**Research Paper** | **Management**

# Work-Life Balance as Source of Job Dissatisfaction and Irresponsible Attitudes an Exploratory Study on The Views of Male Workers

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**ABSTRACT**

*Purpose – The purpose of this article is to explore the views of male workers in a male dominated occupation on issues that pertain to work-life balance.*

*Design/methodology/approach – The study was qualitative in nature. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 bus drivers employed in TNSTC Tirunelveli kottam in order to identify their perceptions on the following: whether issues related to work-life balance were sources of concern and dissatisfaction; how concern over issues related to work-life balance was compared to other sources of concern and dissatisfaction; and whether issues related to work-life balance were linked with withdrawal attitudes and behaviours.*

*Findings – It emerged that work-life imbalance was not only a source of concern, but also that it was the major source of dissatisfaction for participants. Furthermore, participants made a clear connection between problems with work-life balance and withdrawal behaviors, including turnover and non-genuine sick absence. Originality/value – The study has value at both scholarly and practice level. At scholarly level, the research investigated an important contemporary issue within a neglected group: male workers in a low profile male dominated occupation. At practice level, the findings suggest that work life imbalance incurs tangible costs to organizations; hence, organizations need to establish human resource systems to deal with it. Furthermore, pertinent legislation may need to be developed and enacted.*

**KEYWORDS : Job satisfaction, Men, Employee attitudes Paper type Research paper**

## Introduction

Work-life balance has emerged as a major theme during the last two decades, which witnessed a substantial intensification of work caused by economic uncertainty, organizational restructuring, and increase in business competition (Green, 2001; Mill ward et al., 2000). To respond to the new conditions, organizations demand higher performance and commitment from their employees, which is translated into expectations for working longer and for prioritizing work over personal life (e.g. see Persons, 2003, pp. 68-72; Simpson, 2000; White et al., 2003). Indeed, recent survey data suggest that the pressure on employees to work longer hours under inflexible work Schedules is ever increasing (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002c). The literature suggests that lack of balance between work and non-work activities is related to reduce psychological and physical well-being (Sparks et al., 1997; Frone et al., 1997; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Martens et al., 1999; Felstead et al., 2002).

For example, recent empirical research in the India (Hyman et al., 2003) indicated that intrusion of work demands into personal life (e.g. working during the week-end) was related with reports of heightened stress and emotional exhaustion for employees. Furthermore, employees perceived that intrusion of work obligations into their personal lives negatively affected their health (Hyman et al., 2003). However, there are still important issues that ought to be addressed within the subject of work-life balance. Work-life balance has been rather narrowly conceived and considered; as it has been predominantly viewed to pertain to individuals, especially women, who are in corporate employment and have family obligations (e.g. Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001; Hardy and Adnett, 2002; Felstead et al., 2002, p. 57). Because of this narrowness in the consideration of work-life balance, pertinent organizational actions are mostly oriented towards the implementation of "family-friendly" policies (Felstead et al., 2002; Wise and Bond, 2003). Nonetheless, work-life balance is an issue of prime concern for both genders. For example, recent survey data (Cully et al., 1999) showed that a substantially higher proportion of employed men than employed women in the United Kingdom work "long hours" (i.e. more than 48hours per week); and empirical evidence suggests that men may experience lower work-life balance than their female counterparts (Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001). Furthermore, it is not only family obligations that constitute an issue in work-life balance. Any types of activities (e.g. hobbies, time with friends) that the individual desires to pursue outside one's work obligations pertain to work-life balance. Indeed, recent survey research (Department of Trade and Industry, 2004) indicated that more than half of British

employees considered that a better work-life balance was necessary in order to pursue their interests in arts and to engage in sports activities. Hence, recent definitions of work-life balance, in contrast to earlier ones, approach work-life balance as referring to the ability of individuals, regardless of age or gender, to find a rhythm that will allow them to combine their work with their non-work responsibilities, activities and aspirations (e.g. see Felstead et al., 2002). Therefore, work-life balance is an issue that pertains to all individuals who are in paid work, regardless of whether they have family responsibilities or not (see Department of Trade and Industry, 2000; Dex and Scheibl, 2001; Fu and Shaffer, 2001; Rotondo et al., 2003). The present study aimed at contributing in narrowing the gap in the existing literature. This was accomplished by exploring work-life balance views in a sample of male workers employed as bus drivers, which is a male dominated occupation. There is some empirical evidence that suggests that there are differences between male and female employees in the factors that contribute to their experience of work-life imbalance (White et al., 2003). The following themes were explored: Whether issues related to work-life balance were of concern to these individuals; the relative importance of work-life balance concerns over other sources of concern and dissatisfaction for these professionals; and. the perceived link between concerns that relate to work-life balance and withdrawal attitudes and behaviours, including absenteeism and turnover.

### Empirical view of work life balance

Empirical research on work-life balance has mainly focused on relatively high profile professions and occupations, neglecting job roles of lower prestige. The present study focused on a lower profile occupational role that of the bus driver, and this constituted an additional contribution of the research.

Method Setting and participants were 50 bus drivers who were employed on a full-time basis in a horizontally integrated transport company that operates road and rail services across the Tamil Nadu. The transport company has one of the highest prevalence rates of "long work hours", i.e. more than 48 hours per week (Cully et al., 1999). Furthermore, workplaces who employ high proportions of men, like the operations section of a transport company, are less likely to have implemented work-life balance policies (Dex and Smith, 2002) and are more likely to have "long working hours" cultures (see Simpson, 2000). The above constituted reasons to concentrate on male employees in the transport industry. This particular company has currently (i.e. at the time the final manuscript was submitted for publication) the highest market share in its sector. All participants were employed

by the division of the TNSTC. This corporation is contractually obliged to provide bus services to the city and the surrounding areas on a 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year basis. This commitment to the provision of service requires the utilization of a shift system, which conforms to the health and safety regulations. Drivers are strictly to work 38 hours per week, but this time excludes breaks and times between shifts. As a result, drivers are effectively at work for at least 50 hours per week, and can be away from home for up to 60 hours per week. Furthermore, for cost-efficiency reasons, the TNSTC operates with the minimum number of drivers possible; which means that requests for days off, even when "owed by the company", are normally rejected. This situation applies even in cases that such requests are made weeks or months in advance (as the researchers were informed by the managers in the company). The company does not have a formal work-life balance policy. The TNSTC experiences a high turnover rate amongst bus drivers, which in 2011 and 2012 was at the level of 30 and 31 per cent, respectively (the present study was conducted in the second half of 2013). This rate is much higher than the rate of the industrial sector to which the company belongs, the transport and storage sector, where turnover rate was 9.5 per cent in 2012 (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2013). Participants were randomly selected from the pool of drivers who were operating from one of the five of the corporation depots in the city. All drivers who were approached agreed to participate (i.e. to be interviewed). Most drivers and other personnel were familiar with the presence of one of the authors from earlier research work of hers in the company, and they knew that she was working independently and was not linked with their employer in any manner. This may have contributed to the positive attitude of all approached drivers towards participating in the research. Mean age was 46.40 years (SD ¼8:47, range ¼24-60) and mean tenure on the job was 17.68 years (SD ¼9:79, range ¼ 1-38). Of the participants, 35 were married, nine were single, and six were divorced.

The interviews were utilized because the study was set to explore participants' perceptions on certain issues. Therefore, interviews enabled the identification of participants' views, elaboration on the meaning that interviewees attached to issues and situations (e.g. see Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p. 25), and the further exploration of the points that interviewees made (Saunders et al., 1997).

The interviews were semi-structured. This ensured consistency of themes across participants, but also allowed elaboration of interviewees' personal accounts. The questions were developed as to extract information and enable conclusions on the three points of interest stated earlier, namely: (1) whether issues related to work-life balance were of concern to interviewees; (2) the relative importance of work-life balance concerns over other sources of concern and dissatisfaction for these workers; and (3) the perceived link between concerns that were related to work-life balance and withdrawal attitudes and behaviours. In order to avoid bias in the responses, which could have been caused by preconceptions of interviewees, the term "work-life balance" was intentionally not utilized, but only in the very last question, where it was defined for the participants. Having conducted research in the company recently had provided the authors with knowledge of the group culture and the educational background of the bus drivers. Hence, the authors were able to phrase the interview questions accordingly. This contributed to the minimization of misunderstandings and need for clarifications, and to ensuring that all participants attached the same meaning to each concept and question. The fact that the participants were already familiar with the presence of one of the authors and well aware of the fact that she did not represent the company may have also contributed to the establishment of the good rapport in the interviews, and to the apparent reduction of inhibitions in the expression of their views.

The interviews were conducted in a sufficiently isolated spot within the depot's social area. This venue was selected because participants were comfortable with this environment, which they considered to be "their own". Presumably, in such an environment participants were most likely to express their views without inhibitions. Interviews lasted from 25 to 40 minutes.

Analysis and results Participants' responses were analyzed by, first, creating categories on the basis of the expressed views (e.g. categories representing the various sources of dissatisfaction with the

job as mentioned by the participants); and, second, by aggregating the number of responses within each category to draw conclusions regarding the prevalence of a particular view (e.g. how dominant amongst respondents were their concerns over work-life balance issues). Therefore, the frequency with which a theme emerged was utilized as an indicator of its importance for the group of participants. The authors are well aware and acknowledge that frequency of emergence is by no means the only, or a perfect, indicator of the potency or importance of a theme. However, its use was necessitated by the methodological decision to avoid the explicit utilization of the term "work-life balance", or semantically related terms, in the interview questions. This decision disallowed the use of rank-order scales (i.e. where interviewees would rank order various pre-conceived by the researchers themes in terms of importance). Evidently, however, utilization of such a method would invite the possibility of biasing participants by providing them with a priori list of reasons for dissatisfaction in their jobs. The chosen method protected against bias in responses, as participants were required to think themselves and mention sources of dissatisfaction with their jobs. Lack of bias in the responses was assigned higher priority by the authors than more options in data analysis. It was considered that certainty regarding the validity of the data was most valuable, and worth compromising somewhat the choice of the ways in which these data could be analyzed.

The findings suggested that issues pertaining to work-life balance were a dominant concern amongst bus drivers. Inability to dedicate proper attention and time to their non-work activities and obligations was the most frequently quoted factor of dissatisfaction with their jobs, as it was mentioned by all but two of the participants. Some characteristic responses included the confession of a driver who was a parent: "I never get to see my little girl, she is asleep when I leave in the morning and she is in bed when I get home ...it also causes arguments with my Mrs."; the case of another driver who could not enjoy his social life: "If you work a 11.30am-10.30pm shift, you have no social life at all ...you are too tired to go out"; or the case of a participant who blamed his job for the breakage of his marriage and commented: "There is no life for a bus driver". A limited number of participants also noted that the nature of their job disallows them to fully engage in non-work social activities even when they have available time. For example, they noted that they often cannot enjoy nights out when they have to work next day because of concern for their ability to drive properly, and the possibility of random alcohol and drug testing. As one participant noted: You can't have a drink if you are working the next morning. Therefore, work obligations interfered with the personal life domain both at family and at non-family level. Although the nature of the study does not allow conclusions regarding relationships between variables, the responses suggested that the intensity of the spillover effects of work on non-work activities was reduced as the tenure of the drivers increased. The major reason was the fact that seniority on the job earned privileges in shift selection; hence, more senior drivers had more latitude in choosing their shifts and this limited the disturbance in their personal lives. However, it also appeared that drivers with long tenures were the ones who had "survived" the job, and were more accustomed with and more able to tolerate its conditions and peculiarities. As one interviewee noted: It takes a special kind of person to do the job for a long time.

Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that almost all participants, regardless of tenure and age, mentioned issues pertaining to work-life balance as sources of dissatisfaction with their jobs. Regarding the second point that the study aimed to explore, issues pertaining to work-life balance were mentioned much more frequently as sources of concern and dissatisfaction than other job aspects or company policies. Other sources of dissatisfaction that were mentioned included, in order of frequency of emergence: treatment by the management (sixteen participants), pay (ten participants), and general working conditions (eight participants). Therefore, work-life balance appeared to be the predominant factor of concern and dissatisfaction for the interviewees. Regarding the third issue of interest in the study, the responses suggested that the drivers viewed a clear link between work-life balance problems and withdrawal behaviours of their colleagues, as well as their own withdrawal behaviours and turnover intentions. Most participants (34 out of 50) identified problems that related to work-life balance (e.g. "difficult" shifts, inability to properly organize personal life, inability to dedicate time and proper attention to non-work activities and obligations) as the major reason for turno-

ver in their job. Other causes of job turnover were very infrequently mentioned and included the treatment by the management (twelve participants) and general working conditions (four participants). Participants noted that many of their ex-colleagues had quit their jobs with this particular company to go to other, smaller, companies that paid less but were operating schedules that allowed a much better organization and enjoyment of non-work life. According to the responses of the interviewees, turnover in the job was almost exclusively caused by work-life balance problems. Furthermore, most drivers with long tenures noted that the only reason they would not leave was that they did not want to sacrifice their pension payments. For example, one of them, with 20 years of service, noted: I am locked in because of my age and pension. Hence, continuance commitment, a state in which employees stay with a particular employer only because of perceived inability to find better alternatives and perceptions of negative consequences of leaving (Meyer and Allen, 1991), was evident amongst the senior bus drivers in the study. In addition, all participants mentioned work-life balance problems as causes of absenteeism from the job. Importantly, it emerged that this was not only because of health related problems, like fatigue and burnout, caused by the nature of the work. Interviewees confessed that many drivers, including themselves, consistently fake illness or sickness in order to be able to participate in and take care of important non-work activities and obligations. For example, one driver noted:

There would be no chance [to be granted permission for time off] ...even for a funeral... people end up going on the sick.

It was also evident from the responses that all participants considered that their employer paid no attention and had no interest in employees' work-life balance. It was also possible to discern bitterness and negative attitudes towards their employer because of this reason. Representative responses included:

They don't care, you are only a number that's the way I see it"; and "It's a waste of time telling them, they don't listen.

Discussion The study aimed at contributing towards filling a gap in the work-life balance literature, and explored issues that pertain to work-life balance with a sample of male workers in a male dominated occupation, that of the bus driver.

The findings clearly indicated that work-life balance issues were of major concern to bus drivers. Furthermore, the problems caused by inability to balance work and non-work life were identified by the bus drivers as the main causes of job dissatisfaction, job turnover and absenteeism in their job. Other sources of dissatisfaction and withdrawal behaviours, including treatment by the management and pay, emerged as much less serious issues for these drivers than work-life imbalance. Therefore, the findings confirmed views expressed in the literature, as they suggested that work-life balance is also a key issue for men in a traditionally male dominated occupation. Furthermore, the findings suggest that work-life balance can be costly to organizations. This is in line with speculative reports that link work-life imbalance with increased sick leave costs for organizations (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002b). However, the present study also suggested that work-life imbalance relates not only to job turnover and genuine sick leave, but also to absence from work due to faked illness. And this is certainly an area of importance for organisations and managers. It also emerged that work-life balance issues can be a source of negative attitudes towards the management of the company. The study was exploratory in nature. Although the number of participants was sufficient for this type of research, these were working for a single company in a single location. Nevertheless, concentration on a single organization and access to specific information regarding it allowed better understanding and higher accuracy in the interpretation of the findings than a study with employees in multiple organizations would have. This is a large company that apparently enjoys success in both financial and market share terms. However, this success is apparently achieved at a price: Its core workers, the bus drivers, appear very dissatisfied with the effects that their work schedules have on their ability to properly organize and enjoy their personal lives. Importantly, although drivers partly attributed this problem to the nature of the job, they also explicitly held responsible the organization itself and the lack of management interest towards their basic needs. In addition, and in line with the literature conclusion

that employees normally have and perceive very limited control over work-life balance provisions (Bond et al., 2002; Hyman and summers, 2004), participants in the present study appeared to believe that they were unable to influence company policies. In turn, the perceived lack of management willingness to consider work-life balance and to accommodate even minimal pertinent requests, as well as their perceived lack of ability to exert influence upwards, seemed to seriously undermine drivers' morale and organizational commitment. This is corroborated by the job turnover rate in the company, which runs at three times the rate in the sector it belongs to. High job turnover is associated with low affective organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 2002), which reflects the degree to which employees feel part of the organization and desire to exert effort for the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Furthermore, as seen, the responses of the senior drivers suggested that they possess high levels of continuance organizational commitment, which is associated with low effort and low performance (Meyer et al., 1989; Meyer et al., 2002), because individuals with high continuance commitment usually try to do what they perceive to be the minimal required to keep their jobs (see Meyer and Allen, 1991). Therefore, the tangible costs to the organization must be substantial, in the form of increased voluntary turnover, absenteeism (part of it being for non-genuine reasons),Job dissatisfaction and minimal job effort from the drivers. Other, less direct, but nevertheless serious, effects must also be considered. These include the negative image of the company that drivers may transmit to their acquaintances and to potential applicants for drivers' positions in the company. Hence, it emerges that work-life balance is a very serious issue, about which the management of the company must become fully aware of and act upon. If not because of genuine concern for its core workers, certainly because of concern for the maximization of performance; as it appears to be a problem that incurs financial costs of substance. It should be noted that there is reason for some restrained optimism in this front. Authors (Hyman and summers, 2004) have concluded that introduction of work-life balance policies in a systematic manner is most likely in cases in which employers consider that these policies will be beneficial for their competitiveness. Therefore, the management of this company may act upon to improve the situation, provided that they become aware of the costs incurred by lack of work-life balance among their employees. Furthermore, it may be appropriate to consider employment legislation too; as it seems that work-life imbalance seriously reduces the quality of life and compromises the job performance of bus drivers (and by extrapolation, of all employees who perform under similar work schedules). For example, the right of employees to be absent from work for personal or family reasons (e.g. to settle personal transactions, to attend important social functions), apart from medical reasons, could be legally safeguarded. The British government appears to be partly aware of the financial costs incurred by work-life imbalance (e.g. see Department of Trade and Industry, 1998, 2002a), but the issue is still far away from reaching legislative stages (see also Hyman et al., 2003; Hyman and Summers, 2004). At present, establishment of work-life balance in the workplace is generally left to individual employers, amongst whom there is large variance in awareness, interest, commitment and resources to deal with it (e.g. Hyman and Summers, 2004). Our case company represents a sound illustration of this fact. Finally, in must be borne in mind that the study, purposefully, focused on male workers in a male dominated occupation. The results did provide strong evidence on the salience of the work-life imbalance theme among these workers. However, in some respects, the findings may be specific to male workers. For example, it emerged that the higher the ability to choose one's shifts the lower the perceived work-life imbalance amongst our male bus drivers was. On the other hand, research in the general working population has suggested that ability to influence one's work schedule was not related to women's work-life balance (that is women were not more likely to perceive that their personal and work lives were balanced if they had the ability to influence their work schedules (White et al., 2003). This underlines the importance of the present study, but also clearly suggests that similar research on professions or occupations that are highly, or exclusively, dominated by women is important to conduct.

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