

Original Article

Work-Life Balance among Small-Scale Female Entrepreneurs

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The rising number of small-scale female entrepreneurs, particularly in developing regions, has highlighted the critical issue of work-life balance (WLB). Women engaged in entrepreneurial ventures face a dual burden of managing business responsibilities alongside domestic roles, often resulting in time constraints, role conflict, and stress. This paper synthesizes existing research on the challenges, strategies, and socio-cultural dynamics influencing WLB among women entrepreneurs. Findings indicate that female entrepreneurs often lack institutional support, face societal expectations to prioritize home duties, and struggle with access to affordable childcare and financial independence. Time-based and strain-based conflicts are more pronounced among women operating small businesses, especially when they are home-based or lack support staff. However, access to social support—from family members and entrepreneurial networks—has been shown to significantly ease the burden of conflicting responsibilities.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance (WLB), Small-scale female entrepreneurs, Challenges, Strategies, Socio-cultural dynamics, Institutional support, Societal expectations, Childcare, Financial independence, Time constraints, Role conflict

Introduction

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage the demands of both work and personal life in a way that promotes well-being and performance in both domains. For small-scale female entrepreneurs, especially in developing countries, maintaining this balance is particularly challenging due to the overlapping roles they assume—as business owners, caregivers, homemakers, and community participants (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

Unlike salaried employees, entrepreneurs often lack defined working hours or formal support systems, increasing the risk of role overload and work-life conflict. The situation becomes more complex for women who face additional societal expectations to manage household responsibilities, childcare, and eldercare. In the light of above information present paper attempted to investigate work-life balance among small-scale female entrepreneurs.

Review of Literature

Work-life balance (WLB) has emerged as a crucial area of research in entrepreneurship, particularly concerning women entrepreneurs. Several studies have examined the interplay between gender roles, entrepreneurial responsibilities, and personal well-being. Greenhaus and Allen (2011) explain that women, especially those running small businesses, often operate under the influence of traditional gender expectations. They are expected to maintain household duties while also managing their businesses, leading to a “dual burden” that affects their physical and mental health. This dual responsibility is more intense in patriarchal or semi-urban societies where women are culturally expected to prioritize family over work (Singh & Sharma, 2018). Parasuraman and Simmers (2001) highlight that women entrepreneurs experience high levels of role conflict due to insufficient boundaries between work and home domains. This is especially prevalent among small-scale entrepreneurs who operate home-based businesses, making it difficult to compartmentalize their roles.



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Similarly, Frone et al. (1992) observed that time-based and strain-based conflicts are more pronounced in self-employed women than in salaried employees. According to Becker-Blease and Sohl (2007), the size and nature of a woman's business play a significant role in shaping her work-life balance. Small-scale entrepreneurs with limited capital and workforce tend to have less flexibility and face higher workload concentration, which limits time for personal life. Studies by Shelton (2006) and Jennings & McDougald (2007) show that social support—especially from spouses and extended family—plays a vital role in improving work-life balance. Entrepreneurs who receive emotional and logistical support at home are more likely to manage stress and maintain productivity. Informal support systems like peer groups and women entrepreneur networks are also important sources of resilience. In India and other South Asian contexts, cultural expectations, lack of infrastructural support, and social stigma related to women's mobility and financial independence contribute to heightened work-life conflict (Deshpande, 2014). Furthermore, limited access to affordable childcare and rigid banking structures exacerbate the strain faced by female entrepreneurs. Recent research by Agarwal and Lenka (2021) suggests that digital tools, such as e-commerce platforms, online banking, and mobile scheduling apps, have enabled women to better manage time and reduce role overlap. However, digital illiteracy and lack of access in rural areas remain challenges.

Challenges to Work-Life Balance

Several unique challenges affect small-scale female entrepreneurs' ability to achieve WLB:

a. Time Constraints

Female entrepreneurs typically operate under tight time constraints. They must manage business operations (often without employees) and household responsibilities simultaneously (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001).

b. Role Conflict

Women often experience conflict between their entrepreneurial identity and domestic responsibilities. Role conflict arises when the expectations of one role (e.g., mother or wife) interfere with those of another (e.g., business owner) (Frone et al., 1992).

c. Lack of Institutional Support

Small-scale female entrepreneurs frequently lack access to support systems such as childcare, employee assistance programs, or mental health services that could ease their burdens.

d. Societal Expectations

Cultural and societal norms in many communities reinforce the belief that women must prioritize family over career, placing emotional stress on women striving to grow their businesses.

e. Financial Pressure

Running a small-scale business often involves financial instability, making it harder for women to invest in delegation, outsourcing, or leisure—further intensifying work-life conflict.

Strategies for Managing Work-Life Balance

Despite the challenges, many female entrepreneurs develop adaptive strategies to maintain equilibrium between their work and personal lives:

- **Time Management Techniques:** Setting daily routines, using calendars or planners, and prioritizing urgent tasks.
- **Family Support:** Involving spouses, children, or extended family in business and domestic tasks.
- **Hiring Help:** Outsourcing non-core business activities or hiring domestic help (where financially viable).
- **Boundary Management:** Physically or mentally separating work from home life, especially for home-based businesses.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Joining women's entrepreneur groups or cooperatives that offer advice, moral support, and resources.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

To support small-scale female entrepreneurs in achieving work-life balance, the following interventions are recommended:

- **Flexible Financing Options:** Easier access to credit can help women hire assistance and scale their businesses.
- **Skill Development Workshops:** Government and NGOs can offer training in time management, leadership, and digital tools.
- **Community-Based Childcare:** Affordable, local childcare options would ease the burden on mothers managing businesses.
- **Social Recognition Programs:** Celebrating successful female entrepreneurs can help shift societal perceptions of gender roles.

Conclusion

Work-life balance is an essential yet often overlooked aspect of entrepreneurship for women. Small-scale female entrepreneurs, particularly in developing regions, face unique constraints that hinder their ability to balance



work and personal life effectively. Addressing these challenges through supportive policies, education, and community engagement can not only improve the quality of life for these women but also enhance their productivity and contribution to the local economy.

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