
Work stress and work life balance: a study of working professionals of the IT sector

Poonam Kaushal

Balaji Institute of Modern Management,
Sri Balaji Society,
Off Mumbai-Banglore Bypass,
Tathawade, Pune-411033, India
Email: poonamkaushal47@gmail.com

Abstract: Organisation profitability, employees' productivity and their retention will be at risk unless the employees are not living a stress free life. Most of the life incidents encountered by employees that cause stress are related to the workplace. Thus, the present study seeks to identify the various workplace factors that cause stress and their relationship with work life balance of IT working professionals. The information was collected from 372 respondents employed in Chandigarh, Bangalore and Pune cities of India. The results of Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between workplace factors (causing stress) and work life balance of IT working professionals. By performing a regression analysis, the study found work support as the most influential factor in explaining the work life balance of IT professionals. T-test results also revealed that male respondents were experiencing less work's ambiguity, less work overload, more variation in task, high work schedule flexibility and enjoy a higher level of overall work life balance.

Keywords: work life balance; work stress; workplace related factors.

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Biographical notes: Poonam Kaushal is an Assistant Professor in Balaji Institute of Modern Management, Sri Balaji Society, Pune. Previously, she worked as an Assistant Professor in Bahra University, Wagnaghat, Solan (H.P). Dr. Kaushal is UGC NET qualified and has completed her PhD in Human Resource Management. She has done her MBA in Human Resource Management and Marketing Management. Her areas of interest are human resource management, organisation behaviour and industrial relations.

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1 Introduction

The callous business setting has made the organisations to extract more from the employees. Organisations are competing for a talent who can show high performance and high competence in the workplace. The pressure of work on employees has been intensifying over the last few decades, which leads to them to overwork in order to achieve things faster, that leads to work/life balance being disturbed and the level of stress gets increased (Walia and Narang, 2015). Stress as defined by Palmer (1989) is the psychological, physiological and behavioural reaction of an individual when a lack of balance is perceived between the demands and the ability to deal with these demands. High levels of stress are troubling because employees who experience stress are probably seeking potentially damaging coping strategies that further hinder organisational functioning (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970) and personal life of employees. Thus, it is becoming an increasingly worrying issue for employers. The previous researchers also revealed that work stress constitutes an elusive emotional cost to employee wellbeing and sets a considerable financial burden on organisational performance (as cited in Kala et al., 2017). As a consequence, now one of the critical roles of organisations is to successfully strike a balance between work and family/personal life balance of its employees by redesigning the work structure.

Work life balance is a term used to express a person's understanding of how much he/she is experiencing positive relationships between the work and family roles, where the relationships are viewed as compatible and at equilibrium with each other (Kossek and Lambert, 2005). David et al. (2012) define work life balance as "a self defined, self determined state of well being that a person can reach or can set as a goal that allows them to manage effectively the multiple responsibilities at work, at home and community." Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) characterised work-family conflict as "a type of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures of the work and family domains are mutually incongruent in some respect." There are two directions of work-family interference, namely, work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC). Work family conflict occurs when work role expectations interfere with family role expectations and family work conflict occurs when family role expectations interfere with work role expectations. Thus, it can be stated that work life balance is a state of balance in which an individual is managing the demands of work roles and personal roles successfully. Each domain (work domain and family domain) has a different set of demands and when demands of both domains are not compatible, multiple problems can arise and these problems create a lot of stress.

In Indian context, the issue of work-life balance and stress management has become a hot topic, mainly due to the emergence of VUCA world. The Economic Times (2018) revealed that the stress levels among Indian employees are rising owing to growing uncertainty in jobs in a profoundly disruptive working environment as well as increasing tension in personal lives. The newspaper further reported that the increasing stress has led to a surge in the number of employees who are suffering from depression and are at high risk of suicide. As a consequence, organisations experience an increasing challenge of managing with a workforce who are not only personally depressed, but may also

adversely impact the performance of their organisations. Stress is found in almost all the professions, and it's the fact that every job has its own difficulty and at times the job profile itself may be stressful, the highly influenced are the working professionals of IT industry who are very target obsessed, exceptionally forced on results, and are pressed both physically and psychologically to the maximum on their roles and loads. Thus, keeping these facts in view, the present study focuses on identifying the various workplace factors that can cause stress and their impact on work life balance of IT professionals.

2 Literature review

Since mid 20th century, work life balance issues and stress problems have become a focal point of research among researchers and academicians. A number of studies have been carried out that explored the relationship between various workplace factors and work stress. Studies also have explored the relationship between workplace stress and work life balance/work family conflict of employees. Greenhaus et al. (1989) reported that work role stressors (role conflict and role ambiguity) accounted for a significant portion of the variance in time-based and strain-based work-family conflict for both men and women. Work ambiguity was found as a more potent source of work-family conflict for men than for women. In addition, task characteristics (autonomy and complexity) were found to be associated with work-family conflict and were more strongly related for women than for men. Role overload was the most consistent predictor of both forms of work-family conflict (Mohamad et al., 2016). Yongkang et al. (2014) in their investigation found that role ambiguity has a noteworthy impact on job anxiety and job stress; while role conflict and role overload have a significant impact on time pressure, job anxiety and job stress. They concluded that factors viz. role ambiguity, role conflict and role overload resulted in overall job stress among Chinese employees, further adding, they found that female employees experienced more psychological stress and anxiety than their male counterparts. Kim and Ling (2001) in their study found that the number of hours worked, work stressors (role conflict and worries about the financial health of the business) and work schedule inflexibility were negatively related to work-life balance. Kaushal and Parmar (2018) found work support and work role overload as the most influential factors in explaining the work life balance of police personnel. Kaushal and Parmar (2019b) further reported a significant correlation between work-life balance and work autonomy and work ambiguity. They further argued that employees with high work autonomy and clearer about duties and responsibilities associated with their work, showed work-family conflict and higher overall work-life balance. A study conducted by Rao and Chandraiah (2012) revealed that a combination of high demands in job and a low amount of control over the work were the workplace factors that cause stress among employees.

Voydanoff (2004) studied the effects of work demands and resources on WFC. The study revealed that the organisational support (supportive organisational culture and supervisor work-family support) was negatively associated with a FC and positively associated with work life balance. Thomas and Ganster (1995) analysed that supportive practices, particularly flexible scheduling and supportive supervisors had direct positive effects on employee perceptions of control over work and family matters. Control perceptions, thus, were related to lower levels of WFC, job stress and job dissatisfaction. Schirmer and Lopez (2001) studied the effects of supervisor support on work-related

stress in a sample of employees and identified that the perception of support from supervisors significantly reduced reported levels of psychological strain among employees. Sharma and Parmar (2015) in their study on doctors and nurses have found a negative relationship between social support (support from supervisors, colleagues and spouse) and work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work, and positive relationship between work support and the overall work life balance.

According to Bird (2006) and Thriveni and Rama (2012) maintaining a balance between work and family life is commonly more challenging for female employees than for their male counterparts as they are more responsible for family than their male counterpart. Long working hours and caring responsibilities do indeed affect work–life balance of married employees than single men and women who are least likely bothered about long working hours (Eikhof et al., 2007). Mjoli et al. (2013) observed that demographic factors, namely, age, number of children and age of the youngest child were to be positively correlated to work-family conflict. Marital status was found not to be significantly correlated to work-family conflict. Delina and Raya (2013) in their study revealed that married working women find it very challenging to balance their work and personal life irrespective of the age group they belong to, the number of children they have, their spouse’s profession and the industry they are into.

3 Research gap

In today’s VUCA environment, IT industry has emerged as a booming sector and becomes the backbone of Indian economic growth. The IT industry provides vital services to the masses belonging to the various areas of the Indian economy. But the factors of VUCA environment, viz. volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity inherent in today’s business is ‘new phenomena’ and it is intensely changing how organisations do business and how business leaders lead (Mishra and Joshi, 2016). The skills and knowledge employees needed to help their organisations thrive are no longer sufficient. An organisation needs to have employees who are passionate about their work and strive to take their organisation to greater heights. Having a workforce with a balanced life is important as it helps organisations to reap benefits of sustainability, productivity and increased efficacy. But in the current 24/7economy, the work extends beyond the usual working hours. Employees are complaining that the line between work and non work time has become blurred, which is creating personal conflict, stress and causing health issues (Robbins et al., 2009). Organisations also have observed that their employees find work demands get in the way of their non-work commitments thereby resulting in negative fall outs in the work environment. Organisations also recognise the need to address work-life balance issues proactively. In an effort to resolve these issues, it is increasingly vital to identify the factors causing job stress and hindering with personal life of employees. Factors of the work itself, namely working hours, work pressure, work ambiguity, lack of work autonomy and work support etc. can be stressful. Thus, keeping these facts in mind, the present study made an endeavour to contribute to the work life balance literature by identifying the various workplace factors causing stress and their relationship with work life balance of IT working professionals.

Further, an attempt has been made to identify the most significant factor affecting the work life balance of IT working professionals.

4 Objectives

- To study the association between stress-related workplace factors and work life balance of working professionals of IT sector.
- To find out the most significant stress-related workplace factor that affects the work life balance of working professionals of IT sector.
- To study the difference in work stress-related issues among working professionals of IT sector on a gender basis.

5 Hypothesis

- H1 There will be a significant positive relationship between task variety and work life balance of working professionals of IT sector.
- H2 There will be a significant positive relationship between work autonomy and work life balance of working professionals of IT sector.
- H3 There will be a significant negative relationship between work ambiguity and work life balance of working professionals of IT sector
- H4 There will be a significant positive relationship between work support and work life balance of working professionals of IT sector.
- H5 There will be a significant negative relationship between work role overload and work life balance working professionals of IT sector
- H6 There will be a significant positive relationship between work schedule flexibility and work life balance working professionals of IT sector.
- H7 There will be a difference in work stress related issues among working professionals of IT sector on a gender basis.

6 Research design

The present study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The data examined is cross-sectional in nature, collected from 372 working professionals employed in various IT companies of Chandigarh, Bangalore and Pune cities. Well organised questionnaires were distributed among 600 respondents on the convenience and judgment basis. Out of 600 respondents, 400 respondents returned questionnaires. Out of these 400 questionnaires returned, 28 questionnaires were excluded due to unfinished reasons and 372 questionnaires were considered for the investigative purpose, thus yielding a response rate of 62%. Various statistical tools viz. Pearson correlation coefficient, t-test and regression analysis were used with the help of SPSS 21 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Different reflective instruments/scales (standardised) were used (as listed in Table 1) to collect the required information. Negative statements were reverse coded.

Table 1 Instruments used and reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficients)

<i>S. no.</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Instruments</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Reliability (Cronbach alpha values)</i>
1.	Work life balance (WLBT)	Hyman (2005)	15	.84
2.	Task variety	Van Valdhoven and Meijman (1994)	6	.76
3.	Work ambiguity	Van Valdhoven and Meijman (1994)	5	.70
4.	Work autonomy	Van Valdhoven and Meijman (1994)	11	.90
5.	Work schedule flexibility	Staines and Pleck (1986)	2	.73
6.	Work support	Caplan et al. (1975)	8	.90
7.	Work role overload	Beehr et al. (1976)	3	.70

7 Results

As per descriptive statistics, 73.6% of the working professionals were male and 26.4% were female. 67.8% of respondents were married and 32.2% were single. In terms of age, the average age of the working professionals was 37.35 with standard deviation 7.93.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of IT working professionals

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Marital status</i>		<i>Age</i>		
<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Mean</i>
299(80.4)	73(19.6)	180(48.4)	192(51.6)	23	54	32.88

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows percentages.

7.1 Work life balance and workplace factors causing stress

In an attempt to find out the association between workplace factors (related to stress) and work life balance, Pearson correlation coefficient was employed. The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that task variety ($r = .250^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), work autonomy ($r = .275^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), work ambiguity ($r = .127^{*}$, $p < 0.01$), work schedule flexibility ($r = .213^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and work support ($r = .379^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) showed a positive and significant association with work life balance. Work role overload ($r = -.290^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) was found significantly and negatively correlated with work life balance. All the variables identified in the study were correlated in the expected direction with work life balance. Hence, the hypotheses, viz. H1, H2, H3, H4, H5 to H6 are accepted.

Although, the results of correlations signified potential tendencies of considerable effects of workplace factors on work life balance of respondents, more rigorous test of hypotheses were conducted using multiple regression analysis. This technique was used to frame a trimmed model that determined the specific independent variables that

contributed significantly towards the prediction of the dependent variable. All the six variables were entered together to determine the most economical model with the highest variance explained. As given in Table 4, the final model retained all six variables: work autonomy, work ambiguity, task variety, work schedule flexibility, work support and work role overload. The R^2 of work life balance as dependent was .483 (see Table 4) and Adjusted R^2 was .472 ($F = 38.191, p < 0.05$) which revealed that approx. 48% of the variation in work life balance of the respondents could be explained by all the six variables combined. The significant F ratio ($F = 38.191, p < 0.05$) indicates that the results of the regression model could have hardly occurred by chance. Hence, the hypotheses 1 to 6 are accepted.

Table 3 Association between workplace factors (causing work stress) and work life balance

<i>Workplace factors</i>	<i>Work life balance</i>
Task variety	.250**
Work ambiguity	.127*
Work autonomy	.271**
Work schedule flexibility	.213**
Work support	.379**
Work role overload	-.290**

Notes: **Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 Multiple regression analysis: predicting work life balance

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Standardised coefficients</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Collinearity statistics</i>	
	<i>Beta</i>				<i>Tolerance</i>	<i>VIF</i>
Work autonomy	.185		4.044	.000	.942	1.061
Work ambiguity	.133		2.973	.003	.984	1.016
Work support	.276		5.961	.000	.919	1.088
Task variety	.181		4.030	.000	.971	1.030
Work schedule flexibility	.021		.389	.080	.752	1.533
Work role overload	-.215		-3.871	.000	.737	1.570
<i>Model summary</i>						
<i>Model 1</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R square</i>	<i>Adjusted R square</i>	<i>Std. error of the estimate</i>		
	.632	.483	.472	10.866		
<i>ANOVA</i>						
	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	
Regression	27,050.700	6	4,508.45	38.191	.001	
Residual	43,099.225	365	118.080			
Total	70,149.925	371				

Further, by considering standardised coefficients of each of the independent variables, the impact of each variable on the dependent variable was assessed. ‘Work support’ with standardised coefficient, $\beta = .276$ was found the most significant variable in justifying the

work life balance of the respondents. ‘Work role overload’ ($\beta = -.215$), ‘Work autonomy’ ($\beta = .186$), ‘Task variety’ ($\beta = .181$), ‘Work ambiguity’ ($\beta = .133$) and ‘Work schedule flexibility’ ($\beta = .021$) followed the importance. No multicollinearity was found among independent factors as VIF values fall between 1.570 and 1.016. In addition, the relationship of factors was consistent with the prior expectations.

7.2 Workplace stress related issues among male and female respondents

The independent samples t-test was employed to examine the differences in work related issues among respondents on the gender basis. The results (Table 6) interpreted no significant differences in work autonomy, work role overload and work support among male and female respondents. However, significant differences were observed in work ambiguity, task variety, work schedule flexibility and work life balance of male and female respondents. The study revealed that as compared to female (Mean = 9.12), male respondents (M = 10.52) had less work ambiguity (high mean indicates less ambiguity) and higher work life balance. The study further revealed that female respondents found less variety in their work (M = 13.34) and less flexibility in their work schedule (M = 5.05) as compared to male respondents (M = 14.52 and M = 5.97 respectively).

Table 6 Gender differences: independent sample t-test

	<i>Males</i>			<i>Females</i>			<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Work life balance	299	59.22	12.57	73	51.81	11.73	370	4.22	.011
Work autonomy	299	22.65	8.929	73	21.10	9.540	370	1.317	.189
Work ambiguity	299	10.52	3.71	73	9.12	3.63	370	2.890	.004
Task variety	299	14.52	3.9	73	13.34	4.37	370	2.217	.027
Work schedule flexibility	299	5.97	2.72	73	5.05	1.95	370	3.442	.001
Work support	299	23.97	6.50	73	22.44	6.74	370	1.773	.077
Work role overload	299	9.20	2.924	73	10.41	2.971	370	3.151	.054

8 Conclusions and discussion

The main objective of the present study was to identify the workplace variables causing stress and their relationship with work life balance of working professionals of IT sector. On the basis of results, it can be concluded that all the selected work related variables viz. work autonomy, work ambiguity, task variety, work schedule flexibility, work support and work role overload are associated with work life balance of respondents in the expected direction. As cited in Yongkang et al. (2014) and Kahn et al. (1992) in their study found role ambiguity, role conflict and role overload closely associated with low work satisfaction, low trust, low self-confidence and high level of individual stress. Thus, it can be concluded that the employees who have the freedom to plan and execute their work tend to have high work life balance as compared to those who enjoy less autonomy. A significant correlation between work life balance and work ambiguity imply that more

the employee is clear about duties and responsibilities associated with their work, the higher is the work life balance. Greenhaus et al. (1987) also reported a positive relationship between role ambiguity and work-family, i.e. lesser the role ambiguity lesser will be the work- family conflict and higher will be the work life balance. Role ambiguity occurs when individuals lack a clear definition of their role expectations and the procedures/methods to complete their job tasks. In order to reduce ambiguity, work should be structured to a certain extent to ensure that it is performed effectively and helping to contribute to a satisfying and rewarding experience for the worker (Greene, 1989). Greater role clarity can help to lower the negative work behaviours. The study further found a positive and significant correlation between task variety and work life balance, implying that higher skill level at workplace was associated with an increase in daily levels of work family facilitation. From this result, it can be concluded that IT professionals like job challenges that require a variety of skills that enrich and enlarge the job and reduce the stress level caused by monotonous job. Hunnur et al. (2014) found work role overload as a key variable for causing stress among employees. IT professionals entails heavy workload in the form of working long hours, constantly working under time pressures, having to work unsociable hours, having to update their knowledge constantly, it can be concluded that work overload is a stronger predictor of work life balance. The study showed work support as the most influential work related variable affecting the work life balance of respondents. Support from work sources viz. supervisor support and co-worker act as a buffer, helpful in coping stress and balancing life. The positive relationship between work support and work life balance could be explained in terms of better understanding of supervisors and co-workers about the job tasks, problems and challenges unique to the work environment that outside the workplace do not have. This places them in a better position to provide appropriate support.

In independent sample t-test, significant differences were observed in work ambiguity, task variety, work schedule flexibility and work life balance of male and female respondents. The study found that as compared to female, male respondents had less work's ambiguity (high mean indicates less ambiguity) and higher work life balance. The study further revealed that female respondents found less flexibility in their work schedule as compared to male respondents. Male more often use flexitime, perhaps to give them increased flexibility and control over work while retaining full-time hours and associated benefits including pay. Reduced hours may be used to a greater degree of choice by younger men (combined with study) or by older men as part-retirement (Thomson, 2008). In contrast, women more often reduce hours using part-time, or less frequently job-share, as a result of their greater household contribution. This reflects the practical challenges for women, who often combine their commute with the 'school-run' and other household tasks, potentially limiting the use, and benefits, of family work arrangements (FWA).

9 Implications

On the basis of the present study, it can be stated that workplace stress is the exterminator of the work-life balance. Therefore, organisations should realise these workplace factors causing stress and try to prevent or eliminate these factors in order to lessen stress of their employees. The organisations should try to provide them technology based solutions in

order to facilitate work from home, cap on overtime, flexible working hours, job sharing, etc. The existing literature on work stress and work life balance also indicates that organisations can help individuals and families to achieve a balance between their work, family and life commitments by introducing work life programs and policies which benefit both employees and organisations. Thomas and Ganster (1995) in their study reported that family-supportive work policies and practices might give significant benefits in terms of employee attitude and well being. Work-life balance may vary at different stages in the life cycle of an individual's career life. Hence organisations are suggested to have flexible and open-minded approach for ensuring the right balance. Approaches like providing a pleasant atmosphere at workplace where employees can interact informally; creating a casual space for chatting and unwinding with colleagues' and seniors would help in building the transparency within the organisation and let employees the freedom to voice their views (Kaushal and Parmar, 2018). Further Sergerstrom et al. (2012) also has reported that it is the quality of the relationship (e.g. warm, friendly, caring and supportive) and support from supervisors and colleagues that buffer the negative impacts of work-related stressors. Legislation has also need to interfere with the requirements of working employees. Its provisions have to establish a clear set of rules for both employees and employers in negotiating new work arrangements which are mutually helpful and supporting.

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