

Work-Life Balance Among Working Single Mothers

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ABSTRACT

The female labor force participation rate in Indonesia reached 60.18% in 2023. While women's roles have expanded significantly into the public sphere, working single mothers face distinct challenges due to their dual responsibilities as sole breadwinners and caregivers. Consequently, achieving a work-life balance becomes a critical issue for this demographic. This study aims to explicitly describe the level of work-life balance among working single mothers. This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method. Data were collected from 100 working single mothers using a Work-Life Balance Scale, adapted from Fisher et al. (2009). The results indicated that the majority of respondents (74%) possessed a moderate level of work-life balance, while 25% were in the high category, and only 1% were in the low category. These findings suggest that while many single mothers manage to maintain a functional equilibrium, there is a need for supportive organizational policies and social support to further enhance their well-being.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Single mothers, Working women, Psychological well-being.

Introduction

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the labor force participation rate for women in Indonesia reached 60.18% in 2023, showing a consistent increase from 58.84% in 2022. This data illustrates a significant shift in women's roles from the domestic to the public sector. While this progress empowers women economically, it creates a challenge in managing dual roles. Previous studies indicate that career women experience role conflict more often than men because they still bear the primary responsibility for domestic matters (Harsiwi, 2004; Martins & Veiga, 2002; Kinnunen et al., 1998). Keene and Quadagno (2004) found that 60% of working adults struggle to achieve balance when they have children under 18.

This challenge is significantly amplified for single mothers, whether due to divorce or the death of a spouse. BPS data recorded 516,344 divorce cases in 2022, an increase of 15.3% from the previous year. Additionally,

many women become single mothers due to the death of a partner, which requires adapting to new living conditions while navigating grief (Sari et al., 2019). Unlike married mothers, single mothers carry a "double burden" entirely alone. The role of the husband is delegated to them, forcing them to act as the sole breadwinner while simultaneously bearing full responsibility for child-rearing and domestic chores (Rohmiyati, 2017; Lestari & Ishak, 2018).

The pressure on single mothers is not only physical or financial but also psychological and social. Divorced women often face greater stigma than men, leading to feelings of loneliness, sadness, and depression (Yenita, 2022; Jelly et al., 2019). Similarly, single mothers due to death also experience emotional stress and sadness (Sari et al., 2019). Socially, single mothers are often underestimated or viewed negatively by the general public (Sirait & Minauli, 2015; Cahyani, 2016; Tim, 2020). This stigma creates additional social pressure, making it difficult for them to interact freely or build support systems (Fatimah, 2018).

Under these intense pressures, achieving work-life balance becomes critical. Fisher (2009) defines work-life balance as a condition where an individual experiences satisfaction and balance between work and personal life roles. When single mothers achieve a good work-life balance, they can enjoy their roles responsibly, utilize their abilities effectively, and avoid severe stress (Apriani et al., 2021). Conversely, a lack of balance can lead to negative outcomes such as increased absenteeism, low motivation, and poor organizational productivity (Clutterbuck, 2003; Redwood, 2012; Bloom et al., 2006). Furthermore, imbalance is significantly correlated with higher work stress (Fauzi, 2018).

Despite the growing number of single mothers in the workforce and the complexity of the challenges they face—ranging from double burdens to social stigma—empirical research specifically describing their work-life balance levels in the Indonesian context remains limited. Understanding their current state is essential for developing appropriate support systems. Therefore, this study aims to explicitly describe the level of work-life balance among working single mothers to provide a clearer picture of their well-being.

Methods

Participants

This study involved 100 working single mothers who were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria for participants were: (1) single mothers due to divorce or the death of a spouse, (2) currently employed with a minimum work period of 3 months, and (3) aged between 20 and 65 years. The age range was selected based on the categorization of the productive age group (15–64 years) by the Indonesian

Ministry of Health (2017). The participants came from various occupational backgrounds.

Instruments

Data collection was carried out using a Work-Life Balance Scale adapted from Maimunah et al. (2024), which refers to the dimensions proposed by Fisher, Bulger, and Smith (2009). These dimensions include Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL), Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW), Work Enhancement of Personal Life (WEPL), and Personal Life Enhancement of Work (PLEW). The scale consists of favorable and unfavorable items arranged in a 4-point Likert scale format: Very Appropriate (4), Appropriate (3), Not Appropriate (2), and Very Not Appropriate (1). A higher total score indicates a higher level of work-life balance, while a lower score indicates a lower level of work-life balance.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to categorize the levels of work-life balance into three categories: high, moderate, and low.

Table 1. Blueprint of Work Life Balance

No	Dimension	Indicators	Item Numbers	Total
1	Interference	Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL)	1, 6, 11, 13, 15	5
		Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW)	2, 5, 8, 10, 14	5
2	Enhancement	Work Enhancement of Personal Life (WEPL)	4, 9, 12	3
		Personal Life Enhancement of Work (PLEW)	3, 7	2
Total				15

Results

The following are the characteristics of the subjects based on the results of the research scale administered to working single mothers. The characteristics of the subjects include age range, divorce status, and highest level of education, with a total of 100 subjects. Each subject characteristic can be seen in Table 4.1 below.

Table 2 Subject Characteristics

Subject Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Presentation
Age Range	20-40 years	53	53
	41 – 60 years	45	45
	61 years andabove	2	2
	Amount	100	100%
Divorce Status	Divorce Life	71	71
	Divorce byDeath	29	29
	Amount	100	100%
Level of education	Elementary(SD)	1	1
	Secondary (Junior High School, SeniorHigh School)	27	27
	Tinggi (D1, D3,S1, S2)	72	72
	Amount	100	100%

Based on Table 4.1 above, it can be described as follows:

- a. The age range of subjects who contributed to filling out the research scale was dominated by the 20-40 age group (53 people, or 53%), followed by the 41-60 age group (45 people, or 45%). Meanwhile, the age group with the fewest participants was 61 years and above (2 people, or 2%).
- b. The divorce status of the subjects who contributed to filling out the research scale was dominated by divorced status of 71 people (71%) whiledivorced status of 29 people (29%).
- c. The educational level of the subjects who contributed to filling out the research scale was dominated by higher education level (D1, D3, S1, S2) as many as 72 people (72%), then secondary education level (SMP, SMA) as many as 27 people (27%) and elementary education level (SD) as many as 1 person (1%).

Table 3 Categorization *Work-Life Balance*

Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
High	25	25%
Moderate	74	74%
Low	1	1%
Total	100	100%

From the categorization table above, it can be seen that work-life balance that have been achieved by the research subjects in the high category is 25% (25 people), the medium category is 74% (74 people) and the low category is 1 person (1%). This shows that the majority of research subjects have achieved work-life balance in the moderate category.

Discussions

The results of this study indicate that the majority of working single mothers (74%) possess a moderate level of work-life balance. This finding suggests that while these women face significant challenges due to their dual roles as sole breadwinners and caregivers, they have developed certain strategies to maintain a functional equilibrium between work and personal life. However, "moderate" also implies that they are not yet in an optimal state of well-being and are still vulnerable to role conflict.

This moderate level can be explained by the dynamics of the dimensions proposed by Fisher et al. (2009). Working single mothers likely experience fluctuating levels of Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL) and Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW). On one hand, the financial pressure to provide for the family drives them to focus heavily on work, which may interfere with family time. On the other hand, their sole responsibility for domestic duties and child-rearing can interfere with their work focus. Nevertheless, the presence of 25% of respondents in the high category indicates that some single mothers successfully experience Work Enhancement of Personal Life (WEPL), where the skills or income gained from work positively impact their family life.

These findings align with previous research by Apriani et al. (2021), which stated that single mothers who can build a good work-life balance are better able to overcome problems and adjust their time effectively. Conversely, the 1% of respondents in the low category are at high risk of experiencing stress and burnout, as supported by Fauzi (2018). The ability to manage these dual roles is crucial, as failure to do so can lead to negative psychological outcomes such as depression and anxiety (Yenita, 2022).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the work-life balance of working single mothers in this demographic is predominantly at a moderate level (74%). This indicates that while they are coping with their multiple responsibilities, there is significant room for improvement to reach an optimal level of well-being.

Suggestions

Based on these findings, it is recommended that:

1. **For Single Mothers:** Continue to develop time management skills and seek social support from extended family or friends to reduce the burden of domestic roles.
2. **For Organizations:** Companies are encouraged to implement family-friendly policies, such as flexible working hours or child-care assistance. These policies are essential to help single mothers minimize Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL) and move from a moderate to a high level of work-life balance, which in turn will increase their productivity and commitment.

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