

Impact of Working Hours on Work-Life Challenges Faced by Working Couple- An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

The overarching purpose of the study was to know the impact of working hours on the work-life balance challenges faced by working couple. WLB from an employee perspective is the most important strategy of organisation. This article reports that the working hours have a significant relationship with the challenges faced by working couple. Data was collected from various countries like USA, India, Australia, and Canada. A total of 70-80 participants (working couples) indicated that long and odd working hours make their work-life imbalanced. Due to which they are unable to spend time with family and negatively affecting their organisation commitment. Also, these time constraints create more stressful conditions to work and giving unproductive results to organisations. We therefore, recommend all the organisations to implement work-life balance strategies which are family friendly policies and simultaneously, reaping benefits for the organisations too.

Keywords: *Working Couples, Work-Life Balance, Flexible Working Hours, Flexibility.*

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Work-life balance?

For companies to remain competitive there is a need to attract and retain valued employees with regard to human resource policies and practices that address work-life balance. Therefore Work- life Balance is an important area of concern for Employers. Work life balance is about individual choices that enable employers and employees to manage the interaction between work and the demands of life that affect health, families and communities. Work/Life Balance: n. A state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal.

According to Maryln Walton of Herman Miller's Future Insight Group, "The participants rated work-life balance as the most important of the propositions in the future. It also was rated lowest for the amount of attention being paid to it through the

workplace." Therefore in today's organizational settings WLB strategies are being implemented like policies of flexible work and leave arrangements, child and dependent care, compressed work week, job sharing, etc.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Working Hours and Dynamics Interplay between Work and Family Challenges

A work/life balance survey conducted in 2002 by True Careers states that 70% of more than 1,500 respondents said they don't have a healthy balance between their personal and work lives. As organisations move towards more participative and flat structures where fewer employees are expected to manage increase workloads (Hall & Ritcher, 1988), the demands of the environment increase, and maintaining the balance between the demands of a career and life responsibilities become more difficult. Hence an increasing level of stress can rapidly lead to low employee morale, poor productivity, and decreasing job satisfaction. Some of the specific problems that relate directly to productivity in the work environment are abuse of sick time, cheating, chronic absenteeism, distrust, embezzlement, organizational sabotage, tardiness, task avoidance, and violence in the workplace. Other serious repercussions are depression, alcohol and drug abuse, marital and financial problems, compulsive eating disorders, and employee burnout.

With ever increasing work overload there is always negative spill-over of stress from office to home and from home to office. Working late hours, bringing work to home, less time for lunch at office hours are the common problems faced by working couple, moreover, if the working environment is not supportive it may lead to more turnover as before. Employees tend to experience work-family conflict when demands from work and family are both high and difficult to satisfy. Work-family

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conflict is a form of inter-role conflict in which incompatible demands emanating from work and family domains make it difficult or impossible to satisfy both sets.

Employees from dual-earner families (the subjects of our study) are particularly likely to experience conflict between work and family. Whereas most research has focused on individuals and the work-family conflict they personally report, a growing number of studies suggest that work-life issues must be understood in the context of both spouses' employment conditions. Employees tend to experience work-family conflict when demands from work and family are both high and difficult to satisfy. Work-family conflict is a form of inter role conflict in which incompatible demands arising from work and family domains make it difficult to satisfy both sets.

Working couples are particularly likely to experience conflict between work and family. Whereas most research has focused on individuals and the work-family conflict they personally report, a growing number of studies suggest that work-life issues must be understood in the context of both spouses' employment conditions. This study though examines the spousal support and his indulgence in work, being at priority. A 1991 study finds relationships among employees' job security, income, and weekly work hours and their spouses' job involvement and satisfaction. Longer working hours are considered as the biggest work-family conflict reason giving more challenges to be faced by working couple. Late working hours, night shifts, work at home, no flexible scheduling and rigid corporate timings all these are demanding flex time work strategies.

In the last decade (Health Canada 2001, National Work Life Conflict Study), declared that high job stress has doubled, high job satisfaction and employee loyalty has doubled, the percentage of Canadian working more than 50 hours a week has grown from 10% to 25%, most Canadian lives in dual-income families and have dependents, whether children, aging parents or both. Also Canadian employers has reported that work life conflict has resulted in increased absenteeism and employee turnover, reduced productivity increased disability costs and health cost, increased managerial stress, and impaired family/social relationships. Jacobs and Gerson (2001) proposed that total family work hours, or the combined work hours of both spouses, would be a stronger predictor of negative outcomes, especially among parents, than the work hours of the individual spouses.

Total family work hours is a concept with considerable face validity; as Jacobs and Gerson (2001) note, 'married individuals have less time to spend at home, because they

devote more joint time to work' (p. 50). More recently, Voydanoff (2004b) argued that long work hours reduce the resources that couples have for managing home demands, with likely negative effects on marital quality that vary with gender. For example, long work hours have been associated with high work-family conflict (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) as well as with good physical health (Bird & Fremont, 1991). In contrast, there was no significant relationship between long work hours and intention to turnover or life satisfaction (Barnett & Gareis, 2000a,b).

Therefore today's company need various work-life strategies to be implemented that are helpful for working couple. They will be able to maintain a balance between much needed personal and professional life. The *workplace based strategy* could be flexi-time and flexi hours, part time, job sharing, job redesign, compressed work schedule; and *flexi-place strategy* could be telecommuting.

Leave arrangements could be compassionate care leave, extended leave, maternity leave, parental leave, personal leave, self-funded leave, sick leave. A review of more than 30 surveys regarding work/life balance published from 1997 to 2003 reveals that the number of employers who offer family-friendly benefits has dramatically increased. According to the *SHRM@ 2003 Benefits Survey* by the Society for Human Resource Management (www.shrm.org/surveys—available late June 2003), the percentage of employers offering family-friendly benefits continues to increase. The survey documents that the top five family-friendly benefits offered are:

- Dependent care flexible spending accounts (71% of respondents).
- Flex-time (55% of respondents).
- Family leave above required leave of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) (39% of respondents).
- Telecommuting on a part-time basis (34% of respondents).
- Compressed workweeks (31% of respondents).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

A sample of 70-80 working couples was taken from various countries including USA, Canada, Australia and India to measure the effect of working hours on working couples and the challenges they face. Diverse type of

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corporate sector including service sector, medical sectors, NGO's, manufacturing sectors, educational sectors etc. were included. A structured questionnaire was drafted containing various statements on Work-Life Balance and challenges. Giving a Cronbach Alpha of .80 (reliability and validity of questionnaire).

3.2 Measurement

Individual working hour's effect was assessed on the lives of working couple. 12-items from the dual career couple challenge scale were used to assess the challenges experienced by them. Responses were gauged on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5

(always). For example items including, "Do you work late hours at office every day?"; "Do you miss out on quality time with your family and friends because of work pressure?" A higher response rate of 85% was recorded.

Therefore, for measuring the effect of working hours on the challenges faced by dual career couple a simple regression analysis technique was applied with the help of SPSS 18 (PASW). Taking challenges as independent factors and working hours as dependent factors.

Simple regression analysis was used to test the hypothetical relations between the challenges and working hours, in table 1. We can see the variables entered as independent.

Table 1

Variables Entered/Removed ^b			
Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	spouse_availability, stress@work, work@home, lunchmore_30min, enoughtime_urself workingenv_upset, temper@work, work_late, timespend@work, spouse_priority, work_negeffect, miss_qtytime ^a	.	Enter

a. All requested variables entered.

b. Dependent Variable: working_hours

4. Analysis and Discussions

To address the challenge of analyzing data where it's being proved by our results that as $p < .05$, there is a statistically significant correlation between working hours

(dependent) and challenges of work-life (independent). (Table 2). Proving that the organisations need to be more sensitive to the needs of working couple and giving them appropriate space to balance their work-life.

Table 2

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.658 ^a	.432	.290	.815	a. Predictors: (Constant), spouse_availability, stress@work, work@home, lunchmore_30min, enoughtime_urself, workingenv_upset, temper@work, work_late, timespend@work, spouse_priority, work_negeffect, miss_qtytime

Where R Square is .432, i.e. 43% of the variance in working hours is explained by challenges. Where $p < .05$ explaining that longer working hours are reasons for work-family conflict and negative spillover of stress between work and family. It also results in work overload and burnout among employees.

Table 3
ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	24.309	12	2.026	3.046	.003 ^a
	Residual	31.920	48	.665		
	Total	56.230	60			

a. Predictors: (Constant), spouse_availability, stress@work, work@home, lunchmore_30min, enoughtime_urself, workingenv_upset, temper@work, work_late, timespend@work, spouse_priority, work_negeffect, miss_qtytime

b. Dependent Variable: working_hours

Table 4

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.198	.482		.411	.683
work_late	.366	.133	.392	2.756	.008
work@home	-.050	.121	-.055	-.417	.679
timespend@work	-.011	.137	-.013	-.081	.935
stress@work	-.310	.199	-.283	-1.557	.126
lunchmore_30min	-.006	.084	-.009	-.066	.947
miss_qtytime	.240	.172	.298	1.395	.169
work_negeffect	.078	.158	.090	.497	.621
enoughtime_urself	.166	.129	.200	1.292	.202
workingenv_upset	-.092	.126	-.110	-.726	.471
temper@work	.271	.163	.221	1.661	.103
spouse_priorty	.196	.152	.209	1.293	.202
spouse_availability	-.113	.091	-.170	-1.240	.221

a. Dependent Variable: working_hours

5. Conclusion

This study therefore suggests that dual-career couples may have different needs from those of the more traditional single-career couple. There is, therefore, a need for organisations to develop policies and practices that provide support for the demands of both work and family. In the work environment, dual-career employee status implies the need for greater employer sensitivity and awareness of the conflicting demands of simultaneous careers, so that employees may become more effective both at work and at home. What is needed is policies and programmes to help employees reduce the amount of conflict and the resulting stress they experience when they try to juggle the demands of work and home responsibilities (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Higgins, Duxbury and Irving (1992) for example, found that conflict between work and family roles reduce

employees' perceptions of quality of work life and the quality of family life which, in turn, can impact productivity, absenteeism and turnover. Supportive work practices like flexible work options (e.g. flexitime, compressed work weeks, home telecommuting) as well as assistance with child and dependent care, employee support programme (e.g. counselling) and career path alternatives (Bardoel, Tharenou and Moss, 1998) are therefore vital to minimise stress, maximize employees' sense of control over their lives, sustain manageable career progression, and at the same time balance career and family demands. (Elloy F David, 2004).

6. Limitations of Study

The study presented here is not without limitations. Lack of time was also a big constraint. Respondents situated

out of India (home country) having problem while filling up the questionnaire were not able to discuss the doubts regarding the questionnaire because of distance and lack of time. Wrong information like telling wrong age or wrong spouse information cannot be avoided. An additional limitation based on the characteristics of the sample may be bias associated with non-response.

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