

# EXAMINING THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WOMEN'S WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT: AN ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** This study investigates women's work-life balance (WLB) across various countries, focusing specifically on the Indian subcontinent. Utilizing bibliometric analysis of literature from 1990 to 2023 sourced from the Scopus database, the research addresses four key questions: the impact of WLB on women, the evolution of related keywords, the most prolific researchers, and the key research areas in WLB. Findings reveal that while some countries benefit from robust support systems, women in the Indian subcontinent encounter socio-cultural barriers that complicate their work-life dynamics. Notably, India has emerged as a leader in WLB research within the Indian subcontinent, driven by policy initiatives aimed at improving women's experiences. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted policies in the Indian subcontinent that address specific challenges, advocating for family-friendly practices and further research on intersectionality and comparative analyses across nations to enhance understanding of WLB in diverse contexts.

**Keywords:** Women, Work-life Balance, VOS Viewer, Subcontinent

## Introduction

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in gender studies, highlighting differing perspectives between men and women influenced by societal expectations and individual choices (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). In the subcontinent, the complexities of WLB are shaped by traditional gender roles, economic growth, and evolving societal norms, which present both challenges and opportunities for women striving to balance work and personal life

(Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). This bibliometric study systematically examines the theoretical foundations of women's WLB in the region, analyzing literature from 1990 to 2023 to identify research gaps. Women often navigate multiple roles, and achieving WLB is crucial for their mental health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). In the subcontinent, traditional gender expectations and limited workplace flexibility further complicate this balance

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(Kabeer, 2012). Despite these challenges, there has been progress, with more women entering formal employment and advocating for supportive policies like maternity leave and flexible working hours. This paper aims to explore the impact of WLB on women's personal and professional lives, track the evolution of key research keywords, and provide a roadmap for enhancing productivity and well-being through effective WLB strategies.

### Materials and Methods

A comprehensive search was conducted in the Scopus database on October 5, 2024, using the terms "women" or "female" and "work-life balance." The search covered publications in the fields of business management and social science from 1990 to 2023, focusing exclusively on original articles and reviews published in English. The data collected included publication year, keywords, document type, and authorship, affiliation, abstracts, DOI, editor, publisher, and ISSN numbers. Articles that did not meet these requirements were excluded, and all retrieved data were exported into a tab-delimited file for further analysis.

Eligibility criteria mandated the inclusion of only original articles and review in English, excluding preprints, translated works, comments, editorials, letters, and duplicates. Data selection and extraction were independently performed by reviewers, with consensus reached on any discrepancies.

The bibliometric analysis utilized

VOSviewer 1.6.18 to evaluate co-authorship, co-occurrence, citations, bibliographic coupling, and publication trends. A five-step methodology was employed, beginning with the determination of search keywords and resulting in the final selection of 126 documents for analysis. This study aims to visualize the bibliometric network, highlighting relationships among productive countries, institutions, and frequently used keywords, ultimately providing valuable insights into the research landscape surrounding women's work-life balance.

The initial search in the Scopus database retrieved 226 publications, which were further screened based on the inclusion criteria. Of these, 193 were identified as original research articles and review articles (85.39%), and 126 documents were ultimately included in the analysis. The breakdown of final publications by year is as follows:

- **2023:** 14 articles (11.11%)
- **2022:** 17 articles (13.49%)
- **2021:** 19 articles (15.07%)

All manuscripts were published in English, with 35 (27.78%) being open-access publications. The research categories covered in the Scopus database included:

- Business Management and Accounting: 93 articles
- Social Sciences: 64 articles
- Economics, Econometrics, and Finance: 20 articles

- Arts and Humanities: 12 articles

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach to evaluating the impact and structure of scientific research. This study applied bibliometric techniques to assess co-authorship, keyword co-occurrence, citation patterns, and bibliographic coupling.

### Terminologies and their General Significance

Collaborative research, exemplified by technical papers co-authored by multiple writers from different organizations, is a key feature of scientific inquiry. Co-authorship analysis examines patterns of collaboration, where each author, organization, or country is represented as a node connected to others through shared publications.

Keyword co-occurrence networks (KCNs) have been increasingly utilized for

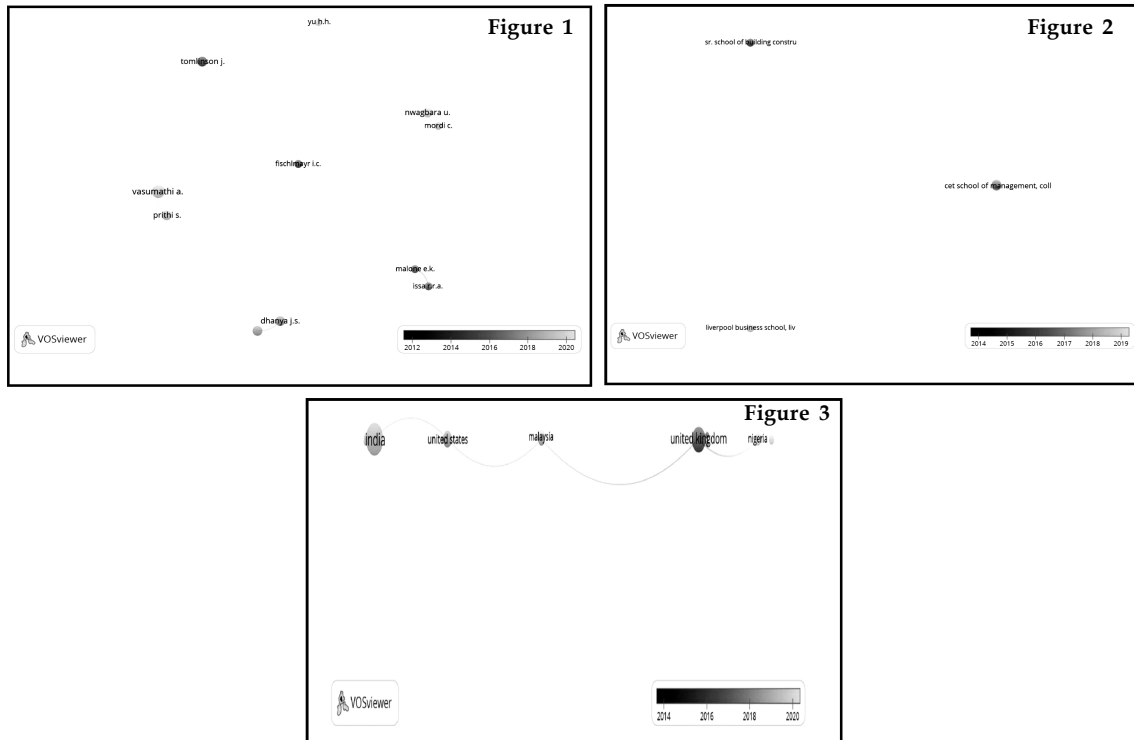
knowledge mapping. Each keyword is represented as a node, with connections formed when two words appear together in the same publication. The strength of these connections indicates the frequency of co-occurrence, helping researchers visualize cumulative knowledge on a topic (Su & Lee, 2010). This is particularly relevant for uncovering insights into women's work-life balance in the subcontinent.

Citation analysis assesses the impact of publications by counting citations. Co-citation occurs when two documents are cited together in a third publication, revealing how authors connect concepts (Small, 1973). Bibliographic coupling identifies relationships between authors or journals based on shared references (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Cobo et al., 2011; Egghe & Rousseau, 2002; Zupic & Eater, 2015).

**Table 1: Bibliometrics of the Search Results in Scopus**

Category	Details
<b>Total number of publications retrieved</b>	226
<b>Number of original research and review articles</b>	193 (85.39%)
<b>Final number of publications considered</b>	126
<b>Open access publications</b>	35 (27.78%)
<b>Research categories covered</b>	
Business Management and Accounting	92 articles
Social Sciences	64 articles
Economics, Econometrics, and Finance	20 articles
Arts and Humanities	12 articles

**Figure 1,2,3: Overlay Visualization of Co-Authorship Metadata (Author Name<sup>fig1</sup>, Organisation<sup>fig 2</sup>, country<sup>fig 3</sup>)**



Source: VOS Viewer

**Co-Authorship: Patterns of Collaboration**

This study provides a comprehensive overview of research collaboration in the field of work-life balance (WLB) among women, emphasizing the contributions of various authors, institutions, and countries. Among 265 authors analyzed, only 11 met the threshold for significant co-authorship, suggesting that while collaboration exists, it remains relatively limited in scope. Such continuity of research fosters opportunities for deeper

collaboration among researchers in the field. For instance, Vasumathi A. and Prithi S., through participation in one publication (*Work-Life Balance of Women Labours in Tannery Industry - A Comparative Empirical Study*), indirectly linked to each other via co-authorship networks.

Notably, prolific authors like Tomlinson J. have made significant contributions to the literature, but their total link strength remains low, pointing to potential opportunities for enhanced collaborative

efforts. Co-authorship networks visualized in Figure 1 reveal seven clusters of collaborative activity, reflecting diverse regional and thematic focuses in WLB research.

The institutional analysis indicates that Sr. School of Building Construction, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, United States, produced papers with high citations during 2014–2015. This was followed by CET School of Management, College of Engineering, Trivandrum, Kerala, India, which showed peak activity in 2017. Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, United Kingdom, gained prominence around 2018. However, the total link strength of these organizations remains weak, suggesting limited cross-institutional collaboration in the field.

The analysis also highlights dominant contributions from the United Kingdom, the United States, and India, as visualized in Figure 3. These countries are key players in WLB research, with India standing out as the leading country for publications related to women's work-life balance.

The analysis identified Tomlinson J. as one of the most highly cited authors in the field of women's WLB. Their work has laid a strong foundation for future research, although collaboration networks around this author remain relatively sparse. The co-authorship patterns emphasize the need for broader

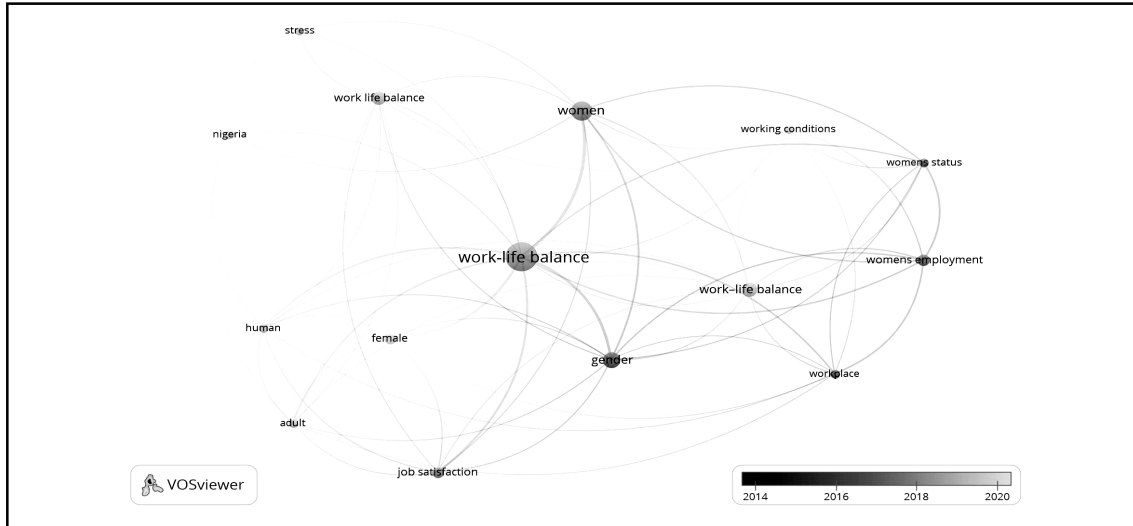
engagement among researchers to strengthen the impact of their findings.

Out of 126 English papers published across 90 journals, *Gender, Work, and Organization* emerged as a prominent journal for high-citation articles in this domain. Other influential journals include *Journal of Work-Life Studies* and *Women's Studies International Forum*, which have significantly contributed to advancing knowledge in this area.

The geographic analysis underscores India as the leading contributor to WLB research, followed by the United Kingdom and the United States. Within India, institutions like CET School of Management, Kerala, and others have shown significant output in recent years. In the broader subcontinent, institutions in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are gradually contributing to this field, although their total publication volumes remain modest compared to India.

Globally, 198 institutions from 34 countries have taken interest in publishing research related to WLB and women. These institutions form a diverse network, as evidenced by the seven clusters identified in the bibliometric analysis. While countries like the United States and the United Kingdom lead in terms of citations and collaborations, there is a growing interest in WLB research within the subcontinent, reflecting the unique cultural and economic challenges faced by women in the region.

**Figure 4: Overlay Visualization of Co-Occurrence Metadata (Keywords)**



Source: VOS Viewer

**Bibliometric Analysis of Keywords**

For the papers published in English, keywords were extracted from 126 articles, focusing on those with a minimum co-occurrence of five. This analysis, performed using VOS Viewer,

identified 15 keywords out of a total of 519 that met the threshold for inclusion. Table 1 below lists these keywords alongside their occurrences and total link strength (TLS), providing insights into the thematic priorities in research on women’s work-life balance (WLB):

**Table 2: Keywords**

ID	Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
499	work-life balance	56	67
463	Women	26	34
156	Gender	18	33
518	work-life balance	14	18
491	work life balance	12	12
134	Female	9	29
482	womens employment	9	25

ID	Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
214	job satisfaction	8	20
282	Nigeria	7	8
413	Stress	6	6
483	womens status	6	19
516	Workplace	6	17
3	Adult	5	23
182	Human	5	23
508	working conditions	5	12

Source: VOS Viewer

Keywords such as “women,” “gender,” “female,” “womens employment,” “job satisfaction,” “stress,” “womens status,” “workplace,” and “working conditions” underscore the multifaceted challenges and dynamics women face in professional settings. The prominence of these terms highlights the centrality of gender-specific experiences in WLB research. For example, “women” and “gender” address societal norms and barriers that disproportionately affect women, while “womens employment” signifies the growing participation of women in the workforce and its implications for work-life balance.

Keywords like “job satisfaction” and “stress” serve as critical indicators of workplace well-being, influencing productivity and employee retention. “Womens status” reflects societal and organizational perceptions of women’s roles, while “workplace” and “working conditions” emphasize the environmental and cultural factors that affect their ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities effectively.

The analysis reveals that WLB research has seen significant diversification in recent years. Emerging keywords such as “flexible work arrangements” and “mental health” indicate a shift towards understanding how modern workplace policies impact work-life dynamics. The keyword “Nigeria” also stands out, reflecting the country’s importance as a case study for examining WLB in diverse socio-economic contexts. Nigeria’s growing labor force participation among women, coupled with challenges like gender inequality and limited access to childcare, provides unique insights into the intersection of cultural norms and employment.

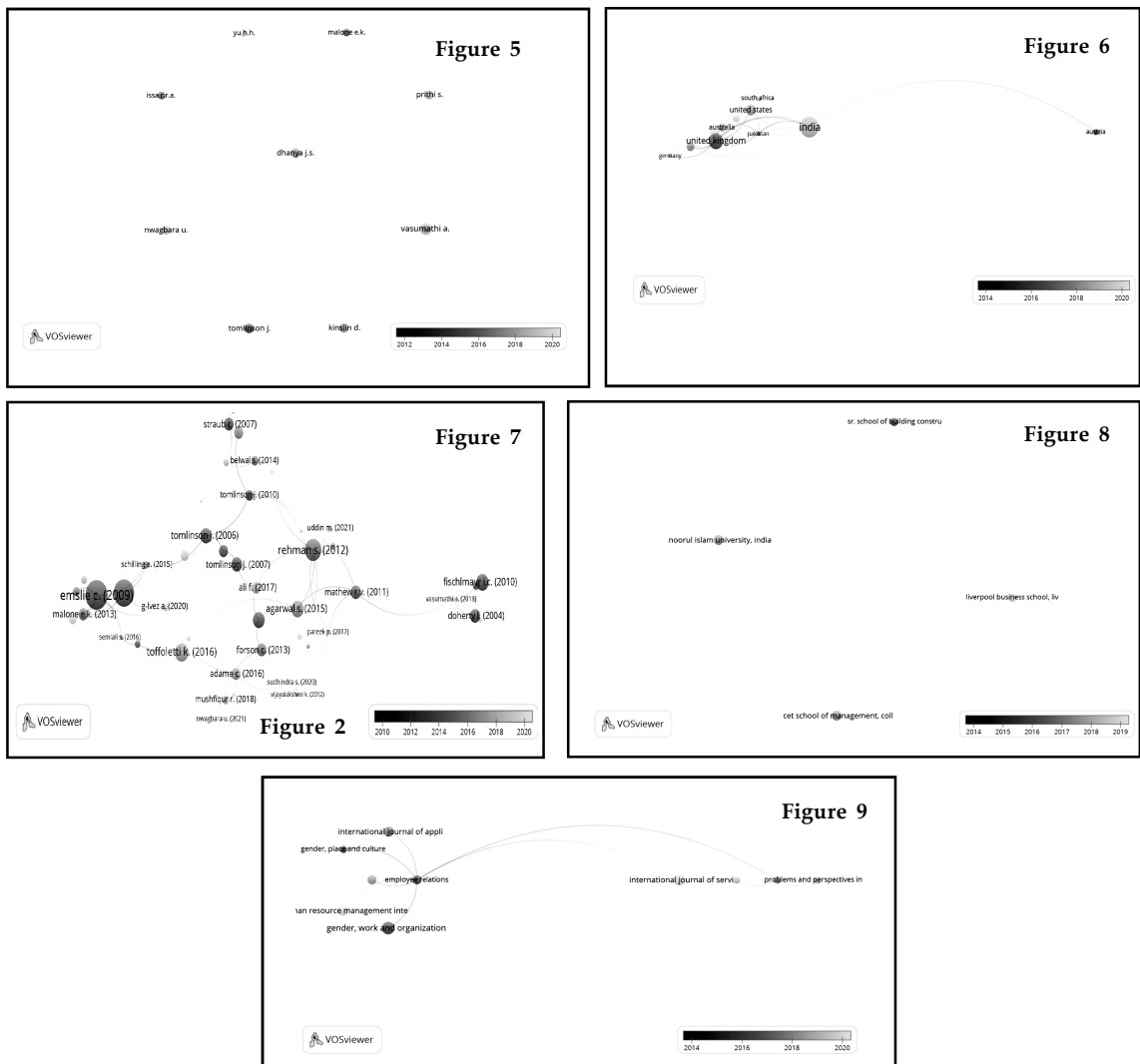
In the subcontinent, themes such as “organizational policies,” “family support,” and “gender equity” are increasingly gaining traction. The rising frequency of terms like “remote work” and “hybrid work models” suggests an adaptation to post-pandemic work environments, which have redefined traditional WLB frameworks. These trends highlight the necessity of context-

specific research that addresses both structural and cultural factors impacting women’s WLB in the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

Through this bibliometric analysis, researchers can better understand the

evolving priorities and challenges in WLB scholarship. By identifying these trends, policymakers and organizations can develop targeted interventions to foster equitable work environments, ultimately contributing to more sustainable and inclusive workplaces.

**Figure 5-9: Overlay Visualization of Citation Metadata (Author<sup>fig 5</sup>, Country<sup>fig 6</sup>, Document<sup>fig 7</sup>, Organisation<sup>fig 8</sup>, Source<sup>fig 9</sup>)**



### Citation Analysis

Citation analysis provides valuable insights into the influence and impact of key authors and articles in the field of women's work-life balance (WLB) research. Among the 126 studies analyzed, Tomlinson J. emerged as the most cited author with 152 citations across three publications, followed by Fischlmayr I.C. with 97 citations. Other significant contributors include Issa R.R.A. and Malone E.K., each with 63 citations. Notably, the article "'Live to work' or 'work to live'? A qualitative study of gender and work-life balance among men and women in mid-life" by Emslie C. and Hunt K. holds the highest citation count at 222, reflecting its foundational role in the field (Table 3).

Country-level analysis reveals that India has published the highest number of papers (39) on women and work-life balance, followed by the United Kingdom (24) and the United States (11). Interestingly, India also features prominently in co-citation and bibliographic coupling networks, with a total link strength (TLS) of 1030, placing it second only to the United Kingdom, which leads with a TLS of 1038. This indicates India's significant contribution to global research, while also highlighting the potential for enhanced international collaboration (Figures 5-9).

The average citation count for the analyzed studies was 27.93, with citation counts ranging from 2 to 222. Organizational analysis of TLS identified two Indian institutions with the highest TLS, collectively contributing 712 to the

global network of WLB research. These include CET School of Management, College of Engineering, Trivandrum, Kerala, and Noorul Islam University, further underscoring the role of Indian institutions in advancing the field (Figure 8).

Prominent journals in this domain include "Gender, Work and Organization" and "International Journal of Human Resource Management," which have published high-citation articles. These journals serve as critical platforms for disseminating research on gender dynamics and WLB, shaping the theoretical and empirical understanding of the topic (Figure 9).

The overlap between co-authorship, keyword analysis, and citation patterns provides a holistic view of the research landscape. Keywords such as "women," "work-life balance," "gender," and "job satisfaction" are not only prevalent in the analyzed publications but also align closely with the themes of the most cited articles and authors. This convergence underscores the interconnected nature of research on women's WLB, where key themes and influential researchers collectively shape the discourse.

Additionally, the citation patterns reflect the collaborative networks identified through co-authorship analysis. For example, Tomlinson J.'s high citation count corresponds to their participation in collaborative networks with other prominent authors. This interconnectedness highlights the importance of fostering research partnerships to address complex issues

related to women's WLB in the subcontinent.

### **Key Research Areas in Women's Work-Life Balance: Insights from Developed Countries**

In recent years, the study of women's work-life balance (WLB) in developed countries has garnered significant scholarly attention, focusing on key themes such as managerial roles, expatriate experiences, and the impact of workplace policies on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Tomlinson and Durbin (2010) examined female part-time managers, highlighting how WLB profoundly influences their career aspirations and mobility, while Tomlinson (2007) compared working-time patterns in the UK and the US, revealing how employment regulations and welfare systems shape WLB. Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) explored the WLB challenges faced by Austrian female expatriates, emphasizing cultural adjustments and family responsibilities, while Malone and Issa (2013; 2014) linked enhanced WLB in the U.S. construction industry to increased job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. Additionally, Doherty (2004) evaluated the varying effectiveness of WLB initiatives based on organizational context, and Kamenou (2008) integrated intersectionality into WLB discussions, underscoring the importance of addressing cultural diversity in workplace policies.

Further studies have expanded on the relationship between WLB and professional growth, such as Straub (2007), who demonstrated that robust

WLB initiatives are mutually beneficial for women's career development in Europe. Emslie and Hunt (2009) advocated for gender-sensitive policies by highlighting the societal expectations women face in balancing work and personal life. Watts (2009) focused on the unique pressures of male-dominated industries like civil engineering, while Yu (2019; 2022) examined the role of family-friendly policies in reducing turnover intentions in U.S. federal law enforcement. Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012) identified systemic inequities affecting women physicians, and Sommerlad (2016) critiqued structural barriers in the legal profession, calling for reforms to foster inclusivity. Other studies, such as those by Annink and den Dulk (2012), Adame et al. (2016), and Toffoletti and Starr (2016), emphasized the need for targeted support for self-employed women, prioritized WLB for employee retention, and discussed gendered challenges in academia, respectively. Collectively, these studies highlight the complex, multifaceted nature of WLB and the need for systemic changes to support women's professional and personal lives.

### **Key Research Areas in Women's Work-Life Balance: Insights from Indian subcontinent**

In the Indian subcontinent, the examination of work-life balance (WLB) for women is significantly shaped by socio-cultural factors. Agarwal and Lenka (2015) highlighted the struggles faced by women entrepreneurs in navigating cultural expectations, underscoring the

necessity for supportive policies and networks tailored to the unique challenges within the subcontinent. Similarly, Akanji et al. (2020) explored the coping mechanisms employed by female professionals, stressing the importance of workplace flexibility and social support systems in enhancing their WLB experiences.

Research conducted by Dhanya and Kinslin (2017a) focused on the effects of WLB on female educators in Kerala, India, revealing that flexible policies contribute positively to job satisfaction and employee retention. Their subsequent studies (2017b; 2017c) proposed the “Clair model,” advocating for comprehensive institutional strategies to empower women in academia throughout the subcontinent. Additionally, Prithi and Vasumathi (2018; 2020) investigated women working in the tannery industry, identifying demographic factors that influence WLB and emphasizing the necessity for improved working conditions. Vijayalakshmi (2012) examined the challenges encountered by women police personnel in Hyderabad, highlighting the urgent need for specialized policies addressing the demands of high-stress professions. Vijayan and Jones (2016) further illustrated the critical role of organizational culture in fostering WLB for women professionals in Kerala, reaffirming the need for context-specific strategies within the subcontinent.

### **Comparative Analysis**

The examination of women’s work-life balance (WLB) reveals both stark

differences and notable similarities between developed countries and the Indian subcontinent. In developed countries, research often emphasizes the influence of workplace policies and managerial roles on WLB, highlighting the importance of organizational commitment to support female employees (Tomlinson & Durbin, 2010). Women in these contexts generally have access to structured policies that facilitate work-life integration, such as flexible working hours and family-friendly initiatives, which have been shown to enhance job satisfaction and career progression (Yu, 2022). Conversely, in the Indian subcontinent, socio-cultural dynamics play a more pronounced role, with traditional gender roles and societal expectations significantly impacting women’s ability to achieve WLB. Studies by Agarwal and Lenka (2015) illustrate how cultural constraints limit entrepreneurial activities among women, indicating a critical need for tailored policies that address these unique challenges. Despite these differences, both regions highlight the necessity of supportive structures to mitigate stress and enhance the well-being of women in the workforce, pointing to a universal recognition of the importance of WLB for female employees.

The comparative analysis of WLB research across developed countries and the Indian subcontinent provides valuable lessons for future studies. One key insight is the importance of contextual factors in shaping women’s experiences, suggesting that researchers should adopt a culturally

sensitive approach when investigating WLB issues. For instance, while developed countries may focus on organizational policies and support systems, studies in the subcontinent should prioritize understanding the socio-cultural barriers that women face, as demonstrated by Uddin's (2021) findings on the compounded effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, there is a pressing need to integrate intersectionality into WLB research, acknowledging the diverse experiences of women based on factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and professional sectors (Kamenou, 2008). Adapting methodologies that incorporate these variables will provide a more nuanced understanding of WLB across different contexts, paving the way for more effective interventions and policy recommendations that cater to the specific needs of women in various regions.

### Conclusions

Research on women's work-life balance (WLB) reveals significant challenges faced by women in the Indian subcontinent compared to developed countries, with socio-cultural dynamics, limited resources, and traditional gender roles affecting their ability to manage personal and professional responsibilities (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015; Uddin, 2021). In developed countries, policies such as paid parental leave, flexible working hours, and workplace diversity initiatives provide a more supportive environment for women, enhancing their job satisfaction and career progression (Tomlinson & Durbin, 2010; Malone & Issa, 2013). However, in the Indian subcontinent, the

absence of such policies, particularly in informal sectors, and the prevalence of traditional caregiving expectations hinder women's opportunities for professional growth (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015). This study underscores the need for culturally sensitive, context-specific policies to address these challenges, advocating for the adoption of family-friendly policies and flexible work arrangements to improve job satisfaction and retention rates among women (Dhanya & Kinslin, 2017a; Yu, 2022). India's progress, with initiatives like maternity benefits and the Women Reservation Bill, shows promise, but there is still work to be done to ensure these policies reach women across various sectors, especially informal and rural ones (Akanji, Mordi, & Ajonbadi, 2020).

Future research should focus on several critical areas to further understand and improve WLB in the Indian subcontinent. First, the concept of intersectionality, exploring how ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status affect women's WLB, is vital (Kamenou, 2008). Longitudinal studies tracking WLB changes over time, especially in response to crises like COVID-19, are necessary to understand long-term impacts on women's careers and personal lives (Mahi Uddin, 2021). Evaluating the effectiveness of existing family-friendly policies and conducting comparative studies across different subcontinent nations can identify successful strategies to address WLB challenges and inform future policy development (Vijayan & Jones, 2016). By exploring these areas, future research can contribute to better policies and practices

that support gender equity in the workforce and promote WLB for women in the region.

### Conflict of Interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests that are directly or indirectly related to this research work.

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