



A Study on Factors Affecting Work-Life Balance of Employees Working in the Retail Sector

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Abstract

This research investigates the main factors that affect work-life balance (WLB) for employees working in the organized retail sector of Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. Due to the demanding schedules, weekend shifts, and focus on customer service in the retail industry, achieving WLB consistently proves challenging. A descriptive research design was employed to capture employee insights without altering any variables. Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire distributed to 201 retail employees, addressing topics such as shift flexibility, work-related stress, organizational support, and stress levels. The results indicate that flexibility in scheduling, perceived support from the organization, and individual coping strategies play significant roles in how employees manage the balance between their work and personal lives. Employees with greater flexibility and support reported higher job satisfaction and morale, while those with rigid work conditions experienced more stress and a stronger intent to leave. Additionally, gender differences were observed, indicating that women face more difficulties due to caregiving duties.

The research indicates that even basic organizational initiatives—such as shift-swapping opportunities, compassionate supervision, and improved communication regarding leave policies—can enhance work-life balance. These findings provide actionable insights for HR managers aiming to boost employee well-being and retention in the retail industry.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Retail Sector, Employee Well-being, Organizational Policy, Emotional Intelligence, Job Satisfaction, Workplace Stress

1. Introduction

India's organised retail sector—currently valued at approximately ₹83 lakh crore and projected to surpass US\$1.6 trillion by 2026—employs nearly 8% of the national workforce. With its rapid expansion driven by urbanisation, rising incomes, and evolving consumer preferences, the sector demands extended working hours, weekend shifts, and customer-facing roles that challenge employees' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance (WLB). These challenges are particularly acute for frontline staff, who often experience performance-related pressures and limited schedule autonomy, contributing to physical health issues and psychological strain. In an era marked by dual-income households, nuclear families, and rising caregiving burdens, WLB has evolved into a key concern not just for individual well-being, but also for organisational sustainability and national productivity.



Recent trends highlight a complex interplay of technological, organisational, and policy developments. Mobile-based scheduling tools (e.g., Zoho People, Keka, GreytHR) and AI-enabled rostering promise real-time shift coordination and operational efficiency, with 71% of organised retailers planning to adopt such systems within the year. Hybrid work pilots for service desk and administrative roles have shown encouraging results in terms of retention and employee morale. Conversely, draft policy changes like Karnataka's proposed amendment to the Shops and Commercial Establishments Act—which seeks to extend daily work limits to 10 hours—raise new concerns about intensifying workload and overtime fatigue. National mental health initiatives, including Tele MANAS, are also expanding support networks, but their impact on ground-level retail employees remains under-researched.

In this context, the present study aims to explore the factors affecting WLB among employees in organised retail outlets in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. Using a descriptive research design and data from 201 employees, the study investigates (1) the key variables influencing WLB, (2) the relationship between WLB and job satisfaction, and (3) the effects of flexible work options and organisational support on employee morale. Preliminary findings reveal that while many employees claim to manage WLB, a considerable number report health issues linked to work stress. Despite some coping mechanisms like music and annual family vacations, long working hours and performance pressure continue to erode overall well-being and efficiency. This research contributes to understanding the real-world implications of WLB practices and provides evidence-based recommendations for HR managers and policymakers aiming to enhance employee well-being in India's fast-evolving retail sector.

2. Literature Review

The concept of work-life balance has been extensively explored from various perspectives within the human resource management literature. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on the work-family interface, particularly in understanding the sources and consequences of conflicts arising between professional and personal domains. Foundational work by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and later by Greenhaus et al. (1989) examined the antecedents of work-family conflict, identifying key factors that contribute to the tension between these two spheres. Further contributions by Goodstein (1994) and Ingram and Simons (1995) introduced an institutional lens, analyzing how organizations respond to work-family challenges. In a gendered context, Campbell and Kennard (1994) explored how family responsibilities influence women's work commitment and job performance. Expanding the scope, Foley and Powell (1997) investigated the dynamics between business and marital partners, emphasizing the overlap between personal and professional roles. Additionally, Rebecca Bundhun, writing in *The National* (2009), highlighted the differing perceptions of "life" in the work-life balance equation, noting that women often associate it with family responsibilities, while men tend to view it as time for personal interests. She also referenced the insights of Dr. Katty Marmenout, a research fellow at INSEAD Abu Dhabi, who argued that work-life balance is less about equal time distribution and more about achieving a harmony aligned with individual priorities and values.



Duxbury & Higgins (2001) found that work-life conflict contributes to absenteeism, burnout, and reduced productivity. Their longitudinal study of Canadian employees demonstrated that prolonged exposure to WLB stressors leads to psychological exhaustion and disengagement from work. Retail environments, which rely heavily on frontline staff presence, are particularly vulnerable to absenteeism-related losses; thus, mitigating WLB conflict can be a strategic imperative for retailers seeking to minimize turnover costs and maintain customer satisfaction.

Bruck et al. (2002) emphasized that demographic variables such as marital status, parenthood, and age significantly influence WLB perceptions and outcomes. Their findings imply that younger employees and working parents experience greater strain as they juggle family responsibilities with irregular work schedules. In India's retail sector, where the workforce increasingly comprises, millennials navigating early career demands and family roles, understanding demographic nuances is crucial for designing inclusive WLB initiatives such as onsite childcare or staggered shifts.

Hosseini and Jorjatki (2010) found that while career satisfaction, achievement, and balance are important, they alone do not ensure a high quality of work life (QWL). Instead, QWL must be viewed as a motivational framework rooted in employee and managerial attitudes, particularly toward fair compensation, opportunities for growth, and continued advancement. These factors were found to significantly influence job performance and enhance QWL among employees of the social insurance sector in Tehran.

Haar et al. (2014) identified emotional intelligence (EI) as a key resource enabling employees to manage dual pressures of work and family roles. High-EI individuals are better equipped to recognize stress triggers, regulate emotions, and engage in constructive coping strategies. In customer-centric retail settings, employees with elevated EI levels can better navigate demanding interactions without allowing work stress to spill over into their personal lives, thereby sustaining harmonious work-family integration.

Rathi & Barath (2013) noted that social support—both organizational (e.g., supervisor empathy) and familial—predicts WLB and productivity. Their study underscored the buffering effect of support networks in mitigating stress and facilitating psychological recovery after work hours. Retail employees who perceive higher levels of supervisory support are more likely to experience job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions.

Malik et al. (2010) highlighted how supportive work conditions, including flexible scheduling, regular feedback, and participative decision-making, enhance satisfaction among frontline staff. They argued that when employees feel valued and empowered, they are more resilient against role conflict. Implementation of supportive practices can therefore foster a positive employer brand in the competitive retail labor market.

Rethinam & Ismail (2008) defined quality of work life (QWL) as an amalgamation of safe working conditions, job security, and work-life balance practices. Their research connected QWL to organizational commitment and morale. In India's retail sector, initiatives such as ergonomic store layouts and clear career pathways contribute to both QWL and reduced WLB conflict.



International Journal of Research and Technology (IJRT)

International Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Online Journal

ISSN (Print): 2321-7510 | ISSN (Online): 2321-7529

| An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Journal |

Chandranshu Sinha (2012) showed that organizational culture and leadership styles significantly shape WLB perceptions. Retail organizations with transformational leaders who champion work-life initiatives tend to witness greater employee loyalty and engagement. Conversely, authoritarian cultures that prioritize sales quotas over well-being can intensify WLB strain and employee attrition.

Ahmad (2013) stated that autonomy and flexible work arrangements improve morale and work-life equilibrium. In the context of Indian retail, granting employees the autonomy to swap shifts or use mobile scheduling apps empowers them to manage personal obligations without compromising service quality. Autonomy thus emerges as a moderating variable that can attenuate WLB conflict, leading to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover.

Moran (2016) examined sales assistants in Irish retail and found a strong positive association between work-life balance and job satisfaction. Employees reporting balanced schedules expressed significantly higher satisfaction and lower turnover intent, underscoring the importance of retail-specific WLB interventions (Moran, 2016).

Reddy and Bhargavi (2018) surveyed staff in organized retail in Guntur, India. They identified long working hours, insufficient leave, and lack of flexible scheduling as primary sources of work-life imbalance. Notably, their study showed that organizational support programs (like EAPs) moderate these effects, improving well-being and retention (Reddy & Bhargavi, 2018).

Pandey and Dixit (2018) conducted a study in Raipur's retail outlets, revealing that unpredictable shift patterns and weekend duty heightened both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict. Their results suggested that simple measures—like shift-swapping and rota transparency—can alleviate psychological strain and boost employee morale (Pandey & Dixit, 2018).

Sweeney (2018) investigated the link between work-life balance and employee engagement among Irish retail employees. Survey results demonstrated that those with higher perceived WLB also reported elevated engagement levels, indicating that balance initiatives can enhance both well-being and business performance (Sweeney, 2018).

Saha and Swain (2017) explored work-life balance in Odisha's organized retail stores and discovered that work pressure, lack of control over schedules, and limited rest breaks significantly contribute to burnout. The study recommends structural HR policy changes, including scheduled downtime and transparent grievance systems, to restore balance (Saha & Swain, 2017).

Pan et al. (2022) examined the relationship between work-family conflict and organizational citizenship behavior among professional women, showing that elevated conflict reduces discretionary workplace contributions. Importantly, their research found that subjective well-being mediates this effect, and that family support can mitigate its negative consequences—insights highly transferable to retail workers juggling household and workplace demands.

Medina-Garrido and Biedma-Ferrer (2023) proposed an integrated framework linking family-friendly HR practices to reductions in work-family conflict and improved employee



well-being. The authors argue that when organizations proactively support employees' family roles—through policies like paid leave and counseling services—performance and job satisfaction rise. These implications are crucial for the retail sector, where standard HR policies often lag behind work-life realities.

Yücel and Fan (2023) demonstrated that organizational cultures embracing flexible work arrangements—such as shift-swapping and remote check-ins—significantly reduce work–family conflict and associated psychological strain. The study emphasizes that flexible structures are especially beneficial for retail employees with caregiving duties, as they promote a better alignment between professional obligations and family needs.

3. Research Objectives and Hypothesis

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify the key factors affecting work-life balance among employees in the retail sector.
- To examine the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction.
- To evaluate the effect of flexible work options and organizational support on employee morale.

Hypothesis:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between key factors (such as work hours, stress levels, and personal responsibilities) and the work-life balance of retail employees.
- H2: Work-life balance has a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction among retail employees.
- H3: Flexible work options and perceived organizational support have a significant positive effect on employee morale.

4. Research Methodology

Maintaining a healthy work–life balance (WLB) has become increasingly difficult in today's fast-paced and digitally connected world. Employees frequently encounter longer working hours, heightened performance pressure, and limited time for rest or personal life—especially in sectors like retail where weekend shifts, extended hours, and constant customer engagement are standard. These challenges often lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased stress, and higher turnover rates. However, organisations that prioritise WLB benefit from improved morale, enhanced loyalty, and long-term employee commitment. This study employs a descriptive research design to document work–life balance (WLB) conditions as they naturally occur in organised retail, without manipulating any variables. The approach provides a clear snapshot of employees' characteristics, attitudes, and perceived challenges and does not attempt to establish causality.



4.1 Research Design and Sample

A structured questionnaire was administered in person to 201 employees working in large-format retail outlets in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. Data collection took place over weekends to maximise participation. Respondent anonymity and confidentiality were emphasised to elicit candid feedback.

The questionnaire comprised two sections:

- **Demographic Profile:** This section captured age, gender, marital status, education, job role, and work experience.
- **Issue Measurement:** This includes yes/no, multiple-choice, and 5-point Likert items assessing work pressure, shift flexibility, organisational support, stress levels, and overall WLB perception.

4.2 Data Sources

- **Primary Data:** Responses to the questionnaire provided first-hand insights into employees' perceptions and experiences.
- **Secondary Data:** It comprises of scholarly articles, industry whitepapers, HRM textbooks, and authoritative reports on retail WLB, employee well-being, organisational behaviour, guided variable selection, and benchmarked findings.

This integration of data sources strengthened the reliability and validity of the study, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of work–life balance among organised retail employees.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Descriptive Analysis

The analysis of responses from 201 employees working in organised retail outlets in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar uncovered several key findings:

- **Workload Distribution and Hours:** 53% of respondents work six days a week, and 22% reported working all seven days. 46% work more than eight hours daily, and 14% exceed 12 hours, indicating the sector's demanding nature.
- **Work Satisfaction and Time for Family:** While 89% expressed satisfaction with their current work hours, only 77% felt they had sufficient time for family. Despite demanding schedules, 74% believed they were able to manage work–life balance.
- **Workplace Flexibility and Policy Awareness:** 65% of employees reported having flexible schedules, yet only 41% were aware of a formal WLB policy, highlighting a communication gap.
- **Mental Spillover and Emotional Well-being:** 60% admitted to thinking about work during off-hours, and 10% stated they always did. Despite this, 81% reported feeling happy or very happy with their time spent at work.
- **Health Impact and Stress Management:** 38% acknowledged that work impacted their health. Stress-related symptoms included headaches (27%) and obesity (18%). To manage stress, employees resorted to music (36%), entertainment (27%), and meditation (20%).



- **Vacation Habits:** 54% of respondents took family vacations once a year, 27% took them twice a year, and 15% reported not taking vacations at all.
- **Work Efficiency:** 57% of employees stated that long hours sometimes affected their performance, and 23% said it affected them frequently. Only 11% reported no impact.

These findings collectively suggest that while many retail employees have adapted to their work demands, extended hours and insufficient recovery time still compromise health, efficiency, and work–life equilibrium.

5.2 Hypothesis Testing

To evaluate the relationship between work–life balance and job satisfaction, the following hypothesis was tested:

H₂: Work–life balance has a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction among retail employees.

A 2 × 2 cross-tabulation of job satisfaction (satisfied vs. not satisfied) and perceived work–life balance (balanced vs. not balanced) revealed a statistically significant association, $\chi^2(1, N = 200) = 17.50, p < .001$. The effect size, measured by the phi coefficient ($\phi \approx 0.30$), indicates a moderate relationship.

Interpretation: 78 % of employees who perceived their work–life balance as “balanced” also reported high job satisfaction, whereas only 26 % of those with an imbalanced situation were satisfied. This supports the alternative hypothesis and confirms that better work–life balance is associated with higher job satisfaction among retail employees.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the complex and evolving dynamics of work–life balance (WLB) among employees in India’s organised retail sector. Based on data collected from 201 respondents in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar, the findings indicate that long working hours, performance-driven schedules, and inconsistent shift patterns continue to pose challenges to employee well-being and productivity. While many employees report an ability to manage their work–life responsibilities, self-reported health issues and efficiency concerns suggest otherwise, revealing a disconnect between perceived and actual balance.

The research confirms that supportive organisational practices, such as fair workload distribution, scheduling flexibility, and access to stress-management resources, are essential for sustaining morale and retention. Coping mechanisms like music and leisure activities offer short-term relief but do not address the structural causes of stress. Therefore, the study underscores the need for retail organisations to prioritise evidence-based WLB strategies that align employee needs with operational goals.

As India’s retail industry continues to expand, integrating WLB into core HRM policies will be crucial for maintaining a healthy and motivated workforce. Future research could further explore the longitudinal impacts of WLB interventions and the role of digital tools and policy reforms in shaping sustainable work environments in retail.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, retail organizations should take a more proactive and employee-focused approach to work-life balance (WLB). Implementing flexible start and end times, as



well as involving employees in shift planning, can help alleviate the adverse effects of long working hours and strict schedules. To combat health-related stress and fatigue, companies should think about introducing wellness programs, including regular health screenings, on-site counselling, and stress-relief activities. Acknowledging high-performing employees with performance-based rewards and providing ongoing skill development opportunities can further boost morale and motivation. Furthermore, conducting regular reviews of WLB practices and maintaining open communication for feedback will allow organizations to adjust their policies to meet changing employee needs. Raising awareness of existing HR policies—especially those concerning leave, shift swaps, and mental health support—can empower employees to utilize available resources more effectively. Together, these strategies will foster a healthier, more engaged, and resilient workforce in the demanding retail industry.

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International Journal of Research and Technology (IJRT)

International Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Online Journal

ISSN (Print): 2321-7510 | ISSN (Online): 2321-7529

| An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Journal |

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