

POSITION PAPERS



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Work-life balance in Greece: A State-of-The-Art Review

ABSTRACT

In today's working and living conditions, work-life balance (WLB) issues have come more forcefully to the foreground. This paper offers a state-of-the-art review of scholarly research on WLB in Greece from 2011 to 2021. Greece is an interesting case as it had to manage the side effects of a tremendous economic crisis and the disruptions caused by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The interdisciplinary character and the WLB determinants identified in empirical research are highlighted and discussed. The paper stresses the need to re-examine previous research to better understand WLB under the new realities and orient future research.

Keywords: *work-family balance, work-life conflict, work-family conflict, negative spillover, positive spillover*

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Εξισορρόπηση εργασιακής-οικογενειακής ζωής στην Ελλάδα: Βιβλιογραφική επισκόπηση

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Στις σημερινές συνθήκες διαβίωσης και εργασίας, η εξισορρόπηση εργασίας και προσωπικής/οικογενειακής ζωής έχει επανέλθει δυναμικά στο προσκήνιο. Η παρούσα μελέτη αποτελεί μια βιβλιογραφική επισκόπηση της ακαδημαϊκής έρευνας στην Ελλάδα (2011-2021) για το ζήτημα αυτό. Η Ελλάδα έχει ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον καθώς ακόμα προσπαθεί να αντιμετωπίσει τις επιπτώσεις της τεράστιας οικονομικής κρίσης και των ρήξεων που προκάλεσε η πανδημία και ο πόλεμος στην Ουκρανία. Ο διεπιστημονικός χαρακτήρας και οι παράγοντες που επηρεάζουν την εξισορρόπηση αναλύονται και συζητούνται. Η μελέτη επισημαίνει την ανάγκη επανεξέτασης των υφιστάμενων ερευνών για να κατανοηθεί καλύτερα το φαινόμενο στην νέα πραγματικότητα και για να καθοδηγηθεί η μελλοντική έρευνα.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: εξισορρόπηση εργασιακής-οικογενειακής ζωής, σύγκρουση εργασιακής-οικογενειακής ζωής, θετική διάχυση, αρνητική διάχυση

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1. INTRODUCTION

The debate on the relationship between professional and personal/family life has been ongoing for several decades. The COVID-19 pandemic brought work-life balance (WLB) issues more forcefully to the foreground due to the restriction measures and the new working conditions. Moreover, various hybrid work arrangements (digital nomads, workation, etc.) are gaining ground, shaping a different reality for modern workers. All these changes pose significant challenges to the work-personal/family life relationship. It is, thus, essential to revisit scientific evidence to develop a deeper understanding of what is still relevant and identify new research challenges in WLB.

In this context, we aim to develop an overview of the WLB discourse, focusing on the case of Greece, which is a country where family plays the most crucial role in people's lives and the organization of society (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Additionally, Greece deals with the aftermaths of a long-standing economic crisis, COVID-19, and the Ukraine war. Therefore, exploring the relationship between professional and personal/family life in Greece is an interesting topic.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper provides a comprehensive review of academic research on WLB in Greece from 2011 to 2021, including peer-reviewed journals, research project reports and PhD theses. Apart from the explicit reference to "Greece/Greek", the keywords "work-life/family", "balance", and/or "conflict" were used for the search to the following academic search engines and databases: Google Scholar, EBSCOHost Web, Scopus, Oxford Academic, SpringerLink, Willey, Sage, Emerald, Elsevier, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global database and the Greek National Archive of PhD Theses. The review focuses on papers published in English or Greek.

In all, we identified 22 papers on work-life balance in Greece -17 in English and 5 in Greek. From the English articles, we excluded those without empirical research and ended up with 6 quantitative and 8 qualitative papers. Among the Greek articles, only 3 met the inclusion criteria, as the rest focus on legal or policy issues. Additionally, we retrieved 7 PhD theses, 3 from Greek universities and 4 from the UK and USA; of these 2 were because they concerned international studies. Finally, our review includes findings from 5 projects.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Quantitative peer-reviewed journal articles

Giannikis and Mihail (2011) surveyed 362 public and private sector employees to explore the attitudes towards flexible work arrangements and the impact on WLB. The findings indicate that women have a more positive attitude toward flexible work arrangements, which can positively impact their WLB. Employees are more likely to participate in flexible work arrangements when necessary for balancing work and life commitments. Glaveli et al. (2013) surveyed 612 employees to explore the impact of family-supportive work environments on work-family conflict and job satisfaction. They found that supportive management can reduce conflict and increase job satisfaction. Skoufi et al. (2017) found in their survey of 91 professionals in a rehabilitation centre that nurses experience more burnout and work-family conflict than other health professionals. This finding can be attributed to stressful work tasks that decrease job satisfaction and affect work-family balance. Kalaitzi et al. (2019) surveyed 24 women in healthcare leadership positions to explore WLB as a barrier to career advancement. They found that balance was the second most important barrier to pursuing leadership positions in medical practice, education, and healthcare organizations.

Symeonaki et al. (2020) collected data from 752 individuals to explore the impact of the pandemic on WLB and found that only a small percentage of the male and female participants felt that balancing work and family life during the pandemic was very difficult. However, women reported sacrificing more of their personal lives to manage work demands. Younger employees were less satisfied with their WLB, while people over 50 reported higher levels of job and life satisfaction and a better balance between their work and personal lives. Lamprinou et al. (2021) surveyed 211 Greek employees to explore the link between servant leadership, job burnout and WLB, mediated by perceived organizational and supervisor support. They found that servant leadership is positively associated with perceived organizational support (POS) and that POS mediates the relationship between servant leadership, job burnout, and WLB. Finally, Finally, Katou (2021) surveyed 2312 employees from 188 organizations to determine the relationship between core self-evaluations and organizational performance. The study found that work-family and family-work enrichment play a positive mediating role in this relationship.

Work-family balance also acts as a mediator between work-family and family-work enrichment and organizational performance.

3.2. *Qualitative peer-reviewed journal articles*

The qualitative research papers focus on diverse samples to investigate people's experiences from various socio-cultural or professional backgrounds. Lalioti (2017) explored "work sustainability" via 12 interviews with representatives from Greek governmental and social partner organizations. Public policies for WLB include leave policies (e.g., maternity, and paternity leave), flexible work arrangements, and childcare services. Women use leave schemes more than men, and private sector employees hesitate to use them for fear of losing their jobs. The public sector lacks flexible work policies, while childcare services are well-developed, but elderly and disabled care provisions are non-existent.

Xypolytas et al. (2017) interviewed 44 migrant domestic workers to explore how the economic crisis affected their familial relationships and relationships with employers based on a sociological analysis of domestic work. For live-in domestic workers, the crisis contributed to loosening family ties, making it more challenging to maintain WLB while their jobs seemed like familial relationships. Live-out workers also find it difficult to achieve balance, but the crises strengthened their relationship with employers. Xhaho et al. (2021) investigated how migration redefined traditional family roles. They conducted 36 biographical interviews with Albanian migrants and found that women became the primary breadwinners due to high unemployment among men. Although husbands took on domestic tasks, the gender division of labour and hierarchies within the home remained the same. Women faced constant pressure and emotional conflict managing dual roles.

In a different vein, Karassavidou and Glaveli (2015) interviewed 20 company employees to investigate organizational and individual factors determining WLB. Based primarily on the work-family border theory, they highlighted how important it is for employees to separate the two domains. Chatrakul Na Ayudhya et al. (2019), via 20 semi-structured interviews with employees, found that the economic crisis caused reduced self-perceptions of agency for employees and a capabilities gap between means and resources, affecting their ability to achieve WLB, quality working life, and career progression.

Papageorgiou (2020) studied the work-life quality of young entrepreneurs. The 18 startup founders interviewed had highly demanding

schedules and made significant personal and emotional sacrifices. Despite difficulties, they developed a strong emotional attachment to their work. Meliou (2020) found that family provides women with critical resources to start and sustain businesses during financial crises. Family, as an “eudemonic babble”, offers material, affective, and symbolic care, affection, and collaboration, playing a significant role in supporting women entrepreneurs.

Miliopoulou and Kapareliotis (2021) interviewed 12 senior female executives in advertising agencies to investigate challenges faced by women in the economic crisis. The authors noted that family and motherhood were perceived as “a blessing and a curse”. Women feel stressed and inadequate due to societal expectations, which force them to limit their ambitions and undertake twice as many duties. The findings shed light on how women experience anxiety and frustration due to personal rather than situational issues. They worry about missing significant moments in their children’s lives and important opportunities at work. Daskalaki et al. (2021), drawing on prior work on feminist economics and social reproduction, conducted 36 semi-structured interviews with women who had previously worked in precarious work positions and had experienced repeated periods of prolonged unemployment. They discovered that these women retreated to reproductive care roles to regain control and resist the devaluation of their work during times of economic crisis and austerity.

3.3. Other research

As previously noted, the present study also included PhD theses and reports from publicly funded research projects. Out of the theses that used Greek-only samples, one utilized a mixed-method approach to examine the impact of occupational stress. The results indicated that when work demands interfere with personal and home life, it negatively impacts individuals’ psychological well-being (Perrotis, 2014).

The 5 PhD theses with quantitative research designs investigated the “glass ceiling” (Meleti, 2020; Rafailidou, 2012), HRM and work-family reconciliation (Glaveli, 2014), and employee attitudes on flexible work arrangements (Bessa, 2012). Rafailidou (op.cit.) suggests implementing family-friendly policies to overcome the glass ceiling. Meleti (op.cit.) found that such policies empower women to pursue higher-level positions, reduce conflict, and increase job satisfaction. Glaveli’s (op.cit.) research showed that family-supportive management practices have a positive

impact on work and family relationships. The conflict between work and family negatively affects job and family satisfaction, but both job and family satisfaction leads to higher satisfaction with work-life balance. Employees in organizations with strong ideal worker norms have less conflict between work and family life and are more satisfied with their jobs. Finally, Bessa (2012) found that the underrepresentation of women in senior-level positions is attributed to their increased family obligations and responsibilities.

Five research projects were reviewed, one examining job expectations and stereotyping among public-sector employees (Komseli et al., 2017) and another focused on single-parent families' needs (Gnosi Anaptyxiaki Symvouleftiki IKE, 2018). The remaining three were EEA-funded projects that involved qualitative and quantitative field research, the first of which (Germotsi et al., 2016) focused on the role of attitudes of female workers and employers in balancing their professional and family/private lives and the role of policies in facilitating WLB. The findings revealed that smaller firms and family businesses support WLB through informal ad hoc practices. At the same time, larger companies view the imbalance of work and personal life as a natural occurrence. The second project (Alipranti-Maratou et al., 2017; Thanopoulou and Tsiganou, 2016) explored women's needs, expectations, and experiences with work-life balance during the economic crisis. The researchers found that income reductions and scarce childcare services disrupted WLB and led many women to return to traditional roles. The third project (Trivellas et al., 2017) found that the work-life balance of women depends more on how their personal life affects their work, rather than vice versa. Work recovery experiences and coping strategies positively affect WLB and quality of life perceptions. Women are aware of management strategies and tools for managing multiple roles, but simply knowing about them is not enough to achieve well-being.

4. CONCLUSIONS & FINAL REMARKS

This review examines WLB empirical research conducted exclusively in Greece. Peer-reviewed published studies were mainly qualitative, looking at the impact of the economic crisis since 2010 and austerity policies on WLB, focusing on different aspects such as entrepreneurship, precarious employment, gender, and policy issues. Quantitative peer-reviewed research focused on WLB's relationship with various factors, including flexible work arrangements, family-supportive management, conflict



Figure 1:

Review of the WLB research using Greek samples between 2011 and 2021

and enrichment between family and work, and the impact of COVID-19. The studies used relatively small samples comprising both genders in the public and private sector jobs, restricting the generalizability of findings. Some studies focused on specific populations, such as women leaders, nurses, and healthcare professionals. Doctoral dissertations, mostly adopting quantitative designs, focus on flexible work arrangements, the glass ceiling, and HRM practices. Finally, funded projects examine policy issues at the societal level, HRM at the organizational level, and coping strategies, attitudes, and socio-economic factors at the individual level.

The review findings are visually presented in the form of a word cloud (Figure 1). The font size of the terms in the word cloud is proportional to the frequency of their occurrence, which means that the more frequently a term appears, the larger its font size will be (Atenstaedt, 2012). To create the weighted list, we counted the frequency of words and phrases in titles, keywords and abstracts of the publications included in the review. We also

considered our analysis of the publications. The cloud was generated using wordclouds.com.

The above indicates that research on work-life balance (WLB) in Greece is interdisciplinary. Sociology, social policy, management and HRM are the most engaged scientific fields. The academic community's knowledge about WLB is diverse and fragmented, with various approaches, views, and information segmentation being present. It's necessary to identify broader categories of factors related to WLB and link the understanding gained to more general conceptual frameworks, scientific paradigms, and approaches. COVID-19 has created a new normal of working with hybrid and remote forms, requiring a re-examination of research on WLB to deepen our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

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