Impact of Work Life Balance on the Career Advancement of the Gen Y Women Professionals in Indian IT Industry: A Review Study

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ABSTRACT

Study on working women professionals has attracted much attention of the researchers and practitioners in all parts of the world due to their increasing presence in different domains including the Information Technology sector. While women have successfully adapted themselves into the nerves of the corporate environment, the professional responsibilities have not relieved women of their personal commitments. Furthermore, the advanced technological system, long working hours, stringent deadlines ensures the commitment of women to be 24*7. This disturbs the balance between work and life domain and impacts the personal and the social health of individuals. The conflict between work and life creates setback for the Generation Y women who want a suitable work-life balance than only professional accolades. The present research paper aims to conduct a systematic literature study to explore the challenges of the Generation Y women professionals in attaining a suitable work-life balance. It also tries to identify the determinants and consequences in the form of organisational and individual factors on the variables under study.

KEYWORDS: Career Advancement, Generation Y Women, Work Life Balance

INTRODUCTION

The term Work Life Balance has been addressed in the scholastic literature from the past many decades from varied perspectives such as giving adequate time for job, spending quality time with family, balancing career and family life etc (Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Kalliath and Brough, 2008; White et al, 2003). However, in simpler terms work-life balance means maintaining a suitable balance between two equally significant yet distinct domains i.e. Work and Life.

Women are believed to be the worst sufferer of this challenge as they hold the dual responsibility of managing work and home together (Emslie and Hunt, 2009). Further with the technological advancements, the issue of work-life balance has become more complex as the line between the work and life spheres becomes indistinct (Morris and Madsen, 2007; Blyton et al, 2005). With technological advancements women today are able to fulfill their work and life demands simultaneously with options such as work-from-home, telecommuting etc. However, the constant juggling between work and non-work activities leads to an integration of two domains than a balanced separation. Additionally, the pressure to be responsive at all times creates a detrimental impact on the personal and social health of women (Armour, 2003).

In a developing country like India wherein majority of woman have the dual responsibility of managing work and home duties together, the challenges related to work-life balance are often raised (Mathew and Panchanatham, 2011). The Indian Information Technology sector which accommodates one of the largest percentage of working women professionals also faces the difficulty of ensuring a suitable work life balance

for women. With the entry of the new generation into the workforce the issue of work life balance has become complex. The new generational workforce typically called as the Generation Y or the millennials shows a greater demand for a suitable work-life balance than their predecessors (Sheahan, 2005). The increasing expectation of the Gen Y women for a suitable balance gives a demographic dimension to the already existing gender challenge.

Over the years, the number of studies on work life balance has grown significantly mainly due to the increase in the percentage of women professionals (Emslie and Hunt, 2009; Crompton and Lyonette, 2006). Also, the percentage of Generation Y population is increasing at a tremendous rate and is expected to dominate the Indian labour market in the coming decades. Hence, it is imperative to understand the challenges of work-life balance from a new demographic lens i.e. Generation Y perspective. The present study considers identifying the factors which creates work-life conflict for the Generation Y women and its impact on their career advancement path as well job performance. The study also focuses on health hazards expected due to the strenuous relationship between work and life. The study is conducted from the perspective of the Indian Information Technology sector which has a significant population of the young Generation Y women professionals.

The present research paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we include a detailed explanation of all the key terminologies based on the study of the existing literature. This is followed by identifying and explaining the determinants and the consequences related to work-life balance. In the subsequent section we have made an attempt to classify our literature by proposing a conceptual framework to explain the relation between the variables under study. The last section includes discussion and conclusion with directions for future research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Work-Life Balance includes two small yet powerful words i.e. Work and Life. Work has several extended meanings such as travel time, taking calls or attending meetings from home, official tours or visits etc. Similarly, life in a broader context is anything which is outside work including personal, family or social life. The metaphor work and life becomes complex when the word "balance" gets attached to it (Kalliath and Brough, 2008; Guest, 2002). The struggle for a suitable work-life balance is constant and ever challenging. Over the years, with the advancement of technology and internet, the boundary between work and personal life is getting thinner. A higher number of women are opting for options like work-from-home, flexible schedules which facilitates them to accomplish their work at any time (Houston, 2005; Tausig and Fenwick, 2001). This has given a new meaning to the definition of 'work' wherein being at work is independent of physical presence of individual.

While this technological comfort has made the life of working professionals much easier, it has deteriorated the quality of human life worse than expected. People are seen bringing their work to home, working longer hours and having a more stressful life than ever. The ultimate result of this is women either drop out of the career paths or go for a slower progression/secondary career (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). This problem becomes more complex when it is seen through a demographic lens i.e. from a generational perspective. Anecdotal evidence suggests that generational values differ and so does the perception towards life and work (Ng et al, 2010). The younger generation demand for both a balanced life and meaningful work (Smola and Sutton, 2002). Sheryl Sandberg (2013) in her book "Lean In" states that today the millennials desire to "have it all" i.e. a successful career and a fulfilling life. It is crucial to study the work-life challenges from the perspective of the Generation Y cohort who are a part of the modern day workforce and aspire to balance the world of work and non-work equally.

EVOLUTION OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

The term "work/life balance" was officially coined in the year 1986. However, the usage of this term can be traced back to as early as 1930s, wherein by reducing the working hours of the employees resulted into better productivity and higher employee morale. From 1960 onwards, the term work-life balance was used more

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often in the context of women professionals with their increasing presence in the workforce. Till 1980s the significance of work-life balance was restricted to married women or women with children. However, 1990s witnessed a series of studies which included the work-life balance challenges for both married and unmarried women (Singh, 2014).

Along the course, various definitions of work-life balance have been proposed by different authors. Greenhaus et al (2003) defined work-life balance as giving equal time for personal as well as work life and gaining an equal satisfaction in both the spheres. Kirchmeyer (2000) has defined work-life balance as finding a healthy balance between work and home life with a suitable usage of one's time, energy and resources. Majority of the definitions explain the meaning of life as limited to home or family life especially for women. Guest (2002) suggests that every human being has a life which is outside of family and might include social, cultural or community life. Hence, a broader definition of the term "life" is required while defining work-life balance.

Studies in the past have frequently addressed the undesirable consequences related to work-life balance. Very few studies have followed a consolidated approach highlighting the causes and consequences related to work-life balance. The present research study proposes a framework focusing on the determinants and consequences related to work-life balance. The determinants of the work-life balance are categorized as Organisational and Individual factors leading to work-life conflict, life-work conflict or a spillover effect. Further the impact of the conflict is studied on the organisational and individual factors in the form of career advancement path, job performance as well as the health of individuals. The study also includes few human resource practices as a moderating variable.

DETERMINANTS OF WORK-LIFE RELATION

The factors leading to or creating a disruption between the work and life measures are many. In the present research study, the determinants are categorized as Organisational and Individual factors.

1. ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS:

The primary onus of balancing work and life demands is considered to be an individual's responsibility. However, research scholars in their studies suggest that it is the organisation and its policies which play an important role in ensuring a suitable work-life balance (Anderson et al, 2002). The Indian IT industry which has one of the highest percentage of women professionals commonly faces the challenge of ensuring work-life balance for women (Valk and Srinivasan, 2011).

In today's time, the equation between work and life has become complex. The technology and internet provisions ensure that the employees never actually leave their professional world. While, this technology facilitation has raised the productivity of employees, it has in turn blurred the lines between personal and work life. Organisational factors in the form of policies and supervisor support are believed to have a significant impact.

(i)Organisation Policies: The Indian IT industry has been appreciated at several platforms for being one of the most women friendly employers. The IT organisations by providing options like flexi time, flexible schedule, work from home etc facilitates women to continue work instead of dropping out completely (Thompson et al, 1999). However, reports suggest that onlythe women friendly policy cannot help to overcome the issues of work-life balance. Women who opt for such policies often complain about facing reluctance or displeasure from their employers. Allen (2001) suggests that implementation of policies can be effective only if it is embedded in the organisation culture.

(ii)Support from Supervisors/Peers: The success of any policy implementation is dependent upon the extent to which it is supported by the managers or peers. The support from the supervisor, coworkers plays a pivotal role in helping the women professional to accomplish their job roles while also fulfilling personal commitments (Jones et al, 2013). Options such as work-from-home, part-time work, job sharing etc can be successfully executed only if the supervisors, peers are supportive of the same. Further, it also prevents women from feeling of isolation, loneliness or anxiety especially after a long career break, maternity leave etc.

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From the generational perspective, the Generation Y workers ask for flexible schedules or timings to fulfill their personal commitments (Meister et al, 2010). However, they often experience resistance from their supervisors and are perceived as less sincere, ambitious towards their career. This disrupts the whole purpose of providing flexible schedules or convenient working for the women.

2. INDIVIDUAL FACTORS:

The individual factors refer to hindrances whether real or imaginary creating impediment in achieving success. The individual factors include several self-related barriers, personal choices or priorities and self-perception which hamper the potential of women to succeed (Reis, 2002). Statistical reports from past suggest that a higher number of women face self-related barriers and score low in terms of ambition, work orientation, energy level, personality etc.

Evidence from the past suggests that women at younger age are very ambitious and career oriented. However, after few years, the career advancement prospects and life progression runs on a parallel track due to which women face conflicts between the two worlds (Sturges and Guest, 2004). In the present day context, this dilemma arises at a very early stage as the Generation Y women desire to "have it all" i.e. a progressive career as well as a meaningful life (Slaughter, 2012). The young women believe that once they enter in their career they can smoothly progress without any hurdles. They often ignore the natural events of life such as marriage or maternity which puts their career path on a slower track if not for ever but atleast for few years. Further, the unrealistic planning often lowers their aspiration or puts them on a slower career path (Reis, 2002).

The other extreme to this issue is some of the young women are overly ambitious and are termed as "workaholics" (Bonebright et al, 2000). While, this helps the women to climb the career ladder smoothly it has a detrimental impact on their personal and social life. Delay in marriage, family planning or remaining single, divorced etc is an indicator of the growing prominence of this problem (Hoffnung, 2004). Under both the circumstances, conflict is experienced which hurts the job performance, career prospects and the health of women.

FAMILY RELATED FACTORS:

(i) Family or Spouse: The change in the composition of family from joint to nuclear system coupled with dual-career partners, working mothers, single or divorced parents has increased the dependence for a family/spousal support (Gregory and Milner, 2009). Women if not supported by the family/spouse hold themselves back which hurts their career advancement prospects. The Gen Y women who are generally perceived as extremely confident, ambitious and career oriented also look for the constant support or backing of their parents (especially father), elders or siblings to progress further.

Another interesting dimension to this genre old problem is the support of spouse for women once they are married. Literature studies suggest that today most of the couples share the domestic responsibilities including elderly or child care (Abendroth and Den Dulk, 2011). However, the young women are still burdened with what Hochschild term suggests as "the second shift" (Guest, 2002). The clash between the work and personal duties often leads to work-life imbalance creating several negative and undesirable consequences.

(ii) Dependent Care:

The modern society treats men and women as equal individuals. However, the biological differences exist which separates the two genders from each other. One of the most enduring differences is related to motherhood wherein women are blessed with the privilege of maternity. A woman experiences several biological, emotional and psychological changes while delivering a child. Even after the child birth, a woman feels an emotional connect with the child and takes the primary responsibility of child care. Similarly, looking after elders or aged relatives are always considered as a women's job (Silbermann, 2015).

In the past centuries, based on the biological differences the roles in the society and household were divided wherein men had to go out for work whereas the role of women was restricted within the four walls of house including domestic work, child and elder care etc (Jain, 2012). Time has changed and today women are entering the professional world equally with men. However, they are still not relieved of their domestic or

familial duties. The high peer pressure or the overloading demands from the employer often pressurizes the women to return to the work too soon even after major life events such as child birth, major illness or death in the family etc. This takes a toll on the physical and the psychological health of women and results into frequent career interruptions impacting their health as well as advancement prospects (Keeton et al, 2007).

WORK LIFE INTERACTIONS:

1. Work Life Conflict:

The traditional Indian society had clearly demarcated the role of men and women, wherein men had to step out and earn money and women had to look after household responsibilities. Over the years, the Indian society has seen dramatic changes and so has the role of the women (Desai, 2001). In the present day scenario, with the changes in the family structure and the growing expenses, a large number of women are entering into the workforce.

However, the successful stepping of women into the corporate world has not relieved them of traditional responsibilities. Women are still accountable for managing domiciliary work along with professional commitments (Clark, 2000). Further in today's time, the equation of work-life has become more complex with the sophisticated and easily available technology provisions. With the proliferation of technology, today the Generation Y women professionals are able to accomplish their work at any time and place (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007). Additionally, the IT industry is also facilitating the women with various options such as work-from-home, telecommuting, job sharing, flexible schedule etc by which they can fulfill their job responsibilities while sitting in any part of the world (Messersmith, 2007). Checking emails while in bed, messaging or mailing while having dinner, taking official calls or attending virtual meetings while travelling has become a common practice. The continuous interference of work into personal space creates a conflict between the two domains in which women falter to perform in either. This results into a high fall out in the percentage of women from the corporate space every year.

2. Life Work Conflict

Inter role conflict has been defined as the struggle or tension created by the participation in one setting which impacts the performance in the other setting (Huang et al, 2004). Women often experience the challenge of this notion as they play multiple roles at a time (Carlson and Kacmar, 2000). While women have fitted well within the corporate walls, the realm of household jobs doesn't leave them. The overall dependence of the family members or the spouse over the female of the house often hampers the productivity, time and energy level required at work.

Over the years, the conflict created from life to work is increasing (Jeffrey et al, 2008). The Generation Y women have seen their mothers, aunts and other relatives struggling for a balanced life. Hence, they wish for a fulfilling life than only a successful career. Further, there has been a growing recognition that single, unmarried women have lives outside of work and they should get time to fulfill their personal demands (Smith, 2010). However, this creates a negative perception about the women who are considered as less sincere or ambitious towards work. The constant conflict caused by the life preferences over work results into stress, burnout and psychological pressure. This has a two-way impact on the career advancement path as well as the health of women.

3. Spillover Effect

Technology has made the world a smaller place wherein challenges related to geographical distance, differing time zone has become almost negligible. While, the technology has connected the whole wide world together, it has made the work and life domains more integrated. Bringing work to home, working over weekends or while on a family trip, taking calls while driving etc creates an intrusion of work into personal space frequently. This integration or overlap of one life setting over the other is commonly termed as the spillover effect (Scholarios and Marks, 2004).

There are conflicting views about the consequences of the spillover effect. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) states that women play multiple roles at home (of wife, mother, daughter, sister etc) which makes them more

proficient at work in handling clients or customers leading to a positive spillover. However, majority of the research work is inclined towards highlighting the negative spillover effects. Ilies et al (2007) states that the interference of one life setting into the other does more harm than good and leads to negative consequences. A spillover leads to an overlap of work and non-work activities which diminishes the performance in both spheres.

CONSEQUENCES OF WORK-LIFE RELATION

The issues of work-life balance are complex and it has a hazardous impact on the career path, job performance as well as the health of individuals.

ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

Career Advancement

Career Advancement in common terms means promotion, movement to higher levels, higher job responsibilities etc. Numerous studies have acknowledged the relationship between work life conflict and job performance, job satisfaction, motivation, productivity (Lyness and Judiesch, 2008). However, less is known about the relation between work-life balance and its impact on the career outcomes of women employees.

The direction of relationship between work-life balance and career advancement prospects has always been debatable. Few researchers state that people who invest their time and energy for other life pursuits lack in work commitments (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Whereas on other hand, few research studies state that women who play multiple role i.e. of wife, mother, sister actually become more competent in dealing with people and varied situations. Hence, a balance of two domains actually helps a person to advance in career.

Recent studies on the issues of work and life suggests that the younger workers place a higher demand for a suitable work-life balance (Ng et al, 2010). The expectation of the Generation Y women for a life beyond work sometimes restricts their advancement prospects. The Indian IT industry which is always appreciated for its progressive approach towards women also faces this constraint. The employers have a higher appreciation for the employees who prioritise work over personal life and are ready to work over time. However, the demand of Gen Y employees for a balanced life clashes with the expectations of the employer. It hurts the career prospects of women more as they are perceived to be suitable for care giving or domestic roles of mother, wife than the aggressive or strategic role of a manager (Rogier and Padgett, 2004).

Job Performance

The longer working hours, compressed personal or family time, work over the weekends etc are some of the traits attached with a high performer (White et al, 2003). Women are often deprived of this status as the number of working hours are increasing at a tremendous rate whereas the time to look after family duties has remained the same. The constant conflict and juggle between the work and life demands leads to exhaustion, loss of interest, lesser confidence and a lower job performance. Research studies state that a conflict in personal life disrupts the overall performance of individuals (Sparks et al, 2001). The Indian IT industry is largely dependent upon the productivity and performance of women employees as they constitute a significant portion of the workforce. A lower job performance by women is also a failure for the organisation. Concrete measures need to be taken to facilitate women to enhance their work performance while also advancing in their life trajectory.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Health factors: Research on the relationship between work-life conflict and the health of individuals has substantially increased over the past few decades (Frone et al, 1997). Recent scholarly work suggests that over the years the life span of humans has depleted and the longevity of illness, stress or depression has increased. Women find it difficult to cope with the work and life demands together and end up experiencing various health hazards whether physical, emotional or psychological. Frequent headaches, migraine, hypertension, sinus etc are some of the issues that women frequently suffer from (Grzywacz and Bass, 2003).

While the physical health issues are sometimes curable, it is the psychological or emotional imbalance which has a lasting impact (Jones et al, 2013). Today, women at a very young age suffer from emotional or mental distress such as feeling of depression, anxiety or loneliness etc. This often results into a disturbed personal life, broken relation, difficulty in making friends, averting from social gatherings or informal networks etc. Additionally, burnout and stress are two common health hazards faced by majority of Generation Y women professionals.

(i)Burnout: The generation Y women commonly complain about experiencing what is termed as the "professional burnout" (Beauregard and Henry, 2009). The burnout syndrome is characterized by emotional imbalance, feeling of deprivation, cynicism, anxiety, low level of personal accomplishment etc. This psychological imbalance deprives an individual to cope with the normal stress of life leading to incompetence, low confidence and uncertainty. Further, it also has an adverse effect on the physical health such as high cholesterol, blood pressure, heart disease etc. Lu and Gursoy (2016), report that women at a very young age are stepping back from their careers and taking breaks to overcome the issue of burnout.

(ii)Stress: The prevalence of job stress in the recent generations is widely acknowledged especially in the Indian Information Technology industry. The long anti-social working hours, night shifts, frequency of over-time or work over weekends are cited as the common causes of job stress (Chiang et al, 2010). Past reports suggest that the constant interference of work over life and vice-versa leads to stress. This creates a detrimental impact on both the individuals (in the form of anxiety, fear, depression and other health issues) as well as the organisation such as high absenteeism, turn over, reduced productivity, loyalty and job satisfaction (Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Batt and Valcour,2003).
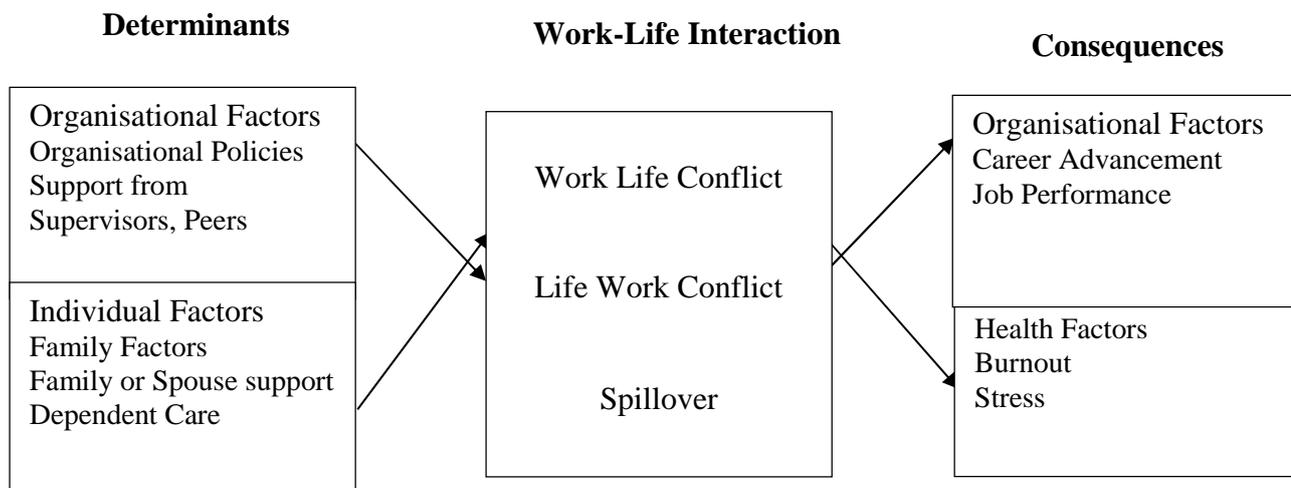
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

CONCLUSION:

The generation Y represents a quarter of the world population of which a large portion is present in India. Reports suggests that by the year 2020, more than 65% of the population would be in the age of 15-64 years and will dominate the future workforce of the country. Thus, it is important for the organisations as well as the human resource professionals, to have a clear understanding about the Generation Y professionals and the work-life challenges they face in today's time.

The issue of work-life balance has been addressed several times in the past. However, it still remains as one of the most contemporary issues with few factors evolving as the new generations enter the workplace. The present research study gives an overview about the existing issues related to work-life balance in the context of the Generation Y women professionals. It further proposes a conceptual framework highlighting the causes

and consequences related to the work-life balance in the form of organisational and individual factors. The present research study is helpful as it provides multiple research directions to the existing challenge of work-life balance. Further, a primary research study can be conducted to validate and extend the usage of the existing conceptual framework which is based on the literature study. There is scope for researchers to further explore the impact of work-life balance on the health of human-beings in the coming days as the line between work and life is getting thinner with the intrusion of technology.

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