

Predictors of Work-life Balance in Select Non-government Organizations in Ethiopia

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This paper investigates factors that predict the work-life balance of employees in NGOs in Ethiopia using quantitative research approach and explanatory research design. Data was collected from 163 managerial and professional employees using a structured questionnaire and responses were analyzed. Results revealed low levels of perceived Work Overload, Family Role Overload, and Work-family Balance and moderate levels of perceived Work-life Balance Policies, and high levels of perceived Workplace Support. Work Overload, Family Role Overload, Social Support, and Work-life Balance Policies predicted the Work-life Balance. To improve the situation, in addition to the existing work-life balance policies, the management should introduce need-based family-friendly workplace policies such as flexible working arrangements, leave arrangements and child care benefits.

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Introduction

Work-life balance has always been a concern of those interested in the quality of working life and its relation to broader quality of life (Guest, 2002). Work-life balance is defined as individuals' perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Work-life issues seized management's attention in the 1980s following the increased entry of women with dependent children into the workforce (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Advances in technology and the related requirements in speed and quality of services in recent decades have also created too much pressure on employees and led to work-life imbalances (Wambui et al., 2017).

Researchers identified several antecedents of work-life balance, for example, long work hours, long travels, and inflexible work schedules (Stephanie, Jennifer & Casa, 2008), supportive work culture, working conditions, work provisions and trav-

elling distances (Shaikh & Dange, 2017), and work demands, hours worked, family demands, job autonomy and supervisor support (Haar et al., 2019).

Work-life balance is a concern in NGOs too. According to Gupta (2006), NGOs include many groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and that have primarily humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial objectives. They are considered as “key third sector actors on the landscapes of development, human rights, humanitarian action, environment, and many other areas of public action . . .” (Lewis, 2010:1). NGOs have been operating in different areas of Ethiopia starting from early 20th century to participate in the economic and social development of citizens (Teka, 2006).

This research was conducted in three selected NGOs believing that they represent other Ethiopian NGOs in terms of their program interventions and work-life balance situations. The first NGO focuses on food security, health and HIV& AIDS response, child development, relief and emergency response. The second NGO has been taking the lead in responding to natural and man-made disasters affecting Ethiopia’s most vulnerable communities. It has a diverse portfolio ranging from very large food-supported emergency response to cutting edge development programs. The third NGO is a pediatric orthopedic teaching hospital. It provides modern medical and surgical care to physically disabled children.

Statement of the Problem

NGOs in Ethiopia provide several humanitarian services to needy local communities. These communities are usually located in remote areas to major towns of the country with low access to basic amenities. To achieve their goals the NGOs recruit employees from local communities, from the city of Addis Ababa, and from other towns and deploy them to the operational areas. The employees are required to either frequently travel to the operational communities or live among the needy communities. Their job requires them to stay away from their homes for longer hours due to long physical distance and commuting time. Observations also show that many NGOs hire a professional for multiple tasks to cut cost. This makes the job of employees somewhat demanding in terms of attention, time, and energy.

Some employees are observed complaining about the challenges they face in striking a balance between their work and life responsibilities.

These employees are also expected to discharge their family life demands; such as, developing themselves, taking care of the house’s daily activities, caring for children and helping them with their daily studies, caring for elders, and attending social and community affairs. They mostly do this without having adequate and reliable assistance. As a result, some employees are observed complaining about the challenges they face

in striking a balance between their work and life responsibilities.

Investigating the factors that affect the work-life balance of the NGO employees may help to address the challenges they are facing and add to the body of literature. Therefore, this paper tries to provide an answer to the research question: “What are the predictors of work-life balance of employees in the selected NGOs in Ethiopia?”

The general objective of this study is to assess the predictors of work-life balance on selected NGOs in Ethiopia. It examines the effects of Work Overload, Family Overload, Social Support, Work Place Support, and Organizational Work-Life Policies on the work-life balance of managerial and professional employees.

Overview of Work-Life Balance

Scholars have given several definitions of work-life balance. For example, Clark (2000) defined work-life balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. In her definition, she clearly indicated that work-life balance is not about total absence of conflict; but it should be kept to minimum. According to Bird (2003) work-life balance does not mean an equal balance between work and other aspects of life because trying to assign an equal number of hours for each of an individual’s work and personal activities is usually unrewarding and unrealistic. He stressed that an individual’s best work-life balance will vary over time, and this can happen on a daily ba-

sis. The right balance for someone today will probably be different tomorrow.

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) noted that work-life balance refers to the efforts of employees to split their time and energy between work and the other important aspects of their lives. It is a daily effort to make time for family, friends, community participation, spirituality, personal growth, self-care, and other personal activities in addition to the demands of the workplace.

Supporting employees to reasonably strike a balance between their work and non-work responsibilities is very important for both the employees and employers. Workers who are satisfied with their work-life balance are likely to be happier social citizens, parents, and more productive workers (Pocock, 2005). From the employers’ point of view, Hassan (2016) argued supporting employees in their work-life balance attracts new hires, help reduce turnover and absenteeism, and increase the chances of employees voluntarily engaging in “pro-social” behaviors that rise above and beyond their job requirements.

Work-life Balance Theories

There are several theories that have guided the theoretical discourse in the field of work and family balance (Schultz & Higbee, 2010). Examples of work-family balance theories include border theory (Clark, 2000), segmentation, spillover, compensation, instrumental and conflict theories (Guest, 2002), work-family enrichment theory (Greenhaus &

Powell, 2006). In this paper Conflict Theory and Conservation of Resources (COR), discussed below, are used for argumentation and hypothesis development.

Work-Family Conflict Theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) proposes that high levels of demand from both the work and family spheres necessitate individuals to make choices that may create conflicting situations. It explains how an individual has to perform several roles and how family and work compete in demanding time, attention and commitment. The basic tenet of the COR Theory is that people strive to obtain, retain, protect, and foster those things they most value in life (Hobfoll, 2001). The things people value are called resources, and anything that threatens them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, people work to obtain resources they do not have, retain or preserve the resources they have, protect resources when threatened, and optimize resources so that their resources can be put to best use.

Predictors of Work-Life Balance

Former work-life balance researchers have identified several predictors of work-family balance. This paper examines the predictors of work-life balance from a demands and resources perspective (Valcour, 2007). In this paper, demands of work-life balance include Work Overload and Family Overload while resources include Social Support, Workplace Support, and Organizational Work-life Balance Policies.

Work Overload & Work-Life Balance

According to McDowall (2009), workload refers to the quantity of physical and cognitive work that workers can perform without endangering their own health and safety or that of others, yet still remain efficient. Elloy and Smith (2003) mentioned that work overload tends to happen when employees receive several work demands that are beyond their capabilities and includes qualitative or quantitative overload. Qualitative overload is a situation where the work load is too challenging to be completed, while quantitative overload occurs when there are too many tasks to be completed.

Shiels (2015) argued that although individuals may find that their job is demanding, they may love their job and enjoy the challenge. On the other hand, employees who experience high levels of work demand may blame their family responsibilities for interfering with their work, and this may create more family-work conflict (Boyar et al., 2003).

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Duxbury and Higgins (2003) in their study about work-life balance found out that the main reason for workers who were dissatisfied with work-life balance were not having enough time for family

due to too much time spent on the job. A study conducted by Boxall and Macky (2014) to identify the relationship between work intensity and work-life balance, concluded that role overload and work pressure are associated with lower job satisfaction, higher stress levels, greater fatigue and greater work-life imbalance. Omar, Mohd and Ariffin (2015) revealed that workload was the most dominant factor affecting work-life balance. The number of hours worked, work demands and organizational time expectations were also related to greater conflict and less perceived work-life balance (Shiels, 2015). In their study on the work-life balance of women leaders of business organizations in Addis Ababa, the empirical findings of Bahiru and Mengistu (2018) showed that one of the major organizational factors posing a challenge was work overload.

The work-life conflict perspective assumes that work and non-work lives are separate spheres, and each of these spheres compete for limited resources, such as time and energy (Gareis et al., 2009). This originates from the scarcity theory with a view that balancing multiple roles will inevitably lead to inter-role conflict. According to the Conflict Theory or scarcity hypothesis, occupying multiple roles creates inter-role conflict and role overload, which leads to psychological distress and exhaustion (Marks, 1977). Based on the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed above and the tenets of Conflict Theory the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: Work Overload has a negative effect on the Work-family Balance of employees in the selected NGOs.

Family Role Overload & Work-Life Balance

Individuals are said to have family role overload when they perceive that they have too many domestic tasks and do not have sufficient time to complete those tasks (Michel et al., 2011) and feel overwhelmed by duties and role requirements (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014).

Boyar and Mosley (2007) found that when the demands from the family are high, employees struggle with work-family imbalance. Shiels (2015) viewed family demands and family support and their relationship with work-life balance, higher family demands were associated with decreased work-family life balance.

Mengistu, Hoobler and Tadesse (2015) found out that family role overload to be negatively related to work-life balance of financial institution employees in Ethiopia. Similarly, Bahiru and Mengistu's (2018) study revealed that trying to meet family and societal expectations added a great burden and affected their work-life balance. In addition, family life interference with work was found out to negatively affect the work-life balance of employees (Mengistu & Worku, 2020). Based on the theoretical and empirical review above and the scarcity theory the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Family role overload has a negative effect on the work-family balance of employees in the selected NGOs.

Social Support & Work-life Balance

Social support can come from both work and non-work sources. Family-based support creates an environment in which family members can coordinate their work and family responsibilities effectively (Voydanoff, 2005). The support from spouse, parents, children, supervisors, friends and peer group helps employees in gaining the balance between paid and unpaid responsibilities. Kinnunen et al. (2005) stated that an employee who has a supportive partner at home is more able to recover from stressors in the workplace by being able to debrief and discuss difficult workplace issues. That is, positive social exchanges that occur within the family unit spill over to the workplace (Shiels, 2015). Rincy and Panchanatham (2011) conducted a study on work-life balance of women entrepreneurs. The study revealed role overload, dependent care issues, quality of health, problems in time management and lack of proper support from the family were the major factors causing imbalance in work and personal lives of women entrepreneurs.

Russo, Shteigman and Carmeli (2016) found a positive effect of multiple support sources help on work-life balance experience of individuals. Flechl (2010) investigated how women in senior management positions in Austria, Denmark and the UK combine a successful career and family life. Findings from the study

indicated that support from their family, help from their partners, and companies' flexibility was the most important things needed by women to reach a satisfactory work-life balance.

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Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) is a good lens to view the work-life interaction as individuals seek to acquire and maintain support resources. The theory posits that the combination of multiple roles does not inevitably result in strain; rather, each role may offer resources that help protect the individual from demands associated with the other role. Therefore, support from family might be crucial to build resistance to strain and enhance balance between work and life demands.

H3: Social Support has a positive effect on Work-Family Balance of employees in the selected NGOs.

Workplace Support

Different researchers have identified several aspects of workplace support; such as, supportive work-family culture, organizational support, supportive supervisor, and supportive co-workers (Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Kossek et al. (2011) distinguished between general workplace support (e.g., perceived organizational support and supervisor support) and family-specific

support (e.g. perceived organizational work-family support and supervisor work-family support). They argued that although having general organizational support is beneficial and can be viewed as a resource, work-family specific support will have a stronger relationship to work-life conflict than general support (Kossek et al., 2011). Feeling supported could enrich the individual's experience at work, and this could lead to greater satisfaction in the family domain as well as the work domain (Shiels, 2015). Harshada (2014) examined the work-life balance of employees of IT companies in Mumbai. The importance of the workplace culture that enabled employees to attain a balance between work and life was highlighted in the results. It revealed the importance of supervisors' role in achieving work life balance.

Research consistently indicated that individuals who report that their supervisors are more family supportive, report less work-family imbalance (e.g., Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Moreover, family-supportive supervision has been associated with positive job attitudes, lower intentions to leave the organization, and more positive spillover from family to work (e.g., Hammer et al., 2009). Based on the literatures reviewed and the tenets of the conservation of resource theory, the following hypothesis was developed:

H4: Workplace Support has a positive effect on Work-Family Balance of employees in the selected NGOs.

Work-life Balance Policies

Work-family policies are organizational initiatives introduced to support employees. Included are dependent care such as providing child and elder care centers, leaves, flextime and other alternative work arrangements (Kossek et al., 2010). Work-life balance policies have increasingly become a topic of discourse within the work-family literature though legislative policies or government-level supports for work and family vary enormously across the world (Heymann et al., 2007).

Work-life policies and practices have positive effect on employees' work-life balance.

Empirical findings show that work-life policies and practices have positive effect on employees' work-life balance. Flexible time scheduling was consistently associated with reduced work-life interference (Skinner & Pocock, 2008; Hayman, 2009). O'Driscoll, Brough and Biggs (2006) also identified access to paid parental leave, adequate leave duration and organizational support as major determinants of work-family balance. Hayman (2009) studied on perceived usability of flexible work practices and found out work-life balance worsens with longer hours, workers on flexi-time had better work-life balance than workers on fixed hours, perceived usability of flexible work arrangements is associated with better work-life balance. Lack of awareness about what was

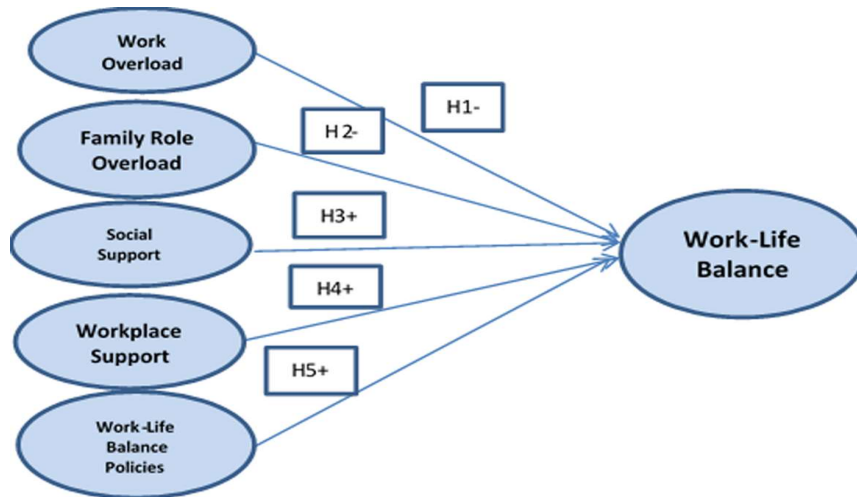
meant by work family balance and the inadequate family friendly organizational initiatives were found out to be sources of negative influence in balancing work and family obligations for women leaders in Addis Ababa (Bahiru & Mengistu, 2018). Therefore, based on the literatures reviewed above and the tenets of Conservation of Re-

sources Theory, the following hypothesis was developed:

H5: Work-Life Balance Policies has a positive effect on Work-Family Balance of employees in the selected NGOs.

The conceptual framework of the study is depicted in figure.1

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study



Research Methodology

Quantitative research approach and explanatory research design were applied to achieve the purpose of the study. Primary data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire from the managerial and professional employees of the selected NGOs. According to the human resources databases, the total number of employees in the selected NGOs was 1,211. The target population which comprises the managerial and professional employees of these organizations was 417 (217 or 52% from the first NGO, 114 or 27% from the second NGO,

and 86 or 21% from third NGO). Samples of 204 were selected using Yamana’s (1967) formula. To make the sample representative of the population, the respondents were selected based on the characteristics of the entire group.

The independent variables were measured as follows: Work Overload was measured by a 7-item instrument (sample item “The urgency of my work requires me to work late hours without my supervisor’s order.”). Family Role Overload was measured by a 7-item instrument including such items as “My home life often takes my attention.”

Social Support, Workplace Support, and Work-life Balance Policies were measured by 5-item, 10-item and 8-item instruments respectively. Sample items include “I get the emotional help and support I need from my family,” “My supervisor treats me well if I request assistance with work related matters,” and “In my organization specific work-life balance policy has been established and documented to help fulfill both work and family commitments” respectively.

The dependent variable, Work-life Balance (WLB) was measured in a 6-item instrument including such items as: “I am satisfied with how I keep balance on my professional and personal life without conflicts”. Respondents indicated how much they agreed with each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree by making “x” mark on their response to each statement. Ethical consideration issues are duly respected. Voluntary participation, unanimity and confidentiality were properly handled. Any written materials are clearly cited and acknowledged. The Cronbach alpha results of the variables were within the acceptable range of reliability. Data analysis was done using appropriate statistical techniques using SPSS version 20.

Data Presentation & Analysis

The return rate of the questionnaires was 80% (163). That is, 65 (39.9%), 51(31.3%), and 47 (28.8%) usable questionnaires were collected from the first, second, and third NGOs respectively. The overall demographic profile of the

respondents shows that the majority of the respondents (52.8%) were females, 70% married, with 4-5 family size, with greater than 5 years of service, and majority having BA/BSc and above levels of education.

The mean results were 2.78 (SD=.803) for Work Overload, 3.15 (SD=.734) for Family Overload, 3.74 (SD=.750) for Social Support, 3.97 (SD=.603) for Workplace Support, 3.17 (SD=.634) for Work-life Balance Policies, and 3.17 (SD=.786) for Work-life Balance. The mean score measurement used by Pihie (2009) was applied where the value <3.39 is considered as low, 3.4-3.79 as moderate and >3.8 as high. This indicates the respondents perceived low levels of Work Overload, Family Role Overload, Work-life Balance Policies and Work-life Balance while moderate levels of Social Support and high levels of Workplace Support. Results show the resources of Work-life Balance (Workplace Support, Work-life Balance Policies, and Social Support) had a relatively higher mean score than the demands of Work-life Balance (Work Overload and Family Overload).

Correlation analysis was done to know if there are possible connections between the variables. (Table 1). Evans (1996) suggestion was used to describe the strength of the correlation where the absolute value of r is 0.00-0.19 represents “very weak” correlation, 0.20-0.39 as “weak”, 0.40-0.59 as “moderate”, 0.60-0.79 as “strong” and 0.80-1.0 as “very strong” and the p-value is used to indicate the significance of the relationship.

Table 1 Correlations between Work-life Balance Predictors & Work-life Balance

Variables	Work Overload	Life Role Overload	Social Support	Workplace Support	Work-life Balance Policies	Worklife Balance
Work Overload	1					
Family Role Overload	.551**	1				
Social Support	-.064	.009	1			
Workplace Support	-.131	-.056	.341**	1		
Work-Life Balance Policies	-.021	.006	.175*	.347**	1	
Work-Life Balance	-.392**	-.299**	.258**	.310**	.389**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results of the correlation between Work Overload and Work-life Balance was found out to be weak and negative ($r = -.392, p < .01$), and this signifies that as Work Overload increases Work-life Balance decreases. Similarly, Family Role Overload was found to have a negative weak relationship with Work-life Balance ($r = -.299, p < .01$). This signifies that as perceived Family Role Overload increases perceived Work-life Balance decreases in the sample respondents.

As Work Overload increases Work-life Balance decreases.

The correlation between Social Support and Work-life Balance was found out to be weak and positive ($r = .258, p < .01$) signifying that as employees get more Social Support the tendency for them to balance their work and life domains increases. In addition, the results of the correlation between Workplace Support and Work-life Balance was found to be weak and positive ($r = .310, p < .01$) which signifies that as employees get more Workplace Support

they tend to better balance their home and work life domains. Weak but significant positive relationship was found between Work-life Balance Policies and Work-life Balance ($r = .389, p < .01$) which signifies that as the organizations introduce better Work-life Balance Policies, the employees' work-life balance increases.

Regression analysis was performed to understand how much the combination of independent variables explain the dependent variable (Table 2). From the regression model, a value of $R = .580$ indicates a positive prediction of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The adjusted R^2 value of .315 shows the five independent variables explained 31.5% of the variations in employees' work life balance, while the rest 68.5% are explained by other variables not included in this study. The ANOVA table shows that the independent variables significantly predicted the dependent variable, $F(5, 152) = 15.437, p < .05$. This shows the regression model is a good fit of the data.

Table 2 Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.580 ^a	.337	.315	.63877

a. Predictors: (Constant), Work-life Balance Policies, Work Overload, Social Support, Workplace Support, Family Overload

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.493	5	6.299	15.437	.000 ^b
	Residual	62.020	152	.408		
	Total	93.513	157			

a. Dependent Variable: Work-life Balance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Work-life Balance Policies, Work Overload, Social Support, Workplace Support, Family Role Overload

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	
1	(Constant)	2.050	.469		4.373	.000
	Work Overload	-.252	.079	-.260	-3.209	.002
	Family Role Overload	-.171	.085	-.162	-2.013	.046
	Social Support	.172	.073	.166	2.360	.020
	Workplace Support	.117	.095	.092	1.237	.218
	Work-life Balance Policies	.391	.086	.321	4.563	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Work-Life Balance

The coefficients of the multiple regression model show the individual contribution of the variables. From the five predictors of work life balance, four of them were found out to be significant predictors of Work-life Balance having $p < .05$. However, Work Place Support was not found out to be significant predictor of the dependent variable having a p -value of .218 which is greater than .05. Hence Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 5 are supported, while data could not support hypothesis 4.

One-Way ANOVA

One-way ANOVA was used to check whether any statistically significant differences existed between the means of the independent and dependent variables among the selected NGOs. Significant mean differences were observed in the perception of the NGO employees towards the level of Work Overload and Work-life Balance in their organizations.

To know which specific organizations differed for the variables Work Overload and Work-life Balance, the results of the

Tukey post hoc test from the Multiple Comparisons table was examined. The Tukey post hoc test revealed that the Work Overload was significantly higher in second NGO ($3.17 \pm .717$, $p = .000$) compared to first NGO ($2.61 \pm .787$, $p = .000$) and the third NGO ($2.59 \pm .792$, $p = .001$). There was no statistically significant difference between the first NGO and the third in employees' perception of Work Overload ($p = .992$). In addition, the result of the Tukey post hoc test revealed that the Work-life Balance was significantly higher in the first NGO ($3.42 \pm .720$, $p = .003$) compared to the second NGO ($2.93 \pm .814$, $p = .003$). There was no statistically significant difference between the first NGO and third NGO ($p = .068$) and between the third NGO and the second NGO ($p = .585$) in employees' perception of Work-life Balance.

Conclusion & Recommendation

Based on the findings presented in the above section, it can be concluded that the perceived Work-life Balance of the NGO employees was low, and most of the identified variables, except Workplace Support, had the power of predicting the effect on Work-life Balance of the employees. However, the strength of their effect is not found as per the expectations as the absolute values of the standardized beta coefficients are not high. The mismatch between what em-

ployees air informally and the information they give about the conditions of their work and family in surveys might be one justification for this variation.

The relatively higher perception of the employees on the resources of Work-life Balance may have a power to justify the low perception of Work Overload and Family Role Overload of the employees. The fact that the perceived Work Overload and Family Role Overload were found to be weak, however, may not mean they are non-existent.

Following the low level of Work-life Balance reported by the employees of the selected NGOs, the organizations should look for mechanisms of enhancing the work-life balance of their employees by strengthening the resources and minimizing the demands of Work-family Balance. The organizations can enhance the Work-family Balance of their employees by introducing need based and more meaningful Work-life Balance Policies that suit with the prevalent situations of their employees. This may include providing childcare and eldercare support, introducing flexible work schedules, providing life skill trainings on how to successfully manage multiple demands while continue to provide workplace supports. Looking for ways of minimizing the Work Overload and Family Role Overload is also essential.

Limitations & Future Research

To make the findings of the research more generalizable and use it as an input for policy makers, it would have been

The perceived Work-life Balance of the NGO employees was low.

advisable to increase the number and type of NGOs that should be included in the sample. In addition, to find out unique challenges and interventions in this area, adopting qualitative research approach and making it mixed approach would have been more appropriate. Finally, to make the model robust, investigating more predictor variables; such as, work-life conflict, life-work conflict, and work/life enrichment, is important.

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