

# Work-Life Balance in Relation to Workload Experience and Work-Life Programme: A Study in a Government Ministry of Malaysia

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## Abstract

*This study focused on the work-life balance and gender which was tested using t-test; and work-life balance in relation to workload experience at workplace, and work-life programme valued as important among staff at Ministry of Youth and Sports in Putrajaya, both of which were measured using Pearson correlation. The findings indicated that staff at the Ministry experienced a balance in their work-life, regardless of gender, while having intermediate level of workload at the workplace. The relationship between workload and work-life balance among staff was negatively correlated. Although work-life balance was reported at a satisfying level, none of the work-life programmes valued by the employees were associated significantly with work-life balance experienced by them. Nevertheless, there is hope that programmes valued by staff as important to them and capable of reducing workload levels are applicable for future consideration by respective parties in implementing policies related to the work-life programme.*

**Keywords:** Work-life balance, workload, work-life programme, gender difference

## 1.0 Introduction

Besides the job, other aspects of life, such as family, friends, and community, are also important in one's life (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Khairunne zam, 2011; Poelmans, Kalliath, & Brough, 2008; Yuile, Chang, Gudmundsson, & Sukanlaya Sawang, 2012). In accordance to that, employee demand for work-life balance also increases as they want to have sufficient time to be effective at the workplace as well as during non-working hours (Nafishah, Shafiz Affendi, Shafiz Affendi, & Wan Rozaini, 2009).

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Work-life balance is not a new term. Its usage in everyday language has been around for a number of years. Even though the term “work-life balance” has been a popular term in the past few years, it was actually coined in 1986 (Lockwood, 2003). This term reflects the situation where one juggles between work and non-work aspects in life (Poelmans & Caligiuri, 2008).

Balancing between work and life is becoming a challenge for both male and female workers. A survey conducted in Asia by a non-profit firm, Catalyst, reported that both genders are now facing difficulties in balancing their heavy responsibilities in work and to meet their needs for non-work activities. Job obligation prevents respondents from having a balanced work-life (Bahree, 2012).

Hence, work-life balance and workload are said to be interrelated, especially in developing countries. A study conducted in Malaysia reported that workload had effects on work-life balance among employees (Amat, Fontaine, & Choy, 2003). It also supported the finding by Ahsan, Zaini, Yong, and Syed (2009), where a positive correlation exists between workload and work-life balance. This positive relationship indicates that a person suffers higher conflict when a higher level of workload is reported.

Therefore, it is important for an organisation to look into the problem and provide employees with relevant initiatives or policies, and programmes. Work-life programmes are usually implemented to create a balance between work and life, and finally improve the organisation’s overall success (Poelmans, Kalliath, & Brough, 2008). Taking Asian countries as an example, the Catalyst survey found that programmes for work-life balance are still lacking. Respondents admitted that the gap still exists, in which work-life programmes provided by the organisations do not meet employee expectations and needs for work-life programmes (Bahree, 2012).

The development of the workplace with family and work-life balance policy in Malaysia is said to be at an early stage (Aminah, 2007). Work-life programmes, especially in the government sector, are not widely implemented and studies on it are still very limited. This particular study set out to identify any gender differences and work-life balance among staff, to explore the relationship between workload and work-life balance among staff, and lastly to examine the relationship between work-life balance and work-life programmes that are valued by staff.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Work-life Balance**

Work-life balance was defined as a situation where a person may allocate time to meet different requirements of work and life, based on priority and demands (Yuile, Chang,

Gudmundsson, & Sawang, 2012). It is the way individuals cope with subjects related to their work against non-work domains (Khairunneezam, 2011; Lewis & Gruyere, 2010). Non-work domain includes oneself, family, friends, and the community at large (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw 2003; Khairunneezam, 2011; Poelmans, Kalliath, & Brough, 2008).

Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) looked into work and family domains in which a person has equal involvement in both aspects. From this perspective, there should be a balance between work and family. Work-life balance helps people to efficiently manage between work and all other non-work activities related to him or her.

Many studies focused more on family and work in measuring work-life balance. Individuals who spend more time on family matters than work would experience a higher quality of life than balanced individuals who, in turn, would experience a higher quality of life than those who spend more time on work than family (Greenhaus et al., 2003). In short, work-life balance is a satisfaction that can be achieved for having good time for work and non-work activities in life.

## 2.2 *Work-life Balance and Gender*

Studies based on gender for work-life balance revealed different results on which group has good work-life balance and which group faces difficulties. Noor Fatima and Shamim (2012), and Sumaira and Muhammad Azam (2012), for example, discovered that males would enjoy more work-life balance than females. However, a survey conducted by University of Hong Kong reported men workers faced more work-life imbalance (Welford, 2008).

Meanwhile, some other studies reported that females would experience more work-life conflicts compared to males (Bond, 2004; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; O'Brien Bachman, 2011). The cause of the conflict is supported by findings in which female respondents found themselves having problems to catch up with their tasks as a mother, or a caregiver, and an employee to their organisations (Bond, 2004; Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Soo, 2008). Nevertheless, it was argued that regardless of gender, being a parent is associated with decrease in work-life balance. British men, for example, faced pressure to become more involved fathers, while at the same time working the longest hours compared to those in other countries in Europe (Bond, 2004; Emslie & Hunt, 2009).

Research by Doble and Supriya (2010) supported the notion that both genders view that the boundary between work and personal life is blurred. Supporting the Theory of Spillover, their findings reported that both men and women do not have enough time to spend with their families, and work pressures would affected their quality of family life (Doble & Supriya 2010). Research by French and Daniels (2008) also showed that there is no significant difference between men and women in relation to work-life balance.

### 2.3 *Work-life Balance and Workload*

Heavy workload, as cited from Leiter and Schaufeli, was defined as the view that a person has too many things to do (Ahmad Zainal Abidin, Che Mohd Zulkifli, & Jamal Nordin, 2010). Excessive workload is seen as a problem based on previous findings, which is one causal factor for work-life conflict (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; French & Daniels, 2008; Lua & Imilia, 2011; Manfredi & Holliday, 2004; Public Service Alliance of Canada, 2003). Ahmad Zainal Abidin (2010) in his study in Malaysia reported that workload is the main cause that hinders a person from achieving work-life balance.

Supporting these findings, Beham and Drobnic (2010) remarked that workload is a strain that hinders employees from having work-life balance. Workload demands employees to perform more work, which influences employees when taking care of their non-work domains (Beham & Drobnic, 2010; French & Daniels, 2008; Im, 2009). The organisation supports specifically work-life programmes that would assist employees to handle their workload and have work-life balance at the same time (Hill et al., 2001; Manfredi & Holliday, 2004).

### 2.4 *Work-life Balance and Work-life Programme*

Work-life programme is defined as any benefit sponsored by the employer or working environment that helps the employee to successfully juggle between work and non-work demands (Cascio, 2010). Casey and Chase (2004), and Allen (2001) stressed the importance of flexible work arrangements in which they found that the adoption of job schedule flexibility was related to enhanced work-life balance among employees.

A study on work-life programmes by Hill et al. (2001) showed that perceived job flexibility and reasonable workweek enable employees to have work-family balance (Hill et al., 2001). Generally, it is assumed that a flexible “employee-friendly” policy improves employees’ work-life balance (Peters, Dulk, & Lippe, 2009).

### 2.5 *Work-life Balance in Government Sector*

Research that studied work life balance in the government sector focused more on the healthcare sector (Ahmad Zainal Abidin, 2011; Wan Rashid, Nordin, Omar, & Ismail, 2011) education sector (Salleh, Wahjono, Ismail, Aman, & Marie Muthu, 2015; Mohd Noor, 2011), federal government office (Saltzstein, Ting, & Saltzsein, 2001), public service agency office (Yuile, Chang, Gudmundsson, & Sukanlaya Sawang, 2012), and comparison between public and private sectors in general (Welford, 2008). Work life balance plays an important part in the government sector in which quality of service they deliver would determine the country’s level of democracy in general, and citizen satisfaction in particular (Pratchett, 1999). They are expected to perform their work faster, thoroughly, and at the best quality to meet clients’ needs, which

poses more challenges to the civil servants to perform at their best (New Sabah Times, 2012). Ahmad Zainal Abidin et al. (2011) in their study found that heavy workload experienced by the respondents was negatively interfering with their motivation to positively respond to the demands of their personal domains, i.e., family. Similar findings were also reported in a study conducted among semi-government office staff, in which the lower level workload experienced by them had increased the level of their work-life balance (Jamadin, Mohamad, Syarkawi, & Noordin, 2015).

Programmes, benefits, and policies have been reported to generate balance between work and non-work commitment. Work-life balance programmes are highly recommended in order to improve government staff satisfaction at work and satisfaction with their personal life where employees' diverging needs are fulfilled (Saleh, 2015; Khairunneezam, 2011; Saltzstein, Ting, & Saltzsein, 2001). Staff members who are happy with their work environment can assist them in juggling between the necessities of their personal life and the necessities at the workplace (Khairunneezam, 2011). Thus, work life balance policies and programmes should be tailored to the needs of government staff in order to help them to achieve equal contribution in work and enjoy their personal life, regardless of demographic background.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

A cross-sectional survey was conducted for the purpose of this study. Data in this study were gathered by distributing self-administered questionnaires to respondents. The respondents for this study were government staff who worked at Ministry of Youth and Sports in Putrajaya. As was recorded up until December 2015, there were 394 staff members at the ministry, divided into two main sections, namely Skills Development Division staff and Management staff (Bahagian Pengurusan Sumber Manusia, 2015). Self-administered questionnaires had been distributed to all staff and 159 questionnaires were returned, yielding a 46.5% response rate, out of which 156 questionnaires were found to be acceptable and analysed, and finally used for this study.

Work-life balance questions were adapted from Hayman (2005), which is a psychometric instrument for measuring work-life balance as constructed by Fisher-McAuley, Stanton, Jolton, and Gavin. Workload questions were adopted from the Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers (USDAW) instrument which was quoted in Nurliyana (2009). Work-life programme questions were being adapted from the study conducted by Branch (2008), and the end questionnaire was being adapted to suit the purpose of the study.

All primary data collected from the respondents were analysed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. The values of Cronbach's Alpha were 0.709, 0.769, and 0.866 respectively for work-life balance, workload, and work-life programme. Thus, the questions were reliable based on internal consistency acceptable minimum value, which is 0.6 (Zainudin, 2010).

Three hypotheses were constructed based on the objectives that guided this study. Hypothesis One, which is the relationship of gender toward work life balance at the work place, was tested using t-test. Hypothesis Two and Three, which are on negative relationship between workload and work life, and conjecture relationship between work life balance and work life programme valued among staff, were tested by using correlation. Details of the analyses would be further explained and discussed in the Results sections.

4.0 Results

4.1 Descriptive

4.1.1 Demographic Background

The sample that was used for the purpose of this study was 156, of which were 69.0% female (N=107) and the rest were male employees (Table 1). Respondents aged between 26-30 years old made up the highest number age group (30.9%) among all respondents. The majority of the respondents were Malays which made up 98.7%, and the rest were other than Malays.

Table 1

Demographic Data of the Respondents

Demographic	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Demographic	Percentage (%)	Frequency
<b>Gender:</b>			<b>Education level:</b>		
Male	31.0	48	SPM	34.8	54
Female	69.0	107	Diploma/STPM	38.7	60
<b>Age:</b>			Degree	20.6	32
Below 26 years old	14.8	22	Masters	4.5	7
26-30 years old	30.9	46	Others	1.3	2
31-35 years old	28.2	42	<b>Status:</b>		
36-40 years old	7.4	11	Single	30.8	48
41-45 years old	8.7	13	Married	64.1	100
Over 45 years old	10.1	15	Divorced	4.5	7
<b>Race:</b>			Widower	0.6	1
Malay	98.7	153	<b>Having kid/s:</b>		
Others	1.3	2	Yes	58.4	90
			No	29.2	45
			Not related	12.3	19

In terms of education, the highest percentage (38.7%) was respondents whose highest education was Diploma/STPM level, and there was only one doctorate level. In terms of marital status, the majority of the respondents were married (64.1%) and only one respondent was a widower. As for having kids, more than half (58.4%) respondents have kids.

### 4.1.2 Work and Life

Information related to work and life is demonstrated in Table 2. More than half of the respondents reported that they had been working up to 10 years (71.5%). Support staff made up 87.5% of respondents. More than half (59%) respondents worked within normal working hours (8 hours per day), while the rest claimed that they worked for more than 40 hours per week.

Table 2

#### *Work and Life of Respondents in the Study*

Work	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Work	Percentage (%)	Frequency
<b>Work experience:</b>			<b>Work hour in a week:</b>		
Less than 11 years	71.5	103	Less than 41 hours	58.9	86
11 years - 20 years	16.1	23	41-50 hours	36.3	53
21 years - 30 years	9.8	14	More than 50 hours	4.8	7
31 years - 36 years	2.8	4			

Leisure activities that were highly preferred and performed by the respondents were activities with family/friends (92.3%) and sports activities (51.3%), while activities that were least performed by respondents were political involvement (6%) and involvement with local activities (6%).

Table 3

#### *Activities that Respondents Perform after Working Hours*

Activities	Yes	
	Percentage (%)	Frequency
1. Activities with family/friends	92.3	144
2. Sport activities	51.3	80
3. Religious activities	28.2	44
4. Attending course of study or training	28.2	44
5. Voluntary work	16.0	25
6. Others	16.0	25
7. Club and associations activities	10.9	17
8. Art activities	5.1	8
9. Political activism	3.9	6
10. Involvement with local organisations	3.8	6

4.1.3 Work-life Balance

Descriptive table (Table 4) below shows level for work-life balance. In general, the mean score for work-life balance among staff at the Ministry is 2.53. The respondents reported that they frequently experienced balance between their work and life. Thus, it has been proven that the staff members at the Ministry are able to juggle their work domain and life domain effectively.

Table 4

*Work-life Balance of Respondents in the Study*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Work-life balance	1.60	3.00	2.534	0.307
(N = 146)				

4.1.4 Workload

Given in Table 5 below is descriptive data for workload in which the mean value is used as an indicator to measure the level of workload experienced by respondents. The mean value for workload was 1.997 (SD=0.537), indicating that respondents faced intermediate level of workload at their workplace. This result showed that even though employees did face intermediate level of workload at their workplace, at the same time, they experience high level of balance between work and life.

Table 5

*Workload of Respondents in the Study*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Workload	1.00	3.00	1.997	0.537
(N = 154)				

4.1.5 Work-life Programme

Work-life programme is divided into six categories, which are leave, work hour, recreation, work, work/home, and study. Overall, not even a single programme was rated below 50% of importance. This shows that respondents felt the importance



of those programmes. However, a general comparison was conducted to examine which one among the six programmes was the most important for the respondents (Table 6). In an ascending order, it was study (Mean= 1.237, SD=0.455), followed by work (Mean=1.443, SD=0.458) and the least important programme perceived by the respondents was working hour (Mean=1.738, SD=0.464).

Table 6

*Work-life Programme Importance as Indicated by Respondents*

Work-life programme		Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Study	1.237	.455
2.	Work	1.443	.458
3.	Work/home	1.544	.404
4.	Leave	1.654	.393
5.	Recreation	1.660	.526
6.	Work hour	1.738	.464

## 4.2 Hypotheses Testing and Discussion

### 4.2.1 Examination of Hypothesis One

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference between gender and work-life balance among employees

An independent t-test was conducted to examine whether or not male and female staff at the Ministry experience work-life balance differently. The mean value for male was 2.483 (SD=0.326), while the mean value for female was 2.554 (SD=0.295). The mean value for female respondents was observed to be slightly higher than male respondents by only 0.07, which was considered as a relatively small value.

Table 7

*Means of Male and Female Respondents Regarding Work-life Balance*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Work-life Balance	Male	47	2.48	.326
	Female	98	2.55	.295

Levene’s test for equality of variance shows that  $p>0.05$ , which implies that equal variances were assumed (Table 8). There is no significant difference between male and female respondents in which  $t=-1.304$ ,  $df=143$ , and  $p>0.05$ . This result shows that  $H_1$  is accepted. This result suggests that male and female staff at the Ministry similarly experience work-life balance. Both genders enjoy work-life balance occasionally.

Table 8

*Independent t-test Results*

	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2 tailed)
Equal variances assumed	1.072	.302	-1.304	143	.194

This study found that there is no significant difference between male and female employees towards work-life balance. Similarly, Duxbury and Higgins (2008), and Emslie and Hunt (2009) reported that both male and female employees enjoy satisfaction with their work and life simultaneously. When provided with sufficient support from the organisation and family, it would be relatively easy for employees to juggle their work and life activities effectively (Doble & Supriya, 2010).

In this study, time and multiple roles being held by a person are among the limited resources that an employee has. Of the total respondents, almost half (41.2%) worked for more than 40 hours a week, and 64.1% of the overall respondents were married. This means that even though they spend more time at work, it does not hinder them from having work-life balance. Besides, juggling multiple roles as a married person, parent, and a working adult did not put them into any work-life conflict.

Although this study did not emphasise on factors of work-life balance, the work-life balance experienced by the respondents of this study could be supported by their environment. Doble and Supriya (2010) found that men and women in their study successfully juggled their work and life domain. They proved that employees with some support provided by their organisation and also by spouses would help them achieve work-life balance (Doble & Supriya, 2010).

Duxbury and Higgins (2008) pointed out that, either male or female employees without children and those who do not have responsibilities of caring for elder dependents would experience higher balance of work and life. Supported by a helpful environment

from their organisation and others make employees able to pursue non-work interest, such as leisure activities, sports, religion, and many others (Emslie & Hunt, 2009).

#### 4.2.2 Examination of Hypothesis Two

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant correlation between workload and work-life balance experienced by employees

The statistical result for Pearson correlation showed that there is a negative significant relationship between work-life balance and workload ( $r=-0.155$ ,  $p=0.031$ ). This means that with lower levels of workload experienced by employees at their workplace, higher levels of work-life balance would be reported. As  $p$  value was less than 0.05, this indicated that there is a significant relationship between workload experienced by employees at workplace and their work-life balance. Therefore, H<sub>2</sub> is rejected.

Table 9

#### *Correlation between Work-life Balance and Workload*

	Workload	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (1-tailed)
<b>Work-life balance</b>	-0.155*	0.031

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

The finding of Hypothesis Two was found to be similar to the study conducted by Ahmad Zainal Abidin et al. (2011), where workload was found to be a predicament for employees to achieve work-life balance. Workload has a causal relationship in which when employees perceive that their workload is higher than what they could manage, the likelihood to experience exhaustion and fatigue is high. This would lower the drive for employees to perform their tasks in the life domain (Ahmad Zainal Abidin et al., 2011). Work-life balance would be hardly achieved when a person faces workload problems and it was identified as one of the conflicts that might hinder a person to achieve work-life balance (Drew & Murtagh, 2005).

Based on the Work Family Conflict Theory, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) described that conflict would occur when the pressure of a role borne by a person either in personal to work or work to personal lives are not in equal harmony with one another. It could be due to time constraints, strain-based, or behaviour-based factors (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Stevanovic, 2011). Whenever all these do not appear in one's life, work-life balance could be enjoyed by a person (Peters, Dulk, & Lippe, 2009). Thus, lower levels of workload experienced by the employees at the Ministry would enhance higher levels of work-life balance, which is in parallel with the essence of Work Family Conflict Theory.

4.2.3 Examination of Hypothesis Three

H<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between work-life balance and work-life programmes valued by employees

Results showed that there was no significant relationship between work-life balance and each of the work-life programmes. It was also shown that *p* values for each of work-life balance programme was greater than 0.05. Therefore, H<sub>3</sub> was accepted.

Table 10

*Correlation between Work-life Balance and Work-life Programme in the Study*

Variable		Work-life balance	
		Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
1.	Leave	0.132	0.130
2.	Work hour	0.109	0.198
3.	Recreation	0.003	0.972
4.	Work	-0.155	0.095
5.	Work/home	0.036	0.665
6.	Study	-0.099	0.266

Even though no significant relationships were reported between work-life balance and work-life programme, other studies had reported similar results as well providing reasons behind this phenomenon. Smith and Gardner (2007), for example, in their study emphasised that despite many factors that influence employees’ work-life balance, but it may not influence the use of work-life initiatives offered by the organisation. They even added that employees may enjoy balance of work and life even though they used less work-life initiatives provided by the organisation.

Family is among the motivations that might influence employees to choose certain work-life programmes to be used if offered in their organisation (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Females were found to choose telecommuting as a way to balance work and home life, because females feel that they may have more time to spend with their family, especially those who have responsibilities toward dependants (Bailey & Kurland, 2002).

Ramesh and Nagapriya (2012) reported that 50% of respondents pointed out that family support would help them to achieve balance between their career and personal life. Employees who do not have close family members to assist them in taking care of their multiple roles would face higher likelihood of experiencing difficulties in dealing with the multiple roles they are holding (Soo, 2008).

In addition, the availability of programmes at the workplace cannot predict the utilisation of these programmes by the employees and the implementation of the programme by the responsible authority (Roberts, Gianakis, McCue, & Wang, 2004). In addition, according to Drew and Murtagh (2005), and Kinnunen and Mauno (2011), they found that work-life policies are not the sole factors that influence employees' work-life balance.

Based on Drew and Murtagh (2005), and Duxbury, Higgins, and Coghill (2003) in their studies, corporate culture was found to be another factor that provides impact on one's work-life balance. Higher rank staff (manager and above) would rather choose not to take a break or use more work-life programmes due to anxiety toward their job security. They are worried for not being considered for promotion or being taken up to higher rungs of the corporate ladder (Drew & Murtagh, 2005).

Additionally, supervisory support is another factor that helps employees to balance work and their personal life (Duxbury et al., 2003; Kinnunen & Mauno, 2011). Cameron (2011) found that employees highly appreciate support and advocacy for work-related and personal matters shown by their supervisor. This informal support in return may alleviate work and personal domain challenges faced by the employees. In the absence of work-life programmes, support provided by the supervisor is perhaps sufficient to reduce the employees' burden or problem by allowing autonomy and flexibility for the employees to perform their job (Cameron, 2011).

In short, although the relationship between work-life balance and work-life programmes is not significant between the two, there might be other factors that facilitate staff in the Ministry in Putrajaya with regard to finding a balance between their work and personal life. Arguments made from past studies concluded that work-life programmes are not the only factor that enhances work-life balance among employees. There might be other factors than work-life programmes that could contribute toward work-life balance among employees.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The study concluded that government staff members were successful in juggling between their work and personal life, regardless of gender. A negative relationship was found between workload and work-life balance, which supports previous studies. In general, the results also did not deviated from the general foundation of Work Family Conflict, where balance can be achieved whenever both work and non-work domains are not harming one another. Last but not least, work-life programmes found in this study were not associated with work-life balance of the staff. Based on previous studies, work life programmes is not a sole contributor to achieve work life balance, as there are other factors that could contribute toward the balance between work and life of employees. Future study can be conducted to explore factors that can be associated with work life

balance among government staff. In addition, the results of this study showed that staff tended to spend their post-working hours with family, sports activities, religious activities, and attending training or furthering their studies. Thus, means to support both these domains should be evaluated by the management to ensure employees' personal needs and organisational goals are in sync.

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