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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS AND WORK–LIFE BALANCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIA AND SWEDEN

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Abstract

This paper examines how government policies in India and Sweden shape work–life balance (WLB) outcomes. Work–life balance describes the ability of individuals to meet professional responsibilities without compromising personal life, health, and well-being. Governments play a critical role in facilitating or impeding balance through legislation, policy frameworks, employment regulations, and social support systems. Using secondary data from government sources, global indexes, and scholarly publications, this comparative study analyses the nature, scope, and effectiveness of government interventions in India and Sweden. India represents a developing economy with emerging WLB initiatives facing implementation challenges, while Sweden offers a mature welfare model with comprehensive family-friendly policies. Through a review of existing government policies, labour laws, social welfare frameworks, and secondary data, this paper highlights differences and similarities in approaches, evaluates impacts on employment outcomes and wellbeing, and provides policy implications for both contexts. The study concludes that Sweden's institutionalised WLB regime significantly outperforms India's in terms of reach and effectiveness, but evolving Indian reforms present opportunities for better work–life integration.

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Introduction:-

Work–life balance (WLB) is broadly defined as the state in which an individual can successfully manage professional responsibilities alongside personal and family obligations, leisure, and caregiving roles, including maternity and paternity duties (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Achieving effective WLB has been linked to numerous positive outcomes, including enhanced psychological well-being, increased job satisfaction, higher organizational commitment, and greater economic participation (Verma & Bhargava, 2025). Conversely, poor WLB is associated with elevated stress levels, burnout, and decreased productivity, which can have long-term consequences for both employees and organizations (Allen et al., 2013). Government interventions play a critical role in shaping the work–life environment through legislation, social welfare entitlements, and regulation of employer practices (OECD, 2018). These interventions may include parental leave policies, flexible work arrangements, anti-discrimination

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laws, and minimum standards for working hours. Countries differ considerably in the extent and effectiveness of such measures, reflecting differences in economic development, labour market structure, and cultural expectations regarding work and family. The aims of this comparative study are to (a) identify and describe key government policies related to WLB in India and Sweden, (b) evaluate the impacts of these policies on labour markets and wellbeing, and (c) draw policy implications for both countries.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review:-

Work-life balance (WLB) is shaped by a complex interaction of socio-economic factors including labour regulations, cultural norms, organisational practices, and social welfare systems. The theoretical framework of the social determinants of health posits that labour conditions and policies are critical determinants of mental and physical well-being (Björk-Fantetal., 2023). Governments are positioned to shape these determinants through various policies and initiative programmes. Existing literature identifies several policy instruments that contribute to WLB, such as flexible working arrangements, including flexitime and remote work, parental and family leave provisions, childcare support, paid leave entitlements, and statutory safeguards such as the right to disconnect. However, the implementation and effectiveness of these policies vary widely across nations.

Government Interventions in India:-

The Government of India has enacted and proposed several legislative and policy measures that influence work-life balance by shaping employment benefits, regulating working conditions, and expanding worker protections. These interventions aim to support workforce well-being, protect rights, and respond to changing patterns of work, although implementation and impact may vary across sectors which are discussed below.

Consolidated Labour Codes and Worker Protections:-

In November 2025, the Indian government notified four major labour codes that unify 29 older labour laws into streamlined frameworks covering wages, industrial relations, social security, and occupational safety and working conditions.



Fig 1 : (Government of India, Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2025, Figure 1)

These codes aim to simplify compliance, extend social security to gig and platform workers, and standardize core employment terms such as written job contracts and working hours. While not all provisions are directly described as work-life balance policies, the reforms collectively promote work-life balance by strengthening worker welfare, improving safety, and encouraging sustainable labour market participation.

Enhanced Maternity leave:-

Under the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, the duration of paid maternity leave for women employees was increased from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, with provisions allowing up to eight weeks' leave before delivery and the remainder thereafter. The legislation also encourages flexible options such as work-from-home arrangements after maternity leave, subject to mutual agreement between employer and employee. This reform is intended to help women maintain employment while fulfilling caregiving responsibilities.

Workplace safety and working conditions:-

The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code, 2020, enforced in 2025, replaced multiple earlier statutes (including the Factories Act, 1948) and sets uniform standards for workplace safety, health, and conditions of employment across sectors. The Code includes provisions on work hours, rest intervals, paid leave eligibility, and employer obligations for worker welfare, indirectly contributing to improved work–life balance through the regulation of work demands. For instance, the Code sets a maximum of eight working hours per day and 48 hours per week, with a mandate for minimum rest intervals of one hour after five hours of work, and restricts overtime beyond these limits. It standardizes paid leave entitlements, including earned leave and casual leave, ensuring workers can take time off for personal or family needs without forfeiting pay.

Proposed Right to Disconnect Initiative:-

In 2025, a ‘Right to Disconnect Bill’ was brought before the Indian Parliament as a private member’s bill by NCP MP Supriya Sule. It aims to give workers the legal right to disconnect from work-related calls, emails, messages or other communications outside official working hours or on holidays. The Bill would require employers to set clear policies regarding after-hours communication and protect employees from any disciplinary action if they choose not to respond. This proposal was motivated by concerns about digital burnout, stress and the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional time in an always-connected work culture.

Sectoral and State-Level Adjustments to Work Hours:-

Indian states are revising labour rules to align with central labour codes, including allowing women to work night shifts with consent and appropriate safety safeguards, and updating provisions on working hours and weekly rest. These reforms reflect efforts to introduce greater flexibility while safeguarding workers’ well-being and enhancing work–life balance.

Government Interventions in Sweden:-

Sweden is renowned for its exceptional work–life balance, ranking sixth globally in the 2025 ‘Global Life-Work Balance Index’ and consistently appearing among the top countries in the ‘OECD Better Life Index work–life balance dimension’. This reflects a culture that genuinely values well-being, family time, and sustainable work practices which is evident in its policies as discussed below.

Working hours:-

Swedish labour laws set clear standards to protect workers’ time and promote a healthy work–life balance. Full-time workers are generally expected to work 40 hours per week, typically spread across eight hours a day, five days a week, providing strong protections for workers’ rights and work–life balance. Employees are guaranteed at least 25 days of paid annual leave each year, regardless of industry, ensuring significant time off for rest and personal life. Overtime is strictly controlled, with a maximum of 200 hours allowed per year, and weekly overtime is restricted so that the average total working time does not exceed 48 hours per week over a four-month period. At the same time, Sweden widely encourages flexible and hybrid work arrangements, allowing employees to adjust their schedules or work remotely as needed.

Parental Leave:-

A key feature of Sweden’s WLB framework is its parental insurance system, which provides a total of 480 days of paid leave per child, typically divided equally between both parents. The system encourages fathers to take leave, promoting shared caregiving and supporting gender equality in the workforce. Research shows that parental leave policies in Sweden promote gender equal uptake, with incentives designed to encourage fathers to take leave, contributing to shared caregiving responsibilities and gender equity in labour participation (Chakraborty, 2016).

Child care facility:-

Sweden provides extensive state-supported childcare services beginning at the age of one, with fees set at affordable levels relative to household income. This system ensures that families have access to high-quality early childhood education and care, which is professionally staffed and regulated to maintain consistent standards. By making childcare widely accessible and financially manageable, these provisions allow parents both mothers and fathers to return to work after parental leave without compromising their child’s care or development. The availability of reliable childcare also reduces stress and uncertainty commonly associated with balancing work and family responsibilities, thereby strengthening overall work–life balance and supporting sustained labour market participation (OECD, 2015).

Recent Reforms and Innovations:-

Sweden has recently updated its parental leave policies to allow parents to transfer up to 45 days of their leave to other caregivers, such as grandparents or other family members. This change provides additional flexibility for families, making it easier for parents especially single parents or those with limited support networks to manage childcare responsibilities while continuing to work. These measures go beyond traditional nuclear family models, supporting a broader definition of work–life balance and ensuring that children receive care while parents can participate fully in the labour market.

Comparative Analysis:-**Parental Leave:-**

Sweden and India differ sharply in parental leave policies. Sweden offers 480 days of paid parental leave per child, shared between both parents and designed to encourage fathers' involvement, supporting gender equality and work–life balance. In contrast, India provides 26 weeks (182 days) of paid maternity leave for mothers but offers very limited paternity leave which is only about 15 days, mainly for government employees, with no nationwide requirement for the private sector. This places greater childcare responsibility on mothers and can negatively affect overall work–life balance. Comparison highlights a significant gap, showing that Indian parents receive considerably fewer days to care for and bond with their newborn. This shorter leave can make it harder for families to share childcare responsibilities and maintain a healthy work–life balance.

Flexible Work Arrangements:-

Sweden has well-established flexible and hybrid work practices supported by strict labour regulations, including a standard 40-hour workweek and clear limits on overtime, which help employees maintain work–life balance (Sweden.se, n.d.). In contrast, flexible work arrangements in India are mostly limited to sectors like IT and BPO, with uneven adoption. Employees may avoid using these options due to career concerns, and the lack of comprehensive national regulations reduces their effectiveness in promoting work–life balance (Chambers, n.d.; Press Information Bureau [PIB], n.d.). According to this point, Sweden's approach is more effective in supporting work–life balance. It creates an environment where employees can balance professional and personal responsibilities without fear of negative career consequences. India's limited sectoral adoption and weaker regulatory support mean that flexible work arrangements are less reliable and less impactful in achieving similar outcomes.

Paid Annual Leave and Holidays:-

Sweden guarantees all employees at least 25 days of paid annual leave per year, which applies to full-time, part-time, and most private- and public-sector workers. Some sectors or collective agreements may offer even more, but 25 days serves as the minimum statutory entitlement, ensuring that nearly all employees have sufficient time to rest and maintain a healthy work–life balance. In India, annual leave entitlements vary significantly depending on the sector, employment type, and state regulations. For example, workers covered under the Factories Act, 1948 receive 12 days of paid leave per year, while employees governed by the Shops and Establishments Acts typically receive 12–20 days, depending on state-specific laws and working hours. Central government employees are generally entitled to 30 days of earned leave, whereas many private-sector employees outside these frameworks receive leave according to company policies, which may be less generous or inconsistently enforced. As a result, compared to Sweden's universal minimum of 25 days, many Indian employees have fewer guaranteed leave days, making it more difficult to achieve a balanced distribution between work and personal life.

Child Care Support:-

Sweden offers universal, subsidized childcare from age one, with capped fees and high-quality standards, enabling widespread affordable access and strong support for work–life balance (SDG16+, 2023). In contrast, India's public childcare system is more limited; while ICDS and Anganwadi centres provide basic early education and welfare services, they are not designed as full-day childcare. As a result, families often depend on private or employer-based options, which vary in cost and quality and make balancing work and caregiving more challenging, particularly for mothers (UNICEF, 2023). Overall, Sweden's childcare system clearly provides stronger institutional support for work–life balance, offering both accessibility and affordability, while India's system, though improving, remains insufficient for most working parents to fully integrate professional and caregiving responsibilities.

Policy Implementation and Coverage:-

Sweden applies labour and social policies consistently across sectors, backed by strong institutional enforcement mechanisms such as labour inspection authorities and municipal oversight, ensuring employees can reliably access

their entitlements and maintain work–life balance (SWEA, n.d.; Lexology, 2022). In contrast, India’s labour policy implementation is uneven, particularly within the large informal sector, and fragmented enforcement by central and state authorities, along with weak monitoring, limits the practical effectiveness of legal protections related to working hours, leave, and workplace flexibility (Amulya Charan, 2025; Times of India, 2022). Sweden clearly provides stronger and more reliable support for work–life balance, thanks to uniform policies and effective enforcement across sectors. While India’s fragmented implementation and weak enforcement, particularly in the informal workforce, limit employees’ access to statutory protections.

Discussion:-

By comparing India with a country that has a well-established work–life balance framework, this study identifies gaps in existing policies and highlights areas for improvement. The analysis highlights the following:

- First, expanding paternity leave and promoting gender-neutral parental benefits can support more equitable sharing of childcare responsibilities, reducing the burden on mothers and encouraging sustained workforce participation.
- Second, wider adoption of flexible and hybrid work arrangements, supported by clear legal guidelines and organisational acceptance, can help employees manage professional and personal commitments without fear of career penalties.
- Third, access to affordable, high-quality childcare is essential for enabling parents to return to work, and integrating full-day daycare options with existing government programmes can strengthen support for working families.
- Fourth, effective implementation and enforcement of labour laws, particularly in the informal sector, is necessary to ensure equitable access to leave, regulated working hours, and workplace flexibility.
- Finally, fostering a culture that values work–life balance, shared caregiving, and organisational support can enhance the effectiveness of these policies.

Overall, a holistic approach combining legislation, institutional support, organisational practices, and cultural change is essential to achieve meaningful work–life balance.

Conclusion:-

Government interventions play a crucial role in promoting work–life balance. Sweden’s comprehensive policy framework demonstrates how coordinated strategies can support employees in balancing professional and personal responsibilities. India’s evolving framework shows significant potential; however, stronger implementation and more inclusive policies are needed to support diverse worker groups. Adopting flexible and innovative approaches can enhance employee well-being, promote gender equity, and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

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