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## **THE COMPARISON OF POLISH AND NORWEGIAN POLICY AND RESEARCH ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE – CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES. NARRATIVE REVIEW<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract.** The sense of work-life balance has an undoubted impact not only on employees' quality of life and work performance, but also on the functioning of companies. Therefore, efforts to maintain work-life balance are beneficial to workers, employers, authorities and researchers. Poland and Norway are the examples of European countries with different work-life balance policies both on legal and organizational levels. This paper aims to compare legal solutions in two economically different countries and review current research on work-life balance issues therein. Norway is a much richer country, disposing of higher possibilities in supporting citizens. The state, however, guarantees similar solutions in Poland, except for parental leaves system. Polish researchers, unlike Norwegian ones, focus more on the use and the availability of different benefits. Norwegian studies, in turn, show psychological determinants and effects of work-life (im)balance. The authors of this paper also give some suggestions for future research that could help shaping proper family-friendly policies, both in Poland and Norway.

**Keywords:** Norway, Poland, social policy, WLB, work-life balance, working parents.

### **1. Introduction**

Work-life balance (WLB) significantly relates to employees' quality of life, work satisfaction, and company's economic results following the employees' loyalty and engagement. Previous research shows the adverse effects of work-life imbalance for employees such as intention to quit job, deterioration of job or family

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satisfaction, stress and poor health (Jain, Nair 2013). Moreover, researchers provide much evidence that the situation when employees are able to achieve the desired WLB is beneficial not only for the employees themselves, but also for the(ir) organizations. Family-friendly policies allow employers to attract and keep the valuable professionals, motivate employees, achieve better results with lower absenteeism (Balcerzak-Paradowska 2008). Borkowska (2010) emphasizes that work-life imbalance might also have negative impact on the whole societies – it may lead to declining number of child birth rates and postponing the decision to have children, growing unemployment rates or increasing social inequality are only a few of the possible negative consequences.

Perception of work-life balance might be fostered by the use of WLB benefits guaranteed by the law or offered by employers, such as paid leaves or financial benefits. Previous research shows that some of the individual characteristics, such as age and gender, determine whether an employee makes use of the offered benefits (Andysz, Najder, Merecz-Kot 2014). However, the decision whether to apply for a particular benefit might depend on values and stereotypes prevalent in the society. Scholars underline the impact of the common beliefs and shared values on the perception of the role of men and women in the society, for example, in the context of their professional lives and sharing household duties (Andysz, Najder, Merecz-Kot 2014). In recent years, researchers have observed a growing interest in the issue of WLB in all European countries (followed by a broader offer of benefits, financial support or work organization possibilities), yet, Scandinavian countries still provide the most generous offer (Abendroth, Den Dulk 2011). In this review we compare Norway and Poland as the examples of disparate attitudes towards WLB benefits. Norway offers a generous social welfare – 25% of the annual Gross Domestic Product is allocated to social protection (mainly to social benefits), whereas in Poland it is only 18% (Eurostat 2014). The greatest difference refers to expenses on family and children support – in Norway it reaches up to 12% of the total amount of money on social protection, in Poland – only 5% (Eurostat 2014). Also for the last 15 years Norway has regularly appeared among the top ten countries to raise a child, whereas in 2014 Poland was on the 29<sup>th</sup> position (Save the Children 2014). This may result from differences in the budgets, which in 2016 amounted to ca 136 billion € in Norway (Norwegian Ministry of Finance 2016) and ca 70 billion € in Poland (Polish Ministry of Finance 2016). Furthermore, in Norway there is much longer tradition on social expenditures. Lately, a major social programme, called “500+” has been introduced in Poland (Dz. U. 2016: poz. 195). It aims to support parents of children aged under 18. However, this programme has been running since barely a year, so there are no significant research referring to its effect on the beneficiaries’ WLB.

Even though legal solutions in Poland and Norway seem to be similar, the attitude towards WLB and WLB benefits vary in these two countries due to

economic and social differences. This paper aimed at indicating: leading topics investigated in Polish and Norwegian studies on WLB, gaps in the literature, and future research directions.

## 2. Legal WLB solutions in Poland and Norway

WLB benefits (flexible working system, range of leaves, telework etc.) are designed to help employees reconcile work and private lives. Legal WLB solutions in Poland derive from the Labour Code (Dz. U. 1974: Nr 24, poz. 141), and in Norway – Working Environment Act (LOV-2005-06-17-62) and Holidays Act (LOV-1988-04-29-21).

Flexible forms of work is one of the most important WLB issues included in Polish law. First, an employer may introduce a task-based working time system and determine the time necessary to perform the assigned task. Work time schedule may also provide different work starting hours or a time interval, in which an employee decides on work starting hour. Eventually, at the written request of an employee, he or she may work a shortened working week i.e. fewer than five days a week, but with extended daily working time. Another form of flexibility at work is teleworking. Telework means work regularly performed away from the premises of an employer, using the means of electronic communication. Telework is a huge facilitation, particularly for pregnant women, people taking care of children, and commuting employees.

Other popular WLB solutions are sickness leaves and annual leaves, also called “holidays”. The former guarantees financial security for an employee who is temporarily unable to work. An employee may also take 14 days of sickness leave to take care of ill family members. Moreover, an employee has a right to annual, uninterrupted, paid leave. The “holidays” amount to 20 days or 26 days (depending on number of the years of employment). In crisis, an employee can have four days of leave at the request in each calendar year (counted into annual leave). Finally, the employer may also grant unpaid leave to the employee.

Another important group of legal WLB solutions are working parents’ rights. First, not sooner than six weeks before the expected date of birth, a female employee may apply for maternity leave, lasting 20 weeks (14 weeks are reserved exclusively for the mother, six weeks can be used by either mother or father). Since 2010, the female employee has been also entitled to additional maternity leave of six weeks, immediately after using the maternity leave (Dz. U. 2008: Nr 237, poz. 1654). Another legal novelty introduced in 2010 (Dz. U. 2008: Nr 237, poz. 1654) refers to a male employee’s right to two weeks of paternity leave, until the child is 12 months old. After having used additional full-time maternity leave, an employee is entitled to 26 weeks of parental leave (52 weeks in total for both parents). The last long-term form of leave is an unpaid childcare leave,

not exceeding 36 months, granted voluntarily by employer until an employee's child reaches the age of 5. Nursing female employee has the right to two half hour breaks from work calculated into working time.

The Norwegian Working Environment Act (LOV-2005-06-17-62) grants an employee the right to flexible working hours if this does not cause any major inconvenience to the employer.

The Annual Holidays Act (LOV-1988-04-29-21) secures the rights of employees to annual holidays on 25 working days during a year, Employees over 60 are entitled to an extra week of holidays (six working days). It is also worth noting that if an employee has worked at least three years, including two years for a current employer, he or she is entitled to a maximum of three years of unpaid educational leave.

As in Poland, in Norway pregnant women and young working parents have special rights. The mother has an exclusive right to maternity leave for at least three weeks before giving birth and six weeks immediately after the labor. Ten weeks are reserved only for fathers (so-called "father's quota"). In total, parental leave may last up to 59 weeks. The father can also take two weeks of unpaid leave directly after birth of the child. In addition, each of the parents has the right to an unpaid parental leave for up to 12 months for each birth, taken immediately after the main parental leave. As in Poland, a pregnant woman and an employee taking parental leave are protected – their contracts may not be terminated during the pregnancy or the leave. Both in Poland and in Norway, a nursing mother is entitled to at least 30 minutes time-off for breast-feeding. Like in Poland, a woman may have a break twice a day or reduce the working hours by up to 1 hour a day. Employees who have children can take leave of absence when it is necessary to attend a sick child. An employee is entitled to a maximum of 10 days leave each calendar year. Employees are also entitled to the maximum of 10 days leave of absence per calendar year to care for parents, spouse, cohabitant or registered partner.

Both countries apply almost identical rules according to daily rest, annual holidays, working hours, working overtime or days off. However, in Poland many benefits are strictly regulated and it requires some formal procedures to claim one's right. This refers particularly to flexible working hours, which in Norway may simply be arranged if it does not mean any major inconvenience.

### **3. Polish research on WLB**

To identify the prevailing research problems regarding solutions supporting WLB in Poland, we analysed quantitative and qualitative studies conducted after 2010. We excluded literature reviews and study cases. We searched EBSCO and Google Scholar databases using the following keywords: *work balance* AND

*program OR benefit OR solution; reconciliation AND benefit OR program OR solutions* as well as different combinations of: *barriers to work-life balance, flexible working hours, reconciling private and work life, meaning of work-life balance, work-life balance programs offer, parents' expectations*. We typed the words in Polish and included different noun versions because of declension typical for the Polish language. We also included texts from the reference lists of the relevant articles. We chose the articles regardless of the adopted WLB definitions. We then excluded the research that offered no description of method or a method section inadequate to assess the reliability and generality of the gained results.

Finally, we analysed 13 papers published after 2010, describing research on various issues related to WLB. All the studies were cross-sectional, the majority of them used survey and questionnaire methods (Stankiewicz 2014; Robak 2012; Bilińska, Rawłuszko 2011; Kacprzak-Choińska, Żemigała 2013; Krawczyk et al. 2010; Grabus, Rogowska 2011; Sadowska-Snarska 2013; Wołoszyn 2012; Szydlik-Leszczyńska 2013; Baran, Kłós 2014; Robak, Słocińska 2013) in some cases, interviews (semi-structured or individual in-depth interviews) were used (Sadowska-Snarska 2011; Wołoszyn 2012; Kacprzak-Choińska 2013; Stypińska, Perek-Białas 2014). Most researchers investigated employees (Krawczyk 2010; Grabus, Rogowska 2011; Sadowska-Snarska 2011; Robak 2012; Wołoszyn 2012; Kacprzak-Choińska 2013; Robak, Słocińska 2013; Stankiewicz 2014; Stypińska, Perek-Białas 2014), some of them included managers or employers (Sadowska-Snarska 2011; Sadowska-Snarska 2013; Wołoszyn 2012; Robak, Słocińska 2013), and only one study involved the unemployed (Szydlik-Leszczyńska 2013). One study did not focus on the employee/employer perspective, but rather on the generation – baby boomers, generation X and generation Y (Baran, Kłós 2014). The study samples comprised from 100 (Robak 2012) to over 1000 respondents (Sadowska-Snarska 2011; Kacprzak-Choińska 2013). The main topics covered a great variety of issues related to WLB: perception and significance of WLB (Krawczyk 2010; Robak 2012; Robak, Słocińska 2013; Baran, Kłós 2014), barriers to achieve WLB (Krawczyk 2010; Robak 2012; Szydlik-Leszczyńska 2013; Stankiewicz 2014), the role of managers in shaping employees' WLB (Robak 2012; Robak, Słocińska 2013), solutions supporting the achievement of WLB (Grabus, Rogowska 2011; Sadowska-Snarska 2011; Sadowska-Snarska 2013), parenting and WLB (Kacprzak-Choińska 2013) but some studies also investigated WLB as a determinant of possibility to achieve professional success (Bilińska, Rawłuszko 2011) or WLB among working people taking care of someone elderly (Stypińska, Perek-Białas 2014).

Having analysed the selected papers, we distinguished a few leading topics occurring in the majority of the studies: (1) perceived barriers to achieve WLB and the resulting needs and preferences on the expected support in achieving WLB; (2) the organizations' attitudes towards WLB and the offered solutions;

(3) particular situation of women combining work and family duties; (4) definition and understanding of the WLB; (5) knowledge of the available WLB benefits and (6) the use of WLB solutions.

### **3.1. Barriers to achieve WLB and employees' needs and expectations**

Studies on employees' opinions revealed the following problems: antisocial working hours (Stankiewicz et al. 2014), extra work, overtime work, excessive workload (Robak 2012), too many home duties (Bilińska, Rawłuszko 2011; Robak 2012), or the lack of childcare services (Sadowska-Snarska 2011). Researchers underline the role of direct superiors and organizational culture that can be unfavourable for employees' WLB. They can hinder the return to work after parental leave, be reluctant to hire young women who are likely to get pregnant. or refuse to give leaves to employees to take care of private issues (Kacprzak-Choińska, Żemigąła 2013).

Because of these barriers, particular needs or expectations of employees might be formed. Most importantly, adaptation of the introduced benefits and solutions to employees' individual needs (Andysz et al. 2014). Considering childcare services, a study on managerial staff and employees having young children has shown that one of the most popular factors preventing employers from organizing nurseries or kindergartens in the premises of their companies was the alleged lack of interest among employees (Sadowska-Snarska 2011). However, the interviews with employees revealed that half of them would like a child care centre in the company (Sadowska-Snarska 2011). Similarly, Polish female managers (Bilińska, Rawłuszko 2011) reported that flexible working time, gender equality and the development perspectives are necessary to support the professional development of women in Poland. They also expected promoting flexibility in employment and increasing childcare possibilities (Bilińska, Rawłuszko 2011). Such results indicate that recognizing their problems with combining work and private life spheres can be crucial for women to develop professionally.

Further, Social Diagnosis including 26 thousand respondents revealed that men and women expected similar solutions to help them reconcile private and work life – 57% of women and 55% of men considered flexible working time as the best in their situation (Batorski et al. 2013). They also wished for better possibilities of care services for children (37% of women and 33% of men) (Batorski et al. 2013). On the other hand, in a study that involved police officers, men expected higher salaries, whereas women also mentioned the need for more support in dealing with private issues and taking care of children as well as flexible working hours (Krawczyk et al. 2010).

Sometimes problems related to WLB do not result in dissatisfaction or motivation for change. For instance, a research that involved employees with caring responsibilities over someone ill or an elderly revealed that except from the



need to take days off or sick leaves to deal with some of the duties, the respondents did not expect employers to do anything more (Stypińska, Perek-Białas 2014). A study on project workers (Grabus, Rogowska 2011) showed they needed freedom to decide about the compensation for the hours worked overtime and to organize their own work. They also wished for more time spent with families, support in organizing or financing holidays, or individual work system (Grabus, Rogowska 2011). However, many of them were willing to work for the same employer again.

### **3.2. Organizations' perspective on employees' WLB and benefits and solutions offered to employees**

The solutions offered by Polish employers include: extra or extended leaves, reduced working time, flexible working hours, the possibility to leave work in case of urgent private issues, reduced overtime work and business trips because of family situation, the possibility to take children to work and above all – financial support: shopping vouchers, gifts on special occasions (such as Christmas), financing holidays, recreation or culture for the employees or their families (Kacprzak-Choińska, Żemigała 2013; Robak 2012; Sadowska-Snarska 2013). Only a few companies offered job-sharing, working at home or telework (Sadowska-Snarska 2013).

Even though 47% of the employers recognize the emerging difficulties in reconciling private and work life (Sadowska-Snarska 2013), 70% of the studied employers claimed the issue of WLB is an employee's problem. Only one in four companies offered WLB programmes as a part of company policy (Sadowska-Snarska 2013). In a research by Wołoszyn et al. (2012), only 19% of the studied employers understood the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as introducing facilities for employees. They rather associated CSR with obeying the rules of balanced development, ethical norms or law (Wołoszyn et al. 2012). Similarly, among 1011 Polish employers, 89% did not identify employees' needs and expectations on WLB support (Sadowska-Snarska 2013). Moreover, only 9% of the organizations conducted surveys about employees' satisfaction. Thus, the question of the effectiveness and influence of the introduced programmes on the functioning of the employees and the whole organization remains unanswered (Wołoszyn et al. 2012).

### **3.3. Particular problems of women in achieving WLB**

A research conducted on a group of 1000 unemployed mothers revealed that only 6% of them believed that combining work and private life was impossible and half of the respondents opted for part-time (Szydlik-Leszczynska 2013).

They also reported difficulties resulting from the break in employment caused by parental leave or lack of possibilities to organize child care (Szydlik-Leszczyńska 2013). Another study on successful female managers (Bilińska, Rawłuszko 2011) revealed that half of the women considered problems with achieving WLB and excessive burden with family duties to be key barriers for women to achieve professional success in Poland. Also the research including police officers (Krawczyk et al. 2010) showed that up to 97% of women as compared to 74% of men had difficulties in maintaining their WLB. The results are similar to those found in a study including over 1000 employees, 84% of women and 79% of men claimed they had serious problems with carrying out their responsibilities towards families (Sadowska-Snarska 2011). In contrast, some research provides evidence that superiors often treat working mothers more tolerantly than other employees. Kacprzak-Choińska and Żemigała (2013) found that 20% of the studied mothers claimed their working time adversely influenced their private life, whereas 26% of other employees agreed with such opinion. These results also showed that 43% of childless workers and only 30% of working mothers were expected to answer work phone calls or reply to emails in their private time (Kacprzak-Choińska, Żemigała 2013).

### **3.4. WLB understanding and meaning**

The research on a group of 100 employees showed that 70% of them declared that work made them feel life fulfilment, but only one in five respondents found work enriching for their private lives (Robak 2012). Such result is similar to that found by Bilińska, Rawłuszko (2011) – among 193 of the studied managers, over a half defined success as keeping the balance between work and family life. Further, Baran and Kłós conducted a research with a group of 850 respondents of three different generations – baby boomers, generation X and generation Y – and showed that all of them claimed they needed the balance between private and work time (Baran, Kłós 2014).

Considering the perception of WLB, the existing studies have provided ambiguous results. A study that involved 875 economically active people showed that despite almost 70% of them claimed they maintained their WLB, nearly 50% complained about too much time spent on work and family duties (Robak, Słocińska 2013). In the same time, they felt they did not have enough free time to spend on pleasure.

### **3.5. Knowledge of the available WLB benefits**

Krawczyk, Modrzejewska and Parafiński (2010) revealed that only 30% of the studied women and 6% of men knew special solutions aimed at supporting WLB available in their workplaces. Moreover, 67% of the studied respondents



did not know about the general law supporting WLB. At the same time, many of them experienced negative consequences of work-life imbalance (Krawczyk et al. 2010). From another perspective, in a research by Robak and Słocińska (2013) up to 80% of the respondents declared they were aware of the available possibilities offered by their organizations and the government, but one in five workers claimed that employee rights were not respected in their companies.

### **3.6. Use of WLB benefits**

A study by Sadowska-Snarska, showed that financial support was the most popular method of supporting employees and included vouchers, gifts on special occasions, grants or loans (Sadowska-Snarska 2013). Only a few companies offered solutions supporting child care. Almost 40% of the studied companies organized or financed holidays for children and 16% of them organized or financed extracurricular activities for children (Sadowska-Snarska 2013). Only 1% of the companies offered a nursery or kindergarten in the company. Also financing the nursery or kindergarten was available only to the parents working in 5% of the studied companies (Sadowska-Snarska 2013). The previous results suggest that the highest percentage of parents used the help of grandparents or public nursery or kindergarten and some of them relied mostly on their partners (Sadowska-Snarska 2011).

Considering flexible working hours, Polish companies mostly used part-time work – half of the companies offered such solution (Sadowska-Snarska 2013). The studied companies also offered reducing overtime work, business trips or work during holidays because of individual family situation. The studied companies used telework, weekend work, work from home, task working time or job sharing the least often (Sadowska-Snarska 2013).

## **4. Future research directions**

Bearing in mind the above findings and conclusions, we propose the following issues should be considered in the future research on WLB in Poland:

1. WLB definition and meaning for employees. Most of the Polish research on WLB do not provide a clear definition of WLB. Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) or Guest (2002) also recognized such a problem in foreign WLB research. The balance between work and private life does not necessarily mean equal distribution of time to each of those spheres. First, an individual does not have to distribute time to different life domains equally to function best. Second, also the energy, engagement or satisfaction with various spheres of life may determine the perception of work-life balance and readiness to achieve one (Guest 2002).

2. Indicators and determinants of work-life (im)balance. Future research should investigate how to recognize that an employee has achieved the needed balance. Recognizing the evidence for WLB would allow to identify the determinants of WLB and to study whether organizational and legal solutions contribute to employees' WLB.

3. The use of benefits offered by the government and organizations controlling for the employees' personal situations (gender, age, family, preferences). Such data would serve as a basis to assess the attractiveness of particular WLB programmes. Linking those results with the knowledge on the employees' needs would make it possible to introduce facilities addressed to particular groups of employees and to encourage them to use their privileges.

4. The consequences of work-life (im)balance and the effectiveness of the WLB programmes as well as their influence on the company and employees. Some companies conduct surveys on employees' satisfaction and preferences on WLB, however, their results are often for the internal management purposes only and thus, are not published. Spreading the knowledge about the advantages and benefits from such programmes would make them more common.

5. Problems and solutions on the issue of reconciling work and private life for people of different life and family situations, e.g. those taking care of elderly or ill. Given that the societies are growing old, the problem of reconciling work and caring duties may become critical in the nearest future. Also WLB of people with no family and no other responsibilities should be explored because WLB refers to all working people.

6. Methods. Some Polish studies on WLB involved small or unrepresentative study samples or offered an inadequate description of the methods used. That hindered the possibility to assess the generality and reliability of the results. Such problems may partially result from the difficulties in defining the phenomenon. Therefore, future research should include clear definitions, representative samples and measurement methods suitable to the definition.

## **5. Norwegian research on WLB**

The review of Norwegian research on WLB was primarily based on EBSCO and Google Scholar database, using the same criteria (i.e. keywords, type of papers included) as in Polish studies, but formulated in English language. For this purpose we chose studies published after 2010, but we did not exclude the studies conducted a few years before publishing in 2010 for two reasons: 1) only one study fulfilled the criteria; 2) the Norwegian labour law did not change significantly over the past few years. Finally, we completed the list of analyzed papers with those found in the references. The review resulted in qualifying 11 papers: 6 quantitative studies (Gautun, Hagen 2010; Instrand et al. 2010; Instrand et al. 2011; Langballe

et al. 2011; Olsen, Dahl 2010; Solberg 2012) and 5 qualitative studies, including 4 group interviews (Alstveit 2011; Lövhöiden et al. 2011; Lövhöiden, Yap, Ineson 2011; Wetlesen 2010) and 1 case study (Håpnes, Rasmussen 2011). Quantitative studies based on surveys and questionnaires and the samples varied from 522 (Solberg 2012) to 2561 (Olsen, Dahl 2010) respondents. Most of the studies focused on employees' issues, but one regarded the transfer of work-family model from the generation of parents (Wetlesen 2010).

Based on the analyses, following subjects of Norwegian researchers' interest emerged: 1) WLB concerns of Norwegian employees; 2) determinants of WLB; 3) the impact of work – life interaction on different life spheres and 4) preferred family – friendly solutions.

### **5.1. WLB concerns of Norwegian employees**

Lövhöiden, Yap, Ineson (2011) examined Norwegian hotel managers' issues of work-family conflicts (WFC) and work-family enrichment (WFE). The interviews revealed following WFC:

- a) Time-based – interviewees could not participate simultaneously in family and work events;
- b) Strain-based – stress and anxiety related to finding childcare affected work performance;
- c) Behaviour-based – frequent helpfulness behaviour at work resulted in family disharmony.

These types of work-family conflicts had some particular causes: time constraints – long working hours, colleagues', guests' and superiors' expectations, and the nature of hotel industry – 24/7 working hours.

Another study by Gautun and Hagen (2010) revealed that the age of children affected the frequency of help. The older the respondent, the more probable he or she was to help parents, because they were older as well. Besides, 73% of men and 67% of women reported that they were both employed and were helping their parents. It occurred that the bigger parents' needs for care, the more difficulties in combining work and care duties their children experienced.

Alstveit et al. (2011) interpreted first-time mothers' experiences of returning to work after maternity leave in a Norwegian context. The analyses resulted in emerging three subthemes and interpretational levels:

1) Rational – managing the workload and taking responsibility for the child. Many participants had changed their previous workplaces to save time for taking the child to day care, to spend less time on commuting or to avoid working overtime.

2) Emotional – managing unpleasant feelings of not being a good mother. Most of the participants reported that being back at work gave them more energy and made them better mothers. They wished to be with their children and felt they could lose too much of their children's development though.

3) Existential – keeping a balance between sensitivity and self-confidence. The participants' adjustment to reduced working hours and being away from work due to their children's illnesses made some of them concerned about how they were perceived in the workplace.

## 5.2. WLB determinants

Wetlesen (2010) described the results of interviews with eight respondents, whose parents – working part-time and sharing home duties equally – joined a research experiment in Norway in the 1970s (Grønseth 1978). In 2010, the interviewers asked respondents (the children) about their recollections on growing up in a work-sharing family. An additional sample of people grown up with full-time working parents was recruited to ensure some contrast between groups. Wetlesen (2010) tried to determine if the participants tended to reproduce the part-time work sharing family model experienced in the childhood. Childhood memories of the participants occurred positive. There were no complaints about childcare arrangements. On the other hand, the contrasting group reported less satisfaction with extra parental care arrangements in the childhood.

Håpnes and Rasmussen (2011) assumed that family-friendly policies may result in different employees' practices. Norwegian researchers presented the results of qualitative case studies of work organization and employment relations in research and development departments. Three categories of employees occurred:

1) "Fire fighters" – female researchers who were ready to leave home even at night, to take care of their work. They worked reduced hours (80–90%) to take care of the children, but the workload remained the same. They did not get compensation for extra hours because they were already paid well as experts.

2) "Balancing actors" – female scientists balancing between their responsibilities for their research projects, customer demands, their colleagues and the needs of their children. Flexible working hours made it easy for them to combine work and care for children. However, some of them needed more flexibility than their working time offered so they reduced their hours.

3) "Modern fathers" – young men aiming at both professional career and the care of their children. Unlike balancing actors, young male researchers were not specialized and worked full-time. Their families depended on their income, so reducing working hours was not an option. Their work schedule was more structured because they had to deliver their children to the day care centre and pick them up. Because of such limited time arrangement possibilities, they had to finish their work in the evening.

Olsen and Dahl (2010) distinguished working time along two dimensions: irregular vs. regular working hours and control vs. no control over working time. Men who worked irregular hours without flexibility had significantly higher sickness absence than the reference category (regular hours, no flexibility).

The authors explained that both lack of control and working irregular hours are damaging to workers' health and they treated sickness absence only as a health effect of working unsocial hours with little control. Next, workers in all categories experienced more difficulties in combining work and family life than the reference group (surprisingly, also respondents working flexible hours). The authors speculate that irregular working hours create so much difficulty for the work-family balance that the problems for employees in this category are even worse than the lack of autonomy over the working time.

Innstrand et al. (2010) analysed how work-home and home-work conflicts (WHC and HWC) and facilitation (WHF and HWF) vary among people from families with different structures: two-parent families, single parents, childless couples and singles. The results revealed that a handful of arrangements available in Norway (day care centres, paid leaves, flexible working hours) may have decreased the differences between single parents and two-parent families. The researchers also suggested that childless employees probably felt they were more often expected to work overtime and to fill in for parents with child responsibilities. More conflict and more facilitation occurred among the younger and female respondents. It may suggest that despite the increase of women in the workforce, they still take main responsibility at home.

### **5.3. The impact of WLB quality on different life spheres**

The influence of work-home interaction on burnout was examined in the two studies including church ministers (Innstrand et al. 2011) and physicians (Langballe et al. 2011). The former group served as an example of helping profession, potentially prone to burnout and thus, WLB difficulties (Allen et al. 2000). If it comes to lagged effects, only work-home conflict (WHC) was negatively related to exhaustion (burnout dimension) at T2. However, two-year time lag may be too short for some of the variables explored in this study to change and such a puzzling result may be due to a probable suppression effect among the variables included in the regression. Namely, burnout might have been suppressed by a stronger predictor than WHC, but unrevealed in the equation. Besides, WHC was positively related to exhaustion and disengagement and WHF was negatively related to exhaustion. The authors explain the first relationships stating that long working hours and highly permeable borders between work and family life make the church ministers susceptible to WHC, which results in burnout. The last relationship may suggest that meaning, personal rewards and challenges associated with the profession might benefit their home life (Allen et al. 2000).

In the same research, physicians were another group of interest (Langballe et al. 2011). The authors found that WHF at T1 was positively related to disengagement at T2 in women. Next, WHC was positively related to exhaustion in both genders and positively related to disengagement only in women. HWC was positively

related to disengagement in women. The authors stress that in Norway half of the male doctors' spouses work part-time or are full-time homemakers, whereas almost all the spouses of the female doctors work full-time. WHF had a protective effect on exhaustion in women only. Langballe et al. (2011) suggested the family role still intrudes into the work role more for women than for men.

Solberg et al. (2012) studied the impact of change in doctors' job position, reduction in working hours and work-home stress on job satisfaction in a longitudinal survey study. The significant factors were following: change in job position from senior house officer to other, any change in job position and decrease in work-home interference stress (the strongest predictor, might have suppressed the coefficients of the first two). Also, the reduction in the number of working hours occurred irrelevant. The decline in the wear and tear of life-work stress and the difficulties of balancing a doctor's work and social life over the years had an independent effect on doctors' work satisfaction.

#### **5.4. Preferred family-friendly strategies and solutions**

Lövhöiden et al. (2011) found that with reference to the respondents' opinion, work-family conflict interventions require management and colleagues' support, understanding and sympathy to succeed. Furthermore, a handful of interviewees believed the provision of following solutions could buffer the negative impacts of WFC:

- flexible working time,
- minimum interruption at work,
- work from home,
- reduced working time,
- work shifts,
- individual office,
- kindergarten/ childcare centre provisions,
- family orientation.

The respondents in Gautun and Hagen's study (2010) reported a few ways of coping with the difficulties of taking care of their elderly parents such as: accumulated holidays, more than three days off from work, changed working hours.

To sum up, the expectations of employees do not include many particular WLB programmes. They just count on minimum flexibility and the support or at least understanding from their superiors and colleagues. Finally, many Norwegian employees may easily adjust their working hours, but they prefer to send their children to day care centres.



## 6. Future research directions

To sum up, we infer there are still some missing points in Norwegian studies that need further exploring.

1. Statistics according to the use and availability of WLB solutions provided by the government and organizations. From the analysed data we already know that the Norwegians tend to use part-time work, flexible working hours and childcare centres (Lövhöiden et al. 2011; Wetlesen 2010). However, Norwegian sources lack the information on how often these benefits are used throughout the nation. Such information, could help create legislation changes in the labour law.

2. Knowledge of the available WLB programmes. Analysed articles included mainly employees who used at least some of the strategies. In future research, organizations with no WLB policies should be also included to provide the information on the causes of poor WLB use and verify whether it is a matter of an employer or employees' insufficient knowledge.

3. Surveys or interviews directed towards employers – their view of chances and constraints in introducing WLB policies. According to the last point, not only lack of knowledge may lead to family unfriendly policy in companies, but also other organizational or technical barriers. Probably, organizations with restricted working time schedules require completely different attitudes in adjusting to young parents' needs.

4. Similarly to Polish studies, Norwegian research gives no information about how people define and understand WLB. Benefits from the better comprehension of folk knowledge of WLB were already given.

5. Guest (2002) suggests that the studies of WLB can be enriched by the individual psychological differences. Although this approach has been presented in plenty of WLB papers (Andysz et al. 2014), none of them were conducted in Norway. It could be helpful for both organizational (recruitment, company policy) and clinical reasons (employees with disorders, workaholics).

## 7. Summary

This review revealed differences in the topics and methods used in WLB research in Poland and Norway.

Polish studies focus more on the social side of WLB, whereas the Norwegian studies were more individual. Poland has a shorter tradition of WLB policy than Norway. Thus, the phenomenon of WLB requires much more basic research in Poland than it does in Norway – prevalence of use of WLB benefits or the consequences of work-life balance and imbalance are the issues that still need some attention when Polish current state of literature is considered. In Poland, the researchers tried to answer whether WLB is important for people and how

they understand it. Norwegians, in turn, rather searched for the determinants and correlates of WLB. In both countries the researchers examined the problems occurring in combining work and private life, recognizing employees' needs and expectations towards WLB policies. What is most important, both Poles and Norwegians count mainly on the provision of child care services and flexible working time which is probably the biggest support for employees with children.

Moreover, the Norwegian studies focused on the impact of WLB on people's lives, whereas Polish researchers studied organizational attitudes towards WLB solutions and employees' knowledge and the use of such programmes. Again, this might be the result of the long tradition of WLB policy in Norway – probably, investigating such issues in Norway would provide trivial conclusions, because of higher social awareness of the importance of WLB. In Poland, in turn, there is still some need to encourage employers to introduce WLB solutions for employees and show them the possible consequences and benefits. The Polish studies paid more attention to the particular situation of women's WLB, which is surprising considering that Norwegian government attempts to promote gender equality (Traavik, Richardsen 2010) and provides generous maternity leave arrangements (Stier et al. 2012). Probably, the situation of Norwegian women in the labour market is good enough and needs no further political assistance nor research interest.

As some Polish employers tend to not comply with Labour Code regulations, researchers should pay special attention to confront employees' needs and employers' possibilities in WLB area. Being aware of the employees' expectations and the sceptical attitudes of the employers, more research could provide the answer whether currently used solutions actually help to achieve WLB.

Norwegian research do not specify which WLB solutions are the most desired by employees. Studies on the use and the knowledge of WLB solutions, similar to the Polish ones, could serve for organizations and authorities as a guide in introducing further changes.

Moreover, more studies on psychology-related WLB issues in Poland would help determine the meaning of WLB, quality of life, health, well-being, job and family satisfaction being the results of work-life (im)balance or individual and situational determinants of attitude towards keeping WLB and using WLB benefits. In this context, Norwegian research strategy seems more useful because it concentrates on people, unlike in Poland, where the research and the law focus on the programmes and systems.

Considering formal and technical aspects we would also recommend publishing both Polish and Norwegian results in English to support the international discussion on WLB issues and the promoting of good practices.

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## **PORÓWNANIE POLITYKI I BADAŃ NAD RÓWNOWAGĄ PRACA–DOM W POLSCE I NORWEGII – OBECNY STAN WIEDZY I PERSPEKTYWY NA PRZYSZŁOŚĆ**

**Abstrakt.** Poczucie równowagi między pracą a życiem prywatnym wpływa nie tylko na jakość życia pracowników i ich wydajność, ale również na funkcjonowanie całej firmy. Dlatego też podejmowanie działań zmierzających do zachowania równowagi przynosi korzyści pracownikom, pracodawcom, władzom państwowym, a także badaczom. Polska i Norwegia stanowią przykłady dwóch europejskich krajów o odmiennej polityce społecznej w zakresie wspierania równowagi praca–dom, zarówno na poziomie prawnym, jak i organizacyjnym. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest: a) porównanie rozwiązań prawnych w dwóch państwach różniących się poziomem ekonomicznym oraz b) przegląd aktualnych badań nad równowagą praca–dom w tychże krajach. Norwegia jest krajem o wiele bogatszym, stwarzającym większe możliwości, jeśli chodzi o oferowane wsparcie dla obywateli. Jednakże norweskie rozwiązania prawne są podobne do tych, które obowiązują w Polsce, z wyjątkiem systemu urlopów rodzicielskich. Polscy badacze, w przeciwieństwie do norweskich, w swoich badaniach skupiają się przede wszystkim na wykorzystywaniu i dostępności poszczególnych rozwiązań. Z kolei badania norweskie prezentują psychologiczne wyznaczniki i skutki równowagi praca–dom (bądź jej braku). Autorzy artykułu podają również pewne wskazówki co do dalszych badań, które mogłyby się przyczynić do kształtowania prawidłowej polityki prospołecznej, zarówno w Polsce, jak i w Norwegii.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Norwegia, Polska, polityka społeczna, WLB, równowaga praca–dom, pracujący rodzice.