



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Exploring the determinants of work–life balance among senior-level working mothers in Yangon, Myanmar

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### Abstract

Work-life balance (WLB) is an emergent issue in contemporary organizational and social research, especially among working women. Working women need to accomplish both professional and personal responsibilities. The research employed a qualitative study and collected data through semi-structured interviews with senior-level working mothers at private, public, and self-owned enterprises. The data are analyzed using content analysis. The findings showed that organizational factors, including workload, working hours, and flexible working policies, are the influencing determinants of work-life balance for senior-level working women. The findings also mentioned that excessive workload and extended working hours contribute to job-related stress and work-life conflict. Advancements in technology have both benefits and drawbacks for working mothers' WLB. Practical recommendations are provided to enhance employee well-being, productivity, and retention.

**Keywords:** Work-life balance; Working mothers; Senior-level management; Myanmar

### 1. Introduction

The balancing act between work and family life is a major challenge for every worker in a highly competitive, fast-paced society. Work-life balance (WLB) is considered a significant factor in enhancing personal freedom across work and non-work conditions (1). WLB has an impact on the family life and other social relationships. When employees experience family conflicts, they experience reduced concentration at work, which can lead to organizational drawbacks such as workplace damage, reduced performance and productivity, a negative brand image, and lost revenue (2). Scientific researchers studied the underlying causes of work-life imbalance to address them and promote individual work-life balance. Family life, job engagement, and support at work are the major impact factors of work-life balance. Technological advancement and excessive workload negatively influence work-life balance (3). Long working hours were noticeably related to work-life imbalance and caused psychological problems such as depression and work-related stress (4,5). Flexible work arrangements help individuals adjust their work and personal lives. Organizational supports and culture become important factors in work-life balance. A strong, positive organizational culture significantly impacts workers' work-life balance.

Myanmar is one of the developing countries in ASEAN. The Myanmar women have not faced serious gender discrimination like other neighboring countries, such as India and Bangladesh. However, the Myanmar woman needs to fulfill many tasks in her daily life. Housework, child care, and elderly care are routine work for women. In the past, Myanmar women were dependents and had to do household work. However, in today's society, women are employed in office work and some high-level employment positions. The working opportunities for men and women are equal. The organization hires qualified women and promotes high-level job opportunities. Myanmar women employees need to complete both job tasks and household tasks within a working day. Female workers face several challenges in balancing work and life, especially married women. Single female professionals need to complete some household tasks,

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but they have personal time because they do not need to care for children. The work-life balance of a professional working mother becomes a critical aspect to maintain. Satisfied women workers bring several benefits to the organization. When women face difficulties balancing work and family life, they feel exhausted and intend to leave their jobs as early as possible.

This study focuses on identifying the factors that affect work-life balance among senior-level working mothers in Yangon, Myanmar. The factors influencing work-life balance need to be studied, as mothers often complete many household tasks and office work in a single day. Some working mothers intended to leave their jobs as early as possible due to a complicated and busy lifestyle. Some female employees quit their jobs when they got married. Working mothers face significant job stress and family issues. The heavy workload and family tasks negatively impact the work-life balance of working mothers. A lack of work-life balance seriously affects employees' health, work performance, and productivity. The results of this paper will inform the main impact factors of work-life balance among senior-level working mothers and how to balance their work-life. Working mothers will notice which factors they should emphasize to achieve a high level of work-life balance and a happy life.

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## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Work-life Balance**

The balance between work and non-work life is called work-life balance. Work-life balance is determined by an individual's practice regarding the scope of the job and their personal life. (1,2). Professional workers face challenges balancing personal and family responsibilities with work responsibilities. Work-life balance among working parents has become a critical issue for researchers. (4,6). The individual aspects of work-life balance and satisfaction differ. Work-life balance significantly affects both organizational and personal development. Working parents, especially mothers, face challenges balancing family and work life. They need to accomplish both family and work tasks within a day. Work-life balance is having enough time for both work and family life. (4). The person faces an imbalance between work and life when they spend more hours at work or with family than others do. A lack of free time to spend with family, along with personal and social issues, creates work-life conflict. The significant association between mental illness of workers, job dissatisfaction, early leave, or retirement, changing to other professions, and work-life conflict.

The organizational factors involved job role, organizational support, working hours, workload, job engagement, and technology advancement. (6).

### **2.2. Organizational support**

In today's business world, organizations focus on employees' physical and mental health and work-life balance. (6,7). Flexible work arrangements and family leave policies also affect the balance between work and family life. The worker's commitment, retention, improved performance, and productivity are the results of positive organizational support for work-life balance.

### **2.3. Working Hours**

Long working hours negatively impact family life and workers' job satisfaction. (5). The important demand for working hours and their impact on workers' job satisfaction, retention, and work-life balance (8). Female employees face a lack of personal and family time due to long working hours and inflexible work policies. The strict working hours created work-related stress, altered eating and sleeping behavior, led to a high turnover rate, and decreased productivity.

### **2.4. Workload**

The increased workload is a critical issue for professionals' work-life balance. (9). The competitive work environment creates work-life conflict. Employees experience high levels of tension at work when they need to handle more tasks than they can handle. High tension leads to a high level of work-related stress, depression, and employee turnover. The business firm emphasizes employees' work-life balance by managing workloads, working hours, and job assignments to ensure they are completed within working hours per day, thereby improving workers' job satisfaction, productivity, and performance.

### **2.5. Technology Advancement**

Technology improvement also impacts the working professional and family life. (10). Advancements in technology improve workplace performance and foster a flexible working culture. Technological advancement can create more time for workers to spend with family and complete tasks more easily than traditional ways of working. (11). Other

studies argued for improvements in technology and positive workplace performance. Technological advancement has both positive and negative impacts on work-life balance.

Work-life balance results from employees' effective management of their work and family lives. Workers' work-life conflict is strongly influenced by organizational and personal success and well-being. Today's business sectors define workplace policies and regulations to balance employees' work-life balance by setting working conditions, working hours, and daily job tasks. Senior-level management workers faced work-life conflict and were dissatisfied with their jobs, intending to leave or switch to other professions. The high level of workplace stress creates family conflict and personal health conditions (depression, change in eating, and sleeping behavior).

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### 3. Research methodology

The current study employed a qualitative research design appropriate for small sample sizes and collected data through interviews. The qualitative data analysis method was used to report the study's findings (12). The qualitative research method provided a complete description and analysis of the research objectives and people's behavior (13). The data were collected using a semi-structured interview format and analyzed using content analysis. The targeted population of the current study was senior-level working mothers. The work-life balance of senior-level working mothers needs to be studied because Myanmar working mothers fulfill job duties and household tasks within one working day. The females are working in both the goods and service sectors at different levels of the professional hierarchy. Household tasks and work responsibilities create high pressure for professional women, leading to work-life conflict. The targeted working mothers in this study live in Yangon and currently work in senior-level management at different organizations (self-employed, private, and public). The senior-level working mothers who are able and willing to participate in the current study are the targeted participants. The scholar used a purposive non-random sampling method to select the sample from the targeted population frame (14). The researcher used a semi-structured interview format to collect the primary data from respondents. The semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to ask open-ended questions, follow the interviewee's responses, and conduct in-depth case analysis (15). The interviewee can report their expression, feelings, and thoughts in the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview allows respondents time to think about the sensitive topic.

Before collecting data, the researcher sent a request letter to the manager or owner of an organization if the respondent is an employee in the business sector. If the respondent is an owner or self-employed, the scholar sends a direct request letter to the participant. After obtaining respondents' approval, the researcher arranged the interview schedule and the interview platform. This study used a content analysis method to analyze the collected data from participants. The content analysis consists of deriving keywords for each transcript, summarizing the interview, coding key information, and logically deriving the conceptual framework from the collected data. (16). Content analysis is used to report relations and concepts. The logical concepts derived from content analysis help explain the interview's underlying causes and the relationships between variables. Content analysis involves identifying emergent themes resulting from immersion in the data.

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### 4. Findings and discussion

A total of five senior-level working mothers participated in this study. Organizational support is an important factor affecting employees' work-life balance. The scholar used *"Do you achieve support from your manager or supervisor? And does the organization emphasize employees' work-life balance?"* The respondents mentioned that:

*"Supervisor supports us in managing our tasks, maintains good communication, and sometimes helps resolve workplace conflicts. Managers also treat us fairly in the workplace, respect our personality, distribute the job roles equally, and create job opportunities similar to those of male staff." (Operations manager)*

*"My organization allows flexible working schedules, annual leave, paid holiday, and work-from-home positions when necessary. These practices help me to maintain work-life balance and spend more time with my family." (Marketing manager)*

The respondents present those supportive organizational policies play an important role in enhancing employees' work experiences. The operations manager emphasized that supervisors and managers provide guidance in task management, maintain open communication, and help to resolve workplace issues. The participants also highlighted fair managerial practices, including respect for employees and equal opportunities for job roles, and career advancement regardless of gender. Moreover, the marketing manager noted that organizational supports, such as

flexible working schedules, annual leave, and work-from-home options, help employees maintain a healthy work-life balance and spend more time with their families. The results support previous studies, which found that organizational support plays a critical role in improving employees' well-being, job satisfaction, and retention (6,7). A supportive organizational culture enables employees to balance family responsibilities with work performance.

The next interview question related to working hours is "How many hours do you work, *and do you have problems with long working hours?*" The participants answered as follows:

*"My daily working hours are around eight hours (9 am to 5 pm), so I still have time at night for my family and do household tasks. Although my job sometimes requires me to work late, my family understands my responsibilities and supports me with childcare and housework"* (Financial Manager)

*"Sometimes my work requires long working hours, and even checking emails or communicating with customers during holidays. Due to these extended working hours, I spend most of my time on work and find it difficult to give enough time to my family and take care of my children."* (Sales and Marketing manager)

The participants illustrate different experiences regarding the impact of working hours on work-life balance. The financial manager indicated that having a relatively fixed eight-hour work schedule allows time in the evening to spend with family and complete household duties. Although work requires staying late, family members are supportive and assist with childcare and household tasks, which helps to balance personal and professional life. However, the sales and marketing manager reported that extended working hours and work responsibilities during holidays create challenges to maintain work-life balance. Working hours can facilitate work-life balance for female employees. The findings align with previous studies (5,8), which reported that long working hours negatively affect employees' job satisfaction and family responsibilities. Excessive working hours lead to work-life conflict.

Regarding the workload, the respondents are asked "*Do you feel stress because of workload, and consume personal time for your work?*", and they mentioned as follows:

*"Sometimes my workload creates stress, especially when there are several tasks to complete within a limited time. I often need to finish work after office hours, which reduces my family time"* (Sales and Marketing manager)

*"As a senior manager, I am responsible for many decisions and tasks, which can be stressful. Sometimes I need to use my personal time to complete work, and it becomes challenging to separate work from family life"* (Senior level manager)

The respondents indicate that heavy workload and managerial responsibilities can create stress and negatively influence employees' WLB. The sales and marketing manager reported that having multiple tasks within a limited time increases work pressure and often requires completing work after office hours, reducing the time available for family. Moreover, the senior-level manager highlighted those managerial responsibilities, including decision-making and task management, can be stressful and sometimes require using personal time to finish work. These situations make it difficult to separate job responsibilities and personal life. These findings support previous research (9), which defined workload as the major factor of work-life conflict. High job demands and excessive workload can lead to emotional exhaustion and work-related stress.

The influence of technology advancement on WLB, the respondents are asked, "*Do you think advanced technology leads to a busy working life? Or develop an easier working life?*"

*"Advanced technology makes my work easier and less stressful. I can quickly communicate with my stakeholders through email and other digital tools. Due to technological advancements, I can finish my work faster and have more personal and family time."* (Operations manager)

*"Although advanced technology helps in completing work, it sometimes requires emailing, attending online meetings, and communicating with colleagues during my personal time at home. This reduces my family time and sometimes makes it a work-life conflict."* (Sales and Marketing manager)

The respondents indicate that advanced technology has both positive and negative effects on employee WLB. The operations manager highlighted that technology makes work more efficient and less stressful by enabling quick communication with stakeholders through digital tools. Consequently, it can complete assigned tasks more quickly and achieve personal time. However, the sales and marketing manager pointed out that although technology improves work efficiency, it can also extend work responsibilities into personal time. These findings suggest that while advanced

technology can enhance work efficiency and flexibility, it may also disturb personal life. The findings support previous studies (10, 11) that have shown that technological advancement enhances employees' productivity. However, some participants mentioned that technology can disrupt their personal lives when they need to respond to work-related emails and communicate with stakeholders during personal time.

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## 5. Conclusion and recommendation

This study examines the determinants of work-life balance among senior-level working mothers in Yangon, Myanmar. The findings indicate that organizational support, working hours, workload, and technological advancement affect the work-life balance of working mothers. Supportive organizational policies, including flexible working schedules, annual leave, and work-from-home practices, promote the working mothers' WLB. However, prolonged working hours and excessive workload negatively affect WLB. Although technological advancement can enhance working mothers' work processes, it can also harm their personal lives. The WLB is a critical concern for working mothers, and organizations need to be aware of the factors that influence it. Organizations should support fair workplace policies, reasonable working hours and workload, and provide advanced technology. Enhancing WLB can help working mothers achieve higher job satisfaction, reduce work-related stress, and improve productivity.

This study is limited to assessing the determinants of different levels of employment (low-level and middle-level) and senior-level male employees. This study also limits the research area and the applied research method. Further studies should be conducted across various levels of employment and among both male and female staff to understand the general factors underlying employee WLB using different research methods.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

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### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

### *Statement of ethical approval*

Ethical approval was obtained by obtaining the agreement of the research participants, and the supervisors approved the collection and continuation of the research.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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