# WOMEN RECLAIMING CONTROL: A LITERATURE ANALYSIS PAPER

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## ABSTRACT

*Work-life balance is a fundamental concept that affects women globally and locally. Literature revealed that an effective work-life balance has substantial effect on women's wellbeing, organizations' welfare, strengthening family ties and altering society's outlook on working women. It also discussed different factors that play a role in shaping the balance across home and work domains such as organizational factors, culture & society, and women's self-perception. The study was designed to identify strategies to achieve work-life balance among working women by reviewing and analyzing the previous literature in the world, especially in Bahrain and the GCC region. The study concluded that women happiness is a construct of happy family, fulfilled personal life and job satisfaction as each of these elements were significantly related. The most substantial factors that drive to work-life imbalance are heavy workload, inflexible working schedule, gender inequality and inconsiderate manager of his employees' personal and family matters. Accordingly, work-life balance is significant to women happiness and attaining work-life balance is a twofold obligation divided equally between employees and their organizations. The main strategies for enabling work-life balance are concerned with women changing their behavior and perspective across different aspects of their lives and the support of organizations mainly in terms of introducing and earnestly implanting family-friendly work policies.*

**Keywords:** Women; Working women; Work-life balance; Bahrain.

## INTRODUCTION

Women nowadays take on multiple roles due to changes in economic, social, and educational factors. Today, they are expected to perform these various roles simultaneously, a devoted mother, a caring wife and a committed employee. This has placed an enormous pressure on them as they attempt to balance their personal/family life and work life (Reddy et al., 2010). According to a survey done by the Mental Health Foundation in Britain, 42% of women expressed their unhappiness which was the result of attempting to balance their various life roles (2003). Women in our day are pressurized to choose between their work and family, and the fact that families have become dual-career oriented, it has increased the pressure on women to choose family over work rather than motivating them to acquire both in chorus. Women are pleased and content when they feel that they can have both career and family simultaneously (Kulaga, 2014),

yet it is hard enough for women to uphold both their family life and work life; when women are at home, they feel guilty for not being in the office and on the other hand when they are in the office they feel guilty for not being at home taking care of their family. A healthy work-life balance has several advantages for women, their families and the organizations they work for. It increases the personal satisfaction and well-being of women at home and at work and it enriches their relationship with their family and friends (Kulaga, 2014).

Although holding more than one role in life can be hectic and stressful especially for women, it is also a valuable source for continuous learning and grasping skills. They can apply such skills and experience in their home, at work and across different aspect of their lives (Wessels, 2012). Currently, many employers think twice when considering hiring women, as some believe that women are more prone to absenteeism and put less effort in work due to their responsibilities at home. However, organizations that have mothers among their employees are at an advantage as they apply their motherhood management experience at work. In a research done in 2003 at Wellesley College in USA; 20% of respondents cited that leadership resembles motherhood on many levels. This shows that women are great resources for companies to hire, and not a cost as some view them to be. Organizations are paying close attention to ensure that their employees are engaged enough, since such employees are happy, satisfied, and energetic. As a result, they tend to enjoy work. Once an organization has enough employees that love their jobs, they can increase their financial returns and produce better results due to their employees' productivity and high performance. However, getting employees to be engaged is challenging. One of the main factors that contribute to that is work-life balance. Those who are happy at home can spend quality time with their family and friends are in a better mood at work and perform better. At the same time, people who are highly engaged at work have a better work-life balance. The reason behind that is as employees are happy at work and have a positive mood, they can perform better at work and hence their positivity spills over to their home environment (Wessels, 2012; Ramaano, 2021). Thus, in a nutshell, work-life balance enables a smooth and happy environment at home and work.

## CONCEPT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Employed women with a multitude of responsibilities are often preoccupied with looking after their children and the elder family members, managing growing job demands, dealing with management and coping with the organizational culture, all of which are some of the main problems for women when managing their work-life balance (Pocock et al., 2010). Women engage in significantly more childcare and housework than men, and women are most likely to care for sick children (Pocock et al., 2010; Al Kurdi, 2021). As that is the case, it is obvious that women have more tendencies to suffer from work-life imbalance and hence deal with the consequences of the negative effect on their wellbeing and their performance at work.

With all the responsibilities that women are taking on, it can be hectic to allocate time outside of work or home. With the increasing job demands, no matter how hard employees work it seems that many are still struggling to figure out how to perform well at work while maintaining happy and active personal lives (Lyle, 2012). What can make things more difficult is not being aware of what one's priorities are and the roles that employers and colleagues can play in shaping one's balance (Lyle, 2012).

As the authors of the book "What Happy Working Mothers Know" put it; mothers are like CEOs, they are at the head of the family and oversee shaping the disposition of the family (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009). Being just a woman is not enough anymore, women want to be

superwomen; super-mom, super-employee, super-wife, all at once! If a woman lists down all the roles she plays, most will end up with a list of over 25 roles! (Kulaga, 2014). Women think that they are responsible of doing everything especially at home. They want to do everything, and they want to the do them well (Kulaga, 2014). Moreover, women always put themselves in a position where they have to be handling something, no matter what they never seem to reach that fulfillment level, once they are done with one thing, before it even ends, they start working on the next thing: thus, never giving themselves a break. It seems that the main factor contributing to this is guilt as it pushes them to create unnecessary work for themselves (Kulaga, 2014).

## Factors That Affect Work-Life Balance

The guilt factor: Guilt seems to be the most common factor. Most women have the need to feel a sense of perfection. This longing for perfection results in a huge amount of pressure, as they believe that everything that goes around the house is their responsibility. As a result, they cannot rest unless everything that "needs to be done" is done! Otherwise, they believe that they are failing their roles as mothers or wives. This makes it difficult for women to find time for them to relax and enjoy doing other things that they would love to do.

Culture & Society: Most western and eastern societies and cultures draw a specific image of women as a devoted wife and a caring mother whose priority is home and family. Very few societies view women as advanced career women. This image is drawn upon on women since birth; girls are dressed in pink whereas boys in blue. Color psychology explains that blue is associated with intelligence, responsibility, and reliability while pink is more associated with nurture, love, and compassion. This shows that the mentality of men being the main breadwinners and women the main caretakers is engrossed in human since birth. Women who choose to put their career first or postpone their family plans are frowned upon in many societies and are considered as minorities. Society makes it evident that career should always come after home and family, and some believe that it should only be as a second source of finance and only if necessary. Most of the pressure is placed on working mothers, as society paints the picture of a working mom as a woman risking the welfare of her kids and the stability of her marriage for the sake of her career (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009).

Ambitions: women who are too ambitious suffer from stress due to their inability to balance work and their personal lives. That is why it is important for women to realize how they should manage their ambitions; in other words, they should be able to know when to pace it down and what opportunities to pursue and when. As Riss and Palagano (2011) explain in their book, it is wise for a woman to sometimes slow down her career advancement so she can shift some of her focus to other areas in her life that requires her attention. To put it differently, when a woman gives birth, without a doubt her work life balance will alter dramatically however this will not last. Therefore, during that period women can still peruse their career dreams but with a different plan. Otherwise, the guilt will kick in. Women should not let go of their dreams; however, they just need to know how to fulfill their dreams while being happy and less stressed (Riss & Palagano, 2011).

Positive & Negative barriers: In life we are faced with different types of barriers; the negative one could cause us hardship and difficulties while on the other hand there are the positive barriers which are barriers that we love and are important to us and are the source of our happiness, yet they still concern us when we try to attain the balance we want because they require slots of our time. Consequently, if the time is not managed well, it can cause lots of stress. Spending time with family & friends plus hobbies & interests are examples of positive barriers (Kulaga, 2014).

Furthermore, the negative barriers are constructed in our anger, anxiety, and the common need for women to control others (Kulaga, 2014). These barriers are considered obstructions to live a happy balanced life.

Organizational factors: Management and colleagues support are apparent to be significant work-domain resources that play a great role in balancing employees work and home domain (Baral & Bhargava, 2011). The support that management provides to its employees can be in the form of flexible work schedule and allowing for unexpected leave when family emergency occurs. (Baral & Bhargava, 2011). Furthermore, the confidence and empathy those managers convey to their employees reduces the level of anxiety that arises from managing work and life domains (Baral & Bhargava, 2011). In a study by Bloom and Reenen (2006), it was evident that work-life balance is strongly related with good management support and work-life balance practices. According to McPherson (2007), some managers tend to send signals to their employees inferring that taking advantage of work-life balance is perceived negative. In a study done with around 2,000 individuals, most employees believed that their employer played a significant role in assisting their employees in managing their work-life balance. Large number of employees said that employers should take more initiatives that would make things less difficult for parents of young/disabled children (Stevens et al., 2004). Leaders may also find it beneficial to reward employees who demonstrate healthy work-life balance, as employees may be more engaged in the office if they feel equally as engaged in their personal lives. Empirical evidence shows that employees with flexible work schedules and options may produce a higher-quality work performance (Kulaga, 2014).

Work-policies: Organizations that offer work-life balance policies are labeled as family supportive organizations, such support that is conveyed to employees creates a positive attitude as employees feel that the organization understands and cares about their family needs (Baral & Bhargava, 2011). In addition, it improves work efficiency and performance (Baral & Bhargava, 2011). In a study done by Baral and Bhargava (2011) with 485 managers in India; results showed that work-life balance policies had stronger effect on female employees. Also, the research showed that it results in higher work-family enrichment. One of the main issues raised by the great majority of a focus group participant was their lack of knowledge of all the current policies and practices that support work-life balance. Additionally, staff experience of using current policies indicated that there is some inconsistency in the way they are interpreted and implemented (Manfredi & Holliday, 2004). Furthermore, studies have shown that organizations with more female employees were more likely to invest in polices like flexible working hours, job sharing arrangement and childcare facilities (Kulaga, 2014). When organizations offer such work-life balance policies; it enables women to maintain a healthy balance between their work and family life (Baral & Bhargava, 2011) especially if the right combination of HR policies and family aiding programs are integrated and carried out in the organization (Lowe, 2006). In that case, the organization's level of productivity increases, and employees contribute in producing better results (Bloom & Reenen, 2006).

Work-place culture: A supportive workplace culture is a culture that has a shared beliefs and values regarding the degree to which the organization cares about work-life balance for its employees across genders equally (McPherson, 2007). A culture that is based on trust and respect allow employees feel more relaxed and less stressed if they make a mistake as they will be better able to make ethical decisions. (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009). A culture that enables employees to realize their potential and enjoy what they do is positively related to work-life balance (Singh,

2013). The benefit of such culture should be known by all managers to ensure that they strive to foster a supportive environment to their employees (Lowe, 2006).

## Benefits of WLB for Organizations

More productive staff (Molloy, 2005, Bloom & Reenen, 2006, McPherson, 2007). Yesbek concluded in 2004 that work-life balance can improve productivity through the decrease in the level of the interference between the home and work domain, reduction in the working hours and lower fatigue rate and the gratitude the employees feel for the effort the organization puts in to provide a work-life balance, accordingly they return the favor with discretionary effort (McPherson, 2007). Lower turnover (Molloy, 2005). Hay Group's research found that in companies that employees consider them unsupportive of work-life balance, one in four employees were planning to quit their job within the next couple of years. On the other hand, one in six employees who worked for companies that support work-life balance was planning on leaving for various reasons (Royal, 2013). Lower absenteeism (Molloy, 2005). According to an international study, only 13% of employees were taking unscheduled leaves due to illness. The rest were being absent due to family matters, personal needs and being stressed out (Munde, 2008). Therefore, organizations that provide work-life balance initiatives will reduce number of absenteeism especially unplanned ones.

## Benefits of Work-Life Balance for Family

Women can apply work skills at home as they are based on the positive workplace culture that enables trust and positive relationships (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009). Work-life balance enables women to have more energy, so they are more able to spend a better-quality time with their families (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009). Women can attend to their children needs especially when they are sick. The positive atmosphere at work will allow women to have a positive state of mind and hence affect their mood in a positive manner when they are at their homes and taking care of their family (Baral & Bhargava, 2011).

## Benefits of Work-Life Balance for Women

Though life fulfillment could be considered a relative term, it could be seen as having the ideal life as per one's own definition. Weather it is having a successful career or achieving a personal running record or simply following their passions. Attaining work-life balance makes it easier to following one's passion and living their own defined ideal life. Reduction of stress decreases the risk of mental and physical health (Lowe, 2006). In addition, a balanced life allows for more time to exercise. Based on Lowe's study in 2006, he discussed that workers who manage to balance their personal lives and work effectively encounter less stress that those who fail to attain a proper balance (Lowe, 2006).

## Consequences of Poor Work-Life Balance

Women who suffer from poor work-life balance can end up suffering from several physical and psychological illness, which in result will require medication and may have an effect on the relationship of the person with those surrounding them (Pocock et al., 2010). One of the main

outcomes of poor work-life balance is stress. Majority of women, 60 % of them, especially those who work fulltime and are working mothers, have been showing signs of increased stress, as they constantly feel time-pressure (Stevens et al., 2004). Stress causes amount of cholesterol and some other hormones to increase and remain unbalanced which could lead to anxiety, heart disease, stomach related issues, diabetes, sleep problems, depression, weight issues and memory issues (Lowe, 2006; Kulaga, 2014). Life dissatisfied due to many reasons namely work overload, financial responsibility and peer pressure, many employees do not go on leave. 60% end up accumulating their leaved days and take them whenever suits the company. Not taking holiday can impact employees' life negatively and create a work-life conflict (Pocock et al., 2010).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Depending on the previous discussion we can conclude that the work life balance for women can be achieved if the following strategies can be considered and applied in the GCC region such as that women with busy schedules to plan their days ahead and structure their hangout with their family in advance. Women, taking care of themselves is important if they want to be able to take better care of others (Riss & Palagano, 2011). For that reason, it is important to set time for them only, or as they call it "me time". During this time, women should do activities just for themselves. Exercising is the number one method in eliminating stress in life and keeping one balanced. It energizes a person and put them in a better mood at home and office (Riss & Palagano, 2011). In addition, listening to music is also important as studies have proven that music can bring a person into a positive mood (Riss & Palagano, 2011). It also enables a person to sleep better (Kulaga, 2014). There are numerous things to do to reduce level of stress at work and at office. For example: screen calls using answering machine, buy healthy takeout whenever staying late at work and do not have much time to prepare dinner at time, share responsibilities with husband and kids and always have back-up plans (Molloy, 2005). Women often feel guilty. Thus, once the guilt kicks in, one should be reasonable to what they can achieve at work and at home. So, they should try to manage priorities and interests in a way that enables them to balance them, as an illustration; if someone really wants to exercise and spend some time chit chatting with their child, they may go for a walk in the park with their kids (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009). Plus, they should realize how this will help those who they love. Taking time-out and relaxing will allow them to re-energize and be healthier thus feeling happier and more fulfilled which will enable them to give more to their family (Kulaga, 2014). Not only that, but then they will be less stressed out at work.

Additionally, if a person knows their values well and able to recognize what is important to them than it will be easy for them to choose the right job that will fit perfectly with their lifestyle. Goals are important to help us work toward fulfillment (Kulaga, 2014; Youssef & Diab, 2021). When setting goals, it is vital to put in mind that goals should be set in every areas of life ensuring that they are aligned to the personal values. Women should not brainwash themselves that they have limited skills and hence there is a limit to what they can achieve. They should work towards maximizing their motivation and boost their confidence to achieve their goals (Molloy, 2005). Of course, many women do not feel much compelled asking others for help as they believe it is an admission of failure or vulnerability. One way to tackle this problem is to ask the kids to help, this will teach them responsibility at an early age, and it is a chance to hang out with them (Kulaga, 2014). A women can also ask her husband to help around, if she worries that he may not be able to do the job as well as she does or the way she wants him to do it then she should sit down and plan with him how he can help, explain to him the way she prefers also bear in mind that even

though he may not do it the way she wants him to do it, it doesn't mean that it's not well enough (Riss & Palagano, 2011). Finally, a thank you and a little bit of gratitude can go a long way, women and mothers should make it a habit that those around them say thank you after they finish dinner or say please when they need a glass of water; this will make them feel appreciated for their hard work around the house (Greenberg & Avigdor, 2009; Riss & Palagano, 2011). Brough and Pears (2004) suggested that women need social support from their family, coworkers, and management to help them with this issue. Likewise, according to Riss and Palagano (2011), every working mom needs a strong support network, a network that includes the following type of people: a friend with a similar life situation, a friend with experience and lastly a friend who has no kids and little responsibilities. A combination of the above will allow her to have someone she can relate to, someone who can help her gain a better perspective, and finally someone who will make her go out from time to time and have fun.

Furthermore, using technology, the right way: Technology can be one's best friend or worst enemy; it all comes down to how one uses it. It turns into a hassle at times; when it causes distractions and adds to one's stress. Another important tern is confidence. The percentage of confidence drops among woman when they do something they perceive to be wrong much more than it does among men (Kulaga, 2014; Gupta & Varma, 2019; Keramati et al., 2020). It is important to be confident about whom she is and the life she is living and be proud of what she has achieved, always communicating with confidence thus having better chance to get the results she desires and hence leading to life fulfilment (Kulaga, 2014). Recently, authors have recommended taking up coaching to enable smooth transition and empowerment in life. According to Molloy (2005), author of the book "Stop living your job", there is an effective coaching model that every coach uses; GROW. G stands for turn issue into goal, R stands for give yourself reality check, O stands for option to move forwards and W stands for commit to a way forward. The advantages of hiring a coach are that a woman can benefit from advanced and effective listening and questioning. She also gets to talk to someone whose opinion is objective and non-judgmental. If she is not interested in hiring coach she can always opt in for co-coaching (Molloy, 2005; Shafi & Ganguli, 2020).

Organizations also play an imperative part in the fulfilment of work-life balance mainly through the introduction of family-friendly work policies. One of the most important policies is flexible working schedule. In a UK study done of over 2000 workers it was evident that employees with flexible working arrangements were more satisfied with their job and enjoyed a better work-life balance and had lower chances of quitting their jobs (McPherson, 2007). Other policies that employees perceive them to be important are on-site day care, telecommuting, cap on overtime, time-off in lieu, counseling services for employees with stress, health programs and exercise facilities. Such facilities would help employees' life be more convenient. Equally important, is the awareness of the existence of these policies and distributing to the employees. Likewise, organizations should ensure that there is no gender discrimination in the organization. Gender inequality at work is one of the main influencing factors of work-life balance. Female employees who perceive discrimination are driven to either work harder or stay longer hours at work to prove their capabilities, or to resent work and hence minimize their productivity at work and consequently affect their balance at home, with their family and personal lives. Organizations of different sectors should support at all-time equal pay initiatives and equal rewards & recognition among working men and women. There should also be equality in giving power for decision making and higher leadership roles in the organization. Organizations can implement gender

equality through refining existing practices or carrying out an in-depth change in the process. Gender equality should be included in the organizations policy and ethical principles and any discrimination should be treated as a serious breach of policy. Finally, the countries can support the idea by supporting the economic independence through endorsing entrepreneurship and self-employment for women.

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