

Work–Life Balance of Women in NCR Hotels:

Challenges, Determinants, and Organizational Role

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Abstract: The hospitality industry in India, especially in the National Capital Region (NCR), has undergone rapid expansion, driven by tourism growth, globalization, and urban development. This expansion has created numerous employment opportunities for women. However, the hotel sector's 24/7 operational nature poses unique challenges to women employees, particularly regarding work–life balance (WLB). This study investigates the WLB experiences of women in NCR hotels, focusing on key determinants such as working hours, organizational policies, safety concerns, gender norms, and family responsibilities. Data were collected using a mixed-methods approach, combining structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with women employees across various hotel departments. The findings reveal persistent challenges: irregular and extended shifts, inadequate organizational support, limited access to childcare facilities, and cultural expectations of women's domestic roles. The study highlights that proactive organizational interventions, including flexible scheduling, enhanced safety measures, supportive HR policies, and leadership opportunities, are essential to improve WLB. Recommendations are proposed to aid policymakers, hotel management, and industry bodies in developing inclusive and sustainable work environments.

Keywords: Environment, Sustainable, Hotel, Work-life Balance

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of work–life balance has become a critical focus in contemporary organizational and human resource management discourse. It refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage professional responsibilities alongside personal and family obligations (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For women in hospitality—particularly in India's NCR—achieving WLB is exceptionally challenging due to the industry's non-standard work hours, intense customer service demands, and the entrenched societal expectations that assign women primary responsibility for caregiving and household work (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

The NCR is home to a large concentration of luxury, business, and budget hotels catering to domestic and international travelers. Women have increasingly joined this workforce, occupying roles from front office and housekeeping to food & beverage service and management. While this represents progress in gender inclusion, it also exposes women to systemic issues:

- Extended and irregular work shifts
- Commuting safety concerns, especially at night
- Limited availability of employer-provided childcare
- Gendered role assignments within hotels

Existing literature highlights the negative effects of poor WLB on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and retention rates (Liu et al., 2021; Sarma & Narayan, 2023). However, focused research on women's WLB in NCR's hotel sector remains limited. This study aims to bridge that gap by systematically identifying challenges, exploring determinants, and evaluating the role of organizational support in enhancing WLB.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept and Evolution of Work–Life Balance

Originally conceptualized as a binary between work and home life, WLB has evolved into a more integrated framework that acknowledges overlap between professional and personal spheres (Fleetwood, 2007). It is now recognized as a multidimensional construct involving time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

2.2 WLB in the Hospitality Sector

Hospitality is characterized by long operational hours, seasonal peaks, and customer-centric service requirements. Research shows that these demands often result in high levels of burnout and job turnover (Karatepe & Kilic, 2007). Women are

particularly affected due to biological, cultural, and social expectations, with studies noting that they are less likely than men to work in late-night shifts due to safety concerns (Mehta, 2022).

2.3 Gender Norms and the Double Burden

The “double burden” refers to women’s dual responsibility for paid work and unpaid domestic duties (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). In India, these cultural expectations are deeply ingrained, making WLB more complex for women in industries requiring unconventional work hours (Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2021).

2.4 Organizational Support and HR Policies

Flexible scheduling, provision of on-site childcare, and supportive managerial attitudes are recognized as effective strategies for improving WLB (Sarma & Narayan, 2023). However, compliance with legal mandates such as the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, remains inconsistent across the hospitality sector (Government of India, 2017).

2.5 Safety and External Constraints

In NCR, women often face unsafe commuting conditions after late shifts. These safety concerns influence their willingness to work night shifts, career advancement opportunities, and retention in the sector (Borah, 2024).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopted a mixed-methods research design to explore and analyze the challenges related to work-life balance (WLB) faced by women working in hotels within the National Capital Region (NCR) of India. This design was selected because WLB is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that cannot be fully understood through a single methodological approach. Quantitative data collection, through surveys, provides an understanding of the prevalence, patterns, and magnitude of WLB challenges. However, it may not capture the subjective experiences and emotional dimensions of women employees. On the other hand, qualitative data, through interviews, helps to uncover lived experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and coping strategies in greater depth.

The integration of both quantitative and qualitative approaches ensured a holistic understanding of the research problem. This method also allowed for triangulation of data, where the quantitative results validated the general trends while the qualitative findings provided context and deeper insight into those trends. Thus, the mixed-methods approach was most appropriate for addressing the objectives of this study.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 Quantitative Data

For the quantitative strand, a structured questionnaire was developed and distributed to 200 women employees working in 4-star and 5-star hotels across NCR cities including Delhi, Noida, Gurugram, and Ghaziabad. The questionnaire was divided into several sections focusing on work schedules, organizational policies, safety concerns, departmental allocation, and overall well-being. The instrument included multiple-choice questions and five-point Likert scale items ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This structure allowed for the systematic collection of comparable data across different hotel properties and departments. The survey was administered both online, through email and professional networks, and offline in hotels, depending on the feasibility and comfort level of the respondents. Data were collected over a period of three months, ensuring adequate representation across the hospitality sector in NCR.

3.2.2 Qualitative Data

The qualitative component of the study involved semi-structured interviews with 20 women employees selected from the larger survey pool. Participants were chosen to represent diverse hotel departments such as front office, housekeeping, food and beverage service, and kitchen operations. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or virtually depending on availability, with each lasting between 30 to 45 minutes. The interview guide included open-ended questions on experiences of managing work and family responsibilities, perceptions of organizational support, safety concerns, gender-specific challenges, and personal strategies for achieving balance.

The semi-structured format allowed flexibility to probe deeper into specific issues raised by participants, while also maintaining consistency across interviews for comparative purposes. Responses were recorded with participant consent and transcribed for analysis.

3.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was adopted to ensure inclusion of women employees from various hotel departments and hierarchical levels. The sample included young professionals in entry-level positions, mid-level staff, and senior supervisory employees, providing a wide range of perspectives. The decision to focus on women working in 4-star and 5-star hotels was based on the premise that these establishments have more structured policies and higher workload demands compared to smaller hotels, thereby offering rich insights into WLB issues in the organized sector of hospitality.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations. These analyses helped to highlight trends and identify the most prevalent challenges related to WLB among women employees.

Qualitative data from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis. Transcripts were carefully read and coded to identify recurring ideas, concerns, and coping strategies. Emerging themes were organized into categories that corresponded with key dimensions of WLB, such as irregular work schedules, organizational policies, safety, gender roles, and well-being. This dual analysis method provided both breadth and depth to the findings.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of the study are presented by integrating both the quantitative survey findings and the qualitative interview insights. This combined approach provides not only statistical evidence of the challenges faced by women working in NCR hotels but also captures their voices, emotions, and lived experiences. The findings have been categorized into five major themes: irregular

working hours, organizational support gaps, safety concerns, departmental gender segregation, and emotional and physical fatigue.

4.1 Irregular Working Hours

One of the most prominent challenges identified was the irregularity and unpredictability of work schedules. Approximately 78 percent of survey respondents indicated that inconsistent working hours were the most significant barrier to achieving work-life balance.

Many women employees reported being scheduled for back-to-back shifts, sometimes with less than 8 hours of rest in between. During festive seasons such as Diwali, Christmas, and New Year's Eve, employees described being on duty for extended hours, often exceeding the legal limit of 8–9 hours per day. Overtime during these peak periods was usually mandatory rather than voluntary, and often uncompensated, leaving employees exhausted.

Interview participants described this as particularly disruptive for those with family responsibilities. Women with young children found it especially difficult to coordinate childcare, as irregular shifts often meant missing important family events such as school functions, parent-teacher meetings, or even evening meals with family members. One interviewee shared:

"I sometimes work a morning shift followed immediately by a night duty because someone else did not show up. I hardly get time to rest or see my children. My family complains that I am never at home during important occasions."

The lack of predictability in scheduling also contributed to higher stress levels, as employees could not plan personal commitments in advance. Several participants admitted that they avoided long-term commitments like higher education, hobbies, or even vacations, because they could not anticipate their work schedules.

4.2 Organizational Support Gaps

A second major finding was the limited organizational support available for women employees. The data revealed that only 15 percent of respondents had access to on-site childcare facilities in their hotels. Even when such facilities existed, they were often poorly equipped or available only during limited hours, making them impractical for those working late or early shifts.

Flexible scheduling policies were also largely absent, with just 12 percent of hotels offering any kind of flexi-hours or job-sharing arrangements. For most women, once the roster was prepared by the management, there was very little room for negotiation, even in cases of family emergencies.

A striking 64 percent of respondents rated managerial support during personal emergencies as low. Interviews revealed stories of women being denied leave when they needed to take care of a sick child, attend a medical appointment, or handle urgent family responsibilities. Several women described feeling penalized for requesting leave, with supervisors labeling them as "less committed" or "not serious about their careers."

One participant noted: *"When I asked for leave to attend my mother's surgery, my manager told me to find a replacement myself. It made me feel like my family responsibility was seen as an inconvenience."*

These findings highlight a lack of empathy and structured policies within many hotel organizations, reinforcing the perception that the hospitality industry values operational efficiency over employee well-being.

4.3 Safety Concerns

Safety emerged as a critical issue, particularly for women working in late-night or early-morning shifts. Over 56 percent of respondents expressed discomfort traveling home after 9 PM. The primary concerns included poor street lighting, inadequate public transport, unreliable hotel-arranged transport services, and incidents of verbal or physical harassment during commutes.

While some hotels did provide pick-and-drop facilities, these were inconsistent and sometimes limited to senior staff only. Women in junior positions, such as housekeeping staff, often had to make their own arrangements. This created feelings of vulnerability, especially among those living far from hotel premises or in areas with limited public infrastructure.

Several women reported adopting safety strategies such as traveling in groups, arranging private cab services, or even paying extra for safer modes of transport, despite their modest salaries. One participant explained:

"I finish my shift at 11 PM. Sometimes the cab doesn't arrive, and I have to take an auto alone. I feel unsafe, and I keep calling my husband until I reach home. I even thought about quitting because of this."

The fear associated with late-night commutes discouraged many women from accepting promotions or positions that required flexible or night shifts, effectively limiting their career growth opportunities.

4.4 Departmental Gender Segregation

The study also uncovered significant gender segregation across hotel departments. Women employees were predominantly concentrated in front office and housekeeping roles. These departments are perceived to be more aligned with women's interpersonal and organizational skills, as they involve guest interaction, customer service, and attention to detail.

In contrast, high-paying and prestigious roles such as kitchen operations, food production, and managerial positions were overwhelmingly male-dominated. Quantitative data revealed that less than 10 percent of women surveyed held positions in the kitchen, and fewer than 7 percent were in managerial or supervisory roles.

Interview insights revealed that women who aspired to work in kitchens or move into senior managerial positions often faced both structural and cultural barriers. Some were told that kitchens were "too physically demanding" or "not suitable for women," while others faced resistance from male colleagues who questioned their authority.

One interviewee recounted: *"I wanted to work in the kitchen, but I was discouraged by seniors. They said it would be difficult for a woman to handle the heat, pressure, and long hours. Eventually, I gave up and moved to front office."*

This segregation not only reinforced gender stereotypes but also contributed to income inequality, as departments like food production and management often offered higher salaries and better career progression opportunities compared to front office or housekeeping.

4.5 Emotional and Physical Fatigue

The dual demands of professional work and domestic responsibilities were found to have a profound impact on women employees' emotional and physical well-being. Many women described experiencing chronic fatigue, headaches, sleep disturbances, and reduced immunity due to long working hours and lack of rest.

Survey data indicated that over 70 percent of respondents reported some form of emotional exhaustion linked to their work. This manifested in irritability, feelings of helplessness, and in some cases, burnout.

Interview participants shared stories of how work-related fatigue negatively affected their family life. Many admitted that they were unable to spend quality time with their children or spouses. Domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving further compounded their workload. The lack of support systems, either at work or at home, created a cycle of stress and exhaustion.

One participant expressed: "After a 12-hour shift, I return home to cook dinner, help my children with homework, and complete household chores. By the time I finish, it's midnight. I wake up at 5 AM the next day for work again. It feels like there is no time left for myself."

The consequences of this fatigue were reflected in reduced workplace productivity, higher absenteeism rates, and in some cases, attrition from the hospitality sector altogether. Several women shared that they were considering leaving the industry because the strain on their health and family life was unsustainable.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings highlight that women employees in NCR hotels face a range of interconnected challenges that hinder their ability to maintain work-life balance. Irregular working hours, lack of organizational support, safety concerns, gender segregation in departments, and emotional and physical fatigue collectively creates a high-pressure environment. These factors not only affect their personal lives and well-being but also limit career growth, reduce retention, and contribute to gender inequality within the hospitality industry.

5. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Flexible Scheduling** – Implement predictable and rotational shift systems.
2. **Childcare Support** – Provide on-site crèches or childcare partnerships.
3. **Safety Measures** – Ensure secure transport, CCTV-monitored premises, and voluntary night-shift policies.
4. **Training and Sensitization** – Conduct gender-sensitivity workshops for staff and management.
5. **Career Advancement** – Promote equal opportunities for leadership roles and cross-departmental mobility.
6. **Policy Compliance** – Ensure strict adherence to maternity and workplace equality laws.

6. CONCLUSION

Women in NCR hotels face significant WLB challenges rooted in operational demands, cultural norms, and safety constraints. While some hotels have initiated supportive measures, these remain sporadic and insufficient. A proactive approach involving flexible policies, enhanced safety, and genuine organizational commitment is essential. Improving WLB not only enhances employee well-being but also strengthens organizational performance and retention in the hospitality sector.

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