

The Impact of Work-Life Balance on Occupational Stress Among Textile Workers in Tamil Nadu: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the impact of work-life balance on occupational stress among textile workers in Tamil Nadu, a region known for its extensive textile industry. The study focuses on understanding how the demands of work and personal life intersect to influence the stress levels of these workers. With the textile industry being one of the largest employers in Tamil Nadu, the workforce often faces long working hours, stringent deadlines, and challenging working conditions, contributing to heightened stress levels. This stress is further compounded by the pressure to manage personal and family responsibilities, which are often overlooked in the discourse on labour welfare.

The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 30 textile workers across various roles within the industry. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation in terms of age, gender, marital status, and work experience. The interviews explored the participants' perceptions of work-life balance, the strategies they employ to manage work and personal life, and the impact of this balance, or lack thereof, on their occupational stress.

The findings reveal that poor work-life balance is a significant contributor to occupational stress among textile workers. Key factors influencing this imbalance include excessive working hours, insufficient rest periods, inadequate family support, and the lack of organizational policies that promote work-life balance. Workers reported feelings of burnout, fatigue, and frustration, which not only affect their mental and physical health.

KEY WORDS: Work-Life Balance, Occupational Stress, Impact, Textile Workers.

INTRODUCTION

The textile industry in Tamil Nadu is a cornerstone of the state's economy, employing millions and contributing significantly to both domestic and international markets. However, behind the economic success lies a workforce that often grapples with challenging working conditions, including long hours, high production targets, and stringent deadlines. These factors, combined with the demands of personal life, create a scenario where maintaining a healthy work-life balance becomes increasingly difficult, leading to elevated levels of occupational stress among workers. Occupational stress, defined as the physical and emotional responses that arise when the demands of the job exceed the worker's capacity to

manage them, is a well-documented issue within the textile sector. Prolonged exposure to such stress can lead to severe health problems, including chronic fatigue, anxiety, depression, and even cardiovascular diseases. For textile workers in Tamil Nadu, the stress is not only a result of the high-pressure work environment but is also exacerbated by the need to fulfil personal and family responsibilities. The dual burden of managing work and home life often leaves little room for rest and recuperation, further aggravating stress levels.

Work-life balance, on the other hand, refers to the equilibrium between professional and personal life, where neither sphere is neglected. Achieving this balance is crucial for reducing occupational stress and promoting overall well-being. However, in the context of the textile industry, this balance is frequently disrupted. Factors such as irregular working hours, mandatory overtime, and the lack of supportive workplace policies contribute to the difficulty in achieving a satisfactory work-life balance. Moreover, cultural expectations, particularly in rural parts of Tamil Nadu, often place additional pressure on workers, particularly women, to prioritize family responsibilities, making the challenge of balancing work and personal life even more daunting.

Despite the critical importance of work-life balance in mitigating occupational stress, there has been limited research focusing on this issue within the context of the textile industry in Tamil Nadu. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the experiences of textile workers, particularly how they perceive and manage the intersection of their work and personal lives, and the resultant impact on their stress levels. Through a qualitative approach, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by these workers and to highlight the need for more supportive organizational policies and practices that promote a healthier work-life balance. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on labour welfare and the importance of addressing work-life balance as a critical component of occupational health.

IMPORTANCE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Work-life balance is a critical component of occupational health, as it directly influences an individual's well-being, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life. In the context of the textile industry in Tamil Nadu, where workers often face demanding work environments characterized by long hours, high production targets, and physically strenuous tasks, maintaining a healthy work-life balance becomes even more essential. A balanced integration of work and personal life can help mitigate the adverse effects of occupational stress, which, if left unaddressed, can lead to serious physical and psychological health issues.

The concept of work-life balance revolves around the idea that employees should have sufficient time and energy to fulfil both their work responsibilities and personal commitments without one sphere encroaching excessively on the other. When work demands overwhelm personal life, it can result in stress, burnout, and reduced productivity. Conversely, when personal life conflicts with work responsibilities, it can lead to decreased job performance and job dissatisfaction. Achieving work-life balance is therefore vital for maintaining a productive and healthy workforce.

For textile workers in Tamil Nadu, work-life balance is particularly important due to the nature of their work. The industry is known for its rigorous schedules, often requiring workers to put in extended hours to meet production deadlines. This leaves little time for rest, family, or social activities, leading to a situation where work dominates their lives. The inability to disengage from work and attend to personal needs can exacerbate stress levels, contributing to both mental and physical health problems. This

imbalance can manifest in various ways, including chronic fatigue, anxiety, depression, and even more severe health issues such as cardiovascular diseases.

Moreover, the lack of work-life balance in the textile industry has broader implications for occupational health. When workers are unable to achieve a satisfactory balance between work and personal life, their motivation and engagement at work tend to decline. This not only affects individual performance but also impacts the overall productivity of the organization. Additionally, high levels of occupational stress can lead to increased absenteeism, higher turnover rates, and a greater incidence of workplace accidents. In contrast, organizations that prioritize work-life balance tend to have healthier, more satisfied employees who are more engaged and productive. Implementing policies that promote work-life balance, such as flexible working hours, adequate rest periods, and supportive workplace practices, can significantly reduce occupational stress. For textile workers in Tamil Nadu, such measures are not just beneficial but necessary to ensure their well-being and sustain the industry's long-term viability. Addressing work-life balance is thus an essential aspect of occupational health, directly impacting the physical and psychological welfare of workers, as well as the overall success of the industry.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To Explore the Perceptions of Work-Life Balance Among Textile Workers in Tamil Nadu
2. To Identify the Key Factors Contributing to Work-Life Imbalance Among Textile Workers
3. To Assess the Impact of Work-Life Balance on Occupational Stress Levels

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The textile industry in Tamil Nadu is a significant contributor to the state's economy, employing millions of workers. However, the demanding nature of this industry often leads to high levels of occupational stress among workers. Long working hours, tight production schedules, and the need to meet high productivity targets create a challenging work environment. Additionally, the industry is characterized by low wages, job insecurity, and inadequate working conditions, all of which exacerbate the stress experienced by workers.

Despite the critical importance of work-life balance (WLB) in mitigating occupational stress, there is a noticeable lack of research focusing on the textile workers of Tamil Nadu. The concept of WLB is crucial as it influences not only the workers' psychological and physical well-being but also their productivity and job satisfaction. An imbalance between work demands and personal life can lead to severe consequences such as burnout, mental health issues, and decreased job performance, which in turn can impact the overall efficiency and sustainability of the textile industry.

This study aims to explore the relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress among textile workers in Tamil Nadu. Given the socio-economic challenges faced by these workers, it is essential to understand how they manage the demands of their work and personal lives, and how this balance or imbalance affects their stress levels. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the specific stressors faced by textile workers and the role of WLB in alleviating these stresses. Ultimately, the research seeks to inform policy and organizational practices aimed at improving the well-being and productivity of textile workers in the region.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A research design is the basic framework or plan for a study that guides the collection of data and analysis of the data. The present study is descriptive in nature. A descriptive research is one which is concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual or of a group. Since this study describes the characteristics and different behavioural pattern of employees influenced by stress, this research is certainly a descriptive one.

Data Collection

The necessary data have been collected from secondary sources.

Secondary Data

The secondary data for this study was collected from the company records, company reports, magazines, and websites and published articles.

Table – 1 Relationship between High and Low Level of Quality Work Life Regarding the Perception of QWL Dimension

Sl.No.	Dimensions of Quality of Work Life	Level of Quality of Work Life			
		High		Low	
		Mean Score	Rank	Means Score	Rank
1.	Adequate wage and fair compensation	20.61	I	18.21	II
2.	Healthy working conditions with adequate welfare	16.24	IV	14.31	VI
3.	Opportunity to develop skills	14.15	VI	15.38	V
4.	Career opportunities and growth	15.21	V	16.41	IV
5.	Social integration at work life	17.24	III	19.31	I
6.	Constitutional guarantees	19.41	II	17.21	III
7.	Good work life	12.14	VIII	12.64	VIII
8.	Social relevance of work life	13.26	VII	13.56	VII

From Table 1 it has been inferred that both high and low level of quality of work life are having the same perception regarding social relevance of work life and good work life. These dimensions were ranked seventh and eighth respectively. The other dimensions namely adequate wage and fair compensation, constitutional guarantees, social integration at workplace, healthy working conditions with adequate welfare, career opportunities and growth and opportunity to develop skills are ranked first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth by the high level of quality of work life. In the case of low level of quality of work life these were ranked second, third, first, sixth, fourth and fifth respectively. The computed rank correlation co-efficient was found to be positive and statistically significant ($R = 0.84$ with $P < 0.014$). It indicates that the high relation was found regarding QWL dimension between workers with high and low level QWL in the study area.

Table – 2 Critical Ratio for Job Involvement between High and Medium Level of Quality of Work Life

Variable	Mean Score			Critical Ratio
	High Level	Medium Level	Difference	
Job Involvement	3.314	2.763	0.551	3.78*

***Statistically significant at 5 percent level.**

Table 2 indicates that the critical ratio for job involvement between high and medium level of quality of work life is 3.78. It is statistically significant at 5 per cent level. Thus the established null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between job involvement and high and medium level of quality of work life.

TABLE – 3 SUMMARY OF STEP – WISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION: DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variable in Equation	Multiple R	R Square	F value	P-Level	Beta Co-efficient
Quality of work life	0.9786	0.94	855.49	0.001	.98
Job involvement	0.9765	0.96	557.63	0.001	.45
Income	0.9873	0.97	372.13	0.001	.17

The results in Table inferred that three of the variables were internal into the equation and the order of inclusion was to follow QWL, job involvement and monthly income. As each of the additional variables was entered, the multiple R and R square increased. This indicates that QWL, job involvement and income were the best set of predictors of performance having a combined contribution of about 98 per cent. Allowing one of the independent variables to operate, while controlling the other variables in equation, revealed that it was QWL which had the highest contribution to performance followed by job involvement and income respectively.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY AND WORKER WELFARE

The findings from this study have significant implications for both the textile industry and the welfare of its workers in Tamil Nadu. The textile industry, being one of the largest employers in the state, plays a crucial role in the economic development of the region. However, the well-being of its workforce is equally important for sustaining productivity and ensuring long-term success.

1. Enhancing Work-Life Balance

The study highlights that the lack of a proper work-life balance among textile workers is a major contributor to occupational stress. Long working hours, rigid schedules, and the pressure to meet production targets often leave little time for personal and family life. To address this, the industry must consider implementing more flexible work arrangements, such as staggered shifts or part-time work options. Encouraging a balance between work and personal life can lead to a more motivated and satisfied workforce, ultimately enhancing productivity.

2. Improving Working Conditions

The physical and psychological stress experienced by textile workers is often exacerbated by poor working conditions. The industry must prioritize improving the work environment by ensuring that

workers have access to adequate rest breaks, ergonomic workstations, and a clean, safe, and healthy workplace. By reducing the physical strain on workers, the industry can lower the incidence of stress-related health issues and absenteeism.

3. Mental Health Support

Occupational stress can lead to severe mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and burnout. The textile industry should invest in mental health support services, such as counselling and stress management programs, to help workers cope with the pressures of their job. Providing access to these resources can reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues and encourage workers to seek help when needed.

4. Strengthening Employee Engagement and Communication

The study underscores the importance of effective communication between management and workers. The textile industry should foster a culture of open dialogue where workers feel comfortable sharing their concerns and suggestions. Regular feedback mechanisms, such as employee surveys and focus groups, can help identify stressors and areas for improvement. By involving workers in decision-making processes, the industry can create a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

5. Policy Development and Enforcement

The findings call for the development and enforcement of policies that protect workers' rights and promote their welfare. This includes adhering to labour laws related to working hours, wages, and safety standards. The industry should collaborate with government agencies, labour unions, and NGOs to ensure that these policies are effectively implemented and monitored.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND REDUCING STRESS AMONG TEXTILE WORKERS

- Introduce flexible working hours or staggered shifts to allow workers to manage their work and personal responsibilities more effectively. Flexibility in scheduling can help workers attend to family needs, reduce commuting stress, and improve overall well-being.
- Ensure that workers have regular and sufficient rest breaks throughout the day. Short breaks during work hours can reduce physical and mental fatigue, lower stress levels, and enhance productivity.
- Improve the physical work environment by providing ergonomic workstations, proper ventilation, and adequate lighting. Creating a comfortable and safe workspace can reduce the physical strain on workers and contribute to lower stress levels.
- Provide access to mental health resources, such as counselling services, stress management workshops, and employee assistance programs. Encouraging workers to seek help and offering support can help manage stress and prevent burnout.
- Promote physical well-being by offering on-site exercise facilities or organizing regular fitness activities. Physical activity is a proven way to reduce stress and improve overall health, leading to a more balanced work-life experience.
- Create a culture of open communication where workers feel comfortable discussing their concerns with management. Regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and an open-door policy can help identify stressors early and allow for timely interventions.
- Offer training programs that focus on time management, stress management, and work-life balance skills. Empowering workers with the knowledge and tools to manage their workload and personal life effectively can reduce stress and improve job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the intricate relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress among textile workers in Tamil Nadu. The findings underscore the significant impact that work-life balance has on the well-being and productivity of workers in this industry, revealing that poor work-life balance is a major contributor to high levels of occupational stress.

Textile workers in Tamil Nadu face numerous challenges, including long working hours, rigid schedules, and intense production pressures. These factors often leave workers with insufficient time for personal and family life, leading to heightened stress levels. The study found that this imbalance not only affects the mental and physical health of the workers but also impairs their job performance and overall satisfaction.

The qualitative approach of this study provided deep insights into the lived experiences of textile workers, highlighting the specific stressors they encounter and their coping mechanisms. The findings suggest that a significant portion of the stress experienced by these workers stems from the conflict between their work demands and personal life responsibilities. This conflict is exacerbated by the lack of support systems and inadequate workplace policies that fail to address the unique needs of workers in this sector. Moreover, the study highlights the urgent need for the textile industry to address these issues by implementing more flexible work arrangements, improving working conditions, and providing mental health support. By fostering a better work-life balance, the industry can not only enhance the well-being of its workforce but also improve productivity, reduce turnover, and create a more sustainable work environment.

The study also emphasizes the importance of policy interventions that protect workers' rights and promote their welfare. Collaborative efforts between industry stakeholders, government agencies, and labour unions are essential to developing and enforcing policies that ensure a balanced work-life environment for textile workers.

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