

# The work -life balance: A Myth or Reality for Indian Women A study from the Specific Perception of ICT

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**Abstract:** This research paper explored the work-life balance issues of women in Punjab. Good percentage of women today are performing dual roles- they have responsibilities of home and job. They are the bread earners and caregivers in the family. But they are struggling in performing both the tasks. The researcher did qualitative research. She selected Focus Group Discussions and collected the data to answer her research questions. With the diffusion of ICT, no doubt women have got opportunities to work and be financially independent. They are contributing to the growth of the family, but the conventional jobs like the household chores, taking care of children and caring for the elderlies are still solely their jobs.

The failure in striking the balance between job and family is acting as a major contributor in women dropping out of their jobs. The struggles in not being able to achieve work-life is causing a lot of mental and physical health problems in women population.

## INTRODUCTION

Glancing at the past, discoveries and inventions have either resulted in evolutionary or revolutionary changes. About three lakh years ago, human beings started using fire on daily basis. With controlled use of fire, human race got a dependable source of light and warmth and also a weapon to keep them safe. The best thing fire did was art cooking. According to Sapiens: A brief history of Human mankind, “the advent of cooking enabled humans to eat all kinds of cooked food and to devote less time on hunting and chewing food”. Some social scientists believe there is a direct link between the advent of cooking and the sharpening of human brain. This, led to changes in food chain and the humans retained the top position in the food chain. Eventually this led to community living and in due course of time family units got established. This is a very significant example showing how a little technique can develop a complete human race.

Similarly, around 70,000 years ago, cognitive revolution took place: Meaning development of language. With this change humans were able to

ingest, store and communicate a large amount of information about the surrounding world. This resulted in formation of the tree of knowledge.

Other major revolutionary change came with the discovery of wheel and iron. Both these discoveries lead to a complete social and cultural change across the globe. Examining the recent developments – movable printing press by John Gutenberg in mid sixteenth century led to the development of mass communication in the form of newspapers, books and magazines. This completely changed the world. This mass media technology gave the voice to the common man. They made general population aware, informed, literate and active. Then, in 1900 came films, followed by radio and television in 1920's and 1950's respectively. All these media technologies have deeply impacted our society. In fact every mass media with its diffusion changes the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of the people across the globe. And the most dynamic technological changes came with digitalization or advent of internet. The digital technologies like internet, laptops, mobile phones and dish television are having synergistic converging relationship with each other and all of them are influencing every facet of human life

New Media technologies have been like tsunami, vastly and forcefully breaking into the lives of the people. These smart technologies like computers, telecommunication, networking and the internet have ushered an Information Age. India is also experiencing that technological changes. These changes have accelerated the process of urbanization and globalization. To a casual observer, all these changes may seem to be disconnected or occurring in separate areas. However, this interplay between technological progressions and social changes have a common denominator i.e. emergence of 'ICT'.

The tools, techniques and technologies employed to process and transfer information are called as Information Communication Technology.

ICT is fastest growing field and it is having significant impact on how people communicate, work, learn and interact.

ICTs are having a direct and constant impact on the lives of Indian Women. Computers and Mobile Phones have raised their aspirations and desires. As women population is getting exposed to these technologies, it is bringing a social change. Technology which is a product of utilization, that is the scientific knowledge-When applied to the problems of life become a prime factor of social change.

Unfortunately, the ICT technologies or Media technologies- all have been in the hands of male gender. Women have always been in the second position as far as the accessibility of technology is concerned. Few decades back, illiteracy and cultural norms kept women away from being the part of mainstream economy and empowerment. In the beginning of this century, when mobile phones came males experimented with it first.. It was the male member or members of the family, who had an exclusive access of it. Majority of women never had an access to brand new mobile phones. And this concept has always been there. Newspapers or T.V. remote or going to theatre, the functioning of all these rested in the hands of the males. They were educated and bread earners. The decision-making was always in their hands.

Now the coin has flipped. ICTs are emerging as a powerful tool as far as gender empowerment. Initially no financial access, lack of computer literacy, and language barriers were hindering the access and usages of technologies by women. But now progression in all these dimensions have led to deeper penetration of technologies and even in social media. Social media and mobile phones have opened up a direct window for women to the outside world. Now, information flows to them without any distortion or censorship.

In developing country like India, more than 40 % of women work in the formal sector and also in rural sector. The women who had no way to engage in social, political and economic activities outside the four walls of the house, now have an opportunity to elevate their status in the society. In other words, they have a forum or way of becoming economically independent and in having some say in the decision- making. ICT technologies offer women flexibility in time and space and also value

to women, who face social isolation. Mobile Phones have become a multi- utility device offering them personal and social security.

India has one of the fastest growing economies in the world .by, 2030 India aims to be the third largest economy in the world. For economy to grow healthier work force is required. It is a proven fact that when women work it's a boom to the economy. As of 2023, the female labour force participation's share in India is 37%. Unfortunately, as India develops women are dropping out of work force in record numbers. This is happening among rich and poor women, in urban and rural area- across social class, religion and age group. Economists are stumped in the era of economic growth Indian women are declining their share in the mainstream social-political growth.

Through this research paper the researcher has tried to investigate the reasons behind women dropping out of the economic independence. Are women not able to balance work and home balance?

Significance of the study: Savitribhai Phule was the first woman to start a school for girls in 1848. Unfortunately, more than a century was not good enough time for India in reaching gender parity in the labour force contributing to the growth of India's economy. Data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO,2022-2023) states that the employability gender gap in India is 50.9%, with only 19.2% of women in the labour force compared to 70.1% of men.

According to data released by Deccan Herald Indian IT sector employing women stood at 9 lakh women in 2012-2013. The number has doubled to more than 2 million, making it 36 per cent of the total workforce of 5.3 million in the sector. Hence, Information and Communications Technologies encourage as well as promote the potential for female gender to come forward in society. The digital economy has the potential to mitigate gender discrimination in work hours by increasing women employment. Contrary to the constant developments and innovations in Information and Communication Technologies and also constant rise in literacy rate in India, the female labour force participation rate in India has been recording a precarious drop from 49% in 2004 -05 to 37.8% in 2009-10 and further to 35.8% in 2011-12. This research paper has examined how not being

able to achieve work-life balance is a contributing factor.

**Research Methodology:** For this research work the researcher has employed Content Analysis and Focus Group Discussions. It is a descriptive study. The researcher had done four sessions of focus groups discussions with 12 women from age group of 20 years to 50 years in each session. The first session had working women and in the second session the researcher has selected the independent entrepreneurs. The third group consisted of house makers and in the fourth group the researcher had called unmarried women (both working and non-working)

**Data Analysis and Interpretation:** According to the report published by India Today (2023), not being able to achieve Work- Life balance is a major deal-breaker when it comes to the economic growth of women in India. According to their data 70 % of women think work-life balance is a barrier in their career and personal growth. Approximately more than 70% respondents also shared that it is very difficult to handle both work, children and home. Majority of women wish to leave their jobs to focus on children and home. They consider these responsibilities of much more vital than a job.

Now, what is work-life balance: work-life balance means to have an opportunity of control over when, where and how women wishes to work. It is achieved, when a woman is given a right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work and respect them and support their decisions for mutual benefit of the family, work space and also society at large.

Today's career women are continually challenged by the demands of full-time work commitments and when the work day is over, they carry more responsibilities and commitments at home. More than 80% women felt that they don't get a breather time when they are at home front. Working women feel that they don't have much peace of mind and help from the life partners. In one of the focus group sessions, it was also revealed that majority of men don't help in household chores. In fact, men don't know how to do the house hold jobs and women who live in joint families revealed that the senior members don't let the men help in family chores. Some percentage of respondents also gave an argument that some women try to become multi

tasker and want to it all. Getting inspiration from the television characters like 'Tulsi' and 'Parvati' they wish to create benchmark in all the fronts, but such ideas and struggles are very short lived. In fact women who are just handling the home front are also not given the opportunity to take their own decisions. Some women shared that they get their pocket money from their husbands and some said they always have to ask. This takes women out of the decision-making circle.

Women also shared that not getting acknowledged for the handwork they do and no gratitude feeling from the counterparts is also a big deal breaker in life and is a major cause for frustration in their lives.

Data also reveals that more than 92 % men don't realise the struggles of working women. Majority of women feel they have achieved financial independence but have lost the companionship from their husbands. Strikingly, working women also said that they have reached forties, their health both physical and mental is getting effected. Problems like depression, anxiety, insomnia, spondylitis, cervical, pre menopause are few health issues which were discussed at length. According to IIMA report published in The Times of India- a survey was conducted on 2000 women working across all the sectors. Two third of the respondents felt that they constantly feel burdened with responsibilities leading to a lot of mental health issues and in some cases even heart issues. Other major findings of the survey are:

- 67% of women report struggling with work-life balance
- 53% of respondents indicated they feel an overwhelming sense of guilt about not spending time with children and family
- 48% cited workplace culture as a major contributor to stress and imbalance
- 60% of working mothers said they face pressure from both home and work, leading to mental fatigue

The focus group discussions done by the researcher reveals approximately the same results, Women overall constantly struggle for some peace and contentment in life. This can only be achieved when people around them will realise their worth. The tragic death of a young female employee at Ernst and Young due to issues in balancing work- life is a example. More than fifty percent of the respondents revealed that they taking counselling or even doctors

help for keeping themselves sane and happy. Some women also reported that more than jobs and household activities marriage is a burden. There is no gender equality in Indian societies. Harassments and mental stresses at job front are also adding to their worries. In fact little percentage of women shared that their mothers have advised them to manage all without complaining to husbands and their families. They believe that women are born tough both mentally and physically.

More than 30% women say that they are expected to be happy and content that they are allowed to go out and work. Hence, it is their moral duty to do all the house chores as it is their primary duty. The financial support they bring to the development of the family goes unnoticed in these cases. In fact these frustrations are also resulting in increasing divorce rates in the country.

All the respondents report that their lives are juggling act that includes multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life, kids and home. In past both men and women had clarity regarding their duties and responsibilities. In Patriarchal Indian society, men were the bread earners and protectors of the family. The major decision-making was on them. Women were given the passive role of taking care of family, kids and all the cultural and religious rituals of the society. After overcoming many inherent disadvantages related to the deeply embedded traditional minds and, today Indian women are on the path of improving their stature in the society by educating themselves and also engaging themselves in different types of traditional and non-traditional entrepreneurial activities.

Society has accepted their working status, but their roles in the family and kids home not being compromised. Career still was to come secondary to their traditional household duties. 53% of women undergo depression due to sense of guilt about not being able to perform their household duties well. 48 % to women go through mental issues for not being able to perfection well in their careers. With women breaking the conventions of past, both the males and females are in the state of dilemma. If women are helping in the economy of the family, then men are to help in the daily chores of the household. Now, there is a need to create an environment of balance as far as duties and responsibilities are concerned. Let's make the society better place to live healthy both mentally and physically.

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