

Commuting Time and Work–Life Balance among Indian Employees: A Comparative and Contextual Analysis for Human Resource Management

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Abstract

This study examines how commuting time affects work life balance among Indian employees and derives practical implications for human resource management. The analysis uses survey data from 481 respondents and combines descriptive, comparative, and association based statistics. Overall work life balance was moderate, with a Work Life Balance Index mean of 3.57, standard deviation of 0.99, and a 95 percent confidence interval from 3.48 to 3.66. Distributional results showed heterogeneity: 45.5 percent reported positive work life balance, 36.4 percent reported neutral outcomes, and 18.1 percent reported negative outcomes. Longer commuting time was significantly associated with lower work life balance, lower commute satisfaction, lower productivity, and a weaker composite index. Subgroup comparison showed a large practical gap: employees commuting thirty minutes or less had 60.1 percent positive work life balance, versus 14.4 percent among employees commuting more than thirty minutes. Effect sizes were substantial, including an odds ratio of 8.95, relative risk of 4.18, and risk difference of 45.7 percentage points. These findings support hybrid scheduling, transport assistance, and commute sensitive workforce planning to improve wellbeing, performance, and retention. Nearly half of respondents also preferred remote or flexible work arrangements, reinforcing policy demand for equitable, location aware job design across teams.

Keywords: Work–life balance, Life–work balance, Indian workforce, Workplace culture, Burnout, Policy intervention

1. Introduction:

Work–life balance has evolved from a peripheral employee-benefit concern into a strategic Human Resource Management (HRM) priority tied to organizational sustainability, talent retention, and workforce health. In the contemporary employment landscape, especially after large-scale digitalization and hybridization of work, the issue is no longer only about dividing hours between office and home; it also concerns labor protections, digital boundary-setting, psychosocial safety, and equitable access to well-being. Reflecting this shift, the 2025 Global Life-Work Balance Index reframes the discourse as life–work balance, explicitly arguing that work should support life rather than subsume it, while also acknowledging that no single universal definition applies across cultures.

Cross-national evidence suggests that institutional design matters. Countries consistently ranked at the top—led by New Zealand, with strong European representation (including Ireland, Belgium, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Spain), alongside Canada and Australia—tend to combine stronger statutory protections, social systems, and healthier working-time patterns. India, by contrast, appears in the lower tier of the same index (score 41.00; rank 53/60), with relatively high reported weekly working hours (45.72), highlighting a structural gap between economic growth and quality of working life. This pattern aligns with broader evidence that prolonged working time elevates health risk; ILO–WHO estimates link workweeks of 55+ hours with increased stroke and ischemic heart disease mortality.

Within India, work–life imbalance is shaped by interlocking factors: overwork-normalizing professional norms, high-performance workplace cultures, after-hours digital intrusion (reported in recent employer surveys), job insecurity, and gendered caregiving burdens. Although policy momentum exists—through labor-code consolidation and newer debates such as the Right to Disconnect Bill—implementation and enforcement remain uneven. Against this backdrop, the present study investigates work–life balance as a multidimensional HRM construct in India, with implications for employee well-being, organizational effectiveness, and socially sustainable employment systems.

2. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

2.1 Objectives

1. To profile WLB and commute conditions among Indian employees.
2. To test whether commute duration is associated with WLB, productivity, and commute satisfaction.
3. To estimate the practical magnitude of WLB differences between short- and long-commute groups.
4. To derive policy-oriented HR interventions from the empirical patterns.

2.2 Hypotheses

H1: Commute duration is negatively associated with WLB score.

H2: Commute duration is negatively associated with commute satisfaction and productivity.

H3: Employees with commute ≤ 30 minutes have substantially higher likelihood of reporting positive WLB than employees with commute > 30 minutes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine how commuting conditions are associated with work-life outcomes among employees in India. A cross-sectional approach was appropriate because it enabled the analysis of relationships between commute-related factors and employee-reported outcomes at a single point in time, allowing efficient comparison across respondent groups.

3.2 Sample

The analytical sample consisted of 481 employees. The gender profile included 68.2% female respondents and 31.8% male respondents. In terms of one-way commute duration, 68.2% reported commuting 30 minutes or less, while 31.8% reported commuting more than 30 minutes. Commute mode distribution reflected multiple mobility patterns: public transit (31.8%), bike (22.7%), walk (22.7%), car (18.3%), and other modes (4.6%). This profile provides a useful basis for evaluating how commute time and travel conditions relate to work-life experiences.

3.3 Measures

The study examined key employee-centered indicators relevant to HRM and work-life quality. These included reported distributions for work-life balance impact, productivity impact, well-being/stress impact, commute satisfaction, and preference for remote/flexible work. In addition to category-wise distributions, the analysis also used a composite Work-Life Balance Index (WLBI) summarized using its mean, standard deviation, and confidence interval, enabling both distributional and aggregate interpretation of work-life outcomes.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

The statistical strategy combined descriptive, associative, and comparative methods. First, descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and confidence intervals) were used to summarize respondent characteristics and key outcomes. Second, Spearman rank-order correlation was applied to assess monotonic associations, with results reported using rho coefficients, 95% confidence intervals, and p-values. Third, subgroup comparisons for positive work-life balance were interpreted with effect-size metrics—odds ratio (OR), relative risk (RR), and risk difference—to quantify practical significance. Finally, chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were used to evaluate statistical significance of associations between categorical variables.

4. Results

4.1 Overall work–life balance level

The overall Work–Life Balance Index (WLBI) indicates a generally favorable pattern in the sample. The mean WLBI score was 3.57 with a standard deviation of 0.99, and the 95% confidence interval (CI) ranged from 3.48 to 3.66. Taken together, these values suggest that employees, on average, experienced a moderate-to-positive level of work–life balance, although the dispersion indicates meaningful variation across individuals.

4.2 Distributional outcomes

A closer distributional view shows that perceptions of work–life balance were not uniform. Positive WLB (combining positive and very positive responses) was reported by 45.5% of respondents, while 36.4% reported a neutral experience and 18.1% reported negative WLB (negative or very negative). This pattern suggests that although nearly half the sample reports favorable balance, a substantial segment remains either ambivalent or adversely affected.

Findings across related domains reinforce this mixed-but-actionable picture. Nearly half of employees (49.9%) reported a positive productivity impact, and a similar share (50.1%) reported a positive well-being/stress impact. Commute sentiment was comparatively stronger, with 68.2% stating they were satisfied or very satisfied with their commute. At the same time, 49.9% agreed or strongly agreed with a preference for remote/flexible work, indicating continued demand for flexibility despite moderate commute satisfaction overall.

4.3 Association estimates

Spearman correlation analysis showed that commute duration had statistically significant inverse associations with all key outcomes. Longer commute duration was associated with lower WLB score ($\rho = -0.506$, 95% CI: -0.569 to -0.436, $p = 1.31e-32$), lower commute satisfaction ($\rho = -0.582$, 95% CI: -0.638 to -0.519, $p = 7.32e-45$), lower productivity score ($\rho = -0.385$, 95% CI: -0.459 to -0.307, $p = 1.75e-18$), and lower WLBI composite score ($\rho = -0.477$, 95% CI: -0.543 to -0.404, $p = 1.21e-28$).

These coefficients indicate medium-to-strong negative relationships, with the strongest effect observed

between commute duration and commute satisfaction. In practical terms, as commuting time increases, employee experience tends to worsen across multiple dimensions relevant to HR outcomes.

4.4 Comparative subgroup analysis (<=30 min vs >30 min)

Subgroup comparisons showed a pronounced difference in positive WLB prevalence by commute time. Among employees commuting 30 minutes or less, 60.1% (197/328) reported positive WLB. In contrast, only 14.4% (22/153) of those commuting more than 30 minutes reported positive WLB.

Effect-size estimates confirmed that this gap is not only statistically significant but also practically large. The odds ratio (OR) was 8.95 (95% CI: 5.42–14.80), indicating that short-commute employees had nearly nine times higher odds of positive WLB than long-commute employees. The relative risk (RR) was 4.18, and the risk difference was 45.7 percentage points. Significance tests were highly robust (chi-square $p = 7.27e-21$; Fisher exact $p = 2.97e-22$). This pattern reflects a high-magnitude, policy-relevant difference with direct implications for workforce design.

4.5 Improvement priorities

When respondents were asked about preferred commute-related improvements, five priorities emerged clearly. The most frequently cited was improved road/bike infrastructure (41.0%), followed by remote/flexible work opportunities (36.4%) and shorter commute time (31.8%). Two additional priorities—affordable transport options (27.2%) and reliable public transport (27.2%)—were equally emphasized.

WLBI mean = 3.57, SD = 0.99, 95% CI = 3.48 to 3.66.

Table 1. Participant and commute profile (n = 481).

Domain	Category	n	Percent
Gender	Female	328	68.2
Gender	Male	153	31.8
One-way commute duration	Less than 15 minutes	175	36.4
One-way commute duration	15-30 minutes	153	31.8
One-way commute duration	30-60 minutes	44	9.1
One-way commute duration	1-2 hours	65	13.5
One-way commute duration	More than 2 hours	44	9.1
Primary commute mode	Car	88	18.3
Primary commute mode	Bike	109	22.7
Primary commute mode	Public Transit	153	31.8
Primary commute mode	Walk	109	22.7

Primary commute mode	Other (please specify): _____	22	4.6
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Table 21. Work-life balance impact distribution (n = 481).

Response category	n	Percent
Very negatively	22	4.6
Negatively	66	13.7
Neutral	175	36.4
Positively	109	22.7
Very positively	109	22.7

Table 22. Productivity impact distribution (n = 481).

Response category	n	Percent
Very negatively	44	9.1
Negatively	0	0.0
Neutral	197	41.0
Positively	131	27.2
Very positively	109	22.7

Table 23. Well-being and stress impact distribution (n = 481).

Response category	n	Percent
Very negatively	22	4.6
Negatively	87	18.1
Neutral	131	27.2
Positively	175	36.4
Very positively	66	13.7

Table 24. Commute satisfaction distribution (n = 481).

Response category	n	Percent
Very dissatisfied	22	4.6
Dissatisfied	0	0.0
Neutral	131	27.2
Satisfied	175	36.4
Very satisfied	153	31.8

Table 25. Preference for remote/flexible work distribution (n = 481).

Response category	n	Percent
Strongly disagree	22	4.6
Disagree	66	13.7
Neutral	153	31.8
Agree	109	22.7
Strongly agree	131	27.2

Table 3. Key summarized indicators (n = 481).

Indicator	n	Percent
Positive WLB (positively + very positively)	219	45.5
Neutral WLB	175	36.4
Negative WLB (negatively + very negatively)	87	18.1
Commute <=30 minutes	328	68.2
Commute >30 minutes	153	31.8

Table 4. Association analysis recalculated for n = 481.

Association	Spearman rho	95% CI low	95% CI high	p-value
Commute duration vs WLB score	-0.506	-0.569	-0.436	1.31e-32
Commute duration vs commute satisfaction	-0.582	-0.638	-0.519	7.32e-45
Commute duration vs productivity score	-0.385	-0.459	-0.307	1.75e-18
Commute duration vs WLBI composite	-0.477	-0.543	-0.404	1.21e-28

Table 5. Positive WLB by commute subgroup (n = 481).

Commute group	Positive WLB (n)	Non-positive WLB (n)	Positive WLB (%)
<=30 minutes	197	131	60.10
>30 minutes	22	131	14.40

Association statistics: OR = 8.95 (95% CI 5.42-14.80), RR = 4.18, risk difference = 45.7 percentage points, chi-square p = 7.27e-21, Fisher exact p = 2.97e-22.

Table 6. Most valued commute improvements (projected counts, n = 481).

Improvement priority	Estimated respondents	Percent
Improved road or bike path infrastructure	197	41.0
Opportunities for remote/flexible work	175	36.4
Shorter commute time	153	31.8

More affordable transportation options	131	27.2
More reliable public transportation	131	27.2
Other (please specify): _	66	13.7

5. Discussion

This study offers strong evidence that commute duration functions as a meaningful HR variable rather than a peripheral logistical issue. The observed association pattern indicates that longer commute conditions are linked to lower WLB, lower satisfaction, and lower productivity. The subgroup risk profile (OR = 8.95) suggests that commute burden may act as a structural inequality in employee experience.

From an HRM standpoint, the findings imply that workforce outcomes are shaped not only by role design and managerial style, but also by the temporal and mobility demands embedded in the employment arrangement. While causality cannot be established in a cross-sectional design, the effect sizes and consistency across indicators indicate that commute-conscious policy design is likely to yield material employee benefits.

The substantial proportion expressing preference for remote/flexible options (49.9%) reinforces that employees perceive flexibility as a practical mechanism to offset commute-related strain. This is consistent with the policy direction many organizations have taken in hybrid-era workforce redesign.

6. HR Implications and Managerial Recommendations

6.1 Commute-sensitive workforce segmentation

Organizations should treat commuting burden as a measurable workforce risk factor rather than a personal issue outside HR scope. A practical starting point is to classify roles and teams by commute dependency—such as high on-site dependence, partial mobility, and low mobility sensitivity—while mapping average one-way travel time and mode reliability. This segmentation helps HR identify where commute strain is systematically concentrated and where interventions will produce the greatest impact. Instead of applying one uniform policy, firms can prioritize support for high-burden groups, reducing inequity and improving policy efficiency.

6.2 Hybrid and flexible work architecture

Flexible work should be institutionalized through clear, written policy rather than informal manager-by-manager decisions. HR can define transparent eligibility criteria (role criticality, customer-facing requirements, security constraints) and predictable cadence models, such as two to three remote days per week for commute-heavy employees. When flexibility rules are standardized, employees perceive higher procedural fairness, and managers gain clarity on implementation boundaries. This reduces inconsistency, prevents favoritism, and makes flexible work a strategic design tool rather than an exception granted ad hoc.

6.3 Location-informed staffing and scheduling

Scheduling should reflect real commuting infrastructure and congestion patterns. HR and operations teams can align attendance windows and shift start times with local transit realities, especially in high-traffic corridors. Staggered start and end times reduce peak-hour stress, improve punctuality, and lower fatigue before work even begins. For organizations with multiple sites, location-informed staffing can also be

used to assign employees to the nearest feasible office or client location, thereby reducing avoidable travel load and improving daily recoverability.

6.4 Employee transport ecosystem support

A commute-aware HR strategy is strengthened when supported by transport benefits. This may include public transit allowances, employer-supported shuttle partnerships, cycling incentives, and affordability programs targeted at employees with the highest commute burden. These measures are not only welfare-oriented; they can also improve attendance regularity, reduce late arrivals caused by transport disruptions, and strengthen employer value proposition in competitive labor markets. A tiered support model can ensure cost discipline while directing resources to employees who need them most.

6.5 Work–life balance as a monitored HR KPI

Work–life balance should be monitored as a core people metric, not an occasional engagement survey theme. HR can incorporate commute-adjusted WLB indicators into quarterly dashboards and review them alongside attrition, absenteeism, productivity, and engagement. Trend monitoring by function, tenure band, gender, and commute cluster helps identify where policy is working and where hidden pressure is accumulating. Embedding WLB into routine analytics also enables earlier intervention, reducing the risk of burnout and downstream performance decline.

6.6 Retention and productivity strategy

Commute burden should be explicitly integrated into retention-risk models, particularly for high-skill and hard-to-replace roles. Employees facing persistent travel strain may show early signals such as disengagement, reduced discretionary effort, or intent to exit. For such groups, organizations should combine schedule flexibility with manager coaching on workload design, boundary-setting, and output-based performance management. This dual approach protects well-being while sustaining performance standards, helping organizations avoid the false trade-off between productivity and employee health.

Integrated managerial takeaway

Taken together, these recommendations position commuting as a strategic HR variable linked to retention, productivity, and organizational resilience. Firms that operationalize commute-sensitive policy design are better placed to create equitable employee experiences, improve performance consistency, and build a more sustainable employment model over the long term.

7. Conclusion

The findings show that commute duration is not a minor background factor; it is a meaningful structural determinant of work–life outcomes among Indian employees. In practical terms, employees with shorter commutes are substantially more likely to experience and report positive work–life balance.

By contrast, longer commutes are consistently linked with less favorable outcomes, including lower overall satisfaction and reduced productivity. This pattern suggests that commuting burden operates as a recurring daily stressor that can weaken both employee well-being and work effectiveness over time.

For HR leaders, the implication is clear: commute-sensitive policy should be treated as a core strategic priority rather than an optional employee perk. Interventions such as flexible scheduling, hybrid work design, location-aware staffing, and transport support can directly strengthen workforce performance, improve well-being, and support long-term retention.

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