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A STUDY ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN DIFFERENT PROFESSIONS:ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows how career-driven women today define success as being more about work-life balance rather than a high salary. The paper discusses the challenges and problems of women in different professions who juggle between their homes and places of work. The paper presents a few solutions to the day-to-day problems faced by women.

KEYWORDS: Working Women, Work-Life, Child Care, Career Advancement.

INTRODUCTION

The workplace has radically changed. Today, women constitute nearly half of the workforce. Today's career-driven women no longer define success as having a high salary; rather it's more about work-life balance (WLB). Many working women must also think about their other reality - managing their family's life at home. Most working women still manage the bulk of the work associated with raising kids and managing a home. So whether they're

working, caring for aging or sick loved ones, or furthering their education while they work, establishing the appropriate work-life balance has become a significant challenge and a reality for most women across the country and around the world.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to understand the challenges and problems of women in different professions who juggle

between their homes and places of work. The study presents a few solutions to the day-to-day problems faced by women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A survey was conducted by networking giant LinkedIn and Cross-Tab, an online market research company, in 2013 which included more than 5,300 working women across 13 countries. The survey asked women questions about what they would need in their careers to feel like they “have it all.” The most interesting result comes from their definition of success. Five to 10 years ago, 56% of women attributed success with earning a big paycheck, but only 45% of women think the same today. And while 39% of women previously defined success as finding the balance between work and personal life, that number has grown to 63% today. Sixty-five per cent indicated that a flexible working arrangement would better allow them to manage career and family.

A 2013 Pew Research Centre poll on modern parenthood found that half of mothers would prefer to work part-time and 11 per cent would prefer not to work. The higher the socio-economic status, the more likely the woman did not want to work full-time: one-quarter (25 per cent) of women with annual family incomes of \$50,000 or higher selected full-time work as their ideal, compared to 75 per cent of fathers.

The results of a study on ‘Gender and work-life balance: a phenomenological study of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan’ by Sumaira Rehman and Muhammad Azam Roomi, show that among motivational drivers to start one’s own business, achieving work-life balance is one of the most significant one. One’s own business gives one the flexibility, control and freedom to juggle with one’s family and social responsibilities. Strategic planning, organizing and delegating are the most effective strategies women use to cope with competing roles of work and family.

In ‘Work/life balance senior management champions or laggards?’ by Eileen Drewand and Eamonn M. Murtagh, the authors find that the greatest obstacle to achieving WLB is the “long hours” culture in which availing oneself of flexible options (e.g. working from home/reduced hours/flexitime) is incompatible with holding a senior management post. Many of the senior men have followed the “breadwinner” model by being able to delegate family and caring activities to their wives. This option has not been possible for the majority of women in senior posts. Hence, women want to avail themselves of more flexible arrangements for family/quality of life reasons. Both men and women in senior management recognize that their own careers would be seriously jeopardized by taking up WLB arrangements. WLB policies are not enough in themselves to ensure acceptance. It will require trust, courage and a range of interventions to champion WLB.

Thus a literature review showed that provision of flexible working practices to enable child care was a predominant need among working women. Work-based social support was positively associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career accomplishment. Personal social support was also associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

DIFFERENT PROFESSIONS AND WORK LIFE BALANCE DOCTORS

Finding an acceptable balance between career and family is a difficult challenge for many physicians. Medicine is a profession in which dedication to the wellbeing of others is of paramount importance. Careers in medicine historically demanded a selfless emphasis on caring for one’s patients, sometimes at the expense of one’s marriage, children, and

personal life. Such a skewed focus worked more easily in the past when the vast majority of physicians were men. When male physicians spent long hours at work or traveling to meetings, their wives were at home to run the household and care for the children. As women entered the medical field in increasing numbers, however, the tensions between career and family became more prominent. In trying to balance personal and professional responsibilities, female physicians face a difficult task in striving to “have it all.” There are many challenges that female physicians must confront in balancing their multiple roles as physician, mother, and spouse.

The number of females pursuing careers in medicine is steadily increasing. Despite the dramatic surge in the number of female physicians, hospitals and medical centers have moved slowly to provide support for women who pursue medical careers while managing families and raising children. The difficulties of balancing family and medicine affect women’s choices of specialty, advancement in academic medicine, health, and decisions regarding whether to have children. Professional women in many families remain responsible for the majority of domestic and child-related duties, which makes it difficult to devote the necessary hours at work to obtain promotions. Most medical institutions furthermore remain oriented toward traditional families of the past, rather than today’s dual-career parents, with rare availability of on-site day care and little opportunity for creative scheduling or job-sharing.

When specialty choices are examined, women are proportionately over represented in the primary care fields and psychiatry. They are underrepresented in most surgical fields, with the exception of obstetrics and gynaecology, where women now comprise the majority of practicing physicians. This skewed

specialty choice may be related in part to the female physician’s awareness of the competing demands that will be made on her time by career, marriage, and children.

BUSINESS

It is simply not a nine-to-five job in business. Management of an entrepreneur’s schedule is crucial to finding a balance between work and personal life. An entrepreneur must commit to managing his or her work schedule and be certain to add family time, events, birthdays and holidays. An individual should commit to each event once it is on his or her calendar—whether work or personal—and follow through on it as any other scheduled meeting. To maintain a balance, a business owner’s schedule must include quiet time to reflect upon commitments. This time could be used to make adjustments should there be any areas that one needs to work on.

Yet the reality is that many women, who spend more time on domestic responsibilities and experience more work-related stress than men, still feel guilty for not achieving it all and continually struggle to find the “perfect” balance. Careers in business require constant adjustments in order to maintain a balance that feels right for a given situation.

TEACHERS

The traditional chalk and talk pedagogic methodologies are more and more becoming redundant with the advent of the internet and other technologies. Students being computer-savvy, they have exposure to the latest developments in different fields. The challenge before teachers then is to deliver lectures that take into cognizance the awareness level of students in relevant fields and create value-addition.

Teachers need to set their priorities. They need to decide if it is more important to take children to the cinema, or prepare a lesson in more detail. Time is precious in

teaching and so teachers should make use of all the resources and tools that are available to them. Teachers should remember why they wanted to teach in the first place. There should be introspection on successes and the pupils they have had an impact on.

Keeping away from staffroom politics and gossip helps in saving time. Teachers need to put aside some time every week where one can just be oneself. One should swap one's self-defeating internal script for a more positive one. Teachers should keep themselves away from perpetual moaners in the staffroom; they will bring one down. Teachers should learn to live in the present moment, not the future. Anxiety about the future is one of the chief causes of stress. Talking to people one trusts, about a particular situation or issue, helps. Talking therapies are great if one can talk to the right sort of person. Often one doesn't need advice, just someone to listen to you.

Step out of the victim mindset: people who see themselves as victims think they have no choices. Everyone always has choices, however dire the situation may appear to be at that time. The first thing one needs to do to get out of the victim mindset is to change one's thinking from: "It's really unfair and I don't have the time," to, "What are my choices here?". It's often as simple as that to make one feel better about things.

SOCIAL WORKERS

A large number of social workers are women. Balancing career and family is a challenge for many in the social work profession. Helping people and families can make one's life as a social worker extremely rich and rewarding, but the stress that goes along with making change happen can disrupt your work-life balance. From being overworked to being underpaid, a social worker has to deal with her fair share of struggles.

As a social worker, one has the opportunity to impact someone's life in a positive way. The highs are high, but the lows can be very low. Social workers witness families going through a crisis and deeper into that crisis, despite their intervention. Seeing the bad side of humanity and society can take a toll on the life of a social worker, and it can make it hard to avoid carrying that negativity into one's home life.

COMMERCIAL AIRLINE PILOTS

Some of the problems faced by women aspiring for a career in aviation is that it can easily take 8 to 10 years from the time you begin flight training until you are capable of being hired by a major airline. After age 40, chances diminish rapidly. The problem that women airline pilots face with wanting to have a family is that in the flying business one's job comes first and family comes second, especially when one is low in seniority. While the airlines are required to provide maternity leave (a few months, not years), one has to come to terms with the fact that as an airline pilot, especially in the early years of a career, one has to be away from home on an average of 150 to 200 days and nights per year (about half the time). One is also required to work a lot on holidays and weekends, especially as a junior first officer, then again later in your career as a junior captain. Unless you have a spouse who can be around all the time to do the required parenting, and would be happy doing so, one has to rely on other people to raise one's children. This needs planning and family support and / or money to pull it off. Very few women pilots have kids for these reasons.

Most corporate flying involves a lot of travel away from home and schedules tend to be extremely unpredictable with lots of odd hours and schedules such as 10 days on, 5 days off, and working holidays. Most of the non-airline jobs that do not require extensive travel

do not pay particularly well. Flight instructing is perhaps the easiest and most common flying career one can have where one can be home every night, but one should still expect to work weekends, and a lot of evenings to accommodate the students. Most other flying jobs where one can be home a lot typically involve working odd hours, such as middle of the night, or onset of dawn. Unlike other careers, 9 to 5 jobs in aviation are very rare. Typical work days can run 10 to 14 hours.

TIPS FOR WORK LIFE BALANCE

Here are some tips to strike the right balance between work and family life:

1. Banish the myth of the always-available parent:-

Children need love and attention but not 24/7 attention. Children benefit from social interactions and the experience of day care, school and camps. Time away from parents needs to be reasonable, but it's desirable for even children to have their own life experiences, friendships and adventures. Thus mothers need not devote her time totally for children, she can spare some of the available time for her personal commitments.

2. Arrange for good child care:-

One may have to invest time seeking out the right caregivers, but it's worth it for peace of mind and to avoid last-minute child care crises. Additional back-up child care is important, too.

3. Let the boss and colleagues respect boundaries:-

Avoid the tendency to agree to every workplace demand. Many social workers serve populations that have significant needs, but it is not possible for any one person to come to the rescue all the time. If one is constantly sacrificing one's family, one is not being fair to oneself or to those who depend on the person at home.

5. Realize that it's an individual decision:-

Life is a tension of opposites. There are periods in one's career where one will have unique opportunities and would want to move full speed ahead. At other times, one may want to focus on a new baby or a unique developmental period in your child's life. For example, some mothers choose flexible hours once their child outgrows day care so they can be home after their job. Women need to set their career and family objectives and then make decisions accordingly.

6. Define your version of work-life balance:-

Every woman needs to have her own version of work-life balance. She needs to decide whether to focus exclusively on her career, or plan to have a family at some point. If she is married she needs to define her life with her partner together whether in relation to kids, care for aging parents or career, or sharing of work load at home.

7. Find a mentor who can help:-

Research shows that women who have strong mentors advance more quickly in their careers and report high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. Mentors can provide important guidance on what has (and hasn't) worked for them over the course of their careers. They can introduce women to other influential women in that industry. They can act as a valuable sounding board when one needs someone to discuss one's ideas and aspirations with.

8. Talk to your current employer:-

If you're already working at a job you love, but you feel challenged by the lack of work-life balance, speak to your manager or human resources. Flexible work arrangements often aren't communicated well by employers, but if you dig into your workplace policies, you may

find that options do exist. You'd be surprised at how willing companies are to be flexible when they want to retain talented employees. Be prepared with a few solutions, including a commitment to maintaining the same quality of work and achieving the same results. Propose a three-month trial period that will give you both the option to revoke the agreement if it isn't working.

9. Do your research:-

An Internet search will uncover extensive content about women and work-life balance, as well as information on fields, industries and companies that offer flexible work arrangements. One can find good amount of research on careers that place the highest time demands on employees and which are seeing women leave in droves.

10. Build and leverage your network:-

Use LinkedIn to your advantage to connect with women in a field or at a company that you're aspiring to join. Traditionally, men have advanced in their careers by building strong networks and leveraging the relationships they've built. There's some truth to the expression, "It's not just what you know, but who you know." Women could advance more quickly in their careers by doing the same, so start honing, building and nurturing a strong network today.

11. Request informational interviews:-

Arrange informational interviews with employers at companies you're interested in. Ask questions about flexible work arrangements and try to uncover the realities of the demands at work. If they don't already have flexible work arrangements, find out why. If they do, find out how successful they've been. This is a good way to get a handle on what's happening in your industry and to compare one employer with another.

12. Once you make it, lend a helping hand to others:-

If you've achieved balance, support your friends and colleagues who are seeking the same. Become someone's mentor, so they can learn from your successes and from what didn't work along the way.

Many employees are starting to embrace the philosophy that work is something you do, not somewhere you go. These employees see the increase in flexible work environments and virtual teams as a welcome alternative to the traditional one, and they're losing interest in demanding jobs that require long hours, extensive face time and travel.

Employers are recognizing this too, and are realizing the importance of meeting employees' lifestyle demands. After all, attracting and retaining top talent is a critical factor in determining a company's success, and employers know that flexible work arrangements make them more attractive to a wider range of professionals.

CONCLUSIONS

Many women believe that work isn't everything. For them, it's important to invest time and energy into both work and family. Women will be successful when they don't allow themselves to be judged by someone else's definition of success and who define success on their own terms. Success in a woman's life is all about the journey, which is defined by the quality of her life along the way.

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