

Analytical study on Work–Life Balance among Women Academicians: The Role of Maternity Policies and Care giving Responsibilities

Dr. Anuja Ameya Dhorje

Assistant Professor

MES Garware College of Commerce, Pune.

Mob:-9881134721

Email id:-anujadhhorje@gmail.com

Abstract

Academic advancement, research output, and information sharing have all benefited greatly from the growing number of women enrolled in higher education institutions. However, juggling work and home responsibilities like childcare and elder care can be difficult for female academicians. As a result, work-life balance has emerged as a crucial factor affecting female faculty members' job happiness, productivity, and career advancement. This study looks at how maternity rules and care giving obligations affect women academicians' work-life balance in higher education. Using both primary and secondary data, the study uses a descriptive methodology. A systematic questionnaire was used to gather primary data from female faculty members employed by colleges and universities. Research journals, policy studies, and scholarly publications from 2020 to 2024 were the sources of secondary data.

The results show that teaching workload, research expectations, administrative obligations, and household responsibilities cause serious work-family conflicts for female academicians. Key elements that enhance work-life balance and professional satisfaction include daycare facilities, flexible work schedules, supportive maternity policies, and institutional support systems. According to the study's findings, universities need to implement gender-sensitive policies and foster inclusive workplaces that assist female faculty members during the stages of pregnancy and child caring. Gender equity in academia, increased productivity, and better well-being will all benefit from such programs.

Keywords: Gender equality, higher education, maternity regulations, work-life balance, women academicians, and caregiving duties.

Introduction

Women's participation in higher education has increased significantly in recent decades. In the fields of teaching, research, student mentorship, and institutional development, women academicians are essential. Despite these successes, female faculty members frequently face substantial obstacles in juggling their work and personal obligations. The COVID-19

epidemic also brought attention to the difficulties experienced by female academicians, since the demands of remote instruction and increased household obligations exacerbated work-family tensions. According to studies, women faculty members had to juggle extra household obligations in addition to their academic responsibilities, which had an impact on their career progression and research productivity.

The ability of people to successfully manage their personal and professional commitments without incurring undue stress or conflict is referred to as work-life balance. Maintaining a work-life balance is especially challenging in the academic field because of the rigorous teaching schedules, research requirements, administrative duties, and ongoing professional development obligations.

Maintaining a work-life balance can be especially difficult for female academicians because of the extra duties involved in managing the home and family. Women are typically expected to do childcare, elder care, and home chores in many nations, including India. These obligations frequently coincide with their work obligations, which increases stress and role conflict.

According to recent studies, work-life balance among female faculty members can be greatly enhanced by institutional policies including maternity leave, flexible work schedules, and childcare assistance. During crucial times in their personal lives, women can continue to be productive in the classroom and experience less stress because of supportive policies. Recent research indicates that female faculty members frequently struggle to balance teaching responsibilities, research obligations, and family obligations, which can have an impact on career advancement and work satisfaction.

Examining how maternity regulations and caring obligations affect women academicians' work-life balance is crucial. Educational institutions can create policies that support female faculty members and advance gender equality in academic settings by having a better understanding of these challenges. The goal of the current study is to investigate these variables and offer solutions for establishing institutional settings that are encouraging to female academicians.

For female academicians, becoming pregnant and taking care of others is a crucial phase in their career. Work performance and career advancement may be momentarily impacted by the physical, emotional, and time responsibilities associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare. Women may find it challenging to balance work and family obligations in the absence of supportive institutional regulations. Reduced research output, postponed promotions, or even quitting academic careers can result from this circumstance. Many nations and organizations have implemented work-life balance regulations and maternity benefits in order to support working women after realizing these difficulties. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 increased paid maternity leave for female employees in India from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. These regulations aim to guarantee that women can fulfill their maternity obligations without jeopardizing their work and professional

prospects. However, different universities apply these regulations differently, and many female academicians continue to have trouble finding supportive work settings.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are the focus of this study:

- i. To investigate how women academicians view and value work-life balance.
- ii. To examine how maternity policies assist female instructors in universities.
- iii. To investigate how women academicians' professional performance is affected by caregiving obligations.
- iv. To determine the primary obstacles that female academicians must overcome in order to preserve a work-life balance.
- v. To make recommendations for ways to enhance institutional policies and support networks for female faculty members.

Review of Literature

The term "work-family conflict" was first used by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), who defined it as a scenario in which the demands of work and family roles are irreconcilable. Their study laid the theoretical groundwork for further research on work-life balance.

Work-life balance is essential for enhancing job performance and lowering stress levels, according to another study on Indian women faculty members. According to the study, the work environment for female faculty members can be greatly enhanced by supportive institutional policies including flexible schedules and childcare facilities. The significance of parental leave laws and maternity rights in assisting female professionals has also been highlighted by academics. Good maternity policies support gender equality in the workplace and create a healthy work environment.

Furthermore, research from around the world shows that childcare obligations have a big impact on women's academic career advancement. Women typically take on more caregiving responsibilities, which may have an impact on their ability to do research and advance in their careers.

Overall, research indicates that institutional support networks and maternity policies are essential for enhancing women academicians' work-life balance.

Researchers from a variety of fields, including management, sociology, psychology, and education, have given the idea of work-life balance a lot of attention. The link between work obligations and personal commitments has been the subject of numerous studies, especially with regard to working women.

One of the first academics to define work-family conflict was Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), who described it as a scenario in which the demands of work and family roles are irreconcilable. According to their research, people frequently find it difficult to balance work and family obligations at the same time, which causes stress and lowers performance in one or both areas.

The term "second shift" was first used by Hochschild (1997) to describe the extra caregiving and home work that women do after finishing their job responsibilities. This idea is especially pertinent to female academicians who frequently balance teaching, research, and administrative duties at work with household duties at home.

A seminal study on the influence of family formation on academic careers was carried out by Mason and Goulden (2004). According to their findings, women who had children had a far lower chance than their male counterparts of obtaining tenure posts. The study made clear how caregiving obligations can affect academic career development and research productivity.

According to Ward and Wolf-Wendel's (2012) analysis of academic moms' experiences, juggling work and childcare obligations frequently results in time limits and career difficulties. The necessity of institutional policies that assist female faculty members during the parenting stages was highlighted by their research.

The work-life balance of female academicians in the context of contemporary higher education systems has been the subject of more recent studies. Flexible work schedules, encouraging coworkers, and institutional norms greatly enhanced work-life balance, according to Gupta and Sharma's (2018) study of female faculty members in Indian colleges. Numerous research brought attention to the greater difficulties faced by female academicians during the COVID-19 epidemic. According to research by Myers et al. (2020), women researchers' productivity decreased during the pandemic as a result of taking on more childcare and domestic duties. This study highlighted how gender disparities in academics can worsen due to crises and unforeseen disruptions.

The combined obligations of remote teaching and domestic responsibilities put women academicians under more stress, according to research done during the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous participants reported higher levels of stress and decreased productivity in their research.

According to a different study by Minello (2020), women academics with small children have trouble staying productive during lockdowns. The study highlighted how work-life balance is more challenging in remote work settings since the lines between personal and professional life are frequently blurred.

The significance of maternity policies in assisting female professionals has also been the subject of recent research. According to Jamunarani and Syed (2024), flexible work

schedules, maternity leave policies, and childcare assistance greatly increased the job satisfaction of female faculty members in higher education institutions.

In a similar vein, Saravana Kumar and Lalitha (2024) noted that extended work hours and household duties frequently result in work-family conflict for female instructors in higher education institutions. The study suggested institutional support mechanisms like counseling services, childcare centers, and a lighter workload during pregnancy.

In their study of work-family imbalance among female administrators in higher education, Begum et al. (2024) discovered that supportive organizational cultures are essential for assisting women in juggling a variety of obligations.

Overall, research shows that a variety of factors, including as institutional policies, workplace culture, family support, and societal expectations, has an impact on women academician's work-life balance. Although flexible work schedules and maternity benefits can greatly enhance work-life balance, many universities currently lack extensive support networks for female faculty members.

Therefore, further study is needed to understand how maternity policies and caregiving obligations affect women academicians' professional experiences and how institutions might create strategies that effectively assist them.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The current study examines work-life balance among female academicians using a descriptive research design.

Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data are used in the investigation.

Primary Data

A systematic questionnaire was used to gather primary data from female faculty members employed by higher education institutions.

Secondary Data

Secondary data gathered from:

- Scholarly publications
- Scholarly publications
- Official documents
- Online databases for research
- Documents containing institutional policies

Sample Size

Fifty female academicians from colleges and universities participated in the survey.

Sampling Technique

Respondents were chosen using the convenience sampling approach.
Tools for Data Analysis

Data Analysis Tools

Data analysis was done using:

- Analysis of percentages
- A tabular depiction
- Interpretive analysis

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

| Age Group | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------------------|------------|
| 25–30 | 12 | 24% |
| 31–40 | 18 | 36% |
| 41–50 | 14 | 28% |
| Above 50 | 6 | 12% |

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents are between the ages of 31 and 40, suggesting that mid-career female academicians have serious issues with work-life balance.

Table 2: Key Elements Influencing Work-Life Harmony

| Elements | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Workload for teachers | 14 | 28% |
| Expectations for research | 8 | 16% |
| childcare duties | 16 | 32% |
| Household duties | 7 | 14% |
| Administrative tasks | 5 | 10% |

Interpretation:

Among female academicians, childcare obligations have the biggest impact on work-life balance.

Table 3: Maternity Policies Awareness

| Feedback | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Completely conscious | 30 | 60% |
| just somewhat aware | 12 | 24% |
| Unaware | 8 | 16% |

Interpretation:

While the majority of respondents are aware of maternity regulations, some faculty members are still unaware of them.

Findings of the Study

The study produced a number of significant conclusions:

- a) **Because of their professional and household commitments, women academicians frequently experience work-family conflicts:** Women in higher education frequently have to juggle several responsibilities at once. Teaching, research, meeting attendance, student guidance, and administrative tasks are all part of their professional obligations. In addition, they are expected to run the home, take care of the kids, and assist other family members. There is a tension between work and family life because these duties overlap. Many female academicians experience pressure to perform well in both professions, which can occasionally result in stress, exhaustion, and less time for personal activities. They struggle to keep a healthy balance between their personal and work lives because of this tension.
- b) **The main element affecting work-life balance is childcare obligations:** One of the key elements influencing women academicians' work-life balance has been identified as childcare. It takes time, focus, and emotional engagement to care for young children. It might be challenging for female academics to attend conferences, carry out fieldwork, or dedicate additional time to research and academic pursuits when they have small children. Additionally, they could have trouble with unforeseen academic obligations like meetings or long teaching hours. Because of this, childcare responsibilities frequently reduce the amount of time and energy available for academic and professional development.

- c) **Maternity policies are crucial in helping female faculty members with their pregnancies and early childrearing:** Educational institutions' maternity policies assist women in juggling their work obligations both during and after motherhood. Women faculty members can take care of their health and their newborn child without worrying about their job security when they have adequate maternity leave. Women can return to the workforce with more assurance and stability when organizations offer paid maternity leave, health benefits, and helpful reintegration policies. These regulations also show the institution's dedication to employee welfare and gender equality, which boosts the loyalty and morale of female academicians.
- d) **Flexible work schedules increase productivity and job satisfaction:** Women academicians are greatly assisted in managing their obligations by flexible working arrangements, such as flexible work schedules, fewer teaching hours during specific times, or the ability to complete academic chores from home. They can schedule their work in accordance with personal obligations and family needs thanks to flexibility. Women faculty members feel less stressed and are more satisfied with their jobs when colleges offer such supportive work environments. They can also carry out their academic responsibilities more effectively and continue to be consistently productive in their teaching and research endeavors because to this flexibility.
- e) **Women are assisted in maintaining a work-life balance by institutional support, such as childcare facilities and a lighter workload during pregnancy:** In order to help women academicians attain a better work-life balance, institutional support is essential. It is easier for women to handle childcare while continuing their professional employment thanks to facilities like on-campus childcare centers. Additionally, organizations that offer short-term task modifications during pregnancy periods assist women in better managing their obligations. An inclusive workplace where women feel appreciated and encouraged in both their personal and professional responsibilities is facilitated by understanding management and supportive policies.
- f) **The strain of juggling research productivity with family obligations causes stress for many female academicians:** Research papers, project work, and professional advancement are frequently prioritized in academic careers. It is expected of female academicians to balance family responsibilities with high levels of research production. It can be difficult to live up to these expectations, particularly for people who have small children or a lot of family obligations. Stress levels are frequently raised by the pressure to satisfy institutional performance requirements, attend academic conferences, and publish research papers. In order to meet these demands, some female academicians might have to give up personal time or put in more hours, which could be detrimental to their general wellbeing.

Suggestions

The following recommendations are made in light of the findings:

- a) **Strengthening maternity policy at universities:** To protect the health of female faculty members during pregnancy and the early stages of parenting, higher education institutions should create comprehensive and encouraging maternity policies. Women academicians can concentrate on their health and childcare without worrying about losing their jobs or experiencing professional losses when they have access to adequate maternity leave and financial security. Additionally, organizations should guarantee a seamless reintegration following maternity leave by providing supportive measures including opportunities for career advancement and a phased return to work. Strengthening these regulations will motivate women to pursue higher education while successfully juggling family obligations.
- b) **Remote work choices and flexible work schedules for female faculty members during pregnancy and childcare:** Offering flexible work schedules can greatly assist female academicians in juggling their obligations to their families and their careers. During maternity and early childcare periods, institutions can provide flexible teaching schedules, online academic meetings, and remote employment possibilities for administrative and research responsibilities. Women faculty members can continue to be productive without sacrificing their family responsibilities because to this flexibility, which also lowers stress. Additionally, this strategy fosters a welcoming workplace that recognizes the special requirements of female employees.
- c) **Setting up daycare centers in colleges and institutions:** Offering childcare services inside or close to educational institutions is one of the best methods to empower female academicians. Women faculty members can concentrate on teaching, research, and administrative tasks while taking care of their children's safety and wellbeing thanks to on-campus childcare facilities. Additionally, having access to trustworthy childcare services lowers absenteeism and boosts productivity. Businesses that make such investments show a strong dedication to gender-inclusive workplace policies and employee welfare.
- d) **Developing institutional policies that are gender-sensitive to support work-life balance:** Gender-sensitive policies that acknowledge the difficulties experienced by female academicians in juggling work and personal obligations should be adopted by educational institutions. These regulations might include methods to address gender-related issues in the workplace, supportive leadership, and equitable opportunities for professional growth. Institutions should encourage female faculty members to actively participate in academic and administrative activities while maintaining a healthy work-life balance by fostering an inclusive and courteous work environment.

- e) **Offering mentorship programs to help women academicians advance their careers:** The professional development of female faculty members can be greatly aided by mentoring programs. Academicians with experience can help younger female scholars with academic networking, career planning, and research activity management. Women who receive this kind of mentoring are better able to overcome obstacles in the workplace, develop their confidence, and progress in their careers. Additionally, it cultivates a collaborative and supportive culture in academic institutions.
- f) **Encouraging work-life balance and gender equality awareness initiatives:** Workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns on work-life balance and gender equality should be held at universities and colleges. By teaching administrators and professors on gender-related issues, these programs can contribute to the development of a more compassionate and encouraging work environment. Raising awareness creates shared responsibility for upholding a balanced workplace, lessens gender bias, and fosters respect for one another.
- g) **Lessening the administrative burden on female faculty members during pregnancy:** Institutions should think about temporarily limiting the administrative duties given to female faculty members during maternity and early childcare periods. This change enables them to concentrate on crucial teaching and research tasks without feeling overly stressed. By offering this kind of assistance, organizations enable female academicians to successfully balance their personal obligations with their professional involvement.

Conclusion

For female academicians in higher education institutions, work-life balance is still a major concern. Career advancement, productivity, and job happiness can all be negatively impacted by the conflicting demands of professional work and family caregiving. The study emphasizes the significance of flexible work schedules, institutional support networks, and maternity policies in enhancing the work-life balance of female faculty members.

Institutions of higher learning must implement comprehensive gender-sensitive policies that acknowledge the particular difficulties experienced by female academicians. In addition to enhancing the wellbeing of female faculty members, offering flexible work schedules, maternity benefits, and childcare assistance will advance academic institutions as a whole.

Ensuring gender equality and empowering women academicians to realize their full potential in teaching, research, and leadership requires fostering inclusive academic settings.

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