AAMC 2019
The 13th Asian Academy of Management International Conference 2019

CONCEPTUALIZING WORK-LIFE BALANCE PRACTICES: THE CASE OF THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

Oscar Dousin (a)*, Ngan Collins (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy, University Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia
(b) School of Management, College of Business, RMIT University, Australia

Abstract

The concept of employee well-being and work-life balance (WLB) practices emerged to be a significant topic in human resource management (HRM). It has received a noteworthy attention from academics, HR practitioners, policy makers and individual employees. The paper intends to revisit these concepts from the perspective of the healthcare sector in Malaysia. The issues of well-being and WLB became significant for the healthcare professionals in Malaysia due to a serious shortage of personnel at both national and state level. This situation has forced doctors and nurses to work in long hours, high work demands with less flexibility. This paper highlighted three WLB practices: flexible working hours, supportive supervision and family-friendly work practices and policies to influence employee well-being. In addition, it also emphasizes gender as a potential moderator to the relationship. The antecedents and consequences affecting WLB are discussed besides the proposed conceptual framework is being put forward for future research.

Keywords: Work-life balance practices, employee well-being, gender, healthcare professions, Malaysia.

1. Introduction

In recent years, employees' perceive work not only as their need but also as a basis of personal satisfaction. Work-life benefits and practices is seen to emerged as one of the motivating factors to assist in achieving employee personal and professional goals (Joshi et al., 2002). The introduction of WLB practices and policies became popular these days because of its potential value for both employers and individuals through improvement of individual general well-being, life satisfaction, organisational productivity, commitment, talent retention and loyalty (Allen et al., 2000; Carrasquer & Martin, 2005; Dousin, 2017; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Hammer et al., 2008; Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007; Nelson et al., 1990; Scandura & Lankau, 1997).

In the healthcare industry, medical professionals have been known for their exhaustive nature of work. In most countries, these professions are demanded to work in an extended hours with a great work pressure and demand besides lacking of work flexibility, which has a substantial influence on their well-being and work-life balance. In Malaysia, this profession has suffered with a shortage of healthcare professionals as measured by international standards. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the doctor to population ratio is 1:600, but in 2016 at national level, this ratio was 1:633 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016; Dousin, 2017). This issue is worsening in the East Malaysia states of Sabah and Sarawak. For the state of Sabah, the doctor to population ratio in 2018 was 1:1200 while in Sarawak for 2015 was 1: 1104. In relations to the nursing profession, Malaysia is also suffering with the issue of nurses leaving the country for a better employment opportunity overseas, such as in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Singapore or Australia (Augustin, 2017; BERNAMA, 2008; myMetro, 2014; Yazid, 2010). The shortage of personnel leads to a high work demand and pressure with extended working hours which negatively impact of their well-being and WLB.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. The Relationship between Work-Life Balance and Employee Well-being

Studies on WLB in the healthcare sector in western countries are extensive but rarely concentrated on the Asian context, specifically Malaysia. Several studies suggested that workplace practices, policies and support to WLB programs helps to improve employee well-being, organisational commitment, job performance and job satisfaction (Cegarra-Leiva et al., 2012; Dousin et al., 2019; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Haar, 2013; Morganson et al., 2010; Noor, 2011). Work-life conflict will occur due to employees' personal experiences of imbalance between work and personal life. Moen et al. (2008) defined conflict in relations to WLB as tensions or problems due to intrusion or incompatible pressures of individual's work and family roles. A sound WLB policy in organisations could alleviate the issue, which could improve employee well-being and organisational performance (Haar, 2013).

Moreover, Mohamed and Mohamad (2012) revealed that the current nursing shortage in Malaysia have a direct impact on their well-being quality of life. They suggested two strategies to improving these issues, (i) transparency in communication and career growth and (ii) WLB practices. The study also recommended a 'voluntary alternate scheduling' practices, which is seen to improve WLB besides permits nurses some choice and control over their working days and hours. In addition, Al-Dubai et al. (2013) also discovered that working hours, work overload, employer-employee relationship and compensation

packages are key factors to influence doctors' well-being and burnout. Other studies highlighted the significance of supervisor support, flexibility in working hours and schedule as well as spousal support, family involvement to positively impact on employee well-being and quality of work-life (Aziz et al., 2011; Md-Sidin et al., 2010; Rose et al., 2006). Subsequently, personal and professional support system (e.g. spouse and supervisor support) is seen as a coping mechanism to reduce employees' work-life conflict, improves well-being and their quality of life (Frone et al., 1992; Frone et al., 1997; Greenhaus et al., 1997; Higgins et al., 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1992). Furthermore, a recent study by Dousin et al. (2019) revealed that WLB practices and policies could improve employees' job satisfaction which eventually enhances their performance at work.

Therefore, WLB practices are an important predictor to employee well-being. The study suggested three concepts of WLB practices, mostly being debated in the current literatures, (i) flexible working hours (ii) supportive supervision (iii) family-friendly work practices and policies.

1.1.2. The Moderating Role of in the Relationship between Work-Life Balance and Employee Well-being

In several current literatures, gender is seen to become an important topic in relations to WLB or work-life conflict. Women in the Eastern countries tend to experience higher work-life conflicts than men, besides sharing more family and household responsibilities (Chandra, 2012; Hassan et al., 2010; Khan & Fazili, 2018). This is due to the increased of women participation in the labour market and they are expected to fulfil both work and family roles simultaneously (Irwan & Azaian, 2011). In the Asian culture, women and working mother are expected to have a total responsibility for household duties as well as to contribute to the household income while working on a full-time basis (Chandra, 2012). Besides, married women and mother with younger children are facing a higher work-life conflict (Khan & Fazili, 2018). Thus, some studies revealed that this group of women would favour to work in an organisation with standard working hours with a minimum contact with clients in order to reduce their emotional burden and work-life conflict (Deery & Jago, 2015; Lawson et al., 2013).

Since most scholars have predicted the influence of gender role to WLB, it is substantial to incorporate this variable in the WLB studies. Gender role is crucial to be explored as a possible moderating variable in the relationships between WLB practices and employee well-being. Since most Malaysian female employees are still bound to the eastern values and norms, they have the tendency to face a higher work-life conflict (Irwan & Azaian, 2011; Chandra, 2012; Khan & Fazili, 2018).

1.1.3. Conceptualising the Relationships between Work-Life Balance Practices, Gender and Employee Well-Being in the Context of the Healthcare Industry in Malaysia

Over the past years, WLB has become an important concept to be implemented in most organisations. As the nature of job become more complex which forces employees to work under a high pressure WLB practices and policies seen as a solutions due to its potential value for both employers and employees (De-Bruin & Dupuis, 2004; Hosie et al., 2004; Wickham et al., 2006). WLB practices of flexible working hours, supportive supervision and family-friendly policies and practices are predicted to influence employee well-being in most current and contemporary HRM literature. Besides, gender (male vs. female) is also predicted to moderate this relationship. Since female employees have the tendency to face a higher

work-life conflict, a positive WLB practices and well-being (job and life satisfaction) would be stronger for females than males. These topics lead to the following proposed conceptual framework below (Figure 01).
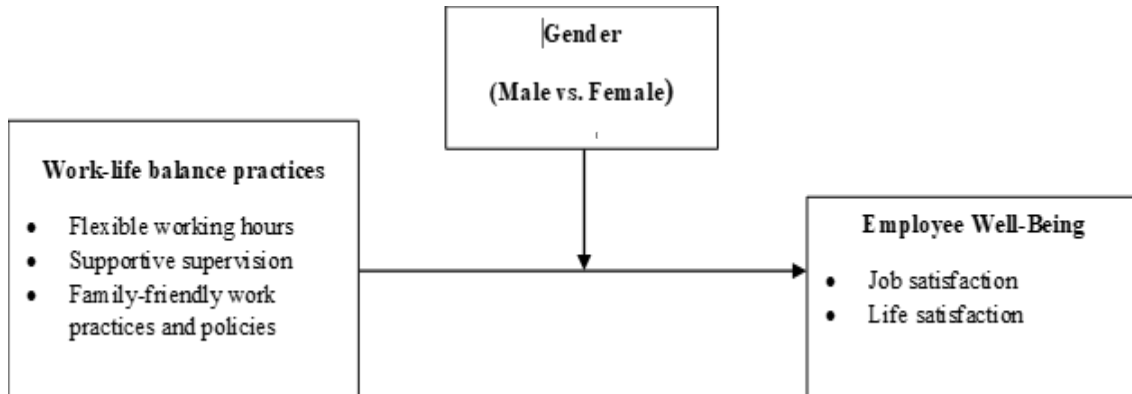
Figure 01. Proposed conceptual framework

2. Problem Statement

The importance of employee well-being and work-life balance has emerged to become an important dimension in the contemporary HRM. Employee well-being refers to an individual experiences' incompatible demands between work and non-work roles which leads to a psychological discomfort and negative well-being (Aryee et al., 2005; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Haar, 2013; Huffman et al., 2008; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Morganson et al., 2010). Job satisfaction defined as the satisfying emotional state resulting from an individual evaluation of their job to accomplishing their job values as well as their general attitudes towards the working condition, job promotion, salary, relationship with supervisors and colleagues (Blum & Naylor, 1968; Locke, 1969). Some studies found out that employee job satisfaction levels will decline due to the increase in their work-life conflict experiences (Aryee et al., 2005; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). In addition, life satisfaction refers to individual evaluations of their quality of life or a happiness which requires total satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984; Shin & Johnson, 1978; Tatarkiewicz, 1976). In relations to work-life balance, a balance between work and non-work activities would improves individual overall experiences to life satisfaction (Babin & Boles, 1998).

Several scholars have studied the relation between WLB practices and employee well-being (Aziz et al. 2011; Deery & Jago 2015; Dousin, 2017; Hassan et al., 2010; Jamieson et al., 2013; Mahpul & Abdullah, 2011; Md-Sidin et al., 2010; Noor, 2011; Tanaka et al., 2011). However, there is a lack of study investigating the moderating role of gender in relations to WLB practices to employee well-being. Besides, very little studies on these issues have been conducted in the perspective of the healthcare sector in East Malaysia context. Thus, it is substantial to investigate the issue among healthcare professions to better understand their motivation, attraction and retention in the sector.

H1: Training and development positively related to intention to stay.

3. Research Questions

There are two proposed research questions of the study: (i) what is the relationship between WLB practices and employee well-being? and (ii) does gender moderate the relationship between WLB practices and employee well-being?

4. Purpose of the Study

The study proposed to investigate the relationship between WLB practices and employee well-being as well as the influence of gender as a moderator.

5. Research Methods

The population for this research inclusive of academics currently attached teaching in Malaysia currently. In this study the individuals comprise of working academics in three selected categories of private higher education institutions in Malaysia, namely in private universities, private college universities and foreign private university branches excluding the private colleges are chosen. The unit of analysis justified through the higher percentage of working academics which is more than 60% attached to these three categories of private higher education institutions in Malaysia compare to the numbers of individual academics in private colleges. This study applied self-administered questionnaire personally distributed and by mail for data collection. In total 970 questionnaires are distributed to samples in 97 private higher education institutions in Malaysia. The questionnaires were distributed to the sample through the respective institutions Human Resource Department and partly distributed personally by the researcher to the locations located nearby. The measurements used in this research were adopted from various previous studies with acceptable reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha).

6. Findings

The findings of the study revealed a conceptual proposed framework that links WLB practices and employee well-being as well as moderating role of gender.

7. Conclusion

WLB could be explored from two lenses: an employee and organisational perspective. From an employee perspective, WLB is seen as the maintenance of a balance between responsibilities at work and home besides their perceptions on the benefits of working in an organisation which assist them to achieve an adequate WLB (Bardoel et al., 1998; De Cieri et al., 2005; Russell & Bowman, 2000). In an organisational setting, WLB practices supports HR policies to promote flexible working hours and arrangements, child and dependent care and family and parental leave (Bardoel et al., 1998; Kramar, 1997), supportive supervision from supervisors and colleagues as well as family-friendly practices and policies.

In the healthcare industry in Malaysia, work-life conflict is a result of the shortages of healthcare professionals due to the rigorous development of the industry itself. In return, it will negatively influence employee well-being. This paper conceptualise three key areas of WLB practices, namely flexible working

hours, supportive supervision and family-friendly practices and policies to influence employee well-being. Besides, it also emphasised the significance of gender to be investigated as a potential moderator. An extended and empirical study should be conducted to better understand these issues, besides, the result of the future study could provide an insight to the Ministry of Health, Malaysia and State health department to creating a sound WLB policies and practices to improving retention, attraction and motivation among healthcare professions in Malaysia.

References

Al-Dubai, S. A. R., Ganasegeran, K., Perianayagam, W., & Rampal, K. G. (2013). Emotional burnout, perceived sources of job stress, professional fulfillment, and engagement among medical residents in Malaysia, *The Scientific World Journal*, *2013*.

Allen, T. A., Herst, D. E. L., Bruck, C. S., & Sutton, M. (2000). Consequences associated with work-to-family conflict: A review and agenda for future research, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *5*(2), 278-308.

Aryee, S., Srinivas, E. S., & Hoon, T. H. (2005). Rhythms of life: Antecedents and outcomes of work-family balance in employed parents. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *90*(1), 132-46.

Augustin, R. (2017, May 7). No oversupply, high demand for Malaysian nurses. *Free Malaysia Today*.

Aziz, R. A., Nadzar, F. M., Husaini, H., Maarof, A., Radzi, S. M., & Ismail, I. (2011). Quality of work life of librarians in government academic libraries in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. *The International Information & Library Review*, *43*(3), 149-58.

Babin, B. J., & Boles, J. S. (1998). Employee behavior in a service environment: A model and test of potential differences between men and women. *Journal of Marketing*, *62*(2), 77-91.

Bardoel, E., Tharenou, P., & Moss, S. (1998). Organisational predictors of work-family practices. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, *36*(3), 31-49.

BERNAMA (2008). Jururawat Masih Kurang, *BERNAMA*, 2008.

Blum, M. L., & Naylor, J. C. (1968). *Industrial psychology: Its theoretical and social foundations*. Harper & Row.

Carrasquer, P., & Martin, A. (2005). La politica de conciliacion de la vida laboral y familiar en la negociacion colectiva. Un aspecto de la estrategia europea de empleo. *Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales*, *23*(1), 131-50.

Cegarra-Leiva, D., Sanchez-Vidal, M. E., & Cegarra-Navarro, J.G. (2012). Work life balance and the retention of managers in Spanish SMEs. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *23*(1), 91-108.

Chandra, V. (2012). Work-Life Balance: Eastern and Western perspectives. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *23*(5), 1040-56.

De Cieri, H., Holmes, B., Abbott, J., & Pettit, T. (2005). Achievements and challenges for work/life balance strategies in Australian organizations. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *16*(1), 90-103.

De-Bruin, A., & Dupuis, A. (2004). Work - life balance? Insight from non - standard work. *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations*, *29*(1), 21-37.

Deery, M., & Jago, L. (2015). Revisiting talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *27*(3), 453-72.

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2016). *Press Release: Social Statistics Bulletin, Malaysia, 2016*. The Office of Chief Statistician, Department of Statistics.

Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin, 95*(3), 524-75.

Dousin, O. (2017). *Work-life balance practices in the healthcare industry: the case of East Malaysia*. (Doctoral Dissertation). RMIT University.

Dousin, O., Collins, N., & Kler, B. K. (2019). Work-life balance, employee job performance and satisfaction among doctors and nurses in Malaysia. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, *9*(4), 306-319.

Frone, M. R., Russell, M., & Cooper, M. L. (1992). Antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict: Testing a model of the work-family interface. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *77*(1), 65-78.

Frone, M. R., Yardley, J. K., & Markel, K. S. (1997). Developing and testing an integrative model of the work-family interface. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *50*(2), 145-67.

Greenhaus, J. H., Collins, K. M., & Shaw, J. D. (2003). The relation between work-family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *63*, 510-31.

Greenhaus, J. H., Collins, K. M., Singh, R., & Parasuraman, S. (1997). Work and family influences on departure from public accounting. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *50*(2), 249-70.

Haar, J. M. (2013). Testing a new measure of work-life balance: A study of parent and non-parent employees from New Zealand. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *24*(17), 3305-24.

Hammer, L. B., Kossek, E. E., Yragui, N. L., Bodner, T. E., & Hanson, G. C. (2008). Development and validation of a multidimensional measure of family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB). *Journal of Management*, *35*(4), 837-56.

Hassan, Z., Dollard, M. F., & Winefield, A. H. (2010). Work-family conflict in East vs Western countries. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, *17*(1), 30-49.

Higgins, C. A., Duxbury, L. E., & Irving, R. H. (1992). Work-family conflict in the dual-career family. *Organization Behavior and Human Decision Process*, *56*(3), 388-421.

Hosie, P., Forster, N., & Sevastos, P. (2004). The impact of global pressures on Australian managers affective well-being and performance. *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, *12*(1), 73-91.

Huffman, A. H., Youngcourt, S. S., Payne, S. C., & Castro, C. A. (2008). The importance of construct breadth when examining inter-role conflict, *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *68*(3), 515-30.

Hughes, J., & Bozionelos, N. (2007). Work life balance as source of job dissatisfaction and withdrawal attitudes. An exploratory study on the views of male workers, *Personnel Review*, *36*(1), 145-54.

Irwan, N. M., & Azaian, A. N. (2011). The prevalence of work-family conflict among mothers in Peninsular Malaysia. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *1*(17), 154-61.

Jamieson, I., Kirk, R., & Andrew, C. (2013). Work-life balance: what generation Y nurses want. *Nurse Leader*, *11*(3), 36-9.

Joshi, S., Leichne, J., Melanson, K., Pruna, C., Sager, N., Story, C. J., & Williams, K. (2002). *Work–Life Balance: A Case of Social Responsibility or Competitive Advantage?* Human Resources Department, Georgia Institute of Technology.

Khan, O. F., & Fazili, A. I, (2018). Work-life balance: A conceptual review. *Journal of Strategic Human Resource Management, 5*(2).

Kramar, R. (1997). Developing and implementing work and family policies: The implications for human resource policies. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, *35*(3), 25-32.

Lawson, K. M., Davis, K. D., Crouter, A. C., & O'Neill, J. W. (2013). Understanding work-family spillover in hotel managers. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *33*, 273-81.

Locke, E. A. (1969). What is job satisfaction?. *Organization Behavior and Human Performance*, *4*, 309-36.

Mahpul, I. N., & Abdullah, N. A. (2011). The prevalence of work-family conflict among mothers in Peninsular Malaysia. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *1*(17), 154-61.

Md-Sidin, S., Sambasivan, M., & Ismail, I. (2010). Relationship between work-family conflict and quality of life: An investigation into the role of social support. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *25*(1), 58-81.

Mesmer-Magnus, J. S., & Viswesvaran, C. (2005). Convergence between measures of work-to-family and family-to-work conflict: A meta-analysic examination. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *67*, 215-32.

Moen, P., Kelly, E., & Huang, R. (2008). Fit inside the work-family black box: An ecology of life course, cycles of control reframing. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *81*, 411-33.

Mohamed, W. N. and Mohamad, M. (2012). Measuring the quality of nursing work life in public hospitals, paper presented to International Conference on Management, Langkawi Kedah, Malaysia.

http://www.internationalconference.com.my/proceeding/2nd_icm2012_proceeding/076_187_2ndICM2012_Proceeding_PG1018_1028. pdf

Morganson, V. J., Major, D. A., Oborn, K. L., Verive, J. M., & Heelan, M. P. (2010). Comparing telework locations and traditional work arrangements: Differences in work-life balance support, job satisfaction and inclusion., *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *25*(6), 578-95.

myMetro (2014). Jururawat kita jadi "rebutan". Harian Metro.

Nelson, D. L. Quick, J. C. Hitt, M. A., & Moesel, D. (1990). Politics, lack of career progress and work/home conflict: Stress and strain for working women. *Sex Roles*, *23*(3/4), 169-85.

Noor, K. M. (2011). Work-Life Balance and Intention to Leave among Academics in Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, *2*(11), 240-8.

Parasuraman, S., Greenhaus, J. H., & Granrose, C. S. (1992). Role stressors, social support and wellbeing among two-career couples. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *13*, 339-56.

Rose, R. C., Beh, L., Uli, J., & Idris, K. (2006). Quality of work life: implications of career dimensions. *Journal of Social Sciences*, *2*(2), 61-7.

Russell, G., & Bowman, L. (2000). *Work and family: Current thinking, research and practice*. Macquarie University.

Scandura, T. A., & Lankau, M. J. (1997). Relationships of gender, family responsibility and flexible work hours to organizational commitment and job satisfaction. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *18*, 377-91.

Shin, D. C., & Johnson, D. M. (1978). Avowed happiness as an overall assessment of quality of life. *Social Indicators Research*, *5*, 475-92.

Tanaka, S., Maruyama, Y., Ooshima, S., & Ito, H. (2011). Working condition of nurses in Japan: awareness of work-life balance among nursing personnel at a university hospital. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, *20*(1-2), 12-22.

Tatarkiewicz, W. (1976). *Analysis of happiness*. Martinus Nijhoff.

Wickham, M., Parker, M., & Fishwick, S. (2006). Exploring a work-life balance impact audit: an aid to informed consensus?. *ANZAM, 1*, 1-12.

Yazid, Z. (2010). Gaji Lumayan Jadi Tarikan. *Utusan Online*, http://ww1.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2010&dt=0203&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Rencana&pg=re_09.htm