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## The Impact of Work Life Balance Practices on Employee Performance of Female Machine Operators on the Sri Lankan Apparel Sector

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### Abstract

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#### Area of the Study

This study discusses the impact of work life balance practices on employee performance of female machine operators in the Sri Lankan apparel sector.

#### Problem of the Study

This study attempts to bridge the existing knowledge gap by empirically studying the impact of work-life balance on employee performance on apparel sector in Sri Lanka.

#### Method of the Study

The data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 108 female machine operators in the Sri Lankan apparel sector by administering a structured questionnaire, which consisted of the 32 questions/ statements with 5 point scale. And also, 108 questionnaires were distributed and 96 were received as completed questionnaire. The respondent rate is 88.88%. The data analysis includes the univariate analysis and bivariate analysis.

#### Findings of the Study

Findings suggest that a high correlation exists between work life balance practices and the employee performance of the female machine operators in the Sri Lankan apparel sector. Further, comparably family supportive work provisions highly impact on employee performance than the three of other dimensions. Unexpectedly there was no statistically significant impact of parenting and pregnancy policy on employee performance.

#### Conclusion of the Study

Final result of the study reveals that leave arrangement, flexible working arrangement and family supportive work provision positively impact on employee performance. In conclusion, work life balance practices of organizations positively impact on their employee performance.

**Keywords:** Work Life Balance, Employee Performance, Female Machine Operators, Apparel Sector

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### Introduction

With the technological improvement, world has become globalized and has created high competitiveness among existing organizations. Most organizations use different strategies to achieve their success and to face competition. Performance has emerged as a critical driver of business success in today's competitive marketplace. Under such conditions all functional areas within organizations have been challenged to demonstrate their contribution to organizational performance. Literature points out there are many factors which can affect the performance of employees in an organization. Employee motivation, compensation management, human relation and work life balance practices are main Human Resource functions that affect employee performance (Dissanayaka & Ali 2013)<sup>[1]</sup>. Work life balance has implication for employee attitudes, behaviors, wellbeing as well as organizational effectiveness (Eby et al. 2005)<sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, Work life balance is important for an organization to gain optimal level of performance from employee. As a result organizations consider implementing work life balance practices in their working culture. The business situation instead of work life balance practices, as espoused by many organizations, rests on

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attracting better applicants and decreasing work life conflicts among existing employees with the aim of enhancing employee performance (Beauregard & Henry 2009)<sup>[3]</sup>. Hence, work life balance practices are important to every organization in the public or private sector. In the Sri Lankan context it is the most important fact for the private sector than public sector. Manufacturing industry is the main private industry in the Sri Lankan economy (Dassanayaka & Ali 2013)<sup>[4]</sup>. With the high competition of the apparel industry, long term retaining in the industry is more challenging. To be successful, organization should rethink about their employee well-being and quality of life. Although, most of the organizations pay attention on employee well-being, they hardly sense employees' work life balancing as important for employee performance.

### **Problem Background and Problem of the Study**

Research on work life balance reports, increase in organizational performance (Beauregard & Henry 2009)<sup>[5]</sup> impact on family friendly policies on employees' job satisfaction and turn over intention (Peggy 2007)<sup>[6]</sup>, reduction in absenteeism (Balmforth & Gardner 2006)<sup>[7]</sup>, increase in self-reported productivity (Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne 2007<sup>[8]</sup>; Konrad & Mangel 2000<sup>[9]</sup>), and improvement in job satisfaction (Balmforth & Gardner 2006<sup>[10]</sup>; Equal Employment Opportunities Trust 2007 as cited by Susi & Jawaharrani 2010<sup>[11]</sup>) as results of organizational work life initiatives, supporting employee work-life balance. Even though satisfaction and engagement both often correlate positively to organizational outcomes, engagement is a direct antecedent of satisfaction, and necessary for more optimal satisfaction outcomes to emerge. The recognition that there is a relationship between the well-being of employees and their contribution at work is not a new or a revolutionary concept (Hacker & Doolen 2003)<sup>[12]</sup>. In a study of male executives, Judge, Boudreau and Bretz (1994)<sup>[13]</sup> rated the work-family policies available to these employees and found that more comprehensive benefits were associated with lower work-to-life conflict, but not life-to-work conflict (Beauregard & Henry 2009)<sup>[14]</sup>. Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness (1999)<sup>[15]</sup> also found a significant, negative association between the availability of work-life practices and work-to-life conflict, while Frye and Breugh (2004)<sup>[16]</sup> identified a negative relationship between perceptions of the usefulness of organizational work-life practices and work-to-life conflict. A number of researchers have found that the use of flexible working hours is associated with lower levels of work-to-life conflict (Anderson et al. 2002<sup>[17]</sup>; Hill et al. 2001<sup>[18]</sup>) and non-directional work-life conflict (Lee & Duxbury 1998<sup>[19]</sup>; Saltzstein et al. 2001<sup>[20]</sup>; Beauregard & Henry 2009<sup>[21]</sup>). Thomas and Ganster (1995)<sup>[22]</sup> found that perceived control served as a mediating mechanism by which family-supportive policies influenced a non-directional measure of work-life conflict, and O'Driscoll et al. (2003)<sup>[23]</sup> demonstrated that family-supportive organizational perceptions mediated the link between use of work-life practices and work-to-life conflict. On the other hand, research by Blum et al. (1994)<sup>[24]</sup>, Galinsky and Morris (1993)<sup>[25]</sup>, and Premeaux et al. (2007)<sup>[26]</sup> found no effects of work-life practices on employees' work-life conflict levels (Beauregard & Henry 2009)<sup>[27]</sup>. Similarly, Goff, Mount, and Jamison's (1990)<sup>[28]</sup> study did not reveal any association between provision of an on-site childcare center and levels of work-life conflict (Beauregard & Henry 2009)<sup>[29]</sup>. Providing work-life practices does not necessarily entail a reduction in levels of staff work-life conflict,

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then, and even where this is the case, there is a dearth of research investigating the mediating role of work-life conflict in the link between work-life practice provision and organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, much of the research literature groups a number of work-life practices together when relating provision or use to attitudinal or behavioral outcomes (Beauregard & Henry 2009)<sup>[30]</sup>.

Thus, this study will attempt to bridge the existing knowledge gap by empirically studying the impact of work-life balance on employee performance on the apparel sector in Sri Lanka. Therefore, an important researchable area and the problem statement of this study is “*Do work life balance practices influence significantly the employee performance?*”

### **Research Framework**

Work life balance practices were identified as the independent variable and the employee performance was identified as dependent variable of this study. This study used to identify the relationship between the independent and dependent variable. Thus, used four dimensions work life balance practices such as leave arrangement, parenting and pregnancy policy, and flexible work arrangement and family supportive work provisions to measuring work life balance practices.

#### ***Work Life Balance Practices***

Work life balance is defined as “*satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict*” (Clark 2000 p.751)<sup>[31]</sup>. Moreover, Parkes and Langford (2008)<sup>[32]</sup> defined this as an individual’s ability to meet work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities.

There is no commonly accepted definition of what constitutes a work-life balance practice; the term usually refers to one of the followings: organizational support for pregnancy policy, flexible work options and family or personal leave (Estes & Michael 2005)<sup>[33]</sup>. According to Berlitz<sup>[34]</sup> practice is the usual way of doing something. Also Business English Dictionary<sup>[35]</sup> defined practice as a method, procedure, process, or rule used in a particular field or profession.

Hence, this study uses Work Life Balance Practices which are available methods, procedures, process and/or rules in the organization that affect the balance of employees’ work life and family life. These practices include flexible work hours compressed work week, working from home, sharing a full-time job between two employees (job sharing), family leave programs (e.g., parental leave, adoption leave, compassionate leave), financial and or informational assistance with childcare and eldercare services (Susi & Jawaharrani 2010)<sup>[36]</sup>.

#### ***Employee Performance***

“*Employee performance is the actions or the completion of errands that were done by individuals within specific period of time*” (Swasto 1995 cited in Khan, Rehman & Akram 2012 p.69)<sup>[37]</sup>. Although, employee performance is a mutual result of effort, ability, and

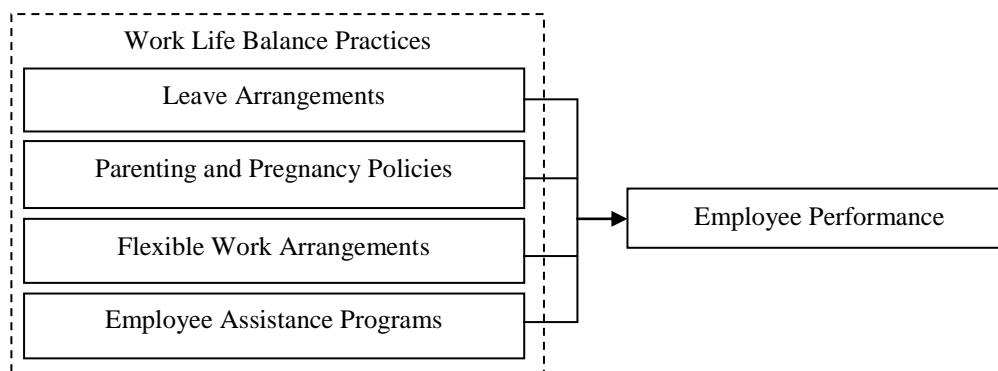
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perception of tasks (Khan & Rehman 2012)<sup>[38]</sup>. On the other hand, “Employee performance is the behavior that can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which it contributes to organizational effectiveness” (Motowidlo, Borman & Schmidt as cited in Golden 2011 p. 4)<sup>[39]</sup>.

Performance is defined as the record of outcomes produced on a specified job function or activity during a specified time period (Dissanayaka & Ali 2013)<sup>[40]</sup>. According to this definition, performance is a set of outcomes produced during a certain time period. Hence, as this study identifies, the working definition of employee performance is that, “achievement of targets of the tasks assigned to employees within particular period of time” (Dissanayaka & Ali 2013)<sup>[41]</sup>.

By enabling employees to schedule their time in order to better balance competing demands from work and from home, and by helping employees to procure third party assistance with caregiving responsibilities, such practices are intended to reduce or eliminate levels of work life conflict, and thereby augment employee performance and organizational effectiveness (Beauregard & Henry 2009)<sup>[42]</sup>. Lazar et al. (2010)<sup>[43]</sup> studied whether work-life balance initiatives and practices can be considered as strategic human resource management decisions that can translate into improved individual and organizational. Likewise, Susi and Jawaharrani (2010)<sup>[44]</sup> examined employee engagement, explore work place culture and work life balance policies & practices followed in industries, in order to promote employee engagement in their organizations to increase their employees productivity and retain them. While, work life practices may be costly for firms to implement, the direct costs are offset by the indirect positive benefits that these work life practices have on employees and firm performance (Soon et al. 2005)<sup>[45]</sup>. Therefore, this study used Figure 1 as the conceptual framework of the study.

Figure1: Conceptual Framework



**Method**

**Study Design**

This study attempts to find out “Do work life balance practices influence significantly the employee performance?” It consists of work life balance practices as independent variables

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and employee performance as dependent variable and this study explains cause and effect relationship. Hence the present study is explanatory in nature and it is a quantitative research. This study uses survey strategy, based on deductive reasoning approach. Data will be collected on each variable in the framework by using a questionnaire. This is a cross sectional study as utilized data will be collected through a common source.

As the garment industry is highly dynamic in nature, cadre fulfillment of machine operators in the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry is changing every day. Therefore, this study considered permanent machine operators in selected two apparel organizations as population. In this study, researcher considered 150 female machine operators those who have children as population (N=150) and the survey is carried out with 108 machine operators of the population. 108 questionnaires were distributed and 96 were received as completed questionnaire. The respondent rate is 88.88%. The data analysis includes the univariate analysis and bivariate analysis.

### ***Measures***

The researcher used questionnaire method to obtain primary data. The questionnaire was a 5 point Likert Scale type which ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The statements for work life balance practices were taken from the questionnaire which has been developed by University of Queensland for the survey on better work life balance. The questionnaire was translated to Sinhala, to collect data easily.

The dependent variable of the research is employee performance and it is measured by using three dimensions as traits (Job Knowledge, Loyalty), behaviours (Punctuality and Attendance) and results (Quality and Quantity) (Opatha 2002)<sup>[46]</sup>. The work life balance practices in apparel industry are also measured by questionnaire which was developed by Queensland University. The Questionnaire included 26 questions relating to dimensions of leave arrangement (Careers leave, Opportunity for leave if care arrangements for children or other dependents break down, Study or training leave, Cultural and religious leave, Bereavement leave, Pooling of leave entitlements), Pregnancy and prenatal policies (Paid maternity leave, Opportunity to return to the same job after maternity and adoption leave, Safety at work during pregnancy, Prenatal leaves, Staggered return to work after pregnancy, Lactation breaks), Flexible work arrangement (Job sharing, Cap on overtime, Compressed working week) and Employee assistance programmes (Telephone for personal use, Referral services for employees' personal needs, Counseling services for employees, Health programs, Parenting or family support program, Relocation or placement assistance, Equal access to promotion and training ).

### ***Validity and Reliability***

The external reliability of the instruments used to collect data was examined by the Test-retest method. This test was carried out using 10 responses (female machine operators) from the Sri Lankan apparel sector within two weeks time interval between two administrations.

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As shown in Table 1, the coefficients of the test-retest of the instruments indicate that each instrument has a high external reliability.

Table 1: Result of Test-Retest

Instrument	Test- retest coefficient
Work Life Balance Practices	0 .818
Employee Performance	0 .925

The inter item consistency reliability was examined with Cronbach’s Alpha test. The results of Cronbach’s Alpha test are given in Table 2, which suggest that the internal reliability of each instrument is satisfactory.

Table 2: Cronbach Alpha Coefficient

	Instrument	Cronbach’s Alpha
1	Work Life Balance Practices	.879
2	Employee Performance	.822

The content validity instrument was ensured by the conceptualization and operationalization of the variables on literature, and indirectly by the high internal consistency reliability of the instruments as denoted by the Alphas.

The construct validity of the variables of the study was ensured by the fact that correlation and regression analysis support the hypothesis formulated linking the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable.

**Techniques of Data Analysis**

The questionnaire data were analyzed and evaluated by the following methods using computer based statistical data analysis package, SPSS (version 16.0). The data analysis includes univariate and bivariate analysis.

**Results**

Using the Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation with one - tailed test of significance, the correlation analysis was made to investigate any relationship between work life balance practices and employee performance.

Table 3: Correlation between Work Life Balance Practice and Employee Performance

Pearson Correlation	0.70825
Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000

\*Note: \*\*P<.01 (1-tailed)

Pearson correlation between the two variables is 0.70825, which is positive. It shows that there is a positive relationship between work life balance practices and employee performance of both categories. The found relationship is statistically significant as correlation significant at 0.01 level (1- tailed). Thus, there is statistical evidence to claim that

work life balance practices and employee performance are positively related. Here relationship was statistically significant at 99% confidence level ( $p < .01$ ).

Table 4: Correlation between Dimensions of Work Life Balance Practices and Employee Performance

Variable	LA	P&PP	FWA	FSWP
LA	1			
P&PP	.750**	1		
FWA	.640**	.707**	1	
FSWP	.747**	.699**	.693**	1
EP	.714**	.676**	.687**	.756**

\* Note: \*\* $P < .01$  (1-tailed)

As shown in Table 4, leave arrangement ( $r = .714$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was positively related to employee performance. According to the theory  $r$  value  $= 0.50$ , it indicates moderate uphill (positive) relationship and  $r = 0.70$  represent a strong uphill (positive) linear relationship. Therefore there is a strong positive relationship between leave arrangement and employee performance and statistically significant at 99% confidence level ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Further, parent and pregnancy policy ( $r = 0.676$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was positively related to employee performance. At this point there was no strong positive relationship but (0.676) value indicated an approximately strong positive relationship between parent and pregnancy policy and employee performance. Also relationship was statistically significant at 99% confidence level ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Table 4 reveals that there is a positive relationship between flexible work arrangement ( $r = 0.687$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and employee performance. Although there was no strong correlation, coefficient indicated approximately a strong positive relationship between flexible work arrangement and employee performance while relationship statistically significant at 99% confidence level.

Furthermore family supportive work provision ( $r = 0.756$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was positive related to employee performance and there was a strong relationship between two variable. Here relationship was statistically significant at 99% confidence level ( $p < 0.01$ ).

According to the results of simple regression analysis, work life balance was found to have a positive impact on employee performance with the strength of  $b$  value of 0.382. Hence, work life balance practices were found to be a predictor of employee performance.

Table 5: Result of Regression Analysis

<i>R</i>	0.756
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.571
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.568
$\Delta F$	178.673
Sig. $\Delta F$	0.000
$\beta$	0.395
<i>SD</i>	0.95613

As shown in Table 3, R value is 0.7082 and it represents strong correlation between the predictors and outcome which in this study are work life balance practices and employee performance. The b value of the equation, the gradient of the regression, is 0.395, which is significant at 1% (significant = 0.000). As indicated by R squared, 56.8% of the variance of the employee performance is explained by work life balance practices with the standardized beta of 0.571. The F value is 178.673, which is significant at 1% (p= 0.000), which suggests that work life balance has significantly explained 56.8% of the variance of employee performance.

Table 6: Result of Regression Analysis for each Dimension of Work Life Balance Practices

Variables	<i>SD</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
<i>Independent Variable</i>				
Family supportive work provision	.926	.382	4.48	.00
Flexible work arrangement	1.072	.250	3.39	.001
Leave arrangement	.881	.268	3.36	.001
<i>Constant</i>		40.198		

Here researcher used stepwise method in regression analysis because this study focuses four dimension as one independent variable. Parenting and pregnancy policy is excluded from the model due to non-significance (p> .01).

As shown in Table 6, R value is 0.808 and it represents strong correlation between the predictors and outcome which in this study are work life balance practices and employee performance. The next column gives value of R square, which measures how much of the variability in the dependent variable is accounted by the independent variable. In this study, it measured how much of the variability of employee performance happens due to family supportive work provision, flexible work arrangement and leave arrangement. Table 6, model one showed; its value is .571, which means that family supportive work provision for 57.1% of the variation in employee performance. However, other two included the value increased to 65.2% of the variance in employee performance. So, when family supportive work provision for 57.1% and flexible work arrangement for 5.1% and additional 3% imply leave arrangement in employee performance.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study considered the relationships among leave arrangement, parenting and pregnancy policy, flexible work arrangement, and family supportive work provision and employee



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performance. For this researcher used correlation analysis and it indicates strong positive relationships among family supportive work provision, leave arrangement and employee performance. Also there are approximately strong positive relationships among parenting and pregnancy policy, flexible work arrangement and employee performance of the organizations. These findings indicate that organization can enhance their machine operators' performance by increasing flexible work arrangement within the organization.

To see the impact of leave arrangement on employee performance, researcher used regression analysis. According to this study it indicates that there is a positive impact of leave arrangement on employee performance and when leave arrangement is increased by 0.881, employee performance is increased by 2.6. Therefore the organizations can increase different leave options by identifying their employees' needs.

Findings of this study reveal that parenting and pregnancy policy has no impact to the machine operators' performance of the organizations. Pregnant and parent employees mainly expect maternity leave for adoption and it is covered from the leave arrangements. As a result, reasonably pregnancy and parent policy do not impact on machine operators' performance of the organizations.

The impact of flexible work arrangements on employee performance and findings of this study reveal that flexible work arrangements positively impact on employee performance. There is no any flexible working schedule in the organizations because it is a manufacturing organization and there are tight working hours. Here flexible work arrangement represents job sharing and compressed work week and those are felt significantly by the employees to balance their work life. The result of this study indicates flexible work arrangements positively impact on machine operators' performance in this context.

Finally the impact of family supportive work provisions on employee performance and findings of this study show that family supportive work provision positively impacts on employee performance. When comparing with the other dimensions of work life balance practices, there is a high impact of this dimension because employees sense new experience by participating in different programs. Therefore always the organizations regard employees' changing needs and create supportive programs based on them. Consequently, these are affected to show high impact of family supportive work provisions on employee performance.

The present findings also highlight the need to develop more supportive family programs, different leave options which facilitate employees' needs and flexible working arrangements within the organizations.

This finding supports much of the literature, which examined the impact of work life balance practices of the organization with employee performance. When the organization has better work life balance practices, significantly affect enhancing employee performance (Peggy

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2007)<sup>[47]</sup>. There is a positive relationship between work life balance practices and employee performance and findings reveal employee performance increases by 0.382 when work life balance practices are increased by 0.95613. Hence, results of this research support the previous researchers' findings. According to the above findings, performance of employees can be enhanced by increasing different work life balance practices options

The problem of the study was "do work life balance practices influence significantly the employee performance of machine operators in the Sri Lankan apparel industry". Based on the theoretical information, conceptual framework developed to test the relationship between work life balance practices and employee performance. According to the findings, it is substantiated that there is a strong positive relationship between work life balance practices and employee performance of female machine operators in the Sri Lankan apparel sector.

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