

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING THE BALANCE BETWEEN WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE OF MEDICAL STAFF

Agnieszka CZERWIŃSKA-LUBSZCZYK^{1*}, Marta JURASZEK²

¹ University of Bielsko-Biała; aczerwinska@ubb.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-8100-8802

² University of Bielsko-Biała; mjuraszek@ubb.edu.pl, ORCID: ORCID: 0009-0006-1683-1353

* Correspondence author

Purpose: Work-life balance (WLB) refers to the ability to combine work with other aspects of life, such as family life, social activities, or personal interests. The topic of WLB appears to be particularly relevant for medical personnel, who face exceptionally high levels of stress, irregular working hours, and emotional strain. Maintaining a balance between work and personal life can contribute to improving employees' well-being, quality of life, and patient care, as well as help reduce staff turnover in the healthcare system, which is a significant sector in the European Union economy. The aim of this article is to identify the factors that are positively and negatively influencing the balance between work and private life of medical staff.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted in the first quarter of 2024 in Polish medical institutions. A paper-based survey questionnaire was used as a research tool to collect data consisting of answers to closed questions. The questionnaire was discussed during interviews with experts, i.e., medical staff. Also, literature review was a key to understand the topic and point out the positive and negative factors.

Findings: Based on the conducted empirical research, we can conclude that medical personnel appreciate a wide range of solutions supporting work-life balance, such as additional days off, reduced working hours, flexible hours tailored to individual needs, accommodations for pregnant women, training to enhance skills, and attention to employees' mental health. The greatest negative impact on work-life balance among medical personnel comes from mobbing and hate.

Research limitations/implications: The limitations of the study stem mainly from the sample selection and the design of the research tool, which allowed for quick completion but may have overlooked important issues. In the future, it would be beneficial to increase the sample size and focus on a single medical profession. Nevertheless, the analysis of factors affecting work-life balance provides a foundation for further research among medical personnel.

Originality/value: The article provides a new outlook on factors affecting maintaining work-life balance. It is a valuable analysis for managers, HR professionals, medical organization leaders and medical staff who want to raise awareness about maintaining work-life balance in their companies and discover new ways to achieve WLB.

Keywords: Work-life balance, WLB, medical staff.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The topic of work-life balance (WLB) is currently of great interest among employees, employers and researchers (Czerwińska-Lubszczyk, Byrtek, 2023). It is particularly important for medical staff who face extremely high levels of stress, irregular working hours and emotional strain (Łuczak et al., 2018).

Medical personnel include doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics at various levels, dieticians, therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, pharmacists, dentists, etc., as well as core business employees employed in medical entities but not practicing medical professions, as well as interns and residents (Ustawa z dnia 8 czerwca 2017 r..., 2017; Ustawa z 5 grudnia 1996 r..., 1996).

Maintaining WLB can significantly improve the well-being and quality of life of medical workers, and at the same time have a positive impact on the quality of patient care and reduce turnover in the health sector, one of the main areas of the European Union economy (Rabiej, 2015). The majority of medical staff are women (GUS, 2022), who should take particular care of their WLB. Over the years, there has been a clear evolution of the family model - more and more women take up paid work, which changes their position in the social and family structure (Siemieniak, Rembiasz, 2018).

The transformation of the family model leads to the redefinition of traditional roles, including the role of the „breadwinner” in the family, which was previously almost unambiguously assigned to men (Guja, 2016; Gałęska, 2015). Global and economic changes mean that women often combine work and private life, which creates numerous challenges in achieving WLB (Batineh, 2019).

In order to understand the specific position of women in this process, it is worth recalling the issue of *the concept of transitioning between cognitive roles* as written by A. Smoder (Smoder, 2020). Women involved in professional life often experience conflict resulting from competing personal and professional responsibilities, which can be difficult to reconcile and may rob both work and family life of their satisfactions (Lakshmi, Sai Prasanth, 2018; Adamska-Chudzińska, 2020; Hildt-Ciupińska, 2017).

One of the reasons for continuing research on the WLB of medical staff in Poland are also legal changes. Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union (Dyrektywa Parlamentu Europejskiego i Rady (UE) 2019/1152..., 2019) and Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the balance between work and private life of parents and guardians and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (Dyrektywa Parlamentu Europejskiego i Rady (UE) 2019/1158..., 2019), are aimed at improving the quality of working conditions and facilitating the reconciliation of work and private life, as well as supporting the having and raising of children.

In response to the directives, changes were introduced to the Polish Labor Code (Kodeks Pracy, 1974; GOV, 2023), which entered into force on April 26, 2023. Changes were introduced regarding fixed-term and trial period employment contracts, a new leave from work for urgent family matters and a new carer's leave.

The changes also included regulations related to the right to request a change to an indefinite contract or more predictable and stable working conditions. New employer information obligations, flexible work organization, as well as changes in protection against dismissal due to parenthood and parental leave have been added (PARP, 2023).

The aim of this research is to analyze the factors determining the WLB of medical staff. It is worth looking at this issue from the perspective of factors that influence maintaining this balance - both those that have a positive and negative impact on WLB.

2. Work-life balance

WLB is currently a key issue that arouses great interest among researcher (Żemigła, 2013; Czerwińska-Lubszczyk, Byrtek, 2024) due to its significant impact on the health and quality of life of employees. Table 1 presents exemplary results of empirical research in the field of WLB. E. Robak and A. Słocińska draw attention to the broad dimension of life outside of work, defining work-life balance as *an ability to join work with other aspects of a human life, such as home, family, social activity and interests* (Robak, Słocińska, 2015, pp. 139-140).

The topic of WLB is often analyzed in the context of work-family conflict, which is a major area of tension. It is indicated that people who devote more time to family life more often achieve better WLB and feel more fulfilled than those who are fully engaged in professional work (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2021).

WLB is the ability to simultaneously separate and harmoniously combine these spheres, which helps maintain health and well-being. Imbalance often leads to negative health effects, which in turn affects work efficiency and the overall quality of life of employees (Kozar, Oleksiak, 2022).

The situation has been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has particularly exposed challenges related in particular to maintaining balance, leading to an increase in health problems such as depression, cardiovascular and musculoskeletal diseases (Łuczak et al., 2018).

Table 1.
Selected results of empirical research in the field of WLB

Item	Author (year of publication)	Information about the study
1.	Tomaszuk A., Olszewski P. (2023)	A quantitative study conducted using a survey questionnaire, taking into account the generational affiliation of respondents. The aim of the article was to analyze the differences in the perception of the concept of WLB by representatives of different generations. The study results also indicate factors influencing WLB, such as: no overtime work, no need for constant availability, flexibility of working hours, a satisfactory amount of free time, no mandatory delegations and the ability to combine professional and non-professional duties.
2.	Aslan T., Burucu R., Akdoğan Y. (2023)	Quantitative research conducted using an online survey questionnaire. The aim of the study was to investigate the factors influencing WLB behavior and the level of psychological resilience of nurses working in internal wards of hospitals in Turkey during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analyzed factors included, among others: work-related stress, support from the employer, working conditions, and ways of coping with difficulties in the face of a health crisis.
3.	Marecki Ł. (2023)	The research included an analysis of available articles, the aim of which was to examine the relationship between WLB, employee performance and their well-being. The analysis revealed key aspects such as stress, health, communication and teamwork, work and schedule flexibility, as well as overall job satisfaction.
4.	Skrok J., Strońska-Szymanek A., Kolemba M., Surzykiewicz J. (2023)	The study was conducted using a quantitative method using a survey questionnaire. Its aim was to examine the relationship between the types of motivation regulation and the satisfaction of needs at work, WLB and life satisfaction. The results suggest that there is a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction and between WLB and life satisfaction. Satisfying the need for autonomy also emerged as important in the context of WLB.
5.	Rao A., Shailashri V.T., (2021)	The quantitative study was conducted using a survey questionnaire in hospitals located in Dakshina Kannada district, India. Its aim was to identify factors influencing WLB among doctors and nurses. The results indicate that practices such as providing appropriate working conditions, flexible hours and strong family support play a key role in maintaining WLB in this occupational group.
6.	Wolor C., Solikhah S., Fadillah N., Lestari D. (2020)	A quantitative study that aimed to assess the effectiveness of e-training, e-leadership and WLB on employee performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was conducted among people belonging to Generation Y, employees of a Honda motorcycle showroom in Jakarta, Indonesia. The factors analyzed included employee performance, stress level and motivation.
7.	Szczygieł E. (2019)	The research is part of the project <i>Cross-sector cooperation to reconcile work and family life based on cooperation models and tools taken from the UK</i> . The aim of the article was to characterize the interinstitutional cooperation system, based on pilot studies conducted in the form of surveys and focused interviews. The results suggest areas requiring changes for more effective implementation of WLB, such as: introducing flexible forms of employment, organizing training and thematic cooperation platforms, enabling care for dependent people, promoting the idea of reconciling private and professional life, as well as overcoming bureaucratic barriers and lack of willingness to cooperation.
8.	Gulewicz M.M. (2019)	The study was conducted using a quantitative method using a survey questionnaire in which bank employees participated. The aim of the article was to determine whether banking sector employees maintain WLB. The study considered aspects such as working overtime and the level of satisfaction with various areas of life, such as health and relationships with a partner.
9.	Türker T. (2017)	Quantitative research conducted using an online survey questionnaire. The aim of the study was to examine the impact of WLB and social support on burnout. The study included aspects such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal achievements.
10.	Gilley A., Waddell K., Hall A., Jackson S.L., Gilley J.W. (2015)	The quantitative study, conducted using a survey questionnaire, included American graduates of master's and doctoral studies in the field of MBA and organizational development, who usually already had professional experience. The aim of the study was to examine the impact of the behavior and leadership style of team managers on maintaining WLB by employees and to identify factors that can improve this situation.

Source: Own study.

Based on Table 1, we can conclude that research in the field of WLB is conducted mainly using a survey questionnaire as a research tool. Studies have examined various aspects of WLB and their impact on job satisfaction, employee performance, stress, burnout, and other factors. The research covered a wide range of professional groups, from nurses to bank employees to managers, as well as various contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and different generations of employees.

Factors that positively influence WLB include: the possibility of remote work, flexible work organization, as well as the availability of paternity, parental and care leave (Sadowska-Snarska, 2023). Initiatives supporting employee well-being are also of key importance (Marecki, 2023), which affects their overall satisfaction and work-life balance. Satisfaction not only with work, but also with other aspects of life, such as relationships with children, partners or friends, has a significant impact on maintaining WLB (Gulewicz, 2019).

The literature often points to the relationship between maintaining balance and various types of employee motivation, which translate into a sense of life satisfaction. Meeting basic needs, such as the need for relationships, autonomy and competence at work, is considered crucial in the context of maintaining life satisfaction (Skrok et al., 2023). What is also important for many modern employees is the opportunity to spend time with loved ones, not having to be constantly available and being able to fulfill themselves in life outside of work (Tomaszuk, Olszewski, 2023).

Hypothesis 1 was adopted: Flexible working hours (e.g. adapting the schedule to individual needs) are the factor that has the strongest impact on maintaining WLB by medical staff. The specific nature of the work of medical staff is characterized by high variability of schedules and unpredictability of duties. Working in hospitals and other medical facilities often requires long, irregular shifts, night shifts and quick response to crisis situations, which makes planning one's personal life difficult. The ability to adjust the schedule to individual needs allows medical staff to manage time more effectively, providing space for regeneration, family care and other activities outside of work. This, in turn, can have a positive impact on their well-being and reduce stress levels, and in the long run contribute to maintaining WLB.

Factors that negatively impact WLB include: exposure to negative emotions (Frąckowiak-Sochańska et al.), role conflicts (Mleczek et al., 2019) and lack of separation between work and personal life (Mroczkowska et al., 2023). Extended working hours, demographic changes in society and increasing demands on employees pose additional challenges in maintaining WLB (Gulewicz, 2019). Problems related to establishing cooperation, including lack of willingness to cooperate, bureaucracy, poor access to information about WLB opportunities and the employer's lack of competence in shaping WLB policy, also constitute significant barriers (Szczygieł, 2019).

Lack of WLB leads to increased susceptibility to stress, reduced quality of life outside of work and reduced quality of childcare. Organizations that do not care about work-life balance experience problems with work efficiency and quality, and the number of absences increases. Additionally, an increase in employee turnover affects commitment to professional duties and reduces investments in human capital. As a result, it may also negatively affect relationships with customers and, in the case of medical staff, patients (Nowak-Lewandowska, 2013).

Because medical staff face exceptionally high levels of stress and emotional burden, the following hypothesis 2 was adopted: Stress and excessive emotions are the factor that has the strongest negative impact on maintaining WLB by medical staff. Working in conditions in which medical staff are constantly exposed to the suffering of patients, are responsible for their health and lives, and perform physically and mentally demanding tasks, means that daily professional duties may constitute a significant strain on their mental health and WLB.

3. Methodology and characteristics of the sample

The research results presented in this publication are part of a broader project on the WLB of medical staff.

A paper survey questionnaire consisting of closed questions was used as a research tool. This format was suitable for collecting information, considering the specific nature of medics' work. The questionnaire was discussed with experts, i.e., medical staff, during interviews. On their basis, the final version of the questionnaire was prepared. Then, after the interviews, the final version of the survey questionnaire was prepared. The survey was conducted in 2024. When conducting the survey, the focus was on selecting respondents according to the following criteria:

- diversity criterion: diverse workplace: hospital, clinic, health center.
- data availability criteria: consent of the institution to participate in the research.

In Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents in the research sample that was analyzed during the research.

Table 2.

Characteristics of the sample

Respondent's gender	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Female	65	79,3%
Male	16	19,5%
None of the above	0	0%
No consent to answer	1	1,2%
Total	82	100%

Cont. table 2.

Respondent's age	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Under 30 years	10	12,20%
30-40 years	20	24,39%
41-50 years	33	40,24%
51-60 years	18	21,95%
Above 60 years	1	1,2%
Total	82	100%
Respondent's education	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Secondary education	67	81,71%
Higher education		
Higher education with a Ph.D	12	14,63%
Higher education with a habilitation degree	3	3,66%
Total	82	100%

Source: Own study (Juraszek, Czerwińska-Lubszczyk, 2024).

Table 2 shows that the largest percentage of the research sample (N = 82) are women, 65 of whom constitute 79.3% of the total. In the age category, the largest share is held by people aged 41-50, which corresponds to 33 respondents - 40.24% of the entire sample. People aged 30-40 and 51-60 have a similar share in the sample, amounting to 24.39% and 21.95%, respectively. People with secondary or higher education constitute 81.71% of the entire sample.

4. Results

Based on the analysis of literature and interviews, factors positively influencing WLB were identified, such as: hybrid work, additional days off, shortened working hours, flexible working hours (e.g. adapting the schedule to individual needs), programs encouraging paternity leave, facilities for pregnant women, facilities for people caring for dependent people, training to expand competences or promote physical activity, taking care of employees' mental health.

Negatively influencing factors were also identified, such as: conflicts in the workplace, mobbing, burnout, sense of isolation, lack of professional development opportunities, lack of well-organized work, disturbed interpersonal contacts in the workplace, organizational culture unfavorable for work-life balance, unequal treatment (e.g. due to gender), stress and excessive emotions, as well as hate and negative attitude of society. Individual factors influencing WLB are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Each statement regarding factors that have a positive impact on maintaining WLB among medical staff was rated by respondents on a five-point scale (1 - definitely has a negative impact, 2 - has a rather negative impact, 3 - hard to say, 4 - has a rather positive impact, 5 - definitely has a positive impact). The results are presented in the form of median and mode. The number of medical staff in Table 3. differs from the sum of women and men due to the fact that one person did not provide an answer regarding gender.

Table 3.
Factors positively influencing WLB among medical staff

Selected factors	Medical staff (N=82)		Medical staff - female (N=65)		Medical staff - male (N=16)	
	M	D	M	D	M	D
Hybrid work	3	3	3	3	2	1
Additional days off	4	5	4	5	3	2
Shortened working time	4	5	4	5	4	5
Flexible working hours (e.g. adapting the schedule to individual needs)	4	5	4	5	3,5	5
Programs encouraging paternity leave	4	3	4	3	3	3
Facilities for pregnant women	4	5	4	5	3	3
Facilities for people caring for dependent people	4	4	4	4	3	4
Competence- expanding training	4	5	4	5	3,5	4
Promoting physical activity	4	4	4	4	3	3
Taking care of employee mental health	4	5	4	5	4	3

Note: Letter D in table 3 means dominant (mode) and M means median.

Source: own study.

According to respondents, hybrid work has the least impact on maintaining WLB among medical staff. This may be due to the fact that performing a medical profession involves limited opportunities to work "at home", which is usually limited to activities related only to office work.

Respondents note the importance of a wide range of solutions supporting WLB. These include additional days off, shortened working hours, flexible working hours that can be adjusted to individual needs, facilities for pregnant women, training to expand competences, and taking care of employee mental health (the median is 4, the dominant is 5). Men attach lower importance to individual factors than do women. Only the shortening of working time is assessed relatively highly (the median is 4, the dominant is 5).

Individual factors that have a negative impact on maintaining WLB among medical staff (median and dominant) are presented in Table 4. Each statement regarding changes was rated by the respondents on a five-point scale (1 - definitely has no impact, 2 - rather has no impact, 3 - hard to say, 4 - rather has a negative impact, 5 - definitely has a negative impact).

Table 4.
Factors negatively influencing WLB among medical staff

Selected factors	Medical staff (N=82)		Medical staff - female (N=65)		Medical staff - male (N=16)	
	M	D	M	D	M	D
Conflicts in the workplace	4	5	4	5	3,5	5
Mobbing	5	5	5	5	4	5
Burnout	4	5	4	5	4	5
Feeling isolated	4	5	4	5	3,5	5
No opportunities for professional development	4	4	4	5	4	4
Lack of well-organized work	4	5	4	5	4	4
Disturbed interpersonal contacts in the workplace	4	5	4	5	4	4
An organizational culture that does not support WLB	4	4	4	4	3,5	4
Unequal treatment (e.g. due to gender)	4	5	4	5	4	4
Stress, excessive emotions	4	5	5	5	4	5
Hate and negative attitude of society	4,5	5	5	5	4	5

Note: Letter D in table 4 means dominant (mode) and M means median.

Source: own study.

Respondents draw attention to the importance of a wide range of factors that negatively affect the WLB among medical staff. However, it can be noted that two factors have the greatest impact on maintaining WLB among medical staff:

- mobbing,
- hate and negative attitude of society.

Mobbing reached a median and dominant value of 5 in the entire research sample, which suggests that this is a factor requiring special attention. High values may result from the proximity of the problem or from the personal experiences of the respondents. The second factor, „hate and negative attitude of society", reached a median of 4.5 and a dominant of 5. Such a high result may be the result of events that took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, when medical staff were exposed to intense hate and were often subjected to negative attitudes from other members of society. The remaining factors assessed reached a median value of 4, but they do not stand out as clearly as the previously mentioned factors.

Men attach less importance to individual factors than do women, but the results do not differ as significantly as in the case of factors having a positive impact on WLB.

5. Summary

Work-life balance (WLB), in other words - the balance between professional and private life - is a topic of interest to among employees, employers and researchers. WLB refers to the ability to combine work with other aspects of life, such as family life, social life or personal interests.

The topic of WLB seems to be particularly important for medical staff, who struggle with extremely high levels of stress, irregular working hours and emotional strain. Taking care of WLB can contribute to improving employee well-being, quality of life and patient care, as well as help reduce turnover of medical staff in the healthcare system, which is an important area of the European Union economy. The aim of the empirical research undertaken is to analyze the factors determining the WLB of medical staff. The factors that have a positive impact as well as those having a negative impact on maintaining this balance are considered. The research results presented in this publication are part of a broader project on the issue of WLB in the context of medical staff (Juraszek, Czerwińska-Lubszczyk, 2024).

The research findings presented in this publication are part of a broader project focused on the issue of WLB in the context of medical personnel. The aim of the research undertaken in this publication is to analyze the factors that determine WLB of medical staff. The factors with a positive impact and those with a negative impact on maintaining this balance were considered. Based on a review of the literature, two hypotheses were adopted:

H1: Flexible working hours (e.g., adjusting the schedule to individual needs) are the strongest factor influencing the maintenance of WLB for medical personnel.

H2: Stress and excessive emotions are the strongest negative factors influencing the maintenance of WLB for medical personnel.

Based on the empirical research conducted, we can conclude that:

- Medical personnel appreciate a wide range of solutions that support WLB: additional days off, reduced working hours, flexible working hours that can be adjusted to individual needs, accommodations for pregnant women, training to enhance skills, and attention to employee mental health. The research findings partially supported Hypothesis 1.
- Compared to women, men attach less importance to the individual factors supporting WLB.
- Respondents pointed to the significance of a wide range of factors that negatively affect the WLB of medical personnel.
- The greatest negative impact on maintaining WLB among medical staff is mobbing and online abuse (hate). The research findings did not support Hypothesis 2.

The limitations of the research presented in this paper include, among others, the sample selection. Future research should aim to increase the sample size and focus on a specific medical profession, as these vary in terms of job specifics. Another limitation is the design of the research tool, which was created to allow for quick completion by medical staff. Unfortunately, this choice may have led to the omission of issues that could have proved to be of value had they been included in the study. Nevertheless, the analysis of factors positively and negatively influencing WLB provides a foundation for further research in this area among medical personnel.

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