

“Taking the Road Less Travelled”: Exploring the Work and Family Demands of Women in the Trucking Industry

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Abstract

Employee well-being has become a primary concern for organisations, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. This period sparked considerable research interest among organisational scholars regarding its impact on employee well-being and work experiences. In this study, we explore how work and family demands affected the well-being of women in the South African transport and logistics industry during the later stages of the pandemic. There is a need to understand the work and family demands that displace women in the trucking industry, more so to understand such practices towards the return to work and normality after the pandemic. Work and family demands are at the centre of employees' lives, and women are faced with a dual role when compared to their male counterparts. We followed a qualitative research approach and sampled 12 women from a large transport and logistics organisation in South Africa using non-probability purposive sampling. The selected sample included participants from various job categories, at job levels ranging from unskilled workers to senior-management level. We employed thematic analysis to analyse the data. The research results indicate that work and family demands affect the physical and psychological well-being of women employees. The well-being of employees forms an integral part of organisations. The employment relations and human resources departments should therefore adopt a strategic approach to ensuring employees' well-being is positioned at the top of their departmental list as a focus point of activities.

Keywords: employee well-being; work demands; family demands; work–family conflict; work–life balance

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Introduction

The well-being of employees is a well-researched topic, with scholars noting that women are more likely than men to suffer mental disorders owing to the daily pressures they face (Sandy et al., 2022; Thibaut & Wyngaarden-Cremers, 2020). It has also been indicated that women struggle to fulfil family demands while employed, they often take more sick leave than their male counterparts (Nordenmark et al., 2020) and are likely to suffer poor psychological health. The well-being of employees has implications for their work and non-work activities, as one could have an impact on the other (Kundi et al., 2020). There has been a decline in support for the traditional concept of men being breadwinners and women being family managers (Sundaresan, 2014). Work and family are intertwined in that individuals' work input affects their work–life balance (Cohen & Liani, 2009). In South Africa, there is an appreciable increase in the number of female employees across all sectors, particularly in the transport and logistics industry, where the presence of female employees is evident at various employment levels (Casale & Posel, 2002).

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on women's physical and mental well-being and careers, mainly owing to the added pressure of balancing family responsibilities while working from home (Deloitte, 2020; Venkatesh, 2020). In addition, there is a lack of gender parity in pay and career advancement, with fewer women in leadership roles (Stielow et al., 2021). Women in the transport and logistics industry face work–family conflict, which presents challenging dilemmas, as they are expected to manage their workloads optimally while also fulfilling their family obligations (Radó et al., 2015); this can therefore result in work–family conflict. Work–family conflict is particularly challenging for women, as they face more household pressures (Wang et al., 2020).

Physical work demands, such as loading and offloading trucks and driving long distances, can be physically strenuous and require psychological resilience. Women in the transport and logistics industry often work long hours, including night and weekend shifts, which can be difficult for those with childcare responsibilities (Dunifon et al., 2013). Long-haul drivers suffer from musculoskeletal disorders, which also affect women drivers (Sekkey et al., 2018). This added pressure on women's physical and psychological well-being highlights the importance of investigating their work satisfaction, which ultimately affects their productivity (Connerley & Wu, 2016). To better understand how women employees in the transport and logistics industry manage their work and family demands and the implications of such demands on their well-being, further research is necessary.

Literature Review

Daily, individuals from various work industries are expected to juggle family and work roles (Bakar & Salleh, 2015). Women face the challenge of striking a balance between the household roles and the role they occupy in the workplace. These two roles are sometimes incompatible and may lead to conflict (Anand & Vohra, 2022). Bakar and Salleh (2015) indicate that work–family conflict occurs when parents’ work demands, especially when this entails weekend work, prevent them from spending time with their children.

There is an ongoing discussion on whether paid work and family demands affect the well-being of working mothers and fathers (Tobergte & Curtis, 2013). In the present study, we focused on the work-family demands placed on women. Inter-role conflict exists because of the evolution of the traditional roles of women and men in society. Previously, men were regarded as the sole providers, while women were expected to stay home and raise the children (Akinnusi et al., 2018). This traditional approach lacks relevance in today’s world, as married and unmarried women work to support their families (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). In South Africa, before 1994, women faced significant disadvantage and unfair discrimination based on gender, leading to widespread gender inequalities. Today, these historical inequities are being addressed through affirmative action measures, particularly under the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998.

Akinnusi et al. (2018) found that working women reported that their roles at home were influenced by the demands of their workplace. In some instances, they travel long distances to work, and 70% of the participants indicated that working hours also have an impact on the quality time they spend with their families (Halonen et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2020). A South African report that was issued in 2015 indicates that, even though women have high levels of education, they still face the possibility of remaining in low-level job categories and lower income brackets owing to the gender imbalances from the past (Department: Women, 2015).

Work and Family Demands

Work demands or job demands can be defined as aspects of the job that require mental and physical exertion and can be linked to physiological and psychological consequences. Job demands refer to the various facets of a job that necessitate continuous physical and mental (cognitive and emotional) exertion or expertise, consequently resulting in specific physiological and/or psychological implications (Bakker et al., 2023). Such demands include intense work pressure, an unfavourable physical setting, and irregular work schedules (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). When coupled with family demands, these demands can lead to health issues (Mostert, 2009). However, employees with high work demands experience less stress when the appropriate resources are readily available and accessible (Van den Broeck et al., 2013).

Resources are the equipment or tools that assist employees in carrying out their expected tasks (Jagodics & Szabó, 2014). Organisational culture and supervisor support are examples of job resources that can also be factors contributing to stress (Achour et al., 2017).

Women tend to be more affected by work demands that spill over into the family setting (Schieman et al., 2009). This spillover can occur in four ways: negative work to family, negative family to work, positive work to family, and positive family to work (Sirgy et al., 2020). Organisations may regard flexible working hours as part of their culture to assist their employees with their work and family demands (Sok et al., 2014).

Family demands refer to commitments outside of work, such as family and community activities (Rashid et al., 2016). The number of children, the age of the youngest child, and the marital status of women all influence their job demands (Gjerberg, 2003). Family demands are further influenced by family settings, with some participants in a study indicating that their children required assistance with homework, while others had infrastructure constraints preventing them from living with their children (Jacobs et al., 2008). Being the sole breadwinner was also noted as a significant pressure leading to workplace mistakes (Jacobs et al., 2008). Family demands can include household chores, such as cooking, homework, bathing children and laundry.

Work–Family Conflict

Work–family conflict is a clash between family and work demands, with a struggle to prioritise either the occupational or household responsibilities, which affects employees' well-being (García-Cabrera et al., 2018; Masuda et al., 2019; Nohe & Sonntag, 2014; Rasheed et al., 2018). Female employees experience greater work–family conflict than their male counterparts, often perceiving their jobs as interfering more with family commitments (Grönlund, 2007; Ruiz Castro, 2012; Walsh, 2013). Work–family conflict is threefold, namely, time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict (Magnini, 2009). Time-based conflict occurs when multiple roles compete for one individual's time, such as long working hours or shift work affecting the time spent with children, the spouse and the family (Lambert et al., 2006). Strain-based conflict refers to the strain produced by another role; the two roles are incompatible, as the demands of one domain affect the demands of the other domain, for example, when work demands negatively affect family life. The third category is behaviour-based conflict, which arises when two roles are not congruent (work and family roles). In other words, this is when two roles lack compatibility (Lambert et al., 2006). According to Belwal and Belwal (2023), the consequence of such strain on women can lead to increased turnover intention and reduced organisational commitment. Studies have indicated the implications of work–life conflict and its negative impact on work–life balance and employee performance (Isa & Indrayati, 2023), women's well-being, stress and burnout (Ademuyiwa et al., 2021).

Methodology

The primary research objective was to investigate the strategies employed by women employees to balance work and family demands and to assess the impact of these strategies on their overall well-being.

Research Approach

In the study, we adopted a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and views (Spencer et al., 2020). The method provided valuable insights into the work and family demands experienced by women.

Research Philosophy

We employed the interpretivist philosophy in this study, which is shaped by the underlying ontology and epistemology. Ontology is concerned with what is considered reality and how it can be studied, while epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge. In the study, we assumed that there is a reality that exists and, through the application of ontology philosophy, the reality needed to be tested (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher embraced a constructionist ontology, recognising that the participants actively constructed their own understanding of the world. Epistemologically, a subjective perspective was adopted to explore the participants' subjective perceptions and experiences. This approach aligns with interpretivism, which aims to analyse the world by considering the perspectives of the individuals being studied, thereby embracing the multiplicity and diversity of realities. The researcher gathered knowledge through open-ended questions and interpreted the knowledge that was gathered into findings. In the study, we employed a deductive approach, which is considered appropriate for a qualitative study in which theory will be tested (Saunders et al., 2019).

Population and Sample

The sample comprised 12 women participants from a large transport and logistics organisation. We used a non-probability sampling technique and selected a convenience sampling method. The researcher gained approval for access to the organisation. The study was approved by the head of human resources. The participants had a mean age of 37.75 and an average of 2 dependents. Their job levels varied from semi-skilled and junior management to senior management.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews (using open-ended questions) as part of the data collection strategy. As part of the research procedure, ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee. Subsequently, the organisation was approached to obtain access to its employees. Approval was granted, and the human resources department acted as the gatekeeper for the study. The

employees were accessed at their convenience, and interviews were scheduled in advance. Owing to the range of the job, the participants were contacted by the researcher telephonically to explain the study and to invite them to participate. Once the participant agreed to participation, an email explaining the study and consent form were sent to each participant. The interviews took place at the participant's convenience and online through Microsoft Teams. The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the sample that was employed in the study. Examples of questions asked in the interviews were: Describe the job demands that you experience at work, from the job demands you mentioned, how do they affect your work–life and from the job demands you mentioned, how do they affect family commitments?

Table 1

Participant Profile

Participant	Age	Dependants	Job Level
P1	37	2	Junior management
P2	32	2	Semi-skilled
P3	35	2	Semi-skilled
P4	22	2	Unskilled
P5	39	3	Junior management
P6	40	2	Unskilled
P7	40	3	Senior management
P8	49	2	Semi-skilled
P9	47	2	Semi-skilled
P10	39	3	Semi-skilled
P11	42	1	Junior management
P12	31	1	Semi-skilled

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the study, we applied a thematic analysis process to analyse data gathered. We followed Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step process, which consisted of the following:

- familiarising with the data by listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts;
- generating initial codes by breaking down data into less complex terms and identifying patterns;
- searching for emergent themes that group the codes;
- reviewing potential themes by validating their relevance to the research question and coherence;
- defining and naming themes with concise and informative descriptions; and
- producing a report by incorporating notes from the analysis and finalising the themes and codes identified.

The trustworthiness of qualitative research was ensured through strategies to achieve dependability, confirmability, credibility and transferability (Bryman, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure dependability, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail to enable the reader to scrutinise the methodology (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Tobin and Begley (2004) note that, to ensure confirmability, the findings have to be neutral and consistent with the data (Cropley, 2001). Credibility was assured through member checking with the participants to ensure they agreed with the findings (Jeanfreau & Jack, 2010). This study achieved transferability by ensuring the findings are relatable to the readers (Cope, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning the study, we obtained a clearance certificate through the Ethics Committee of the University of Johannesburg with clearance number (IPPM-2021-556 (M)). Participation was voluntary, and we informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences (Marshall et al., 2006). We adhered to the research ethics throughout this study.

Findings

In this study, we aimed to explore work and family demands on the well-being of female employees. Seven themes were identified through the use of a thematic analysis process. Table 2 presents the summary of these themes and the subthemes.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes of the Study

Themes and Subthemes		
T1: Changes in work	Changes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic that affected work	Work arrangements Work restrictions Work pressures
T2: Perceived job demands	Job demands from employers and how these affect the employees' work life	Commuting to work Physical job demands Abnormal hours of work
T3: Work–life integration	Integration of work life and family life, including family demands placed on women and how these affect work commitments	Job demands and their impact on work–life balance Job demands on family commitment Family demands Family–life integration
T4: Employee well-being	The well-being dynamics that the participants experience	Physical well-being Psychological well-being
T5: Workplace policy and organisational initiatives	Policies and organisational initiatives to support female employees	Policy awareness Lack of policy awareness Employee assistance programmes

Themes and Subthemes		
T6: Organisational support	Any form of support that the organisation offers its employees	Growth and development Training and management support
T7: Individual well-being	Personal strategies employees employ to cope with work or family demands	Personal strategies Support structure

Theme 1: Changes In Work

The changes in work comprises three subthemes, namely, work arrangements, work restrictions and work pressures.

Work Arrangements

Two participants indicated that during the pandemic their job demands changed with regard to how they render their services to the employers. They moved to remote work and virtual meetings became popular.

So, from a pandemic perspective, the big benefit was that I had the ability to work from home and work remotely, which has really opened up more opportunity to add more value, because you're not sitting in traffic, you're not stressing about your kids. When you're working, you're focused on your work. The big benefit was that I had the ability to work from home and work remotely. (P7, 40, married, top management)

The work arrangements of the other participants remained the same as they were part of the essential services.

Work Restrictions

Three participants indicated that there were work restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant 11 indicating that petrol stations where they would normally deliver fuel were not busy. Participant 3 indicated that revenue went down, as the focus was not on interprovincial, but rather on local loads. Participant 7 indicated that interprovincial travel was restricted.

But there were days when we stayed at home, because they were not really busy that time, the garages, everything was locked down. (P11, 42, married, junior management)

It was, in a way, affected. I think the loads had dropped down a little bit. I'm more focused on the revenue, to see that the clients, we are being paid correctly for the kilometres that were travelled. So, with the pandemic, it was a bit down, because we did fewer local loads as opposed to like when it's normal. (P3, 35, married, semi-skilled)

I think, on the travel side, initially, it was a benefit in the sense that the travel reduced. (P7, 40, married, top management)

Work Pressures

Two participants indicated that there were additional work pressures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant 7 indicated that they had to travel often now as during the pandemic travelling was not allowed. Participant 12 indicated that there were times where some employees would isolate and this increased the work pressure.

But there were days when we stayed at home, because they were not really busy that time, the garages, everything was locked down. (P11, 42, married, junior management)

The travel has almost, like, gone to the other extreme way. Now, people feel like we need to catch up all the time that we have lost. So, now we are traveling more than we did before COVID. (P7, 40, married, top management)

It was actually more work when one of us was sick. Otherwise, when all of us were on shift, it was fine. (P12, 31, engaged, semi-skilled)

Theme 2: Perceived Job Demands

Under this theme three subthemes were identified, namely, commuting to work, physical job demands and abnormal hours of work.

Commuting to Work

Two participants (P2 and P10) indicated that commuting is one of the job demands they face, as they have to commute to work in order to meet their contractual obligations.

Mine, basically, is the traveling, because I work so far. So, I have to take two taxis. So, sometimes, like, if one taxi is late, then I can show up late at work. And that is . . . my biggest, like, stress. (P2, 32, married, semi-skilled)

Physical Job Demands

A job that is physically challenging can be difficult for female employees. Participant 6 commented that the job she is assigned is not suited to women. Participant 4 commented that a colleague miscarried owing to the pressure of the physical work.

A crate alone weighs two kilogrammes. Then, inside it, depends what item it is. So, maybe a crate has chicken breast. Then there are 15 packs of chicken breast in the crate. So, one crate will maybe weigh like 15 kilogrammes or 14 kilogrammes. (P6, 40, married, unskilled)

A month later, she told me that she had a miscarriage, and then I told her, but I told her to go speak, because anything can happen. We don't know what the cold or the heavy duty that we working with can do to our bodies. (P4, 22, married, unskilled)

Abnormal Hours of Work

Three participants indicated that shift patterns affected their family life.

Nightshift is also bad, as you are not home. You cannot really cook for the people that are home. (P12, 31, engaged, semi-skilled)

I have to leave home, like, before five to get to work, because I travel with the public transport. (P4, 22, married, unskilled)

These five weeks are too long. I think it's supposed to be 21 days and seven days off. Two weeks ago, last week, I received a new roster. The new roster said we will work six weeks now and off seven days. (P8, 49, widow, semi-skilled)

Theme 3: Work–Life Integration

This theme has four subthemes, namely, job demands and their impact on work–life balance, job demands and family commitments, family demands and home–life integration.

Job Demands and Their Impact on Work–Life Balance

Overall, the theme highlights the challenges the participants face in maintaining a healthy work–life balance owing to various work demands, such as long hours, high job demands, physical tasks, gender biases, and the resulting exhaustion and impact on their personal life. Seven participants were of the view that job demands affected their work–life balance. Participant 2 indicated that some days are stressful. Participant 7 indicated that she was tired because of the high job demands and that back-to-back meetings have a negative impact on her productivity levels. Participant 11 indicated that she had to always prove herself as a woman driver because she worked in a male-dominated environment. Participant 6 commented that her physical job demands are a challenge. Participant 5 indicated that the nine hours that she was given to perform her duties were not always enough. Participant 3, however, had time to stretch and make coffee during working hours.

So, you get your stressful days, but the part I enjoy about it is interacting with the different people, like Vector Logistics. (P2, 32, married, semi-skilled)

I think, from a work–life perspective, you just, you get tired. . . . I think your productivity levels drop when you are back-to-back the whole time . . . You are struggling to find the time to actually get the work done. (P7, 40, married, top management)

I love working, but coming to work, I was always unhappy, because I always have to prove myself, like I said. And it's like the guys do not really take note of me, but don't take me seriously, because I'm a woman. (P11, 42, married, junior management)

Job Demands and Family Commitments

The majority of the respondents indicated that job demands negatively affect their family commitments, and in various ways. Seven participants indicated that they do not spend enough time with their children owing to job demands.

I do not see him every day. He is growing up; he is 11 now, and he is at that stage now where he is naughty. (P12, 31, engaged, semi-skilled)

They affect it, because, if I work six to nine, there is nothing I can do. Some weekends, we are resting. (P9, 47, live-in partner, semi-skilled, machine operator)

I get home late, so then I don't really have time for them. Like I told you, maybe I get home, they might be sleeping already. (P4, 22, married, unskilled)

Family Demands

All 12 participants had demands in the form of home duties, such as cooking, laundry, groceries, school runs, homework and spending quality time with their families.

There is laundry. There is so many things that need to get done, basically chores. (P5, 39, live-in partner, junior management)

Oh, yeah, because I do not have anyone else to help me, then I am obligated to cook, do the washing, and I'm just going to go into it. I've been very stressed lately. I've been dealing with a lot lately, and it's caused me to get sick a lot. (P2, 32, married, semi-skilled)

Home–Life Integration

Three participants (P4, P2 and P5) indicated that they were tired and stressed by either work or family demands. Three participants indicated that home–life and work–life integration can be challenging.

At times, I come to work, I am very tired, because we do not always get rest, like for proper hours. We need eight hours to sleep. (P4, 22, married, unskilled)

So, there are times where you're distracted with that, when your child is sick, for example. (P7, 40, married, top management)

Sometimes, things do happen in your personal capacity that hinders you to perform well the job demands that needs to happen. (P1, 37, married, junior management)

Theme 4: Employee Well-Being

Employee well-being has two subthemes, namely, physical well-being and psychological well-being.

Physical Well-Being

Five participants (P7, P9, P11, P5 and P12) mentioned that they were always tired because of their day-to-day family and job demands. Participant 5 had attended counselling, as her well-being had been affected by her work.

So, I think it is as exhausting . . . some days. (P7, 40, married, top management).

The only problem is my work. To tell you the truth, even like now, I am feeling to quit this job, because I cannot anymore. My back, my body is too much now for me, because this job is for men, it's not for women. (P6, 40, married, unskilled)

Because I am just so tired, physically and emotionally. And, actually, says she even suggested that I see a psychologist for counselling with regard to these retrenchments. (P5, 39, live-in partner, junior management).

Psychological Well-Being

The study found that three out of the 12 participants reported negative impacts on their psychological well-being owing to work-related stress, including fatigue, emotional strain, and physical exhaustion, with one participant considering seeing a psychologist for counselling and another contemplating resigning from their job. One participant expressed feeling overwhelmed with the demands of work and family responsibilities, leading to increased stress and impacting their well-being.

Because I am just so tired, physically and emotionally . . . and, actually, says she even suggested that I see a psychologist for counselling with regard to these retrenchments. (P5, 39, live-in partner, junior management).

Participant 1 indicated that her physical well-being was affected by the demands of the job, and that she was contemplating resigning.

So, this technically has an impact on my well-being, because I am everybody's support, if I could put it that way. There's a lot of stress on me. It is a lot of stress on me because I take care of the kids. I need to see to their homework. I need to see that my deadlines are met, and it gets too much. (P1, 37, married, junior management).

Theme 5: Workplace Policy and Organisational Initiatives

This theme has four subthemes, namely, policy awareness, lack of policy awareness, training and management support, and employee assistance programme (EAP).

Policy Awareness

Only two participants were aware of workplace policies. Both mentioned the maternity leave policy, and one mentioned the sexual harassment policy.

Yes, there is a maternity policy in place. I will say that it's not the most supportive policy that I've seen. I think it's not the worst one either. (P7, 40, married, top management)

There is a sexual harassment policy, which I know usually affects women more than men, which protects women against the many men. We have maternity leave policy which is 66% after six months of employment. (P5, 39, live-in partner, junior management)

Lack of Policy Awareness, Training and Management Support

Six participants indicated that they were not aware of any policy that the company has to support women in the workplace.

Not that I am aware of, no, not that I am aware of. If there is, maybe you would know better, but not that I know of. (P1, 37, married, junior management)

Not aware of any policies. (P12, 31, engaged, semi-skilled)

I am not aware of any policies. (P9, 47, live-in partner, semi-skilled, machine operator)

I have to look around. I'm not really aware of, but I am sure, as I mentioned, that if counselling was able to be arranged, so definitely I just need to re-familiarise myself. (P3, 35, married, semi-skilled)

Employee Assistance Programme

Two participants mentioned an employee assistant programme the organisation offered to employees. Participant 3 indicated that she had benefited from this.

Actually, I am aware, at some point, there was a counselling given to me when things were a bit hard for me to handle, and that is what I am aware currently of. (P3, 35, married, semi-skilled)

Theme 6: Organisational Support

This theme has two subthemes, namely, training and management support and growth and development.

Training and Management Support

The participants indicated various ways in which the organisation supports women employees, such as training opportunities, leadership development programmes, management support, and the provision of female bathrooms. Participant 1 had participated in a development programme aimed at women, while Participant 9 received

regular training. Participants 5, 11 and 12 all appreciated the support provided by their managers, with participant 11 even having a bathroom built specifically for her. The organisation's efforts to support women in various ways were positively received by the participants.

At one stage, when I joined the company, [name hidden] did try to do female leadership coaching. I remember [name hidden, name hidden] and myself was on the course, but it was more around leadership development rather than juggling work-life balance and being a mom, etc. (P7, 40, married, top management)

I appreciated that. Also, I think the support from my manager, as well, is greatly appreciated, because with, you know, we had like 100 people being retrenched. (P5, 39, live-in partner, junior management)

Growth and Development

Five participants indicated that they would like to see more women empowered. Participant 4 indicated that the company should invest in managers to enable them to be more supportive of women in the workplace, and that the organisation should consider promoting women who are truck assistants to office jobs.

I think the company can invest. There's a programme currently that I'm in that is focusing on women. Such programmes need to be expanded, and not only do they have to end academically, but in terms of, as a woman, I will have to grow to a certain level positions to execute your learning from this kind of programmes that I'm in currently that focuses on women. (P3, 35, married, semi-skilled)

For the organisation to place women in leadership roles; more female drivers. (P9, 47, live-in partner, semi-skilled)

Theme 7: Individual Well-Being

This theme has two subthemes, namely, personal strategies and support structure.

Personal Strategies

Four participants meditated as a way of coping with demands. Participant 12 watched television programmes, participant 6 exercised, participant 1 prayed, and participant 2 listened to music.

I watch a movie and watch TV, stuff like that. Lie down, that's how I try to use my alone time. So, I don't go out much. (P12, 31, engaged, semi-skilled)

I have joined the gym because I don't have a choice. All the heavy stuff I'm picking up during the day. At least I can go exercise. And it's not that much stiff anymore, my back and my arms, because, before, it's my first year now, I joined in January for the two years. (P6, 40, married, unskilled)

Support Structure

Participant 7 indicated that having a mentor is a good strategy that anyone could adopt, and that she had had good mentors.

I think I've had exceptional mentors in my career, and I think that's been, funny enough, they've all been male, but they've all been family men and they've all played a significant role in supporting me as a woman in business. (P7, 40, married, top management)

Discussion

This section entails the discussion of themes derived from the study as pointed out in the findings section above. The discussion of the research findings is centred on the three research questions. The objectives of the study were achieved through an interview setting, and, in order to achieve these, seven themes were identified.

Theme 1: Changes In Work

Although the study was not about the COVID-19 pandemic, we established that significant changes relating to work were introduced and became popular during the pandemic such as remote work and work from home (Dhanpat et al., 2022). This theme relates to the changes in work that were introduced and gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote work is not a new concept (Den Dulk & Groeneveld, 2013), but was not as widely practised as during the lockdown. The organisation under the study had never introduced this method. The findings indicate that working from home has a positive spillover, owing to the flexibility in work schedules. This flexibility allows employees, particularly women, to better manage their work and personal responsibilities (Uddin, 2021). The findings further indicate that teleworking improves efficiencies and productivity levels, which is aligned with the literature (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). However, some participants experienced an increased workload because of the pandemic when their team members were absent. In this regard, there is a need for organisations to carefully manage workloads and ensure proper distribution of tasks to maintain a healthy work–life balance for employees (Sultana et al., 2023).

Theme 2: Perceived Job Demands

The findings related to the job demands that the participants encountered in the workplace indicate that all 12 participants experienced physical and psychological job demands (Ziaei et al., 2019). Job demands have been indicated to be a contributing factor to staff turnover (Pienaar & Bester, 2011). For instance, one participant, who worked as an unskilled worker, expressed her consideration of leaving the organisation owing to the high demands of her job. Furthermore, seven participants reported arriving home late on occasion because of high job demands, resulting in their inability to prepare dinner or spend time with their children. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ziaei et al. (2019), which indicated that the seven participants, employed as

machine operators, unskilled workers or semi-skilled workers, stated that their shift work involved overtime and weekend work. Shift work has been recognised as physically and mentally demanding, especially when continuous operations are required (Akoensi, 2017; Wöhrmann et al., 2020). These findings underscore the importance of addressing job demands and implementing strategies to support employees in managing their work responsibilities alongside their personal lives (Akoensi, 2017; Halonen et al., 2019; Ziaei et al., 2019).

In the transport industry, flexibility is crucial to meet job demands. The participants employed as drivers or machine operators mentioned the lack of scheduled time for offloading, which sometimes required them to sleep away from home. This poses challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, as it limits the time available for personal and family commitments. Organisations in such industries need to recognise the unique demands placed on employees and develop supportive policies and practices that enable them to navigate their work and personal responsibilities effectively (Basile & Beauregard, 2021).

Theme 3: Work–Life Integration

The findings of the present study indicate that some participants experienced a negative spillover between work and family demands. Two participants indicated that at month-end they took work home, and that this had a negative impact on the family domain. One of the participants indicated that her husband complained because she prioritised work over family. Where spillover occurs, one role suffers as a result of the imbalance. Several participants in the present study alluded to such imbalances, particularly with regard to caring for their children. Ciabattari (2007) posits that single mothers experience more work–family conflict, while the current study found no distinction. Not all the participants' spouses assist with house chores. Previous research also supports the idea that job-related stress can result in work–family conflict and potentially lead to employee turnover, highlighting the need for organisational management to monitor and address work–family dynamics to enhance employees' well-being and attachment to the organisation (Rubel et al., 2017).

Theme 4: Employee Well-Being

This theme relates to the impact of job demands on employee well-being. This section details participants' physical and mental well-being. Five participants indicated that their work and family demands have a negative impact on their well-being. These participants indicated that, by the end of each day, they are exhausted. A number of the participants indicated that the work demand of heavy lifting negatively affected their physical well-being.

A number of the participants indicated that not spending enough time with their children affected their psychological well-being. One participant indicated that she blamed herself when her children did not perform well at school. The well-being of parents

affects their children (Lane et al., 2011). The organisation under study has an EAP to support employees' psychological well-being (Attridge, 2019). One participant noted that she had benefited from this programme in the past.

Theme 5: Workplace Policy and Organisational Initiatives

Only two participants were aware of company policies that support women, the maternity leave policy and the sexual harassment policy. Ten of the 12 participants were not aware of any policies that support women in the workplace. One participant noted that the chief executive officer had once introduced leadership programme for women. The participants indicated that they would like to see more women in leadership roles. There is a need for effective communication and dissemination of organisational policies supporting women (International Labour Organization, 2020; Kabeer & Natali, 2013).

Theme 6: Organisational Support

The findings indicate that the organisation does not seem to offer employees support in dealing with their job demands. Organisations are encouraged to assist in improving employee well-being, as poorly managed well-being may lead to staff turnover (Bocean et al., 2022). Studies have indicated that organisations need to provide adequate support to their employees (Pitsoe et al., 2023), especially women, to deal with the demands of work and life balance (Bahrami et al., 2022) and that the lack of support can result in reduced well-being (Sriharan et al., 2020) and increased turnover (Aldossari & Chaudry, 2021).

Theme 7: Individual Well-Being

According to Kinnunen et al., (2016), employees need to mentally disengage from work when they are off-duty, which is referred to as psychological detachment. The present study investigated the personal strategies the participants employed to achieve work–life balance. Delecta (2011) defines work–life balance as the ability of an individual to meet both work and non-work demands. The participants had different coping mechanisms; some watched television and some listened to music. Employers need to assist employees in attaining work–life balance, which yields benefits such as increased productivity (Direnzo et al., 2015). A work–life balance should not just be the concern of employees, but also of employers, as an imbalance leads to health and psychological challenges (Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have practical implications for organisations, industries and parastatals. According to the World Bank (2015), there is a significant increase in women participating in South Africa's labour market (Sandy et al., 2022). Organisations need to support women through policies and work–family programmes. Flexibility in work schedules and remote working can significantly enhance female employees'

ability to meet both work and family demands (Sandy et al., 2022). Organisations should invest in EAP programmes that address the specific concerns of women highlighted in this study. There is a need for awareness campaigns for such policies and the EAPs as mentioned above.

Figure 1 summarises the findings of the themes and subthemes, together with practical recommendations for the organisation under study.

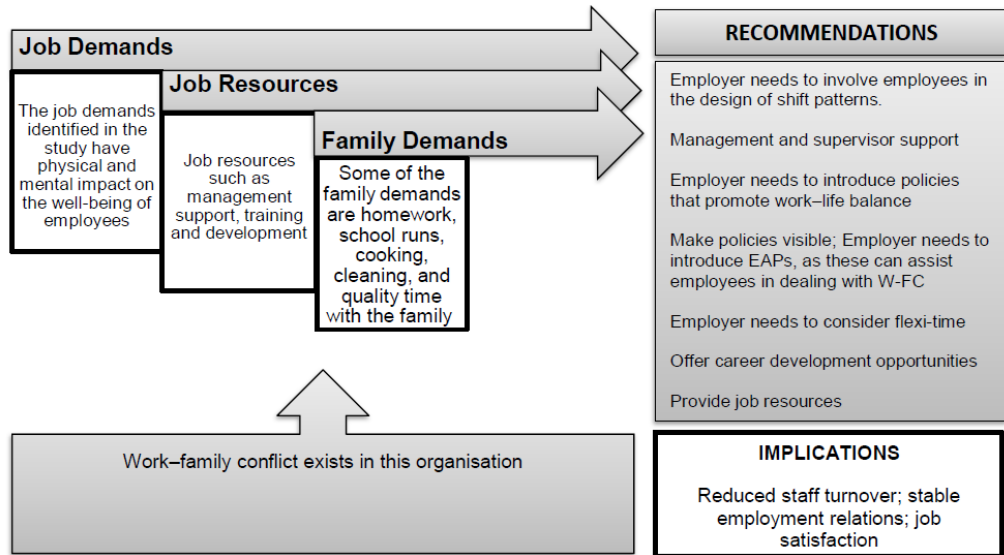


Figure 1: Findings of the study (Authors' own compilation)

The research findings indicate that the organisation under study does not have policies that support women in the workplace. It should provide family-supportive supervision and assistance to manage the negative effects of the work and family demands placed on female employees. The organisation under study should consider policies and practices that enable women to work remotely and according to more flexible schedules. Women may benefit from management and supervisor support.

The organisation needs to promote a work-life balance. Most of the participants indicated that they prioritise job demands over their family demands. Not striking a balance can have a negative impact on the well-being of the families, especially children who still require the attention of their mothers. A work-life balance is beneficial for organisations and employers needs to leverage this in order to reap these benefits (Ullah, 2016). Based on Figure 1, we recommend that female employees manage their well-being by seeking organisational support, while organisations should create mechanisms and increase awareness of workplace policies that support women's careers, thereby reducing work-family conflict.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Research is not without limitations. Although there are various organisations in the transport sector in South Africa, this study focused on women working in transport and logistics at a single organisation. The findings must be interpreted with caution. Future research could involve multiple organisations in this sector to provide a broader perspective. While this study included various job categories, future research might concentrate on specific job levels and categories. In addition, exploring other industries could yield valuable insights. Owing to time and financial constraints, the data were collected via an online platform, which might have limited the observation of physical cues that could have enriched the data. Future studies could employ a quantitative approach and larger samples to facilitate the generalisation of the results (Apuke, 2017). To quantify the findings more robustly, future research should consider incorporating quantitative methods.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this study was to understand the influence of work and family demands on the well-being of women working in the transport and logistics industry. The study contributes both practical insights and a theoretical framework to the realm of employment relations. The findings suggest that employees face challenges in achieving a work–life balance, with work demands often overshadowing family obligations, resulting in a notable gap in their forefront priorities.

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