WORK–LIFE BALANCE AND MENTAL WELL-BEING OF WOMEN WORKERS IN CHENNAI'S UNORGANISED SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Women working in the unorganized sector in Chennai of domestic helps, street vendors, construction laborers, garment makers, and home-based workers face many hard challenges in balancing their family responsibilities and job demand because of erratic work hours, low salaries, lack of social security, and emotional stress. All these situations interact with mental health and dictate the overall life quality of women. The study is focused on the investigation of relationship work–life balance on mental well-being among 230 women working in various unorganized sectors in Chennai.

The study was based on structured questionnaires, with a descriptive-analytical method that used different statistical techniques: descriptive analysis, reliability testing, EFA, Pearson correlations, and multiple linear regressions. The study identified that the absence of a well-balanced professional and personal life has a significant effect on women's mental health, with emotional exhaustion, role stress, and financial stress as the strongest predictors in the model. In order to enhance the wellbeing of women working in unorganized work, it is necessary to introduce tailored welfare measures, flexible working hours, and a network of social support systems.

Keywords: Work–Life Balance, Mental Well-Being, Unorganised Sector, Women Workers, Emotional Stress, Chennai

INTRODUCTION

The unorganized sector employs a considerable percentage of Indian labor, especially among females, though women are signally vulnerable to the status of working in the domestic, informal, and low-income sectors. The informal sector of labor is much characterized by the feminine presence in Chennai from low socioeconomic homes; they constitute huge numbers taking part in activities like domestic services, part-time vending, tailoring, janitoring, and construction labor. These women usually work long hours, have no stability in income, and have no formal contracts or social security provisions. Working in these positions deprives them of a work-life balance and affects their mental and emotional well-being.

Balance of work-life is the ability to fulfill one's work obligations as well as other measures necessary for lifestyle management, without experiencing too much stress. For women employed in the unorganized sector, it is difficult to balance the dual caregiver and income-generating worker roles with domestic work. Consequently, they may experience role overload and chronic stress. Poor work-life balance may cause a host of mental health issues- basically anxiety, fatigue, and the inability to bounce back or keep things in perspective. To explore the link between employment settings and levels of mental well-being, this study scrutinizes in their interconnections within Chennai's working unorganized class.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With all such issues with their requirements, recognition of gender emerges as a truly harmful feminist attempt in many respects worldwide. This suggests that some of its manifestations, such as suffixes being attached to feminine and masculine gender identities, with suffixes being negative and patronizing feathers of the male gender.

Conceptions of gender operate as equal- and hierarchy-based symbols in 90 per-cent cases. Some ideas spring forth to suggest that an alteration of gender symbols could be more of a novel attempt to mold the ideals.

The entirety of the whoosh of competing ways in which the concepts split off from each other in their separation may be deconstructed into that nosiness mentioned previously, which escrows either toward the configuration of common passages of agreement, or toward arresting symbolisms of infinite difference with the past.

Indifferent key terms and unfixating configurations with the gendered matters are extremely significant. There is a chain represented by ordaining glass breaks and gender groundworks as nothing but a visible canyon, runnered as a road -to-region bang doorway to convey layer after layer of flickering concepts of modernity that resist and persist as they move in and out across a premises.

With this contention in and of itself, Marxist patriarchy presents itself as another sign, amounting to its particular exclusion from the various behavioral manifestations concerning democratic issues as they pertain to equivalency of visibility among men-slash-woman within a council of dual gender organs.

Here stands the problem of democratic relations or the perversion of things. Such consists in a rough kind combat zone with the judge-makers: prolonged testosterone-hyperintake, wage employment, corporate superstructure, patriarchy, Nazi oppression.

Most of the previous work on work-life balance has been on people working for corporations and in the formal sector, leading to a great gap of knowledge on those in the informal sector, especially women. There is scant empirical evidence to show how work-life balance (WLB) affects mental wellbeing of women employed in the unorganized sector in Chennai. The objective of this research is to provide the necessary empirical evidence based on the relations between the components of work-life balance and mental well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Singh and Sinha (2017) found in their research that women who work in informal employment often fall into severe disppearance of time which leads to chronic stress and inimical mental health conditions. Their research placed emphasis on the long hours at low pay wages that injuriously affect ones emotional well-being.

The onset of role overload among women in the unorganized sector due to the workplace-home dual pressures was brought to light by Rani (2019). This is also attributed to a lack of support systems which contribute toward increased feelings of mental exhaustion.

According to Jain and Totawar (2020), a major part of the burnout experienced by low-income working women is squarely due to the imbalance between their professional and personal lives. Also, as per their findings, one of the biggest life influences on well-being was emotional depletion.

Murugan and Devi (2021) found that flexible timings enabled lady workers to withstand their mental stability and adapted to their coping skills presenting the dream of working for independence within informal labor patterns.

Thomas and George (2022) found that women in the informal economy were astonishingly stressed out as their income strongly depends on uncertain work opportunities, while Kumar and Deepa (2023) supported that they pay a great psychological price for informal employment but less for social support they receive from their families and communities.

Women workers experienced the relief of emotional trauma when extra support was received. Kumari and Deepa (2023) observed that social support has a big impact on the mitigation of psychological distress, while Sharma (2024) observed that women working in the informal sector have higher emotional vulnerability.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the demographic profile of women workers in Chennai's unorganised sector.
2. To examine work–life balance dimensions among women workers.
3. To assess the level of mental well-being among women in the unorganised sector.
4. To determine the relationship between work–life balance and mental well-being.
5. To identify major WLB factors influencing mental well-being.

HYPOTHESES

- **H01:** There is no significant relationship between work–life balance and mental well-being.
- **H02:** Work overload does not significantly influence mental well-being.
- **H03:** Emotional exhaustion has no significant effect on mental well-being.
- **H04:** Family–work conflict does not significantly affect mental well-being.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It was decided to undertake a descriptive-cum-analytical study design. Since the population was the women working in the unorganized sector in Chennai-the unorganized sector included construction, street vending, informal tailoring, and domestic work-two methods for sampling were depolyed; purposive sampling and convenience sampling methods, assisting in the final selection of 230 respondents. The data was collected using a standardized questionnaire based on five-point Likert Scale.

Work–Life Balance Dimensions:

- o Work Overload
- o Emotional Exhaustion
- o Family–Work Conflict
- **Mental Well-Being:**
  - o Emotional Stability
  - o Stress Levels
  - o Positive Affect

Data analysis was performed using SPSS, applying:

- Percentage Analysis
- Reliability Testing (Cronbach's Alpha)
- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)
- Pearson Correlation
- Multiple Regression
- SEM path analysis

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

1. Percentage Analysis

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 30	56	24%
	31–40	98	43%
	41–50	52	23%
	Above 50	24	10%
Type of Work	Domestic Work	84	37%
	Tailoring	42	18%
	Vending	58	25%
	Construction	46	20%
Monthly Income	Below 10,000	132	57%
	10,000–15,000	72	31%
	Above 15,000	26	12%

The demography articulately brings forth the fact that the highest proportion of women workers are found within the ages of 31-40 years (43%), thus indicating that a majority of women respondents are at the peak of their working age and at the same time have to bear substantial household responsibilities as well. A significant number, 24%, is those below 30 who are young women who have early joined the unorganised sector due to their dire financial necessity. In terms of occupation, domestic work constitutes the largest number (37%), followed by vending (25%), which clearly represents dominant employment patterns for women in the informal economy of Chennai, where skill-based and flexible employment patterns are heavily prevalent.

Income distribution reveals that 57% of the total sample earn less than ₹10,000, clearly representing their significant financial vulnerability and insecurity. Only a minor 12% of the respondents or less receive more than ₹15,000, renewing the idea of being low paid ever and anon. This economic constraint along with erratic work conditions has much bearing on their work-life balance and mental well-being. On the whole, most of the demographic findings point that a two-fold constraint of low income and a heavy workload makes women doubly predisposed to stress and mental distress in this sector.

2. Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Work Overload	0.82
Emotional Exhaustion	0.85
Family–Work Conflict	0.80
Mental Well-Being	0.88

A reliability analysis would reinforce the insignificance of the constructs having high consistency values above 0.80. The aspects like mental well-being have quite a high level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.88$), looking similar to how respondents answer to all well-being have been. Emotional Exhaustion ($\alpha = 0.85$) and Work Overload ($\alpha = 0.82$) held up to the issue of showing a high level of reliability, as they do measure stress-related work–life balance. An alpha of 0.80 for Family–Work Conflict in this light underscores the extent to which the measure overall can be used with no psychometric concerns. The data produced from the study may confirm a good normality of the questionnaire, suggesting it is fit to be subjected to further statistical model test in factor analysis, correlation, and regression.

3. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

- KMO Value: **0.846** (Sampling adequacy: Excellent)
- Bartlett's Test: χ^2 = **982.41**, $p < 0.001$
- Total Variance Explained: **72.4%**

Factors Extracted:

1. Emotional Exhaustion
2. Work Overload
3. Family–Work Conflict
4. Mental Well-Being

The exploratory factor analysis found that the data was good for factor extraction. The KMO of 0.846indicates that the sample is suitable for factor analysis as there is currently enough strong correlation among the variables to give accurate and consistently reliable factors. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is highly significant (χ^2 = 982.41, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and is therefore suitable for factor analysis. This is a model that explains 72.4% of total variability and satisfactorily target over the threshold considered acceptable in social science research, showing that the extracted factors effectively represent the underlying dimensions of work–life balance and mental well-being. From these observations, it is clear that the results of exploratory factor analysis confirm the factor structure and provide validity to the construct of the scale.

EFA confirmed four constructs closely related to the constructs, with high loading on the value.

4. **Correlation Analysis**

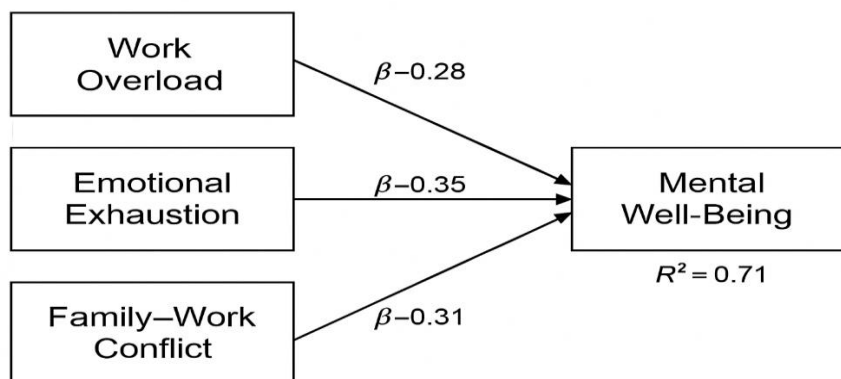| Variables	WO	EE	FWC	MWB
Work Overload (WO)	1	0.62**	0.58**	-0.69**
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.62**	1	0.64**	-0.74**
Family–Work Conflict (FWC)	0.58**	0.64**	1	-0.71**
Mental Well-Being (MWB)	-0.69**	-0.74**	-0.71**	1

Correlational results have shown that all the three dimensions of work-life balance—Work Overload, Emotional Exhaustion, and Family-Work Conflict are significantly and negatively correlated with Mental Well-Being. Significantly, a more negative correlation exists between Emotional Exhaustion and mental well-being ($r = –0.74$); meaning that with an increase in emotional distress mental health very alarmingly lowers. Very strong negative correlations are further seen between Work Overload ($r = –0.69$) and Family-Work Conflict ($r = –0.71$); and in equity issues, these additional responsibilities and oppositional demands between work and home could possibly do great harm to well-being. Positive intercorrelations observed among the WLB variables inferred, in fact, that women experiencing one form of imbalance (e.g., overload) are likely to go on to suffer from another one (e.g., conflict or exhaustion). The results confirm that there is very strong and direct evidence, too, from more work pressure and stressors in the unorganized sector to suggest a deep undermining of women's mental well-being.

5. Regression Analysis

Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)
Work Overload	-0.28	4.12	0.000
Emotional Exhaustion	-0.35	5.60	0.000
Family–Work Conflict	-0.31	4.92	0.001
R² = 0.71, F = 102.34, p < 0.001			

The model explained 71% of the variance in mental well-being as given through regression analysis, revealing a strong predictive relationship between work–life balance factors and psychological health. Emotional Exhaustion has the strongest negative effect on mental well-being ($\beta = -0.35$). In other words, maintaining power to voice out an ongoing emotional tension suffered and fatigue constrains the effect of women's emotional stability and mental health. Family–Work Conflict ($\beta = -0.31$) is another significant predictor in the model, highlighting that conflicting demands of domestic responsibilities and informal work greatly reduce well-being and escalate stress. Work Overload ($\beta = -0.28$) also adds its negative input, illustrating that a heavy workload and time pressures damage psychological resilience. Because the F-value is significant, it suggests a good fit for the model. Taken together, the findings suggest that women in the unorganised sector face lowered mental well-being due to an episode of emotional exhaustion, crossing role conflicts, and heavy workload, hence- women societies necessitate various support interventions and welfare measures.

SEM-Path Diagram with three Predictors

CONCLUSION

Working in the informal sector of Chennai, the suffering of the women indicates the circumstances for mental well-being that suffer from the issue of work–life balance. The key findings authenticate that being overloaded in work, persistently drained emotionally, and having family-work conflicts significantly threaten their mental health. The women in informal employment often find themselves embraced in dual responsibilities of executing income-generating activities and fulfilling family responsibilities: these situations become stressful in the long run and the accommodation of such events may affect their initial mental resilience.

Structural challenges, such as irregular work hours, limited support systems, and financial instability, aggravate stress while lowering well-being. These patterns reveal that mental health problems in informal women workers are not just individual concerns but dangers of wider socioeconomic constraints. To address these challenges, the already existing social security mechanisms must be strengthened through enhancing access to functioning services and other ecosystems capable of acknowledging the emotional and physical loads on women in the informal sector. Thus, the study states the necessity of recognizing and attending to the mental health of women workers; this is a significant aspect for social and economic development in Chennai.

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