

Developmental Paper

Productivity under Flexibility: Exploring the Role of Family Support for Women Employees in India's IT and Banking Industries

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Abstract:

This study aims to determine the factors influencing the productivity of female employees concerning the assistance received from their partners and extended family members during and after the pandemic while working flexibly in the Indian IT and banking sectors. This study has investigated the two primary revenue-generating sectors in India, which operate in very distinct ways. The purpose of the study was to understand the impact of flexible working arrangements in these two sectors, the elements contributing to work-life balance and its significance to employees. The study will adopt a qualitative methodology by gathering data from 45 employees, consisting of both male and female participants, using semi-structured interviews to identify the various factors that affect their work-life balance.

Introduction:

The pandemic has established a unique scenario for flexible working, compelling numerous individuals to navigate it without prior preparation (Bin et al. 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent economic crisis significantly affected working women by substantially increasing their disproportionately allocated domestic work burden, making them more vulnerable to job losses and layoffs (Collins, Landivar, Ruppanner, & Scarborough, 2020). However, India has a similar situation to the rest of the world, with patriarchal families that expect women to handle all home duties, including caring for the elderly, spouse, and children (Kelkar et al., 2002). The continuous pressure from family members during the lockdown has intensified the burden on women balancing home and work, while the contributions of males remained largely unacknowledged. Their personal and professional obligations conflict, which makes it hard for them to focus (Nemteanu et al., 2021). As a result, they are less satisfied with their jobs than males (Feng & Savani, 2023).

According to Abraham, Basole, and Kesar (2021) and Dang and Nguyen (2021), the data reveal a significant gender disparity, with numerous women at heightened risk of job loss due to their inability to manage their lives. Working women had numerous obstacles stemming from school

closures, restricted social connections, erratic working hours, job uncertainty, and incessant requests from family members at home (Adisa, Aiyenitaju, & Adekoya, 2021; Boncori, 2020). A separate study indicated that women with small children were compelled to decrease their working hours four to five times more than their partners from February to April 2020 (Collins et al., 2020). A study has indicated that even among egalitarian couples, gender discrepancies are evident, with 61% of women responsible for managing their children during the initial phase of the epidemic (Dunatchik et al., 2021).

The purpose of the study is to determine the factors influencing the productivity of female employees concerning the assistance received from their partners and extended family members during and after the pandemic while working flexibly in the Indian IT and banking sectors. The researcher has not identified any comparative studies on these two significant Indian sectors regarding the influence of flexible working on women employees from the perspective of familial support. Given that most family members live together, Indian society poses a number of difficulties, including the assumption that women do the majority of the job, which is home tasks (Bhatnagar & Rajadhyaksha, 2001) (Yada, 2019). An Indian woman is anticipated to execute both domestic and professional responsibilities effortlessly, regardless of the difficulty of her employment (Syed & Tarik, 2017).

Relevant Literature:

Work-life balance remains a significant challenge for women in developing nations, particularly in contexts characterized by patriarchal cultures such as India. Gender inequality, sexism, and male dominance are defining traits of a patriarchal society; consequently, women in these nations, irrespective of their profession and status, are tasked with domestic responsibilities, including childbearing and rearing, household chores, laundry, and cooking (Adisa et al., 2019). Women in these cultures fight with the conventional responsibilities mandated by the patriarchal system and the economic and social roles prompted by society, leading to inevitable conflict in balancing their personal and professional life (Akanji et al., 2020).

Furthermore, they are anticipated to operate both successfully and efficiently while meeting the conflicting demands of work and family obligations. The mental and physical limits of managing various aspects of life, coupled with time limitations, result in work-life conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The pandemic has exacerbated this disparity by disproportionately augmenting women's unpaid domestic labor (Craig & Churchill, 2020).

Understanding the pandemic's impact on the personal and professional lives of working women, who fulfill the twin duties of household and employment, is of paramount importance (Daraba et al., 2021; Lott, 2020). Homeschooling, the heightened and prolonged demands of elderly family members, the execution of household tasks such as dusting, cleaning, and laundry due to the lack of hired assistance, which is prevalent in India, coupled with the psychological strain of job insecurity, deadlines, and social distancing, have exacerbated work-life balance challenges among working women (Seck, Encarnacion, Tinonin, & Duerto-Valero, 2021).

The pandemic's impact has been uneven, disproportionately affecting communities with limited resources (Cortes & Forsythe, 2020). Analysis of global trends has revealed an escalation in the gendered impact of Covid-19 (Mooi-Reci & Risman, 2021). Feng and Sarvani (2020) claim that compared to their male counterparts, women's productivity has drastically decreased both during and after the epidemic. Over time, the disparities in continuing remote work and the technical developments facilitating flexible work arrangements became apparent (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020).

Numerous writers have found that flexible working arrangements can yield varying effects based on gender and parental status, mostly influenced by cultural norms about the prioritization of work versus home domains (Brescoll et al., 2013; Clawson & Gerstel, 2014). Researchers observe that women are more inclined to utilize flexible work arrangements to fulfill familial obligations due to societal norms on gender, domestic responsibilities, and caregiving (Kurowska, 2020). Increased pressure from personal and professional domains may have adversely affected job productivity (Jahanshahi et al., 2020; Megatsari et al., 2020). In Indian society, it was common for people to live in a joint family with their spouse, kids, and aging parents or in-laws. The support of a husband or partner is crucial for women in managing their duties (Aycan & Eskin, 2005). The pandemic has profoundly influenced partnership dynamics, with spouses dedicating more time to childcare instead of other home duties (Craig & Churchill, 2020), so adversely affecting women's productivity. Other family members have also failed to provide assistance to women during this time, which has adversely impacted their mental well-being by increasing the strain to manage their lives (Gerson, 2009; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020).

Research Framework:

Based on the gaps found in the literature evaluation, a research framework for this investigation has been developed. Gender is the primary focus, and it is expected to understand the impact of flexible working from the gender perspective on the work-life balance of employees. The study's overarching goal is to determine how flexible work schedules affect employees' personal (child and elderly care) and professional lives, with a particular focus on women. This goal is inextricably linked to the study's other two objectives, work-family integration and family enrichment.

Data Collection Method:

The data has been collected from 45 participants consists of 30 female and 15 male employees from both the sectors. The study found it significant to understand the impact of flexible working on work-life balance from the viewpoint of male employees. The sample has been taken from the three major cities of India, i.e., Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon, and Mumbai from IT and Banking sectors. The age group chosen for this research consisted of respondents from 25-65 years. The study has opted for the semi structured interviews followed by the interview guide. Another name of semi-structured interviews is general interview guide approach (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2017), were used in this study because of their convenience and validity.

Data Analysis:

The qualitative data analysis was performed using a thematic analysis technique, as described by Clarke and Braun (2017). Using a method like this, the transcripts are searched for codes—tiny bits of information—and themes—larger units—that offer context for the subjects being studied and, in the end, aid in answering the research questions. The codes and themes utilized in thematic analysis should be directly applicable to the topic(s) being analyzed. The purpose of thematic analysis is to facilitate the explanation and understanding of the data, rather than simply providing a description (Clarke and Braun, 2017).

For this study, the researcher has selected to use the template analysis, a particular method that was developed by (King and Brooks, 2017). Thematic Analysis (TA) is a method used to analyse qualitative interviews by creating a template. The template is made up of a list of codes, or nodes, that can be inductively formed from analysis or deductively created from preexisting lists, or more frequently, a combination of the two. Due to the practical nature of the present study and its specific research objectives, the use of a priori codes was deemed beneficial in order to investigate the specific themes that the study wanted to analyze. This technique

guarantees that the research does not neglect essential concepts that have influenced and directed the investigation (King and Brooks, 2017).

Findings:

However, the researcher is still in the process of identifying the findings and organizing them into chapters as the analysis of the study continues.

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