



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

- **Work-life balance** is “a state of well-being that a person can reach or can set as a goal in order to allow them to manage effectively multiple responsibilities at work, at home and in their community.”⁽¹⁾
- **Two main aspects** related to work-life balance are:
 - **lack of time** and scheduling conflicts, and
 - **feeling overwhelmed**, overloaded or stressed by the pressures of multiple roles (e.g., being a worker, caregiver, parent).⁽²⁾
- Finding a healthy balance is important as **poor work-life balance can result in stress, absenteeism and low productivity**.⁽³⁾
- **Employees’ work satisfaction, initiative, motivation and morale** are all likely to be improved where effective work-life balance practices and programs are implemented.^(2,3)

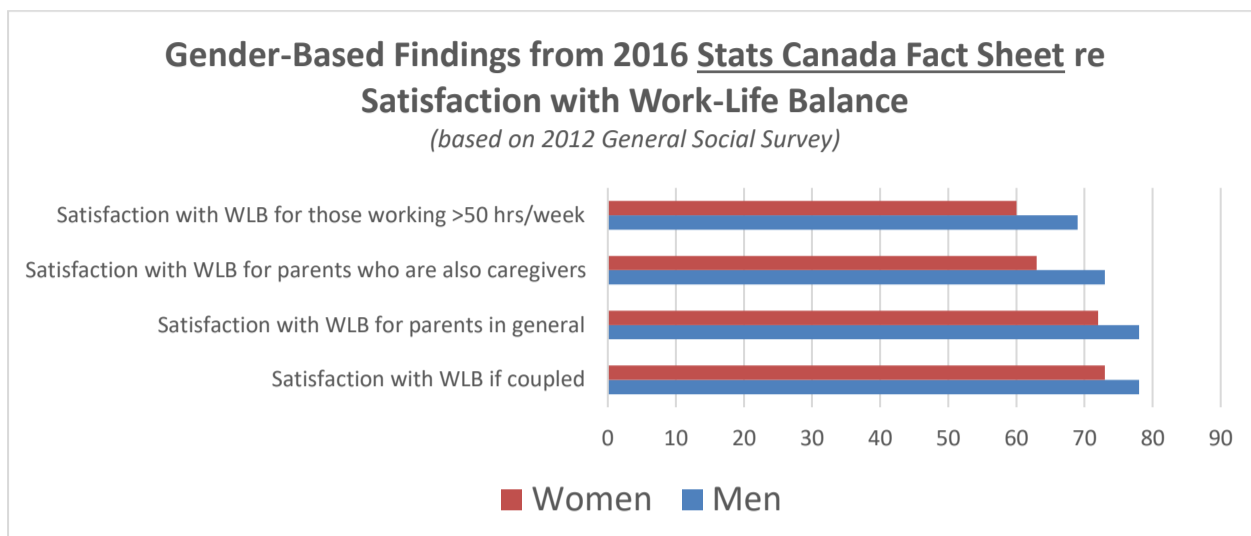
CANADIAN DATA ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- A [PHAC study](#) revealed that 58 percent of employees report high levels of role overload.
- [PSES results](#) suggest that workplace support to help balance work and life demands is **decreasing** slightly from 75% to 71% from 2011 to 2014.

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- **Gender roles** that disproportionately ascribe caring responsibilities to *women* have an unequal effect on women’s work-life balance (WLB) and the level of stress they experience.^(4,5)
 - For instance, women in “sandwich generations” (*those taking care of their children and their parents*) experience [greater family-to-work conflict \(FWC\) than their male counterparts](#).

- The chart below, based on [2016 Stats Can data](#), shows gender differences in satisfaction with WLB between different categories of workers (coupled, parents, etc.). Women are generally less satisfied than men across all the categories.



- **LGBTQ2S employees:** Similarly to the work-family conflicts experienced by heterosexual colleagues, some LGBTQ2S employees face additional conflicts due to their stigmatized family identity (e.g., [feeling uncomfortable about discussing with a supervisor the family-related difficulties that affect their work-life](#)).
- **Older employees:** Although older workers are more likely than younger workers to report achieving WLB⁽⁶⁾, lack of work-life balance is more likely to lead older females to [reduce the number of hours or retire](#) than older males.
- **Indigenous employees:** Employers' lack of understanding of the importance of family in Indigenous culture can hinder Indigenous employees' ability to achieve WLB. Work-life conflict is linked to high levels of stress, substance abuse, depression and anxiety.⁽⁷⁾
- **Racialized employees:** Black and racial minority women are far [less likely to get support from managers](#) for WLB. WLB for women of colour can be negatively affected by heavy workloads and management expectations, coupled with limited career advancement opportunities and gendered ethno-cultural family norms (*both related to women's maternal role and role of caregiver for elderly parents*).^(8,9)
- **Employees with disabilities:** Employees with disabilities may have [complicated lives, most notably for women with respect to family life, public life, and work](#). Discrimination against employees with disabilities in the workplace, including their right or fitness to parent, is also associated with greater work/life conflict.^(10,11)

PROMISING SGBA-INFORMED PRACTICES TO HELP ADDRESS WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Initiatives that foster WLB can have different effects on diverse employees.^(12,13) The literature is sparse on promising WLB practices for Indigenous or racialized employees.

OFFER FLEXIBLE AND GENDER-SENSITIVE WORK HOURS

- Flexible work arrangements, such as compressed work weeks, telecommuting, and unpaid leaves, can be especially beneficial for WLB for women.^(14,15)
 - Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre offers its employees many options for [flexible working hours](#), including a shortened or compressed work week, telecommuting, a reduced summer hours program and an earned day off program.
 - [Consultation with women with disabilities](#) that helps to avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach is a promising practice in work-life balance program design and delivery.

OFFER FLEXIBLE RETURN TO WORK SOLUTIONS

- Deutsche Bank offers women a flexible [return-to-work and re-integration program](#) after family leave, and provides [childcare places](#) near workplaces in major global hubs.⁽¹⁶⁾ More than [90%](#) of female employees return after family leave.
- Deloitte’s [Working Parents Transitions Programme](#) relies on a [team of coaches](#) that aids expectant and new mothers and fathers transition off and back into work.

FOSTER SHARING OF CARING THROUGH UPTAKE OF LEAVES

- Fathers’ taking leaves has been shown to achieve a better sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, but in Canada [less than half](#) of fathers report taking leave. In March 2019, the Federal Government made some [key changes](#) to parental and maternity leave rules in Canada. Provided that parents share leave and benefits, they can now add 5 weeks to the original 35 weeks of paid leave to split as they want. This creates an incentive for fathers (second parents) to take the leave to care for their children.

ASSIST THE SANDWICH GENERATION

- In Canada, there are some supports at the federal and provincial levels to assist employees who care for elderly parents. These benefits may be especially important for women given their greater [involvement](#) in elder care.
 - [Compassionate care benefits](#) are paid to eligible Canadian full-time workers to take temporary, secured, and paid employment leave in order to provide care or support to a gravely ill family member with significant risk of death within 26 weeks (6 months).
 - Caregivers who have dependents with physical or mental impairments may be eligible for the [Canada Caregiver Credit](#).
 - [Caregiver Benefit in Nova Scotia](#) is targeted at eligible caregivers who care for a family or friend with a high level of disability or impairment as determined by a home care assessment.

COVID-19 AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Public health measures to prevent deaths and manage infection rates of Covid-19 have led to the closure of many workplaces. Where we work – i.e. the location for the performance of work - has changed for many who continue to work. In Canada, many employees are now working from home: parents, for example, are simultaneously working and performing other roles such as teaching their children while schools are closed. The boundaries that have served to separate employment and home-life physically, socially and mentally, are now blurred for many workers.
- Although there is evidence of increased population stress (including survey data; calls to help-lines, and increased demand for mental health support) ⁽¹⁷⁻²¹⁾, systematic data collection and evidence of the impacts of home working on work-life balance in the context of Covid-19 remains sparse.⁽²²⁾ Balancing ‘work’ and ‘life’, and the stress and mental health impacts for different populations are relatively unknown at this point in time.
 - Some evidence from one survey conducted by the UK Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that “compared with fathers, mothers are spending less time on paid work but more time on household responsibilities”.⁽²²⁾ While there are some indications that shouldering a heavier burden of family demands (caregiving responsibilities and household work) by women during the Covid-19 crisis may contribute to greater stress and worse mental health^(18,23), studies are needed to determine the consequences of Covid-19 on work-life balance.
 - Also, the pandemic has brought about a reversal of traditional roles in some families, as many men teleworking from home, sometimes for the first time, have been put in the position of assuming primary caregiver roles for their children and running the household.⁽²⁴⁾ This is most evident in the case of men partnered with women who are essential healthcare workers, many of whom are currently required to work longer hours.⁽²⁴⁾ The impact of such role changes on the mental health of men in families with women working in healthcare will need further exploration.

VIGNETTE: WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Samir works in a small unit at the Government of Canada as a policy analyst. His department has a lot of pressures and many demands for quick turn-around times on complex tasks. Samir is married to Anya and they have three school-aged children. His disabled elderly parents who migrated recently from India, live close by. Samir organizes public transportation for them, and this often entails being on the phone for hours, but sometimes he drives them to appointments. Samir feels overwhelmed with the demands of home life, meeting the needs of his parents, and the work that he does. There just are not enough hours in the day to do everything. He is feeling stressed and torn between prioritizing and fitting in care for his parents, looking after his immediate family and managing a heavy workload. Every day is busy, the hours are long but even after a long day, he cannot sleep well. He has been prescribed an anti-anxiety medication. His doctor also suggested that he speaks with someone at work to see if there are any ways to manage better.

Box 1: Important SGBA considerations for managers/supervisors

Based on the vignette and using the evidence you have just read:

- Think about how Samir's different **roles and identities** (e.g. *being an employee and caregiver*) impact his work-life balance?
- How might workplace culture and ways of working impact the mental health of employees by sex/gender?
 - Samir's presenteeism which is encouraged by the workplace culture of 'showing up', particularly for men, impacts his productivity. WLB imbalances thus increase his stress levels and impact his mental health.
- Think about what the evidence shows in general in terms of the impact of sex/gender and other identity factors on work-life balance and in turn on stress and the mental health of an employee.

As a **manager/supervisor**, think about **your employee's life as part of a larger context** before coming to any conclusions or developing plans. Consider:

- How the wider context, including cultural norms/traditions, can influence employees' ability to maintain work-life balance and in turn their mental health (e.g. *Samir's family's cultural norms are that adult children, especially sons, are expected to be responsible for and carry out all aspects of their elderly parents' care. This differs from other cultures where paid services are acceptable.*)
- In addition to sex/gender, how might other factors (e.g., identity factors such as age, disability), and how the response of others might influence an employee's ability to maintain work-life balance and, in turn, their stress and mental health.

GLOSSARY

Absenteeism: “the absence (with or without pay) of an employee from work due to his or her own illness, disability, or personal or family responsibility. The absence must be for a period of at least half a day, but less than 52 consecutive weeks”. The following leaves are not included in the definition: maternity, adoption, paternity and parental leaves, vacation and holidays, bereavement leave, and jury duty.”⁽²⁵⁾

Presenteeism: “ the action of employees coming to work despite having a sickness that justifies an absence and as a consequence, they are performing their work under sub-optimal conditions.”⁽²⁶⁾

Work-life balance: “a state of well-being that a person can reach or can set as a goal in order to allow them to manage effectively multiple responsibilities at work, at home and in their community.”⁽¹⁾

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