Work-Life Balance – Employee Perspective

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Czerwińska-Lubszczyk Agnieszka[1], Byrtek Nikola[2]

Abstract:

Purpose: The significance of achieving work-life balance (WLB) has grown within the European Union. This presents challenges for businesses. The main objective of the study is is to analyze and evaluate the WLB of Polish employees.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The theoretical framework was derived from the Scopus database and analyzed using VOSviewer software. A survey using an online survey questionnaire was carried out in 2023.

Findings: Respondents place a strong emphasis on the importance of additional days off and flexible working hours in achieving a better WLB. They highlight conflicts in the workplace, bullying, and job burnout as the main obstacles to achieving WLB. Among the participants, 45% have encountered workplace conflict, 73% have experienced bullying, and 58% have faced professional burnout in the work environment.

Practical Implications: The publication deals with WLB tools, WLB barriers, and the work environment in the context of conflict, bullying, and burnout. The findings of the empirical research can be used by Polish companies to implement WLB policies.

Originality/value: WLB is currently a significant issue in Poland. The OECD Better Life Index report on the average working hours of employees reveals that Polish workers work on average 115 hours more than the European average compared to other European countries. Furthermore, according to the Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu 2020 report, only a small percentage of companies in Poland have adopted WLB practices. WLB is a challenge for Polish companies. This paper fills a research gap in this area.

Keywords: Work life balance, WLB, WLB barriers, WLB tools.

JEL classification: M50, M59.

Paper Type: Research study.

[1]Uniwersity of Bielsko-Biala, Poland,ORCID: 0000-0001-8100-8802, aczerwinska@ath.bielsko.pl;
[2]Uniwersity of Bielsko-Biala, Poland, nbyrtek@ath.bielsko.pl.

1. Introduction

The subject of Work Life Balance (WLB) is of significant importance in both the European Union (EU) and Poland. Two important documents on WLB were introduced in 2019: 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 and Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers, repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU. It was implemented in Poland in 2023 (as Dyrektywa rodzicielska…).

Polish businesses should prioritize employee well-being and WLB. The OECD Better Life Index report on the average working hours of employees reveals that Polish workers work more than the European average in comparison to other European countries (OECD, Employment ...).

According to the 2020 Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu report, only a small percentage of companies in Poland have embraced WLB practices. Only 3% of the surveyed companies have a comprehensive WLB policy document, while 16% take actions to support WLB without a formal policy (Jak wygląda…).

The main objective of the study is to analyze and evaluate the WLB of Polish employees.

2. Theoretical Background

The concept of WLB is defined as the equilibrium between an individual's personal and professional life, which enables them to harmoniously combine work responsibilities, family time, and personal growth, including spiritual and physical development (Leoński, 2015; Pietras, 2019). The term "life" refers to leisure time that belongs to an employee's private sphere, encompassing relaxation, family life, personal social interactions, as well as uncompensated activities such as voluntary and unpaid household tasks. In contrast, the term "work" refers to activities performed in exchange for compensation (Binniger, 2014; Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2018; Wang, 2015).

According to Łopatka (2017), the essence of WLB is effective time management, enabling employees to establish a balance between their work responsibilities and personal life. The author argues that maintaining such a balance facilitates personal fulfillment, ultimately resulting in overall life satisfaction and happiness. This concept does not advocate that personal life and professional life should be separated, but rather that they should be skillfully integrated.

Various terms have emerged in the literature to describe the interplay between "personal and professional life" (Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2018), "work-

family balance" (Hirschi, Shockley, and Zacher, 2019), "life-domain balance" (Thörel, Pauls, and Göritz, 2022), "work-life integrity" (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2020), "work-life rhythm" (Maidanik, 2021), "work-life blending" (Wang, 2015).

WLB brings a range of benefits not only to employees, but also to employers. Employees who live in harmony have better health, well-being, motivation, and are more eager to take advantage of opportunities for growth. On the other hand, employers who support their employees benefit from increased productivity, better company reputation, and loyalty from their staff (Lazar *et al.,* 2010; Syed, 2015; Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2016; Walentek, 2019; Norena-Chavez and Thalassinos, 2022a; 2022b).

Analysis of scientific publications was conducted using the Scopus database. Publications were searched using the keyword "work-life balance". After the results were limited to English-language articles, a total of 5876 articles were obtained. The data indicate (Figure 1) an increasing interest in this research area in recent years (from 2000 to 2022).

The data show an exponential growth in the number of publications ($R^2=0.983$). It can be inferred that the topic of WLB may continue to attract significant attention from researchers in the coming years (as indicated by the trend line).

Figure 1. *Publications on WLB by publication date (Scopus)*

$$y = 0{,}000e^{0{,}218x}$$
$$R^2 = 0{,}983$$
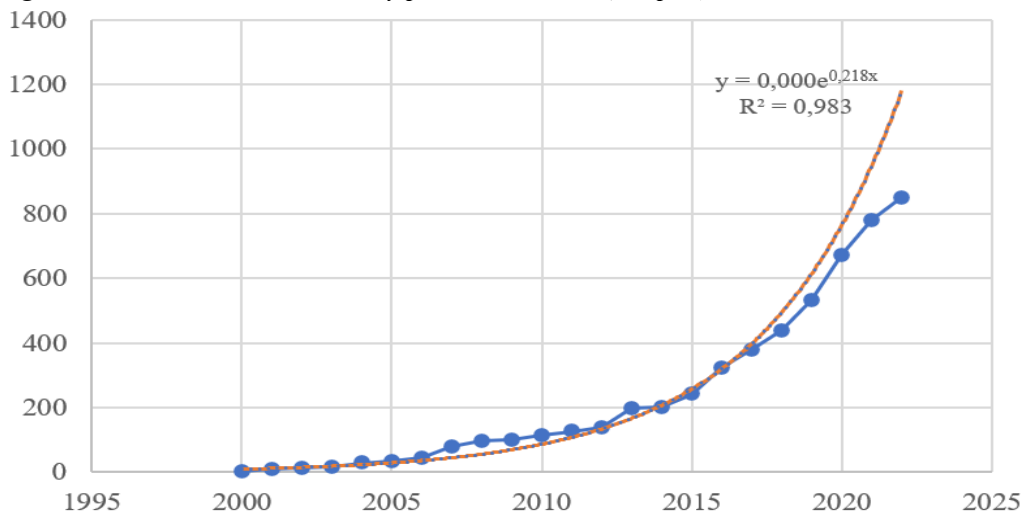
Source: *Own study.*

Table 1 shows the number of publications found in the Scopus database by research area. The data were sorted in descending order based on the number of publications. The main research areas and results with search counts above 200 were included.

Other areas not included in Table 1 account for 10.6% of all publications. It can be inferred that the main research areas in which WLB is analyzed are social sciences, medicine and business, management, and accounting (Table 1).

Table 1. *Publications on WLB by research area (Scopus)*

Subject area	Documents
Social sciences	1908
Medicine	1809
Business, management, and accounting	1561
Psychology	620
Economics, econometrics and finance	371
Nursing	326
Engineering	307
Environmental sciences	293
Arts and the humanities	285

Source: *Own study.*

Next, the results were limited to open access publications from the period between 2020 and 2022 in the areas of Business, Management, and Accounting, yielding 262 outcomes.

The database obtained from Scopus included keywords and abstracts of the publications. Text analysis was conducted based on the co-occurrence of all keywords (the minimum number of occurrences of a keyword was 5).

The results are shown in Figure 2 and Table 2. Figure 2 illustrates the relationships between WLB and other keywords. Four main research areas (thematic clusters) were identified and color-coded in Figure 2; Human Resource Management (e.g., well-being, engagement, and productivity), Gender (e.g., female, male, human, leadership, and women), change due to Covid-19 (e.g., remote work, telework, and telecommuting), and Job satisfaction (e.g., working conditions, stress, and work engagement).

Table 2 shows the keywords with a total strength of association (an indicator of the strength of associations between keywords). The table also contains "occurrences," which represents the number of times a specific keyword appears in the retrieved database.

WLB is analyzed within topics such as gender/female, job satisfaction, and stress. An important area of focus is the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2. *WLB' clusters (VOSviewer)*
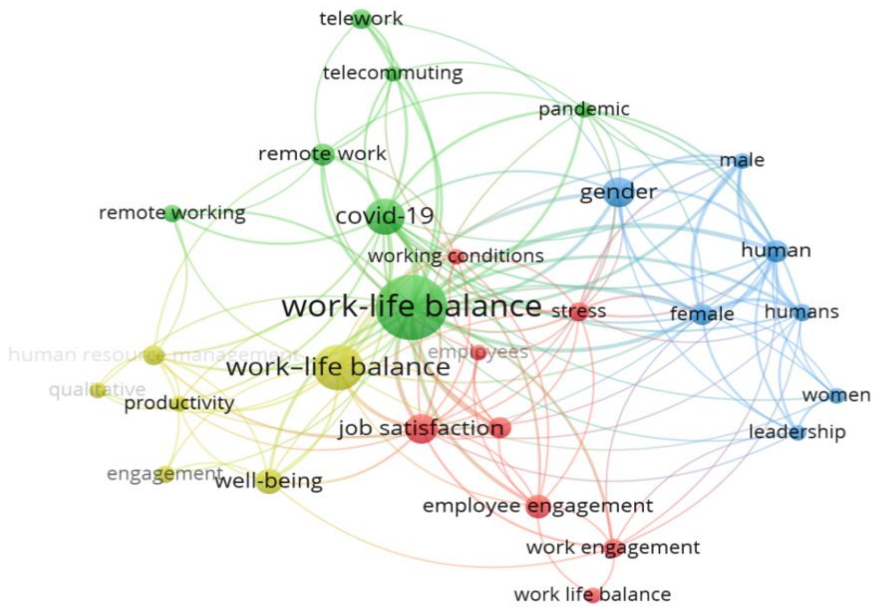
Source: Own study.

Table 2. *Results for WLB (VOSviewer)*

Keyword	Occurrences	Total link strength	Keyword	Occurrences	Total link strength
Work-life balance	85	94	Remote work	10	16
Covid-19	26	54	Employee engagement	11	15
Human	10	47	Well-being	13	14
Female	9	42	Human resource management	8	13
Job satisfaction	18	31	Work engagement	7	13
Gender	18	30	Leadership	5	13
Humans	6	28	Performance	9	12
Male	5	28	Telecommuting	5	11
Stress	7	20	Productivity	5	10
Pandemic	5	17	Telework	8	10

Source: Own study.

The publications obtained from the Scopus database were subjected to content analysis. Details of the studies and the primary research findings are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. *Selected results of empirical research on WLB (Scopus)*

Ali, H.N., Gittell, J.H., Deng, S., Weger, L., Dillon, E.C. (2023)	Quantitive, surveys of clinicians affiliated with a large California health system	The authors focused on the influence of work relationships on work-life balance and employee well-being. One of the aspects analyzed was job burnout, and the authors showed that relationships at work do indeed have an impact on burnout.
Amah, O.E. (2023)	Quantitive, survey. Nigeria.	In the aftermath of COVID-19, there is a growing preference among employees to work remotely, driven by the desire to achieve a balanced WLB and reduce commute costs. The study suggests that a hybrid work model will be common in the future.
Whiteoak, J., Abell, D., Becker, K. (2023)	Quantitive, online survey, Australian workers.	The main objective of this paper was to investigate the crucial issue of boosting productivity without increasing the risk of burnout. The authors analyzed individual perceptions of team dynamics and their link to morale, WLB, and working hours. The findings reveal that the risk of burnout was not related to the number of hours spent working but was mitigated when there was a higher level of WLB, quality work, and trust in the workplace.
Burkhard, D. (2022)	Qualitative, interview with experts. Swiss.	The main objective of the researchers was to promote gender equality by implementing work-life balance initiatives. The study yielded several key findings, including the importance of improving the position of girls in schools at an early stage of education, providing women with sponsors and mentors to foster the development of skills and confidence, offering parental leave to support women in returning to work after childbirth, implementing flexible work arrangements to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, and establishing legal, political, and policy frameworks to encourage companies to adopt these measures.
Grebski, M., Mazur, M. (2022)	Quantitive, survey. Employees from Poland and the USA	The article examines factors contributing to occupational burnout following the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the experiences of employees in both Poland and the USA. According to the findings, remote work can have adverse effects on WLB, which may contribute to burnout.

Khan, S.K., Lim, B.C.Y., Yacob, Y. (2022)	Qualitative, employees in the private higher education sector in Malaysia	The authors aimed to study the effect of the impact of work engagement on WLB and job burnout with the mediating effect of a supportive culture. The study found that a supportive culture positively affects WLB, and explains the interaction effect between job commitment, WLB and job burnout among employees.
Osuizugbo, I.C., Kukoyi, P.O., Aluko, R.O., Akindele, N.A. (2022)	Qualitative, interviews, construction sector.	The study targeted young individuals and aimed to investigate the reasons behind their failure to complete apprenticeships in the building trades. The findings revealed that factors such as lack of information on the content of the training program, financial difficulties, bullying, lack of interest, and WLB were responsible for the failure to complete the apprenticeship.
Zeler, I., Fuentes-Lara, C., Moreno, Á. (2022)	Qualitative, interviews with women. Communication management sector in Spain.	The study highlighted the high expectations that female communication managers set for themselves, which can hinder their ability to achieve WLB and successfully implement role models.
Gudep, V.K. (2019)	Quantitive, survey, teaching staff from United Arab Emirates.	The study investigated the links between flexible working systems, motivation to work, WLB, and job satisfaction among teaching staff. The results indicated that a flexible working system and motivation to work indirectly influenced job satisfaction through their impact on WLB.
Martínez-León, I.M., Olmedo-Cifuentes, I., Sanchez-Vidal, M.E (2019)	Quantitive, survey. Spanish accounting audit enterprises	The objective of this paper was to explore the impact of WLB practices on the company's financial performance. The study suggests that practices such as reduction of working hours and flexible work arrangements are especially advantageous.
Sheikh Khairuddin, S.M.H., Saidun, Z., Hashim, M.S. (2019)	Quantitive, survey. Malaysia.	The authors centered their attention on the well-being of entrepreneurs in terms of stress, work motivation, and performance. Stressors, including work relationships, WLB, job security, and compensation, have a notable impact on performance.

Source: *Own study.*

The analysis indicated that WLB is a relevant and highly regarded topic, which attracts significant interest not only from society (which is reflected in legal changes) but also from researchers. Furthermore, it can be inferred that WLB will continue to garner considerable attention from researchers in the years to come.

One of the main areas in which WLB is being analyzed is business, management, and accounting, especially with regard to such aspects as Human Resource Management, Gender, Change due to Covid-19 and Job satisfaction.

The authors emphasize various tools for improving WLB, including working time reduction and flexible work practices (Gudep, 2019; Martínez-León, Olmedo-Cifuentes, and Sanchez-Vidal, 2019), parental leave, the introduction of new work forms (Burkhard, 2022), and a hybrid work style (Amah, 2023).

Marzec and Szczudlińska-Kanoś (2023) showed that employees expect various subsidies from their employers for health care, entertainment, sports, and recreation when raising children. Additionally, they are looking for flexible working hours and remote work options.

According to Amah (2023), in the post-COVID era, employees are increasingly opting for remote work as a way to achieve a WLB and reduce transportation costs. The study suggests that the hybrid work model will prevail in the future.

H1: Hybrid work is the main tool of achieving WLB.

The authors examined the various barriers related to WLB. Sheikh Khairuddin, Saidun, and Hashim, (2019) focused on stress. Zeler, Fuentes-Lara, and Moreno, (2022) highlighted the high demands that female managers set for themselves, which hinder their ability to achieve WLB. Osuizugbo, Kukoyi, Aluko, and Akindele, (2022) investigated bullying, while Grebski and Mazur, (2022) focused on professional burnout.

Professional burnout is a major factor influencing workforce productivity, and its prevalence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic due to reduced psychological security among employees. Moreover, remote work can have an adverse effect on WLB, as it contributes to job burnout (Ali, Gittell, Deng, Weger, and Dillon, (2023). Whiteoak, Abell, and Becker, (2023) indicated that the risk of job burnout is reduced when WLB is higher.

H2: Professional burnout is a key barrier to WLB.

3. Research Methodology and Sample Structure

The main objective of our study was to analyze and evaluate the WLB of Polish employees. The survey was part of research conducted in Poland in 2023. The main objective of the main research is to analyze and evaluate the WLB among employees in SME sector companies and large enterprises in Poland (Czerwińska-Lubszczyk and Byrtek, 2023).

The pilot study was carried out using an online survey questionnaire in April 2023. The author of the study distributed the survey form as a link to the questionnaire. The empirical research took place during the second quarter of 2023. To manage costs and data availability, we adopted a purposive sampling approach. The survey questionnaire was shared on social media platforms. We created four posts which included the survey questionnaire URL and requested participation from distinct employee groups working in micro, small, medium, and large companies.

Each post, along with the survey, was deleted once the desired sample size was achieved. This ensured that there were enough responses from participants in each sector, in accordance with the distribution of enterprises in Poland, as indicated in the "Raport o stanie sektora małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw w Polsce" (PARP, Raport...). Table 4 shows the comparison between the obtained sample and the overall population. The size of the company was defined according to the European Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 on the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Table 5 shows the sample structure.

Table 4. *Comparison of the sample structure with the population structure*

Size of the company	Proportion of workers employed in companies in Poland as a percentage (PARP)	Number of respondents (empirical research)	Percentage of surveyed respondents (empirical research)
Micro-sized companies	41.8%	42	42.0%
Small-sized companies	10.0%	10	10.0%
Medium-sized companies	16.0%	16	16.0%
Large companies	32.2%	32	32.0%
Sum		100	100%

Source: *Report on the medium and medium-sized enterprise sector in Poland, PARP 2022.*

Table 5. *Sample structure*

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	68	68%
	Male	32	32%
	sum	100	100%
Age	18–24	28	28%
	25–30	46	46%
	31–40	15	15%
	41–50	6	6%
	Over 50	5	5%
	sum	100	100%
Education	Primary education	7	7%

	Secondary education (trade school)	9	9%
	Secondary education	40	40%
	Higher education	44	44%
	sum	100	100%
Place of work	SME	68	68%
	Large company	32	32%
	sum	100	100%

Source: Own study.

The majority of the sample (Table 5) were women (68%). Most respondents fell into the 25–30 age range (46%). Individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 made up 74% of the sample, which means that the majority of the participants were at the beginning of their careers. Regarding education, 44% had a university degree, while 40% had a secondary education. Most respondents worked in the SME sector (68%).

The theoretical framework was derived from the Scopus database and analyzed using VOSviewer software. Statistical data analysis was conducted using PS Imago Process.

4. Results

Respondents were asked to rate the impact of WLB policies on their WLB using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Definitely no impact) to 5 (Definitely has an impact). Response options included Hybrid work (HW), Additional days off (AD), Reduced working hours (RH), Flexible working hours (FH), Programs encouraging parental leave (PL), Facilities for pregnant women (PW), Facilities for caregivers of family members (FM).

The statistical data are presented in Table 6. The Cronbach's alpha score was 0.870. All items were analyzed. If any item was deleted, the reliability analysis score was lower. All measures for improving WLB were rated highly. Respondents appreciated a wide range of practices that impact their WLB.

They strongly emphasized the importance of Additional days off and Flexible working hours in achieving a WLB (see mean, median, and mode). Overall, the results suggest that *H1 (Hybrid work is the main tool of achieving WLB)* is not supported.

Respondents were asked to assess the influence of barriers to WLB on their WLB using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Definitely no impact) to 5 (Definitely has a negative impact). Response options included Conflicts in the workplace (CW), Bullying (B), Work Burnout (WB), Isolation (I), Lack of opportunities for professional development (DO), Lack of well-organized work (OW), Disrupted interpersonal relationships in the workplace (IR), and Organizational culture that is not conducive to WLB (OC).

Table 6. *The impact of WLB practices on employee WLB*

	HW	AD	RH	FH	PL	PW	FM
N (Total)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	4.09	4.45	4.33	4.46	4.04	4.37	4.24
Median	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.50
Mode	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00
Standard Deviation	1.09	0.94	0.99	0.96	1.01	0.82	1.03
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Percentile 25	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Percentile 75	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Source: Own study.

The statistical data are shown in Table 7. The Cronbach's alpha score was 0.836. All items were analyzed. If any item was deleted, the reliability analysis score was lower. Based on the results, all barriers to WLB were rated highly. Respondents listed a wide range of barriers to WLB. They mentioned Conflicts in the workplace, Bullying, and Work burnout as the primary obstacles to achieving a better WLB (see mean, median, and mode). Overall, the results suggest that *H2 (Professional burnout is a key barrier to WLB)* is partly supported.

Table 7. *The impact of barriers to WLB on employee WLB*

	CW	B	WB	I	DO	OW	IR	OC
N (Total)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	4.54	4.75	4.49	4.12	4.08	4.15	4.15	4.10
Median	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Standard Deviation	0.80	0.59	0.75	0.96	0.93	1.01	0.99	0.97
Minimum	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Percentile 25	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Percentile 75	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Source: Own study.

The work environment was assessed through the following questions: Have you ever been a victim of conflict in the workplace? Have you ever been a victim of bullying? Have you ever experienced professional burnout? Possible answers were Yes, no, I don't know. The results are presented in Table 8. Forty-five per cent of the respondents were exposed to workplace conflict, 73% experienced bullying, and 58% experienced professional burnout.

Respondents evaluated their WLB based on the following statements: "Work-related stress contributes to a tense atmosphere in my family" (AF); "I have had to miss family events due to work obligations" (FE), "Household responsibilities make it difficult for me to fulfill my work duties effectively" (HR), and "After returning from work, I am so tired that I am unable to handle household tasks" (TI).

Table 8. Conflict, bullying and burnout in the work environment.

		Frequency	**Percentage**
Conflict	Yes	45	45%
	No	8	8%
	Don't know	47	47%
	sum	100	100%
Bullying	Yes	73	73%
	No	5	5%
	Don't know	22	22%
	sum	100	100%
Burnout	Yes	58	58%
	No	5	5%
	Don't know	37	37%
	sum	100	100%

Source: Own study.

Participants provided answers using a scale that included the following options: daily (4), several times a month (3), several times a year (2), and never (1).

The statistical data is presented in Table 9. The Cronbach's alpha score was 0.753. All items were analyzed. If any item was deleted, the reliability analysis score was lower (Table 10). Respondents reported that they had difficulties with WLB several times a month or several times a year.

The most frequently observed problem was "Household responsibilities make it difficult for me to fulfill my work duties effectively" (see mean, median, and mode).

Table 9. Self-assessment of WLB

	AF	**FE**	**HR**	**TI**
N (Total)	100	100	100	100
Mean	2.44	1.81	2.64	2.18
Median	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00
Mode	2.00	2.00	3.00	1.00
Standard Deviation	0.89	0.80	0.96	1.08
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Percentile 25	2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00
Percentile 75	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00

Source: Own study.

Table 10. *Reliability analysis*

Item	Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
Work-related stress contributes to a tense atmosphere in my family (AF)	0.550	0.695
I have had to miss family events due to work obligations (FE)	0.530	0.709
Household responsibilities make it difficult for me to fulfill my work duties effectively (HR)	0.628	0.649
After returning from work, I am so tired that I am unable to handle household tasks (TI)	0.509	0.726

Source: *Own study.*

5. Conclusions

Achieving harmony between work and personal life, known as WLB, has become a prominent issue across the European Union. In 2019, the European Parliament enacted a directive obliging all member nations to prioritize WLB. This opens up significant opportunities and possibilities, but also poses challenges for businesses (Anisiewicz, 2022; Mruk, 2022).

The main conclusions from our study are as follows:

- Respondents value a wide range of tools that improve employee WLB.
- Respondents strongly emphasize the importance of Additional days off and Flexible working hours in achieving a WLB.
- Barriers to WLB were rated highly. Respondents pay attention to a wide range of WLB barriers.
- Respondents point to Conflicts in the workplace, Bullying, and Work burnout as the primary barriers to achieving a better WLB.
- In the work environment, 45% of the participants encountered workplace conflict, 73% experienced bullying, and 58% faced professional burnout.
- Respondents are concerned that their household responsibilities stop them from fulfilling their work responsibilities effectively.

When interpreting the findings, it is worth noting that a significant proportion of the research sample (74%) consisted of young respondents (aged 18 to 30), which means that the majority of the participants were at the beginning of their careers.

The limitations of this study stem primarily from the selection of the research sample. In addition to the overall analysis conducted on the entire sample, separate analyses were conducted for individual groups of respondents. Caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions due to the sample sizes.

While analyzing the statistical data, the most recent and accessible reports were consulted. Publications from the SCOPUS database were used to overview the current state of scientific research. It is worth noting that this could have influenced the conclusions drawn from the literature analysis.

The results of this study can serve as a basis for more comprehensive research on WLB in the context of gender, job satisfaction, human resource management and change caused by Covid-19. The current literature and its findings highlight the need for further research in this area.

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