Article

Work–Life Balance, Occupational Stress and Organisational Support Among Women Working in the Transportation Industry

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Abstract

The transport sector has traditionally been regarded as a male-dominated industry. For the past two to three decades, women have been largely absent from this industry. The new generation of women globally has changed the conventional patriarchal social order. This social change was initiated in India at the turn of the 20th century. Worldwide, women's representation in the transport sector was less than 20% as of 2018 (International Labour Organisation, 2019, *International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08)*). Although in recent years their participation in this sector has increased slightly, this reflects how women are gradually entering male-dominated sectors and establishing their efficiency and potential. However, this transition has its issues and challenges. The purpose of the present paper is to examine the work–life balance and various occupational challenges faced by women working in the transport sector. By reviewing existing research and qualitatively analysing women's experiences in the field, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing gender discrimination, occupational stress and work–life balance, and to propose ways to address these issues. It was an empirical study of 108 women bus conductors working in Chandigarh (UT). The study aimed to provide better support networks for advancing gender parity and work–life balance for women in this field. The results showed that there were gaps in their organisational support system,

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gender-based discrimination, moderate work-life balance, and evident organisational strain. The findings of the study lead us to the effective implementation of gender-negotiating work, improved organisational support and strengthened grievance resolution and management support to reduce occupational stress and improve work–life balance among women transport workers.

Keywords

Work–life balance, occupational stress, women conductors, transport sector, gender discrimination, organisational support

Introduction

The contemporary labour market is evolving rapidly and is transforming the nature, structure and experience of work across all sectors of the economy. It has been noted that women's participation in the paid workforce is a vital element of inclusive economic development since it opens up opportunities for women to enter paid employment and build their economic independence; however, the participation of women in the labour force has also highlighted the ongoing presence of long-term structural inequalities within labour markets (Powell & Graves, 2003). Among these emerging workforces, women transport workers (particularly women bus conductors) constitute an important but neglected section of this workforce; their participation in public transport systems demonstrates a much broader economic inclusion and gender diversification. While there has been an increase in their presence, there is still a lack of sociological and labour studies literature about their experiences and challenges in the workplace, especially concerning work–life balance and the ability to succeed in their jobs (Punj & Jalan, 2025).

The issue of work–life balance has become increasingly prominent in the last several decades as an area of scholarly inquiry. Work–life balance can be broadly defined as the ability to manage the competing demands on time and energy found between an individual's work responsibilities and their personal or family responsibilities in a manner that diminishes cooperation and enhances the overall well-being of the worker (Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Furthermore, the concept of work–life also encompasses variables related to psychological commitment and satisfaction with various aspects of life, as well as the time spent organising those activities (Frone, 2003). The pursuit of a satisfactory work–life balance is increasingly recognised as a necessary ingredient for good physical and mental health, overall quality of life and job satisfaction in the workplace (Guest, 2002). Therefore, achieving balance between work and life is not just an individual effort, but also a structural and organisational factor, such as working hours, job demands, institutional policies and workplace culture (Kossek et al., 2011). In the context of women bus conductors, these challenges are particularly evident in multiple dimensions, such as temporal challenges (often working long and irregular shifts), physical challenges (continuous need for movement and standing in one place for periods of time), psychosocial challenges (including conflict and

harassment by employees, commuters and others) and institutional challenges (limited support from management and the absence of policies). Like this, these challenges not only contribute to occupational stress, but have also been associated with negative health consequences, low productivity and imbalance in work and personal life (Siegrist, 1996). Therefore, the present research seeks to address the work–life balance and occupational challenges faced by women bus conductors, with particular focus on their stress levels, discrimination, coping techniques and their perceptions of organisational assistance.

Literature Review

This section reviews the scholarly literature on occupational stress and work–life balance to situate the project within the broader academic framework. Prior studies have conceptualised work–life balance as a multidimensional construct comprising individual, organisational and societal factors (Clark, 2000). Thus, the existing literature has helped identify important gaps, particularly related to the experiences of women employed in transportation and labour-intensive sectors. Marcinkus et al. (2007) found that professional success, organisational commitment and job satisfaction were positively correlated with work-based assistance for women (Hantrais & Ackers, 2005). A study found that working from home may offer greater freedom and independence but can also lead to longer hours, including weekends and evenings. The home environment strongly influences quality of life (Bhatnagar & Rajadhyaksha, 2001). The study explored the determinants of attitudes towards occupational and family roles among professional men and women in India, and found that structural and cultural constraints continue to shape women's career growth in India. Kavya et al. (2018), in their article 'A study on the work–life balance of women conductors at BMTC', discussed the challenges faced by women bus conductors at their workplace and explored the key factors influencing their work–life balance. Kurbett and Jadhav (2017) discussed the occupational problems of women bus conductors in North-West Karnataka Road Transportation. The study highlighted that the majority of women bus conductors gave full attention to their families but experienced musculoskeletal pain. Occupational stress levels are also high for transport workers due to the nature of their duties. Transport workers' occupational stress stems from multiple factors, such as prolonged working days, irregular working hours and the need to exert physical effort while interacting with the public (International Labour Organisation, 2019).

Further, Kossek et al. (2011) and Haar et al. (2014) reconceptualised work–life balance as a multidimensional paradigm that integrates time balance, involvement and satisfaction balance. Abdullah et al. (2008) described the occupational stress, social and family difficulties and job contentment of working women in Bangladesh. Empirical studies conducted by Verma et al. (2024) and Irfan et al. (2023) explain that excessive job demands, associated with inadequate resources, lead to burnout, job dissatisfaction and low employee performance. It was also pointed out that dependence on informal support systems often reflects the

inadequacy of formal institutional mechanisms. Despite extensive research in this area, several gaps remain, such as a contextual gap (lack of empirical research), a gender-specific gap (insufficient focus on women), a sectoral gap (limited attention on labour-intensive sectors), institutional gaps (upgrading organisational policies) and others. Based on these gaps, the following research objectives were formulated.

Theoretical Perspective

In the present study, the Job Demand–Resource Model (JD-R) and Work–Family Border theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) have been employed to understand the respondents' working conditions, which affect their work–life balance, performance, well-being and stress levels at work. JD-R was introduced in 2001 by Arnold B. Bakker, Evangelia Demerouti, Wilmar Schaufeli and Sjef Nachreiner, and in 2007, this theory was expanded and formalised comprehensively. The core idea of this theory is to highlight the two major components of occupation: job demands and job resources, which determine the employer motivation, stress levels and work outcomes. Job demand is defined as a continuous physical, psychological and emotional aspect of work which requires sustained effort to accomplish the job. These include long working hours, excessive pressure to complete work, physical strain and stressful interactions or boredom in the workplace. On the other hand, job resources are the supportive systems that help employees to cope with their job demands, such as supportive supervisors, flexible work schedules, training opportunities, welfare services for employees and organisational support and assistance. Similarly, this theory correlates the women bus conductors' experiences based on several job demands, which include long working hours, physically demanding tasks, public dealing, improper rest, harassment by colleagues and commuters and workplace conflict. Whereas job resources show the limitations in flexible schedules, supportive management and professional development opportunities. Thus, the JD-R strongly captures the relationship between challenging work conditions and limitations in organisational resources.

Additionally, Work–Family Border theory emerged in 2000, proposed by Sue Campbell Clark (Clark, 2000), and describes how individuals navigate the balance between work and family responsibilities. This theory elaborates the distinction between work and family domains, which has its own unique sets of expectations, rules, relationships and responsibilities. The primary core of this theory is to maintain balance, depending upon the individual's ability to establish boundaries between work and family domains. In the same way, this theory highlights how women in the transport sector face challenges in managing work conditions, such as irregular and long working hours, physically demanding tasks and others. Taken together, these lead to reduced time and energy respondents need to manage their household tasks and, in some cases, their workplace tasks, affecting employees' personal well-being and family obligations. Thus, this theory provides a central argument that work–life balance is associated with the coping strategies individuals maintain in their personal and professional roles.

Research Objectives

- To analyse the demographic profile of the women bus conductors.
- To examine the work–life challenges faced by women bus conductors.
- To comprehend the presence and impact of gender discrimination within the transport sector.
- To examine the physical and psychological occupational stressors faced by the respondents and their coping strategies.
- To understand the organisational policies in place to support women conductors and their effectiveness.

Methodology

Research Design

The present research is an empirical investigation of women bus conductors working in Chandigarh (UT). The study employs a quantitative research approach aiming to comprehensively understand the challenges women bus conductors face in achieving a work–life balance, the effects of organisational policies and the coping mechanisms they adopt.

Study Area and Sampling

The present study area is Chandigarh, which is a Union Territory of India and the Capital of the two states of Punjab and Haryana. It is a planned city in India. From 1966, only male conductors were working in bus conductor positions, but from 2014 onwards, women bus conductors were also recruited and started working. So, the present study is limited to women bus conductors working in Chandigarh (UT). The selection of respondents was made due to their underrepresentation in academic research and its significance to understanding gender dynamics in male-dominated occupations. A total of 120 women conductors were recruited, but during the present study, 108 respondents were working as women bus conductors.

Sampling Technique and Data Collection Methods and Analysis

To cover all 108 respondents, the researcher adopted the census method to include every woman bus conductor. The respondents belonged to different categories, that is, permanent, probationary and outsourced employees. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, and it consisted of multidimensional sections on work–life balance challenges, occupational gender discrimination, coping strategies and organisational support. The data for the study were collected over 18 months (October 2021 to March 2023), through direct interaction and intensive observation. The data were analysed through descriptive statistical methods, which consist of frequency distribution, percentage and mean score calculation. By using mean scores, analysis of the data can be used to compare variables and identify which challenges and support mechanisms were the most significant.

Findings and Discussions

The study's findings indicate the interconnectedness of work–life balance and occupational stress, as well as how gender discrimination and coping strategies are affected among women bus conductors.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents are an important aspect of this study because they provide a contextual picture of how the socio-economic and personal characteristics contributed to their work experiences. In this study, some of the relevant demographic variables of women bus conductors were included, such as age, marital status, level of education and how long they have worked.

Table 1 represents the demographic profile of the respondents. The age distribution shows that more than half of the respondents (53.7%) were in the age group between 24 and 29 years. This age group is often associated with career-building, advanced education or transitioning into significant professional roles. Whereas 35.2% of the respondents were in the more than 30 years age group. In addition, only 11.1% of respondents were in the 18–23 age group, who might be seen as in the identity versus role confusion stage, possibly still completing education or beginning to define their professional identities. The data show that a significant proportion of respondents (45.4%) hold a graduate degree, while over a third (34.3%) were post-graduate and above qualified. Meanwhile, only 13% of

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents According to Their Demographic Profile.

Demographic Profile	Categories	Number of Respondents (*N* = 108)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	18–23	12	11.1
24–29	24–29	58	53.7
30 and above	30 and above	38	35.2
Educational qualification	12th/Diploma	14	13.0
	Graduation	49	45.4
	Post-graduation and above	37	34.3
	Others (BEd, MBA, PGDCA)	8	7.4
Marital status	Single	69	63.9
	Married	36	33.3
	Separated	1	0.9
	Widowed	2	1.9
Years of joining	0.0–03 years	03	4.6
	3.1–06 years	67	62.1
	6.1 years and above	36	33.3

Source: Computed from primary data.

Table 2. Distribution Showing the Work–Life Balance Challenges Faced by the Respondents.

Work–Life Balance Challenges	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Value
Difficulty in balancing work and family	45 (41.7%)	35 (32.4%)	10 (09.3%)	12 (11.1%)	06 (05.6%)	2.06
Irregular work shifts impact family time	30 (27.8%)	55 (50.9%)	08 (07.4%)	10 (09.3%)	05 (04.6%)	2.12
Lack of flexible working hours	12 (11.1%)	40 (37.0%)	45 (41.7%)	08 (07.4%)	03 (02.8%)	2.54
Lack of support from family in managing work–life	22 (20.4%)	36 (33.3%)	32 (29.9%)	10 (09.3%)	08 (07.4%)	2.47

Source: Computed from primary data.

the respondents had completed their 12th/diploma degree, which was the essential educational criterion for this job involvement.

According to their marital status, 63.9% of the respondents were single or unmarried. At the same time, one-third (33.3%) of the respondents were married. A small proportion of the respondents were separated (0.9%) and widowed (1.9%). Data also indicate that 62.1% of respondents joined between 3 and 6 years ago, and 33.3% of the respondents had joined more than 6 years ago, and a small proportion of respondents, 4.6% had joined within the last 3 years, which may advocate the entry-level nature of the job market for many respondents, aligning with earlier observations on age.

Therefore, the data signifies that a significant proportion of respondents were in the age group between 24 and 29 years, and a substantial proportion of respondents had graduated and post-graduate educational qualifications, which highlights that respondents were more qualified than the minimum educational qualification criteria (12th standard). In addition, a large portion of respondents were unmarried, and many of them had more than 2 years of work experience.

Table 2 provides a structured understanding of respondents' perception regarding key dimensions of work–life balance. By applying a Likert scale, the responses reveal both the degree of intensity and agreeable distribution across four main challenges. The mean score also sheds light on the relative importance of each issue, which influences the respondents' experiences.

Difficulty in Balancing Work and Family

Findings indicate that a significant proportion of respondents (41.7% strongly agreed and 32.4% agreed) experienced significant difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities. While 16.7% of the respondents expressed disagreement, and 9.3% of respondents remained neutral. The mean score of 2.06

indicates strong agreement towards facing difficulty in balancing work and family. Therefore, these findings reflect a persistent role conflict and work imbalance between professional and domestic spheres. The overlap of multiple responsibilities to work and to their families indicates that respondents were negotiating competing expectations, often without adequate institutional support. These findings align with the theories of Work–Family Border theory, role conflict and work–family conflicts, in which time and strain pressure from work and responsibilities impact balancing household and professional work (Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

Impact of Irregular Work Shifts on Family Time

A combined 78.7% of the respondents (27.8% strongly agree and 50.9% agree) acknowledged that irregular work shifts adversely interfere with family time. Only 13.9% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, while 7.4% were neutral, with a mean score of 2.12, which reflects strong agreement towards the impact of irregular work shifts. Thus, it shows high levels of concern about irregular working hours. The results of this difficulty align with research on work–life imbalance, which emphasises how irregular work schedules can interfere with family routines and reduce time spent with dependents or family members.

Lack of Flexible Working Hours

In contrast to the other statement, the perception of inadequate flexible working hours shows a more dispersed response pattern. Out of the total respondents, 48.1% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with flexible working hours, yet 41.7% of the respondents had neutral opinions. Only 10.2% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean score of 2.54 indicates a moderately high level of agreement relative to the other variables. Therefore, this high level of neutrality indicates that respondents have different levels of access to or awareness of flexible work options. These findings also reflect occupational heterogeneity, where flexibility is unevenly distributed across various job roles, sectors or hierarchical levels. Corresponding to other studies, having more flexibility in one's working hours is essential for lowering work–life conflict (Kossek et al., 2011), which advocates that respondents could gain from more flexibility or more transparent communication.

Lack of Family Support in Managing Work–Life Balance

The perception of inadequate family support shows a moderately distributed response. A combined 53.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they experience a lack of family support, while 29.9% respondents gave moderate or neutral responses. Additionally, 16.7% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean value of 2.47 indicates a moderate inclination towards agreement. Thus, this signifies that family support is a relevant factor, and it is not universally perceived as deficient. A lack of family support can

Table 3. The Distribution of Respondents Shows the Perceived Gender-based Discrimination in the Workplace.

Type of Discrimination Experienced	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
Less likely to be promoted	42 (38.9%)	45 (41.7%)	12 (11.1%)	06 (05.6 %)	03 (02.8%)	1.91
Assigned fewer challenging tasks	50 (46.3%)	38 (35.2%)	10 (09.3%)	07 (06.5%)	03 (02.8%)	1.84
Treated unfairly by management	08 (07.4%)	19 (17.6%)	43 (39.8%)	27 (25.0%)	11 (20.4%)	3.12
Pay inequality compared to male colleagues	05 (04.6%)	09 (08.3%)	24 (22.2%)	48 (44.4%)	22 (20.4%)	3.67

Source: Computed from primary data.

worsen stress and role conflict, whereas family support is essential in lowering work–life conflict.

Overall, the analysis reveals that the predominantly challenged barriers to achieving work–life balance were scheduling family time and adjusting to irregular work schedules, while flexibility and family support play secondary but still relevant parts.

Table 3 represents the data on respondents' opinions about gender-based discrimination in the workplace. It addresses the alleged discrimination in various key areas: unfair treatment by management, task distribution, wage disparity and promotion opportunities. The overall distribution of responses with their associated mean scores reveals a complex and stratified distribution of perceived inequalities, suggesting that respondents observe gender discrimination through indirect processes, rather than through actual, overt discriminatory practices.

Perceived Inequality in Promotion Opportunities

A majority of the respondents (80.6%) strongly agreed and agreed (38.9% and 41.7%) with the statement that they were less likely to be promoted than their male counterparts. Meanwhile, only 8.4% of the respondents expressed disagreement, and 11.1% remained neutral. The average score of 1.91 indicates agreement towards the discriminatory practices in promotion. As a result, it implies that discrimination in job promotions is a common problem that stems from gender bias. This data represents that respondents perceive a glass ceiling effect in their professional growth despite formal commitments to equality, which aligns with the existing literature on gender differences in hierarchical promotions.

Assigned Fewer Challenging Tasks

Out of the total respondents, 81.5% of the respondents (46.3% strongly agreed and 35.2% agreed) felt that they were given fewer challenging work tasks,

while 9.3% of the respondents disagreed with this statement, and an equivalent proportion were neutral. The data indicated a mean response of 1.84 (which is also the lowest average of all measured variables), thereby indicating the greatest amount of agreement. Thus, the issue signifies the noticeable trend in the allocation of challenging work assignments, and it represents an example of horizontal segregation in occupational categories. It also highlights how variation in the kind of tasks people do leads to unequal opportunities to gain skills, be seen as capable and advance in their careers. This discrimination can be explained by the role congruity theory, which holds that women are stereotyped as being less able to manage difficult or high-stakes activities, particularly in physically demanding occupations (Eagly & Karau, 2003), as well as the JD-R model also exemplifies the unsupportive organisational services to provide equal resources and opportunities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Perceived Unfair Treatment by Management

Compared to the other dimensions, perception of unfair treatment by management was more evenly distributed. Only 25% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, whereas a substantial proportion of responses (45.4%) disagreed and strongly disagreed, and a considerable proportion of responses (39.8%) were neutral or uncertain regarding unjust treatment by the management. The 3.12 moderate mean score implies a tendency towards neutrality or slight disagreement. Therefore, it reflects that the high level of neutrality indicates ambiguity in interpreting managerial behaviour or variability in individual experiences across departments or organisational contexts.

Pay Inequality Compared to Male Colleagues

In contrast with the other types of discrimination, a substantial proportion (64.8%) of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement that wage inequality exists, compared to just 12.9% of respondents who agreed, and 22.2% remained neutral. The mean score of 3.67, the highest among all the variables, indicates a disagreement with the statement. Thus, these findings reflect that pay fairness is not as much of an issue in this particular workplace or organisation.

Overall findings indicate that perceived gender discrimination is particularly noticeable in areas of job distribution, particularly related to promotions and task allocation, which can have a substantial effect on retention and work satisfaction.

Table 4 highlights the occupational stressors faced by respondents in the workplace, with a focus on both physical and psychological aspects of job-related stress. The above analysis highlights the major stress factors such as long working hours, physical demands of the job, commuter harassment, conflicts with coworkers, lack of rest and insufficient management support.

Table 4. The Distribution Shows the Physical and Psychological Occupational Stressors Faced by the Respondents.

Feeling Stress Due to (n = 108)	Always	Sometime	Never	Mean Score
Long working hours	20 (18.5%)	75 (69.4 %)	13 (12.0%)	1.93
Physical demands of the job	41 (38.0%)	54 (50.0%)	13 (12.0%)	1.74
Harassment from commuters	50 (46.3%)	58 (53.7%)	00 (0.0%)	1.53
Conflicts with male colleagues	38 (35.2%)	52 (48.1%)	18 (16.7%)	1.81
Inadequate support from management	55 (50.9%)	51 (47.2%)	02 (01.9%)	1.50
Lack of rest during shifts	47 (43.5%)	49 (44.4%)	13 (12.0%)	1.68

Source: Computed from primary data.

Long Working Hours

Data signify that a significant proportion of respondents experienced stress due to long working hours, with 69.4% indicating sometimes, and 18.5% of the respondents reported always. Meanwhile, 12% of the respondents reported never. The mean score of 1.93 reflects a moderate but consistent source of stress. Thus, this spectrum shows that working long hours is an ongoing but normalised working condition that produces a periodic strain rather than continual strain. Whereas the predominance of sometimes responses indicates that long hours are not regularly overwhelming, they continue to be a consistent source of stress in the workplace. Therefore, these findings highlight that women conductors are particularly affected by this issue as they frequently balance job and family obligations, which exacerbates their work–life conflicts.

Physical Demand of the Job

It was found that the majority of the respondents (88%) believed that physical demand is a source of stress, with 38.0% reporting that they were always experiencing stress. Meanwhile, 50% of the respondents mentioned it only sometimes, while 12% of the respondents reported never. The average score of 1.74 indicates a high level of stress. Therefore, the results suggest that most of the respondents faced physically demanding job stress, and the possible cause for the observed physical strain is the nature of the work, which includes standing for extended periods, handling equipment, alertness and assisting commuters. These findings align with Karasek's (1979) demand-control model, which argues that occupations that require a lot of physical exertion but give less control over working circumstances are more stressful. These expectations might increase stress on women conductors, who may already be expected by society to perform caregiving duties (Kain & Jex, 2010).

Harassment from Commuters

Data show that nearly half of the respondents (46.3%) had always experienced stress due to harassment by commuters, while the remaining 53.7% sometimes

experienced this type of stress. Thus, the data reflect that all respondents were facing this form of external stress, which has both physical and psychological effects. The low mean score of 1.53 also emphasised a very high level of stress. Therefore, among all stressors, harassment by the commuters was found to be one of the most significant sources of stress experienced during travel by the respondents. The absence of a 'never' response indicates that harassment during the commute is a likely and anticipated experience for all respondents. Furthermore, it illustrates how one's external social environment and commuters' pretentious behaviour impact the respondent's mental experiences.

Conflicts with Male Colleagues

Data signify that approximately one-third (35.2%) of the respondents always felt stress due to conflicts with male colleagues, while close to half (48.1%) of the respondents sometimes encounter conflicts as well. In addition, only 16.7% of the respondents never experienced stress due to such conflicts. The mean score of 1.81 reflects the respondents' experienced moderate level of stress. Thus, these findings support the idea of patriarchal theory, which holds that workplace tensions, disputes and discriminatory practices that negatively impact women or other gendered minorities are caused by male-centred structures of power. In line with these, the evident data support the existence of inequality and stereotypes based on gender among women conductors, which further leads to exclusive or hostile work environments for the women working in these areas that are generally dominated by men.

Inadequate Support from Management

Another major finding of the study was that over half the respondents (50.9%) reported that they always experienced stress, while 47.2% experienced stress sometimes. In contrast, only 1.9% of the respondents reported that they have never felt stressed due to a lack of support from management. The average score of 1.50 signifies the highest level of stress compared to all other stressors. As a result, the lack of management support is one of the most significant stressors and demonstrates management's unsupportive and unresponsive attitudes towards the women conductors. This study supports the strong hierarchical nature of power dynamics in this organisation, as well as demonstrates that the organisation does not demonstrate a level of commitment to its employees.

Lack of Rest During Shifts

More than two-fifths (43.5%) of the respondents experienced stress due to lack of rest during work shifts, while 44.4% of the respondents mentioned that they experience it sometimes, and 12% of respondents never experienced stress due to insufficient rest. The mean score of 1.68 reflects an average to moderately high level of stress. Thus, the findings indicate that respondents experience intense pressure to sustain high levels of output with very little time to recover from their shifts, which leads to physical and psychological stress.

Table 5. Distribution Shows the Coping Strategies used by Respondents to Mitigate the Challenges and Work Demands.

Coping Strategy	Number of Respondents (n = 108)	Percentage (%)
Seeking support from family	80	74.1
Discussing issues with colleagues	50	46.3
Using workplace counselling services	20	18.5
Taking time off work	30	27.8
Engaging in relaxation activities after work	60	55.6

Source: Computed from primary data (*Table 5 is based on multiple responses).

Overall, the analysis depicts that occupational stress among respondents was assessed through various dimensions, including structurally embedded lack of support from the organisation, high physical workloads and poor social interactions. The results clearly indicate the inadequacy of organisational managerial support and the amount of harassment experienced by many respondents and reflect a direct need for all organisations to make the necessary changes to their internal company policies and procedures, as well as to create a pleasant workplace for their employees.

Table 5 represents the coping mechanisms employed by the respondents to navigate the occupational challenges and work demands.

Seeking Support from Family

It was found that the majority of respondents (74.1%) had adopted a strategy of seeking support from their family members. This strategy indicates that families were a key source or central unit for dealing with work-related stress. With the relevance of many theories, these findings indicate a patriarchal structure of society where women are frequently expected to provide care, fulfil family obligations and perform all the necessary work associated with them. This expected behaviour for women may provide them with an essential tool for easing the strain of stresses like lengthy work days and demanding physical jobs.

Discussion on the Issues with the Colleagues

It was found that nearly half of the respondents, 46.3% revealed that they were coping by discussing work-related issues with their colleagues, especially with their female colleagues. Thus, this finding indicates that peer relationships play a crucial role in stress management, which not only helps emotional release but also contributes to collective sense-making, where shared experience normalises stress and a sense of solidarity. Corresponding to the findings, the results align with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1978), whereby they explained how such interaction encourages a reciprocal exchange of practical and emotional assistance, which helps employees to overcome obstacles in their workplace.

Using Workplace Counselling Services

The data on counselling services indicate that only 18.5% of the respondents utilised workplace counselling services. Thus, the results show that a low number of respondents were accessing counselling services, which points to a lack of availability or an unwillingness to do so. This could be a result of several things, such as the stigma attached to getting mental health assistance, ignorance of these resources or even scepticism about the efficacy of workplace counselling. Some of the respondents also mentioned that there is no counsellor and not even any female officers to whom they can convey their issues without any hesitation. This fact also reflects the organisational culture itself, where employees may feel deterred from seeking counselling services. Thus, this shows that there is a major lack of organisational support for workers' well-being.

Taking Time Off Work

Data signifies that 27.8% of the respondents were taking time off from work when it was necessary. Thus, it indicates that taking time off work is one of the other essential coping mechanisms that directly address work–life balance concerns. This shows respondents can rejuvenate both physically and emotionally by taking a break from work. However, a very small proportion of respondents who employ such a strategy would suggest that they have difficulty in taking time off, perhaps as a result of financial limitations, workplace pressure to keep working or fear of job instability. According to work–life conflict theory, employees experience higher levels of stress when they are unable to successfully divide their personal and professional lives.

Engaging in Relaxation Activities After Work

Relaxation activities after work have been another common coping mechanism among the respondents; 55.6% of the respondents reported using these types of activities to manage their stress, such as exercise, meditation, doing hobbies (dancing, singing, cooking, etc.) and socialising with others. Thus, engaging in these activities by the respondents reflects an enhancement of emotional and physical wellness to deal with their job demands. Similarly, this is consistent with cognitive behavioural theory, which places considerable emphasis on individual coping strategies for managing stress.

Therefore, the study illustrates the existence of a wide variety of coping mechanisms used by respondents to manage their stress. However, the findings further demonstrate a reliance on social support systems, including family, friends and colleagues. The study also indicates that even though relaxation techniques were the most frequently chosen method to cope with stress, workplace counselling or professional support networks were still underutilised. In addition, while taking time off from work is a vital component of maintaining a healthy work–life balance, the low level of usage of this strategy indicates that there may be organisational or financial barriers that need to be addressed. By focusing on these barriers,

Table 6. The Distribution of Respondents Shows Satisfaction with the Organisational Policies in Place to Support Women Conductors.

Type of Support Provided	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Mean Score
Flexible work hours	15 (13.9%)	20 (18.5%)	46 (42.6%)	17 (15.7%)	10 (09.3%)	2.87
Anti-harassment policies	16 (14.8%)	30 (27.8%)	33 (30.6%)	20 (18.5%)	9 (08.3%)	2.75
Training for personal development	05 (04.6%)	14 (13.9%)	30 (19.4%)	36 (27.8%)	22 (34.3%)	3.73
Medical facilities	22 (20.4%)	34 (31.5%)	38 (35.2%)	09 (08.3%)	05 (04.6%)	2.45
Leave provisions	33 (30.6%)	32 (29.6%)	29 (26.9%)	09 (08.3%)	05 (04.6%)	2.26

Source: Computed from primary data.

organisations can assist women conductors with developing better coping strategies, which will ultimately improve their overall health and satisfaction at work.

Table 6 provides insight into the levels of satisfaction among women bus conductors with the organisational policies in place to support their well-being and work–life balance. These policies include flexible work hours, anti-harassment measures, training opportunities, medical facilities and leave provisions.

Flexible Work Hours

The above data reveals that only 13.9% of respondents stated they were very satisfied, and 18.5% stated they were satisfied with the flexible working hours. On the other hand, 15.7% were dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied (9.3%) with the statement. Subsequently, a significant percentage of respondents (42.6%) expressed a neutral response towards flexible working hours. With a 2.87 average score, the results indicate a low level of satisfaction with flexible work hours. However, flexible work schedules are critical to helping respondents maintain their work–life balance both personally and professionally. As Table 2 demonstrates, the lack of opinions from neutral respondents regarding their attitude towards flexible work hours indicates potential underuse or lack of awareness of such arrangements.

Anti-harassment Policies

As per the data, respondents showed a moderate level of satisfaction with the anti-harassment policies, with only 14.8% stating they were very satisfied and 27.8% stating they were satisfied. Meanwhile, 30.6% of respondents indicated no opinion or a neutral response. Additionally, 18.5% of respondents reported dissatisfaction, while only 8.3% reported strong dissatisfaction. The mean score of 2.75 for these policies indicates moderate levels of satisfaction, suggesting either the

absence of anti-harassment policies or a lack of their implementation or effectiveness in the workplace. Furthermore, the lack of response or the neutral opinions of respondents showed uncertainty about the policy's use or application, due to fear of retaliation or others.

Training for Personal Development

According to the analysis of the different policies, training opportunities had the lowest satisfaction rating: only 4.6% of respondents were very satisfied and 13.9% were satisfied. Conversely, 62.1% of the respondents indicated dissatisfaction with their training, with 27.8% indicating they were dissatisfied and 34.3% indicating they were very dissatisfied, and a small number expressed neutral responses to this policy. The mean score (3.73) suggests that the majority of respondents were dissatisfied and indicates the training provided for professional or personal development may not meet the standards and relevance of women conductors' occupation. These data may also reflect a lack of gender equity regarding opportunities for advancement into areas of management where women are less likely to be provided with the same number of opportunities as men. Similarly, the glass ceiling theory (Cotter et al., 2001) reflects that these individuals could feel that their lack of training prevents them from advancing to higher levels in their careers. As such, this feeling of disappointment suggests that the organisations reinforce the patriarchal power structures by creating patriarchal and inequitable systems, denying women access to opportunities and resources to develop their careers.

Medical Facilities

The data indicate that a total of 51.9% of the respondents (20.4% very satisfied; 31.5% satisfied) were considered to be satisfied with the medical facilities that they were receiving. However, 35.2% of the respondents remained neutral, and 12.9% stated that they were dissatisfied. The mean score of 2.45 demonstrated a trend towards being satisfied. Thus, it has been examined that the healthcare-related services are mostly sufficient and wide-reaching, and even though the high level of satisfaction indicates that basic needs are being met, the number of neutral statements indicates that improvement is still required.

Leave Provisions

The highest level of satisfaction was found in leave provisions: 30.6% of respondents said they were very satisfied, while 29.6% said they were satisfied. On the other hand, 12.9% were dissatisfied and 26.9% were neutral. With a mean score of 2.26, the level of satisfaction is moderate to high. Thus, having leave is essential for maintaining a work–life balance. The usefulness of leave policies in lowering burnout is demonstrated by the comparatively high satisfaction ratings. However, a portion of the respondents' dissatisfaction suggests that company culture or regulatory limitations make it difficult to take or use leave, as the majority

of outsourced employees were unable to receive various types of leave facilities, such as maternity leave, casual leave and medical leave.

Overall, the findings indicate that various organisational supportive mechanisms were perceived to be working well, especially related to employee welfare, but there were still identifiable gaps in the other areas of professional growth and workplace flexibility. Additionally, the respondents' dissatisfaction with training opportunities suggests an increased need for a number of skill development and career advancement.

Theoretical Implications

In the present research, the role conflict theory has been employed to understand respondents' experiences of conflict between competing demands across their multiple roles. This theory, originally introduced by Goode (1960) and refined by Kahn et al. (1964), asserts that stress is derived from incompatible pressures created when different social roles exert influence on an individual. The most common expression of this role conflict arises with respect to time; such that, how one role limits one's ability to perform in another role and how the pressure of one area may impact the performance of another area of life. Similarly, this study on women bus conductors illustrates how role conflict theory applies to the current context of women bus conductors working in both time-based productive roles in their job and reproductive roles in their families. As a result, they are placed in situations where they face multiple overlapping role expectations, thus leading to ongoing role conflict and imbalance in their work lives.

The findings of the study clearly indicate that time-based and strain-based role conflict is prevalent due to the presence of irregular work patterns, long work hours and insufficient time to rest. Therefore, personnel's ability to meet family obligations has been restricted considerably (to a significant extent), resulting in pronounced work–life imbalance. Moreover, the study further shows that this type of role conflict is not isolated to the individual experience but is rooted in both gendered and organisational structures. The absence of flexible working arrangements, lack of access to opportunities to develop skills and the perception of inequality with regard to task assignment/equity, career progression cumulatively produce a greater degree of incompatibility between work and family roles. This indicates that organisational policies and practices do not accommodate the dual responsibilities of women workers, which further entrench structural barriers for women in the workplace.

In addition to these elements, the results of occupational stress have also provided further evidence to support the role conflict theory, which shows that cumulative stressors from the physical demands of performing a job, harassment from commuters and inadequate support from management cause increased stress on the women bus conductors. The increased level of stress impacts not only a respondent's ability to complete their work but also negatively impacts the quality of their personal life and further creates role conflicts across multiple areas of a respondent's life. Furthermore, the women conductors in this study used various

types of coping strategies to cope with competing demands. The results indicate that the overwhelming majority of respondents rely on informal sources of support, such as family and friends, through their interactions. While these informal sources of support can provide temporary relief, they are generally seen as adaptive methods to deal with existing role conflicts rather than a means of eliminating or reducing the structural sources of role conflict. Lastly, the limited use of formal sources of organisational support suggests that there are insufficient institutional mechanisms available to organisations to reduce or eliminate employee role conflict. Consequently, the role conflict theory provides an integrated explanation of the interrelationship between work–life balance, job-related stress and coping strategies. Furthermore, it illustrates that women working as bus conductors encounter both personal barriers and conflicting expectations from their respective workplaces or society at large due to institutional frameworks and greater cultural value systems.

Policy Implications

The findings indicate a need for targeted policy efforts to develop key areas, including flexible and predictable working schedules, which can help women to manage both professional and household responsibilities, reduce work-related strain and improve their well-being. Besides this, the organisation or agency must strengthen grievance resolution and management support and provide counselling services, and supervisory practice, to reduce occupational stress and role conflict. There is also a need to ensure strict adherence to safe working environments and anti-harassment policies, rapid resolution and redressal platforms, awareness programmes and confirmed workplace security. Likewise, promoting gender equity in the workplace includes transparent promotion opportunities, impartial task allocations and equal career development opportunities, which are other major key points to addressing structural inequalities that exist in these areas.

In addition to the policies, it is recommended that the transport agencies adopt gender-inclusive workplace policies and an equitable work environment that accommodates women's dual commitments. Providing basic well-being benefits like time off, regular training and access to medical services will be essential to minimising employees' physical and psychological stress. Therefore, the recommendations collectively indicate an urgent requirement for a comprehensive policy framework that fosters a safe, inclusive and empowering workplace environment for women in the transportation sector.

Conclusion

Consequently, it appears that improving women's work–life balance and working conditions as bus conductors constitutes a broader concern of social justice and gender equity, rather than merely an individual challenge. Respondents' occupational stress and work–life imbalance were primarily due to irregular work schedules and long working hours (with minimal breaks), as well as the difficult

working conditions they were forced to endure. In addition, the reliance on informal coping strategies by women bus conductors emphasises the absence of organisational support, exposure to harassment and persistent gender discrimination. Therefore, there is a need for policymakers to create appropriate policies and solutions that address both institutional barriers and organisational policies to support, protect and empower women workers in the transportation sector.

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