

A Study of Work-Life Balance for the Working Women in the United Arab Emirates and its Impact on their Job Satisfaction and Employee Retention: A Review Study

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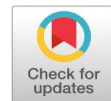
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Abstract: This study aims to explore the role of work-life balance in the life of Emirati women and how it affects job satisfaction and their job retention. Also, it will be discussed what women should do to deal with challenging job nature and maintain family life. This study provided literature to analyze the most important factors/characteristics that determine the work-life balance of women employees working and test this framework in the context of the UAE. It has been noticed that, like in Western countries, the women in UAE also face a lot of difficulties in their workplace and at home to deal with work-life balance, especially women who are working in private organizations and facing more significant issues in the UAE. This research also recommended some measures that should be taken by the government as well as by organizations in the UAE so that women can enjoy their work-life balance and easily bear responsibilities of the family, and can significantly work towards their career goal. These policies help them a lot to grow in their career and enable them to take good managerial positions in the UAE. In the end, from a broader perspective, the economic diversification of the country is also highlighted.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Job satisfaction, Employee retention, UAE, Working women

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations should maximize their efforts to value their human resources to optimize their productivity. It is very important for sustainable businesses to make effective strategies for dealing effectively with employees working in an organization (Deery & Jago, 2015; Garavan, Carbery, Carlier, Llorente, & Grau, 2012; Moore, 2006; Wartika, Surendro, Satramihardja, & Supriana, 2015). For this purpose, organizations should keep working on making policies for committing with their employees to provide them with a sound balance between their personal and professional life (Lester, 2013; Khallash & Kruse, 2012; Pfeffer, 2010; Wong & Ko, 2009).

This element of employee is differentiated as a highly competitive factor of today's business (Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007; Deery & Jago, 2015; Wasike, 2017). Generally, it is the first step taken by the organization to resolve work and family conflict. In this way, employees can perform more efficiently at both sides (Lazar, Osoian, & Ratiu, 2010). In the contemporary business world, organizations are becoming more attentive towards this factor to keep most talented and skilful employees attracted and retained with them (Ojo, Salau, & Falola, 2014; Pimonratanakan & Pooripakdee, 2017). Therefore, it has been identified by different research, including Wilkinson (2008) and Garavan et al. (2012) that by providing employees with flexibility at the workplace can improve their productivity significantly. That is why it is very important for an organization to consider their needs and ensure to provide good work and family life.

Similarly, it was discussed by Cappelli (2000); Wilkinson (2008) that if an organization will ignore

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this factor, it will result negatively, and their employees will suffer from work-life conflict that leads them to becoming unproductive and inefficient at the workplace. This study will cover work-life balance and its impact on different factors, including job satisfaction and job retention of women working in the UAE context.

Job satisfaction

According to [Chen, Tsui, and Zhong \(2008\)](#) the Job satisfaction is actually a behavior and attitude of employees for their job. From extensive literature, we can find that from various countries that have been working on the construct of job satisfaction in a different way with different factors also. However, it has been identified by various researchers; Elton Mayo was one of them. There are a number of reasons for that people likes to work not the pay only. Though Maslow's hierarchy of needs also links motivation with job satisfaction. It has also been identified that those employees are likely to be happier and satisfied whose relationship with their supervisor is good. They are willing to communicate and maintain every friendly relationship with their supervisor that also impacts their satisfaction with their job. Additionally, employees feel more confident and satisfied when their supervisor listens to them and keeps their idea while making a decision. Mostly, the organization makes policy to maintain employee work-life balance but it usually doesn't cover the needs of all employees, as requirements of employees towards their job and family are different. According to [Fisher \(2000\)](#), various studies have been conducted to measure the relationship between standard measures of job satisfaction and real-time effect while working.

Employee retention

The retention of an employee is the major problem that all organizations are dealing with nowadays. They are facing a shortage of skilled employees, a high rate of employee turnover and un-sustained economic growth. No doubt, as also indicated by [Deery and Jago \(2015\)](#); [Lewis \(2010\)](#) all should pay their attention to cost-related high turnover of employees.

[Johnson \(2000\)](#) defines retention as "the ability to hold onto those employees you want to keep, for longer than your competitors". According to [Rich, Lepine, and Crawford \(2010\)](#), employee turnover has been gaining the center of attraction by many researchers and authors. Similarly, the element of turnover should not be ignored. However, it was identified by [Lingard, Yip, Rowlinson, and Kvan \(2007\)](#) that extra working hours are leading employees to work stress and turnover intentions. Similarly, a high rate of turnover adds a huge cost towards organizations. Therefore, it is proposed in this study that employees having a sound work-life balance at the workplace can retain even longer with the organization.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN UAE

Employees in the UAE give their priority to the job where they ensure their work-life balance. They are putting sound work and personal life balance as their priority. Even they sacrifice their job and search for a better job opportunity in which they can maintain a healthy work-life balance. As it was reported at one of the job portals Bayt.com that "Work-Life Balance in the UAE Workplace poll showed that 65 per cent of respondents have considered leaving their current job to find better work-life balance at some point during the past 12 months".

Emirati Female Workers in the UAE

Afaf Ahmed Boasibeh, Director of Economic Statistics at Dubai Statistics Center (DSC), revealed "The number of female Emiratis residing in Dubai has increased to be 28,668 in 2016 compared to 27,868 in 2015 representing 37.6% of the total Emirati workforce residing in Dubai in 2015 and rising up to 37.8% in 2016. Such an increase is attributed to female Emiratis holding high academic degrees. It is a fact that more than half of the Emirati women working in Dubai hold a bachelor's degree or above, and they represent 56.5% of Emirati women working in Dubai." And even the number of Emirati women working in the UAE is increasing till 2019.

Progressive role of Emirati women in the UAE

The report produced by the UAE Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs (MFNCA)

highlighted the role of women in the development of the UAE. It has been mentioned in the report as follows: “Despite the many preconceptions and stereotypes with regards to women in the Arab world, the lives of women in the UAE illustrate that such stereotypes do not necessarily apply in this country. The report outlines the progress and achievements of UAE women in the education, workforce, and entrepreneurial as well as political arenas not only as an information tool but also to provide a baseline against which the UAE can measure future progress.”

It has been noticed that the role of women in different sectors in the UAE is very influential. According to the statistics, the ratios of Emirati women in different sectors are: 30% in the diplomatic service and higher posts of government. A total of 66% in civil service is represented by women. 40% of education is represented by women, at least 35% of women are working in the health sector and about 20% in social affairs. It was also mentioned by Sheikha Hind bint Majid Al Qassimi, acting chairperson of the Sharjah Business Women Council (SBWC).

“The number of start-ups owned and managed by women is increasing at a rate we have never seen before, and their ambition, professionalism and will to succeed has never been greater,” she said. “At SBWC, we are witnessing and encouraging a new generation of female entrepreneurs, who have exceptional talent, but are also aware that they have a responsibility to themselves and their families to enjoy a healthy work-life balance.”

It has been posited that employees feel more satisfied from the job and want to stay with them for a long period if they feel balanced and also tend to feel less stress and burnout at the workplace and also at home. That can boost the productivity of the organization and help to reduce the number of conflicts among employees.

RESEARCH AIMS AND METHOD

Different studies are reviewed to explore the status of women’s work-life balance in a non-western cultural context like the UAE. This study provided literature to analyze the most important factors/characteristics that determine the work-life balance of women employees working and test this framework in the context of the UAE. And determine the impact of work-life balance on employee job satisfaction and factors of employee retention at the workplace in the context of the UAE.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As said by Thompson et al. 1999, various researches have been conducted to analyze that sound work-life balance policy of an organization results in employee’s commitment with the job. Likewise, it was also identified by [Grover and Crooker \(1995\)](#) that the good work-life balance policy must consider these factors, including baby care, flexibility in working time and some monetary benefits; these factors can lead to increased job commitment, satisfaction and employees retention in the organization for a long time. Whereas it was criticized by [Almidani \(2008\)](#) that “work-life balance is not only about families and childcare, but also about working less.” According to him, employees should concentrate on work smart, not hard. Similarly, according to [Pfeffer \(2010\)](#), “one-third of full-time employees in 2009 are of the opinion that their work frequently restricts time with family and friends. This is a more common perception for full-time women than men.”

According to [Sirgy, Efraty, Siegel, and Lee \(2001\)](#), the work-life balance is a factor that is related to the well-being of employees, and it impacts employee’s satisfaction regarding their job directly. As it has been discussed by [Aycan et al. \(2004\)](#), by providing good work-life balance by the organization, this can lead to increased employees dignity and ,as a result, it can increase employee job satisfaction at work.

However, it was discussed by [Gallie \(2005\)](#) that the work-life balance is not only the satisfaction of employees with their job, but it also impacts their personal needs. So, if their needs will not be satisfied, it will lead them to a stressful situation that results negatively in employee’s work-related attitudes, including well-being and job performance.

The prior studies by various authors, including ([Chi & Gursoy, 2009](#); [Rich et al., 2010](#)), have done significant work on its impact on job satisfaction and other work-related attitude. So, it is very essential to identify and discuss key factors of work-life balance in context of the UAE.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE UAE

According to [Aycan \(2008\)](#), work-life balance is defined here as “the ability to harmonize and cope effectively with the competing demands of work and family life.” As per various authors, including ([Aycan, 2008](#); [Lewis et al., 2007](#); [Halpern & Cheung, 2008](#); [Gelfand & Knight, 2005](#); [Fisher, 2000](#)), four broad causes of work family conflict have been identified in the international research literature that has been considered for this study.

Work overload

It has been identified that due to demanding work nature like long working hours, extra shifts and multitasking negatively affect employee’s personal life. By having the load at work, they are not able to fulfil family responsibilities. Therefore, it has been found in many studies that extra workload is directly related to work-life balance. Hence, providing employees with flexible hours can also improve their personal and work life.

Work-to-family interference

Work responsibilities should be separated from family responsibilities. If work interferes with family life, it makes it hard to differentiate and leads to imbalanced work life.

Family-to-work interference

Family matters should be kept separate from work-related matters if family responsibilities interfere with work responsibilities that also lead to improving their personal and work life.

Cultural (gendered) assumptions and expectations

It is related to the belief that women are responsible for performing all household activities, including house chores and taking care of children, even if she is working and earning equally as a man.

Additionally, in the relevant literature, three norms that are highly related to work-life balance have been identified that are categorized or distinguished as women, men, and public and private sector organizations and by individual society or culture. Researchers, including ([Aycan et al., 2004](#); [Aycan, 2008](#); [Drago, 2007](#)) have named them as Motherhood Norm, the Ideal Worker Norm and the Individualism Norm.

The motherhood norm

As women are raised by a family with the strong belief that they have to fulfil household responsibilities and duties first, so they are not considered fully committed to their profession. As a result, the employer doesn’t consider women as ideal workers. That is the reason women’s ratio at the top management level is very low.

The ideal worker norm

It is to believe that employer wants an employee that is available all the time for their service. They must be fully committed to their job. Also, in order to get promotion and leadership position, they have to impress their supervisors. They have to be Visible and present anytime, regardless of any issue. Consequently, it badly affects the quality time with family. They are not able to give time to family and social life.

The individualism norm

It is discussed by various researchers, including ([Donaghy, 2001](#); [Lewis et al., 2007](#); [Thomas, 2004](#)) that it is the responsibility of every organization, whether it is government or private organization, to make policies that can provide their employees with a sound balance of work and life responsibly. They must provide support and ensure them healthy work-life relationship and secure their privacy by not interfering in their family time. “While there are considerable variations in the amount of help and support given by national governments and private sector companies, to help women employees balance

their work and family responsibilities”.

CONCLUSION

Work-Life Balance is defined as a state of equilibrium in which there is an equal relationship of one's work and personal life. Nowadays, this equilibrium is a challenge for every organization and employees as well as maintaining this balance. Human resource practitioner is striving hard to get ways and make policies to provide such an environment in which employees can work more efficiently and effectively, without compromising their personal life. It has been identified by many studies that by providing employees with a balanced work-life environment, it positively impacts employee's job satisfaction and their retention in the organization for a long time. Work-life balance can drastically increase employee's well-being that can enable them to work satisfactorily, can decrease the rate of employee turnover and also make them loyal towards the organization in a hard time.

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