional and personal responsibilities. Women, in particular, face pronounced challenges due to societal expectations around caregiving, household duties, and traditional gender roles (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). These challenges are compounded in corporate environments, especially in high-demand sectors like IT, where long hours, inflexible schedules, and male-centric organizational structures amplify stress for

women (Bailyn, 2011). WLB, defined as the effective management of professional and personal obligations to enhance well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011), has become increasingly difficult to achieve in today's fast-paced corporate landscape, affecting men and women differently due to cultural and organizational factors (Buddhapriya, 2009). The following studies highlight the pertinent issues impacting work life balance in the corporate world :

- **Cultural Expectations and Gender Roles.** Traditional gender roles significantly influence WLB. In a study conducted by Powell and Greenhaus (2010), it was noted that societal expectations often assign women the primary responsibility for caregiving, regardless of their employment status. This dual burden creates an imbalance, as women are compelled to prioritize family duties over career aspirations. Moreover, as these responsibilities intensify, women face barriers to career advancement, a phenomenon referred to as the "glass ceiling effect." Powell and Greenhaus highlight that these expectations often discourage employers from offering flexible work arrangements to women, assuming their familial responsibilities will interfere with professional commitments.
- **Impact of Organizational Structures.** Corporate policies and work environments also play a crucial role in shaping WLB experiences. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) found that long hours, rigid schedules, and a lack of family-friendly policies disproportionately affect women, particularly in male-dominated industries. The study emphasized that while flexible work arrangements are increasingly common, they are often limited in scope, and their usage can lead to negative perceptions about an employee's commitment to work. Men, conversely, are less likely to be penalized for prioritizing work over family, perpetuating gendered disparities.
- **Sector-Specific Challenges.** In the IT sector, high workloads and constant technological changes exacerbate WLB difficulties for employees. According to Sujatha and Singh (2012), women in IT face unique challenges, including limited access to mentorship and networking opportunities, as well as inadequate support systems for managing work and home responsibilities. These factors not only hinder professional growth but also lead to higher rates of burnout among women compared to their male counterparts.
- **Family Structure and Marital Status.** The influence of family structure and marital status on WLB has been explored in depth. Kanter (1977) highlighted how single women and those in nuclear family setups often struggle more with WLB than those in joint family arrangements. Joint families provide shared caregiving responsibilities, which can alleviate some of the pressure on working women. In contrast, nuclear family setups place the entire burden of household management on the individual, increasing the likelihood of work-family conflict.
- **Psychological Impacts and Gendered Stress.** Psychological studies have also delved into the stress and mental health issues resulting from poor WLB. Barnett and Hyde (2001) argue that work-family conflict is a significant source of stress for women, contributing to anxiety, depression, and decreased job satisfaction. On the other hand, men experience stress differently, often related to societal pressures to be the primary breadwinner.
- **Role of Technology in Work-Life Balance.** While technology has facilitated flexible work options, it has also blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life. Hill, Ferris, and Martinson (2003) observed that remote working, although beneficial in reducing commute time and offering flexibility, often leads to an "always-on" culture. This is particularly challenging for women, as they are expected to remain equally accessible to their families, further straining their WLB.
- **Gender Equality Policies and Practices.** Organizations that implement gender-sensitive policies have been found to mitigate some of these challenges. Kossek, Lewis, and Hammer (2010) emphasize that family-friendly policies, mentorship programs, and gender equity initiatives can significantly improve WLB for women. However, the effectiveness of these measures depends on organizational culture and the extent to which they are genuinely supported by leadership.
- **Comparative Global Perspectives.** Cross-cultural studies also shed light on how gender and WLB vary across regions. In Scandinavian countries, for instance, government-mandated parental leave and subsidized childcare significantly ease the burden on working mothers, as documented by Lewis and Cooper (2005). In contrast, developing countries often lack such robust support systems, making WLB an even greater challenge for women.
- **Evolving Gender Dynamics.** As gender roles evolve, men are increasingly participating in caregiving activities, which has implications for WLB. A study by Aumann, Galinsky, and Matos (2011) noted that younger generations of men express a stronger desire for work-life integration, signaling a shift in traditional gender norms. This trend, while promising, also necessitates changes in organizational policies to accommodate both men and women seeking better WLB.

By exploring these diverse perspectives, it becomes evident that achieving WLB requires addressing systemic inequalities in organizational practices and societal expectations. Future research must focus on

identifying sustainable strategies for creating gender-inclusive workplaces that recognize and accommodate the diverse needs of all employees.

Research Questions

This study addressed several key research questions concerning gender disparities in work-life balance in the corporate sector, specifically focusing on the IT industry:

- How do work-life balance challenges differ between men and women in India's corporate sector?
- What unique obstacles do women in the IT sector face in managing work-life balance?
- How do organizational policies in India influence the ability of male and female employees to achieve work-life balance?
- What personal strategies are commonly adopted by men and women in IT to address work-life balance concerns?

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research were:

- To analyze gender-specific work-life- balance issues faced by employees in India's corporate sector.
- To explore the particular challenges women in IT face, considering cultural, social, and organizational factors.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of corporate policies in India in supporting work-life balance and their impact on gender equity.
- To provide recommendations for organizations to develop inclusive strategies for fostering a balanced work environment.

Gender Disparities in Work-Life Balance

Gender disparities in work-life balance within India's corporate sector, especially in IT, reflect both societal norms and organizational biases. Women face a significant disadvantage in managing work and life due to societal expectations and insufficient organizational support, which often fails to accommodate their unique needs. These gender-based disparities are compounded in sectors like IT, where high demands on time and constant skill updates leave women in a continuous struggle to keep up professionally while fulfilling domestic responsibilities. While organizations in India have begun introducing policies like flexible hours and remote work to aid work-life balance, these initiatives often lack the robust implementation and cultural acceptance needed to make a substantial impact. Addressing gender disparities in work-life balance requires a more inclusive approach that recognizes the distinct needs and challenges of men and women, particularly in sectors with high demands such as IT. This can lead to better employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity, ultimately benefiting both individuals and organizations.

Studies globally and in India highlight that women often bear a dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities, resulting in higher stress, slower career progression, and reduced job satisfaction compared to men. For instance, Kossek and Lautsch (2018), in *Academy of Management Annals*, analyzed flexible work policies at Deloitte and PwC, highlighting their positive impact on women's WLB, albeit with some stigma attached to their use. In multinational corporations, Hewlett and Luce (2005), in their *Harvard Business Review* article, documented "time poverty" among women in companies like Google and Microsoft, where the demands of technology-intensive roles leave minimal time for personal responsibilities. Hochschild and Machung (2012), in their book *The Second Shift*, analyzed dual-career couples in companies like Ford and General Electric, finding that women disproportionately manage caregiving responsibilities alongside professional commitments. Ashcraft et al. (2012), in research on Amazon published in *Communication Monographs*, documented how women in male-dominated environments often feel pressured to prove themselves, worsening WLB challenges. Lewis et al. (2007), in *Community, Work & Family*, studied flexible work policies at Unilever and found that despite their availability, cultural resistance often discouraged women from utilizing them. These findings collectively underscore the urgent need for inclusive organizational policies, cultural shifts, and gender-sensitive frameworks. Addressing these issues through robust policy implementation, stigma-free flexibility options, and support systems can help bridge the gender gap in work-life balance across sectors.

Work-Life Balance in the Indian Context

In India, traditional gender roles often dictate that women take on more household and caregiving duties, regardless of their professional status. This cultural expectation significantly affects women's ability to balance work and life. A study by Rajadhyaksha and Smita (2004) highlights that Indian women experience higher levels of work-life conflict due to social pressures to prioritize family responsibilities. Similarly, Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) found that Indian corporate environments are not always conducive to women's work-life balance, as they tend to overlook the unique pressures faced by female employees. The IT sector, with its high demands and often inflexible hours, can exacerbate these issues. A study by Nath (2011) underscores that women in India's IT sector

report significant challenges in managing work-life balance, largely due to long hours and limited access to flexible work options. Nath's research also points to a culture in Indian IT firms where the ideal worker is expected to be constantly available, making it difficult for women, especially those with families, to keep up without experiencing burnout.

Challenges Faced by Women in the IT Sector

Women in the IT sector face significant challenges shaped by cultural, social, and organizational factors. Cultural norms often require women to prioritize family, limiting their participation in demanding IT roles (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). Globally, research has shown that IT companies, including Microsoft and Google, often contribute to "time poverty" for women, due to the demands of continuous learning and after-hours commitment (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Ashcraft et al. (2012) observed that women in male-dominated IT environments face cultural biases, leading them to overperform to prove their worth. Furthermore, studies on firms like Accenture and HCL Technologies revealed that workplace resources and networks tend to favor men, leaving women to rely on personal strategies like time management and familial support (Budhwar et al., 2006). Social expectations in India and other countries exacerbate these pressures, as women are commonly viewed as primary caregivers, making it difficult to balance long hours with professional obligations (Nath, 2011). Organizational cultures also contribute to these challenges. Indian studies further highlight disparities in work-life balance (WLB). Bhalla and Chaudhary (2015) found that flexible work policies at companies like Infosys and Wipro often came with implicit career penalties. Similarly, Nath (2011) noted that women in India's IT sector struggle to balance work and household responsibilities due to inadequate organizational support. Research by Budhwar et al. (2006) at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) indicated that women

often rely on familial support and time-management strategies to juggle work and home duties, while men tend to benefit from professional networks and workplace resources. Additionally, Dhanabhakya and Anitha (2011) found that family-friendly policies at firms such as Infosys and HCL Technologies were poorly implemented, reducing their effectiveness in alleviating WLB disparities. While these companies offered flexible work arrangements, women were hesitant to use them for fear of being perceived as less committed (Dhanabhakya & Anitha, 2011; Bhalla & Chaudhary, 2015). The high-pressure nature of the IT environment, marked by an "always-on" culture, especially affects women balancing work and family (Bhalla & Chaudhary, 2015). In conclusion, these studies collectively highlight the systemic barriers women face in the IT sector, emphasizing the need for more inclusive policies and cultural shifts within organizations.

Impact of Organizational Policies and Work-Life Balance

Organizational policies play a crucial role in shaping work-life balance (WLB) outcomes, particularly in terms of gender disparities. While many top Indian and American firms have introduced gender-friendly policies, their effectiveness is often compromised by inconsistent implementation and cultural resistance. Flexible work hours, parental leave, and remote work options are commonly offered, but these policies are not always equitably implemented. Bhalla and Chaudhary (2015) found that women hesitate to use these benefits for fear of being perceived as less committed, undermining the effectiveness of such initiatives. Studies also show that while these policies are gender-inclusive in theory, they often lack strong managerial support.

Policies such as flexible working hours, remote work options, and on-site childcare facilities can enhance WLB for both men and women, though women often benefit more due to their greater family caregiving responsibilities (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). However, many corporate policies are based on an "ideal worker" model, which assumes employees are always available for work with limited personal obligations, a framework that disproportionately disadvantages women (Acker, 2006). In the IT sector, where innovation and productivity are key, companies are increasingly adopting policies to improve WLB. Yet, these policies often fall short in addressing the unique needs of female employees. For example, while flexible work hours may be available, women often report challenges in accessing these benefits without facing career penalties or judgment from colleagues (Lewis et al., 2007). In some cases, using work-life balance policies is perceived as a sign of lack of ambition, limiting women's career advancement opportunities (Lewis et al., 2007). Additionally, Ashcraft et al. (2012) emphasized that the absence of active managerial support and clear communication about policy benefits reduces the effectiveness of many initiatives.

In the Indian context, work-life balance policies are often reactive, addressing immediate concerns rather than fostering long-term, inclusive cultures (Budhwar et al., 2006). Ghosh and Chakraborty (2019) noted that many organizations fail to adapt policies based on employee feedback, leading to a disconnect between policy design and real-world implementation. Nath (2011) pointed out that policies such as flexible work hours and maternity leave are frequently viewed as concessions rather than rights, further marginalizing women in male-dominated industries. Despite the introduction of some work-life balance initiatives in Indian corporations, these policies often remain ineffective due to poor implementation and cultural resistance (Buddhapriya, 2009). Bhalla and Chaudhary (2015) found that while some organizations offer flexible working hours and remote work options,

these policies are not equally accessible to all employees. Women often feel penalized for utilizing these benefits, as it may be perceived as a lack of career commitment. Dhanabhakya and Anitha (2011) also found that Indian organizations often fail to meet the specific needs of female employees, with family-friendly policies sometimes accompanied by an implicit expectation that employees, particularly women, prioritize work over personal responsibilities.

These findings underscore the critical role organizational policies play in achieving gender parity in work-life balance. However, without cultural change, consistent managerial support, and active enforcement, these policies risk being reduced to symbolic gestures rather than transformative tools for gender equality.

Personal Strategies for Work-Life Balance

In the face of organizational shortcomings, both men and women in India's IT sector adopt personal strategies to balance work and life, though their approaches often reflect gendered expectations and responsibilities. A study by Budhwar et al. (2006) found that women, in particular, tend to use time-management techniques more frequently to juggle professional and personal responsibilities. These techniques often involve careful planning of work hours, setting boundaries, and using reminders to ensure efficiency both at home and in the workplace. Additionally, women in the sector are more likely to rely on extended family support, such as the assistance of parents or in-laws, to manage household chores and childcare duties while they pursue their careers. This reliance on family often reflects the persistent societal norms that position women as primary caregivers. In contrast, men in India's IT sector are more likely to rely on professional networks and workplace resources to manage stress and workload. Men commonly seek support through mentorship, leveraging colleagues or supervisors for professional advice, or utilizing workplace programs like wellness initiatives or Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). These strategies suggest that men may be more comfortable seeking professional rather than personal support when facing work-life challenges. The gender-specific coping strategies used by men and women underscore the distinct pressures each group faces in balancing professional and domestic responsibilities. These differing approaches highlight the need for more inclusive and equitable work environments that support diverse coping mechanisms and offer flexible solutions that address both men's and women's needs. Promoting a culture where both genders are encouraged to use workplace and family support systems without stigma can help bridge the gap and ensure a more balanced work-life integration.

Observations

The meta-analysis reveals several notable observations about gender differences in work-life balance within India's corporate sector, particularly in the IT industry. One key observation is that women face a unique set of pressures that often exceed those experienced by their male counterparts. Women in India's corporate sector tend to juggle professional and domestic responsibilities due to cultural expectations that emphasize their role in family care (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). This dual burden contributes to a higher degree of stress and affects both their professional performance and personal well-being.

Another observation is the discrepancy between corporate policies and their actual implementation. While many Indian companies, especially in IT, offer flexible working hours, these policies are often either not implemented effectively or are perceived as career-limiting for those who use them (Buddhapriya, 2009). Women in particular feel that utilizing flexible options may negatively impact their professional growth, leading to lower rates of uptake and increased difficulty in balancing work and personal life. Furthermore, the IT sector's high expectations for continuous professional development and extended working hours tend to favor men, who are typically less burdened with domestic responsibilities (Nath, 2011).

Finally, gender-specific coping strategies indicate that both men and women develop personalized approaches to managing work-life balance, though these are influenced by their social and family contexts. Men rely more on professional support networks and workplace resources, whereas women often depend on family support and adopt stricter time-management strategies to meet their dual obligations (Budhwar et al., 2006). This difference in coping mechanisms underlines the gendered nature of work-life challenges and highlights the need for organizational practices that cater equitably to diverse employee needs.

Comprehensive Strategy for Improving Work-Life Balance in Corporates

To foster a gender-balanced work environment and promote work-life balance for all employees, organizations should adopt a comprehensive strategy that addresses diverse needs and remove systemic gender barriers for work-life balance. The following recommendations, based on international best practices, outline a comprehensive approach:

- **Flexible Work Policies.** Flexible work arrangements such as remote work, flexible hours, job-sharing, and compressed workweeks empower employees to manage personal responsibilities, including caregiving and education, without sacrificing productivity. These arrangements are particularly beneficial in reducing work-life conflict and improving overall job satisfaction. Research highlights that flexible work policies contribute

significantly to enhancing work-life balance for both men and women, promoting inclusivity across diverse workforce demographics (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). For example, remote work not only offers logistical convenience but also fosters autonomy, which positively impacts employee well-being and productivity (Bloom et al., 2015).

- **Family-Friendly Policies.** Family-friendly initiatives, such as on-site childcare, caregiving support, and extended parental leave, are essential for helping employees balance professional and personal responsibilities. These measures not only create a supportive organizational culture but also reduce absenteeism and improve employee retention. Studies have found that employees who feel supported in their family roles demonstrate higher job satisfaction and engagement (Kossek et al., 2011).
- **Inclusive Parental Leave.** Equitable parental leave policies address the disproportionate caregiving burden on women by encouraging shared responsibilities between genders. Paid leave for both parents, including shared parental leave options, enables fathers to actively participate in child-rearing while supporting mothers in maintaining career continuity. Studies suggest that inclusive parental leave reduces gender inequality in caregiving and promotes better family dynamics, thereby enhancing work-life integration (Baird, 2016). For instance, policies in Scandinavian countries offering extensive paternity leave have been linked to increased paternal involvement and reduced maternal career interruptions (Duvander & Johansson, 2012).
- **Gender-Sensitive Training and Mentorship.** Unconscious bias training and mentorship programs are critical for fostering equity in career advancement. Such initiatives help employees recognize and address gender stereotypes while creating a supportive environment, particularly in male-dominated fields like technology and engineering. Mentorship programs tailored to the needs of both genders provide guidance, professional development opportunities, and strategies for navigating work-life challenges. Research underscores the effectiveness of these programs in reducing career barriers for women and promoting inclusive leadership (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006).
- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).** Comprehensive Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) offering confidential counseling, mental health support, and stress management resources are crucial for fostering resilience in the workforce. Accessible to all employees, these programs address both work-related and personal challenges, contributing to improved mental health and overall well-being. Research shows that organizations with effective EAPs experience reduced burnout and increased employee loyalty (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).
- **Promotion of Work-Life Balance Culture.** A workplace culture that values employee well-being is fundamental to achieving sustainable work-life balance. Leaders play a pivotal role by modeling healthy work-life boundaries, such as avoiding after-hours communication and encouraging the use of vacation time. Research indicates that organizations with a strong culture of work-life balance see reduced turnover rates and improved employee morale (Allen et al., 2000).
- **Mindfulness in Corporates to Improve Work-Life Balance.** Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, stress reduction workshops, and mindful leadership training, are increasingly being adopted by corporations to address employee burnout and work-related stress. These practices enhance emotional regulation, resilience, and focus, enabling employees to navigate the demands of work and personal life more effectively. Studies demonstrate that mindfulness interventions in the workplace lead to improved productivity, creativity, and overall employee well-being (Hyland et al., 2015).
- **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation.** Organizations must regularly evaluate the effectiveness of work-life balance initiatives through employee feedback, surveys, and usage metrics. This ensures that policies remain relevant and adaptable to the changing needs of the workforce. Continuous monitoring fosters inclusivity and supports a culture of improvement, enabling organizations to address gaps and enhance their strategies (Kossek et al., 2011).

III. Recommendations For Future Research

Further research is needed to understand the long-term impact of work-life balance policies on employee retention and productivity, especially in gender-sensitive contexts. The findings underscore the need for future research to explore evolving gender roles, cultural variations, and the impact of technological advancements on work-life balance in diverse corporate contexts and explore how specific policy implementations in other corporate sectors influence gender equity. Finally, a longitudinal research could shed light on the evolving nature of work-life balance in response to technological advancements, remote work trends, and shifting gender roles in the Indian cultural context.

IV. Conclusion

The meta-analysis highlights significant gender differences in achieving work-life balance within the corporate sector, especially in IT. Women face unique challenges due to societal expectations, caregiving responsibilities, and workplace biases, while men experience pressures to prioritize professional roles over personal life. Organizational culture, supportive policies, and individual adaptability play crucial roles in

addressing these disparities. Promoting equitable leave policies, flexible working hours, and awareness initiatives can foster inclusive environments. By implementing these strategies, organizations can create an equitable and supportive work environment. In addition, addressing structural, cultural, and policy-level barriers is critical for achieving gender equality and fostering a balanced workforce where both men and women thrive and can achieve work-life balance, leading to increased productivity, employee satisfaction, and overall organizational success.

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