

Flexible Work: Occupational determinants of work-life balance

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Abstract

Background: Digitization is increasing in working life, which facilitates flexible work, regarding when, where, and how employees perform their work. This autonomy creates opportunities, but even challenges for employees to set boundaries between work and private life. Identifying factors determining whether work-life balance is promoted or threatened in flexible work is important as a basis for developing preventive strategies and effective interventions.

Aim: The aim of this cross-sectional study was to examine the extent to which selected organizational, psychosocial and individual factors are associated with perceived work-life balance among employees' with flexible work.

Method: This study was conducted among full-time office workers (n= 2 975, response rate 67%) with flexible work (i.e. flex time or self-regulated work solutions), within the Swedish Transport Administration. They answered a comprehensive questionnaire containing questions about various organisational factors (e.g. perceived organizational prerequisites for work life balance and opportunity for social activities); psychosocial factors (e.g. work demands, social support, and type of leadership); and individual factors (e.g. working overtime, use of technical devices, and over commitment). Multiple linear regression models were used to determine the association between these factors and the answer to the question "how satisfied are you with your work-life balance?" (scale 0-4). Three separate models were constructed for the organizational, psychosocial and individual levels, with adjustment for possible confounders; i.e. age, gender, level of education, and years of employment.

Results: The organizational factors *prerequisites for work-life balance* (B= 0.49, CI= 0.45 to 0.54) and *opportunity for social activities* (B= 0.35, CI= 0.31 to 0.39) were strongly positively associated with work-life balance. At the psychosocial level, *flexibility at work* (B= 0.16, CI= 0.11 to 0.20), *social support from managers* (B= 0.13, CI= 0.07 to 0.20), *social community at work* (B= 0.12, CI= 0.06 to 0.19) and *structured oriented leadership behaviors* (B= 0.06, CI= 0.01 to 0.12) were positively associated with work-life balance. In contrast, negative associations were found for *high work demands* (B= -0.33, CI= -0.41 to -0.25), *high work rate* (B= -0.28, CI= -0.34 to -0.22) and *expectations of availability* (B= -0.16, CI= -0.21 to -0.10). At the individual level, *over commitment* (B= -0.83, CI= -0.89 to -0.78) showed the strongest negative association with work-life balance.

Conclusion: We found strong associations with work-life balance for several occupational factors among office employees with flexible work. Further research should address these associations in longitudinal studies as well as studies of interventions at the workplace. It is also important to investigate whether these associations are modified by e.g. gender, age and the extent of flexible work. Long-term effects of flexible work on work-life balance should also be investigated in relation to stress, health and well-being.

Keywords: Flexible work, work-life balance, occupational determinants.