



## HR PROFESSIONALS - A STUDY OF THEIR WORK/LIFE BALANCE

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**ABSTRACT**

Work and life are the most important domains in the life of employees. The need for a balance between the two is well emphasized in many scientific endeavours. Psychological and social maladjustments are reported to be the sequel of disturbances in work/life balance, if proper initiatives are not taken more so by the employees and the management. HR professionals have the expertise in understanding the needs and priorities of employees and to plan and initiate programmes and activities so as to bridge a healthy balance between work life and all other domains of life of employees.

The present study is intended to understand the extent of stress experienced by the HR professionals in discharging their duties and the extent of work/life balance that they maintain. A sample of 176 HR professionals working in different manufacturing units has been chosen. A ten-item questionnaire, developed by Krishnam (2010), has been administered on all chosen HR professionals to know the extent of work/life balance of employees and to assess the degree of risk in bringing a harmony between work life and other domains of life of employees. It is observed that very few (14/176 or 7.96%) HR professionals have experienced severe stress warranting professional help. A few (22/176 or 12.5%) have mentioned that they are free from marked stress and 140 (79.54%) have expressed mild to moderate degree of imbalance. From the observations, it is appropriate to mention that stress is an inevitable part of life and measures are to be taken especially by the employees themselves to convert a stressful life into a productive life.

**KEYWORDS** : HR Professional, Overwork, Stress, Work/Life Balance**Introduction**

An effective organization requires able and responsible personnel to carry out its functions in accordance with the stated objectives. The workforce of today is different from what it was a few years ago. There are many reasons as to why people work, why people stay for a long time and why people leave the organization.

Involving oneself actively with all sincerity in productive work and thereby earn decent wages is the desire of almost all employees. Employment doesn't mean just earning the wages and lead a comfortable life. Employment means different things for different people and for many it is a way of performing definite functions in the expected manner, in the stipulated time and for the growth of the organization. Job hunting and job holding are the two essential and equally difficult tasks of job aspirant. The job that one holds is an indication of the status of individual in the society, and a responsibility in serving the nation at large.

Work is important in one's life, so also the rest. Continuous work for a long time without rest may end up with breakdown that in turn means loss of productivity. Working beyond the stipulated working hours has become a norm today and not an exception. People realize that only hard work provides the dividends. Aptly, the World Health Organization (WHO) has observed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017 as World Mental Health Day with the theme 'Mental Health in Work place'. The quality of work life of persons in different organisations in the present times is such that depression and anxiety start at work place and in extreme cases people seek the help of professionals to get out of the stresses and strains. Feldman (1997) mentions that people who are happy at work, generally, are happy at home also. Such happiness facilitates psychological well-being and satisfactions. Hence, it is necessary to know whether job satisfaction and life satisfaction go together.

Studies report that negative work environment definitely leads to mental health problems at workplace. This alarms the HR professionals to take appropriate steps to minimize the adverse effects of unhealthy situations or interactions prevailing on the job and in the workplace. The primary job of the HR professional/s is to understand the employees and to propose and initiate measures as well as sensitize management, so as to bring harmony between work life and other aspects of life of employees. This is definitely a challenging task for HR professionals. Every firm will have different

departments or sections with persons of different background and skills. Personnel belonging to HR stream are unique in the sense that they have the ability and expertise to analyse their own professional life, and stresses and strains involved in performing their functions adequately. Such self-assessment on the part of HR professionals would help them to have a better understanding of others.

The present study is aimed at understanding the balance of work life and other domains of life of employees serving as HR professionals.

**Work/Life Balance of Employees**

Work/life balance of employees, working in any sector, has become a prime area of empirical investigation by both social work and management professionals. Puri Batra (2015) mentioned that poor work/life balance results in stress related illnesses, unhappiness, lowered level of productivity, and a positive relationship exists between the extent of work-life balance and employees' performance in the organization. The author unequivocally asserts **yes** to work/life balance as it is the single most issue that promotes happiness, harmony and ability to perform work. The author has further, detailed the role of HRM department in work/life balance of employees. If employers provide an atmosphere of promoting work/life balance of employees in the professional and personal life, the latter would willingly contribute their mite to organizational growth and it results-in long term sustainability of employees in the organization.

Fisher et. al. (1997) have rightly mentioned that many high profile organisations are making sincere attempts in initiating employee-friendly policies and programmes to facilitate a healthy balance between family demands and work requirements of workforce. These initiatives are found to be necessary as adverse family life situations may negatively impact the quality of work of employees. In the similar way, work conflicts influence negatively the family life. There is no doubt that job satisfaction and life satisfaction cannot be separated. To get a positive balance between the two, friendly initiatives in the form of providing counselling services to the needy are to be made use of to the maximum extent. Susi and Jawaharrani (2011) mention that work/life balance refers to a satisfactory level of balance between the different roles an individual is expected to perform in his life. Performance at work is one such role. The two crucial factors visible among highly performing organizations that

are being perceived as the **best place to work** or **employer of choice** are work/life balance of employees and employee engagement. It is to be stressed that a highly engaged workforce is 50% more productive than unengaged workforce.

In their study on the relationship between work/life balance and employee performance in a telecommunication industry in Sri Lanka, Mendis and Weerakkody (2017) have observed that a positive relationship is noticed between work/life balance and employee performance, work/life balance and employee job satisfaction and employee job satisfaction and employee performance.

Special attention has to be paid on the HR professionals whose primary function is the employees' well-being. The issue of their work/life balance is rarely talked about in empirical work.

### Methodology

The tasks of HR Professionals include providing a pro-active atmosphere for the employees on the work site and to make their work life challenging at an optimal level and to initiate measures so as to enable the employees to perform the best according to their competencies while balancing their familial life, social life and other arenas of personal life.

Work life and other arenas of life are two sides of the same coin as far as the life of employees are concerned. Employees of any category and of any sector have to be good performers not only at the work place but also at every sphere of personal and social life. While precisely demarcating the domains of life, due care has to be taken in such a way that there is a balance promoting a better quality of life. The present study is undertaken to know the extent of work/life balance of employees and to assess the degree of risk in bringing a harmony between work life and other domains of life of employees. It is generally observed that a good number of social work professionals, for better prospects, prefer job placement in the fields of industrial relations as well as human resource development. Opportunities for such placement are slightly better in manufacturing sector compared to other sectors. For the purpose of selecting subjects for the study, a list of HR professionals working in manufacturing sector prepared by a HR professional organisation is made use of. The list comprises of names and professional background of 250 persons representing the fields of social work and management.

A questionnaire, developed by Krishnam (2010), has been administered on all the subjects for collecting the required data. The questionnaire comprises of ten questions to assess the risk of over work and broadly refers to work/life balance. There is a reason for concern and the intensity of risk is more if the answer for more than five questions is affirmative. For objective assessment a score of 1 is given to affirmative response and a score of zero is accorded to negative response to each question. The score ranges between 0 and 10 and a higher score indicate greater degree of imbalance. A pre-testing of the tool has been carried out on 20 teaching professionals from a State university to find out the suitability of the tool for assessing the work/life balance of employees. The results of the study indicate a change to be incorporated for one question in the tool (in question No. 9 the words **watch porno** are replaced with **read books/see films - not related to academic**). Accordingly change is made and again the revised tool has been administered on five HR professionals. The tool is found to be suitable for assessing the work/life balance of employees chosen for the study. From the list of 250 HR professionals (as stated above), 176 have consented to be the subjects for the study. Accordingly 176 HR professionals formed the subjects, and of which 134 (76.13%) are from social work domain and the rest (42 or 23.87%) are from the field of management. Ethical issues of research, especially of informed consent and confidentiality, have been adhered to. The subjects are of varied age groups and also with different years of professional experience. The study was carried out during

November 2018.

### Results and Discussion

The HR professionals, chosen for the study, belong to all age groups with a mean age of 37.2 years. About one-third are in the age group of 24 - 30 years, and 36 (20.45%) are aged 51 years and above. More than half of the professionals are in junior grade positions and there are a few who are in the higher positions in hierarchy. Most of the chosen HR professionals are from social work background (76.13%) and the rest with management background (23.87%). The mean professional experience is 12.8 years with a SD of 10.46 years. Majority (63.64%) are with less than 16 years of professional experience (Table.1).

The characteristics of the subjects, chosen for the study, include persons with all age groups, holding different positions in the job hierarchy and with varied years of professional experience. However, the educational qualification of the professionals is either a degree/diploma in management or degree in social work. The characteristics of the subjects have not skewed toward any particular factor except that majority is with social work background. This is deliberately adopted to know the level of functioning of social work professionals.

In the prevailing volatile situation of job market, persons employed especially in private sector are more likely to be exposed to conditions of **perform** and **flourish** with a heavy emphasis on targets. This made the organizations resort to policies and practices (not to the liking of employees) viz. **hire** and **fire**, work in odd shift hours, stiff and unhealthy competition and severe pressure from higher-ups and colleagues that lead to tensions and depression among employees. Job stress is not confined to work place only. It can even interfere with one's marital life making the situation worse. It may even lead to consultation with elders and professional counsellors (Murali Raj, 2006). Help is possible and can be extended to such of those who require the most. Krishnam (2010) has mentioned that work has become an important part of life and overwork is not a healthy sign of high quality life. People live to work and definitely no longer work to live.

Work/life balance refers to deriving satisfaction and performing effectively both at work and other arenas of life with minimal role conflict. Work is a part of life and not life itself. A right balance of one's work and one's life (other than the work) and deriving satisfaction in all fronts is important. Such a right balance is good for all - employer and employees. This promotes/enhances happiness, interpersonal relations, level of motivation, confidence, loyalty to profession and employer. Achievement of work/life balance indicates a win-win situation for both employers and employees.

The study reveals that a few (12.5%) professionals have expressed that there is absolutely no risk in carrying out both professional work and functions in other domains of life (Table.4). Such a life free from stress is rare to notice. This may be due to the reason that some are in the formative years of their professional career. A study by Deivasigamani and Shankar (2014) on work/life balance of one hundred employees of Chennai-based IT organization, by administering a questionnaire reveals the existence of harmonious work/life balance among employees.

Most of the professional have experienced mild to moderate level of imbalance in their professional and social/personal life (Table.5). This degree of imbalance is expected in case of HR professionals especially for the nature of work that they would carry out. In spite of this, it is considered to be a warning signal or a wakeup call for those at the moderate level of imbalance and that the individuals can alter their life style by resorting to positive changes in some of the practices that are not considered healthy.

It is to be noted with concern that 14 (7.96%) HR professionals have expressed that their professional life is grossly interfered with their

personal/social life. Though the number of such professionals is very small it indicates that those who deal with stresses and strains of employees need to be a role model to others. Work life is a part of life and it is important as that of other two domains of life – the personal life and social life. Stressors like absence of permanency of job, long hours of work schedule, and target-based work demand that the performance on the job should always be at the peak to sustain on the job and to progress further professionally. In the present conditions, it is evident that certain ground rules are to be framed and followed so as to facilitate the employees to be free from stressors emanated from work and also to bring a balance between professional and personal/social life. Singh (2010) has suggested a three-point formula to be adopted to make oneself free from overwork and enable him/her to draw a line between work and rest. These include 1) not taking work home, 2) not to work on holidays, and 3) not to skip lunch. The author revealed that anxiety disorder and clinical depression start at workplace and one may require the services of mental health professionals when the situation is alarming. Igbinomwanhia et. al. (2012) mention that balancing the work and other demands of life is the concern of both employees and employers. The latter have realized that personal and family life of employees influence the quality of work output. Hence, bringing a balance between work and non-work integration is necessary. It is the crucial part of HR policy and strategy of every organization to ensure that the employees are protected from feelings of dissatisfaction and burnout.

The most prominent issues that troubled the professionals are – spending more time at work place and thereby devoting less time with family and social relations/functions, followed by an inability to find adequate time to spend with families in the form of outings (Table.3). This may be attributed to their pressing work at the work place. More than one-third of respondents have erratic work schedule and travel schedule, and attending office work at home has become common thereby depriving them of healthy family life. The situation is so bad that some (25%) find hardly any time for physical exercises which is essential for a healthy functioning of the body and mind. As many as 30 (17.05%) have mentioned that their families and friends have expressed their discontent with regard to their absence of active involvement in familial and social activities especially with friends. Fortunately, very few are deprived of sound sleep or have resorted to unhealthy practices like cigarette smoking or consuming alcohol or reading unhealthy literature probably as a measure of relief from work stresses and strains. In a similar study of 110 employees on varied issues of work/life balance, Nithya (2013) has observed that 27% take work home at night and/or weekends, 25% keep their work before their personal and family life, and 36% work more than 48 hours a week. Further, 87% agree that they have a lot of work to attend to at workplace, and 70% do not have time to attend household chores. The author concludes that over work is harmful to employees.

It is observed that professionals of higher age group (36 years and above), holding higher levels of responsibilities, in terms of job profile (persons occupying senior grade positions viz. Assistant Manager, Deputy Manager, Manager, Deputy General Manager, General Manager, Vice-President and HR Consultant) and with long years of work exposure (11 years and above) have experienced greater level of work/life imbalance (Table.6). These observations are on the expected lines. It is commonly observed that factors like job title in well-established organizations and the corresponding professional exposure of the incumbent go well with the age of the employees. The performance of the employee in terms of competencies he/she has and the duration of his/her work exposure will only enable the professionals to move to higher positions in the ladder of hierarchy. Rewards in the form of promotions to higher positions are generally tagged with greater job responsibilities. Such persons are likely to experience higher level of stress. Further, the person over a period of time exhibits increased level of loyalty to the profession as well as the employer with enhanced level of involvement in matters work performance. In the present study, the

HR professionals' work/life imbalance is at mild to moderate level with a slight caution that they need to take proper and appropriate measures to prevent the imbalance creeping to undesirable proportion requiring therapeutic intervention.

The academic background and the degree of work/life balance are found to be independent and unrelated too. Irrespective of the academic background (social work or management) the level of work/life balance of HR professionals remains the same. It is the perception to the work that is to be considered more important than the past academic exposure of the person. Further, exposure to similar kind of work with minimal variations by the professionals irrespective of their academic background would not impact much on the work/life balance.

### Conclusion

Work/life balance of employees has become the priority area of service of HRD department. The practices linked to work/life balance are noticed in almost every sector. Fleetwood (2007) mentions elaborately on such work practices. While some flexible working practices are employee friendly (employer unfriendly) some others are employer friendly (business friendly). The practices that promote work/life balance of employees and at the same time benefit all (employer and employees) need to be promoted.

It is commonly witnessed that young professionals employed in IT and allied sectors, leave for work every day in the early hours and are uncertain of the time of return from long hours of strenuous work. This speaks that rest and work are blurred and that their life is more centred around work life. The analysis of the nature of work to be performed, and the amount of stresses involved in executing the target-oriented work, speak of the quality output of work. It is observed in a study by Chaturvedi (Quoted by Thomas, 2011) of NIMHANS, Bangalore, in 2008 that a good number of IT professionals perceived their job too stressful. Occupational health has become a priority issue in corporate world. This has enabled every right thinking organization to initiate occupational health centres in their premises keeping in view the magnitude of health hazards exposed to by the employees. Assistance has been provided to employees in the form of awareness programmes on life-style changes and their management. The fact remains that work commitment and other personal and social commitments cannot be separated. Compartmentalization is difficult to make and definitely there is a certain amount of overlapping in the demarcation of arenas of life.

A study is undertaken to know the extent of work/life balance of employees and to assess the degree of risk experienced by them in bringing a harmony between work life and other domains of life. A questionnaire, developed by Krishnam (2010) has been administered on 176 HR professionals. The study reveals that 14 (7.96%) have experienced higher degree of risk in work/life balance. Spending more time at work is the most commonly experienced issue and sleep deprivation and insomnia is the least experienced problem by HR professionals.

There is a comparison that is appropriate to make between HR professionals and Cardiologists. Both deal with stresses of people that fall under their domain of professional practice – employees and persons with heart ailments. Surase (2013) in his article on 'How Good is Your Heart, Doctor?' mentions that stressors impact negatively on the functioning of heart. Some of the stressors that the author has quoted include relationship problems, financial concerns, work over-load, relocation and perfectionism. It further, mentions that individuals who constantly experience higher level of stress are more prone to the risks of heart problem even though there is no family history of such ailment. The advice which the author has proposed to young cardiologists with regard to the issues concerned with their practice include – be honest to self when such an advice is given to others to lead a life with an optimum level of stress. This means follow the dictum advised to others.

Professionals, whether HR personnel or Cardiologists need to lead a life free from severe stresses and strains that impact their professional life negatively. This would make them serve as models for others to emulate.

**Table: 1**  
**Personal and Occupational Profile of H.R. Professionals**

Characteristics	Description	HR Executives N: 176	
		N	%
Age	25 Years and below	18	10.22
	26 Years – 30 Years	46	26.14
	31 Years – 35 Years	44	25.00
	36 Years – 40 Years	16	10.00
	41 Years – 45 Years	10	05.70
	46 Years – 50 Years	6	03.40
	51 Years and above	36	20.45
Range 24 – 60 years, Mean:37.2, SD: 11.95			
Designation	Management Trainee	10	05.68
	Officer – HR	16	09.09
	Executive – HR	11	06.25
	Welfare Officer	10	05.68
	Senior - HR Executive	42	23.86
	Assistant Manager - HR and Admn.	8	04.54
	Assistant Manager – HR	21	11.93
	Assistant Manager – CSR	2	01.13
	Deputy Manager – HR	4	02.27
	Training Manager – HR	12	06.81
	Deputy General Manager - HR	16	09.09
	General Manager – HR	18	10.22
	Vice –President	2	01.14
HR- Consultant	4	02.27	
Academic background	MSW + Ph. D	5	02.84
	MSW	129	73.29
	MBA + Ph. D	1	0.57
	MBA	29	16.48
	PGDHRM	12	6.82
Years of professional experience	1 Year – 5 Years	44	25.00
	6 Year – 10 Years	56	31.82
	11 Year – 15 Years	12	6.82
	16 Year – 20 Years	30	17.05
	21 Year – 25 Years	6	3.41
	26 Years and above	28	15.90
Range: 1 - 37 years, Mean: 12.8, SD: 10.46			

**Table: 2**  
**Work/Life Balance of H.R. Professionals**

Sl. No.	Question	Response of HR Executives N:176		Mean	SD
		Yes	No		
1	Do you spend more than eight hour a day at work?	121 (68.75%)	55 (31.25%)	0.6875	0.4648
2	Do you often take work home and work on holidays?	60 (34.09%)	116 (65.91%)	0.3409	0.4753
3	Do you have erratic work hours and travel schedule?	68 (38.64%)	108 (61.36%)	0.3863	0.4883
4	Do you drink more than two cups of tea or coffee a day?	88 (50%)	88 (50%)	0.5	0.5014
5	Have you put on or lost more than five Kgs. of weight over the last six months?	14 (07.95%)	162 (92.05%)	0.0795	0.2713
6	Do you feel sleep deprived or suffer from insomnia?	10 (05.68%)	166 (94.32%)	0.0568	0.2321
7	Do you feel too lethargic or busy to find time to exercise?	44 (25%)	132 (75%)	0.25	0.4342

8	Do your family and friends often complain about your lack of involvement and enthusiasm?	30 (17.05%)	146 (82.95%)	0.1704	0.3771
9	Do you need to have alcohol, or read books/see films (not related to academic) or smoke regularly to de-stress?	14 (07.95%)	162 (92.05%)	0.0795	0.2713
10	Has it been over a year since you last took a vacation?	90 (51.13%)	86 (48.87%)	0.5113	0.5012
<b>Total</b>		<b>539</b> <b>30.63%</b>	<b>1221</b> <b>(69.37%)</b>	<b>3.0625</b>	<b>2.1034</b>

**Table: 3**  
**Aspects of Work/Life Balance Arranged in Array**

Sl. No.	Q. No.	Question	Response of HR Professionals N:176		Mean	SD
			Yes	No		
1	1	Do you spend more than eight hour a day at work?	121 (68.75%)	55 (31.25%)	0.6875	0.4648
2	10	Has it been over a year since you last took a vacation?	90 (51.13%)	86 (48.87%)	0.5113	0.5012
3	4	Do you drink more than two cups of tea or coffee a day?	88 (50.00%)	88 (50.00%)	0.5	0.5014
4	3	Do you have erratic work hours and travel schedule?	68 (38.64%)	108 (61.36%)	0.3863	0.4883
5	2	Do you often take work home and work on holidays?	60 (34.10%)	116 (65.90%)	0.3409	0.4753
6	7	Do you feel too lethargic or busy to find time to exercise?	44 (25%)	132 (75%)	0.25	0.4342
7	8	Do your family and friends often complain about your lack of involvement and enthusiasm?	30 (17.05%)	146 (82.95%)	0.1704	0.3771
8	5	Have you put on or lost more than five Kgs. of weight over the last six months?	14 (07.95%)	162 (92.05%)	0.0795	0.2713
9	9	Do you need to have alcohol, or read books/see films (not related to academic) or smoke regularly to de-stress?	14 (07.95%)	162 (92.05%)	0.0795	0.2713
10	6	Do you feel sleep deprived or suffer from insomnia?	10 (05.68%)	166 (94.32%)	0.0568	0.2321
<b>Total</b>			<b>539</b> <b>30.63%</b>	<b>1221</b> <b>(69.37%)</b>	<b>3.0625</b>	<b>2.1034</b>

**Table: 4**  
**Degree of Risk in Work/Life Balance (on the basis of score)**

Sl. No.	Degree of risk	No. of HR Professionals N:176	Degree of risk according to norms
1	No risk (0)	22 (12.50%)	22 (12.50%)
2	10 %	20 (11.36%)	53 (30.11%)
3	20 %	33 (18.75%)	
4	30 %	32 (18.18%)	87 (49.43%)
5	40 %	24 (13.64%)	
6	50 %	31 (17.61%)	
7	60 %	6 (3.40%)	14 (7.96%)
8	70 %	4 (2.28%)	
9	80 %	-	
10	90 %	-	
11	100 %	4 (2.28%)	
<b>Total</b>		<b>176</b>	<b>176</b>

**Table: 5**  
**Degree of Risk in Work/Life Balance (on the basis of norms)**

Degree of Risk	No. of HR Professionals N: 176	%
No Risk	22	12.50
Mild Risk	53	30.11
Moderate Risk	87	49.43
Higher Degree of Risk	14	7.96
Total	176	

**Table: 6**  
**HR Professionals: Personal and Occupational Profile and Work/Life Balance**

Age and Work/Life Balance	35 years and below N: 108		36 years and above N: 68		Statistical Inference
	Mean 2.454	SD 2.189	Mean 4.029	SD 1.535	t : 5.601 df :174 p < 0.05 Significant
Designation and Work/Life Balance	Junior Cadre N:89	Senior Cadre N:87	Statistical Inference		
	Mean 2.4606	SD 1.790	Mean 3.678	SD 2.228	t : 3.991 df :174 p < 0.05 Significant
Academic Background and Work/Life Balance	Management N:42	Social Work N:134	Statistical Inference		
	Mean 2.857	SD 1.424	Mean 3.127	SD 2.272	t : 0.916 df : 174 p > 0.05 Not Significant
Years of Professional Experience and Work/Life Balance	Ten years and below N: 100	Eleven years and above N: 76	Statistical Inference		
	Mean 2.41	SD 2.270	Mean 3.921	SD 1.486	t : 5.322 df : 174 p < 0.05 Significant

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