FEDERAL UNIVERSITY GUSAU (FUGUS), ZAMFARA STATE, NIGERIA
FUGUS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
(FIJLIS)VOL.2.,NO.2,(DECEMBER)2025 DOI: https://doi.org/10.57233/fijlis.v2i2.06
ISSN PRINT:1595-3432
A Publication of the University Library.

WORK LIFE BALANCE AMONG WOMEN LIBRARIANS: CHALLENGES, CONSEQUENCES AND STRATEGIES FOR WELL-BEING

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Received on: 2nd Dec., 2024 **Revised and Accepted on:** 25th Sept., 2025 **Published on:** 1st Dec., 2025

ABSTRACT

The pursuit of work-life balance has become an imperative aspect of modern professional life, particularly for women librarians who often face unique challenges in managing their personal and professional responsibilities. Despite the importance of achieving a harmonious balance between work and life, women librarians continue to encounter numerous barriers that hinder their ability to do so. This conceptual paper explores the challenges that women librarians face in achieving work-life balance. It examines the consequences of neglecting personal well-being, including burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and strained relationships. Furthermore, the paper discusses the societal, organisational, and individual factors that contribute to these challenges. It also proposes strategies for promoting work-life balance and enhancing overall well-being among women librarians. These strategies include flexible work schedules, self-care practices, and organisational support. By acknowledging the challenges and consequences of neglecting work-life balance, the paper aims to spark a critical conversation about the importance of prioritizing personal well-being in the pursuit of professional success. Ultimately, it seeks to empower women librarians to take control of their work-life balance, challenge existing norms and expectations, and cultivate a culture of well-being and support within their professional communities.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Women librarians, Challenges, Consequences, Strategies

Introduction

Work is an integral part of one's professional identity, but balancing it with the non-work activities can be difficult. Work-life balance has become a pressing concern for individuals, organisations, and society as a whole. Kedar (2023) emphasized that achieving Work life Balance is crucial for employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organisational productivity. Traditionally creating and managing a balance between the work-life was considered to be a woman's issue. However, escalating increasing pressures, globalization and technological advancement have transformed worklife balance into a pervasive concern with both sexes, all professionals working across all levels and organisations throughout the world. According to Bhatia and Kulshrestha (2018), it began with employees especially working women experiencing difficulties to balance the obligations of family and work assignments. With more working women joining workforce, policies were created to facilitate their effort of balancing work and family roles**.**

Work life balance is a comfortable state of equilibrium achieved between an employee's primary priorities of their employment position and their private lifestyle (Meenakshi, 2013). Work-life balance is a broad concept that encompasses prioritizing responsibilities, striking a harmonious equilibrium balance, professional ambitions and personal aspirations while nurturing essential aspects of life including leisure, family and growth and overall wellbeing. Bhatia and Kulshrestha (2018) opined that the fast-developing knowledge economy has given place for a greater number of women to be enlightened by higher education. Education has not only empowered them but also has given them robust careers. As the knowledge-based economy increasingly values intellectual capabilities over physical strength, women are now equally represented alongside men in virtually every industry. However, this has indeed become a tough challenge for women as they have to perform a lot of duties in home and office as well. Work-personal life conflict occurs for a woman when the burden, obligations and responsibilities of work and family roles become incompatible. The library profession is traditionally dominated by women and has long been characterised by a strong sense of commitment and dedication to serving users.

However, this dedication often comes at a personal cost as women librarians struggle to balance their professional responsibilities with family, care-giving and personal obligations. The demands of librarianship including long hours, evening and weekend shifts, technological expectations can blur the boundaries between work and personal life leading to burnout, stress and decreased job satisfaction. Also, Adeyemi (2018) identified other negative outcomes associated with work-life imbalance include relational problems, hangover, unethical practices, disturbed families, decreased performance. The individual feels irritable and resentful, and this can affect productivity in the workplace. To mitigate this, many employees including women may resort to unethical practice such as abandoning their duty post during working hours to run errands for personal gains, thus heightening the issue of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and low productivity in the workplace.

This paper seeks to explore the specific barriers that women librarians encounter in achieving balance in their work and personal lives, find out the impact of these challenges on their well-being and job performance, and identify effective strategies and policies that can promote a healthier work-life balance.

Concept of Work Life Balance

Work-life balance has become a pressing concern for individuals, organisations, and society as a whole. A contemporary definition frames work-life balance as the extent to which individuals can minimize role conflict and maximize role enrichment between work and personal life (Zaitouni et al., 2024). Wong, Teh, and Chan (2023) describe work life balance as the fit between the time and energy invested in work versus non-work activities, alongside personal satisfaction with these roles.

Similarly. Eurofound (2023) a good work–life balance exists when individuals have the right and ability to live a fulfilled life inside and outside work, supported by both employers and society. This conceptualisation emphasises mutual benefits for employees, organisations, and communities. Timms *et al*. (2022) portrayed work–life balance in terms of complementarity, rather than compatibility of domains, suggesting that the experience of multiple roles can enhance an individual's overall sense of well-being. A common dilemma for many people is how they manage all the competing demands in work and life and avoid letting any negative effects of work spill over into their personal lives (Meenakshi, 2013). The concept of work-life balance of women is receiving a rising interest among researchers today because many women are pursuing jobs and careers while having families. The implication of family and workplace demands is that it increases the likelihood that women employees will experience conflict between their work and family roles thus contribute to higher levels of work-family conflict.

According to Balaji (2014), in most cases, married women's work demand places more negative influence on family responsibilities than the family demand places on the work. Family-work-conflict can negatively impact the quality of life of the woman because they basically result from an individual trying to meet an overabundance of conflicting demands from the different domains in which they are operating. The reason women appear to experience more conflict than men, however, is because work-life balance is "seen more as women issue due to the traditional mindset, where the woman is considered primarily responsible for the smooth running of the day-to-day affairs of the family irrespective of her job profile and official responsibilities.

Benefits of Work Life Balance

According Marecki (2024) effective work-life balance strategies are positively associated with both employee well-being and productivity. Employees with better balance tend to be healthier and more self-motivated, which translates to better output. When employees perceive themselves as having an acceptable level of work–life balance, they experience positive work-related outcomes due to the accumulation of resources, fostering self-efficacy to attain goals, leveraging positive synergies between personal and professional life and reciprocating favorable treatment with increased commitment and dedication to the organisation. On the other hand, it is worth emphasizing that the benefits of work-life balance can enhance both the quality of employees and the effectiveness of the organisation.

Other benefits include:

1. By prioritising personal well-being, individuals can improve their physical and mental health, increase happiness and overall well-being, and cultivate stronger relationships with family and friends. A healthy work-life balance also reduces stress and anxiety, leading to increased self-esteem and confidence.
2. Professionally, achieving work-life balance has numerous advantages. It increases productivity and efficiency, improves job satisfaction and engagement, and enhances creativity and problem-solving skills. Effective time management and prioritisation skills also emerge, leading to increased.

3. Organisations also reap significant benefits when employees achieve work-life balance. Employee retention and morale improve, organisational reputation and culture are enhanced, and communication and collaboration among team members increase. Ultimately, this leads to increased productivity and profitability opportunities for career advancement.
4. Achieving work-life balance also has numerous benefits for family and social relationships. Stronger family relationships and bonding result from increased quality time with loved ones. Work-family conflict resolution improves, and community involvement and social connections increase.
5. Economically, achieving work-life balance reduces healthcare costs and absenteeism, increases employee loyalty and retention, and enhances organisational competitiveness. This, in turn, contributes to economic stability and growth.

Challenges to Work Life Balance among Women Librarians

In most societies, work-life conflict seems to be quite high especially in case of working women. In a patriarchal society such as Nigeria, achieving work life balance poses significant challenges for women. Societal expectations around family commitments create conflict between their professional and domestic responsibilities compounding the struggle for balance. This explains why managing work and family responsibilities can be very difficult for working women including women librarians (Omar *et al*., 2015). As women transit into marriage and motherhood, they assume additional familial responsibilities, undertaking primary care-giving duties for their children and family. Working women of today fulfil family responsibilities and try to remain fully involved in their careers coping up with the competing demands of their multiple roles. The cumulative effect of caring responsibilities and professional obligations imposes a significant burden on working women. As they strive to integrate, manage and balance their roles, they experience heightened stress and pressure.

Also, Bhatia and Kulshrestha (2018) emphasized that when a woman seeks a position of power within an organisation, she must consider the toll on other facets of her life, including hobbies, personal relationships and family. Many executive positions demand time and commitments which can be challenging for working women to fulfill due to familial responsibilities. So also, holding a top management position while serving as the primary caregiver for a child, is a challenge to working women. They must carefully handle their personal balance and skillfully blend their roles, to optimise their potential in all quadrants of life. In this knowledge era, brainpower is the predominant skill. It resulted in the place of women in every field and women's librarianship is also not exceptional for that. Women librarians are trying to balance their leadership roles within their institutions with the challenges of effective use of ICT, managing of library personnel, fostering teamwork, and public relational activities on one front whereas family responsibilities on another (Kedar, 2023). Maximising their time at work, organising household activities and/or chores and finding time during the day for breaks and relaxation, all of which has implications for the provision of library services (Chan et al, 2017).

1. *Burden of excessive work:* Women librarians are often confronted with tasks involving children, home, in-laws, parents and their social circle. Additionally, they must assume multiple roles in their personal lives. The increasing demands on the job require long working hours often extending into their personal time resulting in excessive workload. This perpetuates work life imbalance and may lead to conflict.

2. *Fulfil others' expectations:* The dual roles of women librarians create significant work-life conflict, compounded by the high expectations placed on them by both their families and their organisations. Families anticipate their full participation in social roles, while workplaces demand unwavering professional efficiency. As a result, the pressure to meet these expectations in all areas leads to considerable stress and strain. Consequently, in striving to fulfill the needs of others, women librarians frequently find themselves with little time or energy to pursue their personal interests and aspirations.
3. *Longer work hours:* Women librarians often face the challenge of working longer hours to remain competitive with their male counterparts and stay in contention for career advancement and promotions. Simultaneously, they frequently bear the primary responsibility for caregiving, managing children and older dependents at home. This dual burden significantly extends their working hours, professionally and domestically, thereby compromising their work-life balance.

Consequences of Work Life Imbalance among Women Librarians

Ademuyiwa et al. (2023) identified that women facing conflict report stress, mental fatigue, burnout**,** as well as feelings of guilt towards family, reduced job performance, and disrupted family relationships. They also stressed that women are more likely than men to report high levels of role overload and caregiver strain. This is because women devote more hours per week than men to non-work activities such as childcare, elder care and are more likely to have primary responsibility domestic work.

Long work hours and highly stressful jobs not only hamper employees' ability to harmonize work and family life but also are associated with numerous physical and mental health implications. Brough and O'Driscoll (2010), has established that both formal and informal access to appropriate organisational work–life balance policies clearly assist employees to manage their multiple roles demands. Consequently, these employees have positive work attitudes and performance levels. Conversely, not having appropriate access to organisational work–life balance policies, or having an organisational culture which discourages this access, is associated with negative work attitudes and performance, including employee turnover Otufale and Aina (2023)

Work-family conflict causes problems at home for women employees. These problems can lead to increased frustration and stress for the person, which in turn can result in decreased satisfaction with life. Similarly, when personal family issues spill over into the workplace, employees may become preoccupied, leading to additional challenges. Balancing family responsibilities with organisational expectations and the ongoing effort to maintain equilibrium between the two can significantly impact an individual's well-being, ultimately affecting their overall quality of life. Consequently, conflicts in work-life balance of working women affects their health as they tend to report more stress, muscle tension, headaches, weight gain and depression than their male counterparts (Oludayo, *et al*., 2015). Moreover, work-family conflict not only poses challenges for individuals but also has adverse effects on organisations (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). This conflict can lead to a range of negative outcomes for organisations, including reduced employee job satisfaction, higher turnover rates, increased absenteeism, diminished performance, elevated job stress, and a greater likelihood of employees intending to leave the organization Otufale and Aina (2023). Some consequences of work life imbalance among women librarians are:

1. *High levels of stress and anxiety:* The balancing act between family and work often limits their ability to pursue career advancement beyond a certain level. Some may choose to prioritize their careers over family, which can lead to feelings of frustration and guilt for compromising on family time. In either scenario, they are compelled to make difficult choices or compromises, resulting in heightened stress and anxiety that can take a toll on their overall health.
2. *Job burnout:* With the competing demands of their personal and professional lives, women librarians must stay competitive and keep abreast of developments in their field, which adds to their challenges. Over time, managing these pressures can become increasingly difficult. Many also experience declining health, which further exacerbates their struggles both at work and at home.
3. *Inability to realise full potential:* This creates frustration and resentment among working women, disrupting their various roles and leading to imbalance. Poor work-life balance, therefore, can be seen as a barrier that prevents working women from realizing their full potential. Women librarians, in particular, often juggle multiple roles that frequently overlap, making it challenging to separate their professional responsibilities from family obligations. As a result, they are often compelled to make compromises in either sphere to address immediate demands. Therefore, they are unable to realize their full potential in both domains.

Strategies for Promoting Work Life Balance

1. *Organisational Culture:* Implementing effective organisational support and work-life balance policies, along with fostering a workplace culture that promotes balance and recovery strategies, can significantly alleviate employees' psychological strain and reduce the risk of burnout. Organisations are providing policies parental leave, study leave, flexi-time, part time working, job sharing, emergency leave, and extra maternity leave in order to and retain the best talent Fayaz and Gulzar (2025)
2. *Flexible Scheduling:* Flexible working hours or self-rostering covers flexible start and finish times and a possibility for employees to request specific working hours on a regular basis. Flexible working arrangements are typically negotiated between employers and employees, allowing for adaptable work schedules that benefit both parties. Employees who have access to services such as flexible hours, childcare, parental leave, and supervisor support tend to experience fewer work-life conflicts, higher job satisfaction, reduced stress, and a lower desire to leave their jobs. Flexible working hours are strongly linked to work-family enrichment (Rastogi, Rangnekar & Rastogi, 2015). This allows employees to choose favourable times for them to work effectively. As Ikwor and Amah (2024) stated that employees perceive flexible working hours as essential, especially, when striking a good work-family balance. Flexi-time promotes employee's work-life balance and wellbeing because it reduces work-life conflict, pressure and stress. Offering flexible scheduling options, such as telecommuting, flexible hours, or compressed workweeks, to enable women librarians to balance work and family responsibilities
3. *Supportive Leadership:* Managerial support is a crucial informal work-life balance practice, reflecting how much managers recognised and assist their employees with personal and family matters. Such support is believed to significantly enhance employee satisfaction by promoting a leadership culture that values open communication, empathy, and a deep understanding of work-life balance challenges.

4. *Self-Care Initiatives:* Wellness and health programmes can, for sure assist working women in balancing their personal and professional life. Implementing self-care initiatives, such as mindfulness programmes, wellness workshops, or employee assistance programmes, to promote stress management and overall well-being. Mindfulness has recently gained attention in mental health research and, for instance, has been used as an intervention to address occupational stress and enhance well-being. Mindfulness is the nonjudgmental awareness of your surroundings, "being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present" Opoku (2024 indicate that mindfulness can be beneficial, when employed to manage competing role demands.
5. *Family-Friends Support:* Family may provide an employee both instrumental and emotional support, which are notably similar to workplace support. Hence, it can be stated that employees who receive generous support from family and spouses are indeed capable of solving their varied problems and balancing their work with other aspects of life. The more supportive family and work environment, the better the work-life balance leading to higher rating of organisational efficiency measures for an individual. Bhargava and Baral (2009) found supportive family and work factors lead to enrichment leading to higher job satisfaction, affective commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour.

Conclusion

Work-life balance is not always necessarily an equal balance; it's an activity for the maintenance of the right balance between the two elements of work and life. The concept of best individual work-life balance is very close to a comfortable feeling in handling the multiple aspects of home life and the work of an individual. Furthermore, it has been explained that achieving a better work life balance yields numerous benefits whereas imbalance between work and family of an individual holds a negative effect which can lead to consequences, negatively impacting not only the individual but also the organisations as a whole.

Achieving work-life balance for women librarians can be complex but essential goal, given the unique challenges they face in balancing professional responsibilities and personal commitments. The dual burden of caregiving and workplace demands often leads to stress and burnout, underscoring the importance of adopting effective strategies to promote well-being. At the same time, individuals can benefit from building resilience through flexible scheduling, self-care practices, and leveraging professional networks for support. By addressing these challenges collectively, both organisations and individuals can contribute to a more balanced and fulfilling work-life integration, enabling women librarians to thrive in their careers and personal lives.

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