



**COMPARING DIFFERENCES IN WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND PERCEIVED
STRESS LEVELS BETWEEN MARRIED AND UNMARRIED FEMALE
PROFESSIONALS**

¹Khushi Tekwani, Masters in Arts, Clinical Psychology, Amity Institute of Psychology and
Allied Sciences, Amity University, Noida

²Dr. Mohammad Imran, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity
University, Noida
mimran@amity.edu

ABSTRACT

AIM: The research aim to study the differences in work-life balance and perceived stress levels among married and unmarried female professionals.

OBJECTIVE: To investigate if there are any difference in the level of work-life balance and stress among unmarried and married female professionals.

METHODOLOGY: The research focused on collecting data from female participants above the age of 14 years. The data was collected using google forms and printed questionnaires using a mix of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling.

RESULTS: The result of the study found that there was a significant difference in levels of perceived stress between married and unmarried female professionals while there was no significant difference in work-life balance between married and unmarried female professionals.

NOVELTY: To best of our knowledge, although there were many studies that focused on measuring work-life balance and stress not only with each other but also with various other factors like job satisfaction, job embeddedness, work-family conflict. But there was no research which was focused on female professionals, especially to the case where there was a comparison between married and unmarried female professionals.

Keywords: Work-life Balance, Perceived Stress, Female professionals, Unmarried Female Professionals, Married Female Professionals

INTRODUCTION

Work-Life Balance is the new normal in an ever-changing world, and it is imperative that we adapt as well. However, how many of us actually manage to accomplish that? In general terms, Work-life balance refers to a situation where an individual is able to strike a balance between their work and life. Work refers to the individual's profession and life refers to their personal life. Stress is state of tension. It is a term that all of us are familiar with and are quite used to using it in our daily life conversations.

Female professional refers to all the females that are above the minimum working age of the country i.e. 14 years and are working. The present study aimed to compare the differences in the level of work-life balance and the level of perceived stress levels between married and unmarried female professionals. Even though each person faces unique challenges in their everyday lives, stress is a universal experience. Individuals who have good coping mechanisms are better equipped to manage challenges in life and lead happier lives.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The idea of work life balance is not new, it dates back to the 1800s. The idea started in reference with women who were holding a career and were expected to be the primary care taker of the house. Slowly the idea was spread to males as well. The concept was that individuals had a preference of holding a career/ profession that would let them have a balanced personal as well as professional life (Naithani, 2009).

Every individual have various segments of their life consisting of family, social, health, spiritual etc segments. Each segment demands an individual's time, energy and effort. Professionally the roles of females and males might be different because of societal norms, different qualifications, experiences and designations. A lot of differences come from role expectations as well. And these expectations don't change with the marital status of a woman, rather they are perceived as a positive burden.

PERCIEVED STRESS

How an individual perceives stress at any given moment is often expressed through their feelings and thoughts. Perceived stress if often about what a person's interpretation is of

their stressors. How a person deals with these annoying hassles of daily life makes the difference. It is also about all small life changes that can take place in an individual's life and how these things then affect the confidence of the individual. The scale here measures how a person feels about the overall difficulties and their capacity to deal with life stressors. Everyone experiences different stressors differently. Two people might be experiencing the same life stressors but still not have same outlook towards the stressor.

Stress can be of following types (Shetgovekar, 2021)

- ***Eustress*** : It is the kind of stress that helps us in being energized. It is stress caused by a positive response to a desired stressor.
- ***Distress*** : This stress which occurs when there is too high or too low arousal. It is then classified in Acute stress and Chronic stress. Acute stress is when there will be intense amount of stress but lasts only for a short time interval whereas Chronic stress is a kind of stress that might or might not be intense but it lasts for a prolonged time interval.
- ***Hyper Stress*** : It is referred to as extreme amount of stress
- ***Hypo Stress*** : It is referred to as insufficient amount of stress

Stress can be managed through various means like yoga, mindfulness, meditation, healthy diet, restful sleep to name a few.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND PERCIEVED STRESS

The relationship of work-life balance and perceived stress is intertwined, where both the variables significantly impact each other and impact an individual's overall well-being and quality of life. Stress is about how individual perceives the daily demands of individual's life and how these things then impact the overall well-being of the individual. Work-life balance

talks more about how harmoniously an individual is able to maintain balance between their personal and professional life.

Achieving a healthy work-life balance often involves managing perceived stress levels. Whenever, an individual feels that they are flooded with the demands of their work and they are struggling to find time for their personal pursuits, it is highly likely that they'll experience a heightened level of stress. A disbalanced work-life balance can display in the form of emotional distress, physical symptoms.

On the other hand, a healthy work-life balance serves as a cushion against stress by giving the individual the time of their lives. A healthy work-life balance means that they are able to relax, rejuvenate and engage in the activities that they find recharging. It happens when an individual is able to effectively allocate time for their personal life demands as well as for their professional life demands.

A supportive organisation which has work-life balance initiatives and policies can help the individual in achieving it which will ultimately lead to increase in their productivity. It generally includes, work-arrangements, wellness programs and effective boundaries. Conversely, organisations that tend to ignore this topic often faces issues like burnout, absenteeism etc.

In summary, there is a reciprocal and dynamic linkage between perceived stress and work-life balance. Organisations should assist people in reducing stress, improving general well-being, and achieving greater happiness in both their personal and professional lives by supporting work-life balance programmes and creating supportive work environments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Graves et al. (2021) examined Stress Coping mechanism and Gender differences in undergraduate students during the end of semester. The sample size of the study was 448 Undergraduate and graduate university students who were enrolled in 3 different undergraduate science courses. The researcher administered Perceived Stress Scale and Brief Cope four weeks prior to final exams. The study concluded that female indicated higher levels of stress than their male counterparts. Females used emotion focused coping dimensions more than males.

Hayes (2021) along with associates conducted a research study to understand the impact of involuntary remote working during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic on perceived stress and work-related burnout for workers with or without experience of remote work. The authors developed a survey questionnaire incorporating the Perceived Stress Scale, Copenhagen Burnout inventory, work-related questions and demographics. The sample size of the study was 256 professionals who self-identified as working from home during the pandemic. Snowball sampling method was used. The research suggested that there were personal mental health time and communication management issues for teams who were primarily interacting through technology, perceived stress had increased for all the participants but gender and age had significant effects on the Burnout level and stress level. There was significant burnout among participants who were working remotely before over 19.

Mandaviya and Solanki (2021) investigated gender differences in perceived level of stress, work-life balance health and job satisfaction among university teachers in India. It was an online cross-sectional survey with 86 respondents comprising 51 males and 35 females in the state of Gujarat. The study concluded that job stress on work-life balance was significantly stronger in females, male respondents scored higher in managing anger at work and revealed strong detachment from work. It was also noted that male respondents faced more health issues

compared to females due to job stress and imbalance in work-life while females exhibit lower career resilience often due to family characteristics and responsibility.

Andrea (2020) conducted research examining work-life balance and weighing the importance of work-family and work-health balance. The study was focused on investigating the importance of non-work domains of work-life balance with a particular focus on health, the importance of effects of work-family balance and work-health balance on job satisfaction, and how the effect of work-family balance and work-health balance on job satisfaction changes across workers' characteristics like age, gender, parental status and workability. The study concluded that workers considered health as important as family in work-life balance, work health balance had more variance in job satisfaction than work-family balance. Age, gender and parental status moderated the effect of work-family balance on job satisfaction and workability moderated the effect of work-health balance on job satisfaction.

Anbumalar et al. (2017) conducted a research to study gender differences in perceived stress level and coping strategies among college students. The aim of the study was to explore the gender differences in perceived stress level and coping strategies among the college students. The results of the study showed that there is significant relationship between perceived stress levels and coping strategies, female students reported higher levels of perceived stress than their males. Findings of the research revealed that male participants significantly deferred from female participants in stress coping strategies.

METHODOLOGY

AIM

The research aims are comparing the differences in work-life balance, perceived stress levels between married and unmarried female professionals.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The rationale of comparing the differences in work-life balance and perceived stress levels was that to best of our knowledge, there was less research about the relationship of these three variables in context of female professionals and comparison between the variables in context of marital status was even less.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To investigate the difference in the level of, work-life balance and stress in unmarried and married female professionals.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: There will be a significant difference between work life balance of married and unmarried female professionals.

H2: There will be a significant difference between the perceived stress levels of married and unmarried female professionals.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present research employed quantitative research design.

RESEARCH SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD

For the present research, a combination of purposive sampling, convenience sampling and snowball sampling was used. A sample of 220 female professionals was collected.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Data collection involved reaching out to 250 female working professionals. Participation in the research was voluntary. The Work Life Balance Questionnaire, and the Perceived Stress Scale were utilised. The responses were collected using online Google forms (sent via social media platforms) as well as through the printed versions of the survey which was distributed to the targeted sample. Informed consent and confidentiality clause was highlighted on the front pages of the form as well as on the printed questionnaire. Instructions were given and the participants were informed that there is no time limit and there are no right or wrong answers and the responses will be kept private. Out of 250 collected samples, 30 incomplete data was removed before the scoring. Descriptive statistics and T-test analysis in SPSS21 was performed. The findings were interpreted and discussed and the findings were interpreted and discussed. Finally, the conclusions were drawn.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOLS

- **Work-Life Balance Scale adapted by Hayman (2005):** This is a widely used scale developed to measure the balance between work-life balance in an individual. It is a 15-item scale adapted by Hayman in 2005, originally developed by Fisher (2001). The Reliability for the scale, was estimated using Cronbach alpha coefficient which was 0.91 for WIPL, 0.82 for PLIW and 0.67 for WPLE. The scale was tested for reliability

under the Indian conditions and Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.87. The validity of the rest was also tested using construct validity. The scale consists of three sub items work interference in personal life (WIPL- 7 items), personal life interference in work (PLIW-4 items) and work/personal life enhancement (WPLE-4 items). All the items except for item no. 7 in WIPL and all the items of WPLE are positive scored (Strongly Disagree 1, Disagree 2, Neither Agree nor Disagree 3, Agree 4, Strongly Agree 5). While item 7 of WIPL and all items of PLIW are negatively scored.

- **Perceived Stress Scale :** For Measuring the level of Perceived stress, Perceived stress scale by Cohen et al. The perceived stress questionnaire is a 14-items scale which measured the stress levels in respondents on a 5-point scale. All the items except 4,5,6,7,9,10 and 13 are positively scored. PSS-14 has adequate internal and test-retest reliability. In terms of concurrent validity, PSS-14 is positively related to a life-impact score. ($r = 0.17$ to 0.35 ; Cohen et al., 1983).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

For data analysis and interpretation, Microsoft Excel was used for initial scoring of the data. Once all the raw data was obtained and arranged, IBM SPSS21 was utilized. Descriptive statistics was used to find the mean and SD of the data. Next, t-test Analysis was used to compare the data of unmarried and married female professionals.

RESULTS**Table 1***Descriptive statistics of study variables*

		Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Total Work Life Balance	39.82	5.32
2	Perceived Stress	26.92	5.59

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of all the study variables – Total Job satisfaction, Total work life balance, Perceived stress

Table 2*T test between married and unmarried across study variables*

	Mean	SD	T	Sig. (2 tailed)	Result
Total work life balance					
Married	39.76	5.20	.18	.85	NS
Unmarried	39.90	5.50			
Perceived stress					
Married	26.04	5.49	2.53	.01	S
Unmarried	28.07	5.54			

NS-Not significant, S-Significant

Table 2 represents the t-statistics between married and unmarried on total Job satisfaction, total work life balance, perceived stress.

No significant difference was found in the total work life balance between the two sample groups. There is a significant difference in the total Perceived stress between the two sample groups. Unmarried people scored high in Perceived stress.

DISCUSSION

The present research work was done on a sample size of 220 female professionals with the aim to compare the differences in work-life balance, perceived stress levels between married and unmarried female professionals. Stress is a variable that affects various facets of our life. Especially when considered in the context of work-life balance. The relationship between variables was studied using T-test analysis in SPSS21.

H1: There will be a significant difference between the work-life balance of married and unmarried female professionals. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between the work-life balance of married and unmarried female professionals. The statistical analysis has provided contrary insights about the relationship of marital status with the work-life balance among female professionals. The results indicate that there is no significant difference in work-life balance in the two sample groups i.e. married and unmarried female professionals.

One of the possible explanations for this could be the level of career focus both these groups have. Both married and unmarried women may have a similar level of zeal towards their careers. They may prioritize their professional goals and strive to make a healthy work-life balance, regardless of marital status.

It is very important as a female professional to have access to a supportive work environment that can offer flexible timings and flexible work arrangements. Supportive policy in the workplace can facilitate better work-life balance regardless of marital status.

Both married and unmarried women may come from a strong social support network outside their work. The social network may include their friends, family, and relatives that help them manage personal responsibilities and professional responsibilities while maintaining their well-being. A supportive social network can also be a coping mechanism.

Finally, some females may have good time management skills at an individual level regardless of their marital status they may have the skill to effectively allocate time for their work, social life, and personal life. Some women at an individual level, irrespective of their marital status may prioritise work-life balance and often take proactive steps in achieving it. Regardless of their marital status, they drive out to see opportunities to balance their work and personal lives.

Based on the findings H1 is rejected. The results have revealed that there is no significant difference in the work-life balance between the two sample groups.

H2: There will be a significant difference between the perceived stress levels of married and unmarried female professionals. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in the levels of perceived stress in married and unmarried female professionals. The results of the statistical analysis were in line with the hypothesis. The statistics analysis indicated that unmarried individuals scored high in perceived stress in comparison to their married peers. One of the possible reasons for higher perceived stress among unmarried professionals could be an absence of social support networks and companionship. Marriage often leads to an emotional social and financial support system that can act as a buffer against stressors encountered in daily life. This often helps in coping with stress.

Unmarried individuals may also face societal expectations or social stigmas. Specifically, in the case of the Indian context, where marriage is considered a mark of success or social status. Individuals who remain unmarried may experience pressure and societal expectations to confirm societal norms.

This difference might also stem from differences in lifestyle and responsibilities. While a married female professional has a scope of dividing the work within the household among the family members or partner whereas an unmarried individual has to bear the sole responsibilities of managing personal, finances and household affairs. This can be a stressful and overwhelming experience.

Moreover, this can also be because of the emotional experiences. Unmarried female professionals may experience loneliness, isolation, and emotional distress because of the lack of a strong social support network. They alone have to navigate the ups and downs of life.

Furthermore, there can be role strains. Married female professionals have multiple roles of being a wife, parent, and employee which can in turn lead to a strain. These roles can be challenging and can ultimately contribute to a higher level of perceived stress in comparison to unmarried women.

Additionally, there may be financial pressure. Married female professionals may have to experience additional pressures such as providing for the family and managing household expenses which can be a significant contributor to stress. While an unmarried woman will have more financial flexibility and autonomy.

Finally, A married female professional has additional family responsibilities such as caring for the children managing the household supporting spouses, and looking after the elders of the families. These can lead to an increase in the perceived level of stress in comparison to unmarried women who do not have these additional responsibilities.

Based on the research findings H7 is retained. The research results have revealed that there is a significant difference in the level of perceived stress in married and unmarried female professionals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current study succeeded in its objective of comparing the differences in work-life balance, perceived stress levels between married and unmarried female professionals. The results of the study showed that the level of perceived stress was significantly different for married and unmarried female professionals while the level of work-life balance in both these groups was not significantly different.

The results of the study emphasized that organizations need to keep a check on the level of stress so the employees are able to maintain a healthy work-life balance in their life which will ultimately benefit the individual as well as the organisation. This will help the organisation in employee retention and improving their level of satisfaction. This will help employers apply targeted interventions to improve their work-life balance and stress levels, ultimately improving their employees' job satisfaction. For employees it helps them recognize the role of stress and the importance of managing work and personal life, seeking support from social networks when needed.

It is vital to remember that the sample of this study is the basis of this conclusion. The relationship of the variables could be better understood with further investigation and analysis by considering other factors.

REFERENCES

Anbumalar, C., Dorathy, A. P., Jaswanti, V. P., Priya, D., & Reniangelin, D. (2017). Gender differences in perceived stress levels and coping strategies among college students. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*. 4(4). 22-33.

DOI: 10.25215/0404.103

Gragnano, A., Simbula, S., & Miglioretti, M. (2020). Work–life balance: weighing the importance of work–family and work–health balance. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(3), 907.
<https://doi.org/10.3390%2Fijerph17030907>

Graves BS, Hall ME, Dias-Karch C, Haischer MH, Apter C (2021) Gender differences in perceived stress and coping among college students. *PLOS ONE* 16(8): e0255634.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0255634>

Hayes, S. W., Priestley, J. L., Moore, B. A., & Ray, H. E. (2021). Perceived Stress, Work-Related Burnout, and Working from Home Before and During COVID-19: An Examination of Workers in the United States. *Sage Open*. 11(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211058193>

<https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss7/10>

Shetgovekar, S. (2021). STRESS : AN INTRODUCTION [Review of : STRESS : AN INTRODUCTION]. In Introduction to stress (pp. 13–26). Retrieved April 13, 2024, from <https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/72259/1/Unit-1.pdf>

Solanki, S., Mandaviya, M. (2021) "Does Gender Matter? Job Stress, Work-Life Balance, Health and Job Satisfaction among University Teachers in India," *Journal of International Women's Studies*.22(7). 121-134.