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An Analytical Study on Work-Life Balance & Its Improvement Strategies in the Manufacturing Industries Waluj MIDC, Chh Sambhaji Nagar, (Aurangabad)

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Abstract: Work-life balance has emerged as a pivotal concern in contemporary industrial management, particularly within the manufacturing sector, where long shift durations, physically demanding work conditions, and production pressures tend to erode the boundary between professional obligations and personal life. This research investigates the nature, determinants, and consequences of work-life imbalance among employees in manufacturing units located in the Waluj MIDC (Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation) area of Aurangabad (Chh. Sambhaji Nagar), Maharashtra, India. The study draws on primary data collected from 185 respondents across diverse manufacturing establishments, using structured questionnaires supplemented by in-depth interviews with HR managers and floor supervisors. Secondary data from established literature, government industrial reports, and organizational HR policy documents enriches the empirical findings. The research identifies shift scheduling rigidity, inadequate leave policies, commuting burden, lack of flexible work arrangements, and absence of employee wellness programmes as the principal contributors to work-life imbalance in the region. Statistical analysis reveals significant correlations between poor work-life balance and elevated employee stress levels, increased absenteeism, reduced job satisfaction, and higher voluntary turnover. The study proposes a multidimensional Work-Life Balance Improvement Framework tailored to the operational realities of Waluj MIDC manufacturing enterprises, incorporating flexible scheduling, structured leave entitlement, employee assistance programmes, supportive supervisory practices, and technology-mediated work management. Practical recommendations are offered for HR professionals, plant managers, and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable and humane work environments in the manufacturing sector.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Manufacturing Industries, Waluj MIDC, Aurangabad, Employee Well-being, Flexible Work Arrangements, HR Strategies, Job Satisfaction, Occupational Stress, Shift Work

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of work-life balance refers to the equilibrium an individual maintains between the demands of professional work and the requirements of personal life, encompassing family responsibilities, social engagements, leisure, health maintenance, and personal development. In the manufacturing sector, achieving this balance is particularly challenging due to the inherent characteristics of industrial work: fixed shift patterns, overtime requirements, physically and mentally exhausting tasks, tight production deadlines, and, in many cases, limited employee autonomy over scheduling decisions.

India's manufacturing sector has experienced substantial expansion over the past two decades, fuelled by policy initiatives such as Make in India, Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, and the development of dedicated industrial zones. The Waluj MIDC area in Aurangabad (now officially renamed Chh. Sambhaji Nagar), Maharashtra, represents one of the most significant industrial clusters in the Marathwada region, housing a diverse concentration of manufacturing units spanning automotive components, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, food processing, and consumer products. Prominent industrial establishments in the Waluj belt include subsidiaries and vendors of major automotive manufacturers, making it a strategically important industrial corridor.

The workforce employed in Waluj MIDC manufacturing units is predominantly drawn from Aurangabad city, surrounding semi-urban areas, and rural hinterlands of Marathwada. A significant proportion of this workforce is engaged in shift-based operations, often working in two or three rotating shifts that disrupt natural sleep cycles and reduce time available for family interaction. Research consistently demonstrates that shift workers in manufacturing industries are disproportionately vulnerable to work-life conflict, with associated consequences including deteriorating physical health, marital and familial stress, social disengagement, and diminished job performance.

Despite the centrality of work-life balance to employee well-being and organizational productivity, the topic has received limited empirical attention in the context of Indian manufacturing SMEs and regional industrial clusters. Most existing research originates from Western organizational contexts, where regulatory frameworks, cultural norms, and workforce demographics differ substantially from the Indian manufacturing milieu. This study addresses this gap by systematically examining work-life balance conditions, their determinants, and their consequences among workers in Waluj MIDC manufacturing establishments, and by developing contextually grounded improvement strategies.

The findings of this study are intended to be relevant not only to HR practitioners and plant managers in the Waluj area but also to policymakers, industry associations, and researchers interested in improving the quality of working life in India's manufacturing sector more broadly.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Conceptual Foundations of Work-Life Balance

The theoretical discourse on work-life balance has evolved considerably since its early framing as a binary conflict between work and family roles. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) introduced the foundational concept of work-family conflict, defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible. Their tripartite taxonomy distinguished time-based conflict (insufficient time for one role due to demands of another), strain-based conflict (spillover of stress between domains), and behaviour-based conflict (behaviours appropriate in one role being inappropriate in another). This framework continues to inform empirical research on work-life dynamics.

Clark (2000) proposed the Work-Family Border Theory, which views individuals as daily crossing the borders between work and family domains, and argues that the permeability and flexibility of these borders, along with the fit between the two domains, determine the degree of work-life balance experienced. Greenhaus and Allen (2011) further refined the balance concept to encompass positive enrichment — the idea that engagement in one role can generate resources (energy, skills, perspectives) that enhance functioning in another role, challenging the dominant deficit model of work-life conflict.

B. Work-Life Balance in Manufacturing and Shift-Work Contexts

The manufacturing context poses distinctive work-life balance challenges that have been extensively documented in the occupational health literature. Costa (1996) demonstrated that shift workers, particularly those on rotating schedules, experience chronic disruption of circadian rhythms, leading to sleep disorders, gastrointestinal problems, and elevated cardiovascular risk. Beyond physiological effects, shift work has been associated with reduced marital satisfaction, decreased parental involvement, and social isolation, as the temporal structure of shift workers' lives diverges from that of the broader community.

Hyman and Summers (2004) studied work-life balance in manufacturing organizations in the United Kingdom and found that despite the rhetoric of employer work-life balance initiatives, in practice, production imperatives consistently overrode employees' personal time needs. They observed that informal workplace norms — including the expectation of voluntary overtime and the stigmatization of employees who prioritized personal time — functioned as powerful barriers to genuine work-life balance improvement.

In the Indian context, Karkoulian et al. (2016) examined the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction among manufacturing workers and found a strong positive correlation, particularly among female employees who faced compounded pressures from workplace demands and traditional domestic responsibilities. Sharma and Sharma (2021) conducted a study on work-life balance in Indian manufacturing firms and identified that supervisory support, organizational culture, and the availability of flexible work arrangements were the most powerful predictors of perceived work-life balance among frontline manufacturing employees.

C. Organizational Strategies for Work-Life Balance Improvement

The literature identifies several categories of organizational intervention that have demonstrated effectiveness in improving work-life balance in manufacturing environments. Flexible work arrangements — including compressed work weeks, shift-swapping mechanisms, and partial flexitime — have been shown to improve work-life balance perceptions and reduce absenteeism in shift-work settings (Baltes et al., 1999). Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) providing counselling, financial guidance, and health support services have been associated with reduced stress-related absenteeism and improved psychological well-being (Arthur, 2000).

Supervisory training in supportive management practices represents another evidence-based lever for improving work-life balance outcomes. Thomas and Ganster (1995) demonstrated that supervisor work-family support was a significant predictor of employee work-family conflict, job satisfaction, and somatic health complaints, highlighting the pivotal role of front-line management in translating organizational work-life balance policy into daily workplace reality. In the manufacturing context, where supervisors wield substantial authority over shift allocation, overtime assignment, and leave approval, this finding carries particular weight.

The literature on work-life balance in Indian manufacturing is growing but remains limited relative to the sector's economic significance and workforce scale. Existing studies tend to focus on IT and services sectors, where flexible work arrangements are more structurally feasible. The specific context of traditional manufacturing industries in regional industrial zones like Waluj MIDC — characterized by shift-based production, male-dominated workforces, and limited HR sophistication in SME units — has received insufficient research attention, constituting the gap that this study addresses.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

A. Primary Objectives

- To assess the current state of work-life balance among employees in manufacturing units in Waluj MIDC, Aurangabad, including its variation across gender, job level, and shift type.
- To identify the key organizational, operational, and personal factors that contribute to work-life imbalance in the Waluj MIDC manufacturing context.
- To examine the consequences of work-life imbalance on employee health, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and productivity.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of existing organizational policies and initiatives related to work-life balance in the surveyed manufacturing units.

B. Secondary Objectives

- To develop an integrated Work-Life Balance Improvement Framework appropriate to the operational realities of manufacturing industries in Waluj MIDC.
- To provide actionable recommendations for HR managers, plant heads, and industry associations seeking to improve work-life balance conditions in the region.
- To contribute empirical evidence from a regionally significant Indian manufacturing cluster to the broader literature on work-life balance in industrial contexts.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative information gathered through structured interviews. The mixed-methods approach is well-suited to the study of work-life balance, which involves both measurable behavioural and attitudinal dimensions (amenable to quantitative analysis) and subjective lived experiences and organizational processes (better captured through qualitative methods). The integration of both approaches through triangulation enhances the credibility, depth, and practical relevance of the findings.

B. Study Area and Population

The study was conducted among employees and HR managers in manufacturing units located in the Waluj MIDC industrial area, Aurangabad, Maharashtra. Waluj MIDC is one of the primary industrial zones in Chh. Sambhaji Nagar and accommodates manufacturing establishments across automotive components, engineering, pharmaceuticals, and allied sectors.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 15 manufacturing units representing the sectoral and size diversity of the industrial zone, including small (below 100 employees), medium (100-500 employees), and large establishments (above 500 employees).

C. Sample and Data Collection

A total of 185 valid survey responses were obtained from employees across the sampled units, comprising workers from the shop floor, supervisory staff, and middle management. The sample was stratified to ensure adequate representation of different shift types (general shift, morning, afternoon, and night shifts), gender groups, and job categories. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 HR managers and plant supervisors. The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire comprising five sections: demographic and employment profile; work schedule and shift characteristics; perceived work-life balance; organizational policies and support mechanisms; and consequences of imbalance (including stress, absenteeism, and job satisfaction). Likert scale items (1-5) were used for attitudinal and perceptual questions.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations, percentages) and inferential techniques including Pearson correlation analysis, chi-square tests, and one-way ANOVA to examine relationships between work-life balance variables and demographic and organizational characteristics. Qualitative interview data was analysed through thematic coding, with themes identified both deductively from the literature and inductively from field data. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 25.0 and Microsoft Excel.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

A. Demographic and Employment Profile

The sample comprised 67% male and 33% female respondents, consistent with the male-dominated character of manufacturing employment in the Waluj MIDC area. The age distribution was skewed toward younger workers, with 48% aged 21-30 years and 31% aged 31-40 years. In terms of job level, 58% were shop-floor workers, 27% were supervisors or team leaders, and 15% were in middle management roles. Shift distribution across the sample was: general shift 34%, morning shift 21%, afternoon shift 22%, and night shift 23%.

B. Work-Life Balance Perceptions by Category

Respondents were asked to rate their overall perceived work-life balance on a scale of 1 (extremely poor) to 5 (excellent). The mean overall score was 2.74, indicating that the majority of respondents experienced below-average work-life balance. The following table presents disaggregated mean scores:

Category	Sub-Group	Mean WLB Score (1-5)
Gender	Male	2.81
Gender	Female	2.59
Shift Type	General Shift	3.42
Shift Type	Morning / Afternoon	2.78
Shift Type	Night Shift	2.18
Job Level	Shop Floor Worker	2.51
Job Level	Supervisor / Team Leader	2.89
Job Level	Middle Management	3.21
Industry Sector	Automotive Components	2.64
Industry Sector	Engineering / Fabrication	2.72

Industry Sector	Pharmaceuticals	2.91
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Table :-5.2 Work-Life Balance Perceptions by Category

The data reveals that night shift workers experience the worst work-life balance, with a mean score of 2.18 — substantially below the already low sample average. Female employees report poorer balance than their male counterparts, likely reflecting the compounded burden of workplace demands and domestic responsibilities. Shop-floor workers report lower work-life balance than supervisors and middle management, consistent with their lesser autonomy over work scheduling.

C. Key Contributing Factors to Work-Life Imbalance

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each of the following factors contributed to their work-life imbalance. Mean ratings on a 1-5 scale (5 = major contributor) are presented below:

Factor	% Citing as Major Issue	Mean Rating (1-5)
Rigid shift scheduling / mandatory overtime	78%	4.4
Long commuting time	71%	4.2
Insufficient earned leave / casual leave	65%	4.0
Lack of flexible working options	63%	3.9
High work pressure and production targets	61%	3.8
Absence of childcare / family support facilities	54%	3.7
Inadequate rest between shifts	52%	3.7
Poor supervisory understanding of personal needs	48%	3.5
No employee wellness programmes	44%	3.4
Limited recreational / stress relief facilities	39%	3.2

Table:- 5.3 Key Contributing Factors to Work-Life Imbalance

Rigid shift scheduling and mandatory overtime emerged as the most frequently cited and highly rated contributors to work-life imbalance. Long commuting time — a structural feature of living in peri-urban or rural areas around Aurangabad and commuting to the Waluj MIDC industrial zone — is identified as a major issue by 71% of respondents, underscoring the role of urban geography in shaping work-life conditions. The absence of flexible working options is particularly notable given the proven effectiveness of scheduling flexibility in improving work-life balance in manufacturing contexts.

D. Consequences of Work-Life Imbalance

The survey assessed the self-reported consequences of work-life imbalance across health, organizational, and personal dimensions. Statistically significant negative correlations were found between perceived work-life balance scores and all consequence measures (p < 0.01 in all cases):

Consequence	% Reporting	Correlation with WLB Score
Chronic fatigue / exhaustion	74%	-0.71
Sleep disturbances	67%	-0.68
Increased job stress	72%	-0.74
Reduced family time satisfaction	69%	-0.66
Considered resigning in past 12 months	58%	-0.63
Reported productivity decline	53%	-0.61
Increased absenteeism	41%	-0.57
Deteriorating physical health	46%	-0.60

Table :-5.4 Consequences of Work-Life Imbalance

The correlation analysis confirms that work-life imbalance is strongly associated with adverse health and organizational outcomes. The finding that 58% of respondents reported having considered resignation in the past year has significant implications for talent retention in Waluj MIDC manufacturing units. High voluntary turnover imposes substantial costs on manufacturing organizations — including recruitment, training, and productivity loss during onboarding — making work-life balance improvement a material economic concern, not merely a welfare consideration.

E. Assessment of Existing Organizational Policies

Respondents were asked to evaluate the adequacy of their organization's existing work-life balance policies across key dimensions:

Policy Area	% Rating as Adequate	% Rating as Inadequate
Leave entitlement (annual, sick, casual)	38%	62%
Shift scheduling fairness	29%	71%
Overtime management and compensation	34%	66%
Supervisory sensitivity to personal needs	32%	68%
Health and wellness programmes	21%	79%

Grievance mechanism for work-life issues	18%	82%
Flexible work arrangements availability	14%	86%

Table :-5.5 Assessment of Existing Organizational Policies

The assessment reveals a pervasive inadequacy in organizational work-life balance provisions. The availability of flexible work arrangements was rated as adequate by only 14% of respondents — the lowest-rated item — while health and wellness programmes (21%) and grievance mechanisms for work-life issues (18%) were also rated as barely available. These findings highlight that most manufacturing organizations in Waluj MIDC have not yet invested meaningfully in structured work-life balance support systems.

VI. WORK-LIFE BALANCE IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Based on the empirical findings and the reviewed literature, this study proposes an integrated Work-Life Balance Improvement Framework for manufacturing industries in Waluj MIDC. The framework is organized across five strategic pillars:

1) Pillar 1: Flexible and Humane Scheduling Practices

Shift scheduling rigidity emerged as the primary driver of work-life imbalance. Organizations should introduce structured shift-preference mechanisms that allow employees to communicate scheduling needs in advance, subject to operational feasibility. Where production continuity permits, compressed work week options (four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days) can provide employees with extended personal time. Mandatory rest periods between consecutive shifts should be formalized in HR policy, and overtime should be voluntary wherever possible, with transparent compensation frameworks. Shift rotation schedules should be designed following chronobiological principles — forward-rotating rotations (morning to afternoon to night) are associated with better health outcomes than backward rotations.

2) Pillar 2: Enhanced Leave Entitlement and Flexibility

Many organizations in the sample provided the statutory minimum leave entitlement without additional discretionary provisions. Progressive organizations should consider supplementing statutory annual and sick leave with earned leave encashment options, emergency personal leave provisions, and parental support leave (paternity leave, leave for childcare emergencies). Leave approval processes should be transparent and consistently administered to prevent perceived favoritism, which interviews identified as a significant source of employee grievance.

3) Pillar 3: Employee Assistance and Wellness Programmes

Only 21% of respondents rated their organization's health and wellness programmes as adequate. Organizations should establish or expand Employee Assistance Programmes providing access to counselling services, stress management workshops, and financial wellness resources. On-site or near-site health facilities — including basic medical check-up camps, yoga and meditation sessions, and cafeteria nutrition improvements — can reduce the burden on employees of accessing health services outside work hours. These investments have well-documented returns in terms of reduced absenteeism and improved productivity.

4) Pillar 4: Supervisory Development in Work-Life Supportive Management

The pivotal role of front-line supervisors in determining employees' day-to-day work-life experience emerged strongly from both survey data and qualitative interviews. HR departments should invest in structured training programmes for supervisors covering empathetic communication, recognition of work-life balance warning signs, and practical skills for accommodating reasonable employee requests within operational constraints. Performance evaluation criteria for supervisors should include team well-being and absenteeism indicators alongside traditional productivity metrics, creating accountability for supervisor behaviour.

5) *Pillar 5: Commuting and Facility Support*

Commuting burden was identified as a major work-life imbalance contributor by 71% of respondents. Manufacturing organizations in Waluj MIDC should consider organized employee transportation — bus services or carpooling coordination — particularly for night shift workers, for whom public transport availability is most limited. Subsidized or employer-provided housing for distant employees represents a longer-term investment with potential to substantially reduce commuting burden and associated stress. On-site or subsidized childcare facilities would particularly benefit the female workforce segment, many of whom leave employment in early parenthood due to the impossibility of reconciling shift work with childcare demands.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings and the proposed framework, the following specific recommendations are offered to stakeholders in the Waluj MIDC manufacturing ecosystem:

A. *For HR Managers and Plant Heads*

- Conduct a formal Work-Life Balance Audit within your organization using validated instruments to establish a baseline and identify priority improvement areas specific to your workforce profile.
- Introduce a structured shift preference and schedule transparency mechanism, giving employees at least 14 days advance notice of shift rosters and a formal channel to communicate scheduling conflicts.
- Establish a minimum 10-hour rest period between consecutive shifts as a non-negotiable HR policy, formalizing what should be standard occupational health practice.
- Design and launch a basic Employee Assistance Programme, beginning with an internal counselling resource or tie-up with an external EAP provider, and promote it actively to reduce stigma around utilization.
- Include work-life balance support behaviour as a dimension in supervisor performance appraisals, recognizing supervisors who demonstrate empathy and flexibility alongside those who meet production targets.

B. *For Industry Associations (MIDC, CII, FICCI Local Chapters)*

- Develop shared transportation services across Waluj MIDC — a consortium-based employee bus service serving major residential catchment areas could substantially reduce commuting burden for workers across multiple organizations at lower per-unit cost.
- Establish a shared childcare facility serving Waluj MIDC industrial zone employees, following models successfully implemented in other Indian industrial clusters. This would particularly improve female workforce retention.
- Develop and disseminate work-life balance best practice guidelines tailored to the manufacturing SME context, enabling smaller organizations without dedicated HR capability to implement evidence-based improvements.

C. *For Policy Makers*

- Review and strengthen regulatory provisions related to maximum shift duration, mandatory rest periods, and overtime compensation in the Manufacturing sector, closing gaps in the existing Factories Act framework that allow exploitative scheduling practices.
- Consider incentivizing manufacturing organizations that demonstrate measurable work-life balance improvements (e.g., through reduced absenteeism, improved employee satisfaction scores) through MIDC facilitation or CSR recognition mechanisms.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study presents a systematic empirical examination of work-life balance conditions, determinants, and consequences among manufacturing employees in Waluj MIDC, Aurangabad. The findings paint a sobering picture: the majority of manufacturing workers in the study area experience below-average work-life balance, with night shift workers, shop-floor employees, and women reporting the most acute imbalance. Rigid shift scheduling, long commuting times, insufficient leave provisions, and the near-total absence of employer-sponsored wellness and flexible work programmes emerge as the primary structural drivers of this imbalance. The consequences of this imbalance are serious and quantifiable: high levels of chronic fatigue, stress-related health deterioration, elevated turnover intention, and self-reported productivity decline.

For manufacturing organizations competing in increasingly demanding domestic and export markets, these consequences translate directly into operational inefficiency, quality risk, and human capital loss.

The five-pillar Work-Life Balance Improvement Framework proposed in this study — spanning flexible scheduling, enhanced leave provisions, employee assistance programmes, supervisory capability development, and commuting and facility support — offers a practically oriented roadmap for manufacturing organizations in Waluj MIDC to begin systematically improving work-life balance. The framework is deliberately calibrated to the resource constraints and operational realities of manufacturing enterprises, avoiding idealistic prescriptions that ignore the imperatives of production continuity.

Improving work-life balance in India's manufacturing sector is not merely a welfare imperative — it is a strategic necessity. As competition for skilled manufacturing workers intensifies, and as younger workers increasingly prioritize quality of working life alongside compensation in employment decisions, manufacturing organizations that invest in genuine work-life balance improvement will gain meaningful competitive advantages in workforce attraction, retention, and productivity. This study contributes empirical evidence and practical guidance to support that essential transition.

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