

Work-Life Balance: Insights from Loco-Pilots of Malda Division, Eastern Railways

Ushnish Guha

Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, West Bengal

Abstract:

The concept of occupation has become specific specialized, and competitive with time. Locomotive Pilots (Loco-Pilots) are one such specific group tasked with operating the Locomotives in Indian Railways which power and manoeuvre the trains. The themes from the limited literature available in the Indian context (which is mostly quantitative) talks about occupational stress, fatigue, noise induced hearing loss among others. The social life of locomotive pilots is an area which has been problematized that there is lack of balance due to work but can be described further in detail. The objective to document and discuss the balance between work, social life, and family life of loco-pilots. **Methodology:** The research design is descriptive and the tools of questionnaire and semi structured interview have been used to collect data for quantitative and qualitative respectively. The sampling has been conducted purposively. The ethical considerations of informed consent and anonymity were put into place. **Results:** There is lack of specific time schedule attached to this job which converts to the absence of specific fixed family time. Further, there are no calendar holidays in their occupation which becomes the concern of leaves not matching the calendar festivals. Also, the calendar festivals enhance the frequency of shift duty (festival special trains) thus lack of leave opportunity. The respondents also mentioned that they miss being a stakeholder in children's education which is another highlight. The occupation poses as a direct challenge wherein the occupational factors tend to affect the social and familial programmes.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Loco-Pilots, Social Life, Family Life

Introduction:

Work-Life balance is a concept which acts as the juncture of both differentiation and overlap between work and life. The concept of life here over the years has been understood with various constructions. The components that have been understood to conceptualize life are personal, social, familial and others. The academic construct of work-life balance is a bidirectional one; which essentially translates to that work can interfere with life, and life can interfere with work. Locomotive Pilots is a term that is used as a designation for the individuals who work in the Indian Railways and operate the locomotives which in turn power the trains. The problem is that there is significant work load on the running staff of the railway network, the loco-pilot is an example of such running staff. The themes obtained from the review of literature display that loco-pilots perform an extremely demanding job in terms of work output and efficiency. These jobs require support from the family as well as often result in outcomes of lack of balance and/or neglect towards the family. (Ranjan & Prasad, 2013) (Ranjan & Prasad, 2014) There is direct conceptualization of very frequent travel outstation or base in terms of frequency which also can be for a long time. The job entails associated with tasks requiring continuous monitoring, tasks requiring fine

motor skills, and tasks undertaken in hot and humid environments. Shift work for Loco-Pilots is often associated with two occupational stressors: working unsocial hours; and fatigue. (Pradhan, Pattnaik, Panda, & Panda, 2015) These stressors may induce lack of efficiency thus may lead to increased workplace accidents and injuries. Furthermore, excessive fatigue, family and social life disruption may have implications on lower job satisfaction, motivation, and employee well-being.

Methodology:

The research design is descriptive by nature and the tools of questionnaire and semi structured interview have been used to collect data for quantitative and qualitative respectively. 19 respondents who correspond with the designation Loco-Pilot were the participants of the study thus it is a small sample study. The sampling for this study was conducted purposively. The data was collected by visiting the crew lobby with the necessary permissions. The ethical considerations of informed consent and anonymity were put into place. Since, the quantitative could only highlight the findings thus to describe the experiences the qualitative component was also incorporated and narratives were documented.

Results:

The profile of respondents depicted that 12 respondents are married with 1 Child, 5 respondents are married with 2 children, 1 Unmarried, and 1 Widowed with 1 Child (during the interview it came about that his wife passed during the Pandemic). It also needs to be considered that respondents are Loco-Pilots which is a designation and is obtained with increasing years of service thus age also increases proportionally with some exceptions

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	10.5
Not Sure	4	21.1
No	13	68.4
Total	19	100.0

Table 1: Work-Life Balance

The insights from the data can interpreted that most of the respondents that is 13 (68.4%) believed that work-life Balance was not maintained, 4 (21.1%) respondents were not sure, and 2 (10.5%) respondents believed work-life balance was being maintained. The respondents mentioned that how it was difficult to provide specific fixed family time because there is the absence of the fixed schedule. The schedule runs according to the crew management system roster and the schedule of train that one operates on a given day which would enable their schedule their time of being at home, departure, and arrival from and at home respectively.

	Calendar Festival			Total
	Not Satisfactory	Less Satisfactory	Average	
Not Satisfactory	11	2	0	13

Recreational Activities	Less Satisfactory	2	0	0	2
	Average	1	1	2	4
Total		14	3	2	19

Table 2: Recreational Activities and Calendar Festival

		Calendar Festivals
Recreational Activity	Pearson Correlation	.602
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008
	N	19
Work-Family Life Balance	Pearson Correlation	.839
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	19

Table 3: Correlations

The data depicted in the above-mentioned tables provides the insight that 11 Respondents find Calendar Festivals as well as Recreational Activities to be Not Satisfactory whereas rest are distributed between less satisfactory and average. The understanding that can be conceptualized is that the loco-pilots do not get calendar holidays and recreational activities are also less because of the schedule that possess and it is about getting most rest to tackle the fatigue as well as starting the next shift well rested is vital from the perspective of the locomotive pilot. Furthermore, it is not that recreational activities are not being organized but the continuous scheduling of crew limits the access to the recreational activity like sports (for example cricket, football, volleyball). The correlations drawn between variables of Work and Family Life Balance, Recreational Activities, Calendar Holidays and Family Time display that the variables are correlated.

The significant correlations that can be depicted from the data are between Recreational Activities and Calendar Festivals with a correlation coefficient of .602 (moderate) and p-value of .008 at 0.01 level and the variables of Work and Family Balance and Calendar Festivals display a correlation coefficient of .839 (strong) and p-value of .000 at 0.01 level. These can both be interpreted as statistically significant which further establishes the argument.

	Frequency	Percent
Family	15	78.9
Health	1	5.3
Finance	3	15.8
Total	19	100.0

Table 4: Sources Of Personal Stress

As mentioned earlier, stress is common in any individual's life but it is not always from the same sources. It is essential to understand that among respondents who are loco-pilots there arises a need to categorize for conceptual clarity. Thus, the conceptualization of occupational sources and personal sources need to be introduced into the discussion. The occupational sources would include components like nature of shift duty, responsibility of shift duty, bad weather which may have an adverse impact while on duty and others. The personal sources of the stress would associate the personal life vis-à-vis family, health of self and family, parenting, education and establishment of children, and others. The data that has been depicted in Table 4 essentially displays the distribution of the responses regarding the variable of Sources of Personal Stress. 15 respondents mentioned Family, 3 Respondents mentioned Finance, and the remaining respondent mentioned Health, although there were other options which have not featured in the responses.

One of the respondents mentioned, "I have been working for 25 years but still work-life balance has not been obtained. The attempt is to juggle between job, household work that one is supposed to do, and spending leisure time with family at best. The workload is essentially high because there is an acute shortage of loco-pilots because the designation is obtained based on seniority and regular recruitment at the level, regular promotions and other factors influence the presence of loco-pilot. Mostly, major festival on Durga Puja and Chhath Puja there are special trains that operate to meet the demand of passenger movement thus our frequency of duty also increases, spending time with family on festivals is a problem." Another narrative that was documented from a respondent stated that, "I hardly can participate in household work. The only contribution is that when I get link rest at base I go to bank and do the necessary work that is to be done. I have only to been to my daughter's school Kendriya Vidyalaya once during admission and after that my wife has had to take over paying school fees, to the regular drop and pick-up, to attending keeping track of her studies, marks, and attending parent teacher meetings."

The analysis of the narratives which been documented display that there is direct first-person perspective that how there are different aspects and domains of social and familial life which need to prioritized but not at the cost of each other. There has been the mention of education of children and it is extremely important that there is a role of both parents in it which in this case is extremely difficult to obtain citing the nature, frequency associated workload, and outstation movement. The respondents need to maintain an integrated approach towards it.

Discussion and Conclusion:

There is a felt need to balance and integrate family needs and career requirements. The ability to balance between workplace's needs and personal life's needs is perceived as an important issue among employees globally. The lack of balance can lead to implications like stress, burnout, depression, and lower work contributions. The combination of work and family demands often leads to time pressure, stress, and conflict. (Sanne, 2008) (Srinivas & Reddy, 2013)

The respondents are directly trying to manoeuvre the work deliverables, schedule at work which is one of the major reasons for disruption since it flexible and not predictable in terms of both frequency as well as the clock. The respondents do not function ass per conventional clock hours, it is the railway clock which essentially is 24*7. The factors which play a role in scheduling are the nature of trip, the destination, the type of train (mail/express/superfast/premium) and others. Although, there are several factors directly impact the scheduling like an outlier, weather, railway traffic, delays and others are example of these unpredictable factors.

The intersection with family needs to be understood as that there are significant areas life children's education wherein both parents are key stakeholders and respondents have mentioned it as a theme in the narratives which they are concerned about because there is a thought that it gets neglected.

Also, the discussion of the major finding needs to be understood as railways do not operate as per calendar thus there is the absence of calendar holidays. The intersection is that the family does function as per calendar holidays and spending time with family becomes an issue. Furthermore, vacations for loco-pilots are difficult because it can be planned but leaves for the said days cannot be planned because of link diagram of scheduling that one is functioning upon. The special trains that are operated during specific festivals which have more calendar holidays as mentioned in the narratives increase the frequency of duty of the loco-pilot thus does not have the chance to go on vacation with the family and often ends up missing the original festival because of being outstation with the special trains. The management is conducting programmes for recreational purposes, to increase motivation, but the argument stands that it cannot be substituted in place of work-life balance. Thus, while summarizing it can be argued that work-family life balance for locomotive pilots is an area of concern and there is scope for structured systematic research in the future.

Conflict of Interest: None

Acknowledgment: The author appreciates and thanks Prof. Debotosh Sinha, Professor, Department of Social Work for his help and insights on this study. The author also appreciates all the officials for the necessary permissions and respondents for participation in the study.

References:

1. Pradhan, G., Pattnaik, A., Panda, S., & Panda, B. (2015). Occupational Health Challenges of Railway Employees in India - Towards Developing a Comprehensive Framework for Action. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience*, 17(2), 514-520.
2. Ranjan, R., & Prasad, T. (2013). Literature Review Report on-“Work-Life Balance of Loco-Pilots (Railway Drivers) in India”. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 5(19), 17 - 27. Retrieved from <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/EJBM/article/view/7268>
3. Ranjan, R., & Prasad, T. (2014, August). Working-Conditions, Stress and Their Outcomes: A Review Study among Loco-Pilots (Railway Drivers) in India. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 19(8), 93-101. doi: 10.9790/0837-198193101
4. Sanne, J. M. (2008). Framing Risks in a safety-critical and hazardous job: risk-taking as responsibility in railway maintenance. *Journal of Risk Research*, 11(5), 645-658. doi: 10.1080/13669870701715550
5. Srinivas, T., & Reddy, M. V. (2013). The Human Intervention in Train Safety on Indian Railways. 23rd International Railway Safety Conference, (p. 18). Vancouver.