THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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ABSTRACT

In the VUCA world, it is vital that the professionals render themselves to higher productivity. But at the same time, they need to take care of their mental well-being by achieving a better work-life balance. Although there are many factors to this equilibrium being achieved, social support plays an important part. This study investigates the influence of social support networks on work-life balance among young workers. Data were collected from 150 respondents through convenient sampling using descriptive research design which was predominantly female in their youth with single status and earning a sustainable annual income from different domains. The respondents were from the different parts of Ernakulam city, in Kerala. The analysis included Exploratory Factor analysis which identified 'Flexible Work Arrangements' and 'Core Skills' as key contributors to work-life balance, with 'Core Skills' being the most dominant factor. Chi-square tests revealed no significant relationship between work experience and work-life balance, indicating that achieving work-life balance is independent of the length of work experience. The study suggests that organizations should enhance social support networks by developing core skills such as active listening, empathy, and recognition of efforts through training programs, workshops, and feedback sessions.

Keywords: VUCA, Work-Life Balance, Social Support, Chi-Square Test, Exploratory Factor Analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements, evolving work structures, and an increasing demand for productivity, individuals grapple with the challenge of maintaining a delicate equilibrium between their professional responsibilities and personal lives. The VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) world presents significant challenges for achieving work-life balance. In this rapidly changing environment, employees face increased stress, anxiety, and pressure to perform. The concept of work-life balance has become a focal point in discussions surrounding employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall societal health. This dissertation embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between work-life balance and social support networks. The understanding that individuals do not navigate the demands of their lives in isolation underscores the need to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of social support and how these networks influence the pursuit of balance.

The contemporary workplace is undergoing a profound transformation, with traditional boundaries between work and personal life becoming increasingly porous. Globalization, technological connectivity, and the rise of remote work have altered the landscape of professional responsibilities, challenging conventional notions of work hours and spatial constraints. As individuals navigate these changes, the significance of social support networks in mitigating the stressors associated with work and fostering a harmonious integration with personal life comes to the forefront. Work-life balance has been found to positively correlate with various aspects of employee mental health, including psychological well-being, resilience, life satisfaction, and job satisfaction (L & Muhammad, 2023).

Social support, broadly categorized into emotional, instrumental, and informational dimensions, plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's ability to manage the demands of their professional and personal spheres. Emotional support provides a source of comfort and understanding, instrumental support involves tangible assistance, and informational support offers guidance and advice. Understanding how these forms of support manifest within familial, peer, and organizational networks is essential for comprehending the nuanced dynamics of work-life balance. Workplace social support from supervisors and coworkers is essential for the work functioning of all young employees, irrespective of their history of mental health issues (De Groot et al., 2022).

The contemporary workplace is undergoing a seismic shift characterized by global connectivity, technological integration, and a redefinition of conventional work norms. As individuals navigate these changes, the delineation between work and personal life becomes increasingly fluid, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the factors that influence the quest for balance. Against this backdrop, the role of social support networks emerges as a critical determinant, offering a holistic framework for comprehending how individuals navigate the demands of their multifaceted lives.

Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical research, this paper contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical insights. By offering a nuanced exploration of the interplay between social support networks and work-life balance, the findings aim to inform individuals, organizations, and policymakers, providing valuable guidance for navigating the intricate terrain of modern work dynamics. In essence, this research endeavors to advance our comprehension of the symbiotic relationship between social support networks and work-life balance, shedding light on pathways toward a more balanced and fulfilling professional and personal life.

1.1 Objectives

- To identify the key factors within social support networks that significantly contribute to influencing work-life balance.
- To examine the potential variations in the influence of social support networks on work-life balance across different demographic factors, such as age, gender, and job role.
- To examine the association between work experience and work-life balance among the employees of different sectors among the target population.

1.2 Hypothesis

H_0: There is no association between work experience and work-life balance

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature highlights the importance of work-life balance for both individuals and organizations. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and Greenhaus et al. (1989) examined the antecedents of conflict between family and work, which can have negative consequences for employees(Singh,2013; S & SN, 2023) . Goodstein (1994) and Ingram and Simons (1995) presented an institutional perspective on organizations' responses to work-family issues, emphasizing the need for supportive policies and practices (Singh,2013; S & SN, 2023) .

Work-life balance is crucial for both employees and organizations, impacting various outcomes such as organizational identification, loyalty, turnover, job performance, stress, burnout, and overall well-being (Arora & Wagh, 2017; "Why Is Work-Life Balance Important?," 2023). Research emphasizes that employees with a healthy work-life balance exhibit decreased absenteeism, stress, and job dissatisfaction, leading to increased productivity, engagement, and retention(Yazeed,2016). Particularly, the younger generation, like Generation Y, values work-life balance significantly, with studies showing that gynaecologists and medical students prioritize it when choosing job opportunities (Kasch et al., 2014).

Social support plays a crucial role in influencing work-life balance among employees. Research indicates that social support is positively related to work-life balance, with findings showing that it has a significant impact on balancing work demands and personal life responsibilities (Aprida & Prastika, 2022;Cho & Kang,2022;Mishra & Bharti, 2023). Moreover, social support has been found to mediate the relationship between hybrid work arrangements and work-life balance, highlighting its importance in fostering a harmonious equilibrium between work and personal life (Aprida & Prastika, 2022). Additionally, family support, a form of social support, has been identified as a key resource for employees to maintain work-life balance, with instrumental assistance being a significant aspect influencing this balance among nurses in healthcare settings. Studies show that social support is negatively related to work-life balance, and this relationship is partly explained by the level of psychological well-being (Kurtuluş et al., 2023).Also social support moderates the relationship between work-life balance and workplace happiness, with higher social support leading to a stronger impact on happiness (Kim & Lee, 2023).

III.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The type of research was descriptive and based on a survey conducted using a structured questionnaire. The respondents were from different parts of Kerala. The Likert Scale was used for questionnaire framing. The data collected included the demographics of the respondents. The survey was focused the factors related to the influence of social support networks on the professional and personals life equilibrium of the employees.

Sampling method: The sampling method used was convenience sampling. Primary data was collected through an online questionnaire. Secondary data was collected from journals and websites/related reports.

Sample Size: The sample size was 150 respondents who were consumers from different parts of Kerala.

Data Collection method: A structured questionnaire designed using Google Forms was used for executing this survey. The first part of the questionnaire was used to collect data pertaining to the respondents' demographic characteristics. The second part of the questionnaire was used to factors that social support networks on work-life balance. Proportionate analysis was done along with EFA using IBM SPSS v23.

IV.   RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic characteristics

A comprehensive questionnaire was administered to a sample of 150 respondents to gather data for this research. The questions were meticulously designed after an extensive review of the relevant literature to ensure they provided in-depth insights into the study.

Table 1: Demographic characteristic

Age Group	n	%
18-25	90	60
25-30	48	32
30-35	6	4
35-40	2	1
Above 40 years	5	3
Gender		
Male	102	68
Female	48	32
Marital Status		
Unmarried	123	82
Married	24	16
Divorced	3	2
Annual Income		
Below 4 Lakhs	116	77
4-8 Lakhs	21	14
8-12 Lakhs	11	7
Above 12 Lakhs	3	2
Work Experience		
0-1 yr	105	70
1-3 yrs	30	20
3-5 yrs	12	8
More than 5 yrs	3	2
Occupation		

Student	27	18
Business	33	22
Private employees/Working Professionals	72	48
Homemaker	8	5
Govt Employee	11	7

Note: Sample size N=150

The majority (60%) belong to the 18-25 age group, indicating a younger demographic. The sample leans towards males (68%) and unmarried individuals (82%). A significant portion (77%) falls within the below 4 Lakhs annual income bracket. Furthermore, the majority (70%) have 0-1 year of work experience, which aligns with the younger demographic trend.

Table 2: Influence of Work-life balance on various Professions

Industry	n	Influence on Work-life balance (%)		
		Workload	Demand	Industry type
Technology & IT	150	61%	17%	21%
Healthcare	150	33%	47%	19%
Education	150	27%	43%	30%
Finance	150	29%	45%	26%

Note: Sample size , n= 150

A survey of 150 professionals across four industries (Technology & IT, Healthcare, Education, and Finance) examined the influence of work on work-life balance. The findings indicated that Technology & IT professionals reported the highest positive influence on work-life balance (61%), followed by Finance (29%), Education (27%), and Healthcare (33%). Conversely, Healthcare professionals reported the highest workload (47%) and lowest demand (19%), while Education professionals experienced the highest demand (43%). These results suggest a potential association between workload/demand and work-life balance, with lower workload and demand potentially leading to a more positive influence on work-life balance. Further research with a larger sample size is needed to explore these relationships and investigate the influence of industry type and other factors (e.g., salary, job satisfaction) on work-life balance.

4.2 EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFA): Factors Within Social Support Networks That Significantly Contribute To Influencing Work-Life Balance.

The responses are subjected to factor analysis to identify the key factors within social support networks that significantly contribute to influencing work-life balance.

Table 3: KMO & Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.881
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1223.969
	df	105
	Sig	<.001

The KMO value is 0.881, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity chi-square is 1223.963 with a degree of freedom of 105 and a significance less than 0.001, according to the table. This showed that the data was suitable for factor analysis and the sample size was sufficient (Field,2015; Polit & Beck, 2016).

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix, Eigen Values, and Total Variance Percentage for Components obtained by Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation Method

Variables	Component	
	1	2
Active listening		0.707
Empathy		0.834
Encouragement		0.589
Task assistance	0.574	0.477
Child or Elder care assistance		0.467
Collaborative task management	0.577	0.49
Guidance on time management	0.64	
Workplace policies and resources	0.531	0.457
Sharing relevant insights	0.711	
Constructive feedback	0.534	0.543
Recognition of efforts		0.739
Goal setting and monitoring	0.726	
Telecommuting options	0.792	
Flexible schedules		0.594
Job sharing or Part-time opportunities	0.65	
Eigenvalues	7.3	1.092
Percentage of total variance	48.71	7.28
Note: Factor loadings <.044 have been omitted from the table.		

The table 6, from the factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation provides insights into the factors within social support networks that significantly contribute to influencing work-life balance. EFA results of varimax rotation of the solution are shown in Table 1. When loadings less than 0.44 were omitted, the analysis yielded a two-factor solution with a simple structure. The total variance percentages show that these four components together explain 55.99% of the variance in the contribution of social support in work-life balance of employees working in different sectors of life.

One of the two factors extracted is 'flexible work arrangements in an organization', which consists of variables sharing relevant insights', 'goal setting & monitoring' and 'telecommuting options' with a value higher than 0.5. The factor "Flexible Work Arrangements" was used to group the variables mentioned above. Flexible work arrangements in an organization encompass a spectrum of practices aimed at optimizing productivity and enhancing employee satisfaction. These arrangements often involve a multifaceted approach, integrating variables such as sharing relevant insights, establishing clear goal setting, and monitoring mechanisms, and providing telecommuting options. By encouraging the sharing of relevant insights, organizations foster a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, leveraging the diverse expertise within the workforce. Effective goal setting and monitoring ensure alignment with organizational objectives while empowering employees to take ownership of their tasks and performance. Additionally, offering telecommuting options enables greater flexibility in work schedules, promoting work-life balance and accommodating individual preferences, ultimately contributing to a more adaptable and resilient workforce. Previous literature has

shown that flexible work arrangements positively influence work-life balance (Mattarelli et al., 2022; Shanker,2022). Contradicting the findings of this research, some literature suggest that flexible work arrangements do not significantly influence work-life balance for millennial employees, suggesting other personal factors play a greater role in achieving balance (H.E &W.D., 2023).

The second factor extracted is 'core skills in an organization', which consists of variables 'active listening', 'empathy' and 'recognition of efforts' with a value higher than 0.5. The factor "Core Skills" was used to group the variables mentioned above. In any organization, cultivating core skills such as active listening, empathy, and recognition of efforts lays the foundation for a supportive and thriving workplace culture. Active listening fosters open communication and understanding among team members, facilitating the exchange of ideas and perspectives. Empathy promotes a culture of compassion and understanding, enabling employees to connect on a deeper level and navigate challenges with empathy and understanding. Furthermore, recognizing the efforts of individuals within the organization fosters a sense of appreciation and motivation, driving engagement and commitment to shared goals. Together, these core skills not only enhance interpersonal relationships but also contribute to a more collaborative, resilient, and productive organizational environment. Similar to the result of this research related to Core skills, previous literature mentions that the ability to manage time effectively, prioritize tasks, and communicate efficiently are essential core skills that can help employees maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life("Why Is Work-Life Balance Important?," 2023; Gomathy, 2022)

4.3 CHI SQUARE TEST: Association between work experience and work-life balance

Hypothesis Tested:

H$_{01}$: There is no association between work experience and work-life balance

H$_1$: There is an association between work experience and work-life balance

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests

Test	χ^2	df	p
Pearson Chi-Square	9.363	6	0.154
Likelihood Ratio	7.931	6	0.243
Linear-by-linear Association	2.411	1	0.12

Note : Sample Size =150. p <.05. df stands for degree of freedom.

For the above-mentioned chi-square test, the two variables taken were 'work experience' and 'work life balance'. After the analysis, we found there was no significant association between the variables χ^2 (6, 150) = 9. 363, p >.05.

V.   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study underscores the crucial role of social support networks in enhancing work-life balance within organizations. Factor analysis identified 'Flexible Work Arrangements' and 'Core Skills' as key contributors, with 'Core Skills' being the most influential. The Chi-square test revealed no significant link between work experience and work-life balance, suggesting that tenure does not impact work-life balance. Organizations should prioritize developing interpersonal competencies such as active listening, empathy, and recognition of efforts through training programs and flexible policies. Further research could explore additional factors affecting work-life balance and assess the effectiveness of implemented support initiatives. By continuously adapting to the evolving needs of the workforce, organizations can foster a supportive and productive work environment.

VI.   REFERENCES

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