IMPACT OF FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS ON WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION OF WORKING PROFESSIONALS

ABSTRACT

Work and life boundary dynamics have been changed over the years. Two domains are no longer separated and are integrated. For the fulfilments of work and life demands, employees seek to use different flexible work arrangements for integration. This research investigates the impact of flexible work arrangements on the work-life integration of employees in the service industry. Gender was taken as an intervening factor. Survey was conducted on 446 employees of service sectors. Results show that when employees utilize the FWAs, are more effective in integration and experience fewer conflicts irrespective of gender. In the case of flexitime and part-time work, options are more effective in reducing stress. Study contribute to the work-life literature and results can be implemented to take managerial decisions and useful in future researches.

INTRODUCTION

Work and family are the two important parts of life and in today's world, both domains are merged (Tremblay & Ilama, 2015). Demands of both domains of family and work have increased and one has to work beyond the domain boundaries and to fulfil the demands one is expected to be present anytime anywhere. Due to the demands of work and life, one is expected to work beyond the boundaries of one domain, e.g. office work in the evening or weekend or taking family calls in the office hours.

Initially the concept of work life balance was considered, which suggest keeping two domains separate and gives the equal weightage to both domains. With the time the concept has been changed to work life integration with the realization that keeping two domains separate is impossible. Technology has played a major role in that by enabling one to perform tasks at any time anywhere, organizations have accepted the need of family friendly policies that has helped in merging of two domains. (Edward & Erica, 2018 Richman et al., 2008).

Although the integration enabled one to work anywhere anytime, there are certain consequences of integration too. The availability of one anytime anywhere excerpts more pressure on individuals because the increased expectations to fulfil the demands. When the demands from on domain increases, In the integrated domains

By the integration there are certain consequences. When the two domains are integrated one receive the demands from both domains continuously, regardless of time and physical boundaries as they are already removed with integration, sometime these demands or responsibilities put a lot of pressure and cause the complexities and stress. (Brannan et al., 2018). On the same time integration provide the benefits too, one can schedule his/her time according to

requirements, manage the work remotely, and also can choose the no of hours to work, to enable them to address personal issue.

Integration is different from the work-life balance which suggests that work and personal life are two different segments, and one needs to create a balance between them which require compromise with another domain, whereas work-life integration is a healthy midpoint between separation and enmeshment of work and life segments (Chesley, 2005).

When these two domains coincide, there is Spillover, which can be good or bad or negative. When there is a negative spillover it leads to work-to-family conflict. A positive work-to-family Spillover transfers happiness and feeling of completeness to other domains (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013).

Organizations are offering various FWAs and providing environment to integrate work and life. Integration has proved beneficial in increasing productivity (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). Organizations are now giving value to employee happiness and satisfaction equally to the productivity, i.e. fostering the balance between work and life of employees (Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne, 2007). With the increasing usage of technology and drawing the boundary line between the work and personal life is difficult. By merging two domains i.e. integrating organization are trying to find a work structure that beneficial for both, employees and organizations.

WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

WLI refers to approach of effective and efficient synchronization among time, energies & efforts in a way that enables workers to fulfil their work, family, and societal obligations (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark,2002; Sutton & Noe, 2005). For the effective WLI. Organizations are trying to implement policies that care for the employee's personal issues and also ensure the organizational productivity (Panda, 2019). Based on the literature, WLI can be understood in the following variables:

Work to family & Family to work Interference

Every person has to perform the different roles related to work and personal life. The physical, temporal, and behaviour boundaries between the work and life domains keep two domains separate (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Spieler et al., 2018). To perform the tasks or to fulfil the responsibilities, everyone navigate and communicate between these work and life domains (Kelly et al., 2014). In the current times one need to move between these domains very frequently and the transitions are no longer bounded with the time and physical boundaries, which has blurred the boundaries of domains (Desrochers et al., 2005; Graham & Dixon, 2014) and work-family are merged or integrated (Ahire et al., 1996). When the boundaries vanish, the two domains integrate and roles of both domains interfere with each other and interferences are created with each other (Hayman, 2005). To manage both domains and develop a positive impact of integration one need to create a balance between two and ensure no task of any domain is suffered. The managed state results in higher productivity, performance and positive behavioural impact, contrary to this if

domains are not balanced affects efficiency & commitment (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). This interference can cause conflict or enrichment (Franco et al., 2017).

Work-family Strain

When the interference is beyond the control and affect one domain's tasks or overload one beyond the capacity, become the source of strain. For example, when someone take office work at home frequently, the net available time for household activities, family, self or society reduce and start disturbing one's personal life, similarly the too much interference of personal work in office time distract one from work and cause stress due to reduced efficiency (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Galinsky & Kim, 2000). These conflicts and interferences when not managed, cause the strain (Graham & Dixon, 2014). Also, the research shows that most of work-life policies are biased towards the work and not protect the personal life (Prasad, 2017). Another major reason is, when individual fail to manage the interruptions results in the dissatisfaction (Bader et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2009).

Work-family Enrichment

When there is proper communication between the two domains and both domain's functions are accommodating each other, the one is able to manage the different responsibilities of two domains (Salma & Abderrahman, 2016; Soomro et al., 2018). Work-life enrichment is the positive side of interference (Julien et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2016). When the work arrangements allow one to manage responsibilities of each domain, the level of satisfaction increases and one feel more accomplished (Masuda et al., 2011). Balance between the work and life gives more satisfaction, results in less stress, better mental & physical health and better productivity (Abualloush et al., 2017; Vasumathi, 2018).

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS (FWAs)

FWAs are work structures that give an employee flexibility on how long, where, and when the employees work or the work structures that alters the time and/or place that work gets done regularly (Watson & Swanberg, 2013) and provide the opportunity to the employees to select their work schedules, place, and quantity of the work (Bal & De Lange, 2015). Most offered flexible work options are telecommuting, compressed workweek, flex-time, voluntary part-time work, and job sharing (Duncan & Pettigrew, 2012; Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Masuda et al., 2011). Because of the direct impact on workers and families, the FWA has been the topic of discussion and research. Nuclear families and dual-career culture have increased the demand for flexible work arrangements in today's work environment (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). Job flexibility is very important to manage the competing demands of an employee. Flexibility requirements are not only limited to employees who are having families but also a motivating factor to employees who don't have families to manage their work and non-work responsibilities (De Janasz et al., 2013; Tremblay & Ilama, 2015).

Flexible work arrangements give various advantages to the employees and organizations, employees especially women seek flexibility to fulfil their work and family demands (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018). Employees prefer organizations that are more flexible (Glass & Estes, 1997). When employee chose the flexibility to increase the

performance or to meet the demands at the workplace or to increase the income it may lead to increase the work-life conflict due to devoting the extra time and effort at work, which make less time available for home (Lott & Chung, 2016). Designing a flexible work arrangement that suits the requirement of employees and organizations is a cumbersome task (Allen et al., 2013).

TYPES OF FWAs

Flexibility in time

Flexitime refers to the work option where an employee has the freedom to select the timing of work, i.e. different start and end time than the standard timing of workplaces. Work hours can be set weekly or monthly and core working hours which are mandatory (O'Brien & Hayden, 2008; Rau & Hyland, 2002). Shift working and compressed week (working five or fewer days than six days a week with increased per day hours) (Bloom et al., 2013; Duncan & Pettigrew, 2012; Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Williams et al., 2013). Flexitime, Compress workweek, flexible breaks, and flexible shift arrangements are common arrangements for flexibility in time (Duncan & Pettigrew, 2012; Edward & Erica, 2018; Matilla-Santander et al., 2019).

Flexibility in workplace/Location

Flexi-place gives autonomy to the workers to work from the alternate location or the home (Allen et al., 2015; Munsch, 2016; Shockley & Allen, 2007). Work from home or telecommuting means completing the office work from the home with the help of computers and technology. With the advancement of technology virtual office can be established anywhere and office tasks can be done from anywhere (Gajendran et al., 2015). Telecommuting is a preferred substitute for working in an office from a different location that may be home, satellite office, or from the customer's location. There are various benefits of telecommuting like location flexibility, employee satisfaction, employee retention, employer branding, improved productivity, cost saving, and social benefits (Allen, Golden, et al., 2015; Kecklund et al., 2017). However, telecommuting is not possible for every job & work culture, for example, the service industry e.g. hotel, retail stores where physical presence is a must. Telecommuting can help in coordinate work schedules and family responsibilities. These options have a limited scope as every organization cannot work remotely or from different locations.

Flexibility in the quantity of work (Part-Time Work & Work Sharing)

Other option of FWAs includes the control on the quantity of work and work hours of the employees entitled to serve (Goñi-Legaz & Ollo-López, 2015; Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2020). Reduced hours or part-time options are preferred by the employees to meet their personal and family demands. Employees can share a task voluntarily in a "job share" option (Christensen & Stanes, 1990). Reduced hours refer to working less than a routine full week (Jacobs & Padavic, 2015; Kelliher & Anderson, 2009). Salary or compensation is adjusted accordingly (Tremblay & Ilama, 2015). A part-time employee may work less hours in each day or less days in each weak, individual who cannot go for a full-time job due to responsibilities, e.g. females taking care for the child, old age employees, part-time work options help them to continue their career without an eight-hour job (Hill et al., 2004; Lyonette, 2015).

Reduced hours are not the only method of flexibility but also gives a solution to the availability of specialist which can-not be hired full time due to less availability and high cost. (Byrne, 2005; Goñi-Legaz & Ollo-López, 2015; E. E. Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2020).

In work-sharing arrangements, two or more employees share the duties and responsibilities of a full-time job. (E. E. Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2020; Williams et al., 2013). The employees may share all the tasks or divide the responsibilities according to skill, time & expertise. The job-sharing option is suitable for organizations that are willing to retain their key people who cannot work for the whole day. Job sharing option may result in an increase or decrease in productivity for example if a worker is working for the lesser hours there will be less stress and fatigue that increase the productivity and on the other hand total, no of work has been reduced which may require more employees to finish the work (Lanoie et al., 2001). Employees opting for the work-sharing options get fewer benefits than full-time employees, also there is more risk of laid off when organizations decide to reduce the workforce as they are first to be eliminated (Sherwyn & Sturman, 2002).

GENDER AND WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

The increase in participation of working females and dual-earner families have changed the concept of work-life balance (Chung & van der Horst, 2018). So the default solution of "forced compartmentalization" the work and non-work to avoid conflicts in work and life activities no longer work (Bailyn et al., 2004). Research shows that female employees in Indian organizations has lot of challenges to handle the dual responsibilities, as in Indian culture the family responsibilities are given more to females and also non-availability of the organization's support, add up the challenges, also barriers in career progression (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). It is important to investigate how the different work arrangements (standard and flexible), effects work-life integration for different gendered employees. FWAs or controlling schedules can mean differently according to gender e.g. females may prefer the flexibility for caring for newborn children on the other side male may choose flexibility to earn more to secure the future of the child (Burnett et al., 2010b; Lott & Chung, 2016). In both cases, the FWAs are useful when enabling one to fulfil the work-life requirements. The following hypotheses are derived to analyze the effect of gender on work-life integration.

HYPOTHESES

Male and female employees utilizing standard work options possess experience different work-life integration.

Male and female employees utilizing flexitime options possess experience different work-life integration.

Male and female employees utilizing flexplace options possess experience different work-life integration.

Male and female employees utilizing part-time/job-sharing options possess experience different work-life integration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling

A descriptive research design has been taken to analyze the role of FWAs in WLI for male and female employees. To collect the sample, respondents were taken from working professionals in the different service industries (IT, banking & finance, consultancy, education, hospitality & healthcare). The sample size was determined with the Cochran formula (Cochran, 1977). A total of 600 questionnaires were administrated to the working professionals through direct emails and social media. 496 filled questionnaires returned and after analyzing 446 questionnaires were used for further analysis. Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of the respondents. In the sample 68.6 percent were male and 31.3 were females. Maximum respondents were from the age group of 31-40 years (39.46 %), followed by the age group up to 30 years (24.89 %) and age group 41-50 years (21.08%). Out of total 72.65 percent of respondents were married and 23.54 percent were unmarried. The sample was divided based on work arrangements; 34.98% of respondents were on the standard work option i.e. not availing any kind of flexible work option. In the flexible work options, 30.72% of respondents were availing the flexitime, 21.75% flexitime and 12.56% were availing the part-time work option. Overall respondent's profile shows that the sample was spread between all categories, and free from the biasness error.

Table 1 - Demographic Information of respondents

	Total (n=446)	
	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	306	68.61
Female	140	31.39
Age		
Up to 30 Years	111	24.89
31-40 years	176	39.46
41-50 years	94	21.08
above 51 years	65	14.57
Marital Status		
Married	324	72.65
Unmarried	105	23.54
Single	17	3.81
Family Type		
Nuclear	284	63.68
Joint	162	36.32
Career Level		
Entry Level	68	15.25
Mid-Level	200	44.84
Senior Level	178	39.91
Work Option		

Standard Hours	156	34.98
Flexitime	137	30.72
Flexi-Place	97	21.75
Part-Time	56	12.56

Source: Author's Computation

Measurement

To measure the work-life integration, tailored scales for FIW, WIF, WFS, and WFE were originally developed by Allen et al., 2014; Clark, 2002; Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981; and Fisher, 2002 were used. The WLI scale consists of four items for WIF, factor loadings from .76 to .85 (eigenvalue 1.75 and variance explained 10.3%), four items in FIW with factor loading .76 to .86 (eigenvalue 3.39 and variance explained 19.9%). For the WFS six items with factor loading .74 to .87 (eigenvalue 6.08 and 35.7% variance explained) and for WFE with three items with factor loadings .85 to .89 (eigenvalue 1.4 and variance explained 8.4%). Cronbach values for all four factors FIW, .85; WIF, .86; WFS, .92; WFE. .87 exceeds the threshold value (Cronbach, 1951).

DATA ANALYSIS

Difference between Work-life interference between male and female employees.

Family to work interference

Table 2 shows the work-life integration of male and female employees in different work arrangements. Descriptive data show that female employees experience more interference than male employees in all categories. T-test was conducted to check the significance of this difference (Table 3). Only in Flexi-place option, the result of t-test for family to work interference (FIW) is significant (t = -2.46, p < 0.05). This means female employees availing Flexi-place option, face more work-to-family interference than the male employees availing flex-place option.

Work to Family Interference

WIF experienced by male and female employees is almost the same and maximum in the standard work option. In case of employee utilizing flex-time option, female employees experience significantly more work-to-family interference, then male employees (X_M = 17.35, X_F = 20.5, t = -2.74, p < 0.05). For flex place, the difference is not significant, however male employees report, slightly more interference. Female employees utilizing the part-time work option, experience more work to family interference than male employees (X_M = 13.77, X_F = 16.85) and difference is significant with t = 1.753, p < 0.1.

Work-life Strain

Descriptive of work-life strain, shows that female employees experience more work-life stain in case of flexitime (X_M = 20.30, X_F = 21.22) and part-time work (X_M = 14.94, X_F = 15.90), in comparison of male employees. However, in

both cases difference is not statistically significant. It is to notice that male and female employees utilizing any flexible work option, experience less strain than the standard work option.

Work-life enrichment

Descriptive statistics and t-test results for work-life integration are given in the table. Data shows that female employees experience more enrichment than male employees while utilizing a flexible work option. Difference was significant for the flexitime work option ($X_M = 14.42$, $X_F = 15.78$), with $t = -2.58$, $p < 0.05$.

Table 2: Descriptive - Work-life Integration

			FIW		WIF		WFS		WFE	
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Standard work options	Male	108	14.94	4.30	19.07	4.38	28.39	6.07	12.40	2.12
	Female	48	15.50	5.14	19.08	4.23	28.77	7.02	12.70	2.42
Flexitime	Male	100	13.41	5.59	17.35	5.93	20.30	3.79	14.42	2.88
	Female	37	15.32	6.43	20.35	4.92	21.22	4.10	15.78	2.29
Flexi-place	Male	63	11.87	5.33	17.17	4.20	16.08	3.45	15.92	2.64
	Female	34	14.82	6.13	17.09	3.92	16.18	2.63	16.20	2.69
Part-time & Job sharing	Male	35	11.91	5.15	13.77	5.81	14.94	4.08	15.71	2.58
	Female	21	12.43	4.62	16.86	7.25	15.90	3.99	16.04	2.69

Source: Author's Computation

Table 3: t-test - Work-life Integration (Gender)

	FIW		WIF		WFS		WFE	
	t	sig.	t	sig.	t	sig.	t	sig.
Standard work option	-0.65	0.52	-0.01	0.99	-0.35	0.73	-0.78	0.44
Flexitime	-1.71	0.09	-2.75	0.01	-1.23	0.22	-2.58	0.01
Flexi-place	-2.47	0.02	0.10	0.92	-0.14	0.89	-0.50	0.62
Part-time & Job sharing	-0.38	0.71	-1.75	0.09	-0.86	0.39	-0.46	0.65

Source: Author's Computation

DISCUSSION

Gender is one of the important factors regarding policymaking. It is argued that there should not be discrimination based on gender. But in the case of work-life integration, gender is the most important factor (Pedulla & Thébaud,

2015). Because of the different nature of household responsibilities and social boundaries, males and females require different flexibilities to facilitate their obligations (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018). Results show that females experience more family-to-work interference in every work arrangement, which justifies that females have more household responsibilities and in working from home, females experience significantly more interferences (Kurowska, 2018). Similarly, females experience the work to family interference more than males. Employees using flexible work arrangements experience less strain than the employees utilizing standard work options that mean the FWAs help employees to manage their work and life in better ways (Burnett et al., 2010a; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). In the integration of work-life, FWAs plays important role in work-life enrichment. Employees utilizing the FWAs experience more enrichment. The flexible work arrangements support female employees more than male employees in terms of enrichment, as primarily the FWAs help in household obligations (Burnett et al., 2010b; Lott & Chung, 2016; Van der Lippe et al., 2018). Overall, the FWAs are useful for both male and female employees, however, the effect of different FWAs may different on interference, strain, and enrichment for male and female employees. The research emphasis that FWAs should be available for both gendered employees equally and freedom must be given to choosing according to their requirements.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Results show that in work-life integration, FWAs play a significant role. In each case the employee experience less strain and higher enrichment in comparison to standard work arrangements. Female employees experience significantly less interference and strain in the case of flexitime and part-time work options and justify the need for flexibility of females due to more contribution in household activities. The results of the study are useful in developing strategies for work-life. Managers can use the results in developing different work arrangements that enable both male and female employees to use and enrich work-life. The study also provides the inputs for future researches. Further studies can be executed to investigate more insights into work-life integration in the association of performance, organizational and personal factors, etc. The industry-specific variable can affect the availability and usage of FWAs. Further researches are required for such cases.

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