








Work-Life Integration in Women's Lives: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Work-life integration represents a critical challenge for many, especially women who often navigate complex interplays of professional aspirations and personal responsibilities. This qualitative study aims to explore the experiences of work-life integration among women, identifying the strategies they employ and the challenges they face, with the objective of informing policies and practices that support gender equity and work-life balance.

Methods and Materials: Employing a grounded theory approach, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 women from various professional backgrounds. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a wide range of experiences were represented. Interviews focused on daily routines, challenges in work-life integration, and strategies for managing these challenges. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns.

Findings: The study identified five main themes related to work-life integration: Workplace Flexibility, Support Networks, Personal Well-being, Career Advancement, and Work-Life Conflict. These themes highlight the importance of flexible work arrangements, robust support systems, attention to personal well-being, pathways for career advancement, and the ongoing negotiation of work-life conflict. Each theme encompasses several subthemes and concepts that illustrate the complex and varied strategies women employ to achieve work-life integration.

Conclusion: The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of work-life integration for women, emphasizing the crucial role of workplace flexibility, supportive networks, and policies that prioritize personal well-being and career advancement. The study suggests that addressing these key areas is essential for promoting work-life balance and gender equity in the workplace.

Keywords: work-life integration, women, qualitative study, workplace flexibility, support networks, personal well-being, career advancement, work-life conflict

1. Introduction

In recent years, the subject of work-life integration has garnered significant attention, marking a critical area of inquiry within the spheres of organizational behavior, gender studies, and public health. This increasing interest is partly driven by the evolving workforce demographics and changing societal norms around gender roles and expectations (Potter et al., 2024; Putu Deva Govinda Krisna & Suwandana, 2022). Notably, the experience of work-life integration presents distinct challenges and opportunities for women, shaped by complex interplays of cultural, organizational, and individual factors (Gusti & Putra, 2022; Hashemi & Darvish, 2023).

The literature on work-life balance and integration underscores the multiplicity of factors influencing how individuals navigate their professional and personal lives. As Alyasin, Teate, and Strickland (2021) observe, the health implications of work-life balance can be profound, affecting individuals' well-being and performance (Alyasin et al., 2021). Similarly, studies by Au et al. (2019) and Liu et al. (2021) highlight the diversity of work-life experiences among women, pointing to the need for a nuanced understanding that accounts for sector-specific and cultural variations (Au et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2021).

Gender disparities in work-life integration are further compounded by traditional gender roles and expectations, often resulting in a disproportionate burden on women to manage work and family responsibilities (Choi et al., 2020; Kreiner et al., 2009). The concept of "invisible work," as discussed by Au et al. (2019), is particularly relevant, emphasizing how the undervalued and often unnoticed labor undertaken by women exacerbates challenges in achieving a satisfactory work-life balance (Au et al., 2019). This issue is mirrored in the academic and healthcare sectors, where women face unique pressures and constraints that impact their career advancement and personal well-being (Baptiste et al., 2017; Ghosh-Choudhary et al., 2021).

Flexible working arrangements have been touted as a solution to enhance work-life balance and promote gender equality within the workplace (Chung & Lippe, 2018). However, the effectiveness of such measures is contingent upon their accessibility and the cultural context within which they are implemented. Dilmaghani and Tabvuma (2019) provide critical insights into the occupational gender gap in work-life balance satisfaction, suggesting that structural and policy interventions alone may not suffice to address the underlying issues (Dilmaghani & Tabvuma, 2019).

The role of supportive networks, both within and outside the workplace, emerges as a pivotal factor in facilitating women's work-life integration (Tajlili, 2014). This support can manifest in various forms, including mentorship, peer networks, and family support systems, each contributing to mitigating the challenges associated with balancing professional and personal roles (Paradis et al., 2021; Skotnicki, 2024).

The significance of this research extends beyond academic interest, offering practical implications for policymakers, employers, and individuals striving to create more inclusive and supportive work environments. By elucidating the diverse strategies women employ to manage work and life demands, this study aims to inform the development of interventions that are responsive to the needs of women in the workforce. In doing so, it responds to the call for greater gender equity and the promotion of sustainable work-life integration practices that accommodate the realities of women's lives (Hagqvist et al., 2016; Ovseiko et al., 2022). Despite the wealth of research on this topic, gaps remain in our understanding of how women across different life stages and career paths perceive and achieve work-life integration. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed exploration of women's experiences, drawing on semi-structured interviews to capture the complexity of work-life integration in their lives. Through this approach, we seek to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender equity, work-life balance, and the policies and practices that can support women in navigating these challenges effectively.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This qualitative study employed a grounded theory methodology to explore the complex phenomenon of work-life integration among women. Grounded theory was chosen for its strength in developing a rich, grounded understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions, allowing for the emergence of theories from systematically gathered and analyzed data.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, targeting a diverse range of women across various occupations, ages, and family structures to gain a broad understanding of work-life integration experiences. The study aimed for a sample size of 20 to 30 participants, anticipating that this range would allow for theoretical

saturation—the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data.

Participants were informed about the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and the confidential handling of their data. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected exclusively through semi-structured interviews, which were conducted over a period of six months. These interviews allowed for the exploration of predefined topics while providing the flexibility for participants to share their experiences and insights beyond the initial scope of questions. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in a location chosen by the participant, ensuring a comfortable and confidential environment. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The interview guide comprised open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences with work-life integration. Topics covered included daily routines, challenges faced in integrating work and personal life, strategies for managing these challenges, and the impact of work-life integration on well-being. The guide was pilot-tested with two individuals fitting the participant criteria and refined based on feedback to ensure clarity and relevance.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the principles of grounded theory, beginning with open coding to identify initial themes and followed by axial and selective coding to refine these themes and understand the relationships between them. Analysis was conducted using NVivo software to facilitate the organization and coding of data. The process continued iteratively, with data collection and analysis proceeding in parallel until theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring that the developed theory was well-grounded in the data.

3. Findings and Results

In the study, a total of 23 women participated, encompassing a diverse range of demographic characteristics. The age of participants varied widely, with 6 (26%) being between the ages of 25-34, 8 (35%) falling within the 35-44 age bracket, 5 (22%) aged 45-54, and 4 (17%) over the age of 55. In terms of employment sectors, the distribution was broad: 5 (22%) worked in healthcare, 4 (17%) in education, 3 (13%) in technology, 3 (13%) in business services, and 8 (35%) were spread across other sectors including nonprofit, government, and retail. Educational attainment among the participants was high, with 15 (65%) holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Regarding family status, 10 (43%) of the participants reported having children under the age of 18 living at home, while 13 (57%) did not.

Table 1*The Results of Qualitative Analysis*

Categories	Subcategories	Concepts
Workplace Flexibility	Remote Work Options	Home office setup, Virtual meetings, Communication technology
	Flexible Hours	Core hours, Time banking, Shift swapping
	Part-Time Opportunities	Reduced hours, Pro-rata benefits, Job security
	Job Sharing	Two people one role, Shared responsibilities, Team coordination
	Autonomy in Task Management	Decision-making freedom, Flexible deadlines, Project choice
Support Networks	Family Support	Childcare assistance, Eldercare support, Family leave policies
	Professional Mentorship	Career guidance, Role models, Success strategies
	Online Communities	Online forums, Social media groups, Virtual meetups
Personal Well-being	Peer Support	Colleague advice, Teamwork, Social outings
	Mental Health	Stress reduction techniques, Counseling services, Work-life balance programs
	Physical Health	Exercise routines, Dietary habits, Regular check-ups
	Hobbies and Leisure	Creative hobbies, Sports, Travel
	Vacations and Breaks	Paid time off, Sabbaticals, Weekend getaways
Career Advancement	Spiritual Practices	Meditation, Religious activities, Mindfulness
	Time Management	Prioritization, Delegation, Saying no
	Promotion Opportunities	Visibility projects, Merit-based assessments, Transparent criteria
	Training and Development	Workshops, Online courses, Certifications
	Networking Opportunities	Professional associations, Conferences, Informal gatherings
Work-Life Conflict	Workplace Visibility	Team presentations, Leadership roles, Employee awards
	Overwork	Long working hours, Unpaid overtime, Burnout
	Role Conflict	Work/personal life imbalance, Dual career challenges, Parenting and career
	Lack of Support	Insufficient resources, Lack of mentorship, Unsupportive culture
	Stress Management	Relaxation techniques, Time management skills, Coping strategies
	Time Pressure	Deadline pressures, Urgent tasks, Time allocation challenges

In the exploration of work-life integration among women, five main themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews: Workplace Flexibility, Support Networks, Personal Well-being, Career Advancement, and Work-Life Conflict. Each theme comprises several subthemes, highlighted by specific concepts that participants frequently

discussed. Below, we detail these findings along with illustrative quotes from the interviews.

3.1. Workplace Flexibility

Participants expressed a strong preference for Workplace Flexibility, which was segmented into subthemes such as Remote Work Options, Flexible Hours, Part-Time Opportunities, Job Sharing, and Autonomy in Task Management. Many women highlighted the importance of being able to work remotely, with one stating, "Having the option to work from home has significantly reduced my daily stress and improved my productivity." Flexible hours were also valued, with another participant noting, "Being able to adjust my work hours means I can drop my kids off at school and pick them up, which is incredibly important to me." The desire for part-time opportunities and job sharing was linked to achieving a better balance, and autonomy in task management allowed women to feel more in control of their work and personal lives.

3.2. Support Networks

Support Networks were identified as critical for navigating work-life integration challenges. This theme encompasses Family Support, Professional Mentorship, Online Communities, and Peer Support. One interviewee shared, "My family's support, especially during busy seasons at work, has been my backbone." Professional mentorship was seen as a pathway to growth and understanding, as highlighted by a respondent: "My mentor has been instrumental in helping me navigate my career while maintaining personal well-being." Online communities and peer support were also mentioned as essential sources of advice, empathy, and shared experiences.

3.3. Personal Well-being

Concerning Personal Well-being, subthemes such as Mental Health, Physical Health, Hobbies and Leisure, Vacations and Breaks, Spiritual Practices, and Time Management were prevalent. Participants frequently discussed the need for activities outside of work, with one saying, "Engaging in hobbies has given me a sense of fulfillment that my job alone cannot provide." The importance of vacations and managing time effectively was also emphasized, with a participant noting, "Learning to manage my time effectively has been a game-changer for my mental and physical health."

3.4. Career Advancement

Career Advancement emerged as a significant theme, with subthemes including Promotion Opportunities, Training and Development, Networking Opportunities, and Workplace Visibility. Many women voiced concerns about advancement, with one interviewee stating, "I actively seek out projects that increase my visibility in the company, as I know this is crucial for my career advancement."

3.5. Work-Life Conflict

Lastly, Work-Life Conflict was a theme that captured the challenges faced by women in integrating work and personal life. This included Overwork, Role Conflict, Lack of Support, Stress Management, and Time Pressure. A poignant statement from a respondent was, "The constant pressure to meet deadlines at work while managing household responsibilities is overwhelming." Another added, "Finding strategies to manage stress has been vital for me to not feel constantly overwhelmed by work-life conflicts."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the complexities of work-life integration as experienced by women, revealing nuanced insights into their strategies and challenges. The investigation identified five main themes: Workplace Flexibility, Support Networks, Personal Well-being, Career Advancement, and Work-Life Conflict. These themes encapsulate the multifaceted approaches women employ to navigate the intricacies of balancing professional and personal domains. Findings underscore the significance of workplace flexibility, the pivotal role of support networks, the essential aspect of personal well-being, the intertwined relationship between career advancement and work-life integration, and the persistent challenges of work-life conflict.

The importance of workplace flexibility emerged as a critical factor in enabling women to achieve a semblance of balance between their professional and personal lives. This finding aligns with Chung and Lippe (2018), who emphasized that flexible working arrangements could significantly enhance work-life balance and promote gender equality (Chung & Lippe, 2018). However, as Dilmaghani and Tabvuma (2019) noted, the satisfaction derived from these arrangements can vary greatly across occupations,

suggesting that flexibility alone may not suffice to address the broader issues at play (Dilmaghani & Tabvuma, 2019).

The role of support networks, encompassing family support, professional mentorship, and peer connections, was highlighted as pivotal. This resonates with the observations of Tajlili (2014), who argued for the importance of promoting women's career intentionality and work-life integration through robust support systems (Tajlili, 2014). Similarly, Skotnicki (2024) identified support networks as crucial for women in pediatric emergency medicine, underscoring the universal relevance of this theme across different sectors (Skotnicki, 2024).

Our participants' emphasis on personal well-being, through mental and physical health, hobbies, and time management, echoes the findings of Liu et al. (2021), who examined the impact of work-life balance on organizational commitment in the hospitality sector (Liu et al., 2021). This underscores the idea that personal well-being is not just a private concern but has significant implications for professional life and productivity.

The theme of career advancement brings to light the challenges and aspirations related to professional growth among women. This theme is particularly poignant in light of the work by Baptiste et al. (2017), who documented gender differences in academic surgery, highlighting the intricate balance between work-life considerations and career satisfaction (Baptiste et al., 2017). Ovseiko et al. (2022) further contribute to this discussion, offering insights into the potential for improving gender equity in academic domains, suggesting that career advancement concerns are both a cause and consequence of work-life integration efforts (Ovseiko et al., 2022).

Lastly, the persistent theme of work-life conflict, marked by overwork, role conflict, and stress management challenges, mirrors the broader discourse on the pressures faced by women in the workforce. Morgenroth et al. (2020) provide a complementary perspective, examining gender differences in work-life conflict through the lens of identity compatibility, which adds depth to our understanding of these challenges (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

The synthesis of our findings with the existing literature not only validates the complexity of work-life integration as experienced by women but also highlights the multifaceted strategies required to navigate these challenges. The discrepancies in work-life balance satisfaction across different demographics and sectors, as noted by Dilmaghani and Tabvuma (2019), suggest that organizational policies and societal norms play a significant role in shaping these

experiences (Dilmaghani & Tabvuma, 2019). Furthermore, the emphasis on flexible working arrangements and support networks points to potential pathways for mitigating work-life conflicts, as supported by the work of Ghosh-Choudhary et al. (2021) and Paradis et al. (2021) (Ghosh-Choudhary et al., 2021; Paradis et al., 2021).

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on work-life balance by providing a detailed exploration of women's experiences across various life stages and professional contexts. It highlights the importance of a supportive work environment, flexible work arrangements, and robust support networks in facilitating work-life integration. These findings underscore the need for organizations and policymakers to recognize and address the unique challenges women face in achieving work-life balance, emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive and supportive work cultures that accommodate the diverse needs of the workforce.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

This study is not without its limitations. The reliance on semi-structured interviews, while providing depth and nuance to the data, limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the sample size, though sufficient for achieving theoretical saturation, may not fully capture the breadth of experiences across different cultures, industries, and geographical locations. Future research could benefit from a more diverse participant pool and the incorporation of quantitative measures to complement the qualitative insights.

Future research should aim to expand the demographic and geographical diversity of participants to explore work-life integration across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how work-life integration strategies evolve over time, particularly in response to life events or changes in workplace policies. Investigating the impact of remote work and digital connectivity on work-life integration in a post-pandemic world also presents a fertile ground for further exploration.

The findings of this study have significant implications for organizational policies and practices. Employers and policymakers should consider implementing more flexible work arrangements and developing support systems that address the specific needs of women in the workforce. Creating mentorship programs, offering resources for mental and physical health, and fostering a culture that values work-

life balance can help mitigate work-life conflicts. Moreover, organizations should strive to create transparent pathways for career advancement that consider the unique challenges faced by women. Implementing these changes can lead to more engaged, productive, and satisfied employees, contributing to the overall health and success of the organization.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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