

A Review Study On the Role of Work-Life Balance

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Abstract:

"This research seeks to conduct a comprehensive review of current literature to gain insights into work-life balance (WLB) and its connection with various work-related behaviors. Additionally, it aims to identify existing gaps in the research to propose directions and priorities for future studies. This study aims to provide a comprehensive review of the existing research conducted by leading scholars in the field of Work-Life Balance (WLB) and its associated dimensions. A total of 99 studies have been systematically analysed in this review. The selected works are categorized based on publication year, geographical location, research methodology, and sector. The review also explores key concepts, contributing factors, and components that have significantly influenced the understanding of WLB, along with its importance and practical implications. The paper highlights existing research gaps and outlines potential directions for future studies in the area of Work-Life Balance (WLB). This study identified research gaps related to the systematic review and classification of existing literature, particularly in terms of demographics, publication year, research methodologies, and the sectors examined.

Introduction

In today's fast-evolving technological landscape, the demands of the workplace are increasing, accompanied by shifting job roles and evolving work patterns (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2020). The competitive and high-pressure nature of modern business environments pushes employees to be highly engaged and deeply committed, often at the cost of their work-life balance (Turanligil & Farooq, 2019). Over the past fifty years, scholarly interest in the work-life interface has significantly grown, largely driven by changing family dynamics, gender roles, and career trajectories (Powell et al., 2019). Although numerous literature reviews have been conducted on the topic, scholars argue that the field continues to lack conceptual coherence (Perrigino et al., 2018), which limits a holistic understanding of employees' work-life experiences. Despite extensive research in this area, many individuals still face challenges in effectively managing their work and personal lives (Powell et al., 2019). In response to these ongoing concerns, the present study aims to systematically analyze existing literature on work-life balance (WLB), identify gaps in current research, and propose potential avenues for future investigation. To achieve this, literature from the years 2000 to 2024 has been comprehensively reviewed. This analysis is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How WLB is conceptualized in the past?

RQ2. What are the factors that significantly influenced WLB?

RQ3. Which sectors remain unstudied or understudied with regard to WLB?

Methodology

The literature review was carried out systematically in five distinct steps, as illustrated in Figure 1. The first step involved screening abstracts from articles and journals published by reputable sources such as Elsevier, Emerald Insight, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Sage, as well as relevant newspaper articles. The literature search employed keywords such as "work-life balance (WLB)", "balancing work and family responsibilities", and "domains of work and life" to identify relevant studies published between 2000 and 2024. This initial search yielded a total of 200 potentially relevant publications. As part of the exclusion criteria, non-English articles were not included in the review.



Figure 1. Steps in Review Process.

In the second step, duplicate records were identified and removed, reducing the total to 150 papers. Subsequently, studies that primarily focused on work-life spillover and work-life conflict were excluded, further narrowing the selection to 99 papers. The third step reinforced the language criterion by ensuring that only English-language papers from the aforementioned sources were included. In the fourth step, an organic search was conducted to identify additional relevant articles, but the final selection remained at 99 papers. Finally, in the fifth step, an Excel spreadsheet was developed to systematically organize and analyze the selected studies under various headings. The outcomes of this review process are detailed in the subsequent sections.

Evolution and conceptualization of work-life balance

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) first emerged as a concern among working mothers in the United Kingdom during the 1960s and 1970s. By the mid-1980s, the issue had gained attention from the U.S. government. In the 1990s, WLB began receiving broader recognition globally, particularly as a key topic within human resource management (Bird, 2006). Since then, academic interest in WLB has steadily grown, driven by the increasing participation of women in the workforce, advancements in technology, evolving cultural perspectives on work-family dynamics, and the diversification of family structures (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014).

Research in this area has produced various theoretical models that attempt to explain the interaction between work and family roles. However, despite the growth in literature, substantial gaps remain in our understanding of work-family dynamics (Powell et al., 2019). One of the key challenges in this field is the lack of consistency in how WLB is defined and measured across studies. For instance, Kalliath and Brough (2008) describe WLB as an individual's perception that their work and non-work roles are compatible and mutually supportive, aligned with their current life goals. Meanwhile,

the Canadian Department of Labor, as cited by Waters and Bardoel (2006), defines WLB as a personally defined and self-directed state of wellbeing that enables individuals to manage responsibilities at work, home, and in the community without experiencing undue stress or negative consequences, while supporting their physical, emotional, and social health.

Figure 2 presents a flowchart outlining the framework used for the literature review, highlighting the key factors explored throughout this study. The individual dimensions influencing work-life balance (WLB) encompass various factors, including demographic attributes, personal and family demands, the level of family support, and an individual's coping capacity.

Individual factors

Name of the Journal/Article/web source	No. of Papers/Articles	2000 to 2004	2005 to 2009	2010 to 2014	2015 to 2019	2020 to 2024
The International Journal of Human Resource Management	5	1			2	2
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	3	2				2
Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources	3			2		1
Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health	3			2	1	1
NIMB Journal of Management	4				1	3
Newspaper articles	5				2	3
Web sources Articles	8	5			2	3
others	68	3	7	4	14	36
Total	99	11	7	8	22	51

Table-1 Articles/Journal/Web Source Details

Demographic Variables and WLB:

WLB outcomes often differ significantly across demographic lines (Waters & Bardoel, 2006). Research highlights notable variations based on age (Powell et al., 2019), gender (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2020), and marital status (Powell et al., 2019). A marked increase in women's workforce participation has brought more attention to WLB issues, particularly for dual-career couples (Jenkins & Harvey, 2019; Crawford et al., 2019). While extensive research has been conducted in sectors such as IT, IT-enabled services, banking, education, and women's employment, fewer studies focus on employees in service industries like hospitality, healthcare, and middle management. Even more limited are studies involving professionals such as police officers, military personnel, CEOs, researchers, legal professionals, journalists, and those in transportation.

Personal Demands and WLB:

Heavy workloads and intense family obligations can deteriorate an individual's physical, mental, and emotional health (Jensen & Knudsen, 2017), leading to absenteeism and decreased productivity—both of which are concerns for employers (Jackson & Fransman, 2018).

Family Demands and WLB:

Balancing work and personal life becomes even more difficult when employees spend significant time commuting or juggling responsibilities at home and work (Denstadli et al., 2017). In nuclear families, dual-income couples often struggle to maintain balance without domestic support (Dumas & Perry-Smith, 2018; Srinivasan & Sulur Nachimuthu, 2021). In contrast, those living in joint families may face the added challenge of elder care responsibilities (Powell et al., 2019). Overall,

increased family obligations have been found to negatively influence WLB (Haar et al., 2019). IITian from Bengaluru has a romantic solution to work-life balance problem: 'Marry your colleague' (The EconomicsTimes:Panache(23 Mar 2025))

Family Support and WLB:

Support from family members, particularly spouses, plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Dumas & Perry-Smith, 2018). For dual-career couples with dependent responsibilities, strong family backing significantly enhances their ability to manage both domains effectively (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014).

Individual Capacity and WLB:

Even when organizations offer supportive WLB policies, employees may still face challenges in achieving balance (Dave & Purohit, 2016). Research shows that personal coping mechanisms can play a key role in promoting overall well-being (Zheng et al., 2016). Attributes such as emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and effective stress management strategies have been positively linked to improved WLB (Kiburz et al., 2017). These findings emphasize the importance of enhancing individuals' personal resources to help them navigate work and life more effectively.

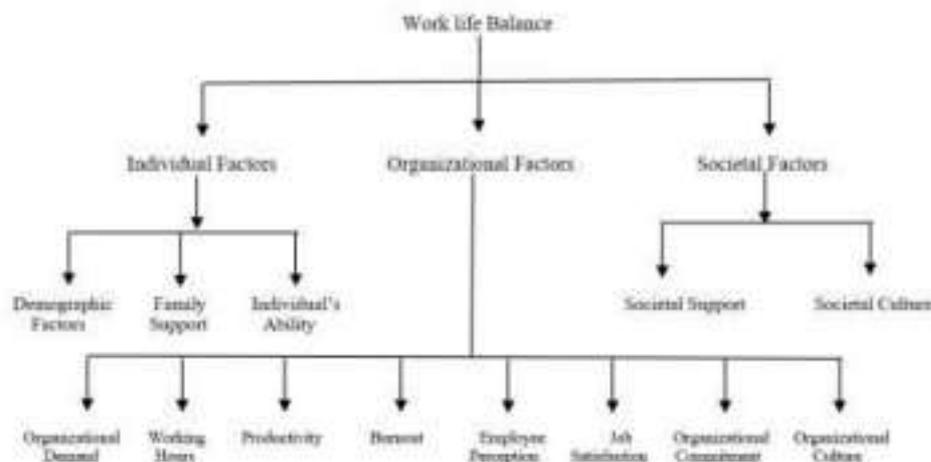


Figure 2: Framework of Work Life Balance

Organizational Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance

Organizational factors refer to the structural and policy-oriented elements that shape how organizations manage employees and their work-life dynamics (Kar & Misra, 2013). This section explores various organizational influences on employees' work-life balance (WLB).

Work-Life Balance and Organizational Policies

Organizations that implement supportive work-life policies significantly contribute to better WLB for their employees (Jenkins & Harvey, 2019). Policies such as flexible working hours, remote work

options, and on-site childcare have been positively linked to employee satisfaction, although such benefits are not uniformly available across industries, especially in the IT sector (Berg et al., 2003; Downes & Koekemoer, 2012). Industry-specific variations in policy offerings are evident (Galea et al., 2014). People should listen to their bodies and recognise when they need rest as prolonged overwork can lead to burnout and reduced efficiency, former WHO chief scientist and health ministry advisor Soumya Swaminathan has said. While intense work for short periods is possible, as seen during Covid-19, it is not sustainable in the long run, she told PTI in an interview. Swaminathan stressed that productivity depends more on work quality than hours spent. (India News-Business Standard (9 Mar 2025). Indians must work hard, whether it's 80 or 90 hours a week: Amitabh Kant Shark Tank's Namita Thapar shares bold parenting advice: If you are working 70 hours a week, don't get married (The Economics Times (24 Mar 2025))

Work-Life Balance and Job Demands

Organizations often require employees to handle multiple responsibilities simultaneously, leading to role overload and stress (Bacharach et al., 1991). Increased workloads and tight deadlines can significantly undermine employees' ability to balance work and personal life (Allan et al., 1999; Jenkins & Harvey, 2019). High job demands are a known predictor of poor WLB (Haar et al., 2019).

Working Hours and Personal Time

Extended work hours tend to encroach on personal time, often leaving employees with limited opportunities for rest and family engagement (Haar et al., 2019). As a result, important areas of personal life may suffer, leading to dissatisfaction and poor quality of life (Hughes et al., 2018; Jenkins & Harvey, 2019).

Productivity and Work-Life Synergy

Organizations that design their teams and work systems with family-friendly practices in mind often see improved productivity (Johari et al., 2018). When WLB is enhanced, employees are generally more productive and committed (Jackson & Fransman, 2018). Does work-life balance exist in healthcare industry? Doctors say this Working in the healthcare industry is a fulfilling career path for many people, while it is only known for long work hours, demanding schedules, and zero work-life balance. (mint 18 may 2023-Alka Jain Published)

Burnout and Psychological Stress

Work exhaustion, commonly known as burnout, has a major impact on WLB. Burnout arises from prolonged job stress and can severely diminish both personal well-being and work performance (Ratlif, 1988; Jones et al., 2019). Increased pressures from work and life demands contribute to this condition. About 52 per cent of employees experience burnout due to poor work-life balance, showed a survey conducted in five states in India by New York-based business process management player Vertex Group. The insights uncover what workers desire from their workspace, highlighting a growing demand for flexible working hours and a healthier balance between personal and professional duties, it said. The survey gathered insights from over 1,500 working individuals across five states: Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh. The survey also revealed that over 23 per cent of employees work beyond the regular working hours. It said, the mental well being of employees is crucial for the organisation's growth and the recent untimely passing of several business leaders and employees due to work-related stress highlights the urgent need to prioritise health in high-stress

occupations.(India News-Business Standard(12 Mar 2025)

Role of Support Systems

Support from supervisors, peers, and leadership significantly influences how employees manage work and life responsibilities (Ehrhardt & Ragins, 2019; Yadav & Sharma, 2021). Organizations that foster family-supportive environments help employees achieve better WLB (Haar & Roche, 2010). Despite ongoing efforts by Indian corporations and regulatory bodies to improve gender diversity, women continue to hold just 19 per cent of C-suite roles in India, according to a study conducted by Avtar, a workplace culture consulting firm. One of the primary obstacles hindering women's progress to leadership positions is the challenge of work-life integration, cited by approximately 60 per cent of respondents in the study. For this to change, companies would need to focus on creating an environment that supports women's long-term career growth, adds the study cited in The Times of India report. "Our research reveals that multiple factors continue to limit the advancement of women to the C-suite. Given the systemic barriers that affect women in India more acutely, an effective approach to bridge the gender gap is through targeted diversity-driven executive searches. These searches offer customised and comprehensive strategies to ensure an equitable recruitment and advancement process," Saundarya Rajesh, Founder-President of the Avtar Group, told TOI.(India News-Business Standard(3 Feb 2025)

Employee Perceptions

An employee's perception of their workplace, including leadership, job roles, and environment, plays a crucial role in shaping their WLB (Fontinha et al., 2019). Awareness of available WLB policies is vital for employees to benefit from them (Matthews et al., 2014). Perceptions vary according to individual background and needs (Kiburz et al., 2017).

Job Autonomy and Flexibility

Having control over one's work and schedule—termed job autonomy—can greatly aid in managing work-life demands (Bailey, 1993). Flexibility in work arrangements enhances employees' ability to juggle professional and personal roles effectively (Ahuja & Thatcher, 2005; Johari et al., 2018).

Job Satisfaction

A fulfilling work environment boosts job satisfaction, which in turn promotes higher employee retention and productivity (Brough et al., 2014). A strong positive relationship exists between WLB and job satisfaction (Jackson & Fransman, 2018; Singh et al., 2020; Yadav & Sharma, 2021).

Organizational Commitment

Work-life policies can foster a sense of loyalty and commitment among employees. When organizations support WLB, employees reciprocate with stronger organizational commitment (Emre & De Spiegeleare, 2019; Callan, 2008). Alvesson (2002) frames this as a reciprocal social relationship.

Utilization of WLB Policies

Although WLB policies may exist, their actual use remains limited due to various organizational barriers (Waters & Bardoel, 2006; Adame-Sánchez et al., 2018). Practical implementation often lags behind policy development.

Organizational Culture

Culture plays a pivotal role in determining how comfortable employees feel using WLB policies. Many fear negative consequences, such as poor performance reviews or limited career growth, if they take advantage of these benefits (Bourdeau et al., 2019; Dave & Purohit, 2016). Unsupportive environments, lack of communication, and inadequate managerial backing further hinder policy use (Fontinha et al., 2017; Jenkins & Harvey, 2019). Consequently, some organizations face issues like reduced morale and work-family conflict (Alexandra, 2014). Despite good intentions, the inconsistent application of WLB initiatives reveals a more complex reality (Perrigino et al., 2018).

Societal Influences on Work-Life Balance

Global and local societal transformations have significantly influenced individual lifestyles. The evolution of a tech-driven world, coupled with demographic changes, has led to a more diverse workforce. As a result, the lines between professional responsibilities and personal life have become increasingly blurred (Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

Work-Life Balance and Societal Expectations

As social beings, individuals are often expected to engage in cultural, familial, and communal activities. However, the growing demands of the workplace have reduced employees' participation in social functions. Many struggle to fulfill the expectations of family, friends, and society due to heavy workloads and time constraints. These societal pressures have a measurable impact on work-life balance (Mushfiqur et al., 2018).

Work-Life Balance and Cultural Norms

Cultural frameworks within society play a vital role in shaping the adoption and success of work-life policies. Cultural dimensions such as collectivism, hierarchical power structures, and traditional gender roles significantly affect how employees perceive and utilize these policies (Brown et al., 2019). In particular, women often find their pursuit of a balanced life hindered by deeply rooted patriarchal values prevalent in many cultures (Mushfiqur et al., 2018). As Indian CEOs continue to debate long work hours and hybrid policies, a small IT firm in Japan is redefining office culture — one drink at a time. Trust Ring Co, an Osaka-based IT company, believes that a little fun can go a long way in keeping employees happy. Forget the usual perks like gym memberships or meal vouchers — this company is serving free alcohol during work hours and even giving staff time to recover from hangovers, according to a report by Oddity Central. (India News-Business Standard(12 Feb 2025)

Work-Life Balance and Community Support

Support from peers, neighbors, and the broader community contributes positively to an individual's ability to manage work and personal life (Mushfiqur et al., 2018). Friends, in particular, can offer fresh perspectives and emotional support, aiding in decision-making and stress relief (Dhanya & Kinslin, 2016). Community encouragement and involvement act as essential buffers, enhancing overall well-being and promoting healthier work-life integration (Phillips et al., 2016).

Research gap

1. Individual Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance

An analysis of existing literature reveals several unexplored areas concerning individual

demographic factors and their influence on work-life balance:

- There is a noticeable gap in research regarding how an employee's educational background and professional experience affect their ability to maintain WLB.
- Similarly, the potential connection between an individual's income level and their work-life balance has not been thoroughly investigated.
- Another overlooked area is the role of domestic support, such as household help, in enabling individuals to manage their work and personal lives more effectively.

Furthermore, most of the existing studies on WLB have been conducted in developed nations including the United States, United Kingdom, various European countries, and Australia. There is a distinct lack of research focusing on the experiences of employees in developing or underdeveloped nations, where cultural and economic factors may yield different insights.

In addition, there is limited research on WLB among workers in essential service sectors such as emergency responders (firefighters, police), public transportation (drivers, railway staff), defence personnel, aviation professionals (pilots, cabin crew), utility workers (power supply departments), and those employed in informal or unorganized sectors. These groups often face unique challenges that warrant dedicated exploration.

2. Work-Life Balance and Individual Capability

A review of existing literature indicates that research focusing on an individual's personal capacity to manage work and life responsibilities is relatively scarce. While organizational policies play a role in enhancing WLB, the individual's own strategies and coping mechanisms are equally—if not more—important and deserve deeper exploration. Research suggests that when personal abilities are aligned with supportive workplace policies, employees tend to experience better work-life balance. However, most studies have concentrated on institutional practices, overlooking the impact of personal approaches and self-management skills. Kiburz et al. (2017) highlighted a clear gap in work-family research, pointing to the lack of experimental and intervention-based studies. To date, very few empirical investigations have tested the effectiveness of individual strategies in achieving work-life balance, underscoring the need for more targeted, evidence-based research in this area.

3. Organizational Culture and Psychological Climate

There remains a significant need for research into how organizational culture and psychological climate affect the utilization of work-life balance policies. Specifically, the influence of an organization's internal environment on the factors that shape and predict WLB has not been sufficiently examined. Understanding how employees perceive their workplace climate could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and adoption of WLB initiatives.

4. Societal Factors and Cultural Influence

The role of societal factors in shaping work-life balance has received limited attention in academic literature. In particular, the broader influence of cultural elements—such as societal beliefs, traditional norms, and value systems—on individuals' ability to balance work and personal life remains largely unexplored. These cultural dynamics can significantly impact how WLB is perceived, practiced, and supported across different communities and regions.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to carry out a systematic review to identify existing research gaps and suggest directions for future investigation in the field of work-life balance (WLB). To achieve this, scholarly literature on WLB published between 2000 and 2024 was thoroughly examined. A total of 99 peer reviewed research articles were selected from reputable indexing sources such as Scopus, Web of Science, articles and journals such as Elsevier, Emerald Insight, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Sage, as

well as relevant newspaper articles, with only English-language publications included. The review provided an in-depth overview of how the concept of WLB has evolved over time and highlighted key theoretical frameworks and definitions. Additionally, it explored the various factors associated with WLB, offering detailed insights into its relationship with organizational, individual, and societal variables. Based on this structured analysis and categorization of existing studies, several gaps in the literature were identified. These findings serve as a foundation for proposing future research directions aimed at enriching the understanding of WLB and its multifaceted dimensions.

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