**Research Paper**

# Work-Life Balance Policiesin India

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**Abstract**
*This paper gives a general overview of work-life balance policies (WLBPs) in the Indian context.Taking a cue from [1] and [2] the study employs a four-fold categorization of the Work-life balance policies (WLBPs) while the history of WLBPs in India and the barriers in their adoption are pointed out. Based on the review of 44 publications since 2004 the paper seeks to delineate the contours of research in this field while seeking to draw out the reasons for the same. The policy and the sectoral setting of these studies are also indicated and based on which inferences are drawn. In India, the policies across the private and public sector entities are not uniform owing to a near total absence of any governmental oversight. Although the WLPBs in the public sector are generally uniform but there is a great deal of variability in the private sector which the current study points out by referring to the policies in place at various major private companies in India. The studies on WLBPs in India are quite sparse, going through all the major research databases, this study has included 44 studies conducted across the geographical and sectoral landscape of India.*
*Keywords: WLBPs, Work-life, Work-life India, Labor policy India, Work-life balance, Labor policy in India*
*JEL classification: J40*

## I. Introduction

Work-Life balance policies refer to the policies and practices meted out by organizations that are formulated to help the employees balance paid work with other important roles such as family, leisure, education, personal development, and other obligations. Although researches have indicated around 100 different work-life balance policies, only a few of these policies are known to any extent in practice. Some of the major work-life balance policies in practice in the public and private spheres include flexibility in time, amount of work and the location (e.g., Flextime, telework, job sharing etc.), providing direct benefits and assistance (e.g., Childcare and eldercare assistance etc.) and informational and monetary help ([3]. [4] view these policies as fundamentally family and dependent centric.

It is posited that these policies have a beneficial impact on the coordination and integration of work and non-work spheres of the employees [5]. [6] describes the co-relation between work-family culture and employee's use of work-family benefits and theobligationto work as positive while being negatively correlated to conflict between work-family roles and intention toquitthe organization.

**Categorization of Work-Life balance policies:** WLBP's have been differently categorized. This research shall follow categorize WLBP's along the line of [1] and [2]. The categorization is tabulated as follows:

**Table 1:** Categorization of WLBPs

| S.no | Policy strategy | Policy |
|------|------------------|--------|
| 1 | Strategies based on time | Flexi time, compressed workweeks, job sharing, part-time work, leave for new parents, telecommuting |
| 2 | Strategies based on information | Intranet, resource and referral service, relocation assistance, work life manuals |
| 3 | Monetary strategies | Vouchers for childcare, leave with pay, assistance for adoption |
| 4 | Direct services | Childcare on site, rooms for lactation, eldercare assistance, self-help and health training, dinners and movies |

Source: [1] and [2].

**Barriers to WLBPs**

Published research on work-life balance policies point to the potential of alleviating work and life conflicts but the implementation of these policies in the organization is not uniform and suffer from inconsistencies in application and practice. These inconsistencies as described in the research are:

• **Ignorance of the employees:** The employees most often are oblivious to the information regarding the WLBPs. For instance, there might be a provision of a certain family-related leave in the employee handbooks, but the employee may not be cognizant of that. The reason for the same may be ineffectiveness or reluctance of the line managers to communicate these provisions to the employees. Alternatively, the line managers are not trained to communicate to the employees the availability of these programs [7]. In some instances, the upper echelons of the organizations are oblivious to WLPBs and thus act as impediments to the application of these policies [8].

• **Differential treatment to employees:** The organization may have WLBP provision for some employees while excluding many others. It has been found that the presence of WLBPs (independent of their use) has a positive influence on the employee perception of the employees[9]. For instance, the employees exhibit higher commitment when they are aware of flexible hours [10].

• **Perceptions of the employees:** Employees may not necessarily take up these policies due to their apprehensions that utilization of these policies may result in the reduction of the future prospects in the organization and that they may be perceived as being less committed to their professional obligations [11].

• **The actual effect of WLBPs:** Questions have been raised about the actual efficacy of these policies. The theoretical research may have overlooked the dark side of these policies. The meta-analysis of various studies points to the conclusion that the remote work does not result in a statistically significant change in the interference of work with between family life [12]. A study conducted by [13] conclude that the employees that do not utilize childcare facilities tend to averse to their presence in the work premises. The utilization of WLBPs by the employees has negative consequences on the career of the employees and in the long run, may lead employees being ostracized by colleagues.

• **Unsupportive organizational culture:** Managerial support is an important factor in actualizing the WLBPs into reality. Employee's avail WLPBs when they find supervisors to be supportive and helpful.

• **Ineffective WLBPs:** Many WLBPs are just a glitter without any substance when most of these policies do not resonate with the ground conditions. In the Indian context where extended family constitutes a social institution the policies are made while keeping a nuclear family in mind [14].

[15] categorize these challenges as 'Individual challenges' and 'General challenges.' They define general challenges as misconstruing the nature of the policies while individual challenges associated with how individuals may mistake or be misinformed about the WLBPs.

**History of WLBPs and Statutory policies in India**

In the earliest stages of industrialization in India, the labor policies were employer centric and in many cases were very exploitative. The consequence of which was the growth of labor unions and trade unions which fought for enactment of International Labor Organization's (ILO) conventions and policies. The result of this was the labor policy was brought under the umbrella of government agencies. These institutions were further strengthened by Article 41 and 42 in the directive principles of state policy in the Indian constitution, 1949 which holds government responsible of legislating so that future of all workers (both industrial and others) be secured. Another important step taken in this direction was the passing of the Factories Act, 1948 which regulated the number of hours that the employees worked. Thegovernment stipulated labor provisions may be categorized under the following headings:

• **Working hours**: The Factories Act, 1948 stipulates that the working time for an adult worker may not exceed 48 hours for a week and 9 hours a day. It restricts working for women and adolescents between 7 pm and 6 am. There is a provision that total workdays shall not exceed 10 consecutive days and when an employee works on holiday a compensatory day off be provided instead.

• **Creches**: The Factories Act (1948) also provides for childcare facilities in organizations which employ more than 30 women.

• **Leave provisions**: The provisions for the leaves are provided under the Industrial Employment Act (1946) and Employee State Insurance Act, ESI (1948). The leaves mentioned are sick leave, compensatory

leave, casual leave and earned leave. Besides this every insured worker shall be paid cash benefits for the time of sickness.

- **Maternity benefits**: The maternity benefits are provided under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961. This act extends to whole India includes every organization, factory, plantation, mine and to every establishment which employs ten or more than ten individuals. This act entitles every woman to maternity benefits wherein the actual wages are to be paid for the period of absence. The leave of absence has been specified as 12 weeks in all. Mothers are also covered under the aforementioned ESI act, 1948, wherein a periodical cash benefit is paid to the mother [16]. This Act was amended in 2017 and the duration of paid maternity leave offered to the women was increased from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. The women can take up to maximum 8 weeks before the expected delivery date and the remaining weeks can be utilized post the delivery. Along with several other acts, the Maternity Benefits Act, 2017 was consolidated by the Code on Social Security, 2020.

These statutory policies were further bolstered by the sixth pay commission (2008) which envisages the concept of childcare where additional leave is to be conceded to a female employee with children aged under the age of 18. This leave is allowed for a period of a maximum of two years. It has consequently increased the allowances for mothers who care for children.

Although several policies have been deployed by the government, and more so recently, but some gaps still exist in the policy framework. The approach of the policies is indirect and general rather than direct and specific which results in ambiguity when these policies are applied. The policies are deeply steeped in patriarchy which end up oblivious to female needs and requirements. Finally, most of the laws that are passed are toothless and most of the organizations find ways to sidestep these stipulations.

**WLBPs in private sector in India:**

Post liberalization in the early 1990's the private sector has continued to grow at 7 per cent and this is reflected in the growth of employment in services and industries large share of which is privately owned. Based on the literature review this section shall briefly present the WLBP's as found in major private companies in India

**State bank of India** is the largest bank in India with around 250,000 employees while having 24,000 branches. The WLB policies are conceived in a manner that immediate family members of the employees may reap benefits as well. Other novel measures include leave extensions for visiting in-laws, leaves for helping out children for exams, choosing the location for work transfer, among others [17].

**TATA group** one of the oldest companies in India set up in 1868 is known as one of the most employee-friendly companies in India. It was the first company to set up a pension fund to retired employees in 1886 and by 1895 the company was providing the employees' accident compensation as well. Presently the major WLBPs provided by the company include 8-hour workday, free medical aid, workers provident fund and leave with pay. Since 2016, the company is also providing seven months maternity leave and new mothers have an option of availing 18 months of half-day half-pay working day after the maternity leave ends [18].

One of the top-ranked IT-forms in India **Tech Mahindra** employs around 125,000 employees across 90 countries has a very proactive WLB policy framework. The policies include provisions for paid leaves for public holidays, dependent care leave, flexi-time and work from home. The company also has provisions for financial support including advance salary, retirement plans, repatriation allowance, relocation allowance and extended family support. Tech Mahindra has envisaged a program by the name of JOSH which enables the employees to access to yoga and salsa clubs, sporting events, adventures and other social activities [17].

**Flipkart** is one of the earliest e-commerce portals in India operating since 2007 and currently employs around 30,000 employees. Flipkart has introduced a novel policy framework by the name of Flex-Ben program in 2019 wherein the employees are allowed to choose their own benefits including insurance and non-insurance benefits. The benefits that the company provides include 6 months of maternity leave and 4 months of flexible hours of work post childbirth. Fathers are given 15 days of paternity leave and 3 months of unpaid leave. In addition to this the company also has an adoption program wherein female employee can avail 6 months paid leave for adopting a child under 12 months whereas male employees can avail 6 weeks of paid leave. There is also a provision for indefinite bereavement leave [18].

Although nearly all the major companies continue to have established regimes of WLBPs, but the ground situation is totally different. According to a survey carried out by a leading employment portal, moster.com 60 per cent of Indians rate their work- life balance from average to terrible and the trend is almost same throughout the country. In another cross-country survey India was ranked as the worst. One of the factors that emerged in the study was negative attitude of supervisors to WLB. Many the respondents in the survey were oblivious to the policies of the companies. So, it is quite evident that the state of WLBPs in India remains despondent.

**Empirical work on WLBP's in India**

Although a good deal of research has been carried out in the area of work life balance in India, but the policy-based research remains sparse. In this paper 44 studies since 2004 have been analyzed for WLBP's in India. The table 2 indicates a subset of that research while indicating field and policy sectors.

Table 2: Empirical research work on WLBPs in India

| Study | Sample | Policies | Organization |
|---|---|---|---|
| [19] | 215 respondents | Arrangements for flexible work, weekend leave, family related leaves, holidays and tours, leaves for dependent care and family-friendly transfer policy | Banking Sector |
| [20] | 245 annual reports | Maternity and adoption benefits, family-friendly policies, flexible work arrangements | Finance Sector |
| [21] | 115 respondents (57 percent are male and 43 percent are female employees). | Flexible work arrangements | IT Sector |
| [22] | 7 respondents | Flexible work arrangements | Service Sector |
| [18] | 21 dual earner couples | Casual leaves, flexibility, autonomy, childcare, recreational activities, informal meetings, working condition, weekend off, informal culture, house accommodation and pick up and drop facility. | Education, Construction engineering, IT, Plastic industry, Hospital, Aviation, Heating & Ventilation, Telcom, Banking |
| [23] | 50 respondents | Policies leave arrangements, policies for parenting and pregnancy policies, flexible work arrangement and additional work provision | Manufacturing Sector |
| [24] | 216 nurses and 141 doctors | Flexible work arrangements, health programs, parenting/family support programs | Health care Sector |
| [25] | 241 respondents | Eldercare and childcare information services, flexi time, maternity leave and work and family balance coaching | Education Sector |
| [26] | 200 respondents | Employee leisure clubs/ get together, fixed number of working hours per day, family health schemes, children education, insurance, Additional leaves/holidays/week offs | Hotel Sector |
| [27] | 100 respondents | Flexi-timing, leave policy, career break options, employee assistant programs, childcare provision, social family events and flexible working environment | IT Sector |
| [28] | 122 bank employees of both private and public sector | Leave policies, flexible work arrangements, parenting related issues and additional work provisions | Banking Sector |

Source: Own analysis

On further analyzing the studies the Sector wise and policy wise distribution is tabulated as below. Table 3 indicates the sector wise distribution of the studies and the number of studies that have been undertaken since 2004 with one or more than one policy categories as described above

Table 3: Sector-wise and Policy wise distribution of studies

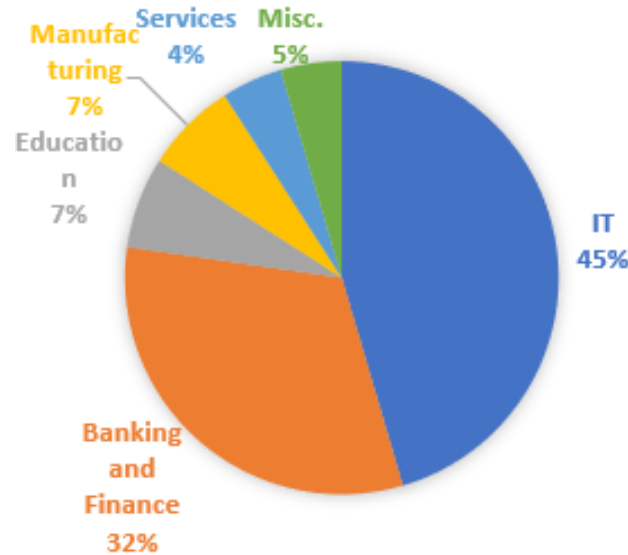| Sector | No. of Studies | Policy Category | No. of Studies |
|---|---|---|---|
| IT | 20 | Time based policy | 22 |
| Banking and Finance | 14 | Monetary based policy | 11 |
| Education | 3 | Direct assistance | 16 |
| Manufacturing | 3 | Information based policy | 5 |
| Services | 2 | | |
| Misc. | 2 | | |

Source: Own analysis

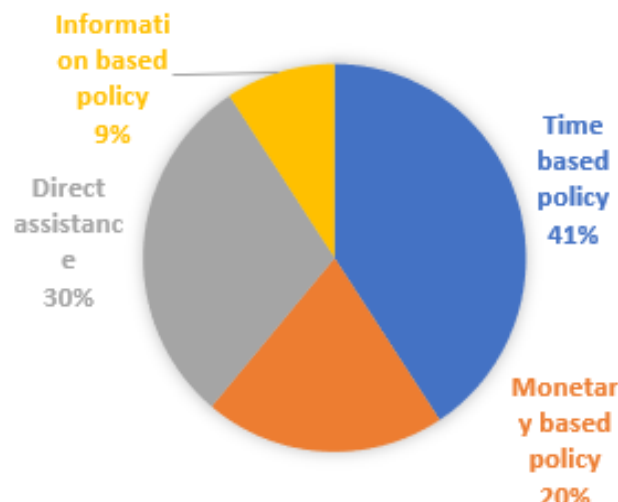Fig 1:  Sector wise studies (Source: Own analysis)



Fig 2: Policy wise distribution (source: Own analysis)

## II.     Conclusion

A large part of the studies covered under the review has been done in IT and Finance companies while considering that out of 1.3 million registered companies only 60,000 are IT-based and the number of financial institutions does not exceed 300. The reason for this may be cited that according to NITI Ayog (formerly known as Planning Commission of India) around 93% of total workforce is based in informal sectors where the application or presence of WLBP's is unknown. The IT and Finance sectors belong to most organized sectors in India where application and practice of WLBPs is well documented and practiced which further points out to the reason why an overwhelming number of studies are undertaken in these sectors. This bias leads to the conclusion that the findings in these studies should not be taken as representative of work culture in India. Since the sample is represented by IT and Finance companies the time-based policies like telework, flexitime, jsob sharing etc. which are convenient for these organizations are in practice. The publication bias also points to the need for research in less organized sectors in India like manufacturing, logistics, healthcare among others.

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