



Work Life Balance Among Woman Worker : A Reflection On Gender Responsiveness Human Resource Management Practice

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Abstract. This study examines work-life balance (WLB), defined as an individual's ability to manage harmoniously their work and personal life, among 324 Indonesian women workers. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design and a standardized WLB scale, Findings reveal a significant WLB deficit, with a mean score (42.42) substantially below the benchmark. Critically, 43% of respondents reported low WLB, with challenges intensifying for married women and mothers. These results underscore the inadequacy of gender-blind HR practices. While limited by its non-probabilistic sample and cross-sectional design, this study provides a critical foundation for advocating Gender-Responsive Human Resource Management strategies to systematically support women's well-being and career continuity in Indonesia.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Women worker, Gender responsiveness

1 Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed a significant global increase in female labor force participation. Social, economic, and cultural changes in recent decades have significantly increased women's participation in the Indonesian workforce. According to data from Statistics Indonesia [1], the female labor force participation rate exceeds 53%, showing a steady rise compared to a decade ago. However, it has also brought to the fore the persistent challenge of achieving work-life balance particularly for women who often continue to bear the primary responsibility for domestic and care work—a phenomenon known as the "second shift" [2].

In the Indonesian context, characterized by strong collectivist and familial values, the pressure on women to fulfill roles both as productive workers and as primary caregivers within the household is pronounced. However, this growth has not been accompanied by adequate organizational and managerial support to help women balance their work and personal lives. This dual expectation creates a high potential for role conflict, which identifies as the core antagonist of genuine work-life balance [3].

This situation raises a critical issue in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM), namely work-life balance (work - life balance). Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage work responsibilities alongside personal life roles, including those related to family, spouse, and children [4]. For working women—particularly those who are married and have children—achieving this balance becomes more complex due to multiple role conflicts between professional and domestic demands. In Indonesia's cultural context, traditional gender norms and patriarchal values still position women as the primary caregivers and household managers, even when they are also active contributors to the family's income [5].

From an HRM perspective, work-life balance should not be viewed merely as an individual issue but as an indicator of organizational effectiveness in managing people. Organizations that are responsive to employees' needs for balancing work and family roles are said to implement gender-responsive HR practices. Such practices reflect inclusivity, sustainability, and human-centered management approaches [6].

Unfortunately, many organizations in Indonesia still prioritize productivity and short-term goals over employees' psychological well-being and quality of life. As a result, many working women experience stress, emotional exhaustion, and decreased job performance [7]. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the extent to which women workers in Indonesia achieve work-life balance and interpret the findings as a reflection of gender-responsive HRM practices.

The state of the art in work - life balance research has effectively documented these challenges and cataloged the policies organizations adopt. However, a significant gap persists. Many studies stop at identifying the problem or evaluating policy availability on paper, without critically examining the underlying HR frameworks that govern their implementation. There is a lack of research that uses empirical work - life balance data as a diagnostic tool to reflect on the fundamental principles of Human Resource Management itself. The prevailing approach in many organizations remains "gender-blind," operating on the assumption of a neutral worker, which inadvertently upholds structures that disadvantage women.

Therefore, the novelty of this article lies in its reflective and critical stance. We move beyond merely documenting work - life balance scores. Instead, we utilize the empirical evidence from 384 Indonesian women workers—which shows a near-universal struggle for balance—as a powerful catalyst to argue for a paradigm shift in HR practice. This study positions these findings as a direct reflection of the limitations of gender-neutral HRM and makes a compelling case for the urgent adoption of Gender-Responsive Human Resource Management (GR-HRM). By doing so, we contribute to the literature by bridging the empirical reality of work - life balance with a critical theoretical framework, offering a new lens through which to diagnose organizational shortcomings and propose transformative, equitable solutions.

2 Literature Review

This study is anchored by [3] multidimensional construct of work - life balance, which effectively captures the role conflict prevalent among women workers. [3], defines it as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. This definition is instrumental for several reasons. First, it transcends a simplistic temporal equilibrium, incorporating both affective (satisfaction) and behavioral (good functioning) dimensions. Second, it positions "role conflict"—the experience of incompatible pressures from work and domestic domains—as the primary antagonist of balance. This theoretical framing is particularly salient for studying women workers, who often navigate intense role conflicts due to entrenched socio-cultural expectations and the unequal distribution of domestic labor [2, 8].

A substantial body of literature corroborates the unique and pervasive work - life balance challenges faced by women in the workforce. A critical review reveals several convergent themes. The concept of the "second shift" [2] remains profoundly relevant, describing the double burden of paid employment and a disproportionately large share of unpaid care and domestic work borne by women. This inherent inequity in domestic responsibilities is a primary driver of the role conflict that Fisher's definition highlights.

Furthermore, empirical research has consistently identified a "motherhood penalty," wherein women, particularly mothers, face systemic workplace disadvantages, including perceived lower commitment and slower career advancement [9]. This creates a vicious cycle: structural barriers at work intensify stress, while societal pressures at home limit women's capacity to conform to the traditional "ideal worker" norm. The cultural context also moderates these experiences. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, strong familial norms can provide support but may also impose additional layers of obligation and expectation [10]. Moreover, the mere availability of organizational policies, such as Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs), is often insufficient. Their usage is gendered, and women who utilize them can face career stigma, being perceived as less dedicated [11]. This indicates that organizational culture is as critical as the policies themselves.

The work - life balance challenges women face are not merely individual issues of time management or resilience. They are systemic, deeply embedded in gendered societal roles, workplace structures designed around a male-centric model, and Human Resource Management (HRM) practices that, while often formally "gender-neutral," are applied within a gendered context with unintended negative consequences.

While much research documents the challenges and evaluates policy availability, there is a paucity of studies that frame poor work - life balance outcomes for women as a direct diagnostic of gender-blind HRM. The literature implicitly calls for, but seldom explicitly adopts, a Gender-Responsive Human Resource Management (GR-HRM) framework as the primary analytical lens for interpreting work - life balance data.

Gender-Responsive HRM offers a transformative framework that moves beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. It is a strategic orientation that acknowledges the differential needs and constraints of employees across genders and proactively designs systems to achieve equitable outcomes [12]. Its core principles include a focus on equity over mere equality, the active mitigation of unconscious bias in HR processes, and the intentional creation of an inclusive culture where support mechanisms are destigmatized.

In summary, this paper will utilize empirical data on the work - life balance of Indonesian women not as a terminal finding, but as empirical evidence to critically reflect on existing HR practices. By analyzing this data through the theoretical lens of GR-HRM, this study argues that the reported levels of work - life balance are a direct reflection of the degree of gender (un)responsiveness in prevailing HRM systems. This integration of Fisher's work - life balance construct with the GR-HRM framework constitutes the novel theoretical contribution of this research.

3 Methods

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the work-life balance of women workers in Indonesia and reflect on the gender responsiveness of existing human resource management practices. The study involved 324 women workers from various sectors in Indonesia. A summary of their demographic characteristics is provided in Table 1.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part captured demographic information (age, marital status, number of children, income).

This research utilized a standardized Work-Life Balance scale comprising 17 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale has a hypothetical mean of 51, with higher scores indicating a more favorable work-life balance. The validity and reliability of the scale were confirmed through construct validity testing, with all Standardized Loading Factor (SLF) values exceeding 0.5 and a Composite Reliability (CR) score exceeding 0.7, demonstrating strong convergent validity and internal consistency.

4 Results

The statistical analysis revealed a critical finding. The empirical mean Work-Life Balance score ($M = 42.42$, $SD = 8.70$) was significantly lower than the scale's hypothetical mean of 51 ($t(323) = -8.200$, $p < .05$). This confirms a statistically significant deficit in the perceived work-life balance among the respondents.

Categorization of the work - life balance scores provides a more nuanced picture:

1. High Level of work-life balance: 1 sample (0.3%)
2. Moderate Level of work-life balance: 184 samples (56.8%)

3. Low Level of work–life balance: 139 samples (42.9%)

This distribution underscores a profound challenge: not a single respondent reported a high level of work-life balance, and a substantial proportion (42.9%) are experiencing low work - life balance. The demographic characteristics of the 324 participants are presented in Table 1. The sample is predominantly composed of married women (80.2%) and mothers (75.9%), with a majority earning above the regional minimum wage (88.9%).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=324)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	Early Adulthood	193	59.6%
	Mid Adulthood	131	40.4%
Marital Status	Unmarried	59	18.2%
	Married	260	80.2%
	Divorced	5	1.5%
Number of Children	No Child	78	24.1%
	1 Child	68	21.0%
	2 Children	94	29.0%
	More than 2 Children	84	25.9%
Income Level	Below Regional Minimum Wage	36	11.1%
	Above Regional Minimum Wage	288	88.9%

5 Discussion

The data gathered from 324 women workers in Indonesia reveals a profound work-life balance deficit, characterized by a mean work - life balance score significantly below established benchmarks and an alarming absence of high work - life balance reports across the sample. This systematic imbalance, particularly acute among married women and mothers, necessitates a critical examination of prevailing human resource management paradigms. The findings indicate that conventional, gender-blind HR approaches is inadequate in addressing the complex interplay between professional obligations and sociocultural domestic responsibilities that characterize women’s lived experiences in Indonesia.

To address these systemic challenges, a comprehensive Gender-Responsive Human Resource Management framework is proposed, comprising two interconnected strategic pillars that is:

First, the institutionalization of life-cycle flexibility through structured organizational frameworks represents a foundational shift. This necessitates moving beyond nominal flexibility options to implementing a formal flexibility matrix

with clearly delineated protocols for flexi-time arrangements, compressed work-weeks, and remote work tiers. The efficacy of such measures depends on establishing objective eligibility criteria based on job nature, performance metrics, and technological requirements. Crucially, this strategy requires complementary investment in managerial training programs focused on output-based performance evaluation, remote team management, and countering flexibility stigma. Alignment with Minister of Manpower Regulation No. 6 of 2016 provides a regulatory foundation for formalizing these arrangements through explicit organizational policies.

Second, the development of comprehensive family support infrastructure addresses critical gaps in current organizational support systems. This encompasses establishing on-site childcare facilities for larger enterprises and subsidized partnership models with recognized childcare providers for smaller organizations. Additionally, emergency childcare services and after-school programs address predictable yet disruptive. For nursing mothers, dedicated lactation facilities meeting minimum standards of privacy, refrigeration, and comfort must be complemented by protected pumping breaks. A phased return-to-work program, structured through graduated workload increases over a 12-week period and paired with mentorship initiatives, facilitates sustainable reintegration following parental leave.

Successful implementation requires phased adoption, beginning with policy development and managerial training, progressing through pilot programs, and culminating in organization-wide rollout with continuous improvement mechanisms. Strategic partnerships with government stakeholder may facilitate childcare infrastructure development through subsidy programs.

This framework is fundamentally designed to serve a dual imperative: to actively safeguard the psychological and physiological well-being of women workers while simultaneously ensuring their continuous growth and retention within the professional workforce. By systematically dismantling the structural barriers that force a choice between career and personal life, these strategies aim to foster an environment where women can thrive holistically. The institutionalization of flexibility and robust family support is not merely a welfare initiative; it is a strategic investment in human capital, targeting burnout and stress to preserve employee health and maintain institutional knowledge. Consequently, by validating and accommodating women's dual roles, organizations can cultivate loyalty, reduce attrition costs, and secure the long-term engagement of a skilled female workforce, thereby transforming workplace well-being into a direct driver of professional sustainability and organizational performance.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing the work-life balance crisis among Indonesian women workers requires a fundamental shift in HR practices. The proposed Gender-Responsive HRM framework offers a practical blueprint for this transformation. By integrating these principles, companies can move from upholding systemic

inequities to becoming pioneers of equitable workplaces that support women's professional success and personal well-being.

7 Limitation

While this study provides valuable insights into the work-life balance of women workers in Indonesia and its implications for gender-responsive human resource management, there is still limitations must be acknowledged to guide future research. Firstly, the sampling method employed, This approach constrains the general of the findings to the broader population of women workers across Indonesia. The concentration of respondents potentially from specific geographic regions or industrial sectors may not fully capture the heterogeneous experiences of women in different cultural and economic contexts within the country.

Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data through a structured questionnaire introduces the possibility of common method variance. Participants' responses regarding their perceived work-life balance may be influenced by social desirability bias or transient affective states, potentially affecting the accuracy of the measurements.

Thirdly, the study's scope, though rich in quantitative data, lacks a qualitative dimension that could provide deeper, nuanced understanding. The statistical identification of low work-life balance among married women and mothers is clear; however, the underlying lived experiences, emotional burdens, and specific contextual challenges that generate these quantitative results remain unexplored. Future studies incorporating in-depth interviews or focus group discussions would be invaluable in elucidating the complex mechanisms behind the numbers.

Lastly, the research focused exclusively on the perspectives of women employees. The absence of data from organizational stakeholders, such as HR managers and company leadership, limits the comprehension of the institutional constraints, policy rationales, and managerial mindsets that perpetuate gender-blind HR practices. Despite these limitations, the study's main conclusions remain significant and help to identify important areas for further investigation.

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