

# Work-life dynamics among married women in employment: A cross-sectional study

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## Abstract

**Background:** Evolving gender roles highlight the challenges married working women face in balancing professional and household responsibilities amid societal expectations and workplace biases. Addressing these multifaceted barriers necessitates comprehensive workplace policies and broader societal shifts toward gender equality and inclusivity. Creating supportive environments must focus on flexible work options, parental leave policies, and fair career advancement opportunities. Additionally, fostering open dialogues on gender equity can drive cultural shifts, challenging traditional norms and empowering women in both personal and professional spheres.

**Aim:** The study aimed to assess work-life balance (WLB) among married working women and associated factors.

**Methodology:** The community-based cross-sectional study involved 200 married working women. Data was collected with the help of a validated questionnaire.

**Results:** The study population had a mean age of  $36.9 \pm 8.4$ , with the predominant age group being 31-45 years, and revealed that 69% (Categories A and B) faced work-life balance issues. Significant associations included family type, dependents to care, number of children, open communication, hobbies, organizational support, and financial autonomy.

**Conclusion:** The study emphasized the necessity of specialized approaches and organizational policies to address the diverse needs of working women, ensuring inclusivity and support in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Work-life balance, married working women, sociodemographic factors, organizational support, financial autonomy.

## Introduction

Traditionally, men were breadwinners while women managed household duties. Economic shifts and evolving norms now necessitate dual-income households, leading to a significant increase in women entering the workforce, driven by greater access to higher education<sup>[1]</sup>. This shift has empowered women, fostering self-sufficiency and financial stability, and creating unprecedented professional opportunities. The landscape of Indian families is rapidly transforming due to urbanization and modernization, with more women entering the workforce across all social classes<sup>[2]</sup>. Despite facing cultural expectations and traditional gender roles that prioritize family duties, increased educational opportunities and economic pressures have significantly influenced women's participation in professional careers. This shift marks

a departure from past trends, driven primarily by the necessity for dual incomes and heightened aspirations for personal growth<sup>[1,2]</sup>.

Despite progress, working women face significant challenges balancing professional and household responsibilities. Abdel et al. found heightened stress among working mothers, while Noor emphasized challenges in family dynamics, working hours, and social security<sup>[3,4]</sup>. Murray et al. noted that women bear primary responsibility for domestic labor and childcare, affecting WLB<sup>[5]</sup>. Makowska et al also highlighted the impact of work stress on family life<sup>[6]</sup>. Key factors include caring for dependents to take care of, hobbies to relax, flexible hours, organizational backing, communication, financial independence, and sleep quality<sup>[4-6]</sup>.

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The WHO reports that women make up 67% of the global health and social care workforce but face significant well-being challenges due to sociocultural discrimination. To address this, WHO's Gender Equal Health and Care Workforce Initiative aims to improve women's leadership representation, and equitable pay, reduce work-related pressures, and provide safe working conditions to foster a healthy WLB<sup>[7]</sup>. Despite the increase in workforce participation driven by higher education, women's quality of life and the unique challenges they face in balancing professional and personal responsibilities, influenced by societal expectations and workplace biases, remain underexamined. This study aimed to analyze WLB issues and influencing factors among married working women to identify obstacles and shape policies that foster equality and support women's professional progression and success.

### Material and methods

Working women refers to women who are actively engaged in paid employment or self-employment, regardless of their occupation or industry. WLB refers to the balance between an individual's work commitments and personal life, including family, leisure, health, and well-being<sup>[1]</sup>. **Study Design, Setting, Duration:** The current community-based descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out in a rural field practice area of a tertiary healthcare facility in Northern Kerala, India. Data was gathered from February 2023 to July 2023 over six months. **Study population and Sample size:** The study population included employed, salaried women aged 18-50 years, residing in Puzhakkattiri village, who were married and living with their families. **Exclusion criteria:** Individuals who were unable to comprehend the study or who displayed non-cooperative behavior. **Sample size determination:** Based on a study conducted in Pune by Kalpana et al, the sample size was estimated using the formula  $4pq/d^2$ , where p is prevalence and d is precision, the target confidence level was 95% and the relative precision was 6%<sup>[8]</sup>. In the suggested study, the proportion of women who have difficulty in balancing work and life was 82.2%. The formula yielded a minimal sample size of 162. The actual sample taken, though, was 200. Convenient sampling was applied. **Method of data collection and analysis:** We conducted face-to-face interviews using a pretested questionnaire divided into different sections: sociodemographic details, factors linked to WLB, and the validated 'Work-Life Balance questionnaire' by Danniell and McCarrarher<sup>[9]</sup>. We conducted a pilot study to validate the questionnaire's applicability and effectiveness within our cultural context. Mean scores were calculated, with Category-A indicating an imbalanced, stress-prone work-life

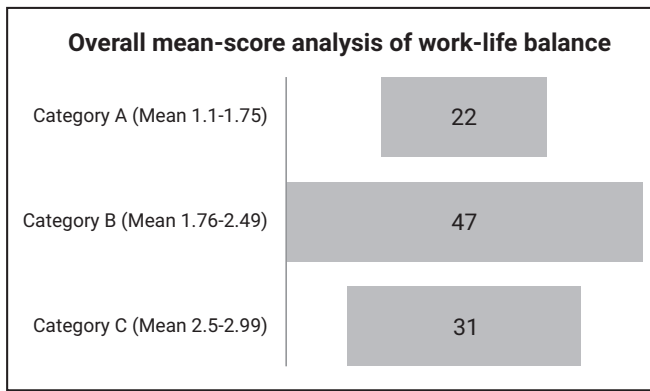
level, Category-B showing moderate satisfaction but room for improvement, and Category-C representing effective WLB. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version-26, with chi-square values for bivariate analysis and a significance threshold of  $p \leq 0.05$ . Percentages and cross-tabulations were used for variable analysis. **Ethical consideration:** Participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity, with voluntary involvement. They received comprehensive study information, provided written informed consent, and the study adhered to Helsinki Declaration ethics, with IEC clearance obtained.

### Results

**Table 1: Sociodemographic details of working women (n=200)**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
18-30	54	27
31-45	112	56
46-60	34	17
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	18	9
Hindu	92	46
Muslim	90	45
<b>Family</b>		
Nuclear	129	64.5
Extended	65	32.5
Joint	6	3
<b>Education</b>		
Illiterate	2	1
Primary	8	4
Middle	8	4
Higher-Secondary	38	19
Graduate	82	41
Postgraduate	62	31
<b>Occupation</b>		
Unskilled	34	17
Skilled	44	22
Semi-professional	104	52
Professional	18	9

In our study, a predominant proportion of the participant pool falls within the age bracket of 31-45 years, constituting 56% of the total with a mean age of  $36.9 \pm 8.4$  years. Furthermore, the religious distribution indicates a significant presence of both Hindu and Muslim individuals. Of the participants, 64.5% belonged to nuclear families, 41% held graduate degrees, and 52% engaged in semi-professional occupations. (**Table -1**)



**Figure 1: Overall mean-score analysis of work-life balance (n=200)**

In our study, 30% of women reported the necessity to work long hours due to job demands, while 34% lacked ample time to socialize with their partner or family during the week, and a majority (exceeding 50%) found themselves compelled to work from home. Regarding relationships, 23% occasionally felt strain with their partner due to prolonged work hours, while 35% agreed that maintaining friendships or finding time for leisure activities was challenging. In our investigation, 47% of working women fell into Category-B, indicating moderate dissatisfaction but under control, while 31% were in Category-C, demonstrating established priorities. Alarming, 22% fell into Category-A, requiring immediate attention due to considerable stress levels. (Figure - 1)

**Table 2: Association of demographic variables and WLB (n=200)**

Factors	Category A (%)	Category B (%)	Category C (%)	Significance
<b>Age-group</b>				
18-30	16(29.6)	18(33.3)	20(37.1)	Chi-square test: 6.6 P-value:0.783
31-45	22(19.6)	60(53.6)	30(26.8)	
46-60	6(17.6)	16(47.1)	12(35.3)	
<b>Religion</b>				
Christian	6(33.3)	10(55.6)	2(11.1)	FE-test:12.63 <b>P-value:0.010</b>
Hindu	4(15.2)	52(56.5)	26(28.3)	
Muslim	24(26.6)	32(35.6)	34(37.8)	
<b>Type of family</b>				
Nuclear	34(26.4)	64(49.6)	31(24)	FE-test:11.02 <b>P-value:0.017</b>
Extended	8(12.3)	28(43.4)	29(44.3)	
Joint	2(33.3)	2(33.3)	2(33.4)	
<b>Occupation</b>				
Unskilled	8(23.5)	18(52.9)	8(23.6)	FE-test:5.25 P-value:0.57
Skilled	6(13.6)	20(45.5)	18(40.9)	
Semi-professional	24(23.1)	48(46.2)	32(30.7)	
Professional	6(33.3)	8(44.4)	4(22.3)	
<b>Number of children</b>				
>2	41(28.9)	65(45.8)	36(25.3)	FE-test:17.5 <b>P-value:0.001</b>
<=2	3(5.2)	29(50)	26(44.8)	

Notably, in the 31-45 age group, 53.6% fell into Category-B, while only 26.8% were in Category-C; similarly, in the 46-60 age group, 47.1% were in Category-B, with 35.3% in Category-C. In contrast, within the 18-30 age group, 37% fell into Category-C, suggesting age-related differences in WLB perceptions, although statistically insignificant. Religion showed a significant association with WLB (FE Test = 12.63,

$p = 0.010$ ): 56.5% of Hindus and 55.6% of Christians were in Category-B, whereas 35.6% of Muslims fell into Category-B and 37.8% in Category-C. The number of children also significantly correlated with WLB (FE test = 17.5,  $p = 0.001$ ): 50% with  $\leq 2$  children were in Category-B and 44.8% in Category-C, while those with  $>2$  children had 46% in Category-B and only 25.3% in Category-C. (Table-2)

**Table 3: Factors associated with WLB (n=200)**

Factors	Category A (%)	Category B (%)	Category C (%)	Significance
Dependents to take care				
Yes	42 (31.3)	80 (59.8)	12 (8.9)	FE-test: 93.7
No	2 (3.1)	14 (21.2)	50 (75.7)	P-value: 0.001
Family-support				
Present	37 (20.9)	84 (46.1)	60 (33)	FE-test: 3.98
Absent	7 (33.3)	10 (55.6)	2 (11.1)	P-value: 0.126
Hobbies to relax				
Present	10 (11.5)	28 (32.1)	49 (56.4)	Chi-square test: 38.6
Absent	34 (30.3)	66 (58.9)	13 (10.8)	P-value: 0.001
Working-time				
< 7 hrs	22 (23.9)	36 (39.1)	35 (37)	Chi-square test: 4.47
>= 7 hrs	22 (20.3)	58 (53.7)	27 (25.9)	P-value: 0.107
Sharing work-related stress with life partner				
Yes	12 (12.9)	29 (31.2)	52 (55.9)	Chi-square test: 50.5
No	32 (29.9)	65 (60.7)	10 (9.4)	P-value: 0.004
Satisfaction of support from working-management				
Adequate	9 (9.2)	33 (34.1)	55 (56.7)	Chi-square test: 37.18
Inadequate	35 (34.0)	61 (59.2)	7 (6.8)	P-value: 0.001
Satisfaction of support from family				
Adequate	42(22.4)	86 (45.7)	60 (31.9)	FE-test: 2.062
Inadequate	2(16.6)	8 (66.7)	2 (68.7)	P-value: 0.395
Salary-freedom				
Yes	15 (16.6)	23 (25.6)	52 (57.8)	Chi-square test: 13.89
No	29 (26.4)	71 (64.5)	10 (9.1)	P-value: 0.001
Sleep minimum 6 hours				
Yes	36 (21.7)	74 (44.6)	56 (33.7)	FE-test: 3.618
No	8 (23.5)	20 (58.8)	6 (17.7)	P-value: 0.164
Satisfaction of support from life-partner				
Yes	38 (22.1)	80 (46.5)	54 (31.4)	FE-test: 0.129
No	6 (21.4)	14 (50)	8 (28.6)	P-value: 0.961

The majority of employed women with dependents to care fell into Category-B (59.7%), with a significant portion (31.3%) in Category-A, indicating struggles in maintaining work-life equilibrium. In contrast, among women without dependents, a larger percentage belonged to Category-C (75.7%), suggesting greater satisfaction and harmony in managing professional and personal commitments. A significant majority of employed women who engaged in diverse leisure activities fell into Category-C (56.4%), while among women without any leisure hobbies, a larger proportion was distributed between Category-B (60%) and Category-A (30.3%). The higher proportion of working women who openly shared work-related stress with their husbands fell into Category-C (55.9%), while a larger proportion in Category-B (60.7%) and Category-A (29.9%) comprised women who did not share such

stress. The majority of working women satisfied with organizational support fell into Category-C (56.7%), while a greater proportion in Category-B (59.2%) and Category-A (34.0%) comprised women dissatisfied with management support. The predominant portion of those enjoying financial autonomy fell into Category-C (57.8%), while a higher demographic in Category-B (64.5%) and Category-A (26.4%) pertained to women lacking salary freedom. (**Table:3**)

### Discussion

In our study, 31% were in Category-C, 47% in Category-B, and 22% in Category-A, totaling 69% facing WLB issues; similarly, N. Krishna Reddy et al. found that over 50% of their study population shared this challenge, highlighting the importance of addressing factors like the working environment, job satisfaction, family support, and working hours<sup>[10]</sup>. Similarly, Mary

Vinora Mercy et al.'s study revealed that 75% of married women struggled to balance work and family responsibilities, with a notable impact from excessive workload and working hours exceeding 8 hours, while Nicole et al.'s investigation found that over 45% of married working women faced challenges related to WLB and job satisfaction<sup>[11,12]</sup>. The findings from Yun et al. revealed that women facing WLB were 1.58 times more likely to experience depressive symptoms<sup>[13]</sup>. In Manisha Thasnim et al.'s study, 62.5% felt overloaded with work pressure, 77.5% expressed dissatisfaction with working hours, and 52.5% reported a lack of support from family and husbands<sup>[14]</sup>. Meanwhile, Pedro Afonso et al. found that 73% of married working women in the public sector and 40% in the private sector expressed negative assessments of their WLB. These percentages collectively highlighted the multifaceted challenges experienced by married working women<sup>[15]</sup>.

Our investigation, along with Manisha Thasnim et al.'s study, found a significant impact of having more than two children on WLB<sup>[14]</sup>. Additionally, Rikoya Hosokawa et al. proposed a correlation between maternal WLB and the number of children, while Frone et al. emphasized that as the number of children increases, WLB is affected<sup>[16,17]</sup>. These studies collectively potentiate the influence of the number of children on WLB, with recommendations for policy tools to assist mothers in achieving harmony between professional and family lives. Our study found a positive correlation between engaging in hobbies for relaxation and improved WLB, consistent with Asha H et al.'s research<sup>[18]</sup>. Meanwhile, Sara D et al. emphasized the significance of enjoyable leisure activities and hobbies in reducing work-related stress, while Sorren Dalmeyer et al.'s investigation highlighted their positive impact on job satisfaction and WLB, particularly among married working women suggesting that leisure activities are a valuable tool for a balanced work-life dynamics<sup>[19,20]</sup>.

Our study, along with Yajuan Haung et al.'s research, found a significant impact on the WLB of married working women due to responsibilities associated with dependents, particularly elderly care<sup>[21]</sup>. Analyses by Su et al. and Ma et al. accentuated the predominant reliance on family care for disabled elderly individuals, with limited support from social care services, emphasizing the challenges faced by married working women in managing dependent care<sup>[22,23]</sup>. Our study, along with Vijayakumar Bharathi et al.'s research, found that sharing work-related stress with a partner positively impacts stress levels<sup>[24]</sup>. Personal factors like exercise, fitness routines, yoga, meditation, balanced diet, hobbies, and having a flexible and understanding life partner, as highlighted by Singley and Hans et

al., were also identified as contributors to enhanced WLB<sup>[25]</sup>. Additionally, Mahi Uddin et al. and Shobha Sundaresan et al. emphasized the importance of the husband's participation and open communication with life partners in improving the quality of life and navigating the complexities of balancing multiple roles for working women<sup>[26,27]</sup>.

Our study, along with Carnevale and Hatak et al.'s research, found a significant association between supportive management practices and WLB among married working women<sup>[28]</sup>. Sania Khan et al.'s study reinforced the benefits of positive work-life policies and practices implemented by companies, while Arulodoss et al. and Susant et al. established a clear association between management support and WLB, re-inforcing the critical impact of supportive managerial practices on the WLB of married working women<sup>[29,30,31]</sup>. Research by S. Bhatia and Gauthami Bhatoahari et al. highlighted the consensus among working women on the importance of financial self-reliance for fostering an improved WLB<sup>[32]</sup>. Murad Ali's research also highlighted the positive influence of financial self-efficacy and coping behaviors on financial empowerment, impacting the WLB of working women and underscoring the broader societal implications of financial independence<sup>[33]</sup>.

## Conclusion

The study revealed that 69% of married working women face WLB challenges, with 22% experiencing critical stress. Factors such as religion, number of children, and dependents significantly influenced this balance. The study emphasized the importance of diverse leisure activities, open communication, organizational support, and financial autonomy for women's effective WLB. Tailoring interventions to diverse demographics is crucial for creating inclusive environments and promoting flexibility, communication, and a dynamic WLB.

## Limitations

The study had limitations, including self-reported data, cross-sectional nature, focusing solely on married women, limited generalizability, and lack of qualitative data. These issues may introduce response bias and limit causal relationships. Future research should incorporate qualitative methodologies for a more comprehensive understanding.

## Recommendations

Based on our findings, employers should offer flexible work schedules and enhanced managerial support, while community initiatives promote shared family responsibilities for childcare and elder care. Additionally, programs focusing on

stress management, leisure activities, and financial empowerment are recommended. Policymakers must tailor interventions that reflect local cultural and social dynamics to foster a balanced work environment.

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