



A Comparative Study on Work-Life Balance among Urban and Rural Women Employees: A Theoretical Perspective

Guttula Venkata Lakshmi*

Assistant Professor, Aditya University, Surampalem, Andhra Pradesh, India -533437.

lakshmiguttula.harsha@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The work life balance (WLB) is one of a growing focus in the human resource management, it was especially for the women juggling professional and their domestic roles. In India, the urban and rural women's are facing the distinct challenges which are shaped by employment structures, family dynamics, cultural expectations, mobility constraints, and also organizational supporting systems. This paper provides a comparative theoretical review of the WLB experiences among the urban and rural women employees, and analyzing the literature from various authors who already done different researches in WLB. the findings highlighting that while urban women's are contend with formal-sector pressures, rigid mobility limits, and isolation, the rural women's are managing the informal work with insecurity, blurred role boundaries, and cultural burdens, despite the extended family support. This paper offers the targeted recommendations such as flexible work, policy extension to the informal sectors, gender-neutral caregiving, and community awareness, to foster the equitable WLB across India's diverse contexts.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Women employees, Urban vs Rural, Occupational stress, Family support, Mobility, Quality of work life, Gender bias

1. Introduction

India's dual-role working women's are facing intense work-life balance challenges. The urban areas, women's are experiencing the high-pressure roles in the education, banking, IT, and healthcare, while dealing with their nuclear-family responsibilities and commuting pressures. Conversely, the rural women's are engaged largely in informal sectors or agriculture works, so which confront the socio-cultural burdens and infrastructural deficits, even as they get benefit from their joint family support. The recent studies are providing some comparative insights about this concept such as, Aggarwal & Singh (2021) analyzed in their study, 410 urban and rural Punjabi cooperative-society women's are reporting as, the higher household satisfaction, yet also greater work-home overlap and mental strain which indicating blurred boundaries even amid to support them. The survey done by, Aruldoss, Kowalski & Parayitam (2020) are surveyed 445 professionals in the southern India, who demonstrating how quality of work life (QWL) impacted WLB via job stress, satisfaction, and commitment. The Goel's (2022) arXiv preprint highlighting the mobility restrictions which are 53% of the urban women's are rarely leave home, implicating isolation, reduced autonomy, and also WLB strain. These studies are underscoring, the urban women's are facing the structural work pressures and also isolation, while the rural women's are grapple with the overloaded home-work roles. Therefore a theoretical analysis is needed to parse these themes within Role, Spill over, and Border frameworks. According to research work of Karlapudi (2024) highlights that rural women's job and house balance is influenced by the demographics, stress, and mostly emotional well-being, which showing that, rural WLB has complex dimensions beyond their familial support. As per the Aon's 2024 Voice of Women Study found that 90% of Indian women's are ambitious, and yet 42% are experiencing workplace bias, holding them back and the Business Standard reports that 34% of women's are leave the jobs due to WLB issues, compared to only 4% of men. This paper is applies the Role, Spill over, and Border theories to dissect these themes, and comparing urban and rural WLB contexts and also supporting to presenting the tailored recommendations.

2. Need and Scope

2.1 Need of the study

The rapid evolving of Indian socio-economic landscape, supporting for women's participation in the workforce, which has been growing significantly, but achieving an optimal work-life balance remains a persistent challenge to them. The urban and rural women's are encountered by distinct pressures due to varying from employment structures, cultural expectations, and family dynamics. The urban women are struggling significantly with the organizational pressures, nuclear family responsibilities, and mobility limitations for work, and the other hand, the rural women are facing economic instability, role overlapping, and deeply rooted patriarchal norms. Despite increasing the awareness, systemic interventions, often fail to address these differentiated needs comprehensively. The urgency of this issue becomes even clearer in the light of Aon's 2024 findings, which reveal that 34% of

women are leaving their jobs due to work-life balance (WLB) conflicts. This makes it a crucial to delve deeper into the topic which is not just by reviewing current theories and recent research, but also by proposing practical, and also context-sensitive solutions. This goal is to Helps Bridge the gap between urban and rural experiences and support women in aligning their career goals with personal well-being.

2.2 Scope of the study

This study exploring that how urban and rural women in India managing their work-life balance, this is done by analyzing the researches which are published in-between 2020 and 2024. It draws the Role, Spill over, and Border theories to understand the influence of the job types, family dynamics, cultural expectations, and also from workplace support. This paper covering the sectors like teaching, healthcare, agriculture, and informal women labor, and it uses the existing data from studies and national reports without conducting the new surveys. Though these studies are focused on India, but the findings offer the broader relevance to the similar developing economies. The study aims to suggesting the practical, multi-level strategies for the employers, policymakers, and communities to help the women balance career and their personal life more effectively.

3. Research Methodology:

This study employing a theoretical and secondary research methodology, which is synthesizing the literatures published in-between 2020 and 2024 to comparing the work-life balance among urban and rural women employees in India. The core sources are collected by the empirical studies, scholarly journals, organizational reports, and national surveys. These analyses are integrating the Role Theory, Spill over Theory, and Border Theory to interpret the multidimensional aspects of the work-life balance. Through the critical evaluation of existing data, the study identifying the key challenges, stressors, and support systems that differentiate the urban and rural women's experiences, and offering context-sensitive recommendations for the policy and practice.

3.1 Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to conducting a theoretical comparative analysis of the work-life balance (WLB) among urban and rural women employees in India, which is focusing on the recent literatures from 2020 to 2024.

The objectives are as follows:

- To analyze distinct work-life balance challenges faced by the urban and rural women employees in different employment structures and social contexts.
- To examine the role of organizational support, family dynamics, cultural norms, and also mobility restrictions in influencing their work-life balance across both sectors.
- To apply established theoretical frameworks as Role Theory, Spillover Theory, Border Theory to interpret women's work-life experiences.
- To incorporate the recent empirical insights in-between (2020–2024) and provide an updated synthesis of WLB issues specific to Indian women.
- To propose the recommendations for the organizations, policymakers, and families aimed at improving work-life integration for the women across urban and rural contexts.

Theoretical Background

4.1. Role Theory:

This theory suggesting that juggling multiple identities such as employee, caregiver, homemaker can creates role conflict and stress. Aggarwal & Singh illustrate this, according to them rural women are even with family support, experience, emotional strain from blurred cooperative and household roles

4.2. Spillover Theory:

Spillover theory explaining that how emotions and stress permeate both the work and personal spheres. which is given by Aruldoss et al. (2020) they showed that better quality of work life (QWL) reduces the job stress and enhances the satisfaction and commitment, thus it improving WLB.

4.3. Border Theory:

The Border theory addresses the psychological and physical borders between the work and home. Which is comes from Goel's analysis and it shows the urban women in Delhi face confinement and isolation, and restricted mobility forms are created invisible borders between their roles.

5. Urban vs Rural Work-Life Balance: A Comparative Review

5.1 Employment Patterns & Organizational Support

Urban Settings:

The women who are living in urban areas are holding formal-sector jobs with some structured hours and also with performance expectations. As stated by Rani (2021) points out that while urban teachers are having flexible leave, they lack sufficient infrastructural support. As reported by Aggarwal & Singh found that urban cooperative workers receive stronger perceived organizational support, yet facing the high fatigue. As per Aruldoss et al. emphasize that QWL-cantered interventions could be reduce stress and will increase job commitment.

Rural Context:

Rural women typically engage in the agriculture or informal labor. In the words of Rani (2021) reveals that the rural teachers rely heavily on their family support but they are burdened by punctuality issues and also infrastructural gaps. As reported by Aggarwal & Singh documented the high emotional exhaustion among the rural women due to the overlapping roles. As noted by Aruldoss et al. argue that the QWL initiatives like training and mental well-being programs can also give benefit to rural workers.

5.2 Family, Culture & Mobility

Family Support:

The rural joint families often share the childcare, elderly care, and chores, which creating structural relief yet blurring the work-home boundaries. In the words of Aggarwal & Singh observe that while these arrangements are can increase satisfaction, they also produce emotional exhaustion. As per Rani notes that domestic duties are often follow women home even after formal work.

The urban women who are in nuclear families juggle the domestic tasks independently, compounding the stress and guilt. As mentioned in mobility restrictions (Goel) exacerbate their dependency and the WLB conflict.

Cultural Norms & Mobility:

The patriarchal culture restricts the women's freedom. As observed in the Goel's study shows that over half of the urban women remain confined to their homes, highlighting the mobility as a crucial WLB barrier. The rural women too face cultural obligations which are religious, domestic, and that limit the personal time and leisure.

5.3 Psychological Stress & Health Implications

Urban Stress:

The urban teachers suffer stress from the institutional pressure and the inadequate mental health support. This restricted mobility contributes to them loneliness and isolation (Goel).

Rural Stress:

The rural women deal with the inconsistent income and overlapping home-work roles. As documented by Aggarwal & Singh found the emotional exhaustion among these women was significant. The poor QWL exacerbates stress which is confirmed by Aruldoss et al.

6. Findings

6.1 Incorporating 2024 Findings

As observed in research Karlapudi (2024) she examined 360 female rural employees in Bangalore Rural area, who uncovering the stress, having job characteristics, and emotional well-being which is crucially shape in job-home balance, this study reinforcing findings that rural WLB is multidimensional.

As reported by Aon's 2024 Voice of Women Study found 90% of women willing to exceed at work, but 42% faced bias which may highlighting the ambition hindered by systemic discrimination.

In the words of Business Standard and Entrepreneur news from 2024 reveal that 34% of the women leave jobs over on WLB concerns, versus only 4% of men this can illustrating high attrition due to the imbalance.

These 2024 data used to reinforce the urgency of addressing the mobility, bias, and QWL disparities in the both urban and rural contexts.

6.2 Key Findings

The study reveals the notable differences in the work-life experiences of the urban and rural women in India. One of the key contrasts lies in the job structure in the women life. We can observe that urban women often work in highly structured and demanding roles that will require strict schedules, longer hours, and constant performance. In contrast, the rural women typically have more flexible work setups, which often in informal sectors, but these roles lack stability, social security, or growth opportunities, making them insecure and less rewarding over the time.

When it comes to the support systems, the rural women's are benefited from their family and community involvement, especially in managing household responsibilities. However, this is also causes a blurring of the boundaries in-between work and the personal life, and making it hard to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. The urban women, though, often lack this familial support due to their nuclear family structures and also migrations but they may receive some support through workplace policies like childcare or maternity leave etc..

In terms of mobility and culture, this study is highlighting that how the patriarchal norms are continued to restrict women in both the urban and rural areas. For urban women, this often translates into the social isolation and the limited community connection, while the rural women face more traditional restrictions that are confine them to household roles, and limiting their ability to seek the employment or pursue education freely.

The Mental health challenges are significant for both groups. The urban women tend to experience the high stress due to institutional pressures, long working hours, and also isolation from family. The rural women, are on the other hand, who face an emotional burden from juggling the multiple roles as worker, caregiver, homemaker, without adequate support.

Finally, attrition and gender bias are the major concerns. Around 34% of women's are reportedly leave their jobs due to the systemic issues like lack of mobility, workplace discrimination, and limited career advancement, which was not only affect their ambitions but also lead to the lower female participation in the workforce overall.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Organizational Actions

- **Flexible work & remote models:** Especially in the urban sectors, to reduce the commuting and caregiving burdens which are backed by Aon's finding of high ambition.
- **On-site childcare & health services:** It is essential in urban companies and rural cooperatives to supporting the working mothers.
- **QWL training in rural areas:** Empower the women through skill-building and mental well-being programs (Aruldoss et al.).

7.2 Policy-Level Initiatives

- **Include informal workers in labor laws:** Give maternity leaves and pension rights for rural employees.
- **Rural employment infrastructure:** Strengthen the cooperatives and micro-enterprises, as in Bangalore study by (Karlupudi)
- **Safe mobility measures:** Expanding the street lighting and the women-friendly transport which is addressing by Goel's mobility concerns.

7.3 Family & Community Engagement

- **Equitable caregiving:** Encourage the men to share household duties.
- **Awareness campaigns:** Challenge the myths around women's roles and the mobility.
- **Support networks:** Establish an effective woman's groups to share the strategies and for reduce the isolation.

8. Conclusion

The urban and rural women's are facing distinct yet interconnected the work-life balance challenges in India. Formal-sector demands, the restricted mobility, and organizational inadequacies which intensify urban women's stress, while informal work pressure, role overlap, and the cultural expectations burden to rural women, that even with stronger family networks. The data of this study underscore the ambition hindered by bias, significant attrition due to imbalance, and nuanced the job-home dynamics. Theoretical analysis through Role, Spillover, and Border frameworks are highlighting the intervention points which are from organizational reforms to the policy inclusion and community programs. Achieving sustainable WLB requires integrated solutions as flexible work models, childcare support, inclusive policies, and gender-equitable family dialogue. These changes will enable the women across India to harmonize the professional aspirations with personal well-being, contributing to the national growth and also individual empowerment.

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