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## **Breaking New Ground: Research Insights on Work-Life Balance in Developing Countries**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article offers a thorough examination of the intricate dynamics surrounding Work-Life Balance (WLB) within organizational contexts. Beginning with a historical perspective on the merit of prioritizing activities in a balanced manner, the study highlights the increasing popularity of WLB, particularly in the last two decades. It underscores WLB as a powerful human resource tool adopted by industry giants like Microsoft and Hewlett Packard. The discussion expands to emphasize the significance of WLB in achieving a win-win situation for both employees and companies, correlating it with positive outcomes such as increased productivity and reduced turnover intentions. Focusing on the healthcare sector in developing countries, notably India, the article addresses the dearth of research in this context. It explores the challenges and benefits associated with implementing WLB practices, shedding light on the pivotal role of flexible work options, including flexible hours and telecommuting. The study also delves into the complexities of work-life conflict and introduces research hypotheses positing significant effects of schedule flexibility, manager support, and job autonomy on both work-life conflict and turnover intentions. In conclusion, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights to the literature, fostering awareness about the critical importance of WLB practices in diverse professional settings.

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*Keywords:* Work-life balance, Turnover intentions, Work-life conflict, Private hospitals, India

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## 1. Introduction

Prioritizing one's activities and tasks in a balanced manner has long been recognized as a valuable skill associated with productivity, time management, and work-life balance (WLB) (Adams and Jex, 1999).

including Microsoft, Hewlett Packard (HP), and Shell, have embraced and implemented WLB as a powerful human resource tool (Dunne, 2007).

WLB is essentially a win-win situation benefiting both employees and the company by achieving a better equilibrium between work and family life (Vloeberghs, 2002). Numerous studies have consistently shown positive correlations between WLB and outcomes such as increased profit returns (Beauregard and Henry, 2009), enhanced shareholder returns (Arthur, 2003), greater productivity, positive workplace attitudes, and lower turnover intentions (Wilkinson, 2008; Koubova and Buchko, 2013). The adoption of WLB practices can yield countless benefits, leading to extensive research on WLB's antecedents and consequences (Mas-Machuca, 2016).

While WLB practices offer various advantages in the workplace, their impact may vary across industries (Konrad and Mangel, 2000), with certain flexible work options being more feasible for some industries than others (Dunne, 2007). Despite extensive research on the role of gender and culture in WLB, there has been limited focus on occupational differences (Moore, 2007).

This research addresses this gap by exploring the relatively unexplored topic of WLB in developing countries, particularly in the MENA region, within the context of healthcare. Responding to calls in the literature to further examine WLB and organizational outcomes in developing

Over the past two decades, WLB has gained significant attention in the literature (Muna and Mansour, 2009; Koubova and Buchko, 2013). Major corporations,

countries (Roberts, 2007), the study argues for the essential examination of WLB in the healthcare sector, given the stressful nature of the field (Yildirim and Aycan, 2008). Research in the healthcare sector in Jordan has highlighted job stressors faced by medical staff (Abdalrahim, 2013).

Furthermore, this study aims to initiate a discussion on the importance of implementing WLB practices in the private sector in India, particularly in Indian private hospitals. The research will also uncover the most influential WLB practices on turnover intentions mediated by work-life conflict, drawing specific conclusions applicable to a developing country like India.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

### 2.1. WLB Conceptualization

WLB (WLB) can be seen as a modernized concept replacing what was originally known as work-family conflict (WFC) (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007). WFC emerged as researchers sought to explore the clash that arises when an individual's work interferes, or conflicts, with their family role and vice versa (Adams and Jex, 1999).

The discussion on work and family clashes gained traction following the influx of women into the workforce after World War II (Roberts, 2007). This conversation was fueled by women struggling to balance their roles as wives and mothers with their professional careers (Konrad and Mangel, 2000; Roberts, 2007; Moore, 2007; Agarwal and Lenka, 2015). Initially perceived as a

women's issue, the challenges of juggling family and work responsibilities took a toll on both men and women (Roberts, 2007; Muna and Mansour, 2009).

The term work-family conflict was eventually replaced in the literature with WLB, suggesting that personal life and work need not be mutually exclusive but can coexist in a balanced manner (Muna and Mansour, 2009). Following the introduction of WLB, numerous studies were published exploring its antecedents and consequences (e.g., Koubova and Buchko, 2013; Mas-Machuca, 2016).

However, some researchers (e.g., Lyness and Judiesch, 2008) defined balance as being more involved in the family role than in work duties. This conflicting view hinders the balanced perspective of achieving harmony between different life domains (Abendroth and den Dulk, 2011). Despite appearing simplistic, this view becomes more complex when considering a person's limited resources such as time, energy, and money (Koubova and Buchko, 2013).

Returning to the idea of viewing work and life in a complementary manner, Graves et al. (2007) proposed a positive correlation between work and personal life. They interpreted WLB in the context of role accumulation and conservation of resources theories, where resources are seen as expandable rather than fixed. A successful personal life contributes to positive behaviors and attitudes in the workplace, such as job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction (Koubova and Buchko, 2013). Another perspective on WLB, suggested by Frame and Hartog (2003), directly linked positive WLB to employees' ability to use flexible working hours to balance work and personal commitments, rather than letting work consume other aspects of life.

In conclusion, WLB is subjective and varies from one person to another, depending on their perception of their

capability to balance work and non-work responsibilities (Moore, 2007).

## 2.2. WBL Dimensions

The concept that has garnered attention in the WLB (WLB) literature is flexible work options (Beauregard and Henry, 2009). Previous research has identified flexible working policies as a crucial factor in enhancing WLB, yet the absence of a specific measurement scale deems it an ambiguous term (Hill et al., 2008). Flexible work options, also known as smarter working (Dunne, 2007), encompass features such as flexible work hours (flextime) or schedule flexibility (Carlson et al., 2010). This allows employees to vary their start and finish times according to their convenience, along with compressed weeks (reducing a standard workweek by working longer hours) (Dunne, 2007; Beauregard and Henry, 2009).

Smith and Carroll's (2002) study revealed that flexible hours were the preferred method for achieving WLB. Additionally, flexible work options can manifest in various forms, such as job-sharing, Time Off In Lieu (TOIL), part-time work (Ahmad and Omar, 2012), and other flexible work arrangements (Dunne, 2007; Koubova and Buchko, 2013). Technological advancements have facilitated remote work possibilities via the internet, intranet, smartphones, etc., leading Muna and Mansour (2009) to describe the virtual workforce as a phenomenon of the twenty-first century. However, the intrusion of work into homes through technology may pose challenges to the balance it initially sought to achieve (Check, 1996).

Vloeberghs' (2002) study expanded WLB practices to include initiatives like providing employees with home office equipment, cultural and leisure facilities, breastfeeding rooms, and financial arrangements such as insurance, allowances

for caring for a sick family member, or subsidies for holiday activities.

To address diverse employee WLB needs, companies must incorporate WLB practices into company policies. Wilkinson (2008) asserts that employers demonstrate commitment to employee well-being through WLB practices, particularly flexible work options. Consequently, WLB is considered multi-dimensional, with Anderson et al. (2002) categorizing it into formal and informal practices. Ahmad and Omar (2012) argue that informal practices are superior, a viewpoint echoed by Hammer et al. (2005), who emphasize the efficacy of informal practices in helping employees achieve balance.

Informal support involves granting employees autonomy, supporting early departure for personal or family matters, and providing psychological support, such as advice on balancing family and professional life (Vloeberghs, 2002). In practical terms, informal support can serve as a viable alternative for companies with limited resources for formal WLB practices (Anderson et al., 2002).

However, these WLB practices should be integrated into Human Resources (HR) strategies and translated into supportive policies. HR professionals need to be responsive to employees favoring flexibility by designing innovative work systems, job structures, compensation packages, and fostering supportive organizational cultures (Muna and Mansour, 2009). While these changes present new challenges for human resource management, they are positively perceived by employees, fostering greater mutual commitment between employers and employees (Vloeberghs, 2002).

This review categorizes WLB (WLB) into the following dimensions:

#### *2.2.1. Schedule Flexibility*

Schedule flexibility, also known as 'flexitime,' is identified as a formal WLB

dimension. It involves granting employees the flexibility to choose their starting and finishing times, typically within a core hours band where each employee must be present (Anderson et al., 2002; Hill et al., 2008). This dimension is favored over other flexibility arrangements, such as flexplace (telecommuting), which may hinder WLB by erasing the physical boundary between work and personal life (Shockley and Allen, 2007). Schedule flexibility is considered a quick-win approach for implementing WLB practices due to its minimal cost implications (Dunne, 2007).

#### *2.2.2. Job Autonomy*

Job autonomy is identified as a key informal WLB practice, indicating the level of freedom and discretion given to employees to schedule work and choose appropriate procedures for job execution (Hackman and Oldham, 1976).

#### *2.2.3. Manager Support*

Manager support is recognized as another crucial informal WLB practice. It refers to the degree to which managers support and understand their subordinates concerning personal and family life issues. Managerial support is anticipated to significantly enhance employee satisfaction (Abdallah et al., 2016).

#### *2.3. WLB Implementation Challenges*

The implementation of WLB (WLB) practices encounters challenges that hinder the realization of intended outcomes, as noted in the literature (Beauregard and Henry, 2009). Several factors contribute to this, including insufficient support from management for the consistent implementation of such practices (Anderson et al., 2002). Employees' willingness to fully embrace WLB practices is often contingent on the level of managerial support they receive, with concerns about potential negative impacts on career advancement and perceptions of commitment (Thompson et al., 1999; Beauregard and Henry, 2009).



The use of WLB practices, particularly flexible work schedules, has been negatively perceived by colleagues and shown to be associated with reduced promotion opportunities and increased likelihood of job turnover (Allen and Russell, 1999; Cohen and Single, 2001; Houston and Waumsley, 2003). For instance, telework can lead to feelings of isolation and hinder professional advancement (Cooper and Kurland, 2002). These adverse outcomes may stem from a prevailing over-work culture that rewards long hours at the expense of recognizing and providing opportunities for career development. This culture, where working extensively is seen as a "badge of honor," poses a barrier to effective WLB practices (De Cieri et al., 2002; Gershuny, 2005).

Moreover, there is a culture that encourages working during unsocial hours, adding to the challenges faced by the average employee in finding time for personal life (De Cieri et al., 2002; Vloeberghs, 2002). To address these challenges, it is crucial to foster a supportive culture for WLB that neither glorifies employees working overtime nor penalizes those taking advantage of WLB practices. Creating such a culture poses a significant challenge, particularly in persuading middle management to set a positive example, as indicated in the literature (Spinks, 2004).

#### *2.4. Work Life Conflicts*

Work-life conflict is defined as the clash between work and life roles, encompassing various personal domains such as family, study, and free time (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). It involves challenges, stresses, and trade-offs associated with reconciling work and other personal aspects, particularly family (McGinnity and Whelan, 2009). The research on work-life conflict is grounded in conflict theory (e.g., ten Brummelhuis and van der Lippe, 2010) and role scarcity theory (Goode, 1960), both suggesting that allocating time and energy to one domain

can diminish resources available for others, thereby reducing performance (ten Brummelhuis and van der Lippe, 2010; Jin et al., 2014).

The literature identifies three main sources of conflict: strain-based, time-based, and behavior-based (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Strain-based conflict occurs when pressures from one domain spill into the other, resulting in emotional intrusion. For instance, a fatigued worker may struggle to provide sufficient attention to family after work (Engle and Dimitriadi, 2007). Time-based conflict arises when time allocated to one domain cannot be spent in others. Excessive work hours, for example, may hinder individuals from caring for their family (Ramasundaram and Ramasundaram, 2011). Behavior-based conflict occurs when there is inconsistency between the expected behaviors in work and life roles. An authoritative manager at work may find it challenging to transition into a nurturing role at home (Shen et al., 2015).

Negative work conditions such as job demands, inflexible hours, lack of skill utilization, job ambiguity, job intensity, insecurity, shift work, and inappropriate working conditions have been identified in the literature as contributors to work-life conflict (Michel et al., 2010; Sav et al., 2013). However, working time is considered a crucial aspect of work-life conflict, encompassing both the amount of work assigned and the control workers have over their jobs (Huws, 2003).

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p. 77) highlight that work-life conflict arises from simultaneous pressures emanating from work and family, often incompatible with each other. They differentiate between two types of conflicts: "work-to-family conflict," involving work interfering with family roles, and "family-to-work conflict," involving family duties impinging on work requirements.

### *2.5. Turnover Intention*

Turnover intentions are defined as an employee's perceived likelihood of intending to permanently leave their job in the near future (Kerlinger, 1973). Employee turnover poses a common challenge for organizations, entailing considerable direct and indirect costs associated with replacing departing employees. Dess and Shaw (2001) categorize turnover into two types: voluntary turnover, where an employee willingly leaves the job, and involuntary turnover, where an employee is terminated by the employer. This study focuses on the former type, emphasizing situations where employees choose to leave the job voluntarily.

It is presumed that fostering strong family and personal relations leads to greater life satisfaction and contentment, subsequently resulting in enhanced workplace performance (Koubova and Buchko, 2013). Generally, employees exhibit positive attitudes toward work when employers prioritize maintaining a good WLB (WLB) (Moore, 2007). Numerous benefits are associated with implementing WLB policies and practices for both employees and employers (Phan et al., 2011; Abdallah and Phan, 2007). Several research studies have explored the relationship between WLB and workplace attitudes and behaviors, investigating specific WLB practices and their impact on attitudes and behaviors. For example, Chow and Keng-Howe (2006) reported a positive relationship between flexible work schedules and self-reported productivity. Roberts (2007) delved into international evidence on the relationship between working hours and employee attitudes.

### *2.6. The Effects of WLB on Work-Life Conflict and Turnover Intentions*

The absence of WLB practices can impede employee motivation, leading to withdrawal symptoms such as absenteeism

and turnover (Hughes and Bozionelos, 2005). Increased conflict between work and personal life can result in employees struggling to maintain a balance, ultimately leading to job dissatisfaction and quitting (Houston and Waumsley, 2003). This holds true even for staff without caregiving duties (Waumsley, 2010), and the consequences can be costly for organizations that neglect such practices (Hughes and Bozionelos, 2005).

Conversely, organizations with work-life-friendly arrangements reap direct financial benefits, including lower turnover ratios and improved recruitment options for highly skilled employees who value flexibility. The relationship between WLB practices and turnover has been explored in both early and recent research studies, emphasizing the positive impact of flexible scheduling on reducing absenteeism (Dalton and Mesch, 1990; Wilkinson, 2008; Koubova and Buchko, 2013).

The negative relationship between WLB practices and turnover and absenteeism may be attributed to the fact that WLB practices offer alternative work arrangements, replacing traditional fixed hours and fixed-place arrangements and providing employees with greater flexibility (Thomas and Ganster, 1995). Specific WLB practices, such as flexible work hours, have been found to reduce absenteeism (Halpern, 2005).

In addition to having WLB practices in company policy, it is crucial for employees to witness management's commitment through consistent and continuous implementation and improvement. This commitment is a strong determinant of turnover ratio, reflecting the sincerity of the employer (Lingard and Francis, 2005).

Work-life conflict has been studied as a mediator in WLB research studies for some time, differentiating between the availability and use of practices (Helmle et al., 2014).

However, conflicting findings exist regarding the link between WLB practices and work-life conflict, with some studies reporting a significant negative relationship, while others found no effects (Thompson et al., 1999; Frye and Breugh, 2004; Premeaux et al., 2007). This raises the need for further investigation into whether WLB practices necessarily minimize work-life conflict (Beauregard and Henry, 2009).

The research presented aims to fill the gap in understanding WLB in developing countries by investigating WLB in the demanding context of healthcare in India. The goal is to raise awareness about this critical concept and its potential benefits for organizations, employees, and society as a whole. The proposed research model was shown in the figure.1

Based on the above literature, we can hypothesize that,

H1: There is a significant effect of schedule flexibility on work-life conflict.

H2: There is a significant effect of manager support on work-life conflict.

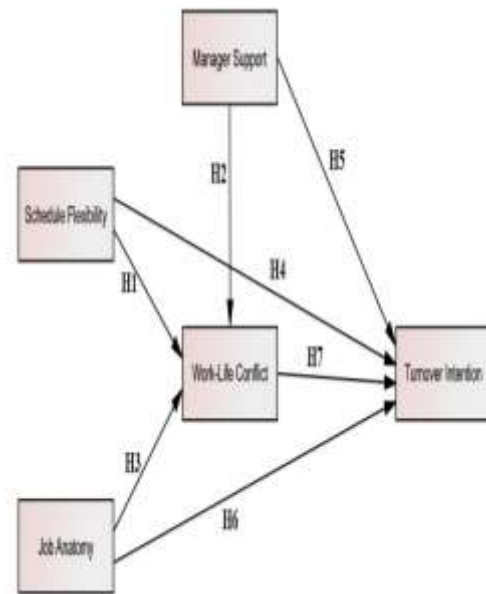
H3: There is a significant effect of job autonomy on work-life conflict.

H4: There is a significant effect of schedule flexibility on turnover intentions.

H5: There is a significant effect of manager support on turnover intentions.

H6: There is a significant effect of job autonomy on turnover intentions.

H7: There is a significant effect of work-life conflict on turnover intentions.



**Figure.1: Proposed Research Model**

### 3. Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, this article has provided a comprehensive exploration of the concept of WLB (WLB) and its various dimensions, emphasizing its critical role in organizational dynamics. The discussion initiated by highlighting the historical perspective, where the quest to achieve a balanced approach to activities and tasks has been acknowledged as a merit. The popularity of WLB (WLB) in the literature, particularly in the last two decades, underscores its significance in contemporary workplaces.

The article further delved into the practical adoption of WLB by prominent business enterprises such as Microsoft, Hewlett Packard (HP), and Shell, recognizing it as a powerful human resource tool. WLB, conceptualized as a win-win situation for both employees and companies, has been associated with positive outcomes, including increased productivity, profitability, and lower turnover intentions.

Recognizing the industry-specific variations in the advantages of WLB practices, the article highlighted the need to consider occupational differences, especially in the



context of healthcare. The focus on healthcare in developing countries, such as India, aimed to address the gap in existing research and shed light on the importance of WLB practices in a highly demanding profession.

The discussion expanded to the implications of WLB on turnover intentions, emphasizing its potential to influence employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. The analysis of turnover intentions led to the identification of challenges in implementing WLB practices, including managerial support and cultural factors that may hinder their effectiveness.

The exploration of flexible work options, such as flexible work hours and telecommuting, brought attention to their significance in improving WLB. However, challenges related to the ambiguous nature of measuring flexible work options were acknowledged.

The article also touched upon the intricacies of work-life conflict, emphasizing the conflict between work and personal life roles and the theories explaining the impact of time and energy allocation on performance in different life domains.

The subsequent sections explored the research hypotheses, positing significant effects of schedule flexibility, manager support, and job autonomy on both work-life conflict and turnover intentions. The interconnectedness of these factors highlighted the complex dynamics influencing employee perceptions and intentions within the organizational context.

In conclusion, this article aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of WLB, its implications for individuals and organizations, and the potential challenges and benefits associated with its implementation. By focusing on the healthcare sector in India, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights to the literature and foster a dialogue about the

importance of WLB practices in diverse professional settings.

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