

Gender Disparities in Balancing Work Life and Home Life

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Gender differences in work have been experienced by mankind from time immemorial and these have evolved in many forms throughout human history. In primitive societies, males went out of home to find food while females stayed at home and looked after their children and performed other household duties. At present, though due to improved access of females to education and to their expected contribution to wellbeing of individuals and families, efforts have been taken to recognize female participation in almost all social development activities.

In Sri Lanka with the improvement in educational opportunities, there is an increasing proportion of females in the labour market. However, female labour force participation is still significantly lower at 35 per cent in Sri Lanka compared to that of males. As less females take up relatively physically hard jobs, there is a difficulty in assigning of males for such jobs in the economy. If females can take up jobs in the service sector, males can be assigned to jobs in industry and agriculture. Increasing labour productivity has become a problem as a result and realizing benefits of the youth bulge for economic growth is delayed. Is this difference due to gender disparities in balancing their work life and home life? This on-going research attempts to find answers for this question.

During Stage 1 of data collection, ten professionals were interviewed to gather most relevant themes for the study and a questionnaire was developed to collect detailed information. During Stage 3, a sample of 600 professionals will be selected from the formal sector, which includes government, semi government and private sector to collect data on problems faced by them on balancing work and life. Professionals will include senior level staff working in education, health, banking and statistics fields.

Literature on the issue reveals the balancing work and home life is more critical among dual working married professionals in Sri Lanka. According to data collected, some professional females preferred to withdraw from employment and find jobs with flexible work hours as they do not have support to look after their young children and to devote to other household duties and due to problems in the work domain. Most of the respondents reported that they are constrained by the distance from home to their work places and of traffic jams. Initial findings show that there are intra domain problems in work and home due to time and behavior-based problems among them. Some respondents reported that they have issues which affect their family life due to office work. Therefore, providing employment may not be the only solution for people, unless their issues are addressed.

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