



Balancing the Scales: an Investigation of Work-Life Balance Among Women in a South African Information and Communications Telecommunications Organization

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - The study's purpose was to determine the extent to which female information and communications technology professionals are aware of work-life balance policies.

Aim - The objective was to assess employee understanding of work-life policies in effect at their place of employment.

Methodology - To analyze female employees' experiences with work-life balance and their awareness of work-life balance policies in their organization, data from female information and communications technology professionals (n=50) were collected using a quantitative technique and cross-sectional survey design. The study used inferential statistics like Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Pearson's product-moment correlation, and T-tests as well as descriptive statistics like Measure of Central Tendency and Dispersion to analyze the data.

Findings - According to the study, the majority of employees were aware that their organization had a separate work-life balance policy.

Limitations of the study - Only one organization was used to test the idea of work-life balance. There were just 50 available responses, making the sample size for the questionnaire small.

Practical implications - The study calls for a re-examination of work-life balance policies and practices, specifically Border Theory, in order to ensure that work-life balance can enhance productivity without inadvertently resulting in poor work-life balance. To better comprehend the management of the company, the personnel should take the time to enquire about the policies and other procedures that interest them. To inform the staff of the organization's rules and various regulations, management must also communicate with and educate them.

Originality/value - Further research is needed to fully explore the topic of work-life balance in information and communications technology. Such empirical studies have never been conducted in the South African environment. As a result, it can be said that there is a considerable level of originality in this paper. By helping lawmakers understand how women perceive work-life balance practices, the current research has the potential to help create better job design policies.

KEY WORDS

Awareness, female professionals, Information and communications telecommunications, work-life balance practices, COVID-19

JEL Code M12, J24, O15

DOI: [10.46287/OSZY8255](https://doi.org/10.46287/OSZY8255)

1 INTRODUCTION

Scholars have documented the challenges of combining wage work and care responsibilities in various societal contexts. National variations reveal that public policy and care infrastructure have major effects in shaping gendered patterns, class inequalities, as well as the overall well-being of parents. Childcare centres and schools can enable people with children to pursue jobs and careers Teo (2022). In a telecommunications sector where females are few, the current study was conducted to evaluate the awareness of work-life balance practices among female information and communications telecommunications (ICT) professionals to gain insight into how they perceive work-life balance by utilizing the Border Theory by Clark (2000).

The Border Theory by Clark (2000) is based on the hypothesis that employees need to work towards separating their work and home lives, thus finding a way to erect an imaginary boundary between the two to prevent overlap. In evaluating the awareness of female information and communications telecommunications professionals, the current study is significant as it provides empirical evidence to organizational managers in formulating effective human resource policies to sustain employees and make their personal and professional lives better.

The discourse around the topic of work-life balance has gained widespread attention from researchers and management practitioners over the past few years (Nicklin, Seguin & Flaherty, 2019; Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). While work-life balance policies are standard in the West and most industrialized countries (Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016; Poster & Prasad, 2005), there is a substantial lack of research in less industrialized countries (Munn & Lee, 2014). As purported by Kelliher Richardson and Boiarintseva (2019), facilitating employees to achieve balance in their work and family lives has been propagated as a suitable practice by prominent policy organizations, including the International Labor Organization, European Union, and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Maiya and Bagali (2014) reported that more women were venturing into traditionally male-dominated areas and have become a visible part of the workforce. There is a paradigm shift from men treated as breadwinners and women as housekeepers or child-bearers to women as both breadwinners and one who is capable of handling multiple roles. Parakandi and Behery (2016) assert that companies are increasingly becoming aware of the need to have policies and practices that lead to a sustainable workforce and embrace the concept of work-life balance and appreciate its importance as a tool to improve employee productivity, satisfaction, and retention. The topic has tremendous significance, especially in the modern business world characterized by highly competitive markets and a higher focus on sustainable organizations.

1.1 THE MOTIVATION, RESEARCH PROBLEM, AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study is motivated by the fact that the boundaries between work and home have become blurred and demands on workers and organizations have become complex leading to increasing challenges for workers to successfully resolve the conflicting needs of paid work and personal lives. An understanding of employees' awareness of work-life balance practices may assist organizations in placing work-life balance measures to improve the dissemination of work-life balance practices.

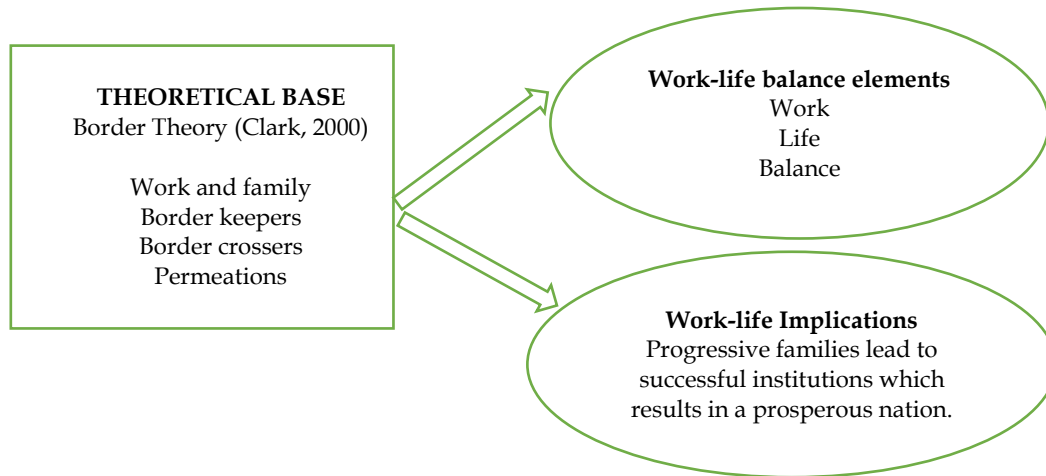
The research problem of the study is informed by a study by Balamurugan and Sreeleka (2020), which emphasizes that work-life balance is the major idea in employment as a dual career that is, family and work. The increasing responsibilities of families and changing dynamics, as well as organizational changes, have led to an increase in work-life balance challenges, especially for women who work in male-dominated fields. The ever-changing demands of the work environment of female information and communications technology professionals can directly affect their personal lives, which in turn can make it difficult for them to manage household responsibilities as well as meet work expectations.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the extent to which all employees are aware of policies and programmes that are in place, which address work-life balance at the telecommunications company.

1.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

In the next section, the conceptual framework of the study is presented.

Fig 1. Conceptual framework



Source: Scholars' anthology

The conceptual framework is based on the Border Theory (Clark, 2000). Border Theory is used to examine the impact of work-life balance on the border between work and non-work domains. Most importantly Adisa, Gbadamosi, and Osabutey (2017) highlighted that, the Border Theory has been used to explain phenomena at either an organizational or individual level.

The information and communications technology industry is underpinned by a digital platform, to enable quick access throughout the world at large and Statistics South Africa (2019) makes the labor force market indicators available, in terms of the number of women in traditionally male-dominated industries, among other indicators. These are all dimensions that may not necessarily need to be encapsulated into public policy. The government can encourage businesses to introduce themselves voluntarily, thus offering organizations more meaningful choices to pursue better work-life balance policies and procedures.

Work-life balance programmes should consider the smallest societal unit, which is the family, and because it is the smallest unit, this may often lead to it being ignored. Taking this unit into consideration leads to contentment in families, which results in content workers. Having content workers leads to highly productive institutions and this has massive implications, which in this case, is the nation. Having well-established family units and highly productive institutions leads to a prosperous and content nation.

In the next section, literature on work-life balance and its related practices is presented.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The role of work-life balance policies has been crucial for enhancing employees' organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). A recent study by Rawal (2023) found that, work-life balance today, especially in times of COVID-19 where home and work place have transgressed boundaries is an imperative precursor for the well-being of an individual. A satisfying job well-integrated into life, balances the overall mental and emotional quotient of working women particularly in the current pandemic in which the workplace is posing a new and unlike set of challenges and problems for women.

Considering the significant contribution of work-life balance policies in individuals' well-being, it has gained immense attention from scholars from the domains of organizational behavior, human resource management, and quality-of-life studies (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Panda and Sahoo (2017), based on their research on information technology (IT) sector professionals, revealed the vital role of human resource development interventions such as teamwork, communication, and career development opportunities in fostering work-life balance amongst professionals. Further, their study findings also highlighted the importance of financial and non-financial benefits such as an attractive salary, sponsored holiday packages, medical expenses, spouse employment, and childcare facilities for accomplishing the requirements and growth of executives and their families.

2.1 WORK-LIFE BALANCE PRACTICES

According to Munyeka (2021), work-life balance is about forming and preserving supportive and healthy work environments, enabling employees to balance work and personal responsibilities, thus strengthening employee loyalty and productivity. Maintaining work-life balance is crucial for peoples' well-being and relationships, as it can improve efficiency in their work performance. Additionally, Dousin, Collins, Bartram, and Stanton (2021) assert that, work-life balance practices are associated with employee perceptions of the need for achievement and well-being which subsequently influence their intention to leave the organization. The following section provides a summary of work-life balance practices.

2.1.1 FLEXITIME

Chung and Van der Horst (2018) assert that flexitime entails workers' ability to change the timing of their work (that is, to alternate the starting and ending times) and to fluctuate the numbers of hours worked per day or week – which may also include accumulating hours for days off. Chung and Van der Horst (2018) highlight that, in the broader sense, flexitime can also have the following: annualized hours, where 'working hours' is not defined per day or week, but calculated throughout the year; and compressed hours, where workers maintain their working hours, usually full-time, but work fewer days; for example, four rather than five days. Eurofound (2015) highlights that flexitime is a type of flexible working strategy that is frequently and increasingly being used to combine paid work with family demands allowing workers more control over when and where they work.

2.1.2 TELEWORKING

Tele-working is the term used to illustrate flexible working that can be done from any location using technologies such as laptops, wireless internet connection, and mobile phones (ACAS, 2016). Chung and Van der Horst (2018) state that tele-working allows workers to work outside of their standard work premises, for example, working from home. Although flexible working can also include workers having control over how much they work – for example, part-time work, term-time only, and job-sharing.

According to Adamovic (2022), telework can be defined as work that is performed at home using information and communication technology. Barnes (2020), Chamakiotis, Panteli, and Davison (2021), Dwivedi et al., (2020), Papagiannidis, Harris, and Morton (2020), Sharma et al. (2020) & Venkatesh (2020) state that, recently, the use of telework (also called working from home or remote work) has strongly increased for several reasons: the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for it in today's globalizing and complex business environment (Srivastava & Chandra, 2018); the potential advantages to employee well-being (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007); the autonomy it provides to employees (Golden, 2006); the cost savings on travel and offices (Scott-Clarke, 2013). Dizaho, Salleh, and Abdullah (2017) additionally, highlight that, it is necessary to know that although teleworking provides workers with needed flexibility to balance their work-life conflict, it also has some dangers that organizations ought to be aware of. When using teleworking/e-working as a strategy for achieving work-life balance, organizations should ensure maximum supervision of employees to ensure that employees do not misuse the opportunity or violate organization rules/regulations and privacy, the provision of technology has created the ease of monitoring employees. This can be achieved by employers providing the technologies for the involved employees with limitation authorization and a system that will enable employers to monitor teleworking employees from time to time at the location/environment in which they work. Teleworking provides flexibility, autonomy, reduces stress, and provides the teleworker ample privilege to work in any location thus, promoting a healthy lifestyle and work-life balance.

2.1.3 JOB-SHARE

Job sharing induces flexibility for both sharers being in attendance when workloads are profound. Job share allows the sharers to adjust working hours to address work-life balance; however, the sharers must concur on any changes to the established hours. Job sharing reduces sick leaves and absenteeism in the case that if one partner is unable to be present because of sickness, emergencies, or holidays, the other colleague can carry on with at least the slightest amount of work (ACAS, 2016). Greenfield (2016) notes that one of the biggest advantages of job sharing is that it allows for work-life balance and flexibility of the schedule. A recent study showed that workers who had more flexibility seemed happier. In addition, Spencer (2017) highlights that job sharing allows flexibility in the schedule when you and your partner can trade days.

According to Spencer (2017), one of the biggest disadvantages of job sharing is how others in the workforce perceive the position. Because job sharers work less than full time, they might not be perceived as professionally as a full-time person. There also may be resentment among others who work full time towards the job sharers. Spencer (2017) also states that job sharers may also face slower job growth or upper mobility or may lose benefits. Employers also may want to have one person in charge, which can cause problems between sharers. There may be some increased costs in training or benefits depending on how the position is set up. Job sharing may also create confusion or more work with human resources.

2.1.4 *SHIFT WORKING*

Shift work is a work schedule whereby one employee replaces or takes over the same job from another employee within 24 hours (ACAS, 2016). While this sort of work arrangement is not always assumed to be a flexible work schedule, its work arrangement does not tally with the common standard working time and creates room for some flexibility (Kossek & Michel, 2013). Employees on shifts usually work in crews, which are groups of personnel composed of different and separate shift teams. Systematically, each team will frequently change its hours of work and rotate morning, afternoon, and night shifts (ACAS, 2013).

2.1.5 *PART-TIME WORK*

Part-time work has been identified by Kossek and Michel (2013), as one of the most common and effective methods of flexible work schedule/arrangement worldwide.

For this study, exploring females allowed for the discovery of how female awareness of work-life balance especially looking at the different life roles that females play. For example, for females who are parents, according to ACAS (2016) working part-time solves the dilemma of childcare for parents and the pre-arranged schedule gives employers ample time to prepare in advance to cover non-attendance.

2.1.6 *WORKING FROM HOME*

Working from home or home working is a working arrangement where an employee regularly works all, or some of, their time at home (Tipping, Chanfreau, Perry & Tait, 2012). Working from home determines a disconnection between remote workers and conventional office-based workers, which produces negative sensations with individual work assignments (Collins, Hislop, & Cartwright, 2016). This is especially true when home-based teleworking is adopted to answer unforeseen and contingent challenges, such as natural disasters or unprecedented events (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). This is especially applicable at the time of this research which was during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next section looks at the work-life balance policy and programme at the telecommunications organization.

2.2 **WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICY AND PROGRAMME AT THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATION**

The telecommunications organization of this current study offers several workplace provisions that guide work-life balance initiatives, as provided by the telecommunications organization policy on Hours

of Work: (Other Working Opportunities and Overtime) of 2015 and the virtual assistance programme of the telecommunications organization which for this study, shall be referred to as the Touch Initiative. The telecommunications organization policy on Hours of Work: (Other Working Opportunities and Overtime) of 2015 is a policy that stipulates work conditions as per the Republic of South Africa's labor laws. The other provision is the telecommunications organization's Touch Initiative, a virtual assistant used at the telecommunications organization, which facilitates a comprehensive lifestyle management service for employees at every level. For each policy and programme, details are provided on the type of provision, how it addresses work-life balance need(s), and any specific conditions that involve employee access and use. The policies and programmes were obtained from the Human Resource Information System (HRIS) system of the telecommunications organization.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCESS

This study followed a secondary data review and analysis process. The process involved collecting information and statistics at various levels of accumulation to allow the researchers to create a situational analysis of unique experiences that occur within a complex context of Information and Communications Technology shaped by these various social aspects that female information and communications technology professionals face. Secondary data regarding female information and communications technology professionals was collected from the telecommunications company's HRIS system for nine months of 2019 from January to September and four months of 2020 from February to April. These statistics were independently verified as reliable and accurate by auditors of the telecommunications company's HRIS Department. The present study started with data retrieval from the Human Resource Information System (HRIS) of the telecommunications organization to examine how the employees were using the work-life balance programme. Following this, and adhering to COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time this research was conducted, a quantitative approach was used, involving the creation of online GoogleTM Drive Forms questions and their distribution. The use of GoogleTM Drive Forms which was the initial plan even before the onset of COVID-19 worked efficiently and as a result, no incomplete surveys were submitted.

Sekaran and Bougie (2016 p.95) explain that "a research design is an outline for gathering, measurement, and scrutinizing data, produced to answer the research question."

The current study's research design needed to lend itself towards the identification, description, and exploration of awareness of work-life balance that occurs within a complex context of information and communications technology that is shaped by these various social aspects female information and communications technology professionals face. The current study was carried out in the information and communications technology department of the telecommunications company to determine how women perceive work-life balance practices in a traditionally male-dominated industry like telecommunications. This information will help policymakers develop work-life balance policies that are female-friendly.

3.2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The researchers contacted the telecommunications organization and through the Human Resource Manager approval was granted together with a list of the names of the information and communications technology employees of interest, with their respective email contact details. The researchers then contacted the employees and requested them to fill in "The Work-Life Balance Study Employee On-Line Survey".

The research's target population was 50 female information and communication technology (ICT) professionals at the telecommunications organization. The current research study used an online survey using a case study. Mwita (2015) defined a case study as an extensive study of a single situation, such as an individual, family, or organization. The case study research method was applied to get detailed information about the organization under study.

The respondents' characteristics in Table 1 show that the highest number of participants (40%) were aged between 20 and 25 years, followed by the 26-30-year age group (18%). The least number of the participants were those aged 36-40 years. Furthermore, most of the respondents had postgraduate degrees (46%) and had between 2-5years of working experience (36%).

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents (n=50)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	50	100%
Age category (years)	20- 25	20	40%
	26-30	9	18%
	31-35	7	14%
	36-40	3	6%
	41-50	4	8%
Racial distribution	Black	39	78%
	White	8	16%
	Mixed-race	3	6%
Marital status	Single	21	44%
	Married	11	21%
	Divorced	2	4%
	Co-habiting not married	8	15%
	long-term relationships	4	8%
Spouse/ partners' employment status if applicable	Full-time employment	24	48%
	Part-time employment	4	8%
	Not employed	18	36%
	Not employed/ does not apply (comprised of individuals who did not wish to divulge their employment status)	4	8%
	Full-time employment	24	48%
Educational level	Diploma	8	16%
	Degree	19	34%
	Postgraduate degree	24	46%
	Diploma	8	16%
	Degree	19	34%
Departmental section under which employees work under	Information and communications technology section	33	66%
	Information Technology section	9	18%
	Information and communications technology auxiliary services	8	16%
	Information and communications technology section	33	66%
	Information Technology section	9	18%
Number of years worked for in the organization	Less than 6 months	6	12%
	6 months -1 year	16	32%
	2-5 years	18	36%
	6-10 years	4	8%
	11-20 years	6	12%
Working hours	40 hours/ week	18	36%
	40 to 50 hours/ week	17	34%
	51 to 60 hours/ week	13	26%
	70 hours and over/ week	2	4%
Number of children <18 living at home	Yes	24	48%
	No	26	52%

Sources: Authors research

3.3 MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

Data were gathered using a self-created questionnaire and self-administered online Google™ Drive Forms called "Work-Life Balance Study Employee Survey". The questionnaire consisted of biographical information. The development of the measuring instrument, statements were designed to obtain rich responses from the respondents' answers in an online survey format, and imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 26 (SPSS) which consisted of:

Section A: Demographic data (9 items); Section B: Work-related questions (8 items that covered work-life balance, gender stereotypes, and flexibility) and Section C: Life-related questions (12 items that covered dependent adults /children-related tasks, work/home interference, time management, sense of accomplishment and skills acquisition).

To validate the Google™ Drive Forms called, "Work-Life Balance Study Employee Survey", a pilot study was conducted on a small group of eight female information and communications technology professionals from an organization in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa who did not form part of the final study utilizing the same protocols and procedures as those applied in the actual fieldwork. The survey was also sent to experts at two South African universities to ascertain that the questions characterized the problems they intended to measure. The psychometric properties of the on-line web-based Google™ Drive Forms called, "Work-Life Balance Study Employee Survey" were established using Cronbach's alpha and the Factor Analysis. To improve the survey's internal consistency and construct validity, numerous changes needed were made. In this research study, the reliability of the scales of the "Work-Life Balance Study Employee Survey" was further established by evaluating the inter-item consistency, using Cronbach's alpha test. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010 p.289), "the closer to 1 Cronbach's coefficient alpha is, the higher the internal consistency reliability." The reliability coefficient (alpha) ranged from 0 to 1, with 0 representing an instrument with many errors, and 1 representing the total absence of errors. A reliability coefficient (alpha) of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The Alpha coefficient ranged from .702 to .773 and the overall study's reliability score was 0.734, which indicated that it was higher than the reliability co-efficient of 0.50. This means that the results obtained were deemed reliable.

3.4 DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample profile. Firstly, Descriptive statistics in the form of Measure of Central Tendency and Dispersion was first conducted. Secondly, inferential statistics in the form of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Pearson's product-moment correlation, and T-tests were also used to analyze the data.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The collection and analysis of data in this study strictly followed conventional ethical principles. For example, one of the ethical considerations was to ensure the items contained in the questionnaire are phrased in a way that would not contravene the privacy of respondents. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa with protocol reference number: HSS/0810/018D dated 5th March 2019.

In conducting the research, the following ethical standards were considered:

- *Informed consent*

Yip, Han and Sng (2016) define informed consent as an ethical requirement for a study that involves human participants, whereby the participants get informed about all aspects of the study and its risks. The researchers obtained informed consent from each of the staff members in this study. The staff members were informed of their rights taking part in the study. The researchers made it clear to the respondents that they were allowed to pull out from the study at any point should they feel that their rights were violated or for any further motive without explaining to the researchers.

- *Avoiding harm during the research*

Harm during the research refers to an injury to the rights, safety and well-being of the respondents that include physical and mental factors (Cox, 2019). In this study, there was no deception and mishandling of information that could result in mental discomfort for the respondents. There were no actions that would cause harm whereby the respondents could experience an injury during the research. The informed consent process was completed to respect respondents' autonomy to avoid contravening the respondents' rights. The researchers considered the lasting impact of their actions or things they could say during the research.

- *Confidentiality and anonymity*

According to Kumar (2019), confidentiality is concerned with the privacy of information including consents to view, share, and the use of that information. It is a fundamental requirement of ethical research that information revealed within the research context be kept confidential (Farrugia, 2019). The respondents were informed of the extent to which confidentiality would be maintained in the informed consent process. The respondents were further guaranteed that the information provided would be kept confidential and used strictly for academic purposes. Anonymity is the best protection of confidentiality regarding personal information and records (Cox, 2019). The researchers ensured that the respondents did not reveal any identifying details like their names on the questionnaires distributed to them. Lastly, the researchers acted with sincerity during this research process and acknowledged all the works from other authors cited in this research.

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following section provides the results and findings of the study. The descriptive statistics are provided and then the results of findings using inferential statistics.

4.1 RESULTS OF FINDINGS: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The work-life balance scale asked respondents whether they were aware of the work-life balance benefits available through the telecommunications organization, to which all 50 female respondents under study indicated awareness. The questions, as shown in Table 2 of the scale, asked the respondents questions on a 5-point Likert scale that used (1) to indicate 'Always' and (4) to mean 'Never.' Table 2 shows the measure of central tendency and dispersion for the awareness of work-life policies.

Table 2. Measure of Central Tendency and Dispersion for awareness of Telecommunications' policy

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Awareness	50	1	1	1.00	.000
Existence of work-life balance and adherence	50	1	2	1.26	.443
Usage of any family-related benefits	50	1	2	1.20	.404
Policy establishment documentation and communication	50	1	3	1.58	.810
Policy interference	50	1	2	1.28	.454
Valid N (listwise)	50				

Sources: Authors research

4.1.1 AWARENESS

On a YES/NO response scale, respondents were asked if they were aware of any work-life balance benefits through the telecommunications organization. A mean of (m=1.00) was revealed, indicating that all fifty (50) respondents were aware of work-life balance benefits. The awareness of work-life balance practices in this study may stem from females balancing boundaries and maintaining their life roles in the

everchanging world of work and this is in line with a study by Mellner, Aronsson, and Kecklund (2015) that highlights, that, profound changes are taking place within working life, where established boundaries between work and personal life are challenged by increased global competition, ever-faster changing markets, and rapid development of boundary transcending information and communication technologies (ICT).

4.1.2 EXISTENCE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND ADHERENCE

The mean score ($m=1.26$) showed that respondents were aware of work-life balance and adherence. The standard deviation ($sd=.443$) indicated that the responses on work-life balance and adherence questions leaned more towards 'Always' on the 5-point Likert scale. The responses revealed that 37 respondents (74.4%) responded 'Always,' and 13 respondents (26.0%) indicated 'Sometimes' on the Likert scale, in terms of the existence of work-life balance and adherence. According to Adisa et al (2017) confirms this finding as the working pattern found in this study is the hallmark of the 21st century and has blurred the border that exists between employees' work and non-work domains.

4.1.3 USAGE OF AVAILABLE FAMILY-RELATED BENEFITS

As seen in Table 2, the mean score ($m=1.20$) showed that respondents were more inclined to use available family-related benefits. The standard deviation ($sd. =.404$) indicated that the responses on the usage of family-related benefits questions closely leaned more towards 'Always' on the 5-point Likert scale. The responses revealed that as many as 27 respondents (54.0%) responded 'Always.' 20 respondents (40.0%) indicated 'Frequently' on the Likert scale to use available family-related benefits. A minority of 3 respondents (6.0%) stated the mid-point option of 'Sometimes' on the Likert scale.

4.1.4 POLICY ESTABLISHMENT, DOCUMENTATION, AND COMMUNICATION

As seen in Table 2, the mean score ($m=1.58$) showed that respondents were more inclined towards agreeing that the work-life balance policy was well established, documented, and well-communicated. The standard deviation ($sd=.810$) indicated that the responses on the policy establishment, documentation, and communication question leaned more towards 'Always' on the 5-point Likert scale.

The responses revealed that 31 respondents (62.0%) indicated 'Always,' with 9 respondents (18.0%) showing 'Frequently' on the Likert scale. Ten respondents (20.0%) indicated 'Sometimes' on the Likert scale to the policy establishment, documentation, and communication question. The respondents indicated that having the policies regarding work-life balance communicated to them enhanced their ability to achieve work-life balance.

4.1.5 POLICY INTERFERENCE

As seen in Table 2, the mean score ($m=1.28$) was according to the policy interference question. This indicated that the response rate leaned more towards employees feeling that their work/ career interfered with their responsibilities at work or home. The standard deviation ($sd=.454$) indicated that the responses to policy interference questions leaned closer to 'Always' on the 5-point Likert scale. The responses revealed that 36 respondents (72.0%) indicated 'Always', and 13 respondents (26.0%) stated 'Frequently,' while one respondent indicated 'Sometimes' on the Likert scale, to the policy interference question. This indicated that the response rate was more clustered towards employees feeling that their work/ career interfered with their responsibilities at work or home.

4.2 RESULTS OF FINDINGS USING INFERENTIAL STATISTICS

4.2.1 AGE AND AWARENESS

Since there was only one respondent in the 60+ age group, and two respondents in the age range of 56-60, the two were combined into one scale of above 50, to obtain an effective outcome. This resulted in a scale of 20-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 56-50, and 50 and over.

As shown in Table 3, a significant difference was found between the age and the work-related scale. It was worth noting that those respondents aged below 31 showed a higher 'awareness' on the work-related scale (Means of 4.00 for the 26-30 age group and 4.56 for 20-25 age group) than the ones aged from 31-35. In the study, relatively older respondents in the age groups 36 to 40 and above 41-50 (Mean=3.83, 4.13) had a lower score, than younger respondents in other age groups (26-30 and 20-25 age groups). It was not hard to notice that 36 to 40 had the lowest mean (3.83) among the seven age groups, indicating more awareness on the work-related scale. The 60+ group also had a low mean (3.92).

Table 3. ANOVA: Awareness and categories of Age

ANOVA			
		<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
(Awareness)			
Existence of work-life balance and adherence	Between Groups	2.423	.052
Usage of any family-related benefits	Between Groups	2.976	.022
Policy establishment documentation and communication	Between Groups	1.393	.247
Policy interference	Between Groups	.590	.708
Awareness (overall)		2.691	.034*

Note: 1= Always, 2=Frequently, 3=Sometimes, 4= Seldom, 5=Never

Sources: Authors research

There was, however, a statistically significant difference in the policy interference ($F=.590$; < 0.05) in the sample, as well as the overall awareness scale ($F=2.691$; $p > 0.05$).

4.2.2 RACIAL GROUPING AND AWARENESS OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATION WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

This section looks at the different racial groupings' awareness of the telecommunications organization work-life balance policies. The races that formed part of this study were the Black, White, and Mixed races.

Table 4. ANOVA: Awareness and Racial group

ANOVA			
		<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
(Awareness)			
Existence of work-life balance and adherence	Between Groups	.554	.775
Usage of any family-related benefits	Between Groups	.802	.555
Policy establishment documentation and communication	Between Groups	.573	.720
Policy interference	Between Groups	.567	.725

Note: 1= Always, 2=Frequently, 3=Sometimes, 4= Seldom, 5=Never

Sources: Authors research

Regarding the aspect of awareness, employees who were White (Mean = 2.80) and Black (Mean = 2.80) differed significantly from those who were Mixed-race employees (Mean = 1.97). The three-race groups (Mixed-race, White, and Black) were all aware of work-life balance policies. As the findings indicated, the awareness of White respondents and Black respondents, both at a mean (Mean=2.80), was higher and

differed from the Mixed-race respondents (Mean=1.97). The Mixed-race respondents, although aware of the telecommunications organization work-life balance policies, awareness was not at the same level as Whites and Blacks.

4.2.3 MARITAL STATUS AND AWARENESS OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATION WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

Table 5 shows the ANOVA results for Work-related scales and categories of marital status.

Table 5. ANOVA: Online survey and categories of marital status

ANOVA			
		F	P
(Awareness)			
Existence of work-life balance and adherence	Between Groups	.651	.525
Usage of available family-related benefits	Between Groups	.491	.615
Policy establishment documentation and communication	Between Groups	.602	.552
Policy interference	Between Groups	1.500	.003*

Note: 1= Always, 2=Frequently, 3=Sometimes, 4= Seldom, 5=Never
Sources: Authors research

Regarding the aspect of awareness, respondents who were categorised as other (the category of not wanting to disclose or part-time co-habiting (Mean = 3.74), followed by singles (Mean = 3.58) were significantly different from those divorced (Mean = 3.35) and married (Mean = 3.17). Hence, others (the category of not wanting to disclose or part-time co-habiting, and single employees) believed more strongly than the latter. They were more aware of all the items under the awareness aspect. The marital status of employees did not affect any of the other dimensions of the work-related scale.

4.2.4 NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 18 LIVING AT HOME AND AWARENESS OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATION WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

The results of the T-test performed on the items of the awareness of the telecommunications organization work-life balance policies of the "On-Line Survey" are described in the following section.

There was not much difference between females with children under 18 and females without children under 18. The 26-30 age group provided the following results:

Existence of work-life balance and adherence (t=0.38 p>0.05). There was only one difference in the average score for the usage of available family-related benefits, among women with children 4.23, and among women without children 3.77 (t=-2.55, p<0.05). Women with children considered this very important while women without did not. This showed that women with children under 18 perceived a stronger positive relationship with the usage of any family-related benefits than women without children under 18. Policy establishment documentation and communication had (t=0.23, p<0.05) and policy interference (t=0.23, p<0.05) (see Table 6).

Table 6. Age and number of children under the age of 18 living at home

Factors	Females with children under the age of 18		Females without children under the age of 18		d	T
	Mean	S	Mean	S		
(Awareness)		D		D	f	

Existence of work-life balance and adherence	4.70	0.46	4.74	0.45	50	0.38
Usage of any family-related benefits	4.23	0.73	3.77	0.35	50	-2.55**
Policy establishment documentation and communication	4.55	0.50	4.58	0.56	50	0.23
Policy interference	4.55	0.65	4.55	0.68	50	0.23

Note: * $p < 0.05$ means significantly different
 1= Always, 2=Frequently, 3=Sometimes, 4= Seldom, 5=Never
 Sources: Authors research

4.2.5 PARTNER/ SPOUSE’S EMPLOYMENT STATUS, EDUCATIONAL LEVEL, NUMBER OF YEARS WORKED FOR IN THE ORGANIZATION, WORKING HOURS OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATION WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

For this section, the results of the partner/spouse’s employment status, educational level, number of years worked for in the organization for the Pearson’s product-moment correlation were looked at.

The Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated and tested for significance to determine a relationship between awareness and demographic variables of partner/ spouse’s employment status, educational level, the number of years worked for in the organization, and working hours of the telecommunications organization work-life balance policies.

The online survey comprised four components: work-life balance and adherence, usage of available family-related options, policy establishment documentation and communication, and policy interference. The results of the Pearson’s product moment’s correlation coefficient showed that there were statistically significant relationships between the components of the online survey and the demographic variables ($p < .005$), except for the Partner/spouse’s employment status and policy interference, which was a moderate negative value, $r = -.368$, $p < .05$. The negative correlation value suggested that partner/spouse’s employment status reduced with an increase in policy interference (see Table 7).

Table 7. Results of Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient and Online survey

		Pearson Correlation	P	N
Partner/spouse’s employment status	Existence of work-life balance and adherence	.760	.020	50
	Usage of any family-related	.719	.010	50
	Policy establishment documentation and communication	.709	.040	50
	Policy interference	-.368**	.006	50
Educational level	Existence of work-life balance and adherence	.848	.003	50
	Usage of any family-related	.702	.040	50
	Policy establishment documentation and communication	.811	.004	50
	Policy interference	.701	.003	50
Number of years worked for in the organization	Existence of work-life balance and adherence	.781	.043	50
	Usage of any family-related	.739	.013	50

	Policy establishment documentation and communication	.888	.045	50
	Policy interference	.779	.029	50
Working hours	Existence of work-life balance and adherence	.619	.022	50
	Usage of available family-related	.700	.049	50
	Policy establishment documentation and communication	.781	.019	50
	Policy interference	.761	.009	50
Work departments	Existence of work-life balance and adherence	.812	.038	50
	Usage of any family-related	.711	.029	50
	Policy establishment documentation and communication	.819	.047	50
	Policy interference	.739	.014	50

5 DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

5.1 THE EXISTENCE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND ADHERENCE

This section discusses the extent to which all employees were aware of policies and programmes in place, which addressed work-life balance at the telecommunications company, and how the telecommunications organization employees utilised the available work-life balance organizational practices. The employees also used the telecommunications organization policy on Hours of Work: (Other Working Opportunities and Overtime) of 2015 and the telecommunications organization Touch Initiative indicating an awareness of the telecommunications organization's organizational practices and how it adheres to them.

This is supported through national legislative frameworks like the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 (1997), Employment Equity Act 55 (EEA) of South Africa. (1998) and Skills Development Act 97 of (1998), and international standards of International Labor Organization (ILO) like Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), ILO Holidays with Pay Convention (Revised), 1970 (No. 132), ILO Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation, 1962 (No. 116), Part-time with pro-rata entitlements as per the ILO Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175).

5.2 THE USAGE OF ANY FAMILY-RELATED BENEFITS

5.2.1 FLEXITIME

This study's results revealed that flexitime was a working practice at the telecommunications organization and most understood to adjust the start and end times of a workday to accommodate employees who best met organizational objectives. Findings for the flexitime were measured through 3-month intervals over twelve months. The use and awareness of flexitime at the telecommunications organization was in line with the Employment Equity Act, 55 of (1998), which stated that flexitime was not a work arrangement reserved only for women but for all employees. It is noteworthy that section 15 of the EEA also stipulated those designated employers must adopt affirmative action measures to ensure equitable representation of designated groups (which included women) and reasonable accommodation of such groups.

5.2.2 TELE-WORKING

Tele-work was a working practice at the telecommunications organization. This study's results revealed that telework was a flexibility-based initiative that allowed employees to have flexibility in their workspace, and perhaps time. That way, employees could better manage their activities and continue to work full-time hours. The results revealed the frequency with which employees utilised telework was high. The implication was that women probably preferred to work closer to home or closer to their families. This was in line with the study by Tremblay (2002), who asserted that it might be surprising to note that for some being close to the family was not the primary motivation, but that flexible schedules, and ways to avoid traveling to work, had a positive influence on work-life balancing. On the other hand, a previous finding by Hubers, Schwanen, and Dijst, (2011) who samples 714 respondents found that telecommuting, however, does not only require adequate information and communications technologies as employment factors also play a crucial role in this respect. Not only should the specific work tasks lend themselves to being performed at a remote location, but the employment organization should also support working from home. A recent finding by Rawal (2023) sampling 255 respondents also examined the support of family members as they worked anywhere via teleworking especially at home where family members were accepting these changes and helping in maintaining work-life balance to a certain extent. The study by Rawal (2023) also uncovered that, the existence of support from spouse/family was one of the very important factors enabling them to maintain their work-life balance during COVID-19.

5.2.3 WORKING FROM HOME

Findings indicated that the participants preferred to work from home because a set schedule did not constrain them. They were also able to perform some home-related activities, as supported by Wheatley (2012), who noted the same benefits with employees able to schedule the day around home responsibilities. Direction (2013) also asserted that productivity could be increased when people were not constrained by a schedule but allowed to work at their own pace and timetable. Individual employees showed different levels of productivity at other times of the day and working from home gave them the flexibility to plan their day around such realizations. However, Rawal (2023) found that, with work shifting to home in 2020, problems in the work-home interface had a significant impact on parenting and marital harmony. The study utilized 255 respondents in India and found that women were quitting jobs to maintain their marital relations. This clearly suggests that focus should be on support to working women to counter any problems in the work-family interface.

5.2.4 WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICY AND PROGRAMME AT THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATION

The use of the Employee Assistance Programme by the employees signified that they were aware of it. The application of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 (1997) in the South African context, which the government ensures organizations adhere to, explained why employees were aware of the telecommunications organization Employee Assistance Programmes. This finding was in line with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 (1997) application, which implies that an employer must adhere to the prescribed working conditions to enable the employee to attain his/her full potential to be productive. The telecommunications organization Programme's findings align with employers' requirement to ensure that the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 (1997) in the South African context were adhered to by establishing wellness programmes and ensuring that employees were aware of them at the telecommunications organization.

5.2.5 POLICY ESTABLISHMENT DOCUMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION AND POLICY INTERFERENCE

Findings regarding policy establishment documentation and communication showed that the respondents stated that; the fact that policies regarding work-life balance were communicated to them helped them achieve a work-life balance. The respondents indicated that flexible working allowed them to fulfill

roles at home and work, showing how good and quickly an employee could adapt to any work situation. That ability to adjust swiftly explained that a flexible person could therefore achieve any goal without fear or favor, thus the ability to enhance and increase their performance, as evidenced by the fact that targets were met. This was revealed through the relationship of awareness of policies and multiple demographic variables such as: Age, Race; and the number of children under the age of 18 living at home.

Age: There was an indication of awareness of policies by all age groups. This variable revealed that relatively older respondents in the age groups 36 to 40 and above 41-50 (Mean=3.83, 4.13) had lower scores than younger respondents in other age groups (mean=4.00, 4.56, 4.80). It also revealed that the two groups had the lowest score, 36 to 40 mean (3.83), and the 60+ group even a low mean (3.92). However, the age group that utilised the organizational practices more was the 31-40 year, which was relatively young. These findings were consistent with Facer, Wadsworth, and Arbon (2009) and Wise and Bond (2003), who stated that organizations had cited attracting and retaining a talented workforce as one of the benefits of having alternative work schedules.

Race: As the findings revealed, the awareness of White respondents and Black respondents both at a mean (Mean=2.80) was higher and differed from the Mixed-race respondents (Mean=1.97). The Mixed-race respondents, although aware of the telecommunications organization work-life balance policies, awareness was not at the same level as Whites and Blacks.

The number of children under the age of 18 living at home, and awareness of the telecommunications organization work-life balance policies: Women with children considered this very important while women without children did not. This revealed that women with children under 18 years perceived a stronger positive relationship from the usage of any family-related benefits than women without children under 18. This finding contradicted studies by Fried (1998) and Hochschild and Machung (1997). They found that even the availability of comprehensive and generous work-life policies did not necessarily result in employees' widespread utilization.

Based on these demographic variables, whether one was old, middle-aged, or older, White, Black, or Mixed-race, or had children under 18 or not, awareness of policies led to their usage. The findings were supported by Thomson (2008), who found that flexible working hours had been introduced as a benefit for employees with caregiving responsibilities to parents to assist them in fulfilling work and life responsibilities, thus achieving work-life balance. Besides, Tipping et al. (2012), in their work-life balance survey, found that employees believed that flexible working practices improved workplace morale, which could positively influence work-life balance. Besides, employees thought that the employer could help them balance their work and life roles. Pruyne, Powell, and Parsons (2012) illustrated that flexible working hours were among the best concepts to improve employee well-being. It helped employees deal with responsibilities outside the workplace.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND IMPLICATIONS

Drawing on the study's strengths and addressing the inadequacies and limitations, many recommendations emerge to be employed in future studies. More studies need to be dedicated to this topic to draw a better picture of work-life balance in developing countries. Furthermore, the study could be expanded to include more elements of work-life balance practices (either formal work-life balance practices, informal work-life balance practices, or both).

As much as employees are aware of work-life balance practices, organizations need to continue developing and implementing effective work-life balance policies and encouraging employees to use available policies. This can be made part of the induction programme so that employees are more aware of policies. Policies are of value only when they are implemented, for example there can be an option of conducting work with flexible times.

Examining the results from the study, it is important to note that the availability and utility of the telecommunications organization work-life balance policy and programme are important to the employees as well as the organizations as they improve organizational outcomes, and it becomes necessary for the organization to build a culture of support and concern for the telecommunications organization individual employees. The basis of Border Theory is to present boundaries and propose a clear separation between

domains or different domains (individuals or organizations). The results of this study challenge the notion of distinct work and family realms in Border Theory. Professional and non-professional activities are no longer tied to specific domains. This has important implications for applying this theory to work and non-work fields. This study therefore provides important insights into the impact of work-life balance on worker activity in the work and non-work domains and on migration between these two important sectors. Additionally, this research provides practical knowledge to help workers and employers revisit work-life balance issues, thereby supporting work-life balance and minimizing work-life conflicts. Perhaps this border permeability and its consequences for work and non-work lives may equally interest institutions as this emerging phenomenon demonstrates more direct and indirect impacts on female employee's lives.

6 CONCLUSION

This study was successful in drawing conclusions that were, to an extent, in agreement with previous studies. First, it proved that some of the telecommunications organization employees utilized and were aware of work-life balance practices.

Second, demographics like age showed an exciting trend; those below 31 years old showed a higher 'awareness' on the work-related scale utilized in the study. The awareness of White respondents and Black respondents was more heightened and differed from the Mixed-race. The marital status of employees did not affect any aspect on the work-related scale. Women with children under 18 perceived a stronger positive relationship with the usage of any family-related benefits than women without children under 18.

In summation, respondents were asked whether they were aware of the work-life balance benefits available through the telecommunications organization, to which all 50 female information and communications technology professionals indicated awareness. The existence of work-life balance and adherence revealed a mean score ($m=1.26$), which showed that respondents were aware of the existence of work-life balance and adherence. The usage of available family-related benefits revealed a mean score ($m=1.20$), indicating that respondents were more inclined to use any family-related benefits. Policy establishment, documentation, and communication revealed a mean score ($m=1.58$), showing that respondents were more willing to agree that the work-life balance policy was well established, documented, well-communicated. The policy interference aspect revealed a mean score ($m=1.28$). This indicated that the response rate leaned more towards employees feeling that their work/career interfered with their responsibilities at work or home.

Research Funding

The authors received no research grant or funds for this research study.

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