

## **An Analysis of Factors Affecting Work-Life Balance of Female Lecturers Associated with Private Higher Education Institutions in Kandy**

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### 1. Abstract

The door to a dignified future in most of the developing countries is education and this accord to persuade students of these countries to follow not only primary and secondary education but also the tertiary level of education. In addition, Sri Lanka focuses on the concept of 'Education For All' as a Millennium Development Goal. In this milieu, with a limited number of state sector tertiary educational institutions in the country, private sector institutions have to fill in the gap of providing educational needs. Therefore, the quality of the service provided by them is of paramount importance. This mostly depends on the staff of these institutions of which the majority (around 60%) is female. The main reasons for females being attracted to these posts are remuneration, status, opportunities for career progress, to stay closer to home and families, and to avoid working in difficult geographical areas. But in most of the developing nations, a female has to play a triple role: personal role, social role as a daughter, sister, wife, and a housewife, mother, maintaining relations with neighbors, etc. and the role of an employee, the economic role as a breadwinner/supporter of the family due to increased household expenditure and other reasons. Though, a lecturing job is attractive to these females, turnover, absenteeism, frequent grievances, low contribution to other events, and a lack of career progress shows that these female lecturers have not maintained Work Life Balance (WLB). This seriously could affect the quality of private sector education. This qualitative study was carried out on the private higher education sector in Sri Lanka, focusing on 11 private higher educational institutes to verify the factors affecting WLB and the conclusion of the study was that in addition to the triple roles, the role of 'a student' for career progress, too affect their WLB.

**Keywords:** Child Care Issues, Female Work Life Balance, Role Overload, Social Support Working Conditions

### 2. Introduction and research problem/issue

WLB is achieving a satisfactory equilibrium between work and non-work activities. WLB is not only about families and childcare. Nor it is about working less. Many conventions have been developed on this as it has become a topical issue. A considerable attention should be paid to WLB of female employees as time has changed from men were the breadwinners of the families to both men and women. Work life imbalance or work life conflicts (WLC) lead to

poor physical, mental health. Such ill-health increases turnover, genuine, non-genuine sick leaves, leads to less productivity, conflicts, absenteeism, attrition, low morale, stress etc.

The effects of work life imbalance has been observed in private sector educational institutions where according to Human Resource (HR) departmental records of these institutes, turnover rate of females is high and the majority of these turnovers were due to WLC. Further it was observed that the engagement with extra-work of the

institution and work for career progression of them was lower. The result of a preliminary survey which was conducted with 30 female lecturers showed a low WLB index, with an instrument developed for a study used of WLB of Sri Lankan software engineers.

Eleven private institutes in Kandy, which offer tertiary education in partnership with foreign universities, have an academic work force comprising 60% females. They work more than 45 hours per week including weekends, to deliver part time programs. This shows that the work life imbalance of these staff could affect the quality of the service of these institutions. Therefore, a verification of the factors affecting WLB was carried out as a qualitative study with a semi structured interview guide to identify the new factors of WLB. This paper reveals that WLB of female lecturers depends on four main roles that they have to play in the society.

### **3. Research Methodology**

A qualitative study was carried out with a study model to verify the already identified factors and to reveal any new factors affecting WLB of female lecturers in this context. The study was limited to Kandy region.

Qualitative data was gathered from face to face, semi-structured in-depth interviews held with twenty female lecturers selected judgmentally, out of a total of thirty four. The semi structured interview guide was developed based on a validated questionnaire. Interviews were held in a free and relaxed environment, lasted for a minimum of one hour to maximum of one and half hours. The interview guideline was slightly modified with the emerging findings after few initial interviews and also was enriched with probing questions.

Further the study results were verified by collecting primary data through the discussions held with five managers out of eleven managers of these institutes and with five respective family members, selected as a convenient sample. The discussions lasted for a minimum of thirty minutes to a maximum of one hour.

All the interviews, discussions were recorded, transcribed, coded and categorized to identify the common themes. The reporting was done in a narrative style for the adopted qualitative study.

### **4. Results and findings**

Literature reveals three main roles a female of the developing world has to play: personal, social and the role of an employee. The results of the study were complying with the literature.

The majority suffered from weekend work as every institution has part-time courses. They work either Saturday or Sunday, sometimes both. This reduces the quality time spend with the family. Family members raised their grievance regarding this. But the management is unable to stop part-time batches due to the demand. These reveals that both family/social and employment roles of the lecturers affect WBL.

The majority of these institutes require employees to work 5.5 days. Due to the heavy road traffic conditions in Kandy, they find half a day as a waste of their energy and time. Therefore, personal role affects WLB of the worker.

They struggle with child-care problems such as preparing foods, medical issues, support to education and for extra-curricular activities, especially the quality time spend with them. The degree of issues is higher when there are small kids. Some of them used to have non-genuine sick leaves to manage children's illnesses and casual leaves to manage educational requirements of the children. But the respondents who have a good support from their spouses, parents, in-laws were noted as having a better WLB. The majority lived together with their parents, and not as a nuclear family, as an extended family to fill the gap of the female lecturer not being able to play the family/social role.

Further, they mentioned about the support extended from the Program Coordination Department (PCD). The main objective of these institutes is to deliver the program on time. The PCD must ensure this while preparing the work schedules. If this department works effectively by allocating the work load equally among lecturers while focusing on the dead line of the program, it shows to give WLB. Most of the respondents had a bad impression about the effectiveness of the PCD and this verified the fact that employment role is affecting WLB of the worker.

Engaging in higher studies is very important for the lecturers for their career-progression. But this adds another new dimension to their lives which had not been identified in the literature which could affect WLB of the worker. As a lecturer they work 45 hours per week. Working hours are fully utilized for conducting lectures, preparations for lectures, assignments, assignment marking and no time can be allocated for studies during working hours. Even after working hours, the women with children, cannot find time easily for their higher studies because they already perform many roles in their life. There is no study-leave policies developed. But the management said that they provide financial support for higher studies. Even with difficulties they engage in studies which makes them stress and family has to support them a lot and the family misses them a lot.

The demography profile too makes differences in WLB conditions. These factors could be identified as marital status, type of family, number of children and their ages which moderates the relationships.

## **5. Conclusions, implications and significance**

Study reveals that the personal, social, employee-role affects WLB of female lecturers in this context which is complying with literature. In addition, a new dimension, 'studentrole' which was revealed from this study to affects WLB.

Study implied certain changes in this context that are necessary to sustain the quality. Since the failure of the female lecturer to deliver lectures with the necessary quality due to work-life imbalance could collapse the system due to higher percentage of female staff contribution.

Findings are useful for this context to sustain the quality by introducing additional support to its staff, especially, females by introducing concepts such as study-leave to maintain and sustain a good work-force.

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