

WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A WOMAN'S AGENCY HUSTLE?

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Abstract

Work-life balance remains a daunting task for most women in Africa. This is complicated by the existing gender stereotypes and norms that accrue domestic work to women regardless of their professional responsibilities. Despite the existing legal, and institutional framework on relieving women, there is no significant improvement. This paper examined the role of agency in determining work-life balance among employed women. Secondary data was used to assess theoretical and practical terrains on how agency can retrieve women's work-life balance and elicit norms transformation. Using a work-life balance model and role theory, the study proposes that legal and institutional frameworks still have a crucial role to play in suppressing stereotypes and norms that condemn women to overworking. Additionally, there must be a positive support system, room for women to make choices, and flexibility for agency to support women's work-life balance. The paper also establishes the significance of the role of men in creating a strong agency that this can only happen when men become catalysts for bringing the balance needed. Additionally, work-life balance provides immunity for mental illness that most women in professional employment are facing. This study contributes to global initiatives for escalating the number of women in professional employment. It also complements global campaigns towards having women who are mentally fit and who can become successful in their professional careers and their social lives.

Keywords: Agency, Work-Life Balance, Norms, Domestic Work, Gender Stereotyping.

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How to cite this article: Ambiliasia Mosha, Work-Life Balance: A Woman's Agency Hustle?, Journal of Management and Science, 15(3) 2025 101-117. Retrieved from <https://jmseleyon.com/index.php/jms/article/view/892>

Received: 10 May 2025 **Revised:** 30 June 2025 **Accepted:** 6 July 2025 **Published:** 30 September 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance, which means handling work and personal life in a way that promotes individual well-being, is now a topical discussion for researchers around the world. Both men and women struggle with this, but it is particularly tough for women in places where gender stereotypes and gender roles are deeply embraced (Barzallo et al., 2024; Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). In Africa, where traditional beliefs often make women take on most of the housework and caring for family, it is hard to find a good balance between work and personal life (Shija, Mwakumbula, & Mboghoina, 2023). While women are supposed to accomplish their professional duties with excellence, they are simultaneously expected to perfect their domestic chores, including child-rearing (Shabir & Gani, 2020). As a result, they end up being

exhausted, stressed, while their mental health, careers, and personal lives are affected.

According to Aruldoss et al. (2021), work-life balance connotes the individual capability of mastering the hurdle of professional employment, personal life, and even having time for leisure, but at the same time not compromising well-being and reducing stress. It is about optimally balancing the three and maximizing happiness and good health (Mujuru, 2025). Kossek et al. (2019) visualize agency as a woman's ability to make independent choices, assert control over her life, and challenge the societal norms that constrain her. It has given women the ability to challenge the existing gender stereotypes and cultural expectations, which often limit their choices, and give them a niche to negotiate a balance between their work and personal lives.

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The exercising of agency is not without complexity since it is to take place under preexisting social structures and navigate power dynamics (Kweka, 2020). In Africa, this is harder for women as they have to challenge the traditional expectations of allocation of domestic work or fight for domestic works that call for flextime, allowing women to balance their time between tasks. Women are better equipped to manage their work and life only when they have the power to make choices on how they use their time. (Kweka, 2020).

When agency is fully exercised, it prevents mental health issues among women as well (Ayar et al., 2022). Less stress and greater satisfaction are experienced when women are less strained or under constant pressure from their domestic and professional duties. The ability to make own choices, values, and priorities subjects women to less stress and greater satisfaction (Kotera et al., 2020). On the contrary, weak women's agency attracts mental health problems, stemming from the inability to balance their time for work and their personal life.

For an agency to be robust, it also needs solidarity among women in catalyzing the ingrained, harmful societal norms. This collective action will help in championing policies and laws that advocate for women's flexibility, paid leave, and shared responsibility among family members to enable women to help balance their work and domestic chores (Bebasari, Parulian, & Daspar, 2025). When agency is taken as an individual versus collective struggle, it prevents the potential transformation of institutional structures that dominate women, escalating gendered expectations.

While work-life balance remains a global outcry, it is more prominent among women in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this area, traditional gender roles heavily influence the distribution of domestic responsibilities. The inexcusable expectation that women are primary caregivers for children and elderly relatives while attending to their professional obligations is automated. This role overload from excessive demands placed on one individual simultaneously has many negative repercussions for women, including failure to balance their work and life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Under such circumstances, women's agency is expected to be a catalyst that creates a balance between these double shifts. Crenshaw (1989), for instance, has assessed the role of agency in creating a work-life balance through the intersectional lens. In what he called "the intersectionality theory", he argued that whether individuals experience oppression or privilege is contingent on a variety of social identities, including race, class, gender, and culture.

In the African context, the intersection of gender and socio-economic factors creates unique challenges for women seeking work-life balance. The challenges are exacerbated by multiple factors, including but not limited to inaccessibility to education, entrenched patriarchal norms, and domineering traditions that stifle women's agency (Reshi, Sudha, & Dar, 2022). This theory, therefore, becomes a lens in examining African women's experience from different perspectives other than gender, such as race, socioeconomic status, and class. Additionally, the framework extrapolates broader structural inequalities that hold down women's emancipation in trying to attain the balance to overcome such barriers.

There is still, however, insignificant progress to achieve work-life balance among women in many African countries, including Tanzania, despite the existence of legal and institutional frameworks (Femnet, 2021a; Femnet, 2021b). In a context where women are struggling with this imbalance, agency becomes a powerful tool to redefine the situation and create a more flexible and supportive environment for them if nurtured well and allowed to operate. Policies and laws addressing maternity leave, anti-discriminatory tendencies, and those promoting gender equality exist, but these frameworks are poorly enforced (World Bank, 2022; Klugman, 2013). Despite this, women continue to preside under the pressure to balance their work and life while at the same time maintaining their sanity and continuing to perfect those roles.

The research problem this paper addresses, therefore, is rooted in the persistent challenges women face in achieving work-life balance in African societies, particularly in Tanzania. Despite the presence of legal protections and institutional frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality, the entrenched stereotypes that women should bear the responsibility for both professional and domestic duties continue to impede their ability to achieve balance. This study seeks to explore how women's agency can play a central role in challenging these norms, promoting flexibility in both professional and domestic spheres, and ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and fulfilling work-life balance.

2.0 Study Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to examine the role of agency in determining work-life balance among employed women in African societies, particularly in Tanzania. In addressing this central objective, the paper focused on the following:

1. To assess how gender norms affect women's agency towards attaining work-life balance

2. To explore the role of women's agency in attaining a work-life balance
3. To examine the effectiveness of legal protections and institutional policies designed to support women in achieving work-life balance.

3.0 Significance of the Study

This paper contributes to ongoing global discussions about increasing the representation of women in professional sectors and promoting gender equality in the workplace. It emphasizes the need for societal and institutional transformation that enables women to not only participate fully in the workforce but to thrive in their careers while maintaining a healthy and balanced personal life. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of mental health and well-being, areas that are often overlooked in discussions about work-life balance. By exploring the intersection of agency, legal frameworks, societal expectations, and support systems, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to women's ability to achieve balance and well-being.

The findings of this paper also complement global campaigns aimed at improving the mental fitness of women, ensuring that they are not only successful in their professional careers but also in their social and familial roles. The ability to create a supportive environment for women, one that recognizes their agency and provides opportunities for choice and flexibility, is key to fostering a more balanced and equitable society.

The paper is structured as follows: Section two covers a literature review, which explores the existing research on work-life balance, gender roles, and women's agency, drawing from global and African contexts. Section three involves a theoretical framework whereby the work-life balance model and role theory are described in explaining their relevance to understanding the dynamics of work-life balance for women. Section four provides the methodology used to address this study, whereby it outlines the research design and data collection and analysis techniques that were employed in assessing the agency and work-life balance. Section five provided the findings, analysis, and discussion, whereas section six provided a conclusion.

4.1 Agency and Gender Stereotypes towards work-life balance: A Global Perspective

Work-life balance (WLB) has become a central concern in modern societies, particularly for individuals who juggle professional responsibilities with family, caregiving, and personal commitments. The concept of WLB has been defined in various

ways, but it is generally understood as the ability to manage the demands of work, personal life, and leisure in a way that reduces stress and promotes overall well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). It is the ability to achieve an optimal balance between work and personal life that minimizes stress and promotes health and happiness (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). While the challenges of achieving WLB are widespread between both men and women, the barriers are more pronounced for women in balancing these competing roles, especially in societies with deeply rooted gender norms (Kossek et al., 2019).

One concept that has gained significant attention in recent years is "agency." Agency, in this context, refers to a woman's ability to make independent choices, assert control over her life, and challenge the societal norms that constrain her. While gender stereotypes and cultural expectations often limit women's choices, agency provides a framework for understanding how women can challenge these expectations and negotiate a balance between their Work and personal lives.

Scholars like Giddens (1991) argue that agency is not merely about making choices in a vacuum, but involves navigating power dynamics and social structures. For women in Africa, exercising agency may mean challenging the traditional expectations of domestic work or advocating for workplace policies that provide greater flexibility (Kabeer, 1999). When women are empowered to make choices about how they allocate their time and energy between work and domestic responsibilities, they are better equipped to achieve work-life balance (Sen, 1999).

Furthermore, recent research has shown that women's agency is closely linked to mental well-being. When women feel empowered to make choices that align with their values and priorities, they experience less stress and greater satisfaction in both their work and personal lives (Ayar et al., 2022). Empowered women, especially those with access to supportive social networks and workplace policies, are better able to balance work and life responsibilities without sacrificing their mental health or well-being.

Importantly, agency is not just about individual choices but can also involve collective action to shift societal norms. Women's agency can catalyze broader structural changes, such as the creation of policies that support paid family leave, flexible working hours, or shared responsibility between men and women for household duties (Bebasari, Parulian, & Daspar, 2025). Thus, agency is seen as both an individual and collective process, with the potential to transform not only the lives of individual women but also the larger social and institutional structures that govern gendered expectations.

Globally, work-life balance remains a challenging pursuit for many women, but the struggle is more pronounced in regions like sub-Saharan Africa, where traditional gender roles heavily influence the distribution of domestic responsibilities. In many African societies, women are expected to be primary caregivers for children and elderly relatives, while also fulfilling professional obligations. This creates a situation where women often experience what has been termed "role overload", that is, the excessive demands placed on individuals who simultaneously hold multiple roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Central to the challenges that women face in achieving WLB are the pervasive gender stereotypes that dictate how women and men should behave in both the workplace and at home. In many societies, particularly in Africa, women are expected to prioritize their domestic duties over professional aspirations (Acker, 2012). These gendered expectations are reinforced by cultural norms and social structures that assign caregiving roles exclusively to women, regardless of their professional status (Moser, 1993). This societal perception leads to an unequal division of labor, with women bearing the bulk of household responsibilities even when they are employed full-time.

Gender roles, therefore, create a dual burden for women whereby professional expectations are compounded by the demands of domestic work. The effects of this imbalance can be seen in the high levels of stress, burnout, and mental health issues experienced by many women (Kaufman, 1994). This is called a "second shift," a term coined by Hochschild and Machung (2012), which refers to the additional domestic responsibilities they undertake after completing their paid work. These gendered expectations, which allocate the majority of domestic and caregiving duties to women, persist even as more women join the workforce. For women in sub-Saharan Africa, these challenges are compounded by a lack of supportive infrastructure such as affordable childcare and flexible working arrangements (Waterhouse et al., 2021). Despite women's increasing participation in the labor force, the societal and institutional frameworks that support work-life balance remain insufficient, reinforcing gender disparities in both the workplace and at home.

For African women, these challenges are compounded by factors such as limited access to education, informal work structures, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that limit women's mobility and decision-making power (Reshi, Sudha, & Dar, 2022). The intersectionality framework helps us understand how African women experience work-life balance not just through the lens of gender, but also through the intersection of race,

class, and socio-economic status. This perspective is particularly useful in understanding how agency can be constrained by broader structural inequalities, and how these women can work to overcome such barriers.

The presence of certain preconditions is mentioned as a panacea for women's miseries brought by the imbalance between work and life. And the powerlessness of the agency. One of such is the legal and institutional framework. Legal and institutional frameworks play an essential role in supporting women's work-life balance. Policies such as maternity leave, paternity leave, flexible working hours, and child care provisions are vital for reducing the burden of domestic labor on women and providing them with the time and space needed to manage both professional and personal responsibilities. However, in many African countries, these frameworks are either nonexistent or insufficiently enforced (Fapohunda, 2014). Sometimes their effectiveness is limited by cultural norms and inadequate enforcement. Maternity leave, for example, is often short, and the benefits may not be accessible to all women, particularly those in informal employment. For example, a study by Kaufman (1994) unveiled that women may be discouraged from taking maternity leave or may be penalized at work for doing so, as employers may perceive them as less committed to their jobs.

Recent studies emphasize that while legal frameworks may exist, they often fail to address the full spectrum of challenges women face in balancing work and life. For example, research has shown that policies on parental leave and flexible working hours are underutilized in African countries due to cultural stigmas that discourage men and women from taking advantage of these policies (Lyakurwa, Jun, & Chung, 2019). Furthermore, policies that focus solely on maternity leave, rather than broader family support, fail to acknowledge the role of men in supporting work-life balance.

To truly support women's work-life balance, institutional frameworks must go beyond basic policy implementation to challenge the cultural and structural barriers that reinforce gendered expectations. Studies suggest that workplace cultures that value work-life balance and encourage shared domestic responsibilities are key to reducing gender disparities (Aruldoss et al., 2021). In this context, legal reforms should focus on creating flexible, inclusive policies that benefit both men and women, such as shared parental leave, subsidized childcare, and greater workplace flexibility (Kaufman, 1994).

Apart from legal and institutional support, the role of men is also among the strategies mentioned in the literature to support women's agency and bring

work-life balance. This is another critical area in this discussion, though. As long as the burden of domestic work remains primarily on women, achieving true work-life balance will be difficult. Studies have shown that when men take on a more significant share of domestic responsibilities, it allows women to focus more on their careers and reduces the strain they face (Evertsson & Duvander, 2011). Moreover, when men become advocates for gender equality in the workplace and at home, they can play an essential role in challenging stereotypes and shifting societal norms (Barker et al., 2007). Men's participation is crucial not only for creating a balanced home life but also for fostering a culture of equality that supports women's agency.

A study by Barker et al. (2007) found that when men actively share domestic labor, women report lower levels of stress and greater job satisfaction. Moreover, men's participation in caregiving and household work helps to challenge traditional gender norms, creating a more equitable division of labor both at home and in the workplace.

In African societies, where patriarchal norms often limit men's participation in domestic roles, encouraging men to take an active role in childcare and household work is crucial for achieving work-life balance for women (Reshi, Sudha, & Dar, 2022). Thus, men's involvement is also vital in shifting societal attitudes about gender roles, which can ultimately contribute to a more supportive and flexible environment for women in the workplace and at home.

4.2.1 Role Theory

Role theory has long been used to analyze the tensions and conflicts that arise when individuals are expected to fulfill multiple roles. According to this theory, when the demands of various roles (such as worker, caregiver, and spouse) conflict with one another, individuals experience role strain. For women, this role strain is intensified by societal expectations that they should perform exceptionally in both their professional and domestic roles, often without adequate institutional support (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Recent research reinforces the idea that role conflict continues to be a significant issue for women, particularly when societal norms and institutional practices fail to acknowledge the complexity of women's responsibilities (Aruldos et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that role conflict negatively impacts job satisfaction, well-being, and mental health, with women in particular facing higher levels of stress due to the imbalance between work and family roles. African women, in particular, experience compounded role conflict due to the lack of formal

childcare, inflexible working hours, and societal pressure to uphold traditional domestic duties. Role theory suggests that when women are allowed to negotiate and prioritize roles, they experience lower levels of conflict and higher satisfaction (World Bank, 2020).

Recent studies in African contexts have found that women's ability to manage role conflict is influenced by their access to supportive policies, such as parental leave, flexible working hours, and access to affordable childcare (Ardhi, 2025). The more flexibility and support women have, the more they can balance their roles and reduce the negative effects of role strain.

4.2.2 Work-Life Balance Models

Work-life balance models have evolved over time to address the increasing complexity of the relationship between work, personal life, and well-being. Traditional models of WLB focused primarily on the trade-off between work and family responsibilities, often portraying these spheres as mutually exclusive (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). However, more recent models have recognized the interconnections between these domains, proposing that individuals navigate work-life tensions through strategies such as role segmentation, role integration, and boundary management (Kossek et al., 2019).

The Work-Life Interface Model is one of the models that suggests that the interface between work and life can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. As propounded by Kalliath & Brough (2008), this model emphasizes that balancing work and personal life is not a zero-sum game and that the outcomes depend on the resources available to individuals, including social support, flexible work arrangements, and coping strategies. In the context of women's agency, this model can be particularly insightful in understanding how women's ability to navigate these boundaries influences their overall sense of balance and well-being. The model proposes a supportive environment that allows women's agency to be robust. Such an environment can be nourished by legal, institutional, and other institutional arrangements, such as good norms and traditions that value women's independence, that allow women to plan their work schedule to minimize negative outcomes while maximizing the positive ones.

Therefore, these theoretical frameworks collectively inform the study's investigation into how women's agency can be a catalyst for achieving work-life balance, challenging gendered expectations, and transforming societal norms. The next section of the paper will explore the methodology used to investigate these concepts and analyze the role of agency in women's work-life balance.

5.0 Methodology

This study aims to examine the role of agency in determining work-life balance among employed women in Tanzania. The research design is an exploratory qualitative study in nature, as it seeks to explore the lived experiences of women balancing work and domestic responsibilities, and how agency plays a role in this process. Given the socio-cultural and institutional challenges women in Tanzania face, understanding their agency requires an in-depth exploration of both individual experiences and institutional contexts. The study draws on secondary data analysis from existing literature, reports, and documents on gender, work-life balance, and women's empowerment in Tanzania. The primary sources include Government Reports and Policies. Reports involved in the study include the Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports, including the Labor Force Survey and the Household Budget Survey, which offer critical insights into the socio-economic status of women in the workforce and their roles in the household. These reports contain data on employment patterns, gender disparities, and family structures, which are essential for understanding the broader context in which Tanzanian women negotiate work-life balance. The [Tanzania Gender and Development Policy \(2000\)](#) also provides the legal framework surrounding gender equality in the workplace and in the home. This policy outlines the government's commitment to ensuring women's participation in the formal economy and promoting gender equity. Analyzing this policy helped to evaluate the effectiveness of institutional frameworks in supporting women's work-life balance. Employment and Labor relations laws, which provide on aspects such as maternity leave and others from Tanzanian government agencies such as the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Youth, and People with Disabilities, are also critical sources of data. These documents reveal the extent to which legal and institutional frameworks facilitate or hinder women's ability to balance professional and domestic responsibilities. Academic Literature and Published Studies, reports from Gender Advocacy Organizations such as Tanzania Gender and International Development, and NGO Reports have also been consulted to provide the needed data. The data collected from secondary sources were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying and interpreting patterns (or themes) within data. Steps followed include: familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation and synthesis.

6.0 Results and Discussion: Gender Norms and Work-Life Balance in Tanzania

This section discusses the role of agency and the effects of gender norms in attaining work-life balance among women. It also assesses how institutional frameworks support women or otherwise, and the role of men in shaping women's agency.

Agency as the capacity of individuals to make independent choices and act upon them, even within structures that limit their opportunities faces some constraints to flourish. In the context of Tanzania, women's agency is often limited by social expectations, lack of institutional support, and economic pressures. Notably, women in leadership roles or with access to higher education are more likely to exercise agency, taking advantage of legal protections and negotiating workplace policies that enable a better work-life balance. However, the gap in access to such opportunities remains a major barrier to achieving universal work-life balance for women across all sectors of Tanzanian society.

Even so, there's a noticeable increase in women's ability to take control of their situations in certain groups. Ogundipe and others did research in 2020 that shows more people are starting to see how women can make decisions and take charge in their jobs, especially when they have work settings or rules that support them. For example, women who work in government jobs or big international groups in cities are often better at getting things like flexible hours, working from home, or longer time off for having babies. A study from the [World Bank in 2020](#) found that women working for large companies in Tanzania are happier with the work-life balance rules compared to women in smaller local businesses or informal jobs, where it's harder to handle both work and family responsibilities.

The agency also builds women's confidence. Negotiating work-life balance with a spouse and standing against the criticisms of the family and societal members requires a developed agency of women ([Bryan et al., 2024](#)). This, however, is hinged upon a built agency in which factors such as education, exposure, and level of civilization contribute. The confidence not only allows negotiation of their fate but also gives them the ability to protect their dreams by facing obstacles on the way ([McCarthy & Krause, 2024](#)). The agency gives women confidence to report sexual harassment at workplaces confidently, following work rules and regulations, and negotiate family planning and plan their lives with their spouses.

The agency also inculcates in women a hardworking spirit, which is required for attaining a work-life balance in a natural and non-negotiated family caring role ([Bryan et al., 2024](#)). No matter how well laws are crafted to stand for women's interests,

without their own determination for hard work, these become futile. This argument is premised on the fact that the nature of women's natural roles, such as giving birth and nurturing their children, forces them to dedicate more time and attention to their family life compared to men. Without agency, which instills in them hard work, their dreams for a higher income die. The agency provides women a reason to work, have dreams, and be ambitious, and hence attain work-life balance. Without agency, women end up sacrificing their professional careers and attending to their domestic chores.

Women's agency also creates room for financial capability. Having qualifications and the capacity to choose the profession to pursue is a result of agency, which is unleashed by women who are not constrained by societal norms and gender stereotypes (BBC News, 2020). When women have agency to earn a salary, they get decision-making power on aspects such as hiring domestic help, which helps them attend to both domestic and professional roles. This also enables them to send their children to boarding schools when the need arises (ILO, 2020). Financial freedom also allows women to adopt flexible work hours, adjust schedules to accommodate childcare and family obligations, and even attend other social events, such as participating in women's groups and solidarity, and explore more opportunities to earn more income and become independent. This freedom enables women to access digital platforms for more opportunities (World Bank, 2022).

In contrast, rural women or those working in small businesses face more rigid schedules and fewer opportunities for negotiating their roles and time. Ogundipe (1994) suggests that women in the informal sectors or rural areas often lack the support systems necessary to exercise agency, as they are more vulnerable to socio-economic constraints and limited legal protections. It therefore follows that women in the informal economy, especially in Tanzania's agricultural sector, small-scale farmers, and market vendors, frequently work long hours in both their jobs and at home, with no legal protections or institutional frameworks to help them manage these roles (McCarthy & Krause, 2024). Most importantly, the economic pressure prevents them from prioritizing work-life balance, and they often lack access to social protection mechanisms like health insurance or paid leave. Thus, women do exercise agency, but this is contingent on their economic status, social networks, and access to supportive institutions.

It is also established that when women fail to exercise agency and eventually work-life balance, they experience several problems, mental health problems being the most mentioned (Sharma & Kapur, 2022), among others. The double burden

of professional and domestic responsibilities has serious psychological consequences for women. According to Nnko (2022) women who experience chronic stress from managing conflicting roles are at greater risk of developing anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders.

In Tanzania, work-life imbalance is linked to high levels of stress and burnout among women. A report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020) and Nnko (2022) suggests that the lack of institutional support for working women, combined with traditional gender expectations, contributes to a higher incidence of mental health issues in women who struggle to balance multiple roles. Women in Tanzania face unique challenges in this regard, as there are fewer mental health services available, particularly in rural areas, where access to counseling and support services is limited. The ILO (2020) reports highlight the toll of stress, anxiety, and burnout that many women experience due to the constant juggling of professional and domestic roles. Mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances are common among women who experience a high workload without adequate support systems.

Disparities also exist for different categories of women. Recent studies have shown that mental health issues are disproportionately high among women, especially those in demanding professions or those without access to supportive work help. Women working in the healthcare sector in Tanzania report high levels of emotional exhaustion due to the pressures of balancing their work with family care. This is compounded by a lack of access to mental health resources or supportive workplace policies. (Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2022).

Greenhaus and Allen (2011) emphasize the long-term effects of work-family conflict on women's psychological well-being. Women who experience chronic work-family conflict are at higher risk of developing serious mental health disorders, including burnout, depression, and anxiety. The World Bank (2022) notes that addressing work-life balance is a public health priority in Tanzania, as improving women's work-life balance has the potential to reduce the incidence of mental health problems among women.

Thus, as proposed by Hobson et al. (2011), agency is central in attaining work-life balance for women, especially in a non-supportive environment where they have to initiate the movement themselves. It is, however, recommended that with the support of an enabling environment, such as a legal and institutional framework and men, as will be discussed shortly, the chances of promoting the agency and hence attaining work-life balance will be highly elevated.

As far as gender norms are concerned, existing gender norms designate an unfair work split among men and women in the home. Some of these norms automate the caregiving role to women, where men are excluded from such chores. Some ingrained beliefs are supported by cultural traditions and social systems that make women do the lion's share of domestic duties despite their professional responsibilities. (Moser, 1993; Acker, 2012; Gender Equity Policy Institute, 2024).

In Tanzania, there is a high influence of gender norms and societal expectations placed upon women's capability of managing their professional and domestic duties, just like in many African societies (Ardhi, 2025). This disturbs women's welfare as far as balancing their lives at home and at work is concerned. In Africa, it is unquestionable that women have to perfectly carry out their domestic responsibilities even when they are full-time formal sector employees. According to the Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2021 Labor Force Survey, there is a notable increase of increase in women in the formal sector recently, but they are still entangled with their primary caregiving roles at home, such as caregiving duties to the extended family members, child-rearing, household chores, and others that consume their time and energy. The equation presented by Fox (2016), demonstrating time-use versus time-poverty, shows that adult men aged 25-64 spend more than nine hours in economic activities. This is contrary to women whose caregiving roles deny them such an opportunity, condemning them to dependence on men and escalating household poverty. Poor adulthood then becomes a nightmare for women, even those who are employed. This is worsened by the existing gender norms that escalate gendered labor division, which engages women more in domestic unpaid work, making them too exhausted to fully attend their professional jobs.

One of the expected norms is taking women as primary and automatic caregivers. This gendered division of labor in Tanzanian households makes women struggle to find a balance between work (Mbilinyi, 2018). Norms that prohibit women from managing their own means of production and controlling their own income are also a bottleneck to the thriving of women's agency. Women's ownership of means of production and control over their income are influenced by cultural norms, legal frameworks, and economic structures. For instance, in agriculture, only 9% of women have sole ownership of land, while 25% own it in partnership (UN Women, 2024). This is contrary to men, who are at 30% and 7%, respectively. The study also shows that even when women own land, it is 40% smaller than that of men. All these give men power in deciding on the distribution of income,

and in some instances, men do control women's income (Shija, Mwakatumbula, & Mboghoina, 2023).

In Tanzania, most women's earnings are controlled by men or spent on unaccountable consumables, which cannot serve as an investment that would have allowed women to choose how to spend their time (Ardhi, 2025; Shija, Mwakatumbula, & Mboghoina, 2023). Parallel to this, they are disadvantaged in both labour force participation and human capital development, which translates into the low probability of formal wage employment and consequently income for women. This hinders the development of agency since the agency has to search for formal work that improves with education (Opoku et al, 2021). When women are undereducated, they cannot penetrate the high-paying formal employment, perpetuating their employment in low-paying jobs, which lowers their agency in bargaining for work-life balance with their spouses.

There is also a widespread societal expectation that women's professional achievements should not come at the expense of their duties at home (Tshweneyagae, 2019). A good example is when a woman is expected to stay home and attend to a sick child instead of her husband, just because her salary cannot cover substantial costs such as school fees or food for the family. This is also escalated by norms that prioritize male education, resulting in women ending up having lower education than men, hence low-paying jobs (Mucheru et al., 2025). This trims the number of women entering the labor force among women with children, resulting in a perpetuated gender bias in formal wage employment opportunities.

The Tanzania Gender and Development Policy (2000) emphasizes gender equality, but traditional gender roles remain dominant in shaping both men's and women's attitudes toward domestic labor. Whereas domestic works are considered primary to women, this is considered secondary to men. Habitually, women cannot negotiate their time outside their households when they need to do so, as this is considered extraordinary and disrespectful to men. (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). The unfair distribution of domestic work to women creates a double burden for women. This, however, does not attract attention to the household members since the labor allocation, that is, men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, is seen as integral to their identities (Muasya, 2016). Without substantial support from the institutions to break these deeply rooted traditional norms, attaining work-life balance for women becomes impossible.

The SIGI Country Report for Tanzania, provided by OECD (2022), notes discriminatory

social norms that hamper women in pursuing their economic dreams by limiting them to household and caretaking duties. Some of the mentioned norms include girl child marriage, bride price, unequal intra-household dynamics, lack of reproductive autonomy and violence against women, and inaccessibility to land and justice. With all these in place, women can't negotiate their time or pursue a career outside their home. Even when such an opportunity occurs, maintaining it is a daily battle that women's agency has to win to sustain.

Women in rural areas experience more strenuous traditions than their urban counterparts. (OECD, 2022; Sibomana, 2018). In these areas, women's agency seems strangled by rigid patriarchal systems caused by a lack of exposure and underdeveloped women's agency. Disproportional workload in domestic chores and unpaid prolonged working hours characterize women's lives in rural areas (Sibomana, & Ingabire, 2018). Low level of civilization also contributes to these tendencies, leaving women vulnerable to their male partners, who seem to have totally neglected domestic chores.

Comparatively, as per Greenhaus and Allen (2011), urban women maintain strong gender egalitarianism, which is advantageous to their agency as it enables them to negotiate their time with men. Supportive policies and their enforcement, gender sensitive practices, and civilization in urban areas give relief to more women in urban areas to attain work-life balance.

Another notable gender norm that affects women's work-life balance is the automatic subjection of women under the authority of men (UN Women, 2024). Women are allowed to pursue their professional duties, but these are highly controlled by men. In worst cases, men dictate when women resign from employment and attend their household duties. Moreover, women's professional jobs are considered lower-level than those of men, even if that is not the case. This has nurtured norms that deny women the ability to control assets, have a significant amount of wealth to contribute to significant decisions, such as the choice of school children and others.

Apart from male domination, social norms also dictate women's progress by limiting their progress. It is common in Tanzania to have some tribes favoring a male child's education over a girl child's (UNICEF, 2023). This eventually affects the future, including the pursuit of formal employment. Even though such women succeed in penetrating the education system, the preference for male education subjects most women to lower-quality jobs than men. It attracts the male-breadwinning scenario, where women are considered only useful

when they attend to household chores rather than low-paying professional employment. Under these circumstances, women's agency struggles to maintain a balance between their household chores and their professional employment outside their homes (UN Women, 2025). The ability to pursue their career, beat male-domination that confines them at home, and determination to have their own sources of income are what the agency does for women who manage to find a work-life balance.

A study by Lunyungu (2025) found significant challenges for single mothers who struggle to balance time in rearing their children and breadwinning. Unsupportive leadership, policies that do not recognize single mothers, a low level of education that subjects them to low-paying jobs, and segregation by family members are all mentioned as norms that prevent single mothers from attaining work-life balance.

Generally, social norms praise women as homemakers and receive credit when their homes are beautiful and children are healthy, and when she is there for their family members when they need them. In case of emergencies such as a sudden sick child or in-law, a woman is expected to take an automatic leave to attend to the sick until they recover, regardless that this will affect her formal employment. Male breadwinning mentality protects them from such emergencies and gives them fully right to attend their professional careers fully, attracting to them promotion, higher salary, and eventually decision-making power over their household. It is therefore hard to attain work-life balance among women in such a context. Uprooting these social norms and traditions that affect women requires collective efforts among societal members and an open mind that treats women fairly and recognizes and allows their contribution in the family.

The role of policy, legal, and institutional frameworks is essential in assessing the role of agency in attaining work-life balance among women. Legal and institutional frameworks serve as yardsticks and points of reference when women's work-life balance involves questions of rights and obligations, guide litigation when the need arises, and are a panacea for women's miseries brought by the imbalance and the powerlessness of the agency (Lyakurwa, Jun, & Chung, 2019). Policies that inform laws on flexible working hours, maternity leave, paternity leave, and child care provisions are vital for reducing the burden of domestic labor on women and providing them with the time and space needed to manage both professional and personal responsibilities (Evertsson & Duvander, 2011).

ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) of 1981, for instance, serves as a guideline for creating an “effective equality of opportunity and treatment as between men and women workers with family responsibilities and between such workers and other workers.” Specifically, the convention calls for measures to prohibit discrimination against workers with family responsibilities in employment, support terms and conditions of employment allowing for work-family balance, and family-friendly working time arrangements. It also inspires the development or promotion of family-friendly facilities such as childcare and other services, providing training to allow workers with family responsibilities to become and remain integrated into the workforce, as well as to re-enter after an absence due to those responsibilities.

However, in many African countries, these frameworks are insufficiently enforced (Fapohunda, 2014). Maternity leave is often short, and the benefits may not be accessible to all women, particularly those in informal employment. A study by Kaufman (1994) unveiled that women are sometimes discouraged from taking maternity leave or may be penalized at work for doing so, as employers may perceive them as less committed to their jobs.

In Tanzania, instruments such as the Employment and Labor Relations Act (2004), the Domestic Violence Act of 1998, the Tanzania Gender and Development Policy of 2000, inform initiatives in fostering work-life balance through shaping women’s agency. These instruments are meant to bring relief from the pressures of balancing professional and domestic duties by protecting women’s rights in the workplace and at home. Despite this, there is inconsistency and uncertainty in the enforcement and practical implementation of the said instruments. This study shows a great misalignment between policy and practice, widening the gap between the two and eventually continuing women’s miseries. The tendency is more experienced in the informal sector and small businesses, where such laws hardly become operational.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Labor Force Survey (2021) declares discrepancies in the implementation of maternity leave, which is a legal entitlement for employed women. The report shows inconsistencies across regions and urban and rural areas. The difference in urban and rural areas in the informal sector is contingent on women’s fears associated with unfair tendencies, like being replaced when they are serving maternity leave. According to Sibomana, & Ingabire (2018), women in the private sector are often forced to choose between their jobs and family responsibilities due to inadequate

workplace policies on maternity leave and workplace flexibility.

According to the ILO reports (2020), adherence to legal and institutional frameworks is somewhat notable in countries with favorable laws, such as South Africa and Kenya. These countries have shown efforts in curbing the work-life imbalance among women by advocating for flextime in formal employment. However, even in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Tanzania, such efforts remain unrealized (Kitole, 2025; Salim, 2025).

Despite notable government initiatives, such as the launching of Tanzania’s National Employment Policy (2008) geared to combat gender equality in the workplace, this policy needs strengthening to enhance the participation of women in the economic sector. The policy, for instance, insists on more employment opportunities for women. However, this would remain unrealized if it is not backed by deliberate supportive measures such as affordable child care and policies emphasizing equal pay. These measures are in place but insufficient to enable women to sustain their professional career entirely attending to their domestic duties. These measures are still underdeveloped in Tanzania, which impacts women’s ability (UN Women, 2024).

Thus, these findings designate that despite the presence of a legal framework supporting gender equality in Tanzania, weak enforcement mechanisms strangle their effectiveness in practice. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that many Tanzanian women are not fully aware of their legal rights in the workplace (World Bank, 2022). Likewise, sometimes they face social and economic pressures, gendered norms, and weak agency that make it difficult for them to claim these rights (OECD, 2022; Men Engage Africa Alliance, 2024).

Additionally, Kossek et al. (2019) opine that there is more these frameworks can address than maternity leave and benefits. Such frameworks can institute family-friendly policies that allow women to pursue their professional careers, flexible working hours, and comprehensive family-friendly policies. The frameworks seem to have helped countries such as Sweden and Norway to at least attain work-life balance for a large percentage of women.

The absence of work-life balance from the legal perspective can also be associated with the violation of the right to work as a human right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that working as a human right to work is unalienable and universal. UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The same is also emphasized by the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Law of Marriage

[Act of 1971 and the Domestic Violence Act of 1998](#) of Tanzania protect women's rights by preventing domestic violence, which is sometimes accompanied by men denying their spouses from work. [The Police Force and Auxiliary Act 1995](#) assures that the culprits are arrested and served with due punishment, ideally. However, the effective enforcement of these instruments remains desired due to a number of factors, including corruption, the male-domination system, and poor women's agency. However, as presented by [Kijo-Bisimba \(2010\)](#), success stories show that legal and institutional frameworks are helpful in ameliorating the imbalance and boosting women's agency.

Other shortcomings with the existing legal and policy frameworks are their inability to fully empower the beneficiaries to utilize them, but also existing traditions and norms that prevent their full enjoyment. For instance, the three-day paternity leave granted to men in Tanzania by the [Employment and Labor Relations Act, 2004](#), seems insufficient to give enough support to women who need to rest and recover ([United Republic of Tanzania, 2004](#)).

Some of the women experience health problems in these early prenatal days, especially when they do not have help other than their husbands. The problems become an obstacle to their careers and domestic duties, making some of them opt to attend to their families. This is due to policies that fail to recognize the role of men in attaining work-life balance. Cultural stigmas prevent men and women from fully enjoying parental leave and flexible working hours as well. Challenging ingrained cultural and structural barriers is the way forward to attract work-life balance among women, rather than the basic implementation of the existing legal frameworks. Institutional, legal, and policy frameworks must therefore go beyond addressing face-value problems and go deep to uproot tendencies that really chain women to their domestic chores, daily denying them the opportunity to attend to their careers. ([Kitole, 2025](#)). Policies and their effective enforcement need to be directed to address subsidized health care, parental leave, and more work flexibility.

Role of men in promoting women's agency towards attaining work-life balance is also a topical discussion.

When males help with chores around the house, give emotional support, and push for legislation that promotes gender equality, they help break down conventional gender roles that frequently impede women's freedom and job advancement ([UNDP, 2022](#)). Men can enable women to pursue their professional duties while attending to their domestic duties through mutual respect, collaboration, and support. These not

only boost women's agency but also improve the whole society's well-being. The collective efforts that can be invested in attaining work-life balance are one of the panaceas for the imbalance that only women experience that is inclusive, balanced, and productive workforce can be attained only when both men and women collaborate in attending the domestic duties ([Onoja, 2024](#)). When men chip in, they help enormously in reshaping gendered norms and stereotypes that dominate women, since, in reality, men are significant perpetrators.

As mentioned, men can participate in creating work-life balance among women in many ways, including engaging directly in transforming and challenging negative traditional gender norms ([van Laar et al., 2024](#)). For instance, it still appears that child-rearing duty is solely attributed to women. Despite this, as [Ogundipe \(1994\)](#) argues, this facilitates disproportionate workload allocation and condemns women to only home duties, neglecting or becoming overburdened to attend their professional duties when they are employed. These made women seem less committed, especially in high-demanding professional duties. When men engage and give a helping hand to women, this enables them to attain work-life balance while maintaining family and societal equilibrium. Men's participation is also supported by [UN Women \(2024\)](#) initiatives that acknowledge the significant role of women in bringing work-life balance, especially in patriarchal societies. Their report states that men can enable the reduction of unpaid care work or domestic labor if they decide to do so. They can do this by overseeing a more balanced distribution of domestic duties and household responsibilities to allow women to fully or flexibly participate in professional duties. Men can also take the lead in reforming workplace policies that provide for flexible working hours that can significantly improve women's career advancement and mental well-being. Studies ([Kossek et al. 2019](#)) show that, whereby most organizations are headed by male managers, they can become allies in advocating organizational cultures in favor of work-life balance, and that male allies are instrumental in shaping organizational cultures positive to gender equality.

Male managers in Tanzania have served as an example of how men can champion the creation of a conducive environment that underlies work-life balance. In organizations such as Tanzania Investment Centre (TIC) in Tanzania and Tanzania Breweries Limited (TBL), men leaders have instituted policies that allow women to attend their professional duties flexibly and reduce their work-life burden ([Daily News Tanzania, 2024](#)). Serengeti

Breweries (SBL), a part of TBL, has posted this on its web page,

"SBL has in place other vital policies to support the development of women, including: (i) Six months of maternity leave (double the legally provided time) to enable women employees to take sufficient time off after giving birth. The company's maternity leave policy is also an indicator to women employees that the company supports all dimensions of their lives and development. (ii) Flexi-working policy that allows employees to start the working day at either 7, 8, or 9 am and end at either 4, 5 or 6 pm, depending on the start time. The flexible working policy also allows employees whose roles allow them to work from home for up to 40% of their working time. These two policies are especially favourable to women. It means that they do not necessarily have to choose between being employed and attending to their other responsibilities".

This and other policy changes that promote women's employment, promotion to leadership positions, and even motivation by sending women to work in sister companies outside Tanzania, provide a testimony that when men engage in eliminating discriminatory workplace traditions and create favorable working conditions for women, it is possible to attain work-life balance among women.

Men can also facilitate work-life balance among women by encouraging shared making in the households (Sibomana & Ingabire, 2018). When men are actively involved in household decision-making in aspects such as household budgeting, caregiving responsibilities, and children's education, it gives them a chance to negotiate their time and economic activities time which allows them to have greater freedom to pursue their professional and domestic duties without the overwhelming pressure of bearing the entire domestic workload.

The report by [Tanzania's Women's Economic Empowerment Program \(2021\)](#) shows that in households where men were involved in financial planning and childrearing, women were more likely to pursue entrepreneurship or employment opportunities outside the home. These men were also more likely to support women in reclaiming their time, providing a buffer to the cultural expectations of gendered labor. By participating in caregiving, men provide more time and energy for women to engage in professional work, study, or community activities, thereby improving their agency.

Media in Tanzania is also used by activists and torchbearers to channel messages on challenging traditional stereotypes surrounding men and their roles in work-life balance. Popular talk shows known as "Mambo Pesa," translated in English as "Everything requires money", and "Kazi na Familia," translated in

English as "Work and Family", have been aired on Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation, highlighting the importance of shared caregiving and gender equality in improving women's work-life balance and building family unity. These programs are meant to attract especially male viewers to get more involved in sharing domestic responsibilities and a shared partnership, and maintaining family tranquility. The outcome cannot be verified, but there is a positive awakening among men in promoting women's agency. Another externality of these programs is the promotion of fatherhood as a lifelong responsibility and the shifting of public attitudes towards women's domestic roles. The programs that show working fathers who are successful but who also share child care and domestic work become a catalyst and an inspiration to others, hence eliminating traditional norms that elevate men as entirely breadwinners who are at home.

There are multiple examples from Tanzania, where programs like the Men's Engagement in Gender Equality Project have targeted men in both urban and rural areas to change their responsibilities in the home ([MenEngage Tanzania, 2021](#)). Men are urged by seminars and campaigns to help their spouses by helping out in the kitchen, taking turns with childcare, and supporting laws that assist working mothers ([Mhando & Kayuni, 2019](#)). Men are now more conscious of how they may help their spouses balance their personal and professional obligations as a result of this program. These men's increased involvement gives their spouses greater agency, which promotes better career advancement and family well-being.

Male political leaders also have a role to play in advocating gender positive policies that prioritize women's work-life balance at the national and community levels. Studies by [Barker et al. \(2007\)](#), [Kossek et al. \(2019\)](#), and [Kaufman \(1994\)](#) opine that male political leaders and policymakers are at the driving seat in instituting large-scale changes in gender equality laws and work-life balance policies.

Male politicians and activists in Tanzania speak openly about the need for stronger workplace and family-friendly policies, including better childcare facilities and the provision of flexible work arrangements. For instance, in 2024 for instance the Vice-President of Tanzania announced policy changes in favor of women with premature babies involving optional flexi-time, short working hours, and extended leave ([Kadoke, 2024](#)). These maternity policy changes provided the recalibration of maternity leave for preterm babies, allowing mothers with such babies to leave work at 1:30 pm for a duration of six months. Here, maternity leave would commence after the special care term, after

delivery of preterm babies, when the doctor has confirmed that the baby is out of danger. Such a policy initiative shows how political decisions can intervene in advocating for women's well-being and attain work-life balance.

Global initiatives by various multinational organizations and international agencies have a share in voicing work-life balance as well. UN Women's HeForShe Campaign, for instance, refers to men as change agents in attaining the balance. The main focus for the HeForShe Campaign is to table work-life balance and gender balance as a collective effort rather than a responsibility of women alone. The [UN Women report \(2021\)](#) shows the contribution of men in women's empowerment, which facilitates their own well-being, relationships, and mental health. The report shows more improvement in emotional well-being for men who participate in caregiving and have a good family life than those who do not. Thus, by intervening to bring the balance, men's welfare is improved, and an equitable society is likely to be attained.

Thus, attaining work-life balance can be realized when there is a shared burden of domestic responsibilities that are traditionally accrued to women. Studies have shown that when men chip in and share responsibilities with women report less stress and improved mental well-being ([Evertsson & Duvander, 2011](#); [Reshi, Sudha, & Dar, 2022](#)). Men can also champion the eradication of gendered norms that dominate women by actually doing and championing policies that create a balanced work-life environment, both in the workplace and at the community level.

7.0 Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study has examined the role of agency in determining work-life balance for women in Tanzania, with a specific focus on the influence of gender norms, institutional frameworks, and men's involvement in achieving a more equitable division of labor both at home and in the workplace. The findings from the secondary data analysis emphasize that while there has been some progress in policy frameworks and gender equality laws in Tanzania, substantial barriers remain, particularly with respect to gendered labor divisions, institutional support systems, and mental health challenges related to work-life imbalance. However, the study elevated women's agency as a savior that can enable women to emancipate themselves from the exploitative and discriminatory gendered norms that expect them to prioritize their domestic and caregiving roles at the expense of their professional roles. The study also showed the prominence of agency in creating women's courage,

decision-making power, and hence attaining a work-life balance.

Despite existing policies and laws aimed at promoting gender equality, the study found that gender norms continue to shape the expectations placed on women, particularly in rural and low-income settings. These entrenched expectations dictate that women should fulfill dual roles as caregivers and professionals, often to the detriment of their well-being and career advancement. Thus, though the multiplicity of legal and institutional frameworks helps to iron out the imbalance, there is still much to be done due to the rampant violation of the same. The study also demonstrated that although men are increasingly recognized as potential allies in the process of attaining work-life balance and gender equality in general, their role in the process remains underdeveloped in many areas, though it has proved successful where it was practiced.

Work-life imbalance has particularly concerning effects on mental health; many women suffer from stress, burnout, and depression as a result of constantly balancing work and personal obligations. There is still more to be done to develop more thorough and encouraging workplace regulations and societal structures that can better support women's mental health, even if these challenges are becoming more widely acknowledged in both academic literature and policy circles.

Overall, the study demonstrates that women's ability to attain a work-life balance is greatly influenced by their agency, although agency itself depends on a number of variables, such as institutional support, cultural changes, legal reforms, and men's active participation in both the home and the workplace.

7.2 Policy Recommendations

Several policy recommendations are proposed to improve the work-life balance of women in Tanzania and to enhance their agency in navigating both their professional and domestic roles.

The Tanzanian government should ensure that it effectively enforces the police and laws that it creates. This includes making and amending the existing laws to update them, emphasizing adherence to the established laws and rebuking any violation by the employers and other responsible institutions, such as the police and the courts, from malpractices that continue to promote women's exploitation and enhance the imbalance. Adherence to the provision of maternity leave, paternity leave, and equal pay, for instance, should be guaranteed.

Public awareness campaigns to promote

shared caregiving and domestic responsibilities between men and women should also be prioritized. Public awareness campaigns, such as those initiated by the UN Women's HeForShe Campaign, community workshops, media campaigns, and educational programs that highlight the importance of shared responsibility in fostering gender equality are Necessary. These should be accompanied by an emphasis that men should engage more in caregiving roles that take up much of women's time.

It is also important to establish flexible work arrangements and supportive workplace environments to assist women in balancing their professional and family duties. Companies in Tanzania, especially within the private sector, should be encouraged to implement options such as telecommuting, adjustable work hours, and childcare services at the workplace. Furthermore, policies should aim to create family-oriented workspaces that help both men and women balance their career responsibilities with family life. In line with global practices, businesses could receive incentives like tax reductions or financial subsidies for adopting such inclusive policies.

The role of men in creating work-life balance should be promoted. Policy-makers and civil society should involve men in gender equality discussions, encouraging their active role in family life and domestic responsibilities. Educational programs for men and boys should challenge stereotypes and promote shared duties at home and work. Male leaders should also publicly support gender equality and work-life balance policies.

8.0 Study's Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on work-life balance, women's agency, and gender equality, particularly in the context of Tanzania and other African countries. Exploring how cultural norms and gendered expectations intersect with women's professional aspirations provides new insights into the unique challenges African women face in balancing work and family life, which has been underexplored in existing literature. The study deepens understanding of how women's agency is shaped not only by legal frameworks but also by entrenched social norms that place caregiving responsibilities on women. Furthermore, the identification of male involvement as a key factor in improving work-life balance offers a new perspective on shared caregiving roles. While much of the literature focuses on Western contexts, this study's findings contribute to the global discourse on gender equality by offering applicable insights for other developing nations with similar challenges.

9.0 Implications for Future Research

This study lays the groundwork for future research on work-life balance, gender equality, and women's agency in Tanzania. Future studies could examine the long-term effects of flexible work policies and shared caregiving on women's economic mobility and mental health. Additionally, exploring the role of men in leadership and their impact on workplace culture would offer valuable insights into promoting gender equality within Tanzanian organizations.

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