

Work-Life Balance and Employee Well-Being: A Comparative Study of Generation Z and Older Employees

Kishan¹Pratiksha²Atyab³DR.Amit Sinha⁴DR.Manju Rani⁵

^{1 2 3} Students of School of Management Sciences, Apeejay Styra university,
Gurgaon, Haryana, IN

⁴Head of School of Management Sciences, Apeejay Styra university, Gurgaon,
Haryana, IN

⁵ Head of School of Behavioural Sciences, Apeejay Styra university, Gurgaon,
Haryana, IN

Abstract

Work-life balance is now a big part of the modern workplace, especially since different generations have different ideas about what it should be. The current study analyzes trends in work-life balance and employee well-being over the past decade (2015–2024), comparing these factors between Generation Z and older employees. The research utilizes secondary data obtained from reports issued by Deloitte, Gallup, the World Health Organization, and the International Labour Organization. The study looks at important factors like job satisfaction, burnout, mental health, and average working hours to see how employee wellbeing changes over time. The findings show that even though people are working fewer hours, they are more likely to feel burned out and have mental health problems, especially after the pandemic. The comparative analysis indicates that Generation Z endures elevated stress levels and diminished job satisfaction relative to older employees, despite working fewer hours. The study concludes that work–life balance is influenced not only by working hours but also by psychological factors, workplace expectations, and socio-cultural changes, including digitalization. Along with digitalization, other changes in society and culture, like changing ideas of success, more awareness of mental health, and the rise of individualistic values, have also changed how workers see work-life balance. These changes have made the workplace more demanding, especially for Generation Z, which could lead to more stress and unhappiness. It emphasizes the necessity for organizations to embrace a more comprehensive strategy for employee well-being by prioritizing mental health, adaptability, and nurturing work environments.

Keywords: work–life balance, employee well-being, Generation Z

Introduction

Recently, the idea of work-life balance has gotten a lot of attention because more and more companies realize how important employee well-being is for long-term productivity and performance. Because work is changing and so are employee expectations, it's important to know how people balance their work and personal lives. People used to think that work-life balance was only a personal issue, but now it's a big part of job satisfaction, mental health, and overall work performance.

Recent trends show that even though the average number of hours worked has gone down over time, stress and mental health problems among employees have gone up. This shows a change in how people balance work and life in modern workplaces. It means factors beyond working hours also play an important role, like work pressure, job demands, and digital connectivity, (International Labour Organization, 2021; World Health Organization, 2022). This paradox is an important part of figuring out how work-life balance has changed over the past ten years. The modern workforce is made up of people from different generations who have been shaped by different social, economic, and technological conditions. There are Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1995), and Generation Z (1996–2012). Every generation has different ideas about work, what they expect from it, and how to balance work and personal life. The most notable difference, though, is between Generation Z and older workers, as they are at opposite ends of the changing workplace spectrum.

Older workers, especially Baby Boomers and Generation X, have always put a lot of value on job stability and staying with a company for a long time. For them, work is closely linked to job security and career advancement, and they have generally been more willing to adjust to tough work conditions, even if it means giving up personal time. They have learned how to deal with stress over time, which has not had a big effect on how happy they are with their jobs. Generation Z, on the other hand, has a different view of the workplace. They grew up in a fast-paced, highly connected world, so they value flexibility, personal well-being, and mental health more. For them, work is not just a way to make money; it's also a way to keep their lives balanced and happy. Despite this heightened awareness and prioritization, Generation Z employees frequently experience elevated levels of stress and burnout (Deloitte, 2024). This leads to high expectations for work-life balance, but the reality of the workplace doesn't always live up to these expectations.

To gain a deeper understanding of these disparities, it is essential to analyze the psychological perspective of work-life balance. The way employees feel about stress, motivation, and burnout is greatly affected by their work environment and their own expectations. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model elucidates that stress occurs when job demands surpass available resources, whereas Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the significance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining motivation and

well-being (Edward L. Deci & Richard M. Ryan, 2000; Arnold B. Bakker & Evangelia Demerouti, 2007). These frameworks help explain why employees from different generations respond differently to similar work conditions. In addition to psychological factors, socio-cultural changes also influence how work–life balance is perceived. Digital technology has grown so quickly that it has changed the way people work and made it easier to stay in touch with each other all the time. This has made things more flexible, but it has also made it harder to tell the difference between work and personal life, which has led to more stress (Gallup, 2023). Along with digitalization, other changes in society and culture, like new ideas about success, more awareness of mental health, and new values at work, have also changed what employees expect, especially younger ones. Digitalization is a normal part of life for Generation Z, but it also makes it more likely that people will always be working, which makes it hard to disconnect. Older workers, on the other hand, who have slowly gotten used to digital work environments, often have clearer lines between work and personal life. These differences show how both cultural values and exposure to technology affect how people balance work and life.

Taking these things into account, the current study seeks to:

- To analyze the trend in work–life balance and employee well-being over the period 2015– 2024.
- To examine changes in key indicators such as job satisfaction, burnout, mental health, and average working hours over time.
- To compare work–life balance and employee well-being between Generation Z and older employees based on selected indicators.

Literature Review

A lot of organizational and behavioral research has looked at work-life balance and employee well-being. More and more, researchers are looking at how these ideas change from one generation to the next. The current literature underscores that work–life balance is a multifaceted concept shaped by psychological, organizational, and socio-cultural determinants. Numerous studies have highlighted the correlation between work demands and employee well-being. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, put forth by Arnold B. Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti (2007), posits that employee stress and burnout arise when job demands surpass the available coping resources. High workload, time pressure, and role conflict are some of the most important job demands. Autonomy, support, and flexibility, on the other hand, are some of the most important resources that help keep things in balance and lower stress. This framework is especially useful for figuring out how modern workplaces make people more likely to burn out.

Self-Determination Theory, created by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan in 2000, has also been used to explain the ideas of motivation and well-being. The theory emphasizes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs for sustaining

motivation and overall well-being. When these needs are not met, employees are more likely to be unhappy and stressed, which can make it harder for them to balance work and life. Recent organizational reports furnish empirical evidence regarding the evolving trends in employee well-being. Gallup (2023) says that global workplace data shows that employees are becoming more stressed and less engaged, even though workplaces are becoming more flexible. Deloitte's (2024) research indicates that younger employees, especially those from Generation Z, experience greater levels of burnout and mental health issues than their older counterparts. These results indicate that heightened awareness of well-being does not inherently lead to enhanced outcomes. Existing research has also focused a lot on differences between generations. People from older generations, like Generation X and the Baby Boomers, are often thought of as having values like job security, long-term commitment, and structured work settings. Generation Z, on the other hand, prefers flexibility, meaningful work, and a strong focus on mental health and personal well-being. However, studies show that Generation Z is under more stress, which may be because of higher expectations and changes in the workplace.

Along with psychological and generational factors, changes in society and culture have had a big effect on work-life balance. Digital technology has grown quickly, making it possible to work from home, but it has also made it harder to tell the difference between work and personal life. Employees are more stressed out because they are always connected and have higher expectations for how quickly they will respond. Digitalization, shifting definitions of success, increased mental health awareness, and changing work values have all changed how employees, especially younger ones, think about work-life balance. Although current studies offer significant insights into work-life balance and employee well-being, the majority concentrate on generational disparities or overarching workplace trends. There has been little focus on integrating both dimensions by examining long-term trends in employee wellbeing in conjunction with generational comparisons. This makes it hard to understand how work-life balance has changed over time and how different generations experience it.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining trends in essential indicators such as job satisfaction, burnout, mental health, and working hours from 2015 to 2024, while also contrasting Generation Z with older employees. The study seeks to enhance the understanding of work-life balance and employee well-being in the contemporary workforce by incorporating both trend analysis and comparative analysis.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design. The main goal of the study is to look at changes in work-life balance and employee well-being from 2015 to 2024 and see how these things are different between Generation Z and older workers. The descriptive approach helps show how key variables change and form patterns over time. The analytical approach, on the other hand, looks at how variables like job satisfaction, burnout, mental

health, and working hours are related to each other. The study is non-experimental and does not entail direct manipulation of variables.

2. Nature of Data

The study is based entirely on secondary data. Secondary data refers to information that has already been collected, analysed, and published by various organizations and researchers. This kind of data is good for this study because it lets us look at long-term trends and compare different generations without having to collect new data.

3. Sources of Data

The data used in this study has been collected from credible and reliable sources over the last ten years. These include reports and publications from Gallup, Deloitte, World Health Organization, and International Labour Organization. These groups give a lot of information about how happy employees are, how stressed they are at work, their mental health, and the conditions at work. Using more than one source makes the study more reliable and valid.

4. Data Collection Method

The data was collected through a systematic review and compilation of relevant reports, research findings, and statistical data related to work–life balance and employee well-being. Key indicators such as job satisfaction levels, burnout rates, mental health concerns, and average working hours were identified and extracted. Since we couldn't get complete data for all variables from one source, we combined and organized data from several reports into a single dataset for analysis.

5. Variables of the Study

The study focuses on four key variables that represent both work–life balance and employee well-being, these variables were selected to provide a comprehensive understanding by combining both psychological and objective dimensions of employee experiences.

Criteria	Description	Relevance to Study
Job Satisfaction	Measures overall employee wellbeing	Indicates level of satisfaction across generations
Burnout / Stress	Reflects work-related pressure and fatigue	Shows psychological impact of work demands

Mental Health	Indicates emotional and psychological well-being	Helps assess overall employee health
Working Hours	Average time spent on work	Represents structural aspect of worklife balance

6. Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

A mix of statistical and graphical methods was used to look at the data that had been gathered:

- **Trend Analysis:** This was used to look at how work-life balance and employee wellbeing changed over the ten years from 2015 to 2024.
- **Comparative Analysis:** This was done to find differences in workplace experiences between Generation Z and older employees across important variables.
- **Graphical Representation:** We used line graphs and bar charts to show trends and comparisons in a way that was easier to understand.
- **Difference Analysis:** This is used to figure out the difference between Generation Z and older workers. It helps us understand how much the work-life balance and well-being of workers differ.

7. Data Standardization and Assumptions

Because the data came from different places, the formats, scales, and ways of reporting were all different. The following standardization methods and assumptions were used to make sure that everything was the same and could be compared:

Data Standardization

- To keep things consistent across different datasets, all data values were changed to percentage format (%) where it made sense.
- Data reported on different scales (like satisfaction scores and index values) were changed into percentage ranges that could be compared.
- We found the average values for years where there were more than one data point.
- To keep things consistent, working hours were changed to average weekly hours.

Assumptions Made

- Similar indicators from various reports (e.g., stress, burnout, mental strain) were regarded as equivalent metrics of employee stress.
- Trend-based estimation was used to fill in data gaps for some years, assuming that changes happened slowly rather than suddenly.

- It was thought that the generational categories used in different reports were the same as the standard ones (Gen Z, Gen X, etc.).
- It was thought that external factors, like changes in the economy or a specific industry, would have the same effect on the whole dataset.

These steps made sure that the data stayed the same and could be used for trend and comparison analysis.

8. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on analysing work–life balance and employee well-being across different generations, particularly Generation Z and older employees. It examines key variables such as job satisfaction, burnout, mental health, and working hours over a ten-year period (2015–2024). The study provides a general understanding of workplace trends without being limited to a specific industry or region.

9. Limitations of the Study

The study offers valuable insights; however, it possesses certain limitations:

- The research relies exclusively on secondary data.
- Data has been gathered from several sources using different methods.
- The research does not concentrate on a particular nation or sector.
- Generalized data might not accurately reflect all employee demographics.
- Assumptions made during data standardization could impact accuracy.

10. Ethical Considerations

The research relies exclusively on publicly accessible secondary data, without the inclusion of personal or confidential information. To keep academic honesty and avoid plagiarism, all sources have been properly credited. The data has only been used for research and learning.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Trend Analysis of Work–Life Balance and Employee Well-Being

Year	Job Satisfaction (%)	Burnout (%)	Working Hours (weekly)	Mental Health Issues (%)
2015	62	45	48	30
2019	66	52	46	36
2021	58	65	43.5	45
2024	63	59	45	42

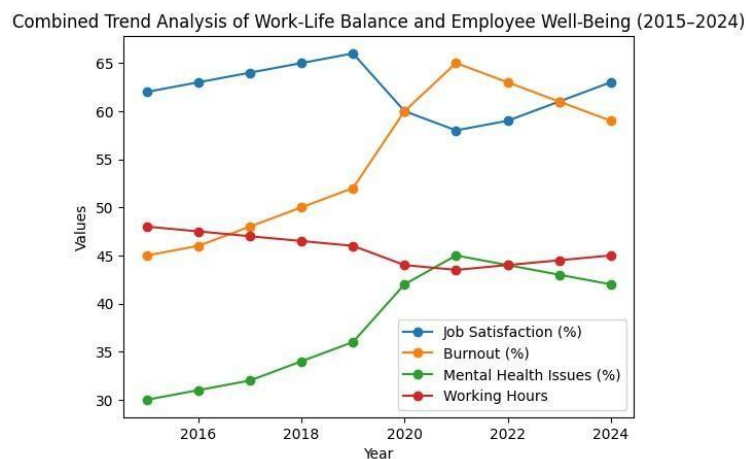
Note. Data compiled from Gallup (2023), Deloitte (2024), World Health Organization (2022), and International Labour Organization (2021).

Table 1 shows a lot of important trends in employee well-being and work-life balance from 2015 to 2024. At first, job satisfaction rose steadily from 62% in 2015 to 66% in 2019. It means that employees had relatively stable and positive working conditions before the pandemic. Better company policies, more awareness of employee health, and the gradual adoption of flexible work practices may have led to this improvement. But there is a big change starting in 2020. In 2020, job satisfaction drops sharply to 60%, and in 2021, it drops even more to 58%. This time period coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused problems like working from home, job insecurity, and higher work pressure. These things made it harder for employees to keep a healthy balance between their work and personal lives. At the same time, the number of people who are burned out has been steadily rising over the past ten years, going from 45% in 2015 to 65% in 2021. This rise gets really steep during the pandemic years, which suggests that workers were more stressed because they didn't know what would happen next, had more work to do, and didn't have clear lines between work and home life. Burnout levels are still pretty high even after 2021, which shows that this time period had a long-lasting effect on employee health. Another important thing to notice is that the average number of hours worked per week goes down from 48 in 2015 to about 43.5 in 2021. Even though this cut would normally be thought to help with work-life balance, the data says otherwise. Employees who worked fewer hours said they were more burned out and had more mental health problems. So, work-life balance depends on multiple factors, not just working hours. There has also been a clear rise in mental health problems over the years, going from 30% in 2015 to 45% in 2021, and then leveling off a little in the following years. This trend shows that employees are under more mental stress, especially during and after the pandemic. Overall, the data shows that some structural changes, like shorter work hours, have been made, but they haven't been enough to make employees happier.

Stress, uncertainty, and changing work environments, on the other hand, have had a bigger impact on work-life balance outcomes.

Figure 1: Combined Trend Analysis of Work-Life Balance and Employee Well-Being

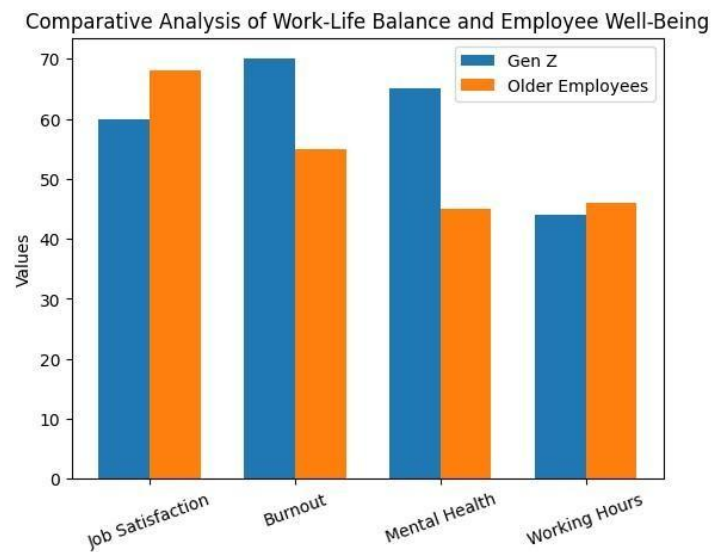
(Line graph showing Job Satisfaction (%), Burnout (%), Mental Health Issues (%), and Average Working Hours from 2015–2024)



Note. Based on data from Gallup (2023) and Deloitte (2024).

The combined line graph gives a full picture of how work-life balance and employee wellbeing have changed over the last ten years. Job satisfaction has been going up slowly from 2015 to 2019, which means that working conditions are relatively stable and getting better. During this same time, burnout and mental health problems also went up a little, which suggests that employees were feeling more stressed even when things were stable. Average working hours are slowly going down, though, which shows that people are moving toward more flexible work schedules. From 2020 on, there is a big change: job satisfaction goes down a lot, while burnout and mental health problems go up quickly. This time period coincides with the global pandemic, which changed the way people worked and made things like remote work, job insecurity, and a heavier workload more difficult. The graph clearly shows that even though working hours were cut back during this time, employee health got worse, as shown by the rise in burnout and mental health issues. After 2021, job satisfaction levels go up a little, but they don't go back to where they were before the pandemic. Burnout and mental health problems have also gone down a little, but they are still higher than they were in previous years. This means that even though organizations have adjusted to new working conditions, the effects of stress and heavy workloads are still there in the long run. The graph shows that many things affect work-life balance and that working hours alone cannot tell you what it is. Even though employees worked fewer hours, they were more stressed and less satisfied. This suggests that things like work pressure, digital fatigue, and not having clear boundaries between work and personal life are very important for employee well-being.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Work-Life Balance and Employee Well-Being Across Generations



Note. Data compiled from Gallup (2023), Deloitte (2024), World Health Organization (2022), and International Labour Organization (2021).

Table 2 shows how Generation Z and older workers compare in terms of their work-life balance and overall health. The data clearly shows that there are big differences between the two groups on all of the variables. Gen Z workers are less happy with their jobs (60%) than older workers (68%), which means that younger workers are less happy with their work-life balance and the conditions at work. At the same time, Gen Z workers are much more likely to be burned out (70%) than older workers (55%). In simple terms younger workers are more stressed and tired at work than older workers. A similar trend is evident in mental health concerns, with Gen Z reporting a higher percentage (65%) in contrast to older employees (45%). This means that younger workers are more likely to have mental and emotional problems.

One can make an interesting observation from the average number of hours worked. Gen Z workers put in a little less time at work than older workers (44 hours a week compared to 46 hours a week). Gen Z, on the other hand, is more likely to burn out and less likely to be happy with their jobs, even though they work fewer hours. This indicates that work-life balance is not exclusively contingent upon the quantity of hours worked, but is also shaped by elements such as work-related stress, expectations, job instability, and the characteristics of the work itself.

The comparison clearly shows that Generation Z faces more challenges in achieving work-life balance and overall well-being than their older counterparts. The results show that younger workers are more likely to have stress and mental health problems, even when they work fewer hours. So basically the way people work is changing. Psychological and emotional factors are now more important than traditional measures like hours worked when it comes to employee well-being.

Table 3: Difference Analysis of Generation Z and Older Employees

Variable	Difference (Gen Z – Older Employees)
Job Satisfaction	-8
Burnout	+15
Mental Health Issues	+20
Working Hours	-2

Note. Data compiled from Gallup (2023), Deloitte (2024), World Health Organization (2022), and International Labour Organization (2021).

Table 3 shows the differences in important variables between Generation Z and older workers. It clearly shows the gap in work-life balance and overall health. The negative value of job satisfaction (-8) shows that Gen Z workers are less happy with their work-life balance than older workers. It indicates that younger employees might encounter greater difficulties in conforming to workplace expectations and achieving equilibrium between personal and professional responsibilities.

On the other hand, the positive differences in burnout (+15) and mental health issues (+20) show that Gen Z is under a lot more stress and mental strain. These differences are very big, which shows that younger workers are more likely to feel stressed and have mental health problems at work. This could be because of things like higher expectations, digital fatigue, and not knowing how to grow in your career.

Another interesting thing to note is that Gen Z works a little less than older workers (2 hours less). Gen Z, on the other hand, says they are more burned out and less satisfied, even though they work less. What this tells us is work-life balance isn't just about how many hours you work; it's also about the type of work you do, where you work, and how you feel about it.

The table clearly shows that Generation Z has a harder time balancing work and life and staying healthy than older workers. The results support the idea that problems in the modern workplace are more complicated and that businesses need to pay attention to more than just the amount of work their employees do. They also need to pay attention to their employees' mental health and the overall work environment.

Psychological Perspective

From a psychological standpoint, the results can be elucidated by variations in individual responses to work demands and accessible resources. The data shows that Generation Z experiences more burnout and mental health issues despite working fewer hours. This suggests that they are more affected by the pressures and expectations of modern work. This could be because it's harder to balance personal goals with work demands. Generation Z is also more aware of mental health issues, which makes it easier for them to recognize and report stress. Even though this awareness helps people find problems early, it could also make them feel more stressed. In contrast, older workers seem to use coping strategies that they have learned over time. Because they know what is expected of them at work, they may be better able to handle stress, which could lead to higher job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout. These differences suggest that experience and stress perception influence employee well-being.

Socio-Cultural Perspective

Socio-cultural factors significantly contribute to elucidating the observed disparities. Generation Z has grown up in a world where technology is a big part of both work and play. This allows for flexibility, but it also means that people are always connected, which makes it hard to keep work and personal life separate. Older workers, on the other hand, have slowly gotten used to working in digital settings. They often base their work habits on more traditional values like stability, long-term commitment, and structured work patterns. This may help them keep their boundaries clearer and lower their levels of stress at work. There has also been a change in how people of different generations define success, in addition to digitalization. Older workers often think that success means moving up in their careers, having a stable job, and being financially secure. Generation Z, on the other hand, cares more about their own health, mental health, and happiness in general. These changing values raise expectations at work, which can lead to more stress and unhappiness when those expectations aren't met.

Conclusion

The current study sought to analyze work–life balance and employee well-being from 2015 to 2024, emphasizing the disparities between Generation Z and older employees. The analysis of secondary data reveals a substantial transformation in workplace dynamics, particularly in the post-pandemic era. The trend analysis shows that even though the average number of hours worked has gone down over time, the health of workers has not gotten better. Before 2020, job satisfaction was steadily rising. During the pandemic, it fell, and it has only partially recovered in the last few years. At the same time, burnout and mental health problems have gone up a lot, which means that just cutting back on work hours isn't enough to keep a healthy work-life balance.

The comparative analysis underscores distinct generational disparities. Generation Z workers say they are less satisfied with their jobs and more likely to be burned out and have mental

health problems than older workers, even though they work a little less. This shows that younger workers are more affected by the stresses of modern work, changing expectations, and problems with keeping work and personal life separate. From a psychological standpoint, these disparities can be ascribed to differences in coping strategies, stress perception, and mental health awareness. Socio-cultural factors, such as digital exposure, evolving work values, and redefined notions of success, significantly influence the work-life balance experiences of various generations.

Overall, the study shows that work–life balance is a complex concept that is affected by more than just how many hours you work. It is also affected by your mental health, the environment you work in, and your own expectations. The results show that companies need to take a more holistic approach to employee well-being by combining mental health support, good stress management, and work policies that are both flexible and structured. These steps will be necessary to make employees happier and to make sure that the workforce is productive and sustainable in the long run.

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