

INVESTIGATING WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONGST THE METAL INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

Work life balance is managing one's work and non-work life. This includes managing relationships with family and friends, extracurricular activities such as sport or hobbies. Many employees are experiencing abridged quality of work life which is noticeable in the work -life imbalance. Work and personal life have difficulties, inconsistent job responsibilities and family responsibilities. This impacts on both male and females, all professionals working across all levels and industries around the world. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine how employees achieve work life balance. This was a cross-sectional study conducted amongst metal industry workers. Results showed that majority of employees felt that they were able to balance their work and non-work life. More than a third of the participants reported that shift work seldom interfered with domestic life in the past few weeks. There was a statistically significant relationship between employees that work shifts during non- working hours. Majority of employees agreed to achieving and maintaining work-life balance. This also included spending enough time at home with the family during non-working hours. Some employees spent their time relaxing at home, watching movies, whilst a few enjoyed exercising by walking, or going to the gym.

Keywords

Work Life Balance, Job Stress, Wellness Programme, Shift work.

JEL Classification

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Introduction

Work stress and work-life imbalance are interrelated with workaholism regardless of gender [1]. Work-life balance is an employee's perception of multiple variables which include personal time, family time and work time which should all work hand in hand with minimal role conflict [2]. Dundas (2008) states that work life balance is about effectively managing or balancing life between paid work and all other activities that are important to the employee such as spending time with the family, leisure, and recreation.

According to [3] work life balance has significant consequences for employee attitudes towards their organisations. Employees focus on maintaining this balance by the support of the organisations policies and procedures. Organisations should implement policies that minimize the workload without effecting productivity. [3] conducted a study on work life balance and its effects on stress, the regression results indicated that only 25.5% of factors affect work life, balance and the remaining 74.5% needed future research to be conducted. According to [4] technological advancement has allowed employees to connect with work even when they are not at the office as a result the working hours have increased conflict between family and work life.

On the other hand, employees that are experiencing family stress which may impact on work stress such as marital problems, death in family, financial problems and so on. As mentioned by [5] work - life balance cannot be measured in an absolute way due to the personal circumstances that influence the way an individual perceives priorities. According to [6] stress occurs when an individual is assigned a huge responsibility without proper authority, delegation of power, interpersonal factors, miscommunication and organisational differences between the sender and receiver. As stated by [7] work life balance and stress work hand in hand. [8] mention that in order for employees to achieve work life balance, the organisations policies and practices needs to effectively support these goals.

As stated by [9] work-life balance has been a subject of study for the past three decades. Research conducted by Ernest and Young, surveyed 10 000 full-time workers from eight countries found that approximately a third find it difficult to balance the two. In terms of parents that are managers, 41% feel that there is an increase in working hours over the past five years. According to [10] work-life balance is a challenge faced by many people. This adds on pressure which leads to stress which further leads to emotional and physical imbalance and unhappiness. [11] conducted a study on challenges and opportunities of work-life balance in the Indian companies. The challenges include an aging workforce, increasingly competitive labour market, information technology and increasing benefit costs which enable employees to maintain organisational goals.

[12] mention that corrective measures are necessary and needed to improve the shift work pattern which includes role insufficiency, role ambiguity as well as supervisor support that needs to be increased which will initially increase productivity and job satisfaction of shift workers. [13] conducted a study on the impact of shift work patterns on the health of nurses. The results indicated that nurses working rotating shifts will benefit from stress reduction interventions and that there should be more research conducted in evaluating the detrimental health effects of nurses working shifts, stress reduction interventions as well as education on stress. The deterioration of health, sleep patterns and rest as well as the social impact that shift work has on an individual. A shift worker would not know how to balance their life unless a programme is put together to assist in this process, especially those that include proper sleep, rest, diet, and the family/personal life. Therefore, the objective of this study was to investigate work-life balance of metal industry workers in South Africa.

Methodology

Arcelor Mittal Newcastle Works, located in the northern part of South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province, is the country's foremost supplier of profile products. This highly efficient and low-cost operation, rated among the lowest billet cash-cost producers in the world by a leading commodities research institute, bears testimony to the success of the intensive re-engineering programmes undertaken at ArcelorMittal South Africa. The plant employs around 2300 staff. The plant has the capacity to produce 1.9 million tonnes per annum post the reline in 2014. The profile products produced include low and medium-carbon commercial grades, low-carbon rimming steel substitutes, sulphur containing free-cutting steels, micro-alloyed steels, high-carbon wire-rod steels and low, medium, and high-alloy steels.

According to [14] a sample is a subset of the population. It comprises some members selected from it. In other words, some, but not all, elements of the population form the sample. By studying the sample, the researcher is able to draw conclusions that are generalizable to the population of interest. From 2300 employees, minimum sample size for the study was calculated to be 329 based on 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. Because of non-response and incomplete questionnaire, 350 questionnaires were distributed among the employees using simple random sampling techniques.

A closed-ended questionnaire was utilized in gathering information from the sample which were shift and non-shift workers. The questionnaire was handed out to staff from different departments within the organisation. The Health and Safety department assisted with the distribution of the questionnaires to the various departments. The questionnaire consisted of a cover letter, section one and two. Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy was implemented and maintained.

Data were captured, coded and analysis using SPSS 25.0 version. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution as well as mean (SD) was calculated for categorical and numerical variables. Man-Whitney U test was carried out to compare the mean rank for different variables with regards to gender and shift work of the employees. P-values <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

A total of 350 questionnaire was distributed but only 102 returned the questionnaire. Only 96 participants completed the questionnaire accurately. Table 1 depicts the following: with regards to the way employees felt, the overall scores showed that most of the participants scored 25 or a mean=14.72 under almost never or quite seldom to statements. In terms of the way employees feel with regards to shift work impacting on their leisure time: 41% of employees fell under the quite seldom category, while 26% of employees fell under the quite often category.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of the Way You Feel

Statements	Almost never	Quite seldom	Quite often	Almost always	N/A
Your shift system impacts on your leisure time.	23.46%	40.81%	25.51%	4.08%	6.12%
Your shift system interferes with your domestic life.	26.53%	41.83%	22.44%	4.08%	5.10%
Your shift system interferes with your non-domestic life (e.g. doctor visits, going to the bank, etc.).	27.55%	40.81%	17.34%	8.16%	6.12%

Table 1 depicts the following: with regards to emotions during the past few weeks experienced by employees, the overall scores showed that most of the participants scored 26 or a mean=16.93 under quite seldom. In terms of shift work impacting on leisure time in the past few weeks: less than half of the employees fell under the quite seldom category, while 23% of employees fell under the quite often category. In terms of shift work interfering on the domestic life of the employee in the past few weeks: 41% of employees fell under the quite seldom category.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the Emotional During the Past Few Weeks

Statements	Almost never	Quite seldom	Quite often	Almost always	N/A
Your shift system impacts on your leisure time.	18.36%	46.93%	23.46%	6.12%	5
Your shift system interferes with your domestic life.	22.44%	40.81%	28.57%	4.08%	4
Your shift system interferes with your non-domestic life (e.g. doctor visits, going to the bank, etc.).	24.48%	44.89%	19.38%	6.12%	5

Table 2 depicts the following: with regards to the employee's knowledge of whether the company hosts wellness programmes, the overall scores showed that most of the participants scored 87 or a mean=1.09 which depicted 89% of employees agreed that the company hosted wellness programmes. With regards to the how frequently the company hosts wellness programmes, the overall scores showed that most of the participants scored 42 or a mean=1.68 which depicted 42.85% of employees agreed that the company hosted wellness programmes once a year.

Table 3 Percentage Distribution of the Wellness and Job Stress

Variables	Score	Mean	Percentage (%)
Company wellness programme	87	1.09	89%
Frequent company wellness programme	42	1.68	43%
Benefits from wellness programme	66	1.31	67%
Investment in wellness programme	89	1.07	91%
Job stress	80	1.18	80%
Company nurse	73	1.24	73%
Leisure time: non-working hours	70	1.24	71%
Balance between work and non-work life	70	1.28	66%
Time with family	59	1.39	60%
Rest periods during working hours	52	1.46	52%
Rest periods during non-working hours	59	1.39	60%
Job stress impacts negatively on the lives of employees	88	1.06	90%

Table 3 illustrates that there is no significant relationship between gender and the independent variables.

Table 3: Non-Parametric Tests Conducted on Gender and Independent Variables

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Man-Whitney U	P-Value
Company Hosts wellness programmes	Male	78	49.54	3864.00		
	Female	18	44.00	792.00		
	Total	96			621.00	0.132
How often the company hosts wellness programmes	Male	75	45.08	3381.00		
	Female	18	55.00	990.00		
	Total	93			531.00	0.125
Has the employee benefitted from the wellness programme	Male	77	48.31	3719.50		
	Female	18	46.69	840.50		
	Total	95			669.50	0.780
Agree to investing in wellness programmes	Male	78	48.69	3798.00		
	Female	18	47.67	858.00		
	Total	96			687.00	0.755
Employees suffer from workplace stress	Male	79	48.48	3830.00		
	Female	18	51.28	923.00		
	Total	97			670.00	0.563
Company Nurse explain	Male	78	48.69	3798.00		
	Female	18	47.67	858.00		
	Total	96			687.00	0.849
Enough leisure time	Male	78	48.42	3777.00		
	Female	18	48.83	879.00		
	Total	96			696.00	0.942
Able to balance work and non-work life	Male	79	47.78	3774.50		
	Female	18	54.36	978.50		
	Total	97			614.50	0.249
Spend enough with family	Male	79	50.26	3970.50		
	Female	18	43.47	782.50		
	Total	97			611.50	0.275

Rest periods during working hours	Male	79	49.83	3936.50		
	Female	18	45.36	816.50		
	Total	97			645.50	0.482
Rest periods during non-working hours	Male	78	48.46	3780.00		
	Female	18	48.67	876.00		
	Total	96			699.00	0.973
Does Job Stress impact on the employee	Male	78	48.81	3807.00		
	Female	18	47.17	849.00		
	Total	96			678.00	0.638

Table 4 illustrates that there is only a significant relationship between employees that work shifts rest periods during non- working hours.

Table 4: Non-Parametric Tests Conducted on Employees that Work Shifts and Independent Variables

	Employees that work shifts	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney	P-Value
Company Hosts wellness programmes	Yes	58	48.97	2840.00		
	No	38	47.79	1816.00		
	Total	96			1075.00	0.689
How often the company hosts wellness programmes	Yes	55	46.18	2540.00		
	No	38	48.18	1831.00		
	Total	93			1000.00	0.700
Has the employee benefitted from the wellness programme	Yes	56	45.38	2541.00		
	No	39	51.77	2019.00		
	Total	95			945.00	0.163
Agree to investing in wellness programmes	Yes	57	50.05	2853.00		
	No	39	46.23	1803.00		
	Total	96			1023.00	0.143
Employees suffer from workplace stress	Yes	58	46.35	2688.50		
	No	39	52.94	2064.50		
	Total	97			977.50	0.086
Company Nurse explain	Yes	57	47.11	2685.00		
	No	39	50.54	1971.00		

	Total	96			1032.00	0.422
Enough leisure time	Yes	57	48.97	2791.50		
	No	39	47.81	1864.50		
	Total	96			1084.50	0.794
Able to balance work and non-work life	Yes	58	50.55	2932.00		
	No	39	46.69	1821.00		
	Total	97			1041.00	0.394
Spend enough with family	Yes	58	52.58	3049.50		
	No	39	43.68	1703.50		
	Total	97			923.50	0.071
Rest periods during working hours	Yes	58	54.09	3137.50		
	No	39	41.42	1615.50		
	Total	97			835.50	0.012
Rest periods during non-working hours	Yes	57	55.26	3150.00		
	No	39	38.62	1506.00		
	Total	96			726.00	0.001
Does Job Stress impact on the employee	Yes	57	51.24	2920.50		
	No	39	44.50	1735.50		
	Total	96			955.50	0.015

Conclusion: Majority of employees agreed to achieving and maintaining work-life balance. This also included spending enough time at home with the family during non-working hours. Some employees spent their time relaxing at home, watching movies, whilst a few enjoyed times exercising by walking, or going to the gym. Some employees noted that the best they could do was to separate work from their non-work life, meaning that they left work at work and did not take personal life issues to work either, that made life easier at home and at work.

Recommendation: A wellness programme is recommended to assist employees in balancing their work and non-work life, ensuring health and fitness concerns are adhered to by conducting medicals.

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