**Opinion Article**

**India's Work-Life Imbalance: A Comparative Analysis with Global Leaders and Pathways for Sustainable Growth**

### ABSTRACT

**Aims:** The purpose of this study is to analyse the contradiction of India's rapid economic growth and persistently low place in global work-life balance (WLB) rankings. It seeks to identify important factors to this imbalance, compare India's WLB to New Zealand's top-ranked model, and make recommendations for improvement.

**Study Design:** This research employs a theoretical and descriptive design.

**Methodology** The study thoroughly examined and analysed secondary data as well as current literature. Data were gathered from several published sources, including Remote's Global Work-Life Balance Index 2025, the ILO, the World Happiness Report, the Global Peace Index, and current employee surveys.

**Results:** Analysis revealed India ranked **42nd out of 60 countries** in Remote's Global Work-Life Balance Index 2025 (score **45.81**), a stark contrast to New Zealand's **1st place** (score **86.87**). Key contributing factors to India's lower ranking include average weekly working hours of **46.7**, prevalent "presenteeism," limited access to flexible work, non-uniform minimum wages, and lengthy commutes (e.g., Bengaluru commuters spent **34 minutes for a 10km ride**). Despite these challenges, a significant **78% of Indian employees prioritized family time** in a recent 2025 survey, indicating a growing demand for improved WLB.

**Conclusion:** India's current work culture poses a sustainability challenge for its growth. Achieving healthier, more productive and sustainable work-life balance necessitates a multi-faceted approach, integrating policy interventions, proactive organizational strategies, and individual empowerment. These methods are vital for the well-being and productivity of India's labour force.

*Key words: Work-Life Balance, Burnout, Global Rankings, Flexible Work.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The quest of work-life balance has evolved as a global necessity, with increased recognition as a foundation for employee well-being, sustainable productivity, and, ultimately, national progress. As nations grapple with the expanding demands of the modern workplace, the capacity to seamlessly integrate professional responsibilities with home life has emerged as an important indicator for both human well-being and economic stability.

India, a country currently enjoying enormous economic growth and boasting a sizable demographic dividend, is an intriguing and challenging case study in this global debate. With a rapidly rising economy and a young, hungry workforce, India is poised for significant global advances. However, this potential trajectory appears to be counterbalanced by a concerning reality: a persistently low ranking in global work-life balance indices. This apparent paradox raises serious concerns about India's growth model and the health of its human capital.
This study tries to delve into this duality, investigating the variables that contribute to India's difficult work-life balance scenario and identifying potential solutions.

**2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Amith, S. M., Devadiga, A. S., & Vivek, M.** This study critically examines work-life balance, highlighting its importance for both individuals and organizations, particularly within the Indian workforce. It investigates how working hours affect personal life and performance, comparing India's working hours to other countries and advocating for the "Right to Disconnect." The research also analyses the historical glorification of overtime in India, its implications for labour exploitation, the role of Indian labour laws, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work schedules and work-life balance.

**Vyas, L. (2022)**.This paper examines the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on labour markets, specifically focusing on the acceleration of flexible work arrangements and their challenge to traditional work structures, work-life balance, and employer-employee relationships. It investigates the distinct implications for manual and non-manual work, arguing that while hybrid and remote models will become more prevalent for non-manual roles, they will not entirely replace traditional practices or office environments, and manual labour will face increased demands. The study highlights employers' growing attention to work-life balance as a driver for employee motivation and classifies these labour market trends into "acceleration," "normalization," and "remodelling" categories, reflecting pre-existing changes that were either intensified or transformed by the pandemic.

**3.0 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

* To identify and analyse the key factors contributing to New Zealand's consistently high work-life balance ranking, and to critically compare these factors with the current work-life balance situation in India.
* To propose effective strategies and policy interventions that can be adopted to improve work-life balance in India.

**4.0 METHODOLOGY**

### 4.1 Research Design

This study employs a theoretical and descriptive research design. It primarily involves a comprehensive review and analysis of existing literature and secondary data to understand the multifaceted concept of work-life balance within the Indian context. The design is analytical in its approach, aiming to synthesize information and draw conclusions from the gathered data.

### 4.2 Data Collection Methods

The data for this research is exclusively secondary. The collection process involves a thorough examination of various published sources, including:

* Academic research papers and publications related to work-life balance.
* Reports and indexes from reputable organizations and governmental bodies focusing on work-life balance, labour markets, and employment trends.

## 5.0 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

## 5.1 Global Benchmarks: New Zealand's Model of Work-Life Balance

New Zealand has consistently distinguished itself on the global stage for its exemplary work-life balance, earning the top spot in Remote's Global Work-Life Balance Index for 2025 – a position it has held for the third consecutive year. This consistent performance underscores a deeply ingrained approach to work that prioritizes employee well-being alongside productivity.

### Key factors cited for NZ's success:

* **Statutory Annual Leave:** New Zealand offers a generous statutory annual leave entitlement, typically providing 32 days of annual leave (including public holidays) for full-time employees. This extensive time off allows individuals ample opportunity to rest, recharge, and engage in personal pursuits, significantly reducing the risk of burnout and fostering a healthier mental state.
* **Public Happiness:** New Zealand consistently ranks high in global happiness indices. This overarching sense of public well-being contributes to a positive work environment, as individuals are more likely to be content and less stressed outside of work, which naturally spills over into their professional lives. Factors contributing to this happiness include a strong social support system, a healthy environment, and a generally relaxed lifestyle.
* **Safety:** The country's high safety and low crime rates contribute to a sense of security and peace of mind for its citizens. When individuals feel safe in their daily lives, they are better able to focus on their work and personal lives without the added burden of constant worry or vigilance. This foundational sense of security is crucial for overall well-being.
* **Minimum Wage:** New Zealand boasts one of the highest minimum wages among the countries assessed in the index. A robust minimum wage ensures that even those in entry-level positions can maintain a decent standard of living, reducing financial stress and the need to work excessive hours to make ends meet. This economic security directly supports the ability to maintain a balanced life.
* **Culture of Respecting Life outside Work:** Perhaps the most pivotal factor is New Zealand's inherent cultural ethos, which deeply values leisure time and personal well-being. The pervasive "work to live" rather than "live to work" mentality encourages employers to respect the boundaries between professional and personal life. Flexible work policies, a general aversion to excessive overtime, and a strong emphasis on outdoor activities and community connection are all manifestations of this deeply embedded cultural value. This isn't just about policies; it's about a collective societal understanding that life extends beyond the workplace.

### How these factors contribute to healthy work-life integration:

These factors interweave to create a synergistic effect on work-life integration. Generous leave policies provide the opportunity for downtime, while a high minimum wage and a safe environment provide the means and peace of mind to truly utilize that time. The underlying culture reinforces these provisions, encouraging both employers and employees to embrace and protect life outside of work. This holistic approach ensures that individuals are not just physically present but also mentally and emotionally available for their personal lives, leading to higher job satisfaction, reduced stress, and ultimately, greater productivity when at work.

## 5.2 India’s Position: A Reality Check

In terms of work-life balance, India stands out from the global leaders. According to Remote's Global Work-Life Balance Index 2025, India ranks 42nd out of 60 countries, showing a significant disparity in the quality of work-life integration for its workers. This poorer ranking is the outcome of a combination of extremely ingrained cultural, economic, and structural problems.

### Primary Factors for India's Lower Ranking:

* **Long Average Working Hours:** Workforces in India are recognized for putting in some of the lengthiest hours anywhere in the world. According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), Indian employees work an average of 46.7 hours per week, with 51% of the workforce working 49 or more hours. This ranks India 13th among the world's most overworked nations. Such extended workdays offer little time for individual activities, family time, or rest, affecting work-life balance.
* **Culture of "Presenteeism":** A prevalent cultural belief in many Indian workplaces is that physical presence for long hours is synonymous with dedication and productivity, often irrespective of actual output. This "presenteeism" fosters an environment where employees feel compelled to stay late, even if their work is complete, to demonstrate commitment to their superiors. This leads to inefficient use of time and contributes to burnout.
* **Limited Access to Flexible Work Arrangements:** While the COVID-19 pandemic did accelerate the adoption of remote and hybrid work models in some sectors, widespread and equitable access to flexible work arrangements remains a challenge. Many traditional industries and smaller enterprises are yet to fully embrace flexible hours or work-from-home options, forcing employees to adhere to rigid schedules. Despite a recent ADP report showing 44% of Indian employees engaged in a fully flexible work model, a large segment of the workforce still lacks this crucial flexibility.
* **Wage Concerns:** India's minimum wage structure is not uniform across the country, varying by state, skill level, and industry. In many cases, minimum wages may not be sufficient to cover the rising cost of living, especially in urban centres. This often compels individuals to work longer hours, take on additional jobs, or compromise on leisure time to achieve financial stability, further eroding work-life balance.
* **Commute Times:** Particularly in India's densely populated metropolitan areas, notoriously long and congested commute times significantly eat into personal time. Cities like Bengaluru and Pune were among the top 10 most congested cities globally in 2023, with commuters spending an average of 28 minutes and 27 minutes respectively for a 10km ride. This daily grind adds hours to an already long workday, leaving individuals exhausted and with little energy for activities outside of work.

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| Metric | New Zealand (NZ) |  | India |  |
| Remote's Global Life-Work Index 2025 Ranking | 1 |  | 42 |  |
| Remote's Global Life-Work Index 2025 Score | 90.00 |  | 45.81 |  |
| Statutory Annual Leave (Days) | 32 |  | 35 |  |
| Average Working Hours per Week (ILO data) | 37 |  | 46.7 |  |
| Minimum Wage (USD/hour) | 14.00 (High) |  | Varies (Low, e.g., 1.50 - 3.00) |  |
| Public Happiness Score (out of 10) | 7.3 |  | 4.0 |  |
| LGBTQ+ Inclusivity Score (out of 100) | 85 |  | 50 |  |
| Public Safety Score (Global Peace Index) | Very High (Low Index Score) |  | Moderate (Higher Index Score) |  |

Table 1: Comparative Work-Life Balance Metrics (2025)

### 5.3 Employee Perspective:

Despite these challenging conditions, there is a clear and growing shift in priorities among Indian employees. Recent surveys, such as **Indeed's Future Career Resolution survey (conducted between December 2024 and January 2025)**, reveal that Indian workers are increasingly prioritizing **family time over career advancement**. The survey found that nearly **78% of Indian employees aim to prioritize family time** with spouses, children, and parents in 2025.

Furthermore, employees are actively seeking less stress, more focus on mental well-being, and jobs that offer flexibility for family and personal interests. The willingness of Indian workers to **leave jobs lacking flexibility** further underscores this evolving mind-set. This indicates a growing awareness and demand for a healthier balance, posing a significant challenge and opportunity for Indian organizations and policymakers.

## 6.0 STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN INDIA

## Improving work-life balance in India requires a multi-pronged approach, encompassing significant policy shifts, proactive organizational strategies, and individual employee empowerment. Given the deep-seated cultural norms and economic realities, a collaborative effort from government, industry, and individuals will be crucial for sustainable change.

### Policy Recommendations:

1. **Stronger Enforcement of Existing Labour Laws Regarding Working Hours and Overtime:**

Despite established labour laws such as the Factories Act of 1948 and various State Shops and Establishments Acts that specify a 48-hour work week and overtime provisions, enforcement remains a significant challenge, with the Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions (OSH) Code of 2020 still awaiting full, uniform implementation. The government must prioritize the swift and consistent enforcement of these new labour codes, particularly the OSH Code, ensuring stricter monitoring and penalties for noncompliance, as well as fair overtime compensation, particularly for white-collar workers who are frequently excluded from these protections, through regular audits and robust complaint mechanisms.

1. **Incentivizing Companies to Adopt Flexible Work Policies :**

While the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the feasibility and benefits of remote and hybrid work, widespread adoption remains low. The government and industry associations should implement incentives such as tax breaks, subsidies for technology that supports flexible work, or recognition programs for companies that successfully implement and sustain flexible arrangements, possibly drawing inspiration from discussions about a 3-day weekend initiative as part of the new Labour Code for 2025, and promoting case studies of successful models to serve as powerful incentives.

1. **Promoting National Awareness Campaigns on the Importance of Work-Life Balance and Mental Health:**

India's "hustle culture" and stigma against mental health are deeply ingrained. Launching nationwide public awareness campaigns, similar to those for physical health, is crucial to educate both employers and employees on the adverse effects of overwork and the benefits of work-life balance and mental well-being; these campaigns should feature prominent public figures and industry leaders championing work-life integration and destigmatizing discussions around stress and mental health, leveraging digital platforms and regional languages for broader response.

1. **Reviewing and Potentially Updating Labour Codes to Reflect Modern Work Realities:**

Even if the new labour laws attempt to consolidate, on-going assessment is required to ensure their relevance. Establishing a standing committee or expert panel comprising labour economists, industry representatives, mental health professionals, and employee representatives could facilitate periodic review of labour laws, ensuring they remain relevant to the evolving nature of work and proactively address emerging challenges related to work-life balance, such as the globally gaining "Right to Disconnect" from work communications after hours, which is also being discussed for India.

### 6.2 Organizational Strategies:

1. **Flexible Work Schedules:**

Employers should actively offer and promote remote work, hybrid models, flexitime (which allows employees to choose their start and end times), and compressed workweeks (for example, four 10-hour days), as these have been shown to increase productivity, retention, and employee well-being.

1. **Clear Boundaries:**

Organizations must encourage managers to set and enforce clear boundaries for after-hours communication, discouraging non-urgent emails or phone calls outside of work hours and actively respecting personal time; additionally, managers must be trained on how to support employee boundaries without compromising productivity.

1. **Focus on Outcomes, Not Hours:** Shifting performance evaluation systems from "time spent at desk" or "hours logged" to measurable "results achieved" and output quality empowers employees to effectively manage their time, work during peak productivity hours, and integrate personal commitments without guilt, directly addressing the issue of low actual productivity during long shifts..
2. **Mental Health Support:** To address India's low EAP utilization rates, it is critical to provide accessible Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that offer confidential counselling services for mental health, financial, and legal issues, as well as actively promoting a culture in which seeking help for mental health challenges is normalized and stigma-free, while proactively communicating and ensuring absolute confidentiality.
3. **Encourage Breaks and Time Off:** Managers should actively encourage employees to take regular short breaks during the workday, full lunch breaks, and to fully use their statutory annual leave and sick leave, with organizations implementing policies that make it simple for employees to apply for and take leave without fear of retaliation or an excessive workload upon their return.
4. **Leadership by Example:** Senior leadership and managers must actively model healthy work-life balance in order to set expectations; if leaders work excessive hours, it implicitly signals that such behaviour is expected, regardless of stated policies, whereas "supportive leadership and a culture of appreciation play a far bigger role in retaining talent than the number of hours spent at a desk," as noted by Manpower Group India's Lulu Khandesi.
5. **Skill Development:** Investing in employee and manager training programs on effective time management, delegation skills, stress management techniques, and digital well-being can help people take control of their workloads and manage their energy more effectively.
6. **Positive Work Environment:** Fostering a friendly, inclusive, and collaborative work culture that really appreciates employee well-being is critical; this includes maintaining open communication, rewarding efforts, and providing chances for growth and development.

### 6.3 Individual Strategies (Employees):

1. **Setting Personal Boundaries:**
	* **Practice:** Consciously decide on work hours and stick to them. Avoid checking work emails or taking calls outside of these hours. If working remotely, create a clear physical separation between work and home spaces.
2. **Effective Time Management and Task Prioritization:**
	* **Techniques:** Utilize tools and techniques like the Pomodoro Technique, Eisenhower Matrix (urgent/important), or time-blocking to prioritize tasks, minimize distractions, and maximize productivity during working hours.
	* **Learning:** Seek out training or resources on effective time management.
3. **Delegation (where applicable):**
	* **Skill:** For those in managerial or team lead roles, learn to effectively delegate tasks to team members. This reduces individual workload and empowers others.
4. **Following Hobbies and Interests Outside Work:**
	* **Benefit:** Engaging in pleasing activities outside of work is vital for mental and emotional transformation. Hobbies decrease stress, increase creativity, and provide a sense of drive beyond professional life.
5. **Prioritizing Healthiness :**
	* **Foundation:** Identify that physical and mental health is the basis of sustainable productivity.
	* **Routine:** Ensure sufficient sleep, maintain a balanced diet, and include regular physical activity into daily or weekly practices. These introductory elements are often the first to be ignored when work-life balance is poor.

By implementing these strategies at various levels, India can aspire to move beyond its current work-life balance challenges and foster a work culture that is not only economically productive but also conducive to the well-being and flourishing of its vast workforce.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

The worldwide landscape increasingly acknowledges work-life balance as a critical pillar for supporting employee well-being, increasing productivity, and achieving long-term national growth. This article has underlined the stark contrast between India's present position in the Remote's Global Work-Life Balance Index 2025 - 42nd out of 60 nations - and New Zealand's continuously high ranking. Whereas New Zealand flourishes on generous statutory leave, a robust social safety net, and a intensely deep-seated culture of respecting life outside of work, India is burdened with an inheritance of long working hours, the universal "presenteeism" culture, limited flexibility, and the important cost of long commutes.

The consequences of this imbalance are deep, demonstrating as amplified stress, burnout, and mental health challenges at the individual level, resulting in reduced productivity and progressive attrition for organizations, and posing important public health and societal well-being concerns for the nation as a whole. The Economic Survey 2024-25 openly highlighted the connection between poor workplace cultures, long working hours, and reduced worker productivity, highlighting that prioritizing mental health and welfare is not only a societal imperative, but also an economic necessity.

Attaining an improved, more sustainable work-life balance in India needs a multifaceted and strong-minded effort. The administration can deliver the essential policy outline by strengthening enforcement of existing labour rules, encouraging flexible work, and beginning nationwide awareness campaigns. Establishments must shift their emphasis from time spent to accomplishments achieved, invest in strong mental health support, set clear boundaries, and lead by example. People can allow themselves by managing their time effectively, creating personal limits, and prioritizing their physical and emotional health.

India is at a serious juncture, with a tough demographic dividend that can push it to extraordinary economic heights. However, this potential will only be fully realized if the country emphasizes the well-being of its huge workforce alongside its ambitious economic growth goals. By cultivating a work culture that values both dedication and personal flourishing, India can create a healthier, more engaged, and ultimately more productive population, ensuring that its rise to the global stage is not only rapid but also sustainable and inclusive. The pursuit of balance is not a luxury, but a strategic need for India's long-term success.

**DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)** Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

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