

STRESS, WORK–LIFE BALANCE, AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING: A LITERATURE REVIEW ACROSS SECTORS AND GENDERS

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Abstract—*Work–life balance (WLB) has emerged as a major issue in modern organizations as occupational stress continues to undermine employee well-being, satisfaction, and performance. This review consolidates studies published from 2013 to 2024 to examine the relationship between stress, WLB, and related outcomes across diverse sectors, with particular attention to women employees in healthcare, education, hospitality, and banking. Drawing on 21 studies, of which 17 form the core evidence base, the review highlights that excessive job demands consistently disrupt WLB, while organizational resources and personal factors such as coping, resilience, and self-efficacy act as protective mechanisms. The analysis also reveals that work engagement mediates links between stressors and satisfaction, and that gender, sector, and pandemic-driven work arrangements moderate these dynamics. Integrating the Job Demands–Resources model, Conservation of Resources theory, and Spillover theory, the review proposes a conceptual framework and identifies research gaps, offering directions for future inquiry and policy development.*

Keywords: *Work–life balance, Occupational stress, Job satisfaction, Work engagement, Resilience and coping, Gender and workforce, Organizational resources.*

INTRODUCTION

Work–life balance (WLB) is now recognized as a significant issue in organizational studies and practice, especially as employees face rising job pressures and changing workplace arrangements. It generally denotes an individual’s capacity to manage professional duties while fulfilling personal and family responsibilities. Achieving balance is essential not only for individual well-being but also for sustaining productivity, organizational commitment, and retention. However, the pursuit of balance is often challenged by occupational stress, role conflict, and limited organizational support.

In recent years, rapid changes in work environments—including the expansion of service sectors, globalization of labor markets, and the widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work during the COVID-19 pandemic—have intensified stressors that disrupt WLB. For women, who frequently shoulder a disproportionate share of family and caregiving responsibilities, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Studies consistently suggest that female employees across sectors such as healthcare, education, banking, and hospitality experience heightened role strain and diminished life satisfaction when work demands overshadow personal needs.

Theoretical models such as the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory provide valuable lenses for examining these dynamics. Both highlights how job demands, when unmitigated by adequate resources, lead to stress, reduced engagement, and lower satisfaction. Conversely, supportive organizational practices—such as flexible working arrangements, quality of work life initiatives, and resilience-building programs—can buffer stress and foster positive outcomes. Moreover, the spillover and enrichment perspectives emphasize the bi-directional influences between work and family domains, further underscoring the importance of policies that address cross-domain interactions.

Despite extensive scholarship, the complexity of stress and WLB continues to evolve, especially in the post-pandemic landscape where remote work has blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life. This review integrates evidence from recent and foundational studies to examine how stress, coping mechanisms, organizational resources, and contextual factors shape work–life balance, job satisfaction, and well-being. By integrating diverse empirical insights, the review aims to propose a comprehensive conceptual framework that can guide both future research and evidence-based organizational interventions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

1. **Khan & Sreenivasan (2024)** analyzed occupational stress and its influence on work–life balance among female employees in the hotel industry. Data from hotel staff revealed that excessive workload and role conflict significantly reduced balance, while organizational support and flexible scheduling lessened adverse effects. The findings emphasized that gender-sensitive human resource strategies are essential to minimize stress and foster employee well-being in hospitality environments.
2. **Ayyashi, Alshowkan & Shdaifat (2024)** applied structural equation modeling to examine psychosocial factors, work engagement, and mental health among Saudi faculty. Survey data indicated that supportive psychosocial conditions enhanced engagement, which subsequently improved psychological well-being. Their study highlighted the value of strengthening psychosocial resources through targeted interventions within academic institutions.
3. **Kathiravana & Mugunthana (2023)** explored work–life balance and stress among employees working remotely during and after COVID-19. Survey results showed that remote work initially enhanced flexibility and balance but later caused blurred boundaries and elevated stress. They recommended clear organizational policies and training programs to help employees manage the challenges of long-term remote work.
4. **Cabrera-Aguilar et al. (2023)** investigated the roles of resilience, stress, and self-efficacy in predicting work engagement among nurses. Findings indicated that resilience promoted self-efficacy and engagement, while stress undermined engagement. Self-efficacy acted as a mediator between resilience, stress, and engagement. The study underscored the need to strengthen nurses' psychological resources to sustain motivation under high-stress conditions.
5. **Anju & Punia (2022)** developed a conceptual “rhythmic matrix” to map stressors and work–life conflicts across pre-, during, and post-COVID periods. Their review revealed that stress factors shifted over time with changing work arrangements and public health measures. They argued for flexible organizational strategies and longitudinal studies to better address evolving patterns of workplace stress.
6. **Dias et al. (2022)** examined the association between work–life balance and job satisfaction in service industries. Their findings showed that strong organizational initiatives to support balance were positively linked to satisfaction and retention. They recommended that organizations incorporate work–life balance measures into HR practices to improve employee outcomes.
7. **Arief, Purwana & Saptono (2021)** assessed the impact of quality of work life (QWL) and work–life balance on job satisfaction was, considering employee engagement as a mediating factor. Results indicated that QWL and balance positively influenced engagement, which subsequently boosted satisfaction. The study advocated for enhancing QWL and engagement practices as strategies to improve organizational performance.
8. **Amarchand (2021)** dissertation investigated work–life balance during COVID-19 in IT, banking, and education sectors in Chennai. Findings revealed sectoral differences, with employees highlighting the importance of institutional support and role clarity. Workers with caregiving responsibilities faced greater challenges. The dissertation called for sector-specific interventions to strengthen resilience during crises.
9. **Sakhrekar (2020)** studied work–life balance among women faculty using surveys and interviews. Results indicated that heavy teaching loads, administrative responsibilities, and insufficient institutional support contributed to work–family conflict. The study recommended reforms in academic institutions to provide flexible arrangements and improve women faculty's quality of life.

10. **Sivakami (2019)** examined women college teachers in Thanjavur district to evaluate work–life balance challenges. The study found that workload, family duties, and long commutes negatively influenced satisfaction. Teachers with higher administrative burdens reported poorer balance. The author recommended redistributing workloads and implementing supportive institutional policies.
11. **Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui (2019)** investigated the mediating role of work–life balance in the relationship between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction among Pakistani university staff. Results showed that flexibility improved balance, which in turn enhanced satisfaction. They emphasized the importance of flexible work policies for academic staff retention.
12. **Horiuchi et al. (2018)** conducted a pilot study to test coping as a mediator between stress mindset and psychological stress responses. Results indicated that adaptive coping reduced negative psychological responses, even when stress mindsets were high. The study suggested that interventions should focus on building coping skills to mitigate stress outcomes.
13. **Fathima & Jesili (2018)** assessed the impact of work–life balance on women nurses’ personal lives. The study revealed that irregular schedules, shift duties, and emotional labor negatively affected family relationships and well-being. They recommended scheduling reforms, counseling services, and supportive practices to improve nurses’ personal and professional outcomes.
14. **ILO & Gallup (2017)** report synthesized global survey data on gender and work. It highlighted persistent gender inequalities in access to quality jobs and family-supportive policies. Recommendations included implementing childcare, parental leave, and flexible work policies to promote women’s participation. The report provided evidence-based guidance for both organizational and national policy-making.
15. **Zaheer, Ul Islam & Darakhshan (2016)** Investigated the relationship between stress and work–life balance among women faculty in the central universities of Delhi. Findings revealed high stress due to workload, role conflicts, and limited institutional support, which negatively influenced balance. The authors suggested targeted interventions to reduce faculty stress and improve women’s work–life integration in academia.
16. **Cho & Tay (2016)** conducted a longitudinal study on work–family spillover and subjective well-being. They found that domain satisfaction mediated this relationship, with positive satisfaction buffering negative spillover effects. Conversely, negative spillover reduced overall life satisfaction. Their study highlighted the protective role of satisfaction in managing work–family dynamics.
17. **Bhola & Nigade (2015)** examined work–life balance practices as strategies to enhance women’s performance. Through organizational case analysis, they argued that flexible hours, childcare support, and supervisory backing improved women’s job performance and retention. They recommended embedding WLB policies into organizational culture to strengthen both performance and employee satisfaction.
18. **Karanika-Murray et al. (2015)** studied the interplay between organizational identification, engagement, and job satisfaction. Results demonstrated that stronger identification enhanced engagement, which subsequently increased satisfaction. They concluded that cultivating organizational identity fosters positive employee attitudes and performance.
19. **Dhanabhakym (2014)** explored work–family conflict and stress among married working women across public and private sectors. The study found substantial conflict and stress, with sector-specific differences in causes. Recommendations included family-friendly policies and stress management interventions to support married women employees.
20. **Golparvar & Abedini (2014)** investigated the relationship between spirituality at work, job happiness, positive affect, and satisfaction. Findings revealed that meaningful and spiritually fulfilling work improved happiness and job satisfaction. They recommended organizational practices that encourage meaningfulness as a way to enhance workplace well-being.
21. **Yadav & Dabhade (2013)** conducted a case study on women employees in public sector banks in India. They found that demanding schedules, organizational culture, and family responsibilities created work–family

conflict. The study recommended flexible scheduling and supportive HR policies to promote better balance and improved organizational outcomes.

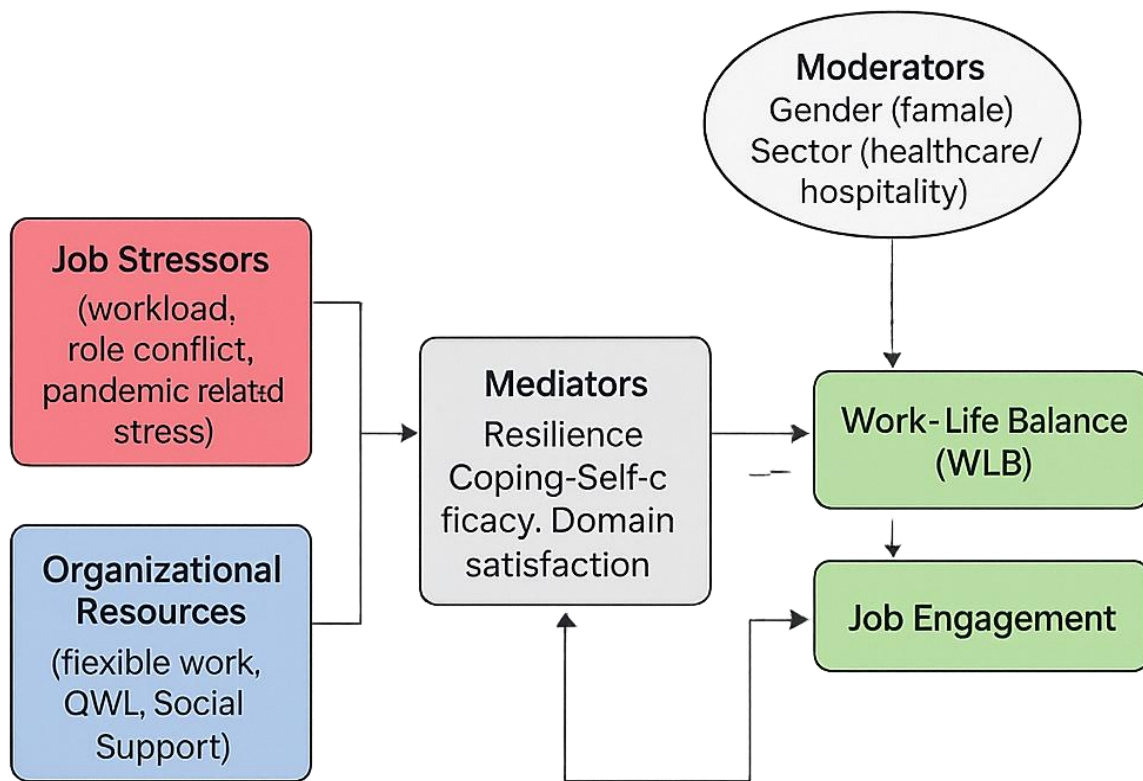


Fig1. conceptual model proposed relationships among job stressors, organizational resources mediators and outcomes

OBJECTIVES:

1. To examine how occupational stress influences work–life balance, job satisfaction, and employee engagement across sectors.
2. To assess the roles of coping strategies, resilience, and organizational support in moderating stress–balance outcomes, particularly for women employees.
3. To integrate theoretical models and identify research gaps for advancing future studies and workplace policies.

METHOD OF LITERATURE SEARCH

A structured literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies examining occupational stress, work–life balance, work engagement, and related outcomes. The search strategy was designed to ensure comprehensiveness and transparency, following widely accepted review protocols.

Databases searched: Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar were used to capture both empirical and conceptual literature across disciplines.

CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed over the past decade demonstrates that occupational stress is a significant determinant of work–life balance across diverse sectors, with particular implications for women in healthcare, education, hospitality, and banking. Stress consistently disrupts balance, yet the presence of organizational supports and personal resources can

buffer these effects. Coping, resilience, and self-efficacy emerge as critical mediators, while factors such as gender, caregiving roles, and sectoral contexts moderate the strength of stress–balance dynamics.

Evidence further reveals that organizational resources, including flexible work arrangements and quality of work life initiatives, contribute not only to improved balance but also to greater engagement, satisfaction, and retention. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both opportunities and challenges of remote work, underscoring the evolving nature of stressors in modern workplaces. Theoretical perspectives such as the JD-R model, COR theory, and Spillover theory offer valuable explanations of these relationships, though stronger integration across studies is needed.

Despite important contributions, the literature remains fragmented by context, methodology, and theoretical application. Gaps persist in longitudinal and cross-cultural research, gender-comparative analyses, and systematic testing of mediators and moderators. Addressing these limitations will strengthen the evidence base and support the development of comprehensive strategies to enhance work–life balance and employee well-being.

Overall, the review highlights the dual responsibility of organizations and individuals in managing stress and sustaining balance. Future research should prioritize theory-driven, multi-sectoral, and methodologically rigorous approaches to advance understanding and inform both workplace practices and public policy.

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