



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Work-Life Balance, Mental Health, and Sustainable Innovation: A Study of Women in Industry

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Abstract

Increasing female participation in modern economies highlights the critical intersection of work-life balance (WLB) and psychological well-being. This conceptual study examines WLB as a determinant of mental health and positions employee well-being as a strategic pathway toward SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). While existing research often treats these variables in isolation, this paper integrates them to explore their collective impact on organizational sustainability.

Drawing on Role Conflict, Conservation of Resources, Work-Family Border, and Human Capital theories, the study develops a framework explaining how workplace pressures and socio-cultural expectations influence innovative capacity. Through a thematic synthesis of global and Indian literature, the analysis identifies key organizational determinants of women's mental health. Findings suggest that gender-responsive practices, flexibility, and institutional support mechanisms enhance both individual well-being and long-term industrial resilience. Ultimately, the study conceptualizes mental health as a vital resource for sustainable industrial development and innovation performance.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Mental health, Working women, Sustainable industry, Innovation, SDG-9.

Introduction

In recent decades, rapid industrialization, technological advancement, and globalization have significantly transformed the nature of work across the world. These changes have expanded employment opportunities for women, enabling greater participation in industrial and innovation-driven sectors. While increased workforce participation has contributed to economic growth and gender empowerment, it has simultaneously introduced complex challenges related to work-life balance and mental health. For working women, balancing professional responsibilities with family and social expectations often

creates psychological strain, making work-life balance a critical factor influencing overall well-being and productivity.

The concept of work-life balance refers to the ability of individuals to effectively manage professional duties alongside personal, family, and social responsibilities. For working women, achieving this balance is particularly challenging due to persistent socio-cultural norms that assign primary caregiving and domestic roles to women, even when they are engaged in full-time employment. As industries evolve toward innovation-driven and knowledge-based systems, employees are increasingly exposed to high performance expectations, long working hours, and continuous technological adaptation. These demands can lead to occupational stress, emotional exhaustion, and declining mental health if adequate organizational and social support systems are not available.

Mental health has emerged as a crucial dimension of sustainable development, influencing individual productivity, organizational performance, and long-term industrial growth. Poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety, burnout, and psychological distress not only affect employees' quality of life but also reduce efficiency, creativity, and innovation capacity within industries. Therefore, promoting psychological well-being among working women is not merely a social concern but also an economic and developmental priority. Healthy employees

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How to cite this article: Prajapati, P., Makwana, D. (2026). Work-Life Balance, Mental Health, and Sustainable Innovation: A Study of Women in Industry. *The Scientific Temper*, 17(3):5924-5929.

Doi: 10.58414/SCIENTIFICTEMPER.2026.17.3.25

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None.

contribute more effectively to innovation processes, collaborative work environments, and sustainable industrial practices.

The relevance of this issue becomes particularly significant when examined through the lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Sustainable Development Goal 9 (SDG 9): Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure. SDG 9 emphasizes inclusive and sustainable industrialization and the promotion of innovation. However, sustainable industry cannot be achieved solely through technological investment and infrastructure development; it also requires human sustainability. The mental well-being and work satisfaction of employees—particularly women, who represent a growing proportion of the workforce—are essential for fostering innovation, creativity, and organizational resilience.

In emerging economies such as India, the participation of women in healthcare, education, corporate services, and industrial sectors has increased considerably. Despite this progress, many working women continue to experience role conflict arising from dual responsibilities at work and home. Limited workplace flexibility, insufficient childcare support, and societal expectations often intensify stress levels. Consequently, work–life imbalance may lead to reduced job satisfaction, decreased innovation potential, and adverse mental health outcomes. Addressing these challenges is essential for achieving inclusive industrial growth aligned with SDG 9 objectives.

Existing research has examined occupational stress, mental health, and women’s employment separately; however, limited studies integrate work–life balance with sustainable industry and innovation outcomes. Understanding how mental health functions as a mediating pathway between work–life balance and sustainable industrial development remains an important research gap. By linking psychological well-being with innovation and productivity, this study contributes to a broader understanding of sustainability that incorporates human-centered development alongside economic progress.

Therefore, the present study aims to explore how work–life balance influences the mental health of working women and how this relationship contributes to sustainable industry and innovation within the framework of SDG 9. The study seeks to provide a conceptual foundation for policymakers, organizations, and researchers to develop gender-sensitive workplace strategies that enhance employee well-being while supporting long-term industrial sustainability.

Problem Statements

Although women’s participation in industry and innovation sectors has increased substantially, many working women continue to experience difficulties in balancing professional and personal responsibilities. The dual demands of employment and family roles often result in role conflict,

occupational stress, and declining mental health. These challenges not only affect individual well-being but also influence organizational productivity, creativity, and innovation outcomes.

Existing studies have primarily examined work–life balance, occupational stress, or women’s mental health as separate constructs. Limited research has explored how work–life balance directly influences mental health and how this relationship contributes to sustainable industry and innovation, particularly within the framework of SDG 9. Furthermore, research in the Indian context remains fragmented, with insufficient integration of socio-cultural factors and sustainability perspectives.

The absence of a comprehensive conceptual understanding creates a gap in both academic research and policy development. Without addressing the psychological well-being of working women, efforts toward sustainable industrialization may remain incomplete. Therefore, there is a need to examine work–life balance as a pathway influencing mental health and to understand its broader implications for sustainable industry and innovation.

The present study seeks to address this gap by developing a conceptual framework that links work–life balance, mental health, and sustainable industrial development among working women, thereby contributing to both sustainability discourse and gender-sensitive organizational practices.

Research Gap and Objectives

Existing studies extensively examine occupational stress, gender roles, and work–life balance; however, most research addresses these constructs independently. Limited attention has been given to understanding how mental health functions as a mediating mechanism between work–life balance and sustainable organizational outcomes. Furthermore, empirical and conceptual studies rarely integrate HRM perspectives with sustainability frameworks such as SDG-9.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated conceptual framework linking workplace demands, work–life balance, mental health, and innovation performance. The objectives are: (1) to synthesize literature on work–life balance and mental health among working women; (2) to develop a theoretical framework connecting psychological well-being with sustainable industry; and (3) to propose theoretical propositions for future empirical validation.

Theoretical Foundations

Role Conflict Theory explains how incompatible expectations across professional and family roles generate psychological strain. Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that stress occurs when individuals perceive a loss of personal resources such as time, energy, and emotional capacity. Work–Family Border Theory highlights the difficulty of

managing boundaries between work and personal life, especially in flexible or remote work environments. Human Capital Theory further emphasizes that employee well-being enhances organizational performance through improved engagement and innovation capacity.

Integrating these theories provides a comprehensive explanation of how workplace demands influence mental health outcomes and organizational sustainability. Together, they support the argument that psychological well-being is a strategic organizational resource rather than a purely individual concern.

Literature Review

Scholarly research increasingly recognizes mental health among working women as a multidimensional outcome shaped by occupational structures, social expectations, and institutional support systems. Early empirical evidence highlights the role of workplace psychosocial conditions in influencing employee well-being. For instance, Shen (2005) demonstrated that high psychological demand combined with limited job control and inadequate organizational support significantly contributed to occupational stress among nurses. These findings suggest that mental health outcomes are strongly embedded within organizational environments rather than determined solely by individual coping capacity.

Global discussions further emphasize gendered dimensions of occupational stress. Reports by the International Labour Organization (2020) reveal that women constitute a substantial proportion of the healthcare workforce and experienced intensified psychological pressure during crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The coexistence of professional responsibilities and unpaid caregiving roles illustrates how structural gender inequalities continue to shape women's work experiences and emotional well-being.

Comparative occupational research provides additional insight into mental health dynamics across professions. Tyagi and Khokhar (2020) observed no significant difference in mental health levels between nurses and primary school teachers, indicating that psychological strain may arise from broader role expectations rather than occupational category alone. This finding challenges assumptions that certain professions inherently generate higher psychological distress and instead highlights the importance of work environment and role management.

Beyond empirical studies, leadership narratives such as Nooyi (2021) illustrate the emotional spillover between professional and personal domains. The difficulty of separating workplace identity from family roles reflects broader challenges faced by women navigating leadership and caregiving responsibilities simultaneously. Such perspectives contribute conceptual understanding of work–family boundary management within modern organizational contexts.

Within the Indian socio-cultural setting, Habeeb and Pallavi (2022) argue that modernization and globalization have intensified dual-role pressures among working women. Their findings emphasize that cultural expectations, family obligations, and social norms interact with workplace demands to influence psychological outcomes. Similarly, Agnes and Akhila (2023) reported that both working and non-working women demonstrate comparable levels of mental health and life satisfaction, suggesting that perceived role fulfillment and social support may be more influential than employment status itself.

A synthesis of existing literature reveals three dominant thematic patterns. First, workplace psychosocial factors such as autonomy, workload, and institutional support significantly determine mental health outcomes. Second, gendered social expectations contribute to persistent work–family conflict among women. Third, psychological well-being appears closely associated with perceived role satisfaction rather than employment participation alone. Despite these contributions, current research remains fragmented, with limited integration of mental health perspectives into sustainability and innovation discourse. Consequently, there remains a need for a comprehensive framework linking work–life balance, psychological well-being, and sustainable industrial development.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopts a conceptual research design to examine the relationship between occupational stress, work–family roles, and mental health among women. Conceptual research focuses on developing theoretical understanding by integrating existing scholarly knowledge rather than collecting primary empirical data. This approach is appropriate because the study aims to synthesize previous findings and propose a comprehensive framework explaining mental health outcomes among working and non-working women within the socio-cultural context of India.

Research Approach

A qualitative and interpretative approach was employed to analyze existing literature related to occupational stress, gender roles, and psychological well-being. The study followed a systematic review process to identify recurring theoretical constructs and patterns across prior empirical and conceptual studies. The approach enabled the researcher to critically evaluate similarities, differences, and gaps in earlier research findings.

Data Sources

The study relied exclusively on secondary data sources, including:

Peer-reviewed journal articles, Books and scholarly publications related to work–life balance and mental health, Reports published by international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), Published empirical studies focusing on working women, healthcare professionals, and comparative occupational groups

Only studies relevant to women’s mental health, occupational stress, and life satisfaction were included for analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

A thematic analysis method was used to synthesize the literature. The analysis involved the following stages:

Identification of key concepts related to occupational stress and mental health.

Categorization of findings into major themes such as workplace environment, gender role expectations, and life satisfaction.

Comparative evaluation of similarities and contradictions across studies.

Integration of themes to develop a unified conceptual understanding.

This analytical process allowed the researcher to derive theoretical relationships and identify research gaps.

Development of Conceptual Framework

Based on thematic synthesis, a conceptual framework was developed linking occupational stressors, socio-cultural expectations, and psychological outcomes. The framework assumes that workplace demands and family responsibilities jointly influence mental health, while social support and autonomy act as moderating factors.

Ethical Considerations

As the study is based solely on secondary sources, no human participants were involved. Ethical standards were maintained by properly acknowledging all original authors through APA-style citations and avoiding plagiarism through careful paraphrasing and referencing.

Limitations of the Methodology

Although conceptual research provides strong theoretical insight, it does not include primary empirical validation. Therefore, findings are interpretative in nature and future studies are recommended to test the proposed framework using quantitative or mixed-method research designs.

Discussion

The present conceptual study aimed to examine how work–life balance influences the mental health of working women and how psychological well-being contributes to sustainable industry and innovation within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 9 (SDG-9). The findings derived from thematic synthesis provide important insights into the interconnected relationship between organizational

practices, socio-cultural expectations, and employee well-being.

The analysis indicates that work–life balance functions as a central mechanism shaping mental health outcomes among working women. Consistent with Role Conflict Theory, the coexistence of professional and domestic responsibilities creates competing demands on time, emotional energy, and personal resources. When organizational expectations exceed individual coping capacity, psychological strain emerges in the form of stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. This supports earlier research suggesting that workplace structures and job design significantly influence employee well-being rather than mental health being solely an individual concern.

The discussion further highlights the importance of organizational support systems in moderating work–family conflict. Flexible work arrangements, supportive leadership, and inclusive HR policies appear to reduce psychological pressure and enhance employee engagement. From the perspective of Conservation of Resources Theory, such institutional support helps individuals preserve emotional and cognitive resources, thereby improving resilience and work satisfaction. Organizations that invest in employee well-being indirectly strengthen productivity and reduce workforce attrition.

Another significant insight relates to the role of socio-cultural expectations in shaping women’s mental health experiences. In many developing contexts, including India, women continue to carry primary caregiving responsibilities despite increased workforce participation. This dual burden intensifies role conflict and limits recovery time, reinforcing the argument that gender norms remain an important structural determinant of psychological well-being. Therefore, achieving sustainable industry requires not only organizational reforms but also broader social recognition of shared caregiving responsibilities.

Importantly, the study positions mental health as a strategic contributor to innovation capacity. Psychologically healthy employees demonstrate higher creativity, collaboration, and adaptive problem-solving abilities—competencies essential for innovation-driven industries emphasized under SDG-9. Poor mental health, conversely, leads to reduced engagement and diminished innovative performance. These findings extend Human Capital Theory by suggesting that employee well-being should be considered an organizational asset contributing to long-term industrial sustainability.

The discussion also reveals that employment status alone does not determine mental health outcomes. Evidence indicates that both working and non-working women may experience comparable psychological well-being depending on levels of autonomy, social support, and role satisfaction. This suggests that quality of work experience and supportive environments are more critical

than employment participation itself. Consequently, organizational policies must prioritize psychological safety and work–life integration rather than focusing solely on workforce inclusion.

Overall, the study contributes to sustainability discourse by integrating mental health into discussions of industrial development and innovation. Sustainable industry cannot be achieved solely through technological advancement or infrastructure expansion; it requires a healthy, motivated, and psychologically supported workforce. By recognizing work–life balance as a pathway connecting employee well-being with innovation outcomes, the study provides a human-centered perspective on SDG-9 implementation.

Observations and Finding

Based on the systematic review and thematic analysis of existing literature on work–life balance, mental health, and women’s participation in industry, several important observations emerged. These findings highlight the interconnected relationship between psychological well-being and sustainable industrial development.

Work–Life Balance as a Determinant of Mental Health

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that imbalance between professional responsibilities and personal life contributes significantly to psychological stress among working women. High workload, long working hours, and limited flexibility often lead to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout. Women experiencing supportive workplace environments and flexible policies demonstrate better mental health outcomes and higher job satisfaction. This observation suggests that work–life balance functions as a primary predictor of psychological well-being.

Dual Role Conflict and Psychological Strain

A recurring finding across the literature is the presence of dual-role expectations. Working women frequently manage professional duties alongside caregiving and household responsibilities. This role conflict increases mental fatigue and reduces recovery time, negatively affecting emotional stability. Socio-cultural expectations further intensify this burden, particularly in developing economies where domestic responsibilities remain disproportionately assigned to women.

Organizational Support Enhances Well-being and Productivity

Studies emphasize that organizational factors such as workplace support, job control, and positive leadership significantly influence mental health. Supportive policies—including flexible working arrangements, maternity benefits, and employee assistance programs—reduce occupational stress and improve engagement levels. Employees

with higher psychological well-being demonstrate greater motivation, creativity, and commitment toward organizational goals.

Mental Health as a Driver of Innovation and Sustainable Industry

An important observation emerging from the analysis is that mental health directly contributes to innovation capacity. Psychologically healthy employees show improved problem-solving ability, collaboration, and adaptability—qualities essential for innovation-driven industries. Poor mental health, in contrast, leads to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and decreased innovative performance. Therefore, employee well-being becomes a foundational element of sustainable industrial growth aligned with SDG 9.

Importance of Gender-Sensitive Industrial Policies

The literature highlights the need for gender-inclusive organizational practices. Industries that promote equality, flexible work arrangements, and mental health awareness contribute not only to employee well-being but also to sustainable productivity. Gender-sensitive policies help reduce workforce attrition and enhance long-term organizational resilience.

The overall synthesis suggests that work–life balance influences mental health, and improved mental health acts as a pathway toward sustainable industry and innovation. When organizations support the psychological well-being of working women, they foster higher productivity, creativity, and innovation capacity, thereby contributing directly to the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 9.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper highlights the strategic importance of work–life balance and mental health for working women within modern organizational environments. By integrating HRM and sustainability perspectives, the study demonstrates that psychological well-being plays a central role in fostering innovation and sustainable industrial growth. Future empirical research can validate the proposed framework across sectors and cultural contexts, further strengthening the relationship between employee well-being and sustainable development.

Implications

The findings of this study offer important implications for theory, practice, and policy. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends existing work–life balance and mental health literature by linking psychological well-being with sustainable industry and innovation under SDG-9. It highlights mental health as a strategic organizational resource rather than solely an individual concern.

From a practical perspective, organizations should adopt gender-sensitive human resource practices such as

flexible working arrangements, supportive leadership, and employee mental health programs to reduce work–family conflict among working women. Promoting a supportive work environment can enhance employee engagement, creativity, and innovative performance.

From a policy perspective, policymakers should encourage workplace regulations that support work–life integration, equal opportunities, and mental health awareness. Integrating employee well-being into sustainability and industrial development strategies can contribute to inclusive growth and long-term organizational resilience aligned with SDG-9 objectives.

Acknowledgement

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the research guide and co-author, Dr. Dipak Makwana, for continuous guidance, valuable suggestions, and academic support throughout the development of this research work. The author also acknowledges the institutional support and encouragement received during the preparation of this manuscript.

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