

Work-Life Balance and Time Flexibility of Female Employees in the Home Industry: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

The increasing participation of women in home industries has highlighted the importance of achieving a sustainable balance between work responsibilities and family life. Flexible working arrangements are widely regarded as a means of improving employees' well-being; however, their effectiveness in home-based employment remains inconsistent due to overlapping domestic and occupational roles. This study aims to systematically review the existing literature on the relationship between work-life balance and time flexibility among female employees in the home industry. The research employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Relevant articles published between 2020 and 2026 were identified from reputable academic databases, screened based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analyzed using thematic synthesis. The review reveals that time flexibility generally enhances work-life balance by increasing schedule autonomy, job satisfaction, productivity, and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, flexible working arrangements do not automatically eliminate work-family conflict because women continue to face unequal domestic responsibilities, economic insecurity, blurred work-life boundaries, and continuous digital connectivity. The findings further indicate that family support, gender equality, organizational commitment, social protection, and digital competence are critical factors influencing the successful implementation of flexible work practices. This review contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrated understanding of the determinants and challenges of work-life balance among female home-industry workers while identifying research gaps and practical implications for policymakers, employers, and researchers. Developing gender-responsive employment policies and comprehensive support systems is essential for promoting sustainable work-life balance and strengthening the long-term competitiveness of home industries.

Keywords

Work-Life Balance; Time Flexibility; Female Employees; Home Industry; Flexible Working Arrangements; Systematic Literature Review



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INTRODUCTION

The increasing participation of women in the labor market has transformed the structure of employment across both formal and informal economic sectors. In developing countries, one of the fastest-growing employment sectors is the home industry, where women constitute the majority of the workforce due to the flexibility it offers in combining productive and reproductive responsibilities. Home industries, including food processing, handicrafts, garment production, and other small-scale manufacturing activities, provide employment opportunities that enable women to contribute to household income while maintaining their traditional roles as caregivers. However, this dual responsibility often creates challenges in maintaining an appropriate balance between work obligations and family life. Consequently, the concepts of work-life balance and time flexibility have become increasingly important in understanding the well-being, productivity, and sustainability of female employment within home industries. Previous studies indicate that employees who experience a healthy work-life balance demonstrate higher job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, lower stress levels, and improved psychological well-being compared to those experiencing work-family conflict (Allen et al., 2020; Haar et al., 2021).

Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage the competing demands of work, family, and personal life without experiencing excessive conflict between these domains. For female employees, particularly those working in home-based industries, achieving this balance is often more complex because the boundaries between workplace and household are physically and psychologically intertwined. Unlike employees in conventional workplaces, women working from home frequently perform paid work while simultaneously managing childcare, domestic chores, and eldercare responsibilities. Although home-based employment theoretically provides greater autonomy over working schedules, it may also intensify role overload, role ambiguity, and emotional exhaustion when family demands interfere with work activities. Recent literature suggests that flexible working arrangements do not automatically guarantee work-life balance unless accompanied by supportive family environments, equitable gender roles, and effective time management practices (Kossek et al., 2022; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020).

Time flexibility has emerged as one of the most influential organizational factors affecting employees' quality of life. Time flexibility generally refers to employees' ability to determine when, where, and how long they perform their work tasks according to personal and family needs. In home industries, flexible scheduling is frequently considered a comparative advantage because women can organize

production activities around household responsibilities. Nevertheless, the absence of fixed working hours often results in longer working durations, blurred boundaries between paid and unpaid labor, and reduced opportunities for rest. Research following the COVID-19 pandemic further revealed that women experienced disproportionate increases in unpaid domestic work despite having flexible employment arrangements, highlighting that flexibility without structural support may exacerbate gender inequality rather than reduce it (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022; Eurofound, 2021).

The relationship between work-life balance and time flexibility has attracted increasing scholarly attention because both constructs significantly influence employee performance, job satisfaction, mental health, and organizational sustainability. Studies conducted across various industrial sectors consistently demonstrate that flexible working hours positively affect employee engagement, reduce turnover intentions, and improve overall life satisfaction. However, findings remain inconsistent regarding female employees in home industries, particularly within developing countries where informal employment dominates and labor protections remain limited. Some researchers argue that flexibility empowers women economically and socially, while others emphasize that excessive flexibility often masks precarious working conditions characterized by low wages, unstable employment, and extended working hours. These contrasting findings indicate the need for a comprehensive synthesis of existing evidence to better understand the conditions under which time flexibility contributes positively or negatively to women's work-life balance (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Despite the growing number of empirical studies investigating work-life balance and flexible working arrangements, existing literature remains fragmented across disciplines such as management, sociology, psychology, labor economics, and gender studies. Differences in conceptual definitions, research methodologies, cultural contexts, and measurement indicators have produced varying conclusions that make it difficult to establish an integrated understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, relatively few reviews have specifically focused on female employees working in home industries, despite their unique employment characteristics and increasing contribution to local economic development. Home industries differ substantially from formal organizations because employment relationships are often informal, family-based, and highly dependent on household dynamics. Consequently, the determinants of work-life balance within this context may differ significantly from

those observed among employees in formal corporate environments (Guest, 2022; Greenhaus & Allen, 2021).

Therefore, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively analyze previous research concerning work-life balance and time flexibility among female employees in home industries. Through a systematic identification, screening, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant scholarly publications, this review aims to identify dominant research themes, theoretical perspectives, influencing factors, methodological trends, research gaps, and practical implications for policymakers, employers, and researchers. By integrating findings from diverse empirical studies, this review is expected to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of how flexible working arrangements influence women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities while supporting sustainable employment in the home industry sector. Moreover, the findings are anticipated to provide valuable recommendations for designing gender-responsive labor policies and workplace practices that enhance both employee well-being and organizational productivity.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively synthesize existing evidence regarding work-life balance and time flexibility among female employees in the home industry. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines, which consist of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. Relevant articles were retrieved from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar, using combinations of keywords such as work-life balance, time flexibility, flexible working arrangements, female employees, women workers, home industry, home-based workers, and informal sector. The inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2020 and 2026, focusing on female employees working in home industries or comparable informal employment settings and discussing work-life balance or time flexibility. Articles that were duplicated, lacked empirical findings, or were unrelated to the research objectives were excluded. The selected studies were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach by classifying evidence into key themes, including determinants of work-life balance, the role of time flexibility, work-family conflict, employee well-being, productivity, and organizational implications. Data

extraction included information on publication year, country, research design, sample characteristics, theoretical framework, principal findings, and research limitations, enabling a comprehensive interpretation of current knowledge and the identification of future research directions. The methodological quality of the included studies was critically evaluated to ensure the reliability and validity of the synthesized evidence in accordance with established systematic review standards (Page et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Time Flexibility in Enhancing Work-Life Balance among Female Employees in the Home Industry

Time flexibility has become one of the most significant determinants of work-life balance for female employees working in home industries. Unlike conventional workplaces that require fixed schedules and physical attendance, home industries generally allow workers to determine when and how they complete their production activities. This flexibility enables women to allocate their time according to family responsibilities, including childcare, eldercare, household management, and community obligations, while simultaneously participating in income-generating activities. The systematic review indicates that flexible working hours contribute positively to women's psychological well-being because they reduce commuting time, provide greater autonomy over daily schedules, and allow workers to adjust work intensity according to family needs. These advantages are particularly important in developing countries, where women continue to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic labor. Consequently, time flexibility has emerged as an essential mechanism for enabling women to remain economically productive without completely sacrificing their family responsibilities. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements depends largely on the availability of supportive family structures, organizational trust, and adequate income opportunities rather than flexibility alone (Kossek et al., 2022; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022).

The literature consistently demonstrates that flexible scheduling enhances employees' perceived control over their work and personal lives, which subsequently improves work-life balance. Perceived control is considered one of the strongest predictors of employee well-being because individuals who can determine their working hours experience lower levels of work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion. Female employees in home industries often report that the ability to temporarily interrupt work for childcare, meal preparation, or family emergencies reduces psychological stress associated with balancing multiple roles. Furthermore, flexible scheduling encourages greater job satisfaction because workers perceive themselves as having autonomy rather than being constrained by rigid organizational

regulations. Several studies included in this review also reveal that schedule autonomy positively influences intrinsic motivation, allowing women to maintain long-term participation in informal economic activities while preserving family relationships. These findings support the argument that flexibility functions not merely as an employment arrangement but also as a valuable psychosocial resource that strengthens resilience and life satisfaction (Allen et al., 2020; Haar et al., 2021).

Another important finding emerging from the reviewed studies concerns the relationship between time flexibility and employee productivity. Contrary to the assumption that flexible working arrangements reduce discipline and efficiency, numerous empirical studies indicate that female home-industry workers often demonstrate equal or even higher productivity than employees working under rigid schedules. Flexible working hours enable workers to perform demanding production tasks during periods of peak concentration while reserving less intensive periods for household responsibilities. This adaptive allocation of time minimizes interruptions and enables women to optimize both work performance and domestic responsibilities. Moreover, flexible scheduling allows employees to respond quickly to fluctuations in customer demand, seasonal production cycles, and family emergencies without experiencing excessive occupational stress. Consequently, productivity improvements are frequently accompanied by greater job commitment and lower turnover intentions because employees perceive flexible employment as more compatible with their personal circumstances (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Despite these advantages, the systematic review also highlights that time flexibility does not automatically guarantee work-life balance. Several studies emphasize that excessive flexibility may blur the boundaries between paid employment and domestic responsibilities. Because work is conducted within the household environment, female employees often experience constant interruptions from family members, resulting in fragmented work schedules and extended working hours. Rather than separating work from personal life, flexible arrangements may encourage women to perform both simultaneously, creating role overlap and increasing cognitive fatigue. This phenomenon became particularly evident during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when home-based work intensified women's unpaid domestic workload alongside paid employment. As a result, flexibility without clearly defined work boundaries may increase work-family conflict instead of reducing it. Therefore, effective time flexibility requires complementary strategies such as family support, workload management, and realistic production expectations (Eurofound, 2021; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020).

The review further indicates that cultural and social contexts significantly influence the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements. In many developing countries, deeply rooted gender norms continue to assign domestic responsibilities primarily to women regardless of their employment status. Consequently, female employees often use flexible working hours not for leisure or personal development but to accommodate additional unpaid household duties. This unequal distribution of domestic labor limits the potential benefits of flexibility

because women remain responsible for managing multiple roles simultaneously. Conversely, studies conducted in households characterized by shared caregiving responsibilities demonstrate stronger positive relationships between time flexibility, psychological well-being, and job satisfaction. These findings suggest that work-life balance is influenced not only by organizational policies but also by broader social and cultural structures that determine gender roles within families. Therefore, policies promoting flexible work should be accompanied by initiatives encouraging greater gender equality in household responsibilities (ILO, 2022; Greenhaus & Allen, 2021).

The systematic review also identifies technological advancement as an emerging factor supporting time flexibility in home industries. Digital communication platforms, mobile payment systems, e-commerce marketplaces, and social media marketing enable female entrepreneurs and workers to coordinate production, communicate with customers, and manage business transactions without being restricted by conventional office hours. These technological innovations increase operational flexibility while expanding market access, thereby enhancing economic resilience among home-based businesses. However, digitalization simultaneously creates expectations of continuous availability, where customers may contact workers at any time of the day. Without clear temporal boundaries, digital connectivity may contribute to work intensification and reduce opportunities for psychological recovery. Consequently, digital flexibility should be accompanied by healthy work practices that encourage scheduled working hours and adequate rest periods to preserve long-term employee well-being (OECD, 2021; Eurofound, 2021).

Overall, the findings synthesized in this systematic review demonstrate that time flexibility plays a critical role in improving work-life balance among female employees in home industries by enhancing schedule autonomy, psychological well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. Nevertheless, flexibility alone is insufficient to guarantee sustainable work-life balance because its effectiveness depends on supportive organizational policies, equitable household labor distribution, technological management, and favorable socio-cultural conditions. The literature consistently suggests that the greatest benefits of flexible work arrangements are achieved when employees possess genuine control over their working time rather than merely transferring organizational responsibilities into the home environment. Therefore, policymakers and home-industry owners should develop gender-responsive employment practices that combine flexible scheduling with family support programs, reasonable workloads, and opportunities for skill development to maximize both employee welfare and organizational sustainability (Kossek et al., 2022; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2022; Greenhaus & Allen, 2021).

Challenges, Determinants, and Future Strategies for Achieving Sustainable Work-Life Balance in Home Industries

Although time flexibility provides numerous advantages for female employees in home industries, the systematic review reveals that achieving sustainable work-life balance remains

a significant challenge due to the interaction of individual, family, organizational, and socio-cultural factors. Unlike workers in formal organizations, women employed in home industries frequently experience overlapping responsibilities because productive and domestic activities occur within the same physical environment. The absence of clear temporal and spatial boundaries between work and family responsibilities often results in work-family conflict, role overload, emotional exhaustion, and prolonged working hours. Several studies included in this review indicate that female workers begin household duties early in the morning, continue income-generating activities throughout the day, and complete additional domestic tasks during the evening, leaving little opportunity for leisure, rest, or self-development. Consequently, work-life balance should not be interpreted merely as equal time allocation between work and family but rather as the ability to perform multiple roles without compromising physical health, psychological well-being, or family relationships. These findings demonstrate that flexible work arrangements alone cannot eliminate structural inequalities experienced by women in informal employment sectors (Greenhaus & Allen, 2021; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022).

One of the most influential determinants identified across the reviewed literature is family support. Emotional encouragement, shared domestic responsibilities, childcare assistance, and cooperative household decision-making substantially improve women's ability to balance paid employment and family obligations. Studies consistently report that women living in households characterized by equitable gender roles experience lower work-family conflict and higher life satisfaction than those solely responsible for domestic labor. Conversely, limited family support increases psychological stress because female employees must continuously switch between work tasks and caregiving responsibilities. The systematic review therefore suggests that work-life balance should be viewed as a shared family responsibility rather than an individual challenge faced exclusively by women. Policies promoting parental involvement, shared caregiving, and gender equality within households may significantly strengthen the positive effects of flexible employment arrangements on employee well-being (Kossek et al., 2022; Haar et al., 2021).

Economic conditions also represent a major determinant influencing work-life balance among female employees in home industries. Many women enter informal employment due to limited access to formal labor markets, low educational attainment, or household financial necessity. Consequently, economic insecurity frequently compels workers to extend their working hours to achieve sufficient income, thereby reducing opportunities for family interaction and personal recovery. The review demonstrates that low wages, unstable customer demand, and irregular production cycles often force home-industry workers to prioritize income generation over health and family well-being. Furthermore, the absence of employment benefits such as paid leave, health insurance, retirement protection, and childcare support increases workers' vulnerability to financial and psychological stress. These findings indicate that improving work-life balance requires broader economic interventions, including

fair compensation, social protection programs, and financial empowerment initiatives for women working in informal sectors (OECD, 2021; ILO, 2022).

Digital transformation has emerged as another important determinant influencing work-life balance in home industries. Advances in digital technology have enabled female workers to expand business operations through e-commerce platforms, mobile banking applications, online marketplaces, and social media marketing. These technologies provide greater flexibility in managing production schedules while increasing access to national and international markets. Nevertheless, digitalization also introduces new challenges associated with constant connectivity, customer expectations for immediate responses, and the erosion of temporal boundaries between work and personal life. Many reviewed studies reveal that female entrepreneurs remain accessible to customers beyond normal working hours, increasing work intensity and reducing recovery time. Therefore, digital competence should be accompanied by digital well-being strategies, including scheduled communication hours, workload planning, and technology management skills to prevent work-related burnout while preserving the economic advantages of digital business operations (Eurofound, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

Another recurring theme identified throughout the systematic review concerns the importance of organizational and governmental support in promoting sustainable work-life balance. Although home industries frequently operate outside formal organizational structures, local governments, cooperatives, non-governmental organizations, and community development agencies play essential roles in supporting female workers. Capacity-building programs, entrepreneurship training, financial literacy education, digital marketing assistance, affordable childcare services, and access to microfinance have been shown to improve both business sustainability and employee well-being. Moreover, labor policies that recognize informal workers and provide access to social security, occupational health services, and legal protection contribute significantly to reducing employment insecurity. The reviewed studies consistently recommend integrating gender-sensitive employment policies into local economic development strategies to ensure that flexibility enhances women's empowerment rather than reinforcing existing inequalities (United Nations Women, 2023; OECD, 2021).

The systematic review further identifies several gaps within the current body of literature that present opportunities for future research. First, most existing studies employ cross-sectional quantitative designs that measure work-life balance at a single point in time, limiting understanding of long-term changes in employee experiences. Longitudinal research is therefore needed to examine how family circumstances, economic conditions, and organizational support influence work-life balance across different life stages. Second, relatively few studies investigate home industries using mixed-methods or qualitative approaches capable of exploring women's lived experiences in greater depth. Third, cultural comparisons between developed and developing countries remain limited despite substantial

differences in gender norms, labor regulations, and family structures. Finally, emerging issues such as digital entrepreneurship, hybrid work models, artificial intelligence, and platform-based employment require further investigation because they are expected to reshape flexible employment opportunities for women in home industries over the coming decade (Guest, 2022; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020).

Overall, this systematic review concludes that sustainable work-life balance among female employees in home industries is determined by a complex interaction of flexible working arrangements, family support, economic security, digital capability, organizational assistance, and gender-responsive public policies. Time flexibility provides substantial opportunities for improving women's autonomy, productivity, and quality of life; however, its effectiveness depends on whether workers possess genuine control over their schedules and receive adequate support from families, communities, employers, and governments. Consequently, future policy interventions should adopt an integrated approach that combines flexible employment practices with social protection, gender equality initiatives, digital capacity development, and financial empowerment programs. Such comprehensive strategies will not only improve the well-being of female employees but also strengthen the sustainability and competitiveness of home industries as important contributors to local and national economic development. The synthesis of evidence presented in this review highlights that achieving work-life balance requires collaborative efforts across multiple stakeholders rather than relying solely on individual adaptation or flexible scheduling arrangements (Kossek et al., 2022; United Nations Women, 2023; Greenhaus & Allen, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review demonstrates that work-life balance among female employees in the home industry is strongly influenced by the availability of time flexibility, family support, economic stability, digital capability, and supportive organizational and policy environments. Flexible working arrangements provide women with greater autonomy to manage both professional and domestic responsibilities, contributing to improved job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and productivity. However, flexibility alone is insufficient to ensure sustainable work-life balance, as blurred boundaries between work and family, unequal gender roles, economic insecurity, and continuous digital connectivity often intensify work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion. The review further highlights that effective work-life balance requires an integrated approach involving equitable household responsibilities, gender-responsive labor policies, social protection, entrepreneurship support, and digital skills development. Future research should expand the use of longitudinal, qualitative, and mixed-methods designs while exploring the impacts of

emerging digital work models on women's employment experiences in home industries. Overall, fostering sustainable work-life balance is essential not only for improving the well-being of female employees but also for enhancing the resilience, productivity, and long-term competitiveness of home industries in an increasingly dynamic labor market

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