

Original Article

Work-Life Balance and Occupational Stress among Urban Middle-Class Male Employees in India

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Abstract

Rapid economic liberalization, urban expansion, and the growth of the private sector have significantly transformed the nature of employment in India. Urban middle-class male employees, traditionally viewed as primary earners, increasingly face intense work demands, long hours, performance pressures, and job insecurity. This paper examines the relationship between work-life balance and occupational stress among urban middle-class male employees in India. By using a political economy and labour governance perspective, the study analyses structural factors like corporate work culture, labour policy implementation, contractualization, and socio-cultural expectations of masculinity. The paper argues that work-life imbalance has become a structural problem rather than an individual failure, contributing to psychological strain, declining well-being, and weakened social relations. Policy reforms, corporate accountability, and cultural shifts are necessary to address this growing concern.

Keywords: Work-life balance, occupational stress, urban India, middle class, labour governance, masculinity, private sector employment.

Introduction

India's post-1991 economic reforms introduced urbanization, privatization, and global market integration. While these changes expanded employment opportunities for the urban middle class, they also intensified workplace competition and performance expectations. Middle-class male employees in metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Pune often work beyond the standard hours and face constant digital connectivity along with managing financial responsibilities for their families.

Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to maintain equilibrium between professional and personal responsibilities. Occupational stress emerges when job demands exceed an individual's capacity. In urban India, the pressure to be successful economically, combined with cultural expectations that men act as primary providers, creates unique stress dynamics. This study investigates how structural employment patterns in India's private sector influence work-life imbalance and create occupational stress among urban middle-class men.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the social implications of work-life imbalance on family and mental well-being.
2. To assess the role of corporate work culture and labour governance in shaping stress levels.
3. To examine the extent of work-life imbalance among urban middle-class male employees in India.
4. To analyse the factors contributing to occupational stress in private sector employment.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach supported by secondary data sources including government reports, labour studies, academic research, and policy documents.

For empirical expansion, the study could include:

- Survey of urban male employees (age 25–50)
- Interviews in metropolitan cities
- Stress assessment scales



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- Analysis of working hours and leave policies

Review of Literature

Existing studies on work-life balance majorly focuses on women's dual roles in paid work and caregiving. However, recent studies indicates that men also experience significant work-family conflict, especially in urban professional sectors.

Studies on occupational stress highlight factors such as:

1. Long working hours
2. Performance-based appraisal systems
3. Target and Incentive based work culture
4. Job insecurity and contractual employment
5. Digital surveillance and constant availability
6. Commuting stress in metropolitan cities

In the Indian context research suggests that neoliberal economic policies have shifted workplace culture toward more efficiency, competitiveness, and productivity maximization. However, there is limited research specifically focusing on the psychological condition of middle-class male employees and the socio-political dimensions of their stress.

This paper contributes by integrating labour governance, masculinity norms, and political economy into the analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based upon three interrelated perspectives:

1 Political Economy of Labour

Privatisation and contractualization has been increased because of LPG Reforms, the work culture has been inclined towards the maximisation of productiveness and efficiency not only in urban society but in everywhere which has a plus point as well as that reduces the long-term job security. This type of work culture prioritises profit and performance over employee welfare.

2 Role Conflict Theory

It's often seen that people struggle between professional commitments and family commitments. This work conflict arises when a person's role is to fulfill professional demands, yet how can they simultaneously fulfill family demands through that work? It's generally difficult to allocate equal time to professional work and family. People know that if they prioritize their work today, they'll be able to fulfill their family demands tomorrow. While they may be able to fulfill monetary demands, spending time equally isn't possible. In this situation, balancing work and family life can be a mental stress.

3 Masculinity and Social Responsibility

In Indian middle-class households, men are often expected to be primary breadwinners. generally, man is considered the sole source of income. All household responsibilities such as taking out loans, paying children's school fees, household expenses, etc. are considered the responsibility of the male. That financial pressure intensifies occupational stress.

Research Questions

1. How do working hours and corporate expectations affect work-life balance?
2. What structural factors contribute to occupational stress?
3. How do social expectations of masculinity influence stress levels?
4. Are current labour policies adequate to protect employee well-being?

Findings and Discussion

1 Long Working Hours and Digital Connectivity

Most private companies have extended working hours these days to increase productivity. Employees are forced to work digitally for more than a standard hour, working on mobile phones and laptops for extended periods to earn more money and meet family needs, which is having a negative impact on mental health.

2 Job Insecurity and Contractualization

Most of the companies have shifted towards contractual basis short term jobs and due to incentive and performance-based work culture, the level of anxiety among the employees and insecurity regarding the job is increasing. Fear of job loss discourages employees from demanding reasonable work hours or leave.

3 Urban Lifestyle Pressures

High living costs in metropolitan cities adds financial stress. Housing loans, school fees, healthcare costs, and social obligations increase economic responsibility and pressure.

4 Masculinity Norms and Emotional Suppression

The Cultural expectation from the male community of our society is that they should never be bored and should never get tired, due to which they can never share their inner problems and tensions. Which discourage men from expressing vulnerability. As a result, stress remains internalized, sometimes leading to burnout, hypertension, anxiety disorders, and strained family relationships.

5 Weak Enforcement of Labour Welfare Provisions

Although labour codes exist, implementation gaps reduce their effectiveness. Employee assistance programs and mental health policies are limited in many private firms.

Implications

1 Social Implications

- Reduced family interaction
- Marital conflict
- Limited parental involvement

2 Psychological Implications

- Anxiety and burnout
- Sleep disorders
- Depression

3 Political Implications

- Declining trust in institutions
- Reduced civic engagement
- Growing dissatisfaction among the urban middle class

Policy Recommendations

1. Strict enforcement of working-hour regulations in private companies.
2. Corporate mental health policies and counselling services.
3. Flexible work arrangements with defined boundaries.
4. Awareness programs challenging rigid masculinity norms.
5. Stronger labour inspection mechanisms to ensure compliance.

Conclusion

Work-life imbalance and occupational stress among urban middle-class male employees in India are structural issues rooted in economic reforms, corporate culture, and socio-cultural expectations. While economic growth has expanded opportunities, it has simultaneously intensified workplace pressures. Addressing this problem requires coordinated action from the state, corporations, and society. Sustainable development must include employee well-being as a core objective rather than a peripheral concern.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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