Balancing Act: Challenges and Coping Strategies of Employed Homemakers in Thoubal District of Manipur

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Abstract:

Employed homemakers encounter a myriad of challenges in achieving work-life balance, influenced by societal, cultural, familial, and gender expectations. This research delves into the specific difficulties faced by employed homemakers and explores their strategies for harmonizing the demands of work and family. Utilizing a semi-structured interview approach, 200 employed homemakers in Thoubal district, Manipur, were surveyed. The findings reveal prevalent workplace stressors such as mental strain, including jealousy, rivalry, gossip, and character defamation, alongside physical exhaustion, inflexible work schedules, and inadequate remuneration relative to qualifications. Nearly half (49%) express difficulty managing both familial and professional obligations, citing the need to attend to household chores and family needs upon returning home, while 41% engage in community and societal activities. To navigate these challenges, employed homemakers employ various strategies, including effective time management, delegation of tasks to other family members, utilizing childcare facilities for young children, and adhering to established routines.

Keywords: Employed homemakers, work-life balance, workplace stressors, family obligations, coping strategies

Introduction

In Ugwu's study in 2009, it was observed that societal shifts due to modernization, urbanization, and technological advancements have led to significant lifestyle changes. With the escalating financial demands fueled by the modern cost of living, including expenses for education, healthcare, housing, and various gadgets, traditional gender roles are being redefined. Women, previously confined to domestic roles, are increasingly joining the workforce to supplement family income, altering familial structures (Ugwu, 2009). Reed et al. (1994) note this shift, emphasizing that women are no longer solely confined to nurturing roles but are also engaged in paid employment, blurring traditional role boundaries and presenting challenges to households. Consequently, women find themselves navigating the dual domains of work and family.

This transition often leads to conflict between work and family roles, as highlighted by Brough et al. (2005), impacting job satisfaction and family stability. Simultaneously, employed homemakers experience physical, mental, and psychological stress, as documented by Houston et al. (1992). Recognizing the significance of this issue, the present research aims to assess the challenges faced by employed homemakers and their coping mechanisms within the framework of Work-Life Balance (WLB) in Thoubal district, Manipur.

Literature Review

The traditional role of a homemaker as primarily a nurturer undergoes significant transformation upon entry into the workforce, necessitating the adoption of new work roles alongside existing familial responsibilities. This transition often leads to work-family conflict, wherein balancing these roles proves challenging, potentially resulting in diminished satisfaction in both domains (Brough et al., 2005). Studies by Higgins and Duxbury (2002) underscore the interdependence of these roles, particularly noting the challenges faced by employed homemakers, an area of growing interest for sociologists and familial researchers. However, while urban areas have received considerable attention, rural regions remain underexplored, highlighting the need for further investigation into the root causes and effects of work-life balance among employed homemakers, especially in locales such as Thoubal district.

The concept of Work-Life Balance (WLB) emerges from the recognition of conflicting demands across different life domains. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) originally posited that pursuit and fulfillment in one domain often necessitate sacrifices in others. This conflict characterized by role overload and interference between work and family domains, manifests in various forms, including time-based, stress-based, and behaviour-based conflicts. The negative consequences of such conflicts are well-documented, spanning from psychological distress to physical ailments (Adams

et al., 1996; Frone et al., 1997; Hertz, 1986; Haynes, 1984; Burley, 1995). Addressing these conflicts necessitates achieving balance across work, family, and personal domains (Delecta, 2011). WLB encompasses various perspectives, including behavioural/ personal, organizational, temporal/role, and boundary/equilibrium viewpoints (Khateeb, 2021). From the organizational standpoint, WLB entails minimizing conflicts between work and non-work demands, fostering coordination and participation among employees (Greenblatt, 2002; Felstead et al., 2002; Ramanathan & Vanitha, 2011).

Temporal/role perspectives emphasize equitable engagement and satisfaction across work and family roles, with minimal conflict (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Punia and Kamboj, 2013; Parkes and Langford, 2008). Similarly, boundary/equilibrium perspectives highlight the importance of achieving equilibrium between career aspirations and personal fulfillment (Abdulrahman and Ali, 2017; Nwagbara and Akanji, 2012; Noon and Morrell, 2013). Effective WLB practices include flexi-time, telework, job sharing, and comprehensive leave policies, alongside supportive workplace environments and social support programs (Khateeb, 2021; Chung and Van der Lippe, 2020; Martínez-León et al., 2019; Sands and Harper, 2007; Kossek et al., 2013). In conclusion, achieving WLB requires the implementation of multifaceted strategies that accommodate the diverse needs of employees across work, family, and personal life domains. Effective policies and practices can mitigate conflicts, enhance satisfaction, and promote overall well-being in both organizational and individual contexts.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the empirical research are as follows.
i) To identify the specific challenges faced by employed homemakers in achieving work-life balance in Thoubal district, Manipur, considering societal, cultural, familial, and gender expectations.
ii) To explore the workplace stressors experienced by employed homemakers, including mental strain, physical exhaustion, inflexible work schedules, and inadequate remuneration relative to qualifications.
iii) To examine the impact of familial and professional obligations on employed homemakers' ability to manage their responsibilities, with a focus on household chores, family needs, and engagement in community and societal activities.
iv) To investigate the coping strategies employed by employed homemakers to navigate the challenges of balancing work and family life, including effective time management, delegation of tasks, utilization of childcare facilities, and adherence to established routines.
v) To provide insights and recommendations for employers, policymakers, and support organizations to better support employed homemakers in achieving work-life balance and addressing workplace stressors.

Materials and Methods

Study Design: This study adopts an exploratory approach to identify the challenges encountered by employed homemakers. The research targets individuals employed in both government and private sectors, with a minimum tenure of twelve months. Participants were drawn from various professional sectors, including public sector enterprises, banks, educational institutions (schools and colleges), hospitals, and commercial organizations, across the entirety of Thoubal district, Manipur.

Data Collection: Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with 300 employed homemakers. The interview schedule comprised three thematic sections: personal profile, challenges faced by employees, and strategies for achieving work-life balance. Data collection took place between April 2021 and March 2022.

Study Area: Thoubal district is situated in North Eastern India, encompassing the larger portion of the eastern half of the Manipur Valley. Geographically, it is characterized by an irregular triangular shape, with its base oriented northward. The district spans latitudes ranging from 24°30'24.688″ N to 24°43'16.689″ N and longitudes from 93°53'17.016″ E to 93°53'18.118″ E. It shares borders with Imphal West and Imphal East districts to the north, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal districts to the east, and Kakching and Tengnoupal districts to the south. According to the 2011 census data (Ukey, 2016), Thoubal district has a population of 286,687, with a sex ratio of 1002 females per 1000 males. The religious composition includes Meitei Hindus (63.28%), Meitei Pangals (Muslims, 25.42%), and other religious groups such as Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists (11.30%). The literacy rate stands at 74.47%, with a higher rate among males (72.38%) compared to females (55.22%). Agriculture serves as the primary livelihood for over 70% of the district's population, with 85,630 households recorded, of which 75% are non-salaried and 24% are salaried households.

Analysis and Findings

Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics:
The profile of respondents reflects a diverse array of demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, providing insight into various facets of their lives across several categories. Segmenting the study subjects into four age (in year) categories say 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, and 40-44, the 35-39 age group notably constitutes the largest proportion, comprising 35% of the total sample, closely followed by the 30-34 age category at 33%. In case of educational attainment, the study subjects' spans are from Matriculate to Post Graduate levels. The majority, comprising 35% of the sample, have attained post-graduate education, indicating a commitment to higher learning. This is trailed by graduates at 29%. The family sizes that is the number of family member range from small (<4) to very large (10+). Medium-sized families (4-6 members) dominate, representing 57% of the sample, followed by Very large families at 19% shown in Table - 1.

The sampled population also exhibits diversity in ethnic and social backgrounds. Hinduism is the predominant religion, with 44% identifying as Meitei Hindu, followed by Meitei (32%), Christians (17%), and Muslims (7%). Socially, 70% identify as Other Backward Classes (OBC), while 17% are Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 13% are Scheduled Castes (SC). The majority of respondents own homestead land, indicative of stable housing situations. Slightly modern homes, characterized by brick walls and CI sheet roofing, are most prevalent (62%), followed by traditional dwellings (27%) and modern homes (11%). The nuclear and joint families, with 66% and 34% representation respectively, reflect diverse familial setups. The study subjects are employed across government and private sectors, with a slight majority (56%) working in government establishments. Teachers constitute the largest occupational group, making up 63% of female employees.

Workplace Environment and Health Issues:
Most subjects (49%) commence their commute between 8-9 am. Concerns about gender-based treatment and sexual harassment are notable, with 55% perceiving differential treatment and 67% expressing occasional hesitance to work with male colleagues. Mental stress is cited as the most significant workplace challenge, followed by physical stress, rigid timings, and salary inadequacy. While a majority (57%) feel respected, 31% are uncertain, and 12% feel undervalued. Roughly half (49%) of subjects encounter challenges balancing work and family responsibilities, while 41% actively engage in community and societal activities. Unfortunately, 82% experience health issues due to conflicts between work and home responsibilities. These empirical findings are manifested in Table - 2. This comprehensive profile provides valuable insights into the multifaceted lives of the respondents, illuminating their demographic characteristics, workplace dynamics, and challenges encountered in balancing work and family obligations.

Discussion

The transition of homemakers into the workforce represents a significant societal shift, challenging traditional roles and necessitating the adoption of new responsibilities. Brough et al. (2005) highlight the ensuing work-family conflict, which often results in diminished satisfaction in both spheres. This conflict highlights the complexity of managing multiple roles and emphasises the need for research into the root causes and effects of work-life balance among employed homemakers, especially in underexplored rural regions like Thoubal district. The concept of Work-Life Balance (WLB) acknowledges the conflicting demands across different life domains, as originally posited by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). The negative consequences of such conflicts on individuals' well-being are well-documented (Adams et al., 1996; Frone et al., 1997; Hertz, 1986), emphasizing the importance of achieving balance across work, family, and personal domains. Various perspectives, including behavioural, organizational, temporal/role, and boundary/equilibrium viewpoints, contribute to understanding and addressing WLB issues (Khateeb, 2021).

From an organizational perspective, minimizing conflicts between work and non-work demands is crucial (Greenblatt, 2002), alongside fostering supportive workplace environments and social support programs (Chung and Van der Lippe, 2020). Equitable engagement and satisfaction across work and family roles are emphasized from temporal perspectives (Greenhaus et al., 2003), while achieving equilibrium between career aspirations and personal fulfilment is highlighted from boundary/equilibrium perspectives (Nwagbara and Akanji, 2012). Effective WLB practices encompass a range of strategies, including flexi-time, telework, and comprehensive leave policies, to accommodate employees' diverse needs (Martínez-León et al., 2019; Kossek et al., 2013). These practices are particularly relevant for employed homemakers, who face unique challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. The findings of this study emphasise the multifaceted nature of employed homemakers' lives in Thoubal district. Despite diverse socio-economic backgrounds, respondents commonly experience workplace stressors and health issues due to the conflict between work and family obligations. This highlights the necessity for tailored interventions and supportive policies to enhance work-life balance and overall well-being among employed homemakers.

Conclusion

Achieving work-life balance for employed homemakers is a complex endeavour that demands a deep understanding of the unique challenges they encounter. These challenges stem from the dual responsibilities of managing both professional roles and domestic duties, which can often conflict and lead to stress and dissatisfaction. Therefore, addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the intricacies of their circumstances. To effectively support employed homemakers in achieving work-life balance, it is essential to implement diverse and adaptable strategies tailored to their specific needs. These strategies may include flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting or flexible hours, to accommodate their familial responsibilities while maintaining productivity in the workplace. Additionally, providing access to supportive resources, such as childcare facilities or family support programs, can alleviate some of the burdens associated with balancing work and family life. Importantly, these strategies must be contextualized to the rural setting, such as the Thoubal district, where societal norms, cultural practices, and access to resources may differ from urban areas. Understanding the unique socio-economic landscape of rural regions is crucial in designing policies and practices that effectively address the challenges faced by employed homemakers in these areas. By implementing effective policies and practices tailored to the specific needs of employed homemakers in rural settings, conflicts between work and family obligations can be mitigated. This, in turn, can lead to increased job satisfaction, improved overall well-being, and better performance in both professional and personal domains. Ultimately, this study offers valuable insights and recommendations for employers, policymakers, and support organizations to better support employed homemakers in achieving work-life balance and addressing workplace stressors. By recognizing the nuanced challenges faced by this demographic and implementing targeted interventions, organizations and policymakers can foster a more supportive and conducive environment for employed homemakers to thrive both at work and at home.

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Table - 1: Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics of Study Subjects

Characteristics	Category	No. of study subjects	Percentage
Age	25-29	51	17.00
	30-34	99	33.00
	35-39	105	35.00
	40-44	45	15.00
Educational level	Matriculate	42	14.00

	Intermediate	66	22.00
	Graduate	87	29.00
	Post graduate	105	35.00
Family size	Small (<4)	48	16.00
	Medium (4-6)	171	57.00
	Large (7-9)	57	19.00
	Very large (10+)	24	8.00
Religion	Hindu	132	44.00
	Meitei	96	32.00
	Christian	51	17.00
	Muslims	21	07.00
Type of house	Traditional	81	27.00
	Slightly modern	186	62.00
	Modern	33	11.00
Type of family	Nuclear family	198	66.00
	Joint family	102	34.00
Economic community	OBC	210	70
	SC	51	17
	Others	39	13
Employment sector	Govt. sector	168	56.00
	Private sector	132	44.00
Employment trait	Office assistant	30	10.00
	Teacher	189	63.00
	Nurses	45	15.00
	Active service	36	12.00
Total		**300**	**100.0**

Table - 2: Workplace Environment and Health Issues of Study Subjects

Characteristics	Category	No. of study subjects	Percentage
Time to go workplace	6 - 7 am	18	6.00
	7 - 8 am	27	9.00
	8 - 9 am	147	49.00
	9 - 10 am	96	32.00
	10 - 11 am	12	4.00
Time to return home	1 - 2 pm	81	27.00
	2 - 3 pm	114	38.00
	3 - 4 pm	54	18.00
	4 - 5 pm	51	17.00
Superiors discriminating based on gender treatment	Not differently	135	45.00
	Differently	165	55.00
Hesitancy in working with male colleagues	Felt hesitation	201	67.00
	Not hesitation	99	33.00
Sexual abuse in various forms	No encountered	273	91.00
	Encountered	27	09.00
Respect and recognition	Respected	171	57.00
	Speechless	93	31.00
	Undervalued	36	12.00
Financial independence and respect	Increased respect	222	74.00
	Disagree	78	26.00
Family-Work Conflict	No issues encountered	153	51.00
	Encountered issues	147	49.00
Engagement in Workplace, Community, and Society	Participated	123	41.00
	Not participated	177	59.00
Health Issues from Work-Home Conflict	Experienced health issues	246	82.00
	No health issues experienced	54	18.00