

# WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE: A TREATISE ON ZIMBABWEAN ACADEMICS

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## Abstract

The study examines the relationship between work-life balance and gender equality amongst academics in Zimbabwe. Although women have made progress in entering the workforce alongside men, many still face significant barriers preventing them from reaching top leadership positions, making achieving gender equality in the academic workspace seem unattainable. Although much research has been conducted on the gendered consequences of work-life balance, there is a lack of focus on this phenomenon because most of these studies are centered on industrialized countries. This study employed a quantitative research approach, utilizing stratified and judgmental sampling techniques to gather data from a total of 74 respondents who were affiliated with an academic institution within a private university in Zimbabwe. Data was collected using a 10-item questionnaire on work-life balance and a 9-item questionnaire on gender equality. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 29, employing descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The study findings suggest a direct correlation between work-life balance and gender equality. The study contributed to the discussion and conversations surrounding work-life balance in the academic community in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Academia, Discrimination, Gender equality, Work-life balance, Workplace, Higher education institutions.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Work and personal life are crucial aspects of an individual's social sphere, and achieving a balance between them has become imperative in academics. Although women have made significant strides in

entering professions formerly dominated by men (Raz & Tzruya, 2018), many still face significant barriers that prevent them from reaching top positions, making the goal of achieving gender equality in the academic sector seem unattainable. The inclusion of women in the workforce has introduced new aspects and operational patterns in companies, such as the pursuit of work-life balance (Manimekakai et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2022) and the division of sexes in the workplace (Oyiana, 2021; Schultz, 2018). Furthermore, the societal, cultural, and policy-based expectations of gender roles greatly influence employees' ability to achieve work-life balance in their place of employment.

Work-life balance (WLB) is the attainment of equilibrium between one's professional and personal life by effectively managing, organizing, and prioritizing personal responsibilities and work tasks (Fazal et al., 2019). Although it is acknowledged that women academics bear similar duties to men, in Zimbabwe, women also assume various additional roles outside of work, unlike males. Similarly, Sections 5, 14, 141, and 18 of the Zimbabwean Labour Act 28:01 outline the fundamental rights of workers, explicitly emphasizing the advancement of gender equality in employment procedures by eliminating bias and endorsing work-life balance practices. This legislative framework establishes the essential legal foundation for advancing gender equity in academic institutions in Zimbabwe. Studies indicate that university administrators should formulate strategies to advance gender equality and develop and enhance policies that support a healthy work-life balance for academics (Amith et al., 2019; Soni & Bakhru, 2019). Hence, the attainment of work-life balance (WLB) and gender equality depends not only on the laws established by the government but also on organizations implementing effective policies to address the disparities marginalized employees face.

Furthermore, the United Nations (UN) has implemented Sustainable Development Goal 5 to promote gender equality and empower women and girls in all sectors (UN Women, 2017). This objective is a valuable reference for businesses to establish strategies to reduce the gender disparity within their workforce. This allows marginalized individuals to overcome barriers and achieve gender equality and a harmonious work-life equilibrium.

There is increased scrutiny of higher education institutions, as evidenced by recent research (Schubert-Irastorza & Fabry, 2017). This heightened attention is due to the significant strain that academics are under in their professional roles (Martis et al., 2021). Academic life is commonly seen as conflicting with the responsibilities of being a parent and managing household duties. This is because academics find themselves torn between the demands of their home and the university. The differences in working patterns between men and women are often explained by the belief that women generally spend more time on caregiving and unpaid work, such as taking care of family members, pursuing education, dealing with domestic duties, and engaging in community activities compared to men. The enduring presence of gender disparities in administrative policies at both the highest and lowest echelons of the academic

structure. The presence of gender segregation in academic disciplines and activities highlights the significant influence of gender on the divisions of academic labor and capital. This is evident in how it silences and denies opportunities for specific genders. This observation is supported by myriad studies, including those conducted by the European Commission (2019), Hearn et al. (2022), and Heijstra et al. (2017). Many studies on work-life balance (WLB) and gender equality focus on countries with developing economies. However, the researchers were interested in examining the WLB of academics from a gender perspective, as there is a lack of research in this area among Zimbabwean scholars.

The article is segmented into five distinct sections. The first section of the study addresses the problem of work-life balance and gender discourse. It incorporates insights from several scholars who examine numerous aspects, including women's simultaneous responsibilities at work and home, as well as the impact of gender on organizational structures. Furthermore, the second section of the article presents a comprehensive analysis of existing literature that explicitly examines the discussions on work-life balance along gender lines in academia. The third section is dedicated to the methodology, and another section focuses on the findings and controversy and concludes with definitive observations. The research aimed at achieving the following objective:

To analyze the relationship between work-life balance and gender equality among academics at a selected private higher learning institution in Zimbabwe.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

This study is guided by the Marxist feminism theory, which identifies the structural and cultural circumstances that lead to gender inequalities in higher education (Morley, 2003; Morley & Walsh, 1995). These research studies conducted in higher education settings have found that culturally mandated gender roles in the family, together with work environments that are not supportive of family life, are significant factors contributing to work-life stress for women (Nikunen, 2012). Marxist feminists have noted that women's oppression is evident in the domestic sphere, the workplace, and social interactions because of economic, social, and commercial factors (Kuleli, 2019). Marxist feminism posits that gender inequality is perpetuated by the dismantling of our capitalist system (Papa, 2017). This viewpoint addresses concerns such as wage disparities, challenges in attaining tenure or excelling in specific subjects, and the frequent absence of regulations supporting work-life balance in numerous higher education institutions. This positions them in a disadvantageous and economically dependent position within the family and in the workplace, where the attainment of work-life balance remains unattainable.

## 2.2 The concept of work-life balance

The work-life balance had implications for women and men, families, organizations, and cultures. It is commonly described as a dynamic phenomenon and a continuous process in which individuals alternate between work and personal life at a specific moment (Leslie et al., 2019). Employees contribute significantly to establishing and maintaining a necessary balance by engaging in negotiations, establishing boundaries between work and personal life, and utilizing this process to simplify and comprehend their surroundings (Semlali & Hassi, 2016). The supply and support of work-life balance practices have been recognized as promoting positive work attitudes among employees (Koon, 2022; Stamm et al., 2023).

Employees who fail to balance their jobs and non-work lives experience conflict arising from conflicting duties. Within the literature on work-life balance (WLB), this conflict can disturb professional and personal roles, leading to pressure or difficulties for the individual. It may arise directly from excessive stress resulting from the demands of both work and family responsibilities. Another perspective is provided by Kreiner et al. (2009). When individuals actively engage in distinct roles. If individuals successfully fulfill their duties in the domains of life and meet the associated expectations, they will achieve work-life balance.

In this study, work-life balance dimensions encompass time with family, time for leisure, and flexible working hours. Flexible working hours allow employees to balance their professional and personal lives by accepting their time constraints and fulfilling their need for more autonomy in organizing their work schedules. Flexibility ensures equal chances and enhances economic efficiency as women and men can adjust their working hours to accommodate more significant domestic duties (Bertrand, 2020).

Quality family time is when family members are relaxed and free from tension and work obligations. In addition, it can facilitate the development of more robust interpersonal connections, establish trust and effective communication, encourage favorable conduct, generate enduring recollections, and alleviate tension and anxiety. According to Wallman (2019), leisure time is when one is not engaged in a job or household tasks, whether paid or unpaid. Time for leisure activities serves to escape work and seek joy and pleasure.

## 2.3 Work-life balance and academia

The work environments are characterized by intense competition, making it highly challenging for employees to achieve work-life balance. Tummala (2016) and Owens et al. (2018) emphasize in their review that academic stress stems from a range of factors such as limited time for oneself, self-imposed standards, committee work, research and publishing obligations, institutional procedures, and interactions with colleagues. According to Ampem et al. (2018), married women academics faced challenges in finding time for their hobbies or socializing. Women academics experienced more excellent absenteeism and

turnover rates because of the deficiencies in adopting work-life balance (WLB) regulations (Kumari & Devi, 2013). The lack of support for achieving work-life balance among academics in the university setting can be detrimental to their dedication to teaching and research and create a disconnect from their family obligations.

Work-life balance (WLB) has traditionally been a significant factor in attracting individuals to pursue an academic career. However, it intersects with the issue of gender equality (Drew & Canavan, 2020). Academia still exhibits gender imbalance, shown in the higher incidence of work-life conflict among women and their greater likelihood of contemplating leaving their careers. This is mainly attributed to the societal expectations that place a heavier burden on women for domestic care and labor (Drew & Marshall (2020). Currently, women face more significant challenges in achieving work-life balance due to the influence of gender-based divisions. These divisions are based on the distinction between private reproductive and academic labor, with women being more likely to have higher collegial duties such as teaching, administrative work, and pastoral responsibilities. These tasks are often undervalued compared to academic work (Manfredi, 2017). Many academics work evenings and weekends as required to meet a wide range of expectations, including conducting groundbreaking research, publishing in top journals, teaching and mentoring students, establishing professional connections, and securing research funding for the university. This phenomenon is gendered in academia as its outcomes vary for female and male researchers.

## 2.4 Gender equality in academia

Gender equality in academia refers to ensuring equal opportunities, treatment, and representation for individuals of all genders within the academic field. Academic institutions now consider gender equality as a crucial policy necessity. An analysis of gender equity in academia has focused on achieving equality, which entails women attaining equal representation as males in employment gains, compensation, leadership roles, career advancement, and the elimination of harassment (Aiston & Fo, 2020). Gender equality can be achieved by challenging harmful gender norms and aggressively promoting equality.

An asymmetry in gender representation within academics is also evident in the distribution of duties. The allocation of these duties exhibits a gender discrepancy, which is perpetuated by gender inequality institutions that create gender bias and discrimination while also supporting gender-typical behavior. This aligns with the findings in the existing body of research (O'Meara et al., 2017; Cockman & Pyke, 2020), which demonstrate that unequal distribution of academic responsibilities stems from a systemic gender bias, leading to an increased workload for women.

According to Cummins (2017), academic women who take advantage of family-friendly policies in higher education are often punished for doing so. Additionally, micro-inequities and micro-politics within the higher education culture are usually based on the belief that women should conform to certain expectations (Aiston et al., 2020). Due to the disproportionate representation of men in leadership roles responsible for policy production and oversight, there is an imbalance in gender equity at the policy formulation level. Nevertheless, research conducted by Levin et al. (2022) indicates that the presence of women in policy-making processes leads to a rise in the representation of women in high-ranking leadership roles. This also guarantees the development and execution of policies that consider and acknowledge the professional requirements of women, thereby resolving gender inequalities in the workplace.

### **2.5 Work-life balance and gender equality**

Research findings show that women exhibited a diminished balance between work and family lives compared to men (Denson et al., 2018; McCutcheon & Morrison, 2018). In addition, a survey suggests that the gender disparity in academics stems from women's extended absences from work due to their engagement in caregiving responsibilities and their lower likelihood of resuming full-time employment after maternity leave (OECD, 2017). According to Kato and Kodama's (2015) Japanese study on work-life balance practices, performance-related pay, and gender equality in the workplace, work-life balance practices and performance-related pay can improve gender equality, but gender discrimination may still exist.

Moen (2015) argues that the conflation of equality and equity in academics fails to acknowledge the realities of life beyond academia. Research has also found that female academics who have caregiving responsibilities often experience feelings of guilt due to their inability to meet their expected obligations. They may also feel a conflict between their professional commitments and their responsibilities outside of the workplace (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). Managing the simultaneous responsibilities of being a mother and an academic result in more conflicts between work and family obligations (McCutcheon & Morrison, 2018). A study by Kang and Kaplan (2019) argues that corporate cultures tolerate all gender identities and contribute to a favorable social environment. Institutional culture must align with the aim of gender equality for any meaningful change to occur. Westring et al. (2016) affirmed that four crucial factors should shape a culture that promotes women's academic achievement: equitable opportunities, a balance between work and personal life, the absence of gender biases, and supportive leadership. In addition, Pace and Sciotto (2021) investigated the impact of gender on the correlation between career opportunities and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. The findings suggested that work-life balance has a more pronounced effect on women's well-being than men's.

Research has demonstrated that women experience gender-biased work environments, both in subtle and obvious ways, not only in less developed nations but also in affluent nations (Azra et al., 2019). Moreover, the study found that organizational policies and practices are strongly shaped by socially and culturally mandated frameworks that raise doubts about women's abilities, skills, and suitability for managerial work. This leads to an unintentional prejudice against women in various workplaces (Azra et al., 2019). These findings indicate a strong correlation between work-life balance and gender equality. Gender-neutral policies are effective in encouraging fairness and adaptability, while gendered practices can perpetuate inequality. The study, therefore, proposes that:

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between work-life balance and gender equality.

## **2.6 Flexible working hours and gender equality**

Several studies indicate that flexible working hours can impact gender equality by empowering women with greater autonomy over their work schedules. Nevertheless, alternative research suggests that these arrangements can exacerbate gender disparities by reinforcing conventional gender norms and wage disparities. A study conducted by Chung and Horst (2018) found that flexible working arrangements, such as schedule control, can worsen gender inequalities. This is because men can dedicate more time to their jobs, while women, especially full-time working mothers, may have fewer chances to commit fully. Paterson et al. (2014) conducted a study revealing that work time flexibility in the United States is not evenly distributed, perpetuating and strengthening gender inequalities. Furthermore, this lack of equal distribution may not effectively contribute to advancing gender equality. Moreover, a study conducted by Chung and Lippe (2018) emphasized that flexible working arrangements have diverse effects on work-life balance and gender equality in different situations, with gender being pivotal in comprehending the results. Overall, studies suggest that men generally have a more significant amount of free time than women. Women frequently have restricted free time, which they usually use within their homes while managing their household duties and engaging in activities such as reading magazines and watching television. In contrast, men partake in activities such as frequenting clubs, perusing newspapers, and engaging in sports. Men derive pleasure from both passive and active forms of leisure. Women typically encounter limits in family responsibilities and employment, whereas men predominantly face constraints associated with their occupations. Infer from the above evidence, we, therefore, hypothesize that:

H1a: There is a positive and significant relationship between flexible working hours and gender equality.



## 2.7 Time with family and gender equality

A survey by Barroso (2021) on American couples and gender gaps in sharing household responsibilities indicated that a percentage of married and cohabiting men (49%) expressed a high level of satisfaction with the division of family chores compared to their female counterparts (39%). The disparity has increased in 2020: By October, 55% of males expressed a high level of satisfaction with this component of their relationship, in contrast to 38% of women (Barroso, 2021). The increased participation of males in domestic responsibilities for a prolonged period can potentially bring about a significant shift in gender norms, both inside the household and in the workplace. On the other hand, Chung (2022) revealed that men are more inclined to utilize the extra time gained by flexible schedules for work-related activities, whilst women tend to allocate flexible schedules for family-related matters. Therefore, the pervasive adherence to established gender norms perpetuates gender disparities in the allocation of time.

Employed individuals also have the chance to use the leave policies offered by their companies to devote time to their families. Based on the analysis of the 2017-2018 Leave and Job Flexibilities Module of the American Time Use Survey, research demonstrates that gender gaps in childcare time decrease among parents who have access to paid parental leave or routinely utilize the Flexplace policy. These regulations provide opportunities for allocated time and active participation in childcare responsibilities. Work-family policies affect how much time parents spend on childcare by increasing their available time and involvement in childrearing tasks while allowing them to stay connected to their work (Estes, 2019). A study by Bittman and Wajcman (2018) indicates that men and women enjoy similar leisure time. However, the interactions inside the home context suggest a disparity in gender equality. Therefore, the study anticipates that:

H1b: There is a positive and significant relationship between time with family and gender equality.

## 2.8 Time for leisure and gender equality

Research indicates that gender equality influences the characteristics and allocation of free time. Typically, males have more free time and participate in a broader variety of activities compared to females. Moreover, elevated levels of gender equality are linked to heightened levels of physical activity during leisure time for individuals regardless of gender (McCarthy & Warne, 2022). Balish et al. (2016) presented compelling evidence highlighting the advantages of gender equality for both men and women. The results suggested that nations with higher levels of gender equality exhibit increasing physical activity levels during leisure time for both males and females, potentially attributed to decreased fertility rates and enhanced leisure time opportunities (Balish et al., (2016). A study by Codina and Pestana (2019) reveals a substantial disparity between gender equality and leisure time. A separate investigation conducted by



Felicia (2012) examined the leisure time patterns in Nigeria and showed that males possess more leisure time than females.

Typically, women tend to have a more favorable and optimistic experience and perception of their leisure time and allocate more of their free time to activities within their homes. In contrast, males with more free time participate in passive and active leisure pursuits. In contrast, a European study conducted by van Tuyckom et al. (2013) discovered that in nations with significant gender equality, the disparities in physical inactivity during leisure time between men and women may cease to exist. In that regard, this study, therefore, assumes that:

H1c: There is a positive and significant relationship between time for leisure and gender equality.

## 2.9 Conceptual framework

Based on the strong relationship between theoretical and empirical study from the variables that become the focus of this study, a conceptual framework was developed, as shown in Figure 1.

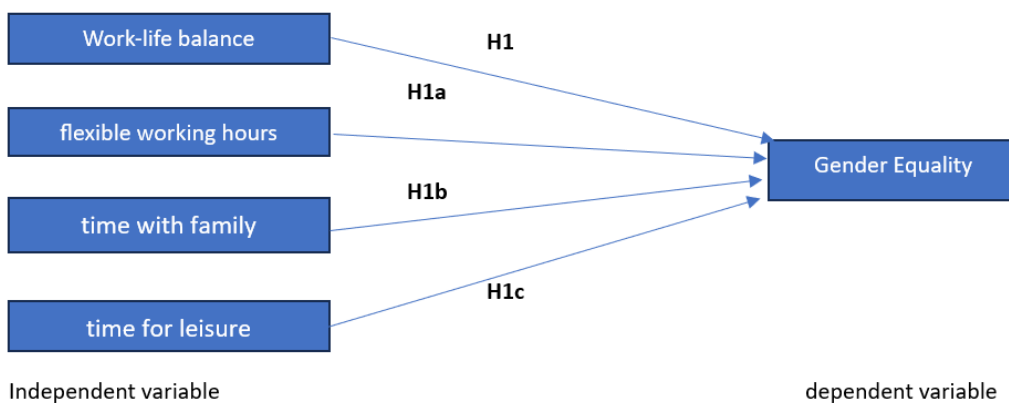


FIGURE 1. HYPOTHESIZED RELATIONSHIPS AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Source: Authors

## 3. METHODS

The study was quantitative in nature. A simple random sampling method selected 74 academic respondents from a private Zimbabwean university. The sampling frame of the study includes both men and women academics at the university. A 12-item work-life balance questionnaire developed by Daniels and McCarragher (2000) and a 9-item gender equality questionnaire was used to collect data. Both scales were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=Strongly disagree to 5= Strongly agree. The

internal consistency coefficient (alpha) of the WLB questionnaire was .85, as computed from the final survey.

The questionnaire was accompanied by an instruction note stating the research's anonymity. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. All participants consented to participate in the study through written consent. The research was ethical and was approved by the Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee at the University of Venda, and the ethics number is FCML/23/HRM/22/2911. The questionnaire was distributed via mail and in person to the respondents. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were used to analyze data using the SPSS version 29.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Sample profile

TABLE 1. SAMPLE PROFILE

<b>Gender</b>	
Female	47.3% (n=35)
Male	52.7% (n=39)
<b>Age</b>	
25-35 years	20.3% (n=15)
36-45 years	43.2% (n=32)
46-55 years	28.4% (n=21)
56 and above	8.1% (n=6)
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Divorced	2.7% (n=2)
Married	59.5% (n=44)
Separated	1.4% (n=1)
Single	32.4% (n =24)
Widowed	4.1% (n=3)
<b>Years of working experience</b>	
0-5	50% (n=37)
6-10	21.6% (n=16)
11-15	13.5% (n =10)
16 and above	14.9% (n =11)
<b>Highest Academic Qualification</b>	
Doctorate	41.9% (n=31)
Master's Degree	56.8% (n=42)
<b>Position</b>	
Associate Professor	2.7% (n=2)
Junior Lecturer	66.2% (n=49)
Senior Lecturer	31.1% (n =23)

Source: authors' research

A sample profile was checked. Results in Table 1 show that 74 respondents participated in this study, and the response rate was 100%. Regarding age, 43.2% were in the age group 36-45 years, and 28.4% were

in the age group of 46-55 years. Those aged 25-35 were 20.3%, and 8.1% represented participants in the 56 and above years category. The above results indicate that most % of the participants, 59.5%, were married, with 32.4% representing those who were single. Widowed participants constituted 4.1%, followed by divorced participants (2.7%) and separated participants (1.4%). As shown in Table 1, the data indicated that 78.4% of most respondents had five and below years of experience in academia. They were followed by 21.6% who had 6 to 10 years of experience, 14.9% represented participants who had more than 16 years, and the remaining 13.5% represented those with 11- and 15-years of experience. Results also revealed that most participants 56.8% represented those with a master's degree, followed by 41.6% of participants possessing doctorates. On the level of academic position, most respondents 66.7% were junior lecturers, whilst senior lecturers constituted 31.1% of the participants. Only a few participants, 2.7%, have reached the associate professor level.

## 4.2 Descriptive statistics and reliability

Respondents agreed with indicators of gender equality, work-life balance, flexible working hours, time with family, and time for leisure, as this had a mean total score close to 4.0. Furthermore, there was unanimity among respondents on these variables as they had low standard deviation scores ranging between 0.7 and 1.0, as shown in Table 2. The normality of data was also assessed using skewness and kurtosis. Results show that data were normally distributed and allowed for further analysis as it ranged from -2 to 2 for both skewness and kurtosis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013)

The internal consistency of the work-life balance and gender equality scale items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. Items with a correlation of less than 0.30 with the total score were deemed poor and removed from further analysis (Pallant, 2016). Results in Table 2 also show that the work-life balance and gender equality scales have a Cronbach alpha score that fulfills the rule of thumb of  $>0.70$  (Pallant, 2016), ranging from 0.87 to 0.91. The highest reliability amongst the scales was work-life balance ( $\alpha = 0.912$ ), followed by time with family ( $\alpha = 0.877$ ), and flexible working hours ( $\alpha = 0.831$ ) being the least. This suggests that all the instruments were reliable.

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

	Mean	SD	N	Skewness Statistic	Kurtosis Statistic	$\alpha$
GE	3.5890	.79545	74	-.399	-.625	.873
WLB	3.7421	.82163	74	-1.504	2.045	.912
FWH	3.8378	1.00417	74	-1.299	1.180	.831
TWF	3.6946	.82643	74	-1.520	2.408	.877
TFL	3.7297	.93976	74	-1.155	.673	.833

Source: authors' research

Note: GE=Gender equality; WLB= Work-life balance; FWH=Flexible working hours; TWF=Time with family; TFL=Time for leisure; SD= Standard Deviation; N=Number of items;  $\alpha$ =Cronbach's Alpha.

### 4.3 Hypothesis testing

A two-tailed Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to test the relationships between gender equality and work-life balance and its dimensions. As shown in Table 3, the study found a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and gender equality ( $r = 0.479$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). This means that the more gender equality exists, the more academics experience a work-life balance. Furthermore, a significant positive relationship was found between gender equality and all work-life balance dimensions (flexible working hours, time with family, and time for leisure) ( $p = 0.001$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ; and  $p = 0.001$ ), respectively, as shown in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3. MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.479 <sup>a</sup>	.229	.196	.71328
a. Predictors: (Constant), TFL, FWH, TWF				

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.957	.394		4.967	.000
	FWH	.205	.121	.258	1.689	.001
	TWF	.024	.171	.025	.142	.001
	TFL	.203	.152	.240	1.334	.001
a. Dependent Variable: GE						

Source: authors' research

The R Square value of 0.229 indicates that approximately 22.9% of the variance in the outcome variable can be explained by the predictors in the model. The R-value of 0.479 suggests a moderate positive correlation between the predictors and the outcome. The adjusted R Square value of 0.196 considers the number of predictors and sample size, providing a more conservative estimate of the model's explanatory power. It suggests that the predictors explain around 19.6% of the variance in the outcome variable the Std. Error of the Estimate measures the average distance between the observed values and the predicted values by the model. In this case, it is 0.71328, indicating the average distance of the observed values from the predicted values. The coefficient for the flexible working hours predictor is 0.205. This suggests that a one-unit increase in flexible working hours is associated with an estimated increase of 0.205 units in the outcome variable. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.258 indicates the relative importance of flexible working hours compared to other predictors in predicting the outcome variable. The coefficient for the impact of time with family predictor is 0.024. It suggests that a one-unit increase in the effects of time with family is associated with a slight estimated increase of 0.024 units in the outcome variable. The

standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.025 indicates a weak impact of time with family compared to other predictors. The coefficient for the time for leisure predictor is 0.203. This suggests that a one-unit increase in time for leisure is associated with an estimated increase of 0.203 units in the outcome variable. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.240 indicates the relative importance of time for leisure compared to other predictors. The t-values and associated p-values represent the statistical significance of the coefficients. All predictors have p-values (Sig.) less than 0.001, indicating that they are statistically significant in predicting the outcome variable, as shown in Table 4 below.

**TABLE 4. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WORK-LIFE BALANCE TOTAL SCORE, ITS DIMENSIONS, AND GENDER EQUALITY**

		GE	WLB	FWH	TWF	TFL
GE	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
WLB	Pearson Correlation	.465**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001				
FWH	Pearson Correlation	.441**	.855**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.001			
TWF	Pearson Correlation	.389**	.925**	.681**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.001	.001		
TFL	Pearson Correlation	.438**	.920**	.692**	.782**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.001	.001	.001	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: authors' research

Note: GE=Gender equality; WLB= Work-life balance; FWH=Flexible working hours; TWF=Time with family; TFL=Time for leisure.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

The study used Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to test the relationship between gender equality and work-life balance in a Zimbabwean university. The results show that gender equality has a positive relationship with work-life balance. All the hypotheses of this study were supported, indicating a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and gender equality. Based on the findings above, resolving the conflict arising from balancing work and family responsibilities would be advantageous for employees at the university. This can be achieved by adopting work-life balance practices such as flexible working hours, dedicated time for family and leisure, and the assumption of shared responsibilities. These practices align with gender equality and work-life balance (Papi, 2005). Similarly, a study conducted by McCutcheon and Morrison (2018) validates the correlation between gender equality and work-life balance.

While cultural and social norms regarding the distribution of unpaid household work based on gender remain significant, the promotion of equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities within the household and the facilitation of full and equal participation in the labor market are heavily influenced by flexible working

arrangements, a supportive work culture, and favorable job conditions (EU, 2022). According to Comunidad Mujer (2017), women's involvement in the workforce does not guarantee gender equality due to various forms of discrimination, segmentation, and other obstacles that hinder their chances of obtaining higher-level or leadership positions. Employees should be provided with work possibilities that achieve a harmonious equilibrium between their professional and personal lives, thereby nurturing their overall well-being (Sen & Hooja, 2018).

Achieving equality in work-life balance is vital for tackling gender equality challenges in the workplace. According to Bailyn et al. (2011), when job conditions and policies make it difficult for workers to balance their family duties, it leads to noticeable variations across genders in terms of the impact and severity of these effects. Studies indicate that women's job experiences might vary significantly from men's, especially when considering family arrangements and dedication to family life (Hill et al., 2003; Morgenroth et al., 2021). In addition, studies indicate that gender equality influences the characteristics and allocation of free time, and males have more free time and participate in a wider variety of activities than females. Furthermore, this flexibility plays an essential role in fostering gender equality. This is corroborated by a study by Shockley et al. (2017) on the relationship between work-life balance and gender equality within organizations, which revealed that the ability to adjust one's work schedule and environment is crucial in achieving a healthy balance between work and personal life.

Prior research suggests that modern organizations often adopt a uniform approach to work-life balance (WLB) options, disregarding the diverse needs of various social groups as influenced by social constructs (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Kossek et al., 2017; Macchioni & Prandini, 2019). Consequently, Roomi et al. (2018) assert that women have considerable challenges in managing the demands of their professional and personal lives due to inadequate time, insufficient support from their spouses, and prevailing cultural norms and gender prejudices in the workplace.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Given such profound and ongoing changes to where, when, and how work is undertaken by distinct groups of people, along with demographic and social trends, it follows that work-life balance issues and gender equality have never been more critical. This study concludes that female academics face more challenges in managing the demands of their jobs and personal lives than males. When compared to men, women take on most household responsibilities. As a result, they were more prone to experiencing role overload. Additionally, women were more likely to have made compromises regarding having children. This research has provided evidence of gender disparities in work-life balance, with the prevailing observation being that women encounter more significant work-to-family conflict compared to males. The

study, therefore, concludes that work-life balance has a significant effect on gender equality in academia. Organizational policies and practices relating to work-life balance are often included in the 'diversity' agenda, implying that it is a gender issue or only relevant to a minority of employees. Therefore, the study recommends that academic institutions implement organizations and contribute to good labor practices to promote gender equality. The policies show the company's commitment to increasing the number of women and equal opportunities between women and men in the selection and employee career development processes.

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