Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Life Balance: A Review on Gender Biases at Workplace

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Abstract

In this paper, we have reviewed the extant literature that highlights the prevailing gender stereotypical notions and flexibility stigma attached with the use of flexible work arrangements. Drawing with the literature, we are able to outline three key findings that (1) gender roles greatly influence the choice of taking up flexible options, (2) availing any type of flexibility will lead to discrimination at workplace, (3) using modern methods of employment for family reasons will attract negative consequences on financial, mental and emotional state, irrespective of gender. Based on the review, we subsequently propose an agenda for future research in order to lay foundation for scholars to advance their research on this topic.

Key Words: Work-life balance, Flexible work arrangements, Flexibility Stigma, Gender bias, Gender roles, Women Employees

Introduction

The after-effects of globalisation (technological enhancement, 24x7 workplaces, organizational restructuring and constant evolution of policies to secure a sure shot seat while competing) has enforced serious modifications in working pattern of organizations, companies and businesses (Marchington et al., 2005). As a result, a large number of people experience swift changes in work culture and practises (White et al., 2003). This dynamicity prompts feelings of pressure, overburden, time insufficiency and unbalance work and life (Gambles et al., 2006; Lewis, 2003). Certainly, a major part of today'slife has been dominated by work and workplace leaving less time and energy for other life roles and activities which consequent into work-life conflicts and deterioration ofphysical and mental well-being of working population (Rothbard, 2001; Frone,2003). Further, overpowering work demands invades personal life in many ways such as bringing work home, available on call even after work hours, responding to emails at home and working on days off. Some of the researchers highlighted that incorporating work and family hassles is much more difficult for female personnel than males (Lingard et al., 2007; Kant, 2018)caused by gender stereotypes, societal obligations, unequal

distribution of household chores, child rearing and bearing responsibilities (Haas, 1982; Jawahar, 2006).Moreover, the ideal image of women as caretaker and men as bread earner is still dominating the work environment (Rao &Indla, 2010) in countries with rigid gendered assumptions and roles like India.In all the chaos of finding a balance between crushing demands of work and non-work roles, flexible work arrangements comes as a potential solution. Giving freedom to employees to choose their work pattern and workplace i.e. flexible working is the new formula followed by the companies to retain and manage their key talent (Hill et al., 2003). This phenomenon is grabbingattention of the world, business organizations, human resource practitioners and working population. According to Flex jobs annual survey, 2019 with at least 7300 respondents, 60 percent concluded that flexibility at the workplace is a significant variable while making employment choices. Flexible options help working couples to manage their work and family demands more efficiently (Chung 2017; Langer 2017). These policies are considered as family friendly arrangements (Clark 2000) because utilisation of these options uphold employees' internal locus of control, when personnel are able to regulate both domains simultaneously without any compromise being done in any sphere, he presumes to have more control over the events of work and non-work life (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). The study of Shanmugam & Aggarwal (2019) recommended that this will give rise to favourable image in employees' mind regarding family supportive organization policies as well as supervisory support.Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) acts as tool to resolve the tensions between an individual's dual work and non-work responsibilities (Laundon & Williams, 2018) lessens work family conflict (Anderson et al., 2002) and increasesjob satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2002). In the similar way,organizationsadopting this strategy experiences competitiveness, performance rise (Sharma et al., 2010) and also reaps financial advantages in terms of reduction in costs such as accommodation, travel reimbursements, furniture and space costs (Thomson, 2008; Bloom, 2014). Decline in operating costs, turnover costs and negligible talent management costs makes these practises highly economical to employ in the organization.

Earlier, these policies were introduced to stimulate female work force participation (Laundon & Williams, 2018; Formankova & Krizkova 2015), and lately, it's widespread demand and multidimensional benefits made it open for all.However, it was discovered that its benefits are acquired only by a particular group, mainly females with child care needs (Atinkson & Hall 2009), which makes mothers an odd bird in whole flock and were bounded to face monetary unfairness. Whilst some courageous men who used this facility for familial needs were stigmatized by their colleagues for breaking the stereotypes. Hence, irrespective of the benefits these options provides to employees and organizations, these facilities also comes with a flexibility stigma attached herewith (Chung 2018). Therefore, this study would be really helpful for HR practitioners, business houses and employees in gaining knowledge regarding the significance of

flexibility, framing policies to incorporate all employees and seeing its effective implementation across the whole organization.

Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexibility is an important variable that enables to find a proper balance between work and life. It empowers employees to allocate, adjust and rearrange numerous demands of their professional and personal domains. Toffler (1980) had described flexibility as "work is not necessarily going to take place in offices or factories; it is going to take place everywhere, anytime". Surely the statement highlighted rigid time schedules and face time in official premises as a limiting factor to flexibility and emphasised on employee driven freedom to choose the temporal and spatial arrangements of work. Clark (2000)brought insights on flexible working arrangements and defined it as "family-friendly arrangement that can provide workers with the capacity to form and blend the boundaries of their work to allow a better fit to their family demands". Significant use of these arrangements is related with happiness, satisfaction and loyalty towards organization.

Further, these arrangements are quite different from the conventional methods of work; Conventional working criteria consists of working late, fixed working hours, regular commute to office and fewer commitments outside work. Presence of employee in office premises is more significant than performance. Managers and supervisors strongly believe that enthusiasm, zeal and passion towards work are only visible through face time (Brewer 2000). These ideal norms are considered as the reliable parameters to judge employee productivity and commitment towards the organization (Rao & Indla, 2010). Whilst modern flexible methods contradicts traditional rules, autonomy given to employees in selection of time and even place of work breaks the image of ideal worker. Hence, these arrangements might portray a negative image of the employee asking for it (Munsch, 2016)and might marginalised them into lower positions and lessens their earning capacity in comparison to regular staff.

Flexible working arrangements include a number of formal arrangements such as flex-time, flex-place, job sharing, part-time work, sabbaticals, and compressed work week. The availability and applicability of formal policies varies at institutional levels hence, the formal mechanism lacks universality which encourages disposal of these arrangements based on gender, gendered roles and perceptions (Atinkson & Hall 2009). Using formal flexible options often comes at a cost of reduction in their pay scale, eliminates promotion possibilities (Smithon et al., 2004) and also affects individual performance (Menezes & Kelliher 2016). Formal options reduces face time, training opportunities as well as colleagues support whose direct effects are visible on performance. Moreover, inadequate knowledge about formal policies and procedures to pursueit makes formal flexibility less favourable among employees (Hall & Atinkson 2005).

In addition to that, one on one negotiation between employee and employer regarding customised use of formal arrangements is termed as informal flexibility. Atinkson & Hall (2009) highlighted that need based use of flexibility reaches to a wider range of employees. With informal flexibility

employees perceives to have increased control over life and work, relives pressure and enhances probability of meeting demands from all spheres without any consequence on career progression, job commitment and salary (Hall & Atinkson, 2005). In addition informal arrangements (location bound) shows positive association with both satisfaction and commitment of employees which consequent into higher performance (Menezes & Kelliher 2016). According to Anderson et al., 2002 administrator's support is significant for employees to manage the integration of work with family and family with work. Informal arrangements allow employees to practice these options as when situation arises with boss being in their side. This supportive gesture of employer enhances employees' commitment and develops a desirable helping attitude towards company at times of peak seasons and deadlines. In addition, personnel also reciprocate the support shown by the employer in managing his work and non-work demands through being loyal, engaging extra effort and pushing his limits to outstand his performance (Menezes & Kelliher 2016).

Gender

An array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influences that society differentially assigns to men and women. Gender is a multidimensional concept which includes gender roles, gender identity, gender relations, and institutionalized gender (Jule, 2014). Gender identity is how you recognise yourself (men,women& combination of both)while gender role describes how society sees you. The former is an individual viewpoint and expresses one's internal sense and experiences of gender but the latterdescribes set of behavioural norms which are acceptable, desirable and appropriate in a society and are strictly according to gender identity. These society driven norms had given females reproductive roles (care taker of family) and men perform productive roles (earning livelihood). However, with changing scenario, women are entering the workforce, challenging the societal norms and breaking the stereotypes. Although, some researchers still believes that gender roles are deeply rooted and totally alive in society. Bianchiet.al.(2012) added that men often refuse to share household work even in dual earner families. Smithon et.al., (2004) also underlined that the stereotypical notions of gender as male being bread earner of the family opts for flexible working options only to prioritise family's financial care. On the other hand, females use flexible options to carry out their domestic responsibilities (Chung & Lippe, 2018). Indeed, gender roles strongly influence the general behaviour of both the genders.

Another key determinant is gender relations which encompasses how we interact with, or are treated by, people in the world around us, based on our gender. The relations at workplace primarily constitute associations with co-workers and superiors. Women are more likely than men to be targets of sexual harassment and discrimination (Schmitt et al., 2002). However, flexibility seekers are stigmatized irrespective of their gender. While women face repercussions in terms of decreased financial incentives (Smithon, et al 2009) and status and men gets a character certificate of having more

inclination towards feminine traits (Vandello et al., 2013).

Institutionalised gender represents gender based allocation of power in various institutions of society and it can be further elaborated as number of women over men in various decision making bodies. Presence of women in these organizations provides a new perspective which might was lacking otherwise. Tobias (2016) highlighted that frequency of using flexi-time significantly rose in the presence of female supervisor particularly in production industry. Contrastingly, male managers had negative views towards flexibility; they found it hard to manage the work of employees working from home and consider flexibility as a mismatch for senior posts (Drew & Murtagh, 2005). Women in power understand the need of family friendly policies and takes effective steps for their execution.

Recent Gender Statistics at Workplace

Workplaces are unevenly distributed and unequally compensated; gender gaps and consequently pay gaps has widened.According to women in workplace survey, 2020; statistics from corporate America reported a slight increase in position of women at senior level from 17 to 23 percent and women as vice president from 23 to 28 percent. Only 85 women per 100 males were promoted to managerial level, females more specifically mothers are three times more burdened with household and care taking responsibilities than their malecounterparts, one in three women employee has either downsized or left the job in this pandemic. Likewise, in India, Only 20 percent women participates in labour force, 8.9 percent holds senior

level positions and top of it, pay gap between female earner and male earner for same work is 34 percent. This data is speaking for itself, its high time big business houses, HR practitioners, senior level managers and even government should make some changes in policies, work culture and organizational environment too to regain confidence of its female employees.

Work-Life Balance

Work- life balance is a multidimensional concept, (Frone, 2003) and a subjective term which can be elaborated into several senses. Many researchers has explained their diverse versions for instance, Frone (2003) defined it as absence of conflict or intervention between work and other life roles while Greenhaus (2003) described it as prioritising family time over work hours.According to Clarke, et al (2004) work-life balance is an equal distribution of time and effort to work and personal activities, such that overall sense of harmony in life can be attained. Wheatley, (2012) understands it as an effective mix of work and non-work duties such that no burden of managing numerous roles is felt. Talking about the characteristics of work-life balance: multi-dimensionality is pivotal of all, whichcan be observed in the forms of its origin and outcomes. Undesirable elements of work life balance are considered as Work-family conflict and its positive features are treated as enrichment or facilitation (Frone 2003). In the words of Greenhaus & Powell, 2006 "Work-family conflict is a type of inter-role conflict that incorporates two sort of loads, such that settlement with one role makes it harder to complete the demand with another role" prioritising one domain and ignoring others is the predominant

reason for arousal of conflict. The dominating domain (if work consequent into work-family conflict and if family resulting into family-work conflict) overpowers andsuppresses performance of other life roles which clearly magnifies the frequency as well as the intensity of clashes.

Further, work-family conflict can be categorised based on its evolution namelytime based conflict which arises due to uneven and irregular time demands of work and family, strain based conflict implies stress, anger, anxiety travelling from one role to other, behaviour based conflict emerges when change in behaviour at one place badly influences actions in other roles (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985). Disagreements negatively influences work, family and personal domains in the form of dissatisfaction at workplace leading to withdrawal intentions, family unhappiness affecting performance and detrimental physical and mental health issues (Frone, 2003; Budhiraja & Kant (2020). According to Hofacke & Koing 2013, an employee experiencing unpredictable and uneven working hours tends to have high level of work-family conflict than staff working under normal job hours. However, utilization of flexible work policies stimulates balance between work and personal lives for females while flexibility escalates work-family conflict for men.

Conversely, skills, insights and knowledge gained from performing duties in one domain assist in better performance in other spheres is termed as enrichment (Greenhaus & powell, 2006). Control over schedules or geographical location or autonomy in working goes hand in hand with positive spill over in other domains

along with official front however, flexible timings stimulates greater degree of enriching experiences than operational flexibility (Rastogi et al., 2016). Active involvement in all arenas of life through the use of flexible options has shown desirable results with regard to job satisfaction and lowering quitting rates (Mcnall et al., 2010).

Gender Biased Use of Flexible Working Arrangements

Plenty of scholars have recommended for organizations to adopt flexible working policies because of its plethora of benefits. Indeed, these policies have the potential to help women in managing work and home demands and many researchers has proposedthat flexibility is desirable for both women & men. However, women pursue flexible options more commonly than them (Vandello et al., 2013). Laundon & Williams (2018) advocates that itis a matter of great concern for female employees such that they are even ready to drop financial incentives and career advancement opportunities for flexibility options. Formal flexible policies are strongly connected to female employees in a manner that "talking about flexible working" certainly directs whole conversation towards "talking about female employees" (Smithon et.al., 2004). Besides that, not all women have access to these options equally. Chung (2018) propounded that female working in male dominated sector (construction, manufacturing and transport) has more access to control schedules whereas women working in predominantly female occupations (teachers and nurses) have less or no control over flexibility policies. Moreover, mothers have more chances to avail flexibility in comparison to non-

mothers and single females in an organization.

Furthermore, use of flexible work arrangements is surrounded by flexibility stigma, which implies a condition or situation in which employees working remotely or using any other form of flexible working faces discrimination at workplace (Chung 2018). While most of the researches advocated consequences on women, some propounded that male flexibility seekers also faces the same repercussions or even worse. According to Formankova & Krizkova (2015) women accessing these facilities especially part time often face discrimination, inequality and have less bargaining power comparing to other co-workers. A woman asking for flexible options is conceived asdisinterested in her career, especially after having kids which put mothers' devotion and loyalty towards organization at stake. They are termed as "failed, unreliable professionals" & even considered "undeserving of elite jobs" (Williams, 2013). Hence, mothers first need to demonstrate their commitment and latterly a positive wage effect emerge for them (Langer, 2017). Research shows that females experiences "motherhood penalty' (Chung, 2019) while fatherhood has its perks.Explanations for father's income premium and mothers' earning penalty are based on the gender specific uses of flexibility. While working mothers use their schedule control to complete their household responsibilities (Chung & Lippe, 2018) and enhances their work life balance (Hofacker & Koing, 2012) working fathers on the other hand strengthens their work sphere (Hofacker & Koing, 2012 & Chung & Lippe, 2018). Work intensification and devotion of male

counterparts makes it harder for women to reverse the earning penalty. Moreover, presumption that father being the provider of the family will work harder for meeting the needs of the new member. Hodges and Budig (2010) found that fathers work more hours a day and more weeks a year, than childless men. However, some men strongly believed that short-time work schemes will lower their earning potential and jeopardise their role as breadwinners, thus raising their family conflict level (Hofacker & Koing, 2012).

To contradict the assumption of fatherhood perks, it was found that men who break traditional gender roles and seek flexibility for child care reasons faces flexibility stigma. Like women, men also face reduction in earnings. A study conducted by (Collarane, 2013) highlighted that reducing work hours for family reasons has 15.5 percent wage decrement and 11.2 percent for non-family reason. Norm of work devotion is strongly tied to men. Any deviation from that promotes negative judgements and character labelling against fathers (Berdahl & Moon, 2013). Those who choose family commitments over work were defamed of having strong maternal traits (Vandello et al., 2013).

Hence, previous studies disclosed that women and men flexibility seekers who opt for non-traditional methods of work are breaking the ideal worker norms and prioritizing families over work,as a consequent both genders were penalized and experienced flexibility biases. However, males replicating work devotion even after availing flexibility options experiences income gains. In general, it can be said that flexibility seekers experience discrimination and dishonoured behaviour at the workplace not only on the

basis of gender but its consequences also relies on how they use their flexibility.

Using modern methods of employment for meeting family responsibilities along with work profile in such manner that an effective balance is obtained between personal and professional life is described as Prioritising family while using similar flexible options only to have a stronger work profile is shown as Prioritising work. Highlighting any one domain has its own benefits and drawbacks until a proper equation is arranged among all other arenas of life.

Figure 2 Word cloud of words used in abstracts of all searched papers, words used frequently are displayed in larger fonts.

Conclusion

Most organizations and even employees themselves are concerned regarding balanced work and private life (Guest,

2002). A series of negative by-products can be guarded and desirable outcomes can be magnified through healthy work-life equilibrium (Bird, 2006). Various researchers have recommended that family friendly organizational policies can contribute in achieving parity between work and life and even lessens incidences of conflict (Abstein & Spieth, 2014). Moreover, the utilisation of these policies such as child care centre at workplace, telecommuting, flexi time and child care leaves boost morale, improves retention, enhances productivity, lower absenteeism and burnout and also, refines public image of the company (Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997). Still, these arrangements failed to implement entirely and were recognised helping a particular set of people only, in spite of the fact that most employees struggle to find a balance and not any particular segment of the community (Panisoara & Serban, 2013). Indeed, reviewing existing literature has enlightened several causes for ineffective implementation of these policies namely unsupportive organizational climate,traditional gender beliefs, and presences based work culture and flexibility stigma. Female staff (at any level) severely suffering from a second shift at home, mainly due to well-built gender roles, identities and relations and these work division biases are even transferred to workplaces. It is high time to understand that male and female employees are dissimilar so are their needs and organizations must provide options for them differently which can be either strict legal regulations (paid maternal leave, paid childcare leave, working part time, career breaks) or flexibility provisions(Doherty, 2004). Undoubtedly, workplaces would

become a better place when policies shift from women to ones who follows traditional gendered beliefs (either male or female) (Rajadhyaksha, 2020).

Talking about modifications in organizational culture, some of the key changes should be to encourage employees to detach themselves from work after job hour can contribute significantly in upgrading their quality of life. By simply shutting down emails and limiting evening phone calls, organization hascreated a family enriching culture after work time (Chummar, 2019). Moreover, a change in employers' attitude can do wonders for their organization; organizations should make their employees believe that they are actually concerned about the struggles of managing home and office duties and are working in right direction to ease their routine. Also, Managers' assumption of less committed employee can be evolved through proper managerial training programs (Leslie et al., 2012). A recent survey of conducted by BCG has examined the sentiments of job providers & seekers towards transitions of workplaces after the pandemic; it is reported that companies want 40 percent of their employees to work remotely even after the end of pandemic. Employees in India (50 percent) & U.S (67 percent) want some flexibility temporal, locational or operational and most importantly, almost 70 percent managers will try to be more open to towards flexible working arrangements than they were before the pandemic. Truly, this virus has changed the outlook of everyone upto some extent and has prompted remarkable changes quickly which otherwise can't done this soon. Undoubtedly, the credit for arousal

of compassion, concern and empathy towards fellow employees, supervisors and management (vice-versa) must be given to Covid. Probably, more recognition would be provided to employees need irrespective of their gender and a genuine family-friendly workplace culture with relaxed time pressure on the job which are fundamental for achieving the dual objectives of job-family balance and gender equity in contemporary society can be successfully attained (Mennino et al., 2005).

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