

The Illusion of One-Size-Fits-All: “A Qualitative Exploration of Work-Life Balance Among Young Professionals in Pakistan”

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ABSTRACT:

This study explores the complex dynamics of work-life balance among young professionals in Pakistan, questioning the conventional idea of a universally applicable, one-size-fits-all strategy for balancing professional duties and personal life. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study aims to unveil the intricate experiences, diverse perceptions, and adaptive coping mechanisms employed by young professionals (aged between 22 to 30) working in different industries of Pakistan with experience of 1 to 5 years, as they confront the intricate web of their burgeoning careers and personal lives. The findings not only provide insights into the unique contextual factors influencing work-life equilibrium but also contribute to a broader understanding of the individualized strategies adopted by young professionals in navigating the complexities inherent in their professional and personal spheres.

Keywords: *Work Life Balance, Wellbeing, Personal Priorities, Boundary Management.*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of work-life balance has gained significant attention in recent years, with many organizations recognizing the importance of promoting a healthy balance between work and personal life (Lavoie, 2014). However, the idea of a one-size-fits-all approach to work-life balance may not be applicable to all employees, particularly young professionals in Pakistan. According to Abbott (2013), work-life balance can be broadly defined as the state in which an individual effectively manages actual or potential conflicts arising from various demands on their time and energy, while fulfilling their needs for well-being and personal satisfaction (O’Mahony et al., 2016). As the contingency theory suggests that there is no one-size-fits-all solution in management and that the effectiveness of strategies depends on the specific context (Fiedler, 2015). The data supports this notion by revealing that work-life balance strategies are contingent upon individual preferences, job roles, and industry demands. Organizations applying contingency theory principles would tailor their work-life balance initiatives based on the unique needs of their workforce. Strategies might differ across departments or job roles, accommodating the varied demands and preferences of employees (Shala et al., 2021).

The concern regarding an imbalanced life was initially raised by working mothers in the UK during the 1960s and 1970s. Subsequently, in the mid-1980s, the issue of work-life balance gained attention from the US Government. However, it wasn't until the 1990s that the matter gained even more prominence and was acknowledged globally as a significant concern in human resource management (Bird, 2006). The surge in research on work-life balance can be attributed to the increasing participation of women in the

Bahria University Journal of Management and Technology (BJMT). 2024, Volume 7, Issue 2.

workforce, technological advancements, a cultural shift from joint to separate family systems, and the rise in single-parent family settings due to an increase in divorces (Silbermann, 2015).

Various theoretical models of work-life balance have been integrated into research, rendering it a well-recognized theme among scholars since its inception (Sonal & Sarvesh, 2023). The study of this topic has considerably expanded, attracting increased attention, and the concept has evolved over time (Panda & Sahoo, 2021). Nevertheless, substantial gaps persist in our understanding, notably the neglect of issues affecting single and young adults concerning work-life balance. The focus on the family often omits other crucial aspects, including personal values, education, social responsibility, leisure time, and self-care (Cada & Ed, 2021).

The current study will draw on existing literature and research on work-life balance in Pakistan, including the challenges and strategies for promoting work-life balance among employees. Previous studies have highlighted the challenges faced by employees in achieving work-life balance, such as extensive workloads, long working hours, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life due to digitalization (Panda & Sahoo, 2021). However, there is limited research focusing specifically on young professionals in Pakistan, a demographic that is rapidly growing and facing unique challenges.

Understanding what has already been done is crucial. Numerous studies have examined work-life balance in various contexts, exploring the effectiveness of different strategies and their impact on employee well-being and productivity (Duan et al., 2023). However, these studies often focus on broader populations or specific sectors, leaving a gap in understanding the particular needs and experiences of young professionals in Pakistan. The current study aims to fill this gap by providing insights into the work-life balance needs of this specific group and exploring how personal and organizational factors contribute to their experiences.

The findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the unique work-life balance needs of young professionals in Pakistan and provide insights into the development of effective work-life balance policies and initiatives that cater to the diverse needs of employees. The study will conclude by highlighting the importance of avoiding the one-size-fits-all trap and adopting a multi-layered approach to work-life balance that considers the individual needs and preferences of employees. The study will explore the following research question: "How do the personal and organizational factors contribute to the multifaceted nature of work-life balance, challenging the notion of a one-size-fits-all approach, among young professionals in a dynamic and evolving work landscape in Pakistan?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-Life Balance Definitions and Models Work-life balance has been extensively studied, with various models and definitions emerging over time. According to Abbott (2013), it broadly refers to managing conflicts between work demands and personal life, ensuring well-being and personal satisfaction (O'Mahony et al., 2016). The contingency theory suggests that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies based on individual contexts (Fiedler, 2015). This theory underlines that effective work-life balance initiatives must consider individual preferences, job roles, and industry demands (Shala et al., 2021).

Historical Context and Evolution The issue of work-life balance first gained attention among working mothers in the UK during the 1960s and 1970s and later caught the US Government's attention in the mid-1980s. It wasn't until the 1990s that work-life balance became a globally recognized concern in human resource management (Bird, 2006). The increase in women's workforce participation, technological advancements, and shifts in family structures have significantly influenced the evolution of this concept (Silbermann, 2015).

Generational Perspectives on Work-Life Balance Research indicates that different generations have distinct perspectives on work-life balance. Millennials and Generation Z, for example, are known to place a higher value on work-life balance compared to previous generations. These generations view work and personal life less compartmentalized, advocating for flexible work hours and environments that support their work-life balance (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Recent studies reveal that these younger generations face unique challenges, including extensive workloads, long working hours, and blurred boundaries due to digitalization (Panda & Sahoo, 2021).

Study Problem and Its Relation to Main Themes

Young Professionals' Contextualization of Work-Life Balance: In the current study, the researchers aim to explore the experiences of young professionals embarking on their early career journeys. These individuals, typically in their twenties or early thirties, have recently entered the workforce or are still navigating their way in their chosen professions (Lidija et al., 2017). They are characterized by their educational accomplishments, drive, and eagerness to learn and progress in their careers. However, maintaining a balance between work and personal life is a significant challenge for them, given the demands from their professional roles and personal commitments.

Research by Safira et al., (2023) highlights the formidable challenges they confront, such as extensive workloads, prolonged working hours, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life due to digitalization. Young professionals are often hailed as the tech-savvy generation, but concerns are rising about how they navigate and uphold their work-life balance amidst continuous technological advancements. This study underscores the importance of understanding their perspective to address these evolving challenges effectively.

The present study focuses on young professionals aged 22 to 30 years as participants (Sturges, 2013). This age group includes both Millennials and Generation Z, who exhibit unique characteristics and perspectives regarding work-life balance. Brummelhuis and Lippe (2010) assert that individuals' work-life priorities are dynamic, influenced by social demographics such as family structure, marital status, parental status, and household composition. These priorities adapt in response to major life events and transitions (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). For instance, young professionals often prioritize their careers before starting families, as they have fewer caregiving responsibilities during this phase (Detzen et al., 2021).

This study aims to fill the gap in the current knowledge by focusing on the unique work-life balance needs of young professionals in Pakistan. By examining the specific challenges and strategies for promoting work-life balance in this demographic, the research will provide insights into the development of effective work-life balance policies and initiatives that cater to the diverse needs of employees. The study will address the research question: "How do the personal and organizational factors contribute to the multifaceted nature

of work-life balance, challenging the notion of a one-size-fits-all approach, among young professionals in a dynamic and evolving work landscape in Pakistan?"

Recent surveys and studies provide valuable insights into the work-life balance needs of young professionals. (De Ruiter & Peters, 2022) in "Flexible Work Initiatives, Employee Workplace Well-Being, and Organizational Performance" examine the impact of flexible work initiatives on employee well-being and organizational performance, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, a survey by Lever (2022) found that approximately 40% of Generation Z employees and 24% of millennial employees are contemplating leaving their current jobs within the next two years, citing burnout and job dissatisfaction as major reasons. Similarly, Deloitte (2023) conducted a survey involving 14,483 Gen Z individuals and 8,373 millennials across 44 countries, revealing profound concerns about their future prospects despite acknowledging some positive changes. Some of the key differences identified through literature among the Generation Z and Millennials is summarized in the following table:

Aspect	Gen Z	Millennials
Technology and Flexibility	Grew up with advanced tech, values flexibility, seamless integration of work and personal life	Tech-savvy, seeks flexible hours and remote options
Career Aspirations	Prioritizes meaningful work, willing to change jobs for better work life integration	Desires purposeful work, seeks employers with work life balance initiatives
Communication and Collaboration	Values open communication, seeks feedback, favors collaborative work environment	Emphasizes communication, may stress work life boundaries to prevent burnout
Value of Personal Growth	Highly values personal development, seeks growth opportunities	Dedicated to personal growth, prioritizes work life balance for well-being
Entrepreneurial Spirit	Entrepreneurial, values flexibility, may blur work lifelines	Open to entrepreneurship, seeks balance in ventures
Workplace Culture and Environment	Emphasizes inclusive culture, prioritizes work life balance	Prioritizes supportive cultures for work life balance
Impact of COVID-19	Seeks flexible work arrangements post-pandemic	Advocates for remote work and flexibility post-pandemic
Family and Caregiving Responsibilities	May prioritize work arrangements based on caregiving roles	Looks for employer support tailored to caregiving needs

Adapted from Kiran, T. (2023). *No Boundaries , No Breaks : Contextualizing Young Professionals Perspective on Work Life Balance*

METHODOLOGY

We conducted 21 individual interviews with young professionals in Pakistan, aged 21 to 30, from various fields with 1 to 5 years of experience. One-on-one interviews were vital for gaining deep insights

into organizational culture and its impact on work-life balance. This method helped uncover key themes and provided comprehensive insights into participants' lived experiences.

Selection and Recruitment of Participants: Purposeful sampling was chosen due to the absence of a known population frame, selecting participants with direct experience of the phenomena under study (Creswell, 2009). Judgment sampling, a form of purposive sampling, was applied to choose participants based on their suitability to provide the desired data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants, where initial contacts helped recruit more individuals (Zikmund et al., 2010). This method was particularly useful given the demanding work routines of young professionals. Notably, 10 out of the 21 participants were recruited through snowball sampling

Interview Process: The recruitment process began in January 2023, with interviews conducted from February to July 2023. Managers from various industries were contacted to provide lists of eligible employees. In-person interviews were conducted in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, while those from other cities used Zoom video calls.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Following Kallio et al. (2016), a semi-structured interview guide was developed to maintain a consistent sequence of topics while allowing flexibility for participants to introduce additional issues. Participants were questioned about their understanding of organizational policies and practices regarding work-life balance and their practical implementation.

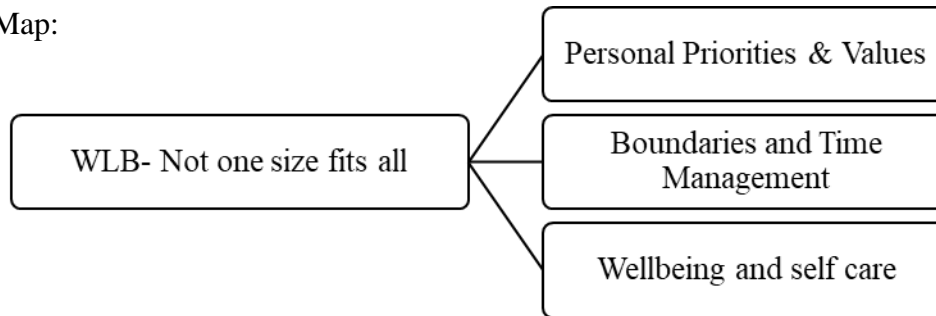
Data Transcription: Interviews were recorded using Zoom for online sessions and an iPhone voice recorder for in-person sessions. Transcription involved converting spoken language into written text, capturing participants' statements and non-verbal cues like gestures (Saunders et al., 2012). Field notes were taken to record non-verbal cues and overall impressions. Transcriptions included all interview questions, saved in separate MS Word files with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Files were stored in a password-protected format and shared with participants for review and approval. Standardized transcription notations ensured accuracy and consistency, highlighting non-verbal reactions like laughter or sighs, contributing to the thematic analysis (Flick, 2014; Saunders et al., 2012).

Data Analysis: Our research embraced a constructivist epistemological perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Miles et al., 2018). Despite drawing from existing theories and literature on work-life balance, we employed a thematic analysis approach to identify and explore emerging themes. This method allowed us to establish connections between themes and construct a nuanced understanding of the implications of work life balance and the perspectives of young professionals about it.

Adhering to the recommended protocol for qualitative data analysis, during the initial phase, we adhered strictly to the participants' terminology, refraining from prematurely categorizing the information. The primary researcher systematically navigated through the entire dataset, dedicating comprehensive attention to each item. The focus was on identifying noteworthy elements that could potentially form the basis for recurring patterns (themes) across the entire dataset. In first phase some of the emerging codes were identified: personal priorities and values, cultural and societal influences, life stage and career development, personal coping mechanisms, generational variations and individual autonomy. In second phase of iteration the researchers sort out the common themes and categorized them into sub themes.

During the concluding phase of the analysis, the authors revisited the subthemes identified earlier as second-order themes. This process entailed further refinement of these subthemes and their organization, guided by the research questions: “How do the personal and organizational factors contribute to the multifaceted nature of work-life balance, challenging the notion of a one-size-fits-all approach, among young professionals in a dynamic and evolving work landscape in Pakistan?” In this phase, certain subthemes were discarded due to insufficient support in the dataset. Additionally, other subthemes were deconstructed to create two to three distinct subthemes. The objective of this procedure was to guarantee that the data within the themes and subthemes coherently aligned, preserving clear and identifiable distinctions between them. Thematic map of current study is given below:

Thematic Map:



FINDINGS

In this qualitative research study, the researchers embarked on a journey to explore the complexities of achieving work-life balance in today's fast-paced era, particularly from the viewpoint of young professionals. Through in-depth interviews, observations, and meticulous analysis, the researchers explored the lived experiences, perceptions, and narratives of these young professionals to uncover profound and multifaceted insights. The primary objective extended beyond mere data collection, aiming to reveal the underlying meanings, motivations, and recurring patterns that shape their perspectives. As the research findings illustrate, our participants openly shared their voices and personal stories, providing insights into their strategies for achieving work-life balance. The themes distilled from the qualitative data collection process are presented as follows:

Theme: Work life balance: Not one size fits all:

This theme elucidates the comprehensive concept of work-life balance, as conveyed by young professionals who emphasize it as “not one size fits all”. According to their perspectives, each individual's coping strategies to balance personal and professional life are unique to themselves. Consequently, the attainment of equilibrium between work commitments and personal life is a highly individualized and subjective matter.

“There exists no universally perfect definition or concept of work life balance[^]. For some[^] it involves adhering to strict schedules, while for others, it revolves around having flexible working hours. Each

person is responsible for defining and maintaining their own balance as it's a unique and individual effort to balance work and family life.” (Hina- 27-4-4).

In the preceding passage, Ms. Hina provides her perspective on the notion of work-life balance. In her view, there is no universally applicable definition or concept of work-life balance, as it varies for each individual based on their personal circumstances. Ms. Hina believes that adhering to strict timings is the sole approach to attain work-life balance, aligning with the preference of Mr. Bilal, who also favours a similar approach.

“My job is 9 to 5 so in my opinion I should not get any call from office after 5 and neither on weekends so that my family time should be managed and my office time should not interfere in my personal life. Late sittings and work demand after working hours are not acceptable to me.” (Bilal-27-1.5-20)

Mr. Bilal defines work-life balance as adhering to a set schedule with specific working hours, advocating for a more structured approach. By doing so, he effectively allocates time for his family after office hours and during the weekends, emphasizing a clear boundary with no office involvement during that time. Although structured timings suit many individuals, they may not be suitable for others.

“As the nature of my job is demanding and being in IT field I always knew that I will not be able to get a standard timing in my job. Therefore for me flexibility matters a lot. If I have to finish a project three hours late after office time then next day I will be going to office late. So this let me balance my time at home and take care of my sleep as well.” (Ashar-24-3-9)

In the above passage, Mr. Ashar highlighted the demanding nature of the IT industry, emphasizing its varied work schedules. Many IT roles involve projects with tight deadlines and addressing client issues, necessitating flexibility in how the work is executed. Given the absence of standardized timings, individuals in this field prioritize a flexible work environment. This adaptability not only helps them meet work requirements but also empowers them to maintain a balance in their personal lives. Through adjustments in their schedules, they can allocate more time to personal matters, including spending time with family and ensuring sufficient rest, as emphasized by Mr. Asher when he mentioned "...take care of my sleep."

Flexibility and the ability to set one's own schedule for achieving work-life balance are not exclusive to the IT industry; they depend on individual preferences. This preference can vary from person to person, exemplified by Mr. Bilal in the same sector who values fixed timings over flexible ones. In the realm of managing work and personal life, it's essential to recognize that someone who advocates for fixed timings may still appreciate flexibility, as expressed by Mr. Osman.

“I prefer doing work when I am in the mood I am the kind of person who do work as per his own timings my boss gives me a task and expect that task to be done in a specific time frame. Now it is totally up to me that I will do it while staying at office from 9 till 5 or to do it as per my own schedule. The target is to get the assignment done in specific time frame. So I always improvise There is no challenge in balancing my personal time with professional time.” (Osman-24-3-12)

The preceding remarks by Mr. Osman highlight the preference for working when in the mood. This approach implies that individuals who choose to work when they are most motivated may experience increased productivity and efficiency, as they can concentrate on tasks when motivation is high. Furthermore, the decision between fixed and flexible timings allows individuals to make personal choices about how they complete assignments, with the ultimate goal being the completion of the job rather than a specific method.

Contrastingly, Ms. Sadaf views work-life balance not as a balance but as an adjustment:

"You must have heard the phrase" Work Smarter rather than Harder" whereas^ our organization wants us to work harder and smarter both. So, I think nobody^ has the idea^ to balance between their work and home^. But^ regardless of all the hurdles at the end of the day^ we balance^ or I must say adjust our lives with the work. or I should say^ that most of the people are adjusting their lives^ according to the work schedules not balancing. (Sadaf-26-3-8)

Ms. Sadaf's statement emphasizes the recognition that work-life balance is not a one-size-fits-all concept. It acknowledges the diversity in individuals' lifestyles, responsibilities, and preferences, understanding that what constitutes a balanced approach can vary significantly from one person to another. Ms. Sadaf notes that people "adjust their lives with the work" and "adjust their lives according to the work schedules," indicating the flexibility individuals may employ to customize their approach to work-life balance based on their unique circumstances. Some may be willing to adapt their personal lives to align with work commitments if it suits them.

Sub theme 1: Personal Priorities and Values

This concept revolves around the notion that each individual harbours unique priorities influenced by their values, which, in turn, shape their decisions regarding work-life balance. People prioritize different facets of their lives, including family and friends, health, career advancement, and personal time. Attaining balance involves aligning their work and personal needs with these priorities.

"I work to provide a good life for my family^ or for myself^ and it's important to note that my family doesn't exist because of my work, nor do I work just to have a good family life. So, I consistently prioritize my personal life over my work life. (Saif- 28-5.5-18).

Mr. Saif's statement above distinctly presents key perspectives on his relationship between work and personal life. At 28 years old, Mr. Saif falls within the millennial category. He views work as a means to attain a quality life for himself and his family, recognizing its significance in providing financial stability and resources that contribute to a comfortable lifestyle. Millennials prioritize their family responsibilities and actively steer clear of situations that blur the boundaries between their personal and professional lives.

Mr. Saif highlighted that the presence of his family is not solely contingent on his work. Instead, family life is distinct and holds its own significance beyond his professional endeavours. This underscores the notion that family is not a derivative of one's profession but is a separate and integral part of one's life.

Mr. Saif further clarifies that his motivation for work is not solely for the purpose of having a good life. He emphasizes that he consistently prioritizes his personal life over work, recognizing that while work is essential, it should not overshadow or compromise his personal well-being and time with family and friends. Similarly, Mr. Osman, another participant, underscores that he prioritizes his well-being more:

“In order to get my sanity after hectic work routine, I need time for myself^ therefore^^ most of the time I prefer to stay alone once I get back home. For me my health is the priority” (Osman- 24-3-12).

The above statement by Mr Osman, exhibits a conscious effort to prioritize mental health and self-care by dedicating time for himself and seeking solitude as a means of recuperation after a demanding work routine. It underscores that for Mr Osman taking care of his health is paramount and for himself care is his priority when it comes to work life balance.

In conclusion, examining the viewpoints of Mr. Saif and Mr. Osman reveals that Mr. Saif gives greater importance to his family responsibilities, whereas Mr. Osman prioritizes his own well-being and health above all else. Both individuals recognize the role of work in facilitating a high-quality life while emphasizing the crucial need for maintaining a healthy work-life balance. However, it is essential to acknowledge that diverse perspectives exist regarding the prioritization of work life versus family life, which may differ from those expressed by Mr. Saif and Mr. Osman.

“I never rush to go to home if I am in the middle of completing any task^. This is the start of my career^ and for me^ my priority is to give my maximum output to the job^ because if I will be dedicating my time to my profession then ultimately my chances to go on the top will be more. So^ for me^ my work comes first.” (Kiran-24-2.4-23).

Ms. Kiran's statement underscores a profound dedication to her career and a commitment to attaining success in her professional life. The key analysis of her statement can be broken down into the following: prioritizing work over personal life, maximizing output, focusing on career advancement, and placing work as a top priority.

Sub theme 2: Boundaries and Time Management

This concept involves creating distinct boundaries between work and personal life by implementing effective time management practices. It encompasses setting time constraints on assignments and organizing work-related tasks and personal obligations based on their respective importance:

“If I have an unfinished task^ I make an effort to allocate extra time to it^ while I'm still in the office^, rather than considering it as work to be done at home. This approach is preferable because it allows me^ to invest^ an additional 30 to 45 minutes at the office^ to complete the task^, rather than bringing it home and spending two to three hours of my personal time on it. It's about maintaining a clear boundary between my work hours and my family hours^^. So^, instead of leaving at six^, I may stay until 6:30 to wrap up a task, free my mind from work, and then head home.” (Ashar-24-3-16).

In the above statement, Mr. Ashar outlines his proactive strategy for handling unfinished tasks within a work environment. His primary choice is to dedicate additional time to complete any pending tasks while still in the office, demonstrating a willingness to extend work hours if necessary to fulfill work responsibilities. This approach emphasizes a preference for concluding tasks within the office setting rather than bringing them home. The rationale behind this decision is to preserve personal time and energy by avoiding work-related tasks outside of the office.

Mr. Ashar underscores the efficiency of this strategy, noting that investing an extra 30 to 45 minutes at the office can save him two to three hours of personal time at home, showcasing a commitment to

effective time management. The statement emphasizes the importance of clearly delineating work hours from personal or family hours to ensure work responsibilities do not encroach upon personal time. Mr. Ashar exhibits a willingness to adjust his work hours when necessary, illustrating his dedication to task completion while striving for a balance between professional and personal life.

In summary, the statement portrays a pragmatic and efficient approach to task management at work. It highlights the individual's commitment to utilizing work hours effectively, establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life, and optimizing time to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal commitments. In contrast to Mr. Ashar, another participant holds a completely different perspective:

“Since my job follows a strict 9-to-5 schedule, I make it a point to shut down my laptop after 5 PM, leaving no room for office-related tasks beyond that time. Because, if I am assigned with any assignment, then I manage my time within the official hours and always finish my tasks before 5 pm. But if sometimes the task is not complete, I never take it home or stay late. I leave it for next day and then finish it. Which happens very rarely because I am good at following the timelines, therefore I never have to stay late.” (Tehmina-27-2.5-23).

Ms. Tehmina's statement highlights her commitment to managing work within the stipulated job schedule. Key points include her adherence to organization-set working hours, a conscious effort to cease work after official hours, and effective time management to complete tasks before 5 pm. This approach ensures a clear boundary between work and personal life, with an emphasis on timely task completion. Additionally, Ms. Tehmina emphasizes the significance of her family life in her overall perspective.

“Similarly, I dedicate my evenings to personal tasks such as spending time either alone or with friends if they're available. After 5 PM, it's essentially my time, and I strictly separate it from office responsibilities. This is the strategy I follow to maintain a healthy work life balance”. (Tehmina-27-2.5-23)

Ms. Tehmina's establishment of boundaries through deadline management is noteworthy. In a similar vein, Mr. Salman elucidates how he navigates his tasks within deadlines:

“We are given tasks with deadlines, so we have to manage our tasks within that time duration. This way we have to manage our time and other responsibilities. We are not burdened because we have our due dates and it's up to us to keep our tasks within the deadlines. It's purely our own time management skills. (Salman-25-2-10).

Mr. Salman's statement emphasizes the significance of personal responsibility, effective time management, and the role of deadlines in structuring and completing tasks without feeling overwhelmed.

Sub theme 3: Wellbeing and Self Care

This means that achieving a healthy work-life balance involves prioritizing your well-being and practicing self-care. This encompasses activities like regular exercise, taking necessary breaks for both physical and mental health, and indulging in vacations. Beyond merely dividing time between work and personal life, it entails recognizing the importance of overall well-being, including physical health, mental wellness, and relaxation. Integrating practices such as exercise, taking breaks, and allowing time for vacations contributes to a well-rounded and fulfilling life. Placing self-care and well-being at the forefront

is crucial when striving to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal responsibilities. Ms. Sadaf underscores the concept of avoiding excessive work for recognition, emphasizing its detrimental impact on individual well-being.

“Working all the time doesn't actually make us better at our jobs^. It can make us less creative^, less productive^, and even harm our health^, leading to more sick days. Personally, when I work too much, I find it hard to focus on even simple tasks like reading a newspaper or a magazine^. It also makes me feel down because I enjoy both my work and activities like relaxing, gardening, and friends' meetups. But when I overwork, I don't have the time or energy to do any of these things.” (Sadaf-26-3-14)

Ms. Sadaf's statement underscores the critical importance of well-being and self-care, emphasizing that a constant work trend without breaks can negatively impact both job performance and various aspects of an individual's life. This includes a potential reduction in creativity, decreased efficiency and productivity, and potential harm to physical and mental health, leading to increased sick days and decreased job efficiency. Ms. Sadaf draws from personal experience, noting that overworking affected her concentration, mood, and left little time for enjoyable pursuits alongside work. In essence, the statement emphasizes the need for a balanced approach between work and personal life to enhance job performance, creativity, productivity, and overall well-being. Meanwhile, Mr. Bilal's perspective highlights his commitment to avoiding excessive work.

“My health is more important than money. I cannot deal with tiredness^ and headaches^ I will not do it for money, especially night shift, even if they offer me 1 crore^ I still won't not do it. My health is much important for me.” (Bilal-27-4-30)

Mr. Bilal's statement unequivocally underscores the prioritization of his health over financial gains. He emphasizes that his well-being is paramount, rejecting offers, particularly those involving night shifts, that could compromise his health. Mr. Bilal highlights his inability to handle the exhaustion and headaches associated with excessive or irregular work hours, emphasizing that his health is invaluable, and no amount of money is worth jeopardizing it. Likewise, Mr. Asad echoes the sentiment of prioritizing well-being.

“Whenever there is extra workload that disturbs my work life balance, I keep these feelings to myself but obviously my wellbeing is compromised. Which makes me upset and angry, I don't vent these emotions on my family, but occasionally, I share my feelings with my brother about my job dissatisfaction. I believe that when I'm not content, it slows down my performance at work.” (Asad-28-4-12).

Mr. Asad's statement reveals the impact of excessive workloads on his emotional well-being, describing how he tends to internalize feelings of frustration, unhappiness, and anger when facing an increased workload that disrupts his work-life balance. Despite experiencing emotional turmoil, he consciously avoids expressing these emotions openly, especially towards his family. This containment of emotions, while preventing external conflicts, contributes to heightened stress and frustration. Mr. Asad acknowledges the direct influence of his dissatisfaction at work on his job performance, recognizing the interconnectedness of well-being and overall productivity. In summary, Mr. Asad places a high value on well-being when balancing work and personal life due to its direct correlation with employee performance and productivity.

DISCUSSION

The thematic findings related to work-life balance among young professionals reveal a complex and diverse landscape, emphasizing the individualized nature of strategies employed to strike a balance between personal and professional life. The subthemes further explore personal priorities and values, boundaries and time management, and the crucial aspect of well-being and self-care.

Work-Life Balance: Not One Size Fits: All the overarching theme underscores the multifaceted nature of work-life balance, rejecting the notion of a universal definition. Participants expressed varied approaches, ranging from strict adherence to schedules to a preference for flexibility. This discrepancy suggests that the pursuit of work-life balance is highly individualized and subjective. The findings align with existing literature emphasizing the importance of recognizing diverse needs and preferences in work-life balance initiatives (Boakye et al., 2023). This personalized approach is crucial, especially in the context of young professionals in Pakistan, where cultural and organizational norms can significantly influence work-life balance strategies (Johnston et al., 2022).

Personal Priorities and Values: Personal priorities and values play a pivotal role in shaping one's approach to work-life balance. Participants articulated a conscious effort to maintain a clear distinction between their professional and personal lives, reflecting their individual values. This aligns with studies suggesting that individuals with clearly defined priorities experience less conflict between work and personal life (Shakoor et al., 2023). For instance, some participants prioritized personal life over work, while others focused on well-being, underscoring the significance of individual values in decision-making (Perreault & Power 2023). The emphasis on personal values is particularly relevant for young professionals in Pakistan, who may be navigating traditional family expectations alongside modern career demands.

Boundaries and Time Management: Setting boundaries and effective time management emerged as key strategies for maintaining work-life balance. Participants demonstrated proactive approaches to managing tasks within the confines of the workplace, advocating for completing tasks during office hours rather than bringing them home. This finding aligns with the literature, emphasizing the importance of setting boundaries to prevent work from encroaching on personal life (Johnston et al., 2022). Effective time management allows young professionals to compartmentalize their work and personal lives, reducing stress and enhancing productivity (Yasir et al., 2019). This is particularly crucial in the Pakistani context, where extended family obligations can complicate time management.

Well-Being and Self-Care: The emphasis on well-being and self-care emerged as a recurrent theme, with participants recognizing the holistic nature of work-life balance. They stressed the negative impacts of excessive work on creativity, productivity, and health, highlighting the importance of considering mental health in work-life balance discussions. These findings align with studies emphasizing the interconnectedness of well-being and job performance (Pettifor et al., 2021). For young professionals, balancing the demands of a burgeoning career with the need for self-care is essential to sustaining long-term productivity and satisfaction. This is especially relevant in Pakistan, where high-pressure job environments can lead to burnout without adequate support for mental health and well-being (Stefanova et al., 2021).

Interpretation of Main Findings: The findings indicate that work-life balance among young professionals in Pakistan is influenced by a combination of personal values, effective time management, and a strong focus on well-being. The diverse strategies employed by participants underscore the necessity for organizations to adopt flexible and individualized approaches to work-life balance policies. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by young professionals in Pakistan, such as balancing traditional family roles with modern career aspirations, is crucial for developing effective work-life balance initiatives. This study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of work-life balance that goes beyond a one-size-fits-all approach, considering the specific cultural and organizational contexts of young professionals in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the unique strategies that young professionals employ to navigate the complex landscape of work-life balance. The diverse perspectives highlighted in the findings emphasize the necessity for personalized approaches and organizational flexibility in addressing the challenges of balancing work and personal life. By recognizing the interconnected nature of personal values, effective time management, and well-being, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of work-life balance.

The implications of this research extend to organizational policies and practices. The findings underscore the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive work environment that accommodates individualized approaches to achieving work-life equilibrium. Organizations can benefit from acknowledging and accommodating the diverse needs and priorities of their employees, fostering a workplace culture that values both professional commitments and personal well-being. This inclusive approach not only enhances employee satisfaction and productivity but also contributes to a healthier and more sustainable work environment.

Despite the valuable insights offered by the study, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The sample size, consisting specifically of young professionals, might restrict the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Future research should explore work-life balance dynamics across diverse demographic groups and industries to enhance the applicability of the results. Additionally, adopting a longitudinal approach in studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how work-life balance strategies evolve over time. This approach would offer a detailed view of the changes and adaptations individuals make in response to varying life and career stages, contributing to a more robust understanding of the complex interplay between work and personal life.

Future research directions could also investigate the role of technological advancements in shaping work-life balance, particularly the impact of remote work and digital tools on managing professional and personal responsibilities. Furthermore, examining the influence of organizational culture on employees' ability to achieve work-life balance could provide insights into effective organizational practices and policies. Studies could also explore the psychological and emotional aspects of work-life balance, focusing on how stress, burnout, and mental health are managed in different work environments. By addressing these areas, future research can offer more targeted and practical recommendations for individuals and organizations striving to improve work-life balance.

The study findings have implications for organizations and policymakers seeking to enhance work-life balance initiatives. Recognizing the individualized nature of work-life balance is crucial, necessitating flexible policies that accommodate diverse preferences. Organizations should encourage a culture that values personal well-being, with an emphasis on clear communication about expectations and boundaries. Additionally, time management training and support can empower individuals to optimize their work hours efficiently.

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Appendix

S#	Name of Participant	Gender	Age	Years of Experience	Industry	Mode of Interview	Prior Consent	Preferred Language of Interview	Duration of Interview	City	Sector
1	Bilal	M	27	2.5	IT	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	25:56	Islamabad	Public
2	Ashar	M	24	3	IT	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	1:00:31	Islamabad	Public
3	Salman	M	25	2	IT	Audio-recorded	Yes	Urdu	1:01:55	Islamabad	Public
4	Rida	F	24	1.5	IT	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	1:05:50	Rawalpindi	Private
5	Anabia	F	24	2	IT	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	22:04	Rawalpindi	Private
6	Ali	M	24	2	Telecom	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	18:29	Lahore	Private
7	Hina	F	27	4	Telecom	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	45:39	Lahore	Private
8	Saiq	M	30	4	Telecom	Audio-recorded	Yes	Mix	42:36	Karachi	Private
9	Asad	M	28	4	Banking	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	35:24	Faisalabad	Public
10	Kiran	F	24	2.4	Insurance	Audio-recorded	Yes	Urdu	47:24	Islamabad	Public
11	Naila	F	27	5	Insurance	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	23:46	Peshawar	Private
12	Daniyal	M	25	4	Accountancy	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	25:47	Multan	Private
13	Saif	M	28	5.5	Accountancy	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	32:49	Lahore	Private
14	Saba	F	25	2	Telecom	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	45:43	Islamabad	Private
15	Beenish	F	26	3	Banking	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	44:53	Lahore	Private
16	Hajra	F	28	2	Insurance	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	42:42	Multan	Private
17	Zara	F	25	3	Insurance	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	38:56	Quetta	Private
18	Adnan	M	26	4	Healthcare	Audio-recorded	Yes	Mix	42:17	Lahore	Private
19	Sadaf	F	26	3	Hospitality	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	45:12	Karachi	Private
20	Tehmina	F	27	2.5	Hospitality	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	55:26	Islamabad	Private
21	Osman	M	24	3	Healthcare	Audio-recorded	Yes	English	58:34	Peshawar	Private

