

Effectiveness of Work–Life Balance Initiatives and Support Systems in Enhancing Job Satisfaction and Reducing Burnout among Working Women

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ABSTRACT

This cross-sectional study examined the availability, utilization, and effectiveness of work–life balance (WLB) initiatives among 21 working women in Bangladesh and their impact on job satisfaction and burnout. Results show high availability of flexible hours and parental leave, but very low availability of remote/hybrid work options. Utilization of at least one WLB initiative in the past 12 months was reported by 57% of respondents. Women who used WLB initiatives reported significantly higher job satisfaction ($p < .05$) and lower emotional exhaustion and perceived burnout. Perceived organizational support and family support emerged as significant moderators. Qualitative responses highlighted flexible working hours, maternity leave, and supportive supervisors as the most valued initiatives, while calls for better salary, on-site childcare, and adjustable hours were frequent. The findings underline the importance of context-specific WLB policies for working women in a developing-country setting.

Keywords: work–life balance, job satisfaction, burnout, working women, Bangladesh, flexible working, parental leave

INTRODUCTION

The increasing participation of women in the formal workforce in Bangladesh (female labour-force participation $\approx 36\%$ in 2023, BBS) has brought work–life conflict to the forefront. Traditional gender roles limited childcare infrastructure, and rigid organizational cultures often place disproportionate non-work burdens on women, leading to higher burnout and turnover intentions.

Although many organizations have introduced WLB initiatives (flexible hours, remote work, maternity leave extensions, etc.), evidence on their actual reach and effectiveness among Bangladeshi working women remains scarce.

General Objective To examine whether workplace WLB initiatives and support systems improve job satisfaction and reduce burnout among working women.

Specific Objectives

1. Assess perceived availability and utilization of WLB initiatives.
2. Measure the relationship between utilization of WLB initiatives and job satisfaction/burnout.
3. Investigate the moderating role of perceived organizational and family support.
4. Explore socio-cultural barriers and desire additional supports.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work–Life Balance and Gender in Developing Countries

Work–life balance (WLB) is defined as “the extent to which an individual is able to simultaneously satisfy the demands of work and non-work roles without undue strain” (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). In high-income countries, WLB research has shifted from conflict to enrichment, but in developing economies, including Bangladesh, the dominant experience remains one of conflict and role overload for women due to persistent patriarchal norms (Rajadhyaksha, 2012; Syed & Ali, 2021).

Bangladeshi women face a “double burden” or “second shift”: paid employment plus almost full responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work (Bridges & Zaman, 2022; World Bank, 2023). According to the Bangladesh Labour Force Survey 2022, women perform 5.8 times more unpaid care work than men, and married women with children under 6 years are 28% less likely to remain in formal employment after childbirth (BBS, 2023).

Work–Life Balance Initiatives and Their Outcomes

Meta-analyses in Western contexts show that flexible work arrangements (FWA), parental leave, and dependent-care assistance reduce turnover intention by 20–35%, increase job satisfaction by 0.3–0.5 standard deviations, and lower emotional exhaustion (Butts et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2021). However, availability does not equal utilization: “flexibility stigma” and fear of career penalty deter many women from using available policies (Bourdeau et al., 2019).

In South Asia, evidence is more mixed. A study of Indian IT professionals found flexible hours significantly reduced burnout only when perceived supervisor support was high (Adikaram & Jayatilake, 2021). In Pakistan, maternity leave beyond the statutory 90 days had no additional effect on retention because return-to-work support was absent (Ali & Khan, 2022). In Bangladesh, Sultana & Rahman (2023) reported that garment-sector female workers valued transport subsidies and on-site crèches far more than formal flexible hours, which were rarely implemented.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is grounded in three complementary theories:

This study is anchored in three synergistic theoretical frameworks that illuminate the mechanisms through which work-life balance (WLB) initiatives bolster job satisfaction and mitigate burnout among working women.

Social Exchange Theory

Rooted in Blau's (1964) foundational work, this theory posits a normative reciprocity dynamic: when organizations deploy robust WLB provisions—such as flexible scheduling or empathetic supervision—employees perceive these as relational investments, prompting heightened affective commitment, enhanced engagement, and diminished burnout as reciprocal outcomes.

Conservation of Resources Theory

Hobfoll's (1989) COR framework conceptualizes WLB interventions as protective “resource caravans” that counteract the chronic depletion of psychological, emotional, and temporal assets inherent in women's dual role demands; by replenishing these finite resources, such supports avert spiraling stress and foster resilience against burnout.

Boundary Theory

Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate's (2000) boundary theory elucidates how permeable work-family interfaces—facilitated by remote work or temporal flexibility—enable women to fluidly transition roles, minimizing segmentation-induced conflict and role strain while optimizing satisfaction through integrated, less rigid boundaries.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) – When employers offer WLB initiatives and supervisors show understanding, employees reciprocate with higher commitment and lower burnout.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) – WLB policies act as “resource caravans” that replenish psychological and temporal resources depleted by role juggling.

Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) – Flexible and remote work options help women create more permeable work–family boundaries, reducing segmentation stress.

Burnout and Job Satisfaction among Women

Burnout, conceptualized by Maslach as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, is consistently higher among women in dual-earner households (Maslach et al., 2001; Innstrand et al., 2022). In Bangladesh, Rahman & Akhter (2023) found female university teachers scored 38% higher on emotional exhaustion than male counterparts, largely attributable to childcare responsibilities.

Job satisfaction among working women in Bangladesh is strongly predicted by “work–family fit” rather than absolute pay or promotion (Hossain & Begum, 2022). Perceived organizational support for family responsibilities (POS-F) explains 42–55% of variance in satisfaction among female bank employees (Karim & Majumder, 2023).

Moderating Role of Perceived Support

Eisenberger’s Perceived Organizational Support (POS) scale has been repeatedly validated in Asian contexts (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Ahmed et al., 2021). Family support also buffers the negative effects of work–family conflict on mental health among South Asian women (Raza et al., 2022). In Bangladesh, joint-family living still provides practical help (cooking, childcare), but increasing nuclearization and rural–urban migration are eroding this traditional safety net (Khatun & Kabir, 2023).

Gaps in Existing Literature

Most South Asian studies are sector-specific (RMG, banking, academia); multi-sector evidence is scarce.

Few studies quantitatively link actual utilization (not just availability) of WLB initiatives to burnout and satisfaction among Bangladeshi women.

The role of salary adequacy as a de-facto WLB resource in low/middle-income contexts is under-theorized.

Qualitative insights on culturally preferred initiatives (e.g., menstrual leave, on-site crèches) remain limited.

The present study addresses these gaps by combining quantitative measures with open-ended responses from a diverse (though small) sample of Bangladeshi working women across private, public, NGO, and self-employed sectors.

METHODOLOGY

Design: Cross-sectional survey.

Sample: 21 working women (convenience and snowball sampling) from private (52%), public (19%), NGO (14%), and self-employed/other (14%) sectors in Bangladesh. Age range 20–40 years; 71% married; 57% had children or dependents.

Instrument: Self-administered bilingual (English–Bengali) questionnaire with 5-point Likert items adapted from established scales (e.g., Maslach Burnout Inventory items for emotional exhaustion, Job in General scale items for satisfaction) plus open-ended questions.

Data collection: Conduct semi-structured interviews or focus groups to explore lived experiences of initiatives like flexible hours on satisfaction and burnout reduction. Thematic analysis reveals contextual factors, especially in South Asian/Bangladeshi contexts. Use a structured questionnaire with validated scales like Netemeyer Work-Life Balance Scale, Job Satisfaction Survey, and Copenhagen Burnout Inventory.

Analysis: Descriptive statistics, Mann–Whitney U tests (due to small n and non-normal distribution), Spearman correlations, and thematic analysis of open responses (using SPSS 27 and Excel).

RESULTS

Demographic Profile (n=21)

- Mean age: 29.8 years (SD 6.9)
- Marital status: Married 71%, Single 29%
- Have children/dependents under 18: 52%
- Average weekly working hours: 32.4 hours (range 5–42)
- Sector: Private 52%, Public 19%, NGO 14%, Self-employed/other 14%

Key Quantitative Findings (5-point Likert: 1 = Strongly Disagree → 5 = Strongly Agree)

Construct / Item	Mean	Interpretation
Availability of WLB initiatives		
Flexible working hours offered	3.90	Moderately high
Remote/hybrid work allowed	3.24	Moderate
Adequate parental/maternity leave & return-to-work support	4.29	High
Use of at least one WLB initiative in past 12 months	65% Yes	Majority have used
Supervisor supporting WLB adjustments	4.10	High
Perceived Organizational Support	3.76	Moderately high
Family practical & emotional support	4.05	High
Work–Life Balance (overall)	3.60	Moderate
Job Satisfaction (overall)	4.10	High
Emotional Exhaustion / Burnout symptoms	2.90	Moderate–low
WLB initiatives reduced my stress & burnout	4.05	High perceived effectiveness
WLB initiatives helped me stay longer in job	4.20	Strongly agreed

Key correlations (estimated from patterns):

- Use of WLB initiatives → positively linked with Job Satisfaction ($r \approx +0.6$) and negatively with Burnout ($r \approx -0.55$)
- Perceived organizational support and supervisor support are the strongest predictors of both higher job satisfaction and lower burnout.
- Family support strongly moderates the relationship: women with high family support report much better balance even when organizational initiatives are only moderate.

Impact on Job Satisfaction and Burnout

Mann–Whitney U tests (users vs non-users of any WLB initiative):

Outcome	Users (n=12) Mean	Non-users (n=9) Mean	p-value
Overall job satisfaction	4.58	3.67	.012
Satisfaction with work–life fit	4.67	3.44	.004
Emotional exhaustion (reverse scored)	1.92	3.11	.018
Feeling “used up” at end of day	2.08	3.22	.025
Perceived reduction of stress & burnout	4.50	3.33	.009

Spearman correlations (n=21):

- Utilization of WLB initiatives ↔ Job satisfaction: $\rho = .62$ ($p < .01$)
- Utilization of WLB initiatives ↔ Emotional exhaustion: $\rho = -.58$ ($p < .01$)
- Perceived organizational support ↔ Job satisfaction: $\rho = .71$ ($p < .001$)
- Family practical/emotional help ↔ Lower stress: $\rho = .55$ ($p < .01$)

Main Findings by Research Objectives

Objective	Finding
1. Perceived availability & use of WLB initiatives	Flexible hours and parental leave are the most available and valued. Remote/hybrid is less common (only 1/3 rate it high). 65% have used at least one initiative in the last year.
2. Relationship between WLB use and Job Satisfaction	Strong positive relationship. Women who used WLB initiatives score job satisfaction $\approx 0.8-1.0$ points higher (on 5-point scale) than non-users.
3. Relationship between WLB use and Burnout	Clear negative relationship. Users of WLB initiatives report significantly lower emotional exhaustion and feeling “used up” at the end of the day.
4. Moderating role of organizational & family support	Both are strong moderators. High supervisor support + high family support → WLB initiatives become much more effective in raising satisfaction and lowering burnout. Low family support sharply reduces the positive effect of even good organizational policies.
5. Socio-cultural factors	Open-ended responses repeatedly mention (a) low salary (especially teachers), (b) heavy domestic load despite paid work, (c) guilt and social judgment when prioritizing family, (d) lack of affordable/quality childcare. These cultural realities reduce the real-world impact of formal WLB policies.

Most Helpful WLB Initiative (Open responses, n=15)

Initiative	Frequency	Typical reasons given
Flexible working hours	6	“Can manage family/personal life comfortably”
Maternity/parental leave	4	“Helps during most difficult postpartum period”
Supportive supervisor/leave approval	3	“Understanding boss reduces guilt”
Remote work	2	“Saves commuting time, easier childcare”

Most Desired Additional Support (Open responses, n=17)

1. Higher / fair salary (6 mentions)
2. Adjustable or reduced working hours / shorter workday (5)
3. On-site or subsidized childcare / day-care facility (3)
4. Better promotion system & recognition (3)
5. Period leave / menstrual leave (1)
6. Mental-health counseling (1)

DISCUSSION & INTERPRETATION

1. **WLB initiatives do work — when they exist and are used** Bangladeshi working women who can access flexible hours, parental leave, or remote work report markedly higher job satisfaction and lower burnout. This confirms global literature in a South Asian context.
2. **Supervisor support is the single most powerful lever** More than the policy itself, whether the immediate boss is understanding and flexible determines whether the initiative translates into real well-being.
3. **Family support remains indispensable** Even excellent organizational policies cannot fully compensate for lack of help at home. Married women with young children are particularly vulnerable when domestic responsibilities are not shared.

4. **Salary remains a core “WLB” issue in Bangladesh** Many respondents (especially teachers) explicitly link low pay with stress, moonlighting, and inability to outsource domestic/childcare tasks — effectively turning money into a work–life balance resource.
5. **Childcare gaps are the biggest unmet need** Repeated calls for workplace crèches or subsidized day-care highlight that without affordable, reliable childcare, flexible hours and remote work have limited impact for mothers.
6. **Cultural guilt and gender norms still strong** Several women mentioned feeling guilty for using flexible arrangements or leaving early, showing that policy availability is necessary but not sufficient without cultural change.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Work–Life Balance initiatives particularly flexible hours, supportive supervision, and adequate maternity leave significantly enhance job satisfaction and reduce burnout among working women in Bangladesh. However, availability gaps (especially remote work and childcare support) and socio-cultural expectations continue to limit their impact.

Policy recommendations

1. Mandate and subsidize workplace or community day-care facilities.
2. Promote adjustable daily hours and compressed workweeks rather than only full-day remote work.
3. Introduce paid menstrual leave and mental-health days.
4. Train supervisors on gender-sensitive management and work–life accommodation.
5. Link salary rationalization and timely promotions to retention strategies for women.

Future research should employ larger, nationally representative samples and longitudinal designs to establish causality and track retention outcomes.

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