

Maintaining Work Life Balance Among Female Medical Staff Through Positive Work Environment: Evidence from Malaysia

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Abstract: The concept of work-life balance is based on the notion that paid work and personal life should be seen as corresponding essentials of a full life. Work-life balance reflects a person's orientation across career and non-career life roles, and a conflict between work and life is seen as a mismatched between inter-role phenomenon. The need for work-life balance (WLB) has become even more pressing because of changes in the composition of the workforce. Longer working hours and after-hours connectivity not only negatively affect employees' lifestyle health but also limits their time available for non-work life. Women are more likely to spend more working hours than men are and the larger share of household work that is generally borne by women could cause this. A positive work climate leads to a strong emotional bond between organizational members, which in turn increases employees' engagement, commitment, loyalty and performance. If employees feel that the work environment is not safe, uncomfortable and unharmonious, it will cause discomfort, which may affect organizational performance. Organization need to take care of their employees by helping them maintaining a stable balance between their personal and professional life. This paper analyzed the relationship between a positive work environment (via supervisory support and flexible work arrangement) and the work-life balance of selected female medical staff in a hospital in Peninsular Malaysia. The findings of this study revealed that supervisory support and flexible work arrangements are important in helping employees developed a caring and helpful workplace.

Keywords: Work Life-Balance, Positive Work Environment, Supervisory Support, Flexible Work Arrangement

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the line between a person's professional life and non-work life has become increasingly blurred. This is largely due to changes in family structures, increases in women's participation in the workforce, and technological changes, which has seen the nature of work, evolve with the introduction of remote working practices [16]. Given such an environment, employees now place more value on free time or social interaction with friends, family, and their community.

The concept of work-life balance is based on the concept that paid work and personal life should be seen less as opposite priorities and more as corresponding essentials of a full life. The way to achieve a work-life balance is by adapting a system that can be defined as a two-way process which considers the need of workers as well as those employers. Apart from that, work-life balance also reflects good functioning at work and at home with negligible role conflicts. In short, it is about creating a productive work culture where the possibilities of forcing someone between work and other aspects of people's life is reduced. It means that there is an equal amount of paid work and personal time while having an appropriate organization system.

However, the combination and balance between work and personal life can change over time. Work-life balance reflects a person's orientation across career and non-career life roles, in which a conflict between work and life will be seen as a mismatched inter-role phenomenon. Work-life balance involves achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains and to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment to be well distributed across to all the domains [15].

Rapid industrialization has increased the participation of women in the workforce in many Asian countries. This has led to higher work-family conflict for working parents and female workers. Despite this, women still undertake the lion's share of domestic responsibilities in most of East and South Asia. In India, although the government passed anti-discrimination laws in 1995, it is still common for employees to work unpaid overtime. In China, paid maternity leave in South East Asia is usually about 10 to 14 weeks, in comparison to some Nordic countries where it can be as long as one year [8].

In Malaysia, the concept of work life balance is not new. Work-life issues have become an attention in research and practices since the 1980s, due to increasing number of women employees [10]. Women are more likely to spend more working hours than men are and the larger share of household work that is generally borne by women could cause this. Even though many researches support the negative relationship between work-life balance and career advancement, other research found the relationship to be positive. Sometimes, a good policy is not enough to retain women in the labor market, for example, women choose to drop out of the labor market despite laws that entitle national women to 70 days of maternity leave with optional leave for up to two years on a reduced salary to enable mothers to nurse infant children. When the conflict between work and life become higher and unmanageable, women would highly consider sacrificing career over family. Others maintain that the difficulty of balancing professional and family obligations leads to women feeling that they are unable to take on a leadership role [10].

The mounting pressure of work demand is expected to negatively influence the life domain. Longer working hours and after-hours connectivity not only negatively affect employees' lifestyle health but also limits their time available for non-work life. Sadly, many employers have turned a blind eye towards employees' call for better work-life balance (WLB). The need for Work-Life Balance (WLB) has become even more pressing as a result of changes in the composition and composition of the workforce. Failure to accommodate non-family aspects of life can induce stress and be detrimental to the well-being of employees and their performance at work.

The conflict between home and work roles leads to women feeling frustrated, inferior, and lack of self-confidence. It was found that having a positive work environment, which include having supportive

supervisors and a flexible work arrangement, may be equivalent to having a supportive and healthy work climate that could assist women in balancing work and family issues.

1.1 Positive Work Environment

A positive work environment is where the employees feel comfortable, safe and healthy. When an employee feels safe and comfortable working in that environment, they will become more committed and dedicated to their jobs and duties. This in turn will make them loyal and productive. A positive work environment also relates to the good work relationships between colleagues that reflect a harmonious working environment. A positive work climate leads to a strong emotional bond between organizational members, which in turn, increase employees' engagement, commitment, loyalty and performance. If employees feel that the work environment is not safe, uncomfortable and unharmonious, it will cause discomfort, which may affect organizational performance [1]. In the context of this paper, positive work environment will be reflected through supervisory support and flexible work arrangement.

1.1.1 Supervisory support and work life balance

Work-life balance is not only the concerns of the employees but also the employers. Organization need to take care of their employees by helping them maintaining a stable balance between their personal and professional life. In other word, the organization must provide the support for the employees to maintain a healthy and positive work-life balance. Supervisors' support is important as providing support means that the organization values the contribution of their employees and cares for their employee's wellbeing [6].

Supervisor support leads to employees' high commitment, achieved through job satisfaction, motivation and positive leader behaviors concerned with promoting the comfort and wellbeing of the subordinates. This also means that the supervisors are willing to help their employees to improve their skills, knowledge, and work attitudes. According to organizational support theory, supervisor support facilitates changes in employees' levels of affective commitment and other related work attitudes [9]. Supervisor support is defined as employees' views about the degree to which their supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being. Supervisors are responsible for directing and evaluating employees' job performance. Thus, employees often view their supervisor's feedback as indicative of the organization's orientation toward them. Supervisor support reflects the support from the upper level that will enhance the perceived of the work-life balance. In addition, supervisor support is one of the resources that helps employees developed a caring and helpful workplace. Supervisor support also enhances both affective, establish commitment among workers towards the organization, and reduce the possibility of turnover. Based on this aforementioned discussion, we developed our first hypothesis as the following:

There is a significant relationship between supervisors' support and the work-life balance of female medical staff.

1.1.2 Flexible work arrangement and work-life balance

Besides supervisory support, a positive work environment is also reflected in how work is organized in an organization. Flexible work arrangements affect employees' job motivation and dedication [7]. In many ways, this kind of flexible work arrangement allows for efficient and quality time in scheduling all of the activities because the employees know how to handle the situation that they face. Flexible work arrangements have also been recognized as a means for employees to create a more satisfying balance between work and family lives [14]. Employees experiencing work-life conflict

suffer negative individual and organizational consequences, thus it is important to have flexible work arrangements to facilitate a positive work environment.

Flexible work arrangements have been viewed as a means of obtaining a competitive advantage by improving the attraction and retention of high-quality employees. These arrangements are adjustments to the employee's regular work schedule on a recurring basis to respond to the work-life needs of an employee. The flexible work arrangement must continue to support the operational needs of the department and allow for appropriate oversight of the employee's work. Flexible work arrangements have also been recognized as a means for employees to create a more satisfying balance between their work and family [14].

Flexible work arrangements have been known as a means of obtaining a competitive advantage by improving the attraction and retention of high-quality employees, who may have been overlooked in the past for various reasons including their personal circumstances [3]. According to Nadeem and Henry (2003), there are further suggestions that the utilization of flexible work arrangements has been linked to improved organizational commitment, motivation, and job satisfaction.

Flexible work arrangement is defined as the opportunity for the employees to make a choice that may influence when, where, what, and for how long they involve in work-related tasks [2]. So if the employees can manage their working life to align with their matters it will make the employees feel more dedicated and motivated. Based on the research, therefore the first hypothesis of the study is as follows:

There is a significant relationship between flexible work arrangements and the work-life balance of female medical staff.

1. Methodology

This study was conducted among female medical staffs located in hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia. 123 medical staffs were involved in this study. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to respondents in a non-fixed setting, with minimal contact between respondents and the researchers. The data collection was personally administered by the researchers through the face-to-face method. The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections which were Section A (demographic information), Section B (work life balance), Section C (supervisory support) and Section D (flexible work arrangement). The questionnaire was prepared in two languages, which were English and Malay to better gain respondents' understanding. In an attempt to make sure the data was collected ethically, all the information given by the respondent were treated with utmost confidence and were only used to achieve the research's objectives. The reliability for all the items used were between 0.729 and 0.886.

3. Data Analysis and Results

Data analysis, respondents' demographics, and descriptive data such as percentages and frequencies were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 24 software for Windows. Table 1 shows a total of 123 respondents. The respondents' age involved in this research were between 21 and 60 years old. 52.8% of the respondents were single, followed by married, divorced, and widowed, which were 38.2%, 6.5%, and 2.4%, respectively. Most of the respondents did not have children (41.5%), and the balance had 1-3 (32.5%), 4-5 (8.2%), and more than 5 children (2.4%). The highest academic qualification among the respondent were a bachelor's degree (37.4%), followed by a diploma (26.0%), a Master's degree (13.0%), a Doctorate (10.6%), the Malaysian Certificate of Education or SPM (8.1%), and the lowest was the Malaysian High School Certificate or STPM (4.9%). Most of the respondents were from other positions (41.5%) excluding doctors, nurses, and the heads of nurses. The respondents came from other miscellaneous departments (24.4%), and the lowest number

of respondents were from the critical care unit (8.1%). The length of services of the respondents ranges from less than one year to more than 20 years. The highest number of respondents came from the respondents that already worked for one year to five years (39.8%). This was followed by less than one year (22.0%), 6 to 10 years (19.5%), 11 to 15 years (8.1%), and the lowest was more than 20 years (4.9%). The respondents' working hours were between 20 and 80 hours per week. Apart from that, most of the respondents were working the day shift (29.3 %) followed by long shift and monthly rotating shift (25.2%), night shift (11.4%) and the lowest was the afternoon shift (8.9%).

3.1 Tables

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

No.	Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Age		
	21 – 30 years	66	53.7
	31 – 40 years	23	18.7
	41 – 50 years	22	17.9
	51 – 60 years	12	9.8
2	Marital status		
	Single	65	52.8
	Married	47	38.2
	Divorced	8	6.5
	Widowed	3	2.4
3	Number of children		
	0	70	56.9
	1-3 children	40	32.5
	4-5 children	10	8.2
	> than 5 children	3	2.4
4	Academic qualification		
	SPM	10	8.1
	STPM	6	4.9
	Diploma	32	26.0
	Degree	46	37.4
	Master	16	13.0
	Doctorate	13	10.6
5	Current position		
	Doctor	23	18.7
	Head of Nurse	14	11.4
	Nurse	35	28.5
	Others	51	41.5
6	Type of work setting		
	Medical		
	Surgical	20	16.3
	Emergency	16	13.0
	Operating room	17	13.8
	Critical care unit	13	10.6
	Paediatrics	10	8.1
	Others	17	13.8
		30	24.4

7	Length of service		
	< 1 years	27	22.0
	1– 5 years	49	39.8
	6 – 10 years	24	19.5
	11– 15 years	10	8.1
	16 – 20 years	6	4.9
	>20 years	7	5.7
8	Hours of work per week		
	20 - 35 hours	7	5.6
	36- 50 hours	10	80.4
	> 51 hours	11	13.6
9	Shift worked		
	Long shift	31	25.2
	Day shift	36	29.3
	Afternoon shift	11	8.9
	Night shift	14	11.4
	Monthly rotating shift	31	25.2

Table 2: Correlation table for supervisory support and work – life balance

Supervisor support and work – life balance	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
Pearson correlation	0.537**
N	123

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows the correlation analysis between supervisory support and work-life balance among female medical staff ($r = 0.537$). There was a significant relationship between supervisory support and work-life balance among female medical staff in the study ($p < 0.01$). The proposed hypothesis was accepted.

Table 3: Correlation table for flexible work arrangements and work – life balance

Flexible work arrangements and work – life balance	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
Pearson correlation	0.542**
N	123

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Further, table 3 shows the correlation analysis between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among female medical staff ($r = 0.542$). There was a significant relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among female medical staff in the study ($p < 0.01$). The proposed hypothesis was accepted.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Women face more challenges to balance their personal and professional lives compared to men [12]. One of the reasons why women employees leave an organization and the company could be a lack of work-life balance. There are many negative impacts that affect employees regarding both work and non-work life matters, such as the emotional distribution that leads to low-quality productivity and low commitment by employees towards work. To worsen, healthcare professionals are also tied to shift work, overtime, and other medical emergencies. So, as a result, these medical staffs, particularly female employees, need to find solutions to balance their work and their personal lives due to the increasing numbers of patients from time to time to avoid any problems such as stress and unbalanced work life [13].

The healthcare sector is a priority for the government's manpower planning and resources; however, this sector has suffered from a shortage of staff and personnel. This situation forces medical professionals to work long hours under high pressure with less flexibility. According to the World Health Organization, the number of medical staff is only 1:600 per head of the population, which is not enough to fulfill the number of people. However, in 2015, there was an increase in the number of medical staff in the population, which is 1:671 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016).

Even though the number of medical staff has increased, the shortage of nurses is also critical, especially in the public healthcare sector. The shortage of medical staff has forced the medical staff to work under high pressure with long working hours, which affects the work-life balance of the employees [5]. The imbalance between work and life has also caused other serious complications, especially for female employees, which included job burnout, job dissatisfaction, and higher turnover intentions. Work and life balance also seem more difficult for women as they carry heavy responsibilities as mothers and family caretakers. The findings of this study prove that a positive work environment through supervisory support and flexible work arrangements are critical to the work-life balance of female medical staff. Medical institutions must consider increasing, if not maintaining a positive work environment for their employees to keep the employees' well-being at their best. As studies done in Malaysian settings are still scarce, future studies are recommended to explore the longitude effect of other aspects of the work environment on the work-life balance of employees.

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