



Assessing the Quality of Work Life for Women Officers In Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Quality of Work Life (QWL) is a tool to evaluate the current work conditions and reflects performance, productivity and the quality of output by an employee at the workplace. It also reflects the effectiveness of the job roles of an employee in an organization. Traditionally the education sector is considered a better workplace for women, yet there exists a glass ceiling and barriers that hinder their career progression and occupy challenging tasks at the top level in some organizations. The present study explores the QWL of women officers working in selected publicly funded Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in India on nine dimensions identified based on the literature review. A structured questionnaire was developed, and the primary data with a sample size of 320 university officers with 75 women respondents from nine selected central universities of India were collected. The study results indicated that the respondents enjoyed a fair treatment at the workplace, autonomy at work, and good reporting relationship besides the -work-life balance.

Keywords: Quality of Work Life; Employee Autonomy; Employee Commitment; Employee Development; Higher Education

1 Introduction

The job plays a major role in an employee's life, and beyond work hours, it may adversely affect one's personal life if it is not balanced. It would possibly create tension even in one's personal life. Quality of work life (QWL) was not frequently used before the 1900s. In the 20th century, social scientists undertook several studies on the relationship between employee attitudes and workplace behavior and organizational productivity. A post-Hawthorn study in 1993 by Elton Mayo showed a shift toward the working conditions of workers at large companies and industries. Lawler attributed job satisfaction as a major factor contributing to QWL [1]. Seashore, on the other hand, claimed that the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction by an employee at the workplace determines the level of QWL [2]. Evaluation of job satisfaction was the preferred method of evaluating QWL researchers [3]. QWL is an organizational goal and a way of thinking about people at the workplace [4, 5]. QWL is an employee's self-interpretation of the workplace's role and interactions with peers, superiors, and expectations [6]. QWL is a corresponding condition experienced by the employee at the workplace, separating the individual from the organizational goals within the sphere of work. QWL is the positive reflection of the general quality of life experienced by an individual employee and positively contributes towards the overall growth of society at large [7].

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1.1 Work-family conflicts

Work-family conflicts are uncommon and arise when the demand for more attention toward one domain happens. Participation in one domain becomes incompatible with the demands of another. Suppose the situation is prolonged, and the employee concerned finds it difficult to cope. In that case, it affects the quality of work and the family [8–10]. Burke argued that the conflict between work-family will be bound to impact the health and well-being of an employee if not sorted out [8]. The ability of individuals to deal with their work and personal life constructively depends upon several factors depending upon their socio-economic background, types of employment, joint family system, and societal values where they live [11, 12].

1.2 Striving for sustainable growth in a competitive business environment

The conditions of employment and patterns are changing rapidly due to increased globalization and the growing digital economy due to the adoption of newer technologies. The growing demand for work requirements now requires 24/7 services. The nature and intensity of the work have changed dramatically, and the traditional spatial and temporal boundaries between the workplace and home are blurred. There is a common link between the positive attributes, viz. creativity and self-motivation of an employee towards the well-being at work. Such employees tend to be more productive and provide better customer satisfaction than those with poor levels of well-being at work [13].

The new form of digital environment offers a host of benefits to the employees in the form of flexible working hours, working from home (WFH), and taking up freelance jobs outside office hours. The new workplace norms are essentially the reflection of the degree of choice about when, where, and how much work is expected to undertake by an employee [14–16]. Results of past studies prove that remote working increases the QWL, happiness, job satisfaction, and self-motivation and thereby positively contributes towards improved work-life balance [17–19]. Gallie's study proved that direct participation is associated with job satisfaction, skill enhancement or development, and well-being [20]. However, job autonomy and control over one's work at the workplace are strongly connected with the level of QWL.

1.3 Women's empowerment in creating a better workplace

The International labor organization (ILO) Report states that the equality between men and women in the world of work is showing some improvements, but at the same time, there is further scope for improvement and progress [21]. Economic empowerment of women and gender equality are intertwined to achieve work-life balance, ensuring a more balanced sharing of responsibilities by men. At the typical workplace, the female non-teaching staff is challenged by perceived barriers such as lack of professional development opportunities, absence of administrative support, the dominance of male employees, customs and traditions, etc. The self-esteem of women employees is an important factor in shouldering higher responsibilities and climbing the ladders of power in the workplace.

Empowerment of women is the core of the Indian constitution. The preamble of the constitution of India related to fundamental rights, duties, and directive principles of public policy grants equality to women. The spirit of the constitutional provisions is creating a conducive environment through positive economic and social policies for the full development of women to realize their full potential [22]. The general guidelines issued by the central government also emphasize the point wherein it was stated that the state, as a model employer, has to provide a very congenial atmosphere to develop, to the fullest extent, their working efficiency and to contribute their best in the efficient transaction of government business.

In the post-national education policy (NEP) 2020 regime, the central government is giving a major push to digital education in the higher education sector, which may fuel the growth of Edtech companies collaborating with many publicly funded universities in India [23]. According to the 'all India survey on higher education report' for 2019-20, among the Group 'A' level officers working in universities across the country, women constitute only 15.1%, followed by 17% of supervisory staff, and the remaining were the supporting staff. There is an increasing trend observed in the case of female Group 'A' level officers in HEIs in India, which indicates that the universities are paying more attention to the gender ratio in the university administration.

Gender equality is one of the crucial factors [24] used for the research to assess the level of satisfaction of QWL in organizations by the researchers. Because gender gap, gender pay, working hours of women, gender segregation and proportion of women to men with different levels of responsibility, taking into account detriments like age and education play an important role in the workplace towards the QWL. A past study conducted on QWL in U.K.-based universities found that women managers had reported high workloads with long working hours, which consumed their time and energy, which was otherwise available to relationship commitments and leisure [25]. The glass ceiling refers to the inequalities between men and women as they evolve in their professional careers within the organization. It usually occurs at higher levels than middle levels in the hierarchy [26].

Another study established the positive relationship between workplace empowerment, job satisfaction, and creativity of an employee [27, 28]. Past research suggests that adequate attention has not been given to the leadership attributes, performance, and development of women in university leadership positions [29]. The study indicates that women in universities get fewer mentoring opportunities than their male counterparts. Women leaders in the university system face exclusion from the informal network - not being part of such informal gatherings outside office hours [30]. Participation in such informal networks forms the core of their career advancement in universities.

The present empirical study aims to examine the QWL of Women in administrative roles, their existence, and women empowerment in HEIs in India, particularly in central universities. The scope of the present study is to determine the level of satisfaction of women officers holding administrative positions at central universities regarding their QWL. Nine Indian central universities were randomly selected based on their historical importance and geographical spread. A total sample of 320, including 75 female staff at the supervisory and managerial levels, has been collected for the study. The study was limited to a small number of prominent central universities in India. The researchers could not include more universities, especially state universities or centrally funded technical Institutions, because of resource crunch and time constraints.

2 Methods

Walton suggested eight dimensions ranging from fair compensation to social relevance of work to assess the QWL. Most researchers used these dimensions with modifications [31]. Based on the literature reviewed and the Walton model, a questionnaire consisting of 29 items was prepared considering the role and functions of university officers working in the central universities on a 5-point Likert scale. The data was collected from 320 respondents, including 75 women officers serving in the selected nine central universities across the geographical spread and historic perspective. During the data collection stage, certain women officers/respondents were also interviewed to understand workplace dynamics, including their involvement in decision-making and career opportunities.

Through factor analysis, the researchers have extracted nine factors based on the Walton model. These factors are (1) work-life-balance; (2) autonomy; (3) relationship with the boss; (4) training, development, and career progression; (5) participation in the decision-making process; (6) welfare; (7) fair treatment; (8) relations with peers and subordinates; and (9) commitment. The assessment of the QWL of the respondents has been done through descriptive statistical methods based on these nine identified dimensions to understand their quality of work. The data details, i.e., the respondents' responses, were coded in the Excel file. The data was tested through SPSS statistically and extracted the data. Descriptive statistics were used to find the mean and standard deviation. After pre-testing the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the final data was collected.

The parametric test and factor analysis method were used to find the dimensions of their work's quality. Factor analysis was done to reduce and yield the dimensions from the 27 items. The results of Cronbach's alpha values (0.837) with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy test (0.720) were used to determine the adequacy of the sample size. The commonly accepted Cronbach alpha value should be (>0.7) with a minimum KMO value (>0.5). The Chi-Square value is quite large at a significance level (0.000). The obtained values indicate that the factors extracted from the data are not correlated, and the questionnaires have high internal consistency and stability. Table 1 shows the frequencies of male and female respondents.

Table 1: Frequencies of male and female respondents.

Gender of the respondents	Frequencies	Gender of the respondents
Male	245	77%
Female	75	23%

3 Results and Discussions

Nine factors of QWL were extracted through factor analysis using SPSS statistical software suite. These factors are work-life balance, autonomy, relation with the boss, training, development and career progression, participation in decision-making, welfare, fair treatment, relations with peers and subordinates, and commitment. Table 2 shows the respondents' mean, standard deviation (p-value), and t-values towards QWL for the nine identified factors extracted through factor analysis.

Table 2: Level of Satisfaction of Male and Female Respondents on QWL dimensions.

Factors/dimensions	Male (N=235)		Female (N=75)		Total (N = 310)	
	Mean	SD (p-value)	Mean	SD (p-value)	Mean	SD (p-value)
1 Work-life-balance	1.50	0.41	1.60	0.33	1.60	0.40
2 Autonomy	1.50	0.46	1.60	0.40	1.60	0.45
3 Relationship with boss	1.60	0.37	1.60	0.42	1.60	0.38
4 Training, development and career progression	1.10	0.55	1.00	0.54	1.10	0.54
5 Participation in the decision-making process	1.00	0.61	1.10	0.56	1.00	0.56
6 Welfare	1.30	0.55	1.30	0.55	1.30	0.55
7 Fair treatment	1.60	0.47	1.70	0.60	1.70	0.52
8 Relationships with peers and subordinates	1.60	0.34	1.70	0.46	1.70	0.37
9 Commitment	1.70	0.46	1.60	0.64	1.80	0.52

Table 3: Your caption here

The conducted survey in the present work aimed to evaluate female officers' QWL in Indian HEIs. The study analyzed nine dimensions of the quality of work life to determine the satisfaction of female officers with their working conditions. Considering the work-life balance dimension, the study found that female officers had a mean score of 1.60, indicating a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives. This value was greater than the mean for male officers, indicating that female officers have a higher level of engagement and better mental health. This outcome reflects universities' benefit, considering the reduced absenteeism and increased retention rates. In terms of autonomy, female officers were found to be more satisfied with their work autonomy than their male counterparts, with a mean value of 1.60 compared to 1.50. This high level of satisfaction indicates a high level of workplace engagement and innovation. The study also analyzed the relationship between female officers and their superiors or reporting officers and found that, on average, these relationships are cordial. The mean value of 1.60 and the p-value of 0.42 indicate that job satisfaction is high in a collaborative work environment. Both male and female officers expressed concerns regarding their development and career progression. However, female officers were found to be more concerned than their male counterparts, with a mean score of 1.00 versus 1.10. The dimension of participation in the decision-making process was found to be the least satisfactory for both male and female participants, with mean values of 1.00 and 1.10, respectively.

The study found that both male and female respondents were satisfied with the aspect of fair treatment in the workplace, with a mean score of 1.70 for female and 1.60 for male respondents. This high level of satisfaction fosters confidence between employers and workers. The study also revealed that female and male respondents were equally pleased with their relationships with coworkers and superiors. Previous research indicates positive peer relationships can increase workplace productivity, teamwork, and employee retention. The study found that male and female respondents were highly committed to their organizations, with a mean score of 1.70. A committed workforce is advantageous to an organization and demonstrates a high work ethic. It is important to note that the present study was restricted to a subset of central universities and analyzed only university officials without external funding. Additional research can be conducted to analyze additional universities at the national and state levels.

4 Conclusion

The study of women officers' satisfaction with their quality of life (QWL) at work in Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) revealed a mixed picture. On the one hand, the results revealed a significant level of satisfaction in five dimensions: fair treatment at work, commitment to the organization, relationships with peers/boss, work autonomy and work-life balance, demonstrating a positive work environment emphasizing mental health and well-being, reduced absenteeism, employee engagement, teamwork, creativity, collaboration, and mutual trust. On the contrary, the results also revealed room for improvement, particularly in professional development, advancement, and participation in decision-making processes. The results indicate a need for training and capacity-building programs for female officers and an increase in their participation in academic administration.

To enhance the skills and self-assurance of university officers, the university should consider implementing a centralized training calendar and management development programs at top business schools. In addition, it is suggested that the top university administration involve university officers in academic administration under the supervision of senior academicians. This intervention is necessary to improve organizational productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Thus, in a nut-shell, it can be said that the study emphasizes the significance of fostering a satisfying and healthy work environment for women officers in higher education institutions, particularly in India. While there is evidence of significant improvement in certain areas, there is also a need for additional intervention to improve the overall QWL for women officers at these universities.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The author declares that she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Author Contribution

Anita Sikandar: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, investigation, writing – original draft preparation; **M.A. Sikandar:** Writing- Data visualization, Software validation, Supervision, Writing- Reviewing and Editing.

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