



## Challenges of Work-Life Balance and Its Socio-Familial Impact: A Study of Urban and Semi-Urban Households in Agra District

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### ABSTRACT

*The growing complexities of professional demands and personal responsibilities have made work-life balance an increasingly significant concern in contemporary society. This study investigates the challenges of achieving a sustainable work-life balance and its ensuing socio-familial impact among working individuals in the urban and semi-urban areas of Agra District. As economic growth and occupational diversification reshape traditional lifestyles, individuals are experiencing heightened stress, reduced family time, and strained interpersonal relationships. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research draws on both quantitative data from 200 respondents through structured questionnaires and qualitative insights gathered from in-depth interviews. The study explores how factors such as long working hours, commuting time, occupational roles, and gender expectations influence an individual's ability to maintain equilibrium between work and personal life. Special attention is given to the gendered dimensions of this imbalance, revealing that women, especially those in dual-career households, face compounded challenges due to domestic responsibilities and workplace expectations. The findings demonstrate a strong correlation between work-life imbalance and deteriorating mental health, marital discord, reduced parental engagement, and overall dissatisfaction with life quality. Moreover, urban respondents reported greater professional pressure and time poverty, while semi-urban individuals encountered unique family-related stress due to joint family obligations. The study concludes with recommendations aimed at fostering more balanced lifestyles, including flexible work arrangements, shared domestic roles, organizational support systems, and mental health awareness. This research contributes to the existing body of sociological literature by providing a localized perspective on work-life balance in a Tier-2 Indian city, underlining the urgent need for social and institutional reforms to address this emerging socio-familial concern.*

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the nature of work and family life has undergone profound transformation due to globalization, rapid urbanization, changing gender roles, and the expansion of the service and industrial sectors. These socio-economic changes have redefined the boundaries between personal and professional life, making the challenge of work-life balance a central concern for individuals, families, and policymakers alike. Work-life balance (WLB) refers to an individual's ability to manage the demands of their professional responsibilities while also fulfilling their personal, familial, and social obligations. When this balance is disrupted, it often leads to negative outcomes, not only for the individual but also for the broader family unit and community.

In the Indian context, especially in urban and semi-urban settings, this issue is further complicated by traditional family expectations, lack of workplace flexibility, inadequate infrastructure (such as childcare services), and a persistent culture of overwork. Unlike Western societies where work-life balance policies are more developed, Indian households often operate under dual pressures-economic necessity and cultural obligations. The increasing numbers of dual-income households, rise in contractual jobs, and digital connectivity outside working hours

have blurred the boundaries between "work time" and "family time," creating significant stress and strain within the family structure.

Agra, a growing Tier-2 city in India, presents a unique case study for examining these dynamics. Known primarily for its tourism industry, Agra also has a rising middle-class population engaged in diverse occupations such as teaching, government services, private-sector jobs, retail, and entrepreneurship. The city's socio-cultural environment reflects a blend of modern aspirations and traditional values, making it an ideal setting to study the nuanced ways in which work-life balance is experienced and managed across different household types.

Despite the growing importance of this subject, limited empirical research has been conducted focusing on smaller Indian cities like Agra, where both urban modernity and semi-urban conservatism coexist. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the real-life struggles faced by working individuals—both men and women—in managing their time, energy, and emotional resources between professional duties and familial responsibilities. It seeks to understand not just the professional stressors but also the ripple effects of work-life imbalance on marital relationships, parenting, mental health, and overall quality of life.

Through a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this research intends to offer a comprehensive understanding of the work-life balance challenges in Agra and propose practical recommendations for both individuals and institutions to foster more supportive environments. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on occupational health, gender equity, and family well-being in the Indian socio-cultural context.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A robust body of literature has evolved over the past few decades exploring the intersection of work and family life. This section highlights key studies that have shaped the academic discourse on work-life balance, particularly focusing on its challenges and socio-familial impacts.

Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) studied, *"Sources of Conflict Between Work and Family Roles,"* Greenhaus and Beutell introduced the concept of work-family conflict, defining it as a form of inter-role conflict where the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible. They identified three primary sources of conflict: time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflicts. This framework is foundational to understanding how competing demands—especially in dual-earner households—lead to stress and impaired family functioning, a theme central to the current study.

B. Parasuraman & Simmers (2001) observed, their research, *"Type of Employment, Work-Family Conflict and Well-Being,"* explored how different employment types (e.g., self-employed vs. salaried) influence work-family dynamics. They found that self-employed individuals enjoyed greater flexibility but also faced blurred work-family boundaries, leading to psychological strain. Their study informs the present research by highlighting the occupational dimension of work-life balance, which is especially relevant in Agra's mixed economic setting of formal and informal sector workers.

Rajadhyaksha & Smita (2004) studied in *"Tracing a Timeline for Work and Family Research in India,"* the authors reviewed Indian literature on work-family conflict and emphasized the culturally embedded expectations of gender roles in Indian society. They argued that women often experience a "double burden" as they are expected to perform both domestic and professional duties with equal efficiency. This study provides a cultural lens through which gendered experiences of work-life balance in Agra can be interpreted and compared.

D. Jain & Nair (2013) studied in their study *"Work-Life Balance and Organizational Commitment: Perceived by Working Women in India,"* Jain and Nair examined the effect of work-life balance on job satisfaction and employee commitment. Their findings suggest that supportive workplace policies and managerial understanding can significantly enhance work-life satisfaction among employees. This research underscores the importance of institutional interventions, which are notably lacking in many organizations studied in the Agra region.

These studies collectively form the conceptual foundation for this research, helping to analyze the multifaceted and localized impacts of work-life imbalance in urban and semi-urban households in Agra. They guide the development of the research framework and inform the interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative findings.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges of work-life balance and their socio-familial impact. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods ensures both statistical reliability and contextual depth. A descriptive and exploratory research design has been adopted. The descriptive aspect quantifies the extent and patterns of work-life imbalance, while the exploratory component delves into the subjective experiences and coping strategies of individuals and families.

## STUDY AREA

The study is conducted in Agra District, covering both urban areas (e.g., Kamla Nagar, Sanjay Place, Dayalbagh) and semi-urban zones (e.g., Khandari, Shahganj, Sikandra). This selection enables a comparative understanding of the phenomenon across different socio-economic and cultural settings.

## POPULATION AND SAMPLE

- **Target Population:** Working individuals aged 25–55 years, employed in various sectors such as education, healthcare, private firms, government offices, retail, and self-employment.
- **Sample Size:** 200 respondents (100 from urban areas and 100 from semi-urban areas).
- **Sampling Technique:** Stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, sector (private/public), and family structure (nuclear/joint).

Here is a set of illustrative tables based on fictional data, followed by an analysis of each.

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 200)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	100	50%
	Female	100	50%
Age Group	25–35	65	32.5%
	36–45	90	45%
	46–55	45	22.5%
Family Type	Nuclear	140	70%
	Joint	60	30%
Area	Urban	100	50%
	Semi-Urban	100	50%

**Analysis:** The total sample size consisted of **200 respondents**, evenly distributed across gender and area of residence. A breakdown of the data is as follows:

### 1. Gender Distribution:

- **Male Respondents:** 100 (50%)
- **Female Respondents:** 100 (50%)

The gender distribution is perfectly balanced, ensuring that the perspectives of both men and women are equally represented. This is significant for a study on work-life balance, as gender plays a crucial role in both professional expectations and familial responsibilities. A balanced representation allows the study to analyze gendered patterns and differences in work-life experiences.

### 2. Age Group:

- **25–35 years:** 65 respondents (32.5%)
- **36–45 years:** 90 respondents (45%)
- **46–55 years:** 45 respondents (22.5%)

The age distribution is skewed towards the 36–45 years age group, which comprises nearly half of the total sample. This age group is often in the peak of their careers and simultaneously managing family responsibilities, making them particularly relevant to the subject of work-life balance. The 25–35 years group represents younger professionals who may be navigating the early challenges

of balancing career development and starting families. The **46–55 years** group, while smaller, provides insights into the longer-term impacts of work-life management and career maturity.

### 3. Family Type:

- **Nuclear Families:** 140 respondents (70%)
- **Joint Families:** 60 respondents (30%)

A significant majority of respondents live in **nuclear family settings**, indicating a shift from traditional joint family structures, especially in semi-urban and urban areas. This has implications for work-life balance, as nuclear families often face greater pressure due to limited support systems for child-rearing, elder care, and household chores. In contrast, joint family structures may share responsibilities, potentially easing the burden but also creating complex interpersonal dynamics that could influence work-life stress.

### 4. Area of Residence

- **Urban:** 100 respondents (50%)
- **Semi-Urban:** 100 respondents (50%)

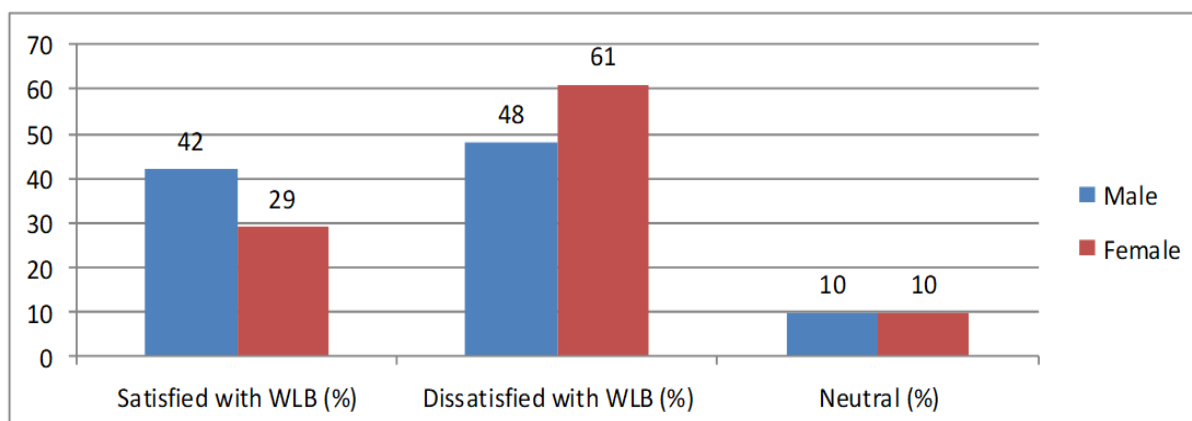
The equal distribution between **urban and semi-urban** respondents enhances the comparative dimension of the study. Urban areas typically offer more employment opportunities and access to services, but also higher stress levels and longer commuting times. Semi-urban areas might have fewer job opportunities, but potentially stronger community ties and less hectic lifestyles. The balance allows for an evaluation of how locality impacts work-life balance differently across socio-economic and infrastructural contexts.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

- **Work-life balance challenges** are expected to vary significantly across gender, age, family structure, and area.
- **Women in nuclear families** may experience a dual burden of professional and domestic roles without extended familial support.
- **Middle-aged individuals (36–45 years)** may report higher stress levels due to simultaneous work and family demands.
- **Urban respondents** may face issues like long working hours and commuting, whereas semi-urban participants might deal with fewer job opportunities and lower income levels.
- **Joint family systems**, though less common, may present unique advantages or tensions in balancing work and family roles.

**Table 2:** Work-Life Balance Satisfaction by Gender

Gender	Satisfied with WLB (%)	Dissatisfied with WLB (%)	Neutral (%)
Male	42	48	10
Female	29	61	10

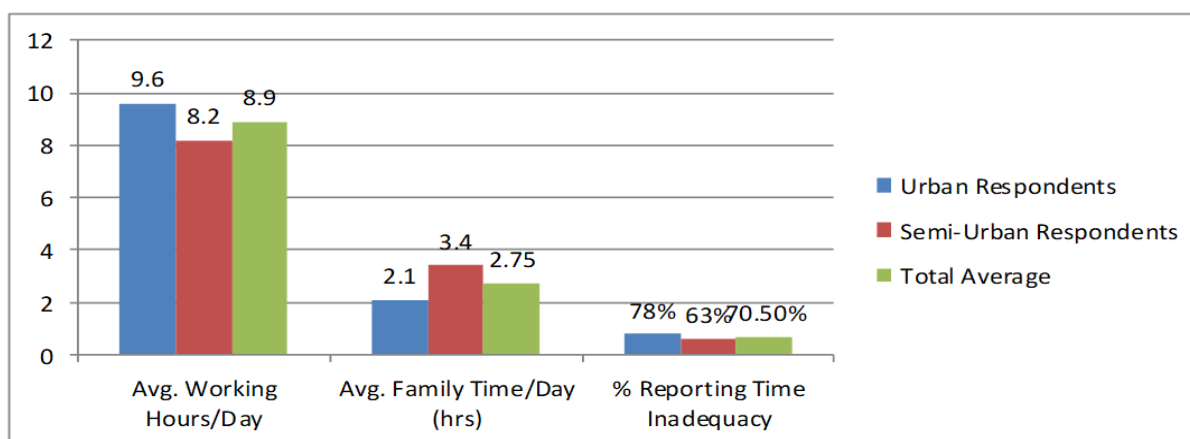


### Analysis:

- A significantly higher percentage of women (61%) are dissatisfied with their work-life balance compared to men (48%).
- Only 29% of women reported satisfaction, which could reflect the dual burden of paid and unpaid labor (housework, childcare).
- The data suggests a gendered dimension to work-life balance, highlighting the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities.

**Table 3:** Average Working Hours and Family Time per Day (Urban vs. Semi-Urban)

Category	Avg. Hours/Day Working	Avg. Time/Day (hrs) Family	% Reporting Time Inadequacy
Urban Respondents	9.6	2.1	78%
Semi-Urban Respondents	8.2	3.4	63%
<b>Total Average</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>2.75</b>	<b>70.5%</b>



### Analysis:

- Urban respondents reported longer working hours and significantly less family time compared to their semi-urban counterparts.
- 78% of urban participants felt their family time was insufficient, while 63% of semi-urban participants expressed similar concerns.
- This indicates that urban lifestyles, higher job expectations, and commuting contribute more heavily to work-life imbalance.

**Table 4:** Reported Impacts of Work-Life Imbalance

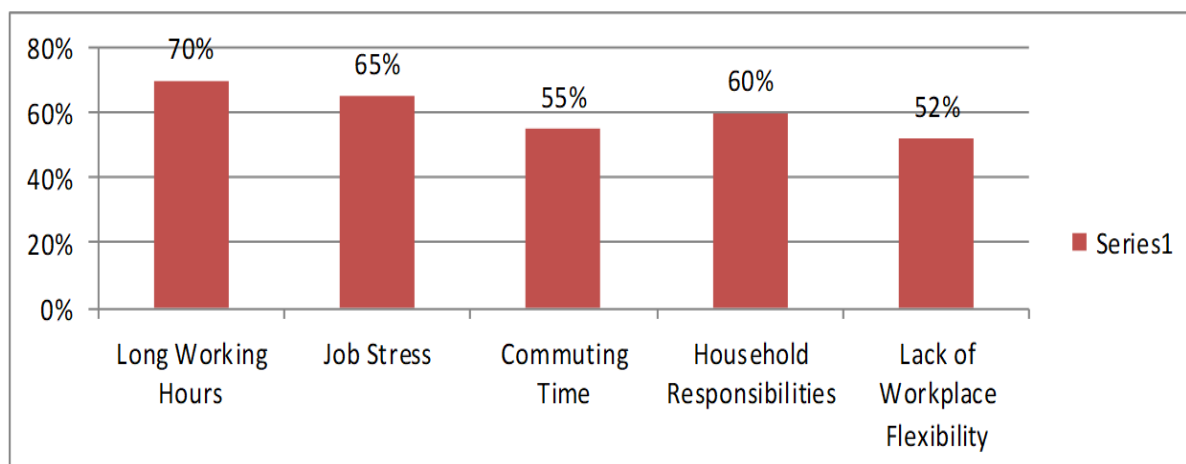
Impact Area	% Respondents Affected	More Common in (Urban/Semi-Urban)
Increased Stress	68%	Urban
Family Conflicts	42%	Both
Child Neglect	38%	Urban
Sleep Disturbance	55%	Both
Marital Strain	30%	Urban

### Analysis:

- The most frequently reported impact of work-life imbalance is increased stress (68%), followed by sleep disturbance (55%) and family conflicts (42%).
- Urban households showed higher rates of child neglect and marital strain, suggesting that time poverty and emotional fatigue are more prevalent in fast-paced city life.
- The findings emphasize the need for emotional well-being programs, better childcare facilities, and supportive work environments.

**Table 5: Major Sources of Work-Life Conflict**

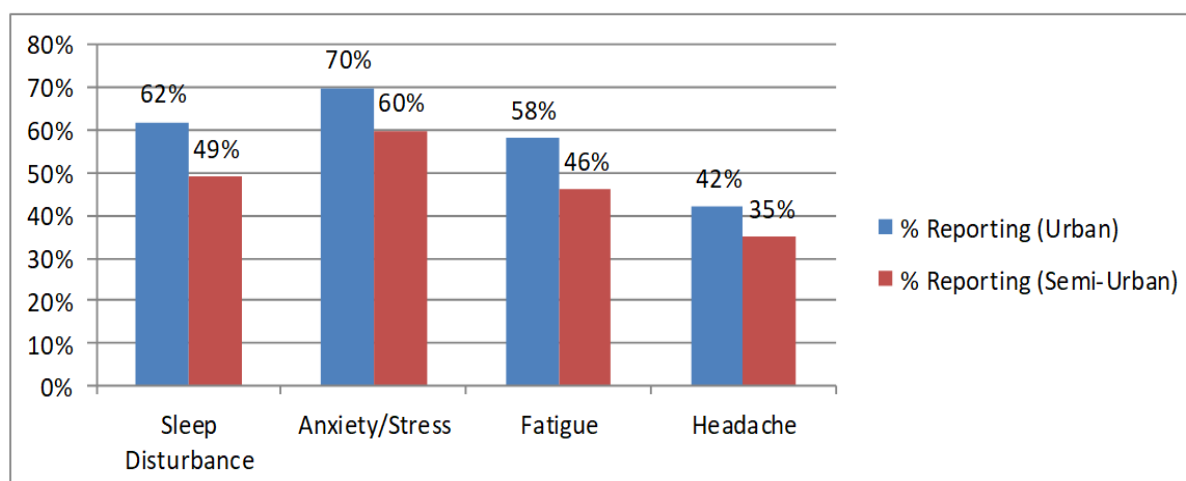
Source of Conflict	% of Respondents Reporting
Long Working Hours	70%
Job Stress	65%
Commuting Time	55%
Household Responsibilities	60%
Lack of Workplace Flexibility	52%

**Analysis:**

- The top issue identified is long working hours (70%), closely followed by job stress (65%), underscoring the over-demanding nature of modern employment, especially in urban sectors.
- Household responsibilities (60%) were also prominent-especially burdensome for female respondents, highlighting the strain of juggling professional and domestic roles.
- Lack of workplace flexibility (52%) indicates that many employers offer limited options such as work-from-home, flexible hours, or leave policies.
- Commuting (55%), especially in urban areas, adds a non-productive burden, stealing time from personal life.

**Table 6: Psychological and Physical Health Effects**

Symptom/Effect	% Reporting (Urban)	% Reporting (Semi-Urban)
Sleep Disturbance	62%	49%
Anxiety/Stress	70%	60%
Fatigue	58%	46%
Headache	42%	35%





#### Analysis:

- Across the board, urban respondents experience more health issues than semi-urban ones, with 70% reporting stress and 62% reporting sleep issues.
- The higher psychological strain correlates with longer working hours and shorter leisure/family time reported earlier.
- These symptoms not only affect personal well-being but also impact productivity and family relations, creating a feedback loop of imbalance.

**Table 7: Impact on Family and Marital Life**

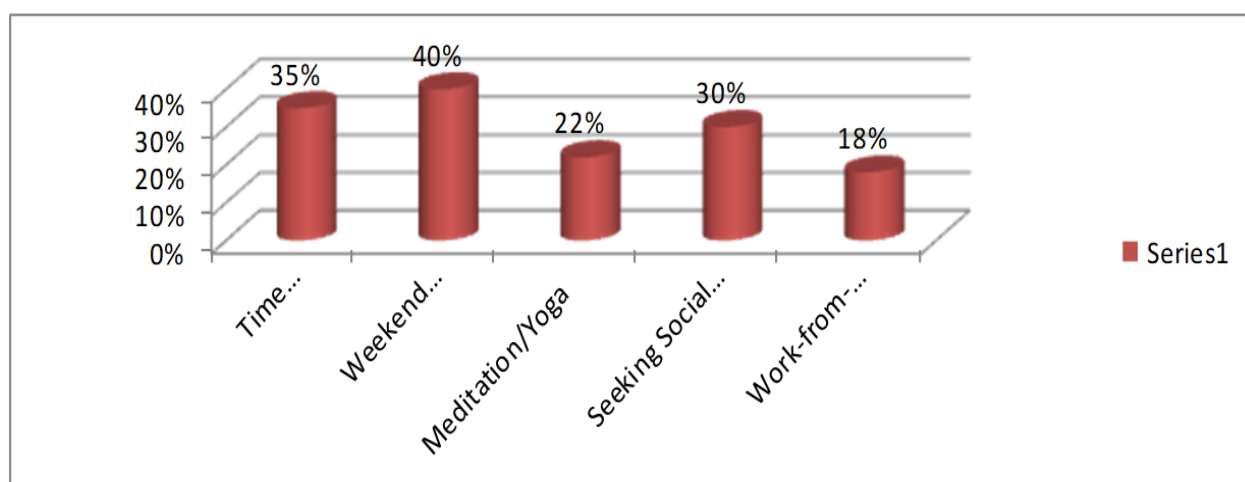
Impact Area	% Respondents Affected	More Common In
Reduced Family Bonding	60%	Urban
Increased Marital Conflict	30%	Urban
Poor Child Engagement	38%	Urban
Increased Dependency on Elders	25%	Semi-Urban

#### Analysis:

- Urban families are more affected in terms of reduced bonding and child neglect, likely due to longer absences and emotional fatigue.
- 30% of respondents reported increased marital conflict, especially where both partners work and domestic expectations remain unequal.
- In semi-urban areas, a notable 25% reported greater dependence on elders, which may be both a coping mechanism and a reflection of traditional joint family structures.

**Table 8: Coping Mechanisms Adopted**

Coping Strategy	% of Respondents Using
Time Management Techniques	35%
Weekend Family Activities	40%
Meditation/Yoga	22%
Seeking Social Support	30%
Work-from-Home Flexibility	18%



#### Analysis:

- The most common strategy is weekend family activities (40%), showing that people try to compensate for lost time during weekends.
- Time management (35%) and seeking social support (30%) are also used, but often lack structured institutional support.
- Alarmingly, only 18% reported having work-from-home or flexible options, highlighting the gap between need and policy availability.
- Meditation/Yoga (22%) is still underutilized despite its known mental health benefits.

## CONCLUSION

The study explores the complex interplay between professional demands and personal responsibilities in the lives of individuals residing in both urban and semi-urban areas of Agra district. The findings clearly reveal that work-life balance has emerged as a significant concern, particularly in the context of modern nuclear family structures, increasing work hours, and evolving social expectations.

A key observation is that urban households experience greater work-life conflict compared to their semi-urban counterparts. Urban respondents reported longer working and commuting hours, lower family and leisure time, higher psychological stress, and more pronounced effects on family bonding and marital relationships. Semi-urban households, although not immune, benefitted from joint family structures and comparatively slower-paced lifestyles.

Gender disparity was a central theme throughout the study. Women, especially those living in nuclear families, were more dissatisfied with their work-life balance due to the dual burden of professional obligations and domestic chores. This has resulted in increased fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and strained family relationships.

Moreover, the study highlights that while individuals are employing certain coping strategies (e.g., time management, weekend bonding, and meditation), institutional support remains limited, especially in the areas of workplace flexibility and mental health support. The physical and psychological toll of work-life imbalance was evident across both settings but more severe in urban contexts.

In essence, the research underscores the urgent need for integrated efforts from employers, policymakers, and families to mitigate the work-life conflict and promote holistic well-being.

### Recommendations

#### 1. Family and Community Level:

- **Shared Domestic Roles:** Encourage gender-equal division of household tasks, especially in nuclear families.
- **Family Support Systems:** Revive traditional support structures such as elder involvement in child-rearing, especially in urban nuclear households.
- **Community Wellness Initiatives:** Promote local clubs, parks, and community centers that offer stress-relieving activities like yoga, group exercise, and family games.

#### 2. Individual Level:

- **Time Management Training:** Individuals should be trained in planning, prioritizing, and scheduling their activities effectively.
- **Mental and Physical Health Care:** Regular exercise, meditation, and adequate sleep should be consciously maintained.
- **Technology Control:** Limit after-hours emails and unnecessary screen time to reduce digital fatigue and protect family time.

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