

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS
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FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS AND THEIR IMPACT
ON EMPLOYEE WORK-LIFE BALANCE
AT UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR
AFRICA (UNECA)

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Commerce of Addis
Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Human Resource
Management

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STATEMENT OF DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been accepted for the award of any other degree in any institution to the best of my knowledge.

Due acknowledgement is made for any material previously published and used as a reference.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this study, “Flexible Working Hours and Their Impact on Employee Work-Life Balance at United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)”, undertaken by Teguest Berhanou for the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Human Resources Management at Addis Ababa University College of Business and Economics School of Commerce, is an original work and not submitted earlier for any degree either at this University or any other University.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of flexible working hours on employee work-life balance, job performance, and overall well-being within the context of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). With the growing adoption of alternative work arrangements, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research aims to determine whether flexible or traditional schedules better support employee satisfaction, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. Employing a mixed-methods approach that includes structured surveys and focus group discussions, the study explores the relationship between flexible working hours and critical outcomes such as stress reduction, motivation, employee engagement, and the ability to manage personal and professional responsibilities. Four key hypotheses were tested using SPSS-based statistical analysis, confirming that flexible work arrangements significantly improve job performance, enhance work-life balance, and reduce burnout. The study also highlights the importance of managerial support and well-defined boundaries in ensuring the success of flexible work policies. Based on the findings, the research offers practical, evidence-based recommendations for human resource professionals and policymakers to optimize workplace flexibility and improve employee well-being and employee performance at UNECA.

Key words: *flexible working hours, employee work-life balance, job performance, stress reduction, employee well-being, organizational effectiveness and employee satisfaction*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The rise of flexible working arrangements, particularly flexible working hours, has significantly transformed the workplace landscape across various sectors globally (Guoqiang, Z. and Bhaumik, A., 2024). These changes have been evident at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Understanding how flexible working hours influence employee work-life balance and job performance is essential to fostering an efficient and motivated workforce.

Flexible working hours refer to the ability for employees to have control over their work schedule, allowing them to adjust their hours to better fit their personal commitments. This can take various forms, including flextime, compressed workweeks, telecommuting, and staggered shifts.

Flexible working hours are an increasingly popular organizational arrangement that allows employees to modify their work schedules. This arrangement could be staggered working hours, compressed work schedule, scheduled break for external learning activities and telecommuting. The concept is rooted in the belief that flexibility can improve employee satisfaction, reduce stress, and help balance work and personal life more effectively.

In the past decade, many organizations have adopted flexible working arrangements as part of their human resource strategies (Singh, A., A, 2023 & Berkery, E., Morley, M.J., Tiernan, S., Purtill, H. and Parry, E., 2017). According to various studies (Guoqiang, Z. and Bhaumik, A., 2024 & Shagvaliyeva, S. and Yazdanifard, R., 2014), flexible working hours can lead to several benefits, including enhanced productivity, greater employee satisfaction, and improved retention rates. However, despite these advantages, organizations must consider how these policies are implemented and the specific needs of their employees to ensure that they are effective.

Research has consistently shown that work-life balance has a positive impact on job performance (Kumari, V. and Vasantha, S., 2019., & Oktafien, S., Oktari, S.D. and Suhardi, A.R., 2023). Employees who experience a better balance between their professional and personal lives tend to

exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction, lower stress levels, and greater motivation. This, in turn, can lead to improved job performance, higher productivity, and reduced absenteeism. Flexible working hours have been shown to help employees achieve a better balance by allowing them to manage their work tasks alongside personal responsibilities, such as childcare, education, or health-related issues (Shagvaliyeva, S. and Yazdanifard, R., 2014 & Guoqiang, Z. and Bhaumik, A., 2024).

At UNECA, the dynamic and collaborative nature of the work demands both individual expertise and the ability to work in teams across different locations. The organization's mandate to promote sustainable development in Africa requires a high level of coordination and responsiveness, often in real-time, despite the differences in time zones between regional offices and international stakeholders. In this context, flexible working arrangements, particularly regarding working hours, are essential in managing the work-related stress that employees face and collaboration with diverse stakeholders.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The increasing demand for work-life balance, coupled with advancements in technology and shifting workplace dynamics, has led to a growing interest in flexible working arrangements, particularly flexible working hours. UNECA employs a diverse workforce working across different time zones, regions, and professional backgrounds. This diversity, alongside the organization's focus on sustainable development and policy advocacy, creates a unique work environment where flexible working hours could potentially enhance employee satisfaction, performance, and overall productivity.

However, despite the widespread adoption of flexible working hours in various global organizations, limited research has been conducted to assess how such arrangements impact employee work-life balance, specifically at UNECA. While flexible working hours are seen as an effective tool to improve employee well-being and enhance productivity, there are concerns about their potential negative effects, such as misalignment of work schedules, difficulty in coordination, and issues with workload management.

This research aims to investigate the impact of flexible working hours on employees' work-life balance at UNECA, with a focus on understanding how these arrangements influence employee satisfaction, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. It also seeks to explore the challenges and benefits associated with the implementation of flexible working hours in this specific organizational context, providing insights into how such arrangements can be optimized for improved work-life balance and enhanced job performance. (Krishnan, A. and Chinnathambi, S., 2024 & Salmazzo, D. and Azunu, J., 2023)

The problem, therefore, lies in the need to assess the practical implications of flexible working hours at UNECA and to determine whether these arrangements enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, and job performance. Additionally, it will highlight how flexible arrangements reduce work-related stress and burnout, promoting a healthier work environment. Therefore, this thesis was mainly designed to address these problems by raising the following research questions.

1.3. Research question

1. Which work arrangement, flexible or normal working hours, leads to higher employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall job performance?
2. How does improved work-life balance affect job performance among employees with flexible working arrangements?
3. To what extent do flexible working hours contribute to reducing work-related stress and burnout?
4. How do employees perceive the relationship between flexible working hours and their ability to meet personal and professional demands?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1. General Objective

The main objective of this study is to examine whether improvements in work-life balance, resulting from flexible working hours, influence employees' job performance at the UNECA, exploring the benefits, challenges, and employee perceptions of such arrangements, and providing recommendations for optimizing their implementation to enhance both individual well-being and organizational effectiveness.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Compare the levels of employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall job performance under flexible and normal working hour arrangements.
- Assess the impact of flexible working hours on employees' job satisfaction levels and examine their influence on overall mental and physical well-being.
- Measure the effect of flexible working arrangements on reducing work-related stress and burnout rates.
- Explore employees' perceptions, challenges, and preferences regarding the effectiveness of flexible working hours in achieving work-life balance.

1.5. Scope of the study

The scope of this study is centered on evaluating the impact of flexible working hours on employee satisfaction, productivity, job performance, and well-being at the UNECA. The research will address four key research questions: First, it will compare flexible working hours with traditional working hours to determine which arrangement leads to higher employee satisfaction and productivity, and has an effect on work-life balance. Second, the study will explore how improved work-life balance resulting from flexible work arrangements is positively associated with higher job satisfaction and job performance. Third, it will assess the extent to which flexible working hours contribute to reducing work-related stress and burnout among employees. Finally, the study

will examine how employees perceive the relationship between flexible working hours and their ability to meet both personal and professional demands. The research will focus on UNECA employees who have access to flexible work arrangements, considering variables such as job role, departmental differences, and managerial support. However, the study will not compare the findings with those from other organizations, nor will it explore the long-term effects beyond the study period.

1.6. Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide valuable insights into how flexible working hours can impact employees' work-life balance and related outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance, specifically within the context of UNECA. By investigating these dynamics, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how flexible work arrangements can enhance employee well-being, productivity, and overall organizational effectiveness within an international, multicultural, and diverse work environment. The findings could help UNECA refine its human resource policies, enabling the organization to better support its employees, increase job satisfaction, and improve performance. Moreover, the study's results could serve as a reference for other international organizations and public institutions looking to implement or optimize flexible working arrangements, thereby influencing broader HR practices and contributing to the global discourse on work flexibility and employee engagement.

1.7. Limitations of the study

- UNECA's unique policies, work culture, and operational structure, tailored to the UN system, may limit the applicability of findings to private sector organizations or other international institutions. Additionally, significant differences in flexibility policies between UNECA and other organizations further restrict the generalizability of the study's results.

- The study's reliance on self-reported data may lead to inaccuracies, as employees could overstate or understate their work-life balance and job performance due to personal biases or concerns about confidentiality. Additionally, a low response rate or selective participation could skew the findings, making them less reliable. Furthermore, limited sample diversity, with insufficient representation from all departments or levels of seniority, may result in an incomplete and potentially unbalanced understanding of the overall impact of flexible working arrangements.
- Personal factors, such as family obligations, health challenges, or financial pressures can have a substantial impact on an employee's work-life balance and overall job performance, making it difficult to isolate the direct impact of flexible working hours.
- The perception of fairness in the implementation of flexibility policies can impact employee satisfaction and performance, as those who feel they are not benefiting equally may report lower outcomes.
- Cultural norms can influence how employees perceive flexible working hours, with some viewing them as a sign of reduced commitment or facing societal pressures to prioritize work over personal life. Additionally, resistance to change from managers or employees may hinder the adoption of flexible arrangements, potentially skewing perceptions of their effectiveness and limiting their impact on work-life balance and job performance.
- Flexible working hours can blur the boundaries between work and personal life, increasing the risk of burnout over time, which a short-term study might not fully capture. Additionally, employees may unintentionally work longer hours under flexible arrangements, particularly if they feel pressured to demonstrate productivity, potentially diminishing the intended benefits of such policies.
- The effectiveness of flexible working arrangements largely centers on managerial support, which can vary across departments. Some managers or teams may implement these policies more effectively than others, leading to inconsistent practices and uneven experiences among employees. Such disparities can influence how flexible working arrangements are perceived and their overall impact on work-life balance and job performance.

1.8. Organization of the study

This study is structured into five chapters, each addressing a key aspect of the research process:

1. Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, the problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and the scope and limitations. It establishes the context for examining the impact of flexible working hours on work-life balance at UNECA.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing literature on flexible working arrangements, work-life balance, job performance, and the perception of fairness in policy implementation. It explores relevant theories and previous research to provide a theoretical framework and identify gaps the current study aims to fill.

3. Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design, approach, and methods used to collect and analyze data. It covers the study population, sampling techniques, data collection tools (such as questionnaires and focus group discussions), and ethical considerations. The chapter also discusses the validity and reliability of the research instruments.

4. Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the data collected from UNECA employees and analyzes the results. It includes quantitative and qualitative analyses, highlighting key trends, patterns, and correlations between flexible working hours, work-life balance, and job performance.

5. Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the study's key findings and discusses their implications for UNECA's flexible working policies. It provides recommendations for improving the implementation of flexibility policies to enhance work-life balance and job performance. The chapter also highlights areas for future research.

1.9. Definition of terms

1. **UNECA:** Stands for the **United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**. It is one of five regional commissions under the United Nations and is headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
2. **HR:** Stands for **Human resources**. Human Resources focuses on managing an organization's most valuable asset: its employees. HR professionals handle various responsibilities; recruitment, training, performance, employee well-being, and compliance to align the workforce with organizational goals.
3. **Flexible Working Hours:** A work arrangement that allows employees to choose their start and end times, within certain limits, as opposed to a fixed, traditional work schedule.
4. **Work-Life Balance:** The ability of an individual to effectively manage both personal and professional responsibilities, minimizing stress and promoting well-being.
5. **Job Performance:** The effectiveness with which an employee performs their duties and responsibilities, often measured by productivity, quality of work, and efficiency.
6. **Employee Productivity:** The output of an employee in relation to the input of time, effort, and resources, reflecting their efficiency and contribution to the organization.
7. **Employee Engagement:** The level of an employee's emotional investment, enthusiasm, and commitment to their work and organization, which influences motivation and performance.
8. **Workplace Flexibility:** The ability to adjust the work environment or schedule, including options like remote work, flexible hours, and job-sharing, to suit the needs of both the organization and employees.
9. **Organizational Policies:** A set of formal guidelines, rules, and practices established by an organization to govern its operations, employee behavior, and decision-making processes.
10. **Managerial Support:** The assistance, encouragement, and resources provided by managers to employees, helping them to succeed in their roles and effectively utilize workplace policies like flexibility.

11. Burnout: A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, often related to overwork, lack of support, and insufficient work-life balance.
12. Employee Well-being: The overall health, happiness, and satisfaction of employees, encompassing physical, emotional, and mental aspects of their lives, both inside and outside the workplace.
13. Job Satisfaction: The degree to which employees feel content and fulfilled with their work, including factors like job duties, work environment, compensation, and relationships with colleagues.
14. Resistance to Change: The reluctance or opposition of employees or organizations to adopt new practices, policies, or systems, often due to fear, uncertainty, or perceived loss of control.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of flexible working hours arrangements

Flexible working hours offer a modern approach to work organization, enabling employees to adjust traditional parameters like time, location, and schedule. This flexibility promotes better work-life balance while ensuring job responsibilities are met. It is designed to provide greater autonomy and balance for employees, often leading to improved productivity, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. According to Lutz (2012) these arrangements encompass various practices including remote work, flextime, compressed workweeks, and part-time scheduling, designed to provide employees with greater autonomy and control over their work patterns.

Lewis (2003) further elaborates that flexible working arrangements are strategic organizational interventions that deviate from standard 9-to-5 work models, enabling employees to adapt their work schedules and environments to personal and professional needs. These arrangements are characterized by their emphasis on output and performance rather than rigid time-based work structures, focusing on creating more responsive and employee-centric workplace environments.

This literature review examines existing research on the impact of flexible working hours on work-life balance, job performance, and employee well-being, providing a foundation for studying these effects within the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

2.2 Theoretical review of Literatures

2.2.1 Concept of employee work-life balance

Work-life balance is a foundational concept in contemporary human resource management (HRM), referring to an employee's ability to successfully manage professional obligations alongside personal, familial, and social commitments without one domain overwhelming the other (Igbinomwanhia et al., 2012; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Its practices have emerged as crucial

strategies for enhancing organizational performance and employee well-being. These practices, including flexible work arrangements and wellness programs, contribute to reduced burnout, increased job satisfaction, and improved productivity. As stated by Bello et al. (2024), achieving work-life balance is essential for employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall organizational success. HR professionals play a central role in implementing flexible working hours, supportive supervision, and family-friendly policies that promote harmony between work and personal life. In addition, Field, J.C. and Chan, X.W., 2018 also state that for knowledge workers, the line between work and personal life has become increasingly blurred due to flexible working arrangements and ICTs, the technological advancement allowing work to be done anytime and anywhere. This autonomy helps reduce work-life conflict by enabling better management of both professional and personal responsibilities.

A balanced integration of work and non-work roles yields numerous benefits. Long working hours and non-standard work schedules are key contributors to work-life conflict, as they make it harder to balance job and family demands. In contrast, part-time workers often report better work-life compatibility, and having control over one's schedule is linked to improved balance and overall well-being (Fagan et. al. 2012).

Organizations have increasingly embraced flexible working arrangements, such as flextime, compressed workweeks, telecommuting, hybrid models, and wellness programs. These initiatives offer employees greater control over how, when, and where they work, which helps reduce work-family conflict and improve time management. As stated by Russell et al. 2009 part-time work and flexi-time generally help reduce work pressure and work-life conflict by offering greater flexibility and control. In contrast, working from home can increase both work pressure and conflict, likely due to blurred boundaries and constant availability. Job-sharing shows little impact on women's work-life balance but may actually heighten conflict for men, suggesting gendered differences in how such arrangements are experienced

HR practitioners are therefore tasked with ensuring equitable access to these arrangements, supported by transparent policies, performance-based evaluation systems, and continuous managerial training.

2.2.2 Theoretical Basis of FWAs on employee work life balance

The underlying theoretical foundation for FWAs is based on the following theories: Work-Family Border Theory, work-family conflict theory and the conservation of resources theory.

2.2.2.1 Work-Family Border Theory

Theoretical foundations such as Work-Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000). This paper introduces the Work/Family Border Theory as a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between work and family roles in the context of achieving balance. This theory emphasizes that work and family are two distinct yet interconnected domains, each governed by its own set of values, rules, and expectations. It explores how individuals actively construct, maintain, and manage the borders between these domains to minimize conflict and maximize harmony. Key components of the theory include domain integration (blending work and family roles), segmentation (keeping roles separate), and the creation and management of physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries. Additionally, the theory considers the role of domain participants, such as supervisors, coworkers, and family members, who influence an individual's ability to navigate these borders. By highlighting these elements, the Work/Family Border Theory provides valuable insights into how people balance competing demands and adapt to role transitions.

2.2.2.2 Work-Family Conflict Theory

The Work-Family Conflict Theory, introduced by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), provides a foundational framework for understanding the tension that arises when the demands of work and family roles are incompatible. According to the theory, work family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict, wherein participation in one domain (work or family) is made more difficult by participation in the other. This conflict can manifest through three primary dimensions: time based conflict, strain based conflict, and behavior based conflict. Time based conflict occurs when time devoted to one role limits time available for the other; strain based conflict arises when stress or fatigue from one role hampers effectiveness in the other; and behavior based conflict emerges when behavioral patterns or expectations in one domain are incompatible with those in the other.

Greenhaus and Beutell emphasize that such conflicts can lead to psychological strain, reduced job satisfaction, and diminished well being, highlighting the importance of organizational strategies

that can mitigate these effects. The authors also propose a comprehensive model outlining antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict, advocating for empirical studies to validate and expand the theory.

In response to these challenges, FWAs have been widely studied and implemented as a strategic approach to alleviate work family conflict. FWAs include options such as flexible start and end times (flextime), compressed workweeks, telecommuting, and job sharing. These arrangements are designed to increase employees' control over their work schedules, thereby enabling better alignment between professional obligations and personal responsibilities.

A growing body of research supports the idea that flexible work arrangements (FWAs) are a vital tool for reducing work-family conflict. By offering employees greater autonomy over when and where they work, FWAs enable individuals to better manage family responsibilities without compromising job performance. Guoqiang and Bhaumik (2024) found that FWAs are linked to lower turnover rates, higher job satisfaction, and stronger organizational commitment. These benefits are particularly significant for women with children, as FWAs help them achieve a better balance between professional and personal responsibilities, thereby enhancing engagement and reducing stress. Additionally, FWAs contribute to employee well-being by fostering a healthier work-life balance, which translates into greater satisfaction, improved retention, and higher productivity. As Golden (2003) notes, flexible work schedules also play an important role in motivating employees and minimizing time and role conflicts, while reducing absenteeism, tardiness, ultimately boosting productivity.

2.2.2.3 Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) is a resource-based model that suggests individuals are naturally motivated to acquire, preserve, and safeguard valuable resources such as time, energy, social support, and well-being. According to this perspective, stress arises when there is a risk of losing these resources, when actual loss occurs, or when individuals invest resources without receiving adequate returns. The model emphasizes that maintaining a balance of resources is essential for coping effectively with challenges in both personal and professional life. It serves as a key framework for understanding how people respond to demands and pressures in work-family contexts. And the provision of FWAs allows employees to manage these resources more effectively, thereby improving job satisfaction and performance.

Edwards & Rothbard, 2000 provide important frameworks for understanding the dynamics of work-life balance. Work-family research highlights the significance of mechanisms that connect the work and family domains that can benefit from permeable and flexible boundaries, enabling individuals to negotiate their roles more effectively. However, these mechanisms are often expressed in metaphorical terms, which limits their usefulness for empirical investigation. This article addresses that gap by reframing work-family linking mechanisms as causal relationships between specific work and family constructs. For each identified relationship, the paper clarifies its direction, causal structure, and the role of individual intent in shaping its influence. By translating abstract concepts into defined causal links, the study offers foundational theoretical components that can be used to construct more robust and comprehensive models of the work-family interface.

Despite these advancements, several persistent challenges hinder the effective realization of work life balance. These include work intensification, long working hours, prolonged screen time, insufficient boundary setting, and cultures that equate long hours with dedication or success (Atheya & Arora, 2014). Moreover, stigma around utilizing flexible work options especially among women, caregivers, or junior staff can limit the uptake of supportive policies. Organizational culture, leadership attitudes, and managerial practices thus play a critical role in determining the actual accessibility and effectiveness of work life initiatives (Haar et al., 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted work life dynamics, accelerating the transition to remote and hybrid work models. While remote work offered autonomy, reduced commuting, and greater scheduling flexibility, it also presented new stressors such as digital fatigue, blurred boundaries, and social isolation (Wang et al., 2021; Chatleska et al., 2022). In response, HR professionals were compelled to recalibrate performance systems, sustain employee engagement, and safeguard mental health, while also redefining organizational culture in a largely virtual environment.

Recent research also emphasizes the importance of robust legal and institutional frameworks in supporting work life balance. Santhosh et al. (2024) argue that effective labor laws, including mandatory rest periods, parental leave, and the right to disconnect, play a crucial role in institutionalizing work life balance across diverse sectors. However, equitable implementation remains a challenge, as access to flexible arrangements is often influenced by factors such as job

type, organizational role, or gender (Lewis et al., 2007; Allen et al., 2013). This calls for continued evaluation of policies to ensure fairness, inclusivity, and alignment with employees' diverse needs.

Employee work-life balance is a multidimensional, evolving concept with profound implications for individual well-being and organizational success. It is shaped by interrelated individual, organizational, and societal factors. For HRM, the critical task lies in developing and embedding flexible, inclusive, and equitable policies that enable employees to thrive in both their professional and personal lives. As work environments continue to evolve in response to global challenges, work life balance remains a vital lens through which to assess and enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and long-term organizational performance.

2.2.3 Concept of employee Performance

Employee performance is a multidimensional concept central to human resource management. According to Pradhan and Jena (2017), employee performance comprises three critical components: task performance (execution of job specific duties), adaptive performance (ability to cope with and adapt to change), and contextual performance (engagement in extra role behaviors that support the organizational environment). These factors collectively determine the level of an employee's contribution to organizational success, productivity, and competitiveness.

Okolie and Kawedo (2018) further define employee performance as a measurable behavior that contributes to organizational effectiveness. This highlights the importance of employee actions not only in fulfilling individual roles but also in advancing broader organizational objectives.

At its core, employee performance reflects the efficiency and effectiveness with which employees meet their job responsibilities, achieve organizational goals, and enhance workplace productivity. Human Resource professionals are instrumental in managing and improving employee performance through targeted initiatives (Nor 2018) . These include performance appraisals, goal setting, constructive feedback, training and development programs (Kareem and Hussein 2019.). An effective performance appraisal system must account for the organizational context while incorporating procedural, representative, and profile performance criteria to provide a holistic evaluation of employee contributions.

Moreover, HRM strategies such as integrated planning, fostering a learning culture, and implementing talent retention programs significantly enhance employee performance (Waliyatiand and Supratikta 2024). By aligning HR policies with organizational goals, HR professionals can optimize performance, driving both individual and organizational success. Ultimately, effective employee performance management ensures that the workforce is engaged, productive, and capable of meeting the dynamic demands of the workplace.

In recent years, FWAs such as flextime, remote work, compressed workweeks, and job sharing have emerged as strategic tools to enhance employee performance. By allowing greater control over work schedules, FWAs support employees in balancing personal and professional responsibilities, which can lead to improved focus, engagement, and productivity.

2.2.4. Theoretical Basis of FWAs on Employee Performance

The impact of Flexible Working Arrangements on employee performance has been extensively examined through various theoretical lenses, two of the most influential being the Job Characteristics Theory and Self Determination Theory.

2.2.4.1 Job Characteristics Theory

Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) emphasizes that the way a job is designed has a profound impact on employee motivation and performance. The theory outlines five key job characteristics skill variety (the extent to which a job requires diverse activities and skills), task identity (the perceived impact of a job on others within or outside the organization), task significance (the perceived impact of a job on others within or outside the organization), autonomy (the level of freedom and discretion employees have in scheduling and performing their tasks), and feedback (the clarity and frequency of performance-related information provided to the employee). These characteristics influence three critical psychological states: experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of results, all of which are essential for fostering intrinsic motivation and, consequently, higher job satisfaction and performance. Among these characteristics, autonomy is particularly influential, as it directly enhances an employee's sense of ownership and control, which is central to self-motivation and sustained engagement.

FWAs closely align with this theory by enhancing job autonomy. By allowing employees to choose their work hours or locations, FWAs promote a sense of control and ownership over one's work. This increased autonomy can lead to greater engagement, creativity, and productivity. The connection between autonomy and intrinsic motivation helps explain why FWAs are especially effective in improving employee outcomes, particularly in environments that require adaptability and independent problem-solving.

2.2.4.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) posits that individuals are most motivated and achieve optimal performance when three fundamental psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy (the sense of having control over one's actions), competence (the feeling of being capable and effective) and relatedness (the need to feel connected and supported by others). Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) primarily support the autonomy component by granting employees greater discretion over when, where, and how they perform their work. This control allows individuals to tailor their work schedules to align with personal preferences, peak productivity periods, and family responsibilities, thereby enhancing their sense of agency and ownership. When autonomy is supported, it fosters intrinsic motivation and a self-driven desire to perform well because the work itself is engaging or meaningful. Research shows that intrinsically motivated employees demonstrate greater persistence, higher quality performance, and enhanced psychological well-being. Thus, FWAs not only offer practical benefits in balancing work and life but also activate deeper motivational drivers that lead to sustained job satisfaction and improved organizational outcomes.

Kelliher and Anderson (2010) found that employees with access to flexible arrangements often display greater initiative and improved task performance, as they can synchronize work demands with personal rhythms and productivity peaks. These workers also tend to report higher organizational commitment and job satisfaction compared to their peers without flexibility.

However, it is important to note that FWAs are not without challenges. Some studies have shown that remote or part-time workers may experience increased work intensity or blurred work-life boundaries, potentially leading to stress or burnout. Therefore, while FWAs have a positive

theoretical foundation for enhancing performance, their design and implementation must be carefully managed to ensure they deliver intended benefits without unintended drawbacks.

2.3 Empirical review of Literatures

2.3.1 Impact of flexible working hours on employee work-life balance and well-being

Flexible working hours offer a range of benefits for both employees and employers, contributing to improved productivity, profitability, and employee well-being (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard 2014). These arrangements have been widely studied as an effective strategy to promote work-life balance, mitigating conflicts between professional and personal responsibilities (Galea et. al. 2014). By allowing employees greater control over their schedules, flexible work hours foster harmony and reduce role conflict, enabling individuals to allocate resources more efficiently across different domains.

Research highlights the positive impact of flexible work arrangements on employee satisfaction and stress reduction. For instance, Hayman (2009) found that the perceived usability of flexible schedules, particularly flexitime, was directly linked to higher levels of work-life balance among office-based employees. A study of 710 participants revealed that employees operating under flexitime reported significantly better work-life balance compared to those on fixed-hour schedules.

In addition, studies by Eshak et al. (2021) emphasize the correlation between flexible work policies such as reduced working hours, parenting-friendly policies, and employee benefits and enhanced work-life balance. These findings align with evidence that improved work-life balance leads to better employee performance.

Grzywacz et al. (2008) have examined that employees with flexible schedules experienced decreased psychological strain, with 30-50% of the effect explained by perceived flexibility.

Chung et al. (2018) also states that flexible working arrangements, especially flexitime and teleworking, play a key role in helping women remain employed after childbirth. The studies show

that mothers who actively use flexitime are less likely to reduce their working hours, highlighting that actual use rather than mere access is critical. This underscores the practical value of flexitime in supporting work-life balance and maintaining consistent employment for women with children.

However, flexible work arrangements are not without challenges. Research by Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen (2015) indicates that while such arrangements can improve work-life balance, autonomy, and communication, they may also blur work-life boundaries, resulting in increased interruptions and potential stress. Similarly, Kim et al. (2020) observed that flexible schedules, such as remote work and adjusted start/end times, can exacerbate work-to-family conflict, particularly for women.

In the specific context of UNECA, there is a notable lack of empirical research exploring the effects of work flexibility on employee well-being. This gap underscores the need for more comprehensive studies to understand the emerging impacts of flexible working hours in such organizational environments.

2.3.2 Impact of flexible working hours arrangement on Job Performance

Flexible working hours significantly enhance job performance by allowing employees to work during their peak productivity periods, better manage personal obligations, and reduce stress. Research by Mandalahi et al. (2024) and Estanio et al. (2023) highlights that personalized work schedules lead to higher engagement, improved concentration, and increased job satisfaction.

Multiple studies confirm the positive relationship between flexible working arrangements and job performance. Govender et al. (2018) found that such arrangements are associated with higher employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention. Similarly, Çivilidağ and Durmaz (2024) identified a highly significant and positive correlation between flexible work practices and employee performance.

In addition, a study done by Bloom, N. et al. (2015) revealed that remote work resulted in a 13% boost in employee performance and increased job satisfaction. The benefits were even greater when employees had the autonomy to choose their work location, emphasizing the value of flexibility and progressive management approaches.

Despite these benefits, flexibility can also present challenges. Thorgeirsdottir and Kelliher (2017) caution that flexible schedules may complicate team dynamics and communication, particularly in organizations requiring extensive coordination. In a context like UNECA, where cross-departmental collaboration is critical, the impact of flexible arrangements on team performance warrants careful consideration and further investigation.

2.3.3. Impact of Work-Life Balance on Job Performance

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between work-life balance (WLB) and job performance, consistently demonstrating that a well-maintained balance between work and personal life enhances individual and organizational outcomes. This section reviews recent findings from diverse contexts that support this relationship.

A study by Ernst Kossek et al. (1998) was among the earliest to show that work-life conflict negatively correlates with job performance and job satisfaction. Employees who experience higher conflict between work and personal life are less likely to perform effectively due to stress, fatigue, and divided attention.

Roopavathi et al. (2021) also examined the positive impact of work-life balance on employee performance and behavior, emphasizing its contribution to enhanced job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement, as well as its role in reducing stress.

However, not all findings are uniformly positive. Greenhaus et al. (2003) cautioned that the impact of work-life balance on performance can vary based on role salience employees who prioritize family roles may not always show performance gains unless organizational culture supports that balance. This study explored how different aspects of work–family balance; time, involvement, and satisfaction, relate to quality of life among public accounting professionals. Findings showed that individuals who prioritize family over work reported higher quality of life than those with balanced roles, who in turn fared better than those who prioritized work.

Collectively, these empirical studies support the hypothesis that a positive work-life balance enhances job performance, either directly or indirectly through mediators such as job satisfaction, motivation, and psychological well-being. This evidence suggests that organizations that invest in flexible policies and foster a culture that supports employee well-being are more likely to benefit from improved individual performance and overall productivity.

2.4 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this research provides a foundation for understanding the effect of flexible working hour arrangements on employee work-life balance at UNECA. The independent variable in this study is the flexible working arrangement, which refers to the presence and implementation of flexible working hours. Properly implementing such arrangements is expected to enhance job performance, improve the quality of service delivery, and contribute to organizational effectiveness.

The dependent variables in this framework include work-life balance, job performance and job satisfaction. Work-life balance refers to the ability of employees to effectively manage their professional responsibilities alongside personal and family commitments. Job performance relates to efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of employees' work output and service delivery. This framework posits that flexible working arrangements, when implemented appropriately, can foster a better work-life balance, enhance job performance and job satisfaction.

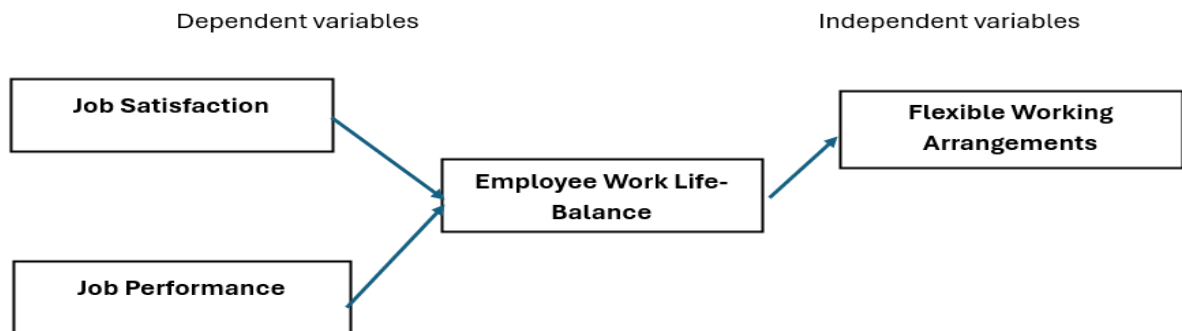


Figure: Conceptual Framework adapted from Kulesa et al. (2024).

2.5 Research Gaps

Flexible working hours have emerged as a pivotal feature of modern workplace practices, reshaping traditional employment frameworks. As organizations adapt to evolving employee needs and global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of flexible work arrangements has gained significant traction. These arrangements allow employees to determine

their working hours within certain limits, offering greater autonomy and fostering a balance between professional responsibilities and personal commitments.

Although research on the impact of flexible work arrangements is expanding, there is limited focus on international organizations such as the UNECA. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how flexible working hours influence the work-life balance and job performance of UNECA employees.

2.6 Hypothesis of the Study

Hypothesis 1: Flexible working hours arrangement has a positive and significant effect on employee Work-Life Balance

Hypothesis 2: Improved work-life balance resulting from flexible work arrangements is positively associated with higher job satisfaction and job performance.

Hypothesis 3: Flexible working hours arrangement significantly reduces stress and burnout

Hypothesis 4: Flexible working hours significantly meet personal and professional demands

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research methodology provides the framework and strategies used to systematically collect, analyze, and interpret data to answer the research questions. This study, which examines the impact of flexible working hours on employee work-life balance at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Ethical considerations are central to this methodology, ensuring the privacy, consent, and voluntary participation of all respondents. Furthermore, the analytical techniques employed, ranging from statistical tests to thematic analysis, are chosen to provide robust and actionable insights.

This chapter outlines the step-by-step processes involved in designing and executing the research, offering a clear roadmap for addressing the study's research questions effectively.

3.2 Description of the study area

This study will be conducted at the UNECA which is a United Nations body established to promote economic and social development across African member states, focusing on fostering intra-regional integration and advocating for international cooperation to support Africa's development. UNECA is considered one of the five regional commissions under the UN system, headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

3.3 Research Approach

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The quantitative aspect allows for the measurement of relationships between flexible working hours and work-life balance, while the qualitative component offers in-depth

insights into employees' perceptions and experiences. This combination ensures a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The methodology is carefully designed to align with the study's objectives and research questions. It begins with identifying the target population, which are UNECA staff at various levels and departments. Employees can be categorized by department, job level, or contract type and utilizes stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness.

Data collection tools, including structured surveys and focus group discussions are selected for their ability to capture both measurable and contextual aspects of the study.

3.4 Research Design

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of flexible working arrangements on employee well-being and performance at UNECA. By adopting both exploratory and descriptive research methods, the study aims to uncover employees' and managers' perceptions of flexible work policies, including their benefits and challenges, while also identifying measurable trends and correlations. The rationale for this dual-method approach is to first explore new insights into how flexible work policies are perceived and implemented within the organization and then describe measurable patterns and relationships to understand their overall impact on employee outcomes.

Through qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, and quantitative methods, including surveys and organizational data analysis, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how flexible work arrangements influence productivity, work-life balance, and overall job satisfaction within the organization.

3.5 Population and Sampling

3.5.1 Target Population

The target population consists of UNECA permanent employees, which is approximately 500 employees.

3.5.2 Sampling Technique

The study will employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative components to ensure diverse and representative data collection. For the quantitative survey, stratified random sampling will be used to ensure proportional representation of employees across different departments, job roles, and hierarchical levels at UNECA. This approach will help capture variations in experiences and perceptions of flexible working arrangements across the organization, providing a balanced and generalizable dataset. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling will be used to select participants for interviews and focus groups. The focus will be on individuals with diverse experiences in remote work, such as team leaders, staff members, and administrative personnel, to ensure a broad range of perspectives. By deliberately including participants from various roles and levels, the qualitative data will provide rich, nuanced insights into how flexible work impacts collaboration, team dynamics, and individual performance. Together, these sampling techniques will ensure the study captures both the breadth and depth of employee experiences with flexible work policies.

3.5.3 Sample Size

While more complex formulas exist, a widely accepted guideline suggests that a minimum of 50 participants is necessary for conducting correlation or regression analyses. To determine the appropriate sample size from the total population of 500 individuals, the Yamane (1973) formula will be used, a well-established method for sample size calculation

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

- n = required sample size
- N = population size 500
- e = margin of error (commonly set at 5% or 0.05)

$$n = \frac{500}{1 + 500(0.05^2)} = \frac{500}{1 + 500(0.0025)} = \frac{500}{1 + 1.25} = \frac{500}{2.25} \approx 222$$

For a population of 500 employees and a 5% margin of error, the sample size required is approximately 222 participants.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Primary and secondary data will be used for this study. The primary data for this study will be collected through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. For the quantitative data, an organized online survey will be distributed via email using platforms such as Google Forms to gather measurable insights on productivity, engagement, and work-life balance. The survey will include a mix multiple-choice question, and demographic details, enabling the identification of patterns and trends across the employee population. For the qualitative data, facilitated focus group discussions will be conducted to delve deeper into the shared experiences and perceptions of employees regarding flexible working arrangements. These discussions will provide valuable insights into team dynamics, communication challenges, and how employees collaborate in remote work settings. Together, these approaches will generate both broad and nuanced perspectives on the impact of flexible work policies at UNECA.

The secondary data for this study will involve an in-depth review of UNECA's policy documents on flexible working arrangements to understand the organization's formal guidelines, objectives, and implementation strategies related to workplace flexibility. This will provide context and a framework for evaluating how these policies align with employee experiences and outcomes. Additionally, existing reports will be analyzed to identify historical trends, and any documented challenges or successes linked to flexible work practices. These data sources will complement the primary data by offering a broader organizational perspective and enabling comparisons between established policies and employees' lived experiences. Together, the secondary data will provide critical background information and serve as a benchmark for interpreting the findings from primary data collection.

3.7 Validity and reliability

Validity ensures that the research accurately measures what it is intended to measure and that the findings are meaningful and aligned with the research objectives. According to Kothari (2004), content validity refers to the extent to which a measuring instrument adequately covers the subject matter under investigation. Establishing content validity involves designing comprehensive surveys and interview questions that thoroughly address all aspects of flexible working hours, work-life balance, and job performance, with input from subject matter experts. To enhance the study's validity, advice will be sought from the advisor and experienced individuals in the field. Additionally, adopting and adapting questionnaires from previous research will further strengthen the validity of the measurements.

Reliability focuses on the consistency of research instruments in producing stable and dependable results under similar conditions. In this study, the questionnaires were specifically designed to measure the three dimensions of flexible working arrangement. Internal consistency will be measured using Cronbach's Alpha, a widely recognized statistical method for assessing the reliability or internal coherence of items (e.g., survey questions) within a given scale.

According to Ognjen et. al (2016), reliability levels are categorized as follows: $\alpha < 0.5$ indicates the test is not reliable; $0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$ represents poor reliability; $0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$ suggests questionable reliability; $0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$ indicates acceptable reliability; $0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$ signifies good reliability; and $\alpha \geq 0.9$ reflects excellent reliability. To ensure reliable measures, constructs with a Cronbach's Alpha value of ≥ 0.7 , as identified in previous studies by Mansora and Idris (2014) and Adriana et al. (2020) were adopted for this research.

3.8 Data Analysis Methods

This research employs a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analysis is conducted using SPSS, where descriptive statistics are used to summarize key variables and understand general trends in the data. In addition, regression analysis is applied to explore the relationships between flexible working hours, work-life balance, and job performance. These methods help identify both the central tendencies and the strength of associations among variables. On the qualitative side,

thematic analysis is employed to interpret patterns and insights emerging from interviews and focus group discussions. Furthermore, comparative analysis is carried out to assess differences in outcomes between employees with flexible working hours and those with standard schedules. This multifaceted analytical approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of flexible work arrangements on employee well-being and productivity.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical research practices, respondent anonymity will be maintained and will be treated confidentially. Participation in the study will be voluntary, and respondents can withdraw at any time. This research will be conducted solely for academic purposes, and the researcher will not share any confidential information with any third party. Prior to commencing data collection, ethical clearance will be secured from UNECA's Human Resources Department.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the data collected in response to the research questions and objectives established in earlier chapters. The primary aim of the study was to examine Flexible Working Hours and Their Impact on Employee Work-Life Balance at United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), with a focus on understanding how specific variables influenced the outcomes of interest. Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires distributed through google forms and printed copies to permanent personnel within the organization, supplemented by focus group discussions to enrich the quantitative findings with qualitative perspectives.

The collected data were systematically analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis focuses on identifying patterns, relationships, and trends within the data, enabling a comprehensive evaluation of the study's hypotheses and objectives. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods are employed, with results presented through tables, charts, and narrative explanations to facilitate clear interpretation.

This chapter is organized as follows: an overview of the data collection process is provided, followed by a presentation of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Subsequently, the analysis related to each research objective is presented, leading to a discussion of the key findings in relation to the broader research problem.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the hypothesis testing.

4.2. Demographic data of respondents

Out of the 222 questionnaires distributed to permanent ECA employees, 219 were completed and returned, resulting in a high response rate of 98.6%. Figure 1b shows the gender distribution of respondents, with the majority being female (54.8%) and the remaining 45.2% male.

The age distribution, presented in Figure 1a, demonstrates that the majority of respondents are concentrated within the middle age groups. Specifically, 43.8% belong to the largest age group, while 38.4% are in the next group, collectively comprising 82.2% of the sample. The youngest and oldest age groups account for smaller proportions of 9.6% and 8.2%, respectively. This indicates that most respondents are mid-career professionals, likely actively balancing professional responsibilities with personal or family commitments. Such a demographic context is critical, as it could influence perceptions regarding the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements in promoting work-life balance, job performance, and stress reduction.

Respondents' length of service at UNECA, illustrated in Figure 2, reveals that most employees surveyed have substantial organizational experience. Specifically, 58.9% have served more than ten years (the highest category), and an additional 26.0% fall into the second-highest category. Thus, a total of 84.9% represent long-term employees. In contrast, only 1.4% of respondents have the shortest duration of service. This demographic suggests that the sample consists predominantly of experienced staff, potentially enhancing the reliability of responses regarding institutional practices and long-term perceptions of work-life balance and job performance.

A one-sample t-test was conducted to assess whether employees are currently permitted flexible working hours, with a test value of 0 (representing "No") and 1 (representing "Yes"). Results indicated that the mean response ($M = 0.65$, $SD = 0.477$) was significantly greater than 0, with a 95% confidence interval. Consequently, a considerable proportion, 65% of participants reported being allowed flexible working hours.

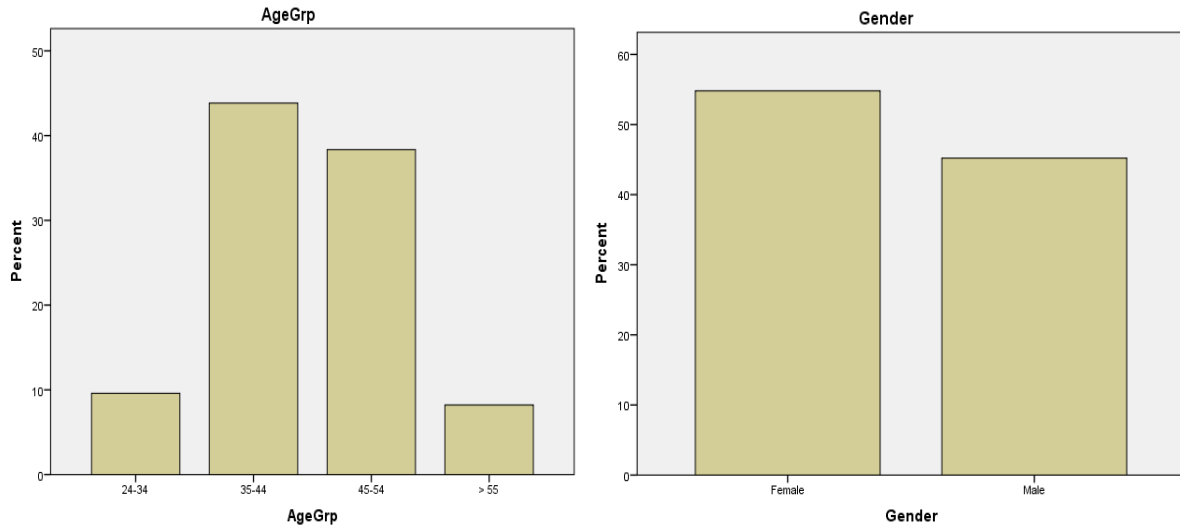


Fig 1. Percentage distribution of respondents by a) age group and b) gender.

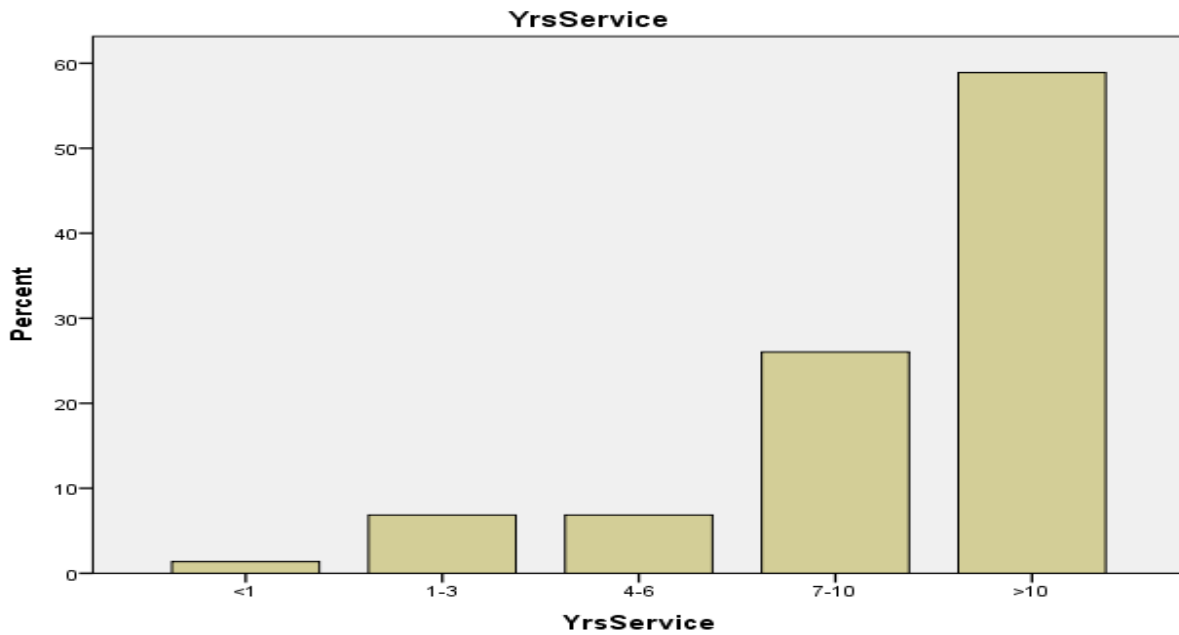


Fig 2. Percentage distribution of respondents by year of service

4.3. Descriptive Analysis of Variables

To address the research hypotheses, descriptive statistics are first presented for the independent variable, Flexible Working Hours Arrangement, and the four dependent constructs: Job

Performance, Work–Life Balance, Stress Reduction, and Personal & Professional Responsibilities. Each construct is assessed through specific questionnaire items.

For each variable, means, standard deviations, minimums, and maximums are calculated to summarize employees' perceptions regarding the availability and impact of flexible working hours. These descriptive analyses establish a foundation for subsequent hypothesis testing, including correlation and parametric analyses, which will evaluate whether flexible working hours significantly influence job performance, work–life balance, stress reduction, and the management of personal and professional responsibilities.

The following table provides an integrated interpretation of descriptive statistics for each of the four constructs—Job Performance, Work–Life Balance, Stress Reduction, and Personal & Professional Responsibilities—based on their item-level means (M), standard deviations (SD), and range (Min–Max):

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of key variables: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD)

	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Job performance					
How do flexible working hours affect your ability to collaborate with colleagues and team members? (FlexCollaborate)	219	3.42	.937	2	5
How does flexible working affect the quality of your work output? (FlexQuality)	219	3.99	.870	2	5
Have flexible working hours positively impacted your ability to handle work pressure and deadlines? (FlexImpacted)	219	4.36	.749	2	5
Do flexible working hours influence your overall physical and mental well-being? (FlexWellBeing)	219	4.26	.685	2	5
Have flexible working arrangements improved your overall job satisfaction? (Flexsatisfaction)	219	4.41	.720	2	5
Do flexible working hours lead to more frequent distractions or interruptions in your work? (FlexDistractions)	219	3.89	.989	2	5
Employee well-being/ reduce stress					

Do flexible working hours improve your ability to balance work and personal responsibilities? (FlexBalance)	219	4.27	1.188	0	5
How does flexibility in working hours affect your stress levels? (FlexStress)	219	4.42	.811	2	5
Do you feel more motivated and engaged in your work when allowed flexible hours? (FlexMotivated)	219	4.59	.660	2	5
Do flexible working hours influence your overall physical and mental well-being? (FlexWellBeing)	219	4.26	.685	2	5
How does flexible working affect the quality of your work output? (FlexQuality)	219	3.99	.870	2	5
Do you feel supported by your manager/supervisor in utilizing flexible work arrangements? (FlexMgtSupport)	219	3.75	1.250	1	5
Work life balance					
Do you feel more motivated and engaged in your work when allowed flexible hours? (FlexMotivated)	219	4.59	.660	2	5
How does flexibility in working hours affect your stress levels? (FlexStress)	219	4.42	.811	2	5
Do flexible working hours improve your ability to balance work and personal responsibilities? (FlexBalance)	219	4.27	1.188	0	5
Do you face any challenges with flexible work arrangements, such as maintaining boundaries or managing time effectively? (FlexChallenges)	219	3.67	.982	2	5
Personal and professional responsibilities					
Do you feel that flexible working hours reduce conflicts between work and personal life? (FlexCflictPrsnlLife)	219	4.08	.990	1	5
How does flexible working affect the quality of your work output? (FlexQuality)	219	3.99	.870	2	5
How do flexible working hours affect your ability to collaborate with colleagues and team members? (FlexCollaborate)	219	3.42	.937	2	5
Do you feel more motivated and engaged in your work when allowed flexible hours? (FlexMotivated)	219	4.59	.660	2	5

How satisfied are you with the current flexible work arrangement policies at UNECA? (FlexPolcsECA)	219	4.41	.720	2	5
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4.3.1 Job Performance

Across 219 respondents from Table 1, mean ratings for the four performance dimensions ranged from $M = 3.42$ ($SD = 0.94$; $Min = 2$, $Max = 5$) for collaboration, to $M = 4.36$ ($SD = 0.75$; $Min = 2$, $Max = 5$) for handling pressure and deadlines. The quality of the output item was rated moderately high ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.87$), while the well-being influence item was notably positive ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.69$). Overall, these results indicate that employees generally perceive flexible working arrangements as beneficial for enhancing their performance, particularly under high-pressure conditions, although the improvements in collaborative tasks are somewhat less pronounced.

Further analysis of specific job-related factors revealed that flexible work arrangements significantly enhance employee job satisfaction ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.72$). This high mean and relatively low standard deviation indicate widespread agreement among respondents about the positive impact of flexibility on their overall job satisfaction. Given this strong positive sentiment, flexible work conditions are likely to contribute to higher motivation and improved overall job performance.

However, respondents also acknowledged potential downsides, notably regarding distractions. A mean score of 3.89 ($SD = 0.99$) reflects general agreement that flexible hours frequently result in increased interruptions. The variability indicated by the higher standard deviation suggests individual differences in how employees experience these distractions. Despite general positivity about flexible working conditions, managing these distractions is critical, as they have the potential to adversely affect concentration and efficiency.

The multiple responses shown in table 2 and 3 analysis identified specific challenges faced by employees working flexibly, highlighting limited access to resources (64.3%), difficulty coordinating tasks (46.9%), and problems separating work and personal life (46.9%). Additionally, respondents reported increased workload (52.4%) and managerial challenges (52.4%) as

significant limitations. Communication difficulties were also noted by nearly a quarter of respondents (23.8%), underscoring potential barriers to effective collaboration. These findings collectively emphasize that while flexible working hours generally enhance individual performance and satisfaction, addressing identified systemic and individual challenges is crucial for optimizing the benefits of flexible work arrangements.

Moreover, demographic differences emerged clearly in the multiple-response analysis. Gender-based analysis indicated that male respondents reported greater difficulty coordinating tasks and separating work from personal life (each at 67.2%), compared to female respondents. In contrast, female respondents identified managerial challenges slightly more frequently (51.5%) than male respondents (48.5%). Age-group analysis revealed that employees aged 35-44 faced the highest levels of coordination and separation challenges, indicating specific demographic vulnerabilities that organizations may need to address when implementing flexible working policies.

Table 2: Multiple responses of the factors that limit the ability to benefit from flexible work arrangements based on gender, age group and year of services

	Gender		AgeGrp				YrsService				
	Female	Male	24-34	35-44	45-54	> 55	<1	1-3	4-6	7-10	>10
Lim_Communication	38.60%	61.40%	13.60%	47.70%	25.00%	13.60%	0.00%	0.00%	6.80%	31.80%	61.40%
Lim_Management	51.50%	48.50%	9.30%	50.50%	37.10%	3.10%	0.00%	6.20%	4.10%	21.60%	68.00%
Lim_inability	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	75.00%
Lim_Workload	44.30%	55.70%	9.30%	51.50%	29.90%	9.30%	0.00%	12.40%	5.20%	26.80%	55.70%

Table 3: Multiple responses of the challenges facing with flexible working hours based on gender, age group and year of services

	Gender		AgeGrp				YrsService				
	Female	Male	24-34	35-44	45-54	> 55	<1	1-3	4-6	7-10	>10
Chlg_coordination	32.80%	67.20%	6.00%	67.20%	22.40%	4.50%	4.50%	9.00%	4.50%	32.80%	49.30%

Chlg_access	47.80%	52.20%	10.90 %	37.00 %	39.10 %	13.00 %	0.00%	9.80 %	7.60%	23.90 %	58.70 %
Chlg_separating	32.80%	67.20%	6.00%	67.20 %	22.40 %	4.50%	4.50%	9.00 %	4.50%	32.80 %	49.30 %

4.3.2. Employee Stress Reduction

To assess stress reduction, five key items were analyzed: work balance, stress levels, motivation, well-being, and work quality under flexible work arrangements. All five items showed very high mean scores ranging from 4.27 to 4.59, indicating that most employees view flexible work as beneficial in reducing stress. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.66 to 1.19, suggest moderate variability, meaning that responses were generally consistent but with some differences in experience. The lowest mean score (4.27, SD = 1.19) was observed for the ability to balance work and personal responsibilities, suggesting that while most employees benefit, some still struggle with this aspect. In contrast, motivation received the highest mean score (4.59, SD = 0.66), reflecting strong agreement that flexibility boosts employee drive and engagement. Overall, the consistently high scores and relatively low variability confirm that flexible arrangements are widely perceived as effective in reducing stress and improving well-being, with slightly more variation in responses regarding work-life balance than other factors.

Additionally, managerial support emerged as a key factor in stress outcomes. The mean score of 3.75 suggests moderate agreement that employees feel supported by their supervisors. However, the high standard deviation (1.250) and full response range (1–5) reveal significant differences in experience. While some employees feel fully supported, others do not, which can increase stress levels. Therefore, managerial support plays a crucial role in how employees experience flexible work, and lack of support can create uncertainty or guilt, increasing stress. Conversely, strong support can alleviate pressure, making stress reduction a key outcome associated with this variable.

4.3.3 Work-Life Balance

The descriptive analysis of work-life balance reveals mixed experiences among employees. Three related items motivation, stress, and balance showed high overall agreement, with mean scores ranging from 4.27 (SD = 1.19) to 4.59 (SD = 0.66). Motivation under flexible work arrangements received the highest score, while work-life balance had the greatest variability, indicating that although most employees benefit from flexibility, their ability to maintain balance varies more widely. This pattern aligns with findings on well-being, where flexibility clearly enhances motivation and reduces stress, but achieving actual balance between work and personal life is less consistent across the sample.

Additionally, a separate item specifically measuring challenges in managing boundaries and time within flexible work settings yielded a mean score of 3.67 (SD = 0.982). This suggests that many respondents moderately agree they struggle with aspects of work-life balance. The minimum score of 2 and maximum of 5 further illustrate that while no one strongly disagreed, some individuals experience significant difficulty in separating work from personal responsibilities. These findings reinforce that although flexible arrangements are generally seen as positive, maintaining a clear and healthy work-life boundary remains a common challenge.

4.3.4 Personal & Professional Responsibilities

The data show that flexible work arrangements are generally effective in helping employees manage their personal and professional responsibilities. High mean scores for motivation (M = 4.59, SD = 0.66), policy satisfaction (M = 4.41, SD = 0.72), and conflict reduction (M = 4.08, SD = 0.99) suggest that flexibility boosts engagement and reduces tension between work and personal demands. However, two areas revealed less consistent experiences. Collaboration had the lowest mean score (M = 3.42, SD = 0.94), indicating that teamwork may be more difficult under flexible arrangements. Similarly, work-life balance (M = 4.27, SD = 1.19), though positive overall, showed the greatest variation in responses. This suggests that while many employees benefit from flexibility, others face challenges in maintaining clear boundaries or coordinating with colleagues. These results highlight the need for targeted support to help all staff balance personal and professional responsibilities effectively.

4.4. Data Analysis Overview

To address the research hypotheses and answer the core research questions, the data analysis was conducted exclusively on employees who are currently using flexible working arrangements, comprising 65% of the total sample. This subset provided a focused lens through which to evaluate the effects of flexible work on work-life balance, job performance, stress reduction, personal and professional responsibilities. The analysis employed multiple statistical methods, including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) to assess internal consistency of the scale items, and Regression analysis to examine the relationship among variables. Variables were grouped and tested based on their relevance to the dependent constructs outlined in the hypotheses.

4.4.1 Relationship between Work life balance and Flexible working arrangements

A reliability analysis was carried out to assess the internal consistency of a scale designed to measure employee work life balance. This scale was constructed using three key items that reflect the impact of flexible working arrangements on employees' personal experiences. Specifically, the items measured the perceived influence of flexible work on work-life balance, stress reduction, and motivation levels. The questionnaire included targeted questions corresponding to these dimensions, aiming to capture a comprehensive view of how flexible working contributes to the overall employee work-life balance. The scale demonstrated in Table 4 shows acceptable reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .73) suggesting that the items on the scale are moderately correlated and reliably measure the same underlying construct. All inter-item correlations were moderate and positive, indicating good internal consistency. The average composite score was 13.50 (out of a maximum of 15), suggesting that participants generally view flexible working hours as beneficial to their work life balance.

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency of items measuring the relationship between work life balance and flexible working arrangements

Reliability Statistics	Scale Statistics
------------------------	------------------

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
0.73	0.778	3	13.5	4.055	2.014	3

4.4.2 Relationship between Job performance and Flexible working arrangements

The Job performance variable was measured using four items: FlexQuality, FlexCollaborate, FlexWellBeing, and FlexImpacted. The internal consistency of this scale was acceptable as indicated in Table 6, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.792, indicating a good level of reliability among the items.

The scale statistics indicated a mean score of 16.43 out of a possible 20, with a standard deviation of 2.48, showing that most respondents generally agreed that flexible working arrangements contribute positively to job performance.

Overall, the findings suggest that flexible working conditions are positively associated with job performance, although some aspects (e.g., collaboration and impact on tasks) are more strongly endorsed than others.

Table 5: Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency of items measuring the relationship between Job performance and Flexible working arrangements

Reliability Statistics			Scale Statistics			
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
0.792	0.792	4	16.43	6.148	2.479	4

4.4. 3 Relationship between Stress reduction and Flexible working arrangement

The Reduce Stress variable was assessed using five items: FlexStress, FlexBalance, FlexMotivated, FlexQuality, and FlexWellBeing. The internal consistency of this scale was found to be good as indicated in Table 8, with Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.795 and 0.821 based on standardized items, indicating strong reliability.

The scale Statistics showed a mean score of 21.91 (out of a possible 25), with a standard deviation of 2.98, strongly suggesting that employees perceive flexible working as effective in reducing stress and burnout.

Overall, these results demonstrate that flexible working arrangements are perceived to positively influence stress reduction, with notable variability in how different aspects are experienced.

Table 6: Cronbach’s Alpha for internal consistency of items measuring the relationship between Stress reduction and Flexible working arrangement

Reliability Statistics			Scale Statistics			
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
0.795	0.821	5	21.91	8.9	2.983	5

4.4. 4. Relationship between Managing personal and professional responsibilities and Flexible working arrangement

To examine how flexible working arrangements help employees manage their personal and professional responsibilities, a five-item scale was constructed. The items assessed perceived satisfaction, motivation, ability to collaborate, quality of output, and conflict with personal responsibilities. Reliability analysis returned (Table 10) a Cronbach’s Alpha of .838, indicating good internal consistency.

Table 7: Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency of items measuring the relationship between Managing personal and professional responsibilities and Flexible working arrangement

Reliability Statistics			Scale Statistics			
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
0.816	0.821	5	22.01	7.19	2.681	5

4.5. Regression Analysis

4.5.1. Regression Analysis between Work-life balance and Flexible working arrangements

The regression model examining the impact of flexible working hours on work-life balance was statistically significant, F Change = 65.262, $p < .001$. As indicated in Table 4, the model yielded an R^2 of 0.478, indicating that 47.8% of the variance in work-life balance can be explained by the predictors: FlexBalance, FlexMotivated, FlexStress, and FlexChallenges. The model showed a strong overall correlation ($R = 0.69$), and the standard error of the estimate was 0.865, suggesting a reliable and meaningful positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and perceived work-life balance.

Table 8: Regression model summary of items measuring the relationship between work life balance and flexible working arrangements

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F change
1	.690 ^a	.477	.469	.865	.477	65.262	.000

4.5.2. Regression analysis between Job performance and Flexible working arrangements

The regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between flexible working arrangements and job performance, as measured by four indicators: FlexQuality, FlexCollaborate, FlexWellBeing, and FlexImpacted. The model explained approximately 40.9% of the variance in

job performance ($R^2 = 0.409$), with a strong overall fit ($F = 69.547$, $p < .001$), as shown in Table 5. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.639$) indicates a moderate to strong positive association, indicating that employees who experience greater flexibility tend to report enhanced work quality, improved collaboration, better stress management, and increased overall effectiveness in their roles.

Table 9: Regression model summary of items measuring the relationship between job performance and flexible working arrangements

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F change
1	.639 ^a	.409	.401	.674	.409	49.547	.000

4.5.3. Regression analysis between Stress Reduction and Flexible working arrangements

The regression analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant relationship between flexible working arrangements and stress reduction. As indicated in Table 6, the model yielded a correlation coefficient of $R = 0.744$, indicating a strong positive association. The coefficient of determination, $R^2 = 0.554$, suggests that approximately 55.4% of the variance in reducing stress can be explained by the flexibility-related factors assessed. These included FlexStress, FlexBalance, FlexMotivated, FlexQuality, and FlexWellBeing. The model's overall significance is confirmed by an F-change value of 66.353 ($p < .001$), demonstrating that flexible work arrangements significantly contribute to employees' stress reduction.

Table 10: Regression model summary of items measuring the relationship between stress reduction and flexible working arrangements

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F change
1	.744 ^a	.554	.545	.547	.554	66.353	.000

4.5.4. Regression analysis between Managing Personal and Professional Responsibilities and Flexible working arrangements

The regression analysis indicates a moderate and statistically significant relationship between flexible working arrangements and the ability to manage personal and professional responsibilities.

The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.458$) shows a moderate positive association, while the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.210$) suggests that approximately 21% of the variation in managing personal and professional responsibilities can be explained by flexibility related factors as shown in Table 7. These factors include FlexStress, FlexBalance, FlexMotivated, FlexQuality, and FlexWellBeing. The model is statistically significant, as indicated by the F-change value of 19.041 ($p < .001$), confirming that flexible working arrangements play a meaningful role in supporting employees' ability to balance personal and professional obligations.

Table 11: Regression model summary of items measuring the relationship between managing personal and professional responsibilities and flexible working arrangements

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F change
1	.458 ^a	.210	.199	1.119	.210	19.041	.000

4.6. Responses Emerging from Focus Group Discussions

The focus group discussions were guided by four key thematic areas and corresponding questions, aimed at exploring participants' experiences and perspectives on flexible work arrangements:

Question Set 1: Comparing Flexible and Normal Working Hours

- What type of work arrangement do you currently have (flexible or fixed)?
- Have you experienced both flexible and fixed schedules? If so, how do they compare?
- Which work arrangement do you feel helps you be more productive? Why?
- Do you believe flexible working hours improve or hinder teamwork and collaboration?

Summary of Responses:

Participants frequently emphasized that flexible work schedules allowed them to align tasks with their natural productivity rhythms. For example, one participant remarked, "Flexible, because I can work during my most productive hours," illustrating how flexibility can enhance job performance by enabling employees to operate at peak efficiency.

However, perspectives varied. Another participant noted, "Both have their pros and cons depending on the nature of the work," indicating that the suitability of flexible or fixed schedules depends on job-specific requirements.

Regarding collaboration, opinions were also mixed. One participant stated, "Support, because people are less stressed and more engaged," suggesting that flexible arrangements can foster more engaged and relaxed teams. Conversely, another respondent pointed out, "But it also depends on team communication tools and practices," highlighting the need for effective communication systems to support collaboration in flexible settings.

Overall, these responses suggest that while flexible schedules generally support productivity and engagement, their success depends on aligning with job functions and being supported by strong communication infrastructure.

Question Set 2: Impact of Flexible Work Hours on Job Satisfaction and Well-Being

- Do you feel more motivated when you have control over your working hours?
- Has flexible working improved your mental well-being and overall happiness at work?
- What are the biggest challenges you face when working flexibly?

Summary of Responses:

Participants reported that having control over their schedules increased motivation and fostered a sense of empowerment and trust. Many also noted improvements in mental well-being. However, some challenges were mentioned, such as difficulty separating work and personal life and a perceived decline in communication with colleagues.

Thus, while flexible hours enhance job satisfaction and mental health, they may also blur boundaries and reduce interpersonal interaction if not well managed.

Question Set 3: Flexible Work and Stress Management

- Do you feel that flexible working hours reduce workplace stress? Why or why not?
- Have you ever experienced burnout? If so, do you think flexible hours could have helped prevent it?

- Do you find it easier to recover from stress when you have control over your schedule?

Summary of Responses:

Flexible schedules were generally regarded as effective tools for managing stress. Respondents shared that flexibility allowed them to better manage their energy levels and schedule breaks. However, some participants cautioned that this flexibility could make it harder to distinguish between work and rest time. Most attribute burnout more to excessive workload than to rigid schedules. Having control over their time was seen as aiding recovery from stress.

This indicates that while flexibility supports stress management, addressing workload and maintaining work-life boundaries remain essential.

Question Set 4: Work-Life Balance and Meeting Personal & Professional Demands

- How do you balance personal and work responsibilities when your schedule is flexible?
- Do you believe flexible work arrangements contribute to a better quality of life?

Summary of Responses:

Many respondents indicated that flexible work arrangements improved their quality of life and work-life balance, particularly when supported by effective time management and boundary-setting. Most participants reported managing their schedules by planning their day, prioritizing tasks, and setting clear limits between work and personal time. Others shared that flexibility enabled more family time and healthier lifestyles.

Overall, flexible work supports better work-life integration, provided individuals actively manage their time and uphold clear boundaries.

Summary of Focus Group Insights:

Flexibility emerged as both a facilitator and a potential risk factor. While it generally enhanced productivity, reduced stress, and improved work-life balance, it also introduced challenges such as blurred boundaries and social isolation. The effectiveness of flexible work arrangements was

often tied to individual self-management and the availability of organizational communication support.

In summary, the focus group discussions revealed that flexible working arrangements have a predominantly positive impact on employee productivity, stress reduction, and work-life balance. However, the benefits are maximized when employees exercise personal responsibility, and organizations provide adequate structural support.

4.7. Summary of the Hypothesis

The whole purpose of this study was to answer the basic research questions and to prove or disprove the four research hypotheses proposed below. Overall, the reliability of the scales used to measure employee work-life balance, job performance, reduce stress and well-being was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. All scales demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Each hypothesis was tested using the appropriate statistical methods and the results are presented as follows:

- Hypothesis 1: Flexible working hours arrangement has a positive and significant effect on employee Work-Life Balance - Supported
- Hypothesis 2: Improved work-life balance resulting from flexible work arrangements is positively associated with higher job satisfaction and job performance - Supported
- Hypothesis 3: Flexible working hours arrangement significantly reduce stress and burnout- Supported
- Hypothesis 4: Flexible working hours significantly meet personal and professional demands - Supported

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary

This thesis explores the impact of flexible working arrangements on employee performance, well-being, and work-life balance at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). As flexible work modalities have become increasingly common across the United Nations system, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding their implications on staff outcomes has become essential for sustainable workforce management and policy formulation.

The research is grounded in the context of UNECA's adoption of flexible work options, such as remote work, staggered hours, and compressed work schedules. It assesses whether and how these arrangements influence key employee outcomes, particularly job performance, stress reduction, and the ability to balance work and personal life responsibilities.

A quantitative research approach was adopted, using a structured questionnaire distributed to UNECA staff members across various departments and their number of years of experience. Data was collected from a diverse sample, and statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to test hypotheses and examine correlations between flexible working and the dependent variables.

The findings indicate that flexible working arrangements have a positive impact on employee well-being, significantly reducing stress and burnout. Similarly, respondents reported improved work-life balance, enabled by greater autonomy and reduced commuting pressures. In terms of job performance, flexible working was associated with increased efficiency, focus, and output, particularly when supported by clear goals and digital tools.

The study concludes that flexible working arrangements are not only compatible with UNECA's results-based management principles but also contribute positively to staff morale, productivity,

and organizational resilience. Key recommendations include the development of context-specific guidelines, enhanced managerial training, investment in digital infrastructure, promotion of a trust-based culture, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on modern workplace practices in international organizations and provides practical insights to inform UNECA's human resource policies and strategic planning

5.2 Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of flexible working arrangements on employee work-life balance at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). The research was guided by the growing institutional interest in modern workplace practices, particularly following the global shift triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. UNECA, in line with the broader United Nations framework, has progressively adopted flexible working modalities including remote work, staggered hours, and compressed schedules, in recognition of their potential to support staff well-being and operational efficiency.

The findings of this study confirm that flexible working arrangements positively influence key employee outcomes. Statistical analysis using SPSS revealed that employees with access to flexible working hours experienced reduced stress and burnout, thereby enhancing their psychological well-being. Furthermore, flexible working was shown to contribute to improved work-life balance, as employees reported greater autonomy in managing personal responsibilities alongside work obligations.

The study also demonstrated a positive correlation between flexible work and job performance. Many respondents indicated that having control over their schedules allowed for better focus and time management, leading to more efficient completion of tasks. This is consistent with the principles of results-based management (RBM), which emphasize outputs and deliverables over physical presence. As UNECA strives to maintain high performance standards while supporting staff well-being, flexible work emerges as a strategic asset.

It is important to note that the success of flexible work depends on a supportive organizational culture, effective leadership, and appropriate infrastructure. While challenges were noted in certain operational contexts particularly in areas requiring in-person coordination, the overall effect of flexible working on staff morale, engagement, and productivity was found to be positive.

In conclusion, flexible working arrangements align well with UNECA's internal policies, its commitment to employee well-being, and the UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy. They can serve as a sustainable approach to workforce management, particularly in the evolving context of international public service.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the research findings and in alignment with UNECA's internal practices the following recommendations are proposed:

5.3.1. Establishing Customized Flexible Work Guidelines

UNECA should formalize and implement comprehensive internal guidelines on flexible working arrangements, tailored to the specific operational and organizational context of the Commission. While UNECA currently operates under the broader United Nations Secretariat's Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) policy framework, there is a critical need for supplementary internal documentation that provides clearer, context-specific interpretation and application of these principles.

Internal guidelines for flexible work should clearly define eligibility criteria, specifying which roles are suitable based on operational requirements. Not all positions can be performed remotely or with modified schedules. A transparent eligibility matrix will help ensure consistency and fairness across divisions. The guidelines should also outline clear performance expectations, with measurable goals and timelines aligned with the results-based management (RBM) approach, individual work plans, and the organization's strategic objectives.

To maintain accountability, monitoring mechanisms such as regular check-ins, progress reports, and digital productivity tools should be established. Managers must be trained to evaluate performance based on outcomes rather than physical presence or hours logged. Roles and

responsibilities should be clearly defined, with employees responsible for managing their time and maintaining communication, and supervisors tasked with providing support, direction, and fair oversight. Both parties must understand expectations around availability, responsiveness, and reporting.

Ensuring equity and fairness is essential; access to flexible arrangements must be applied consistently across units and levels, with safeguards to prevent bias or unequal treatment, particularly concerning gender, caregiving responsibilities, and contract types. Finally, the guidelines should include provisions for regular review and updates, informed by staff feedback, operational changes, and emerging best practices. By institutionalizing flexible work in this structured and transparent way, UNECA can enhance effectiveness, staff engagement, and overall resilience, while aligning with UN system-wide mandates.

5.3.2. Enhancement of Digital Tools and Infrastructure

Enhancing UNECA's digital tools and infrastructure is essential for enabling effective flexible work arrangements. As remote and hybrid work become more common, digital platforms must shift from a support role to a strategic asset that ensures collaboration, communication, and service delivery. While progress has been made, further improvements are needed in key areas: expanding access to cloud-based tools like Microsoft 365 for real-time collaboration; strengthening cybersecurity through secure VPNs, encryption, and user training; standardizing digital communication platforms to streamline coordination; and ensuring equitable access to digital resources for all staff, regardless of location or contract type. These upgrades are vital to supporting a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready work environment aligned with UNECA's broader digital transformation goals.

The enhancement of UNECA's digital infrastructure is not merely a technical upgrade, it is a strategic imperative. Investing in digital tools and support systems strengthens the institutional capacity to deliver results under flexible work conditions and ensures that UNECA remains responsive to the changing nature of work in the international public sector.

5.3.3. Promotion of a Culture of Trust and Autonomy

Organizational culture is a key determinant of the success or failure of flexible working arrangements. UNECA must foster a culture that encourages trust, autonomy, and mutual accountability between staff and supervisors. In flexible work environments, where physical oversight is limited, trust becomes central to performance and collaboration.

Supervisors must shift from managing by physical presence to managing by outcomes, creating space for employees to take ownership of their tasks and schedules, provided that they consistently meet agreed-upon deliverables. Open and transparent communication becomes critical in this context, requiring regular check-ins and feedback mechanisms to ensure alignment and sustained engagement. A culture that values results over physical presence is also crucial, emphasizing outputs and achievements rather than rewarding presenteeism or time spent at a desk. This approach necessitates a deliberate effort to combat biases against flexible workers, particularly in performance evaluations, promotion opportunities, and informal recognition. Without such safeguards, flexible workers may be unfairly perceived as less committed or visible, even when delivering strong results.

Promoting trust and autonomy also aligns with the UN's core values of integrity, professionalism, and respect for diversity. By cultivating this type of culture, UNECA can increase employee motivation, enhance productivity, and attract a more diverse and committed workforce.

5.3.4 Feedback and Continuous Improvement

To keep flexible work arrangements effective and responsive, UNECA should establish structured feedback and continuous improvement processes. This includes regularly evaluating the system to identify challenges, track progress, and adjust policies as needed. Key actions involve conducting staff surveys to assess satisfaction and productivity, analyzing feedback by gender, duty station, and job function to ensure equity, and forming review committees to make data-driven recommendations. Additionally, integrating flexible work assessments into performance reviews, planning, and HR reporting will support transparency and alignment with best HR practices. These steps reflect UNECA's commitment to continuous learning, inclusivity, and adaptability.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provided valuable insights into the relationship between flexible working arrangements and employee outcomes at UNECA, future research could explore the following areas:

- A comparative analysis of flexible work practices across different UN agencies to identify best practices and shared challenges.
- Longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effects of flexible working on staff performance and well-being. This would help in understanding whether the benefits observed are sustained over time or if there are any negative consequences in the long run.
- Researchers could examine how flexible work affects different types of roles (e.g., administrative vs. technical vs. managerial) within UNECA to see if some job categories benefit more than others.
- Research could explore how leadership styles need to evolve to manage remote and hybrid teams effectively. Are UNECA managers adequately trained to support flexible working?
- Future studies could perform an organizational-level analysis to evaluate the cost savings (e.g., office space, utilities) versus potential costs (e.g., decreased collaboration, increased IT investment) of adopting flexible work models.

6.1 Appendix

6.1.2 Questionnaire

Demographic Information

1. **Age:**

- Under 25
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55+

2. **Gender:**

- Male
- Female

3. **Years of Service at UNECA:**

- Less than 1 year
- 1–3 years
- 4–6 years
- 7–10 years
- More than 10 years

4. Are you currently allowed flexible working hours in your role?

Yes

No

Job Performance

5. If yes, what type of flexible working arrangements do you use?

Staggered working hours

Compressed work schedule

Scheduled break for External Learning Activities

Work away from the office: Telecommuting

Other: _____

6. How do flexible working hours affect your ability to collaborate with colleagues and team members?

Significantly improve collaboration

Improve collaboration

No impact

Hinder collaboration

7. How does flexible working affect the quality of your work output?

Significantly improves quality

Improves quality

No change in quality

- Reduces quality
 - Significantly reduces quality
8. Have flexible working hours positively impacted your ability to handle work pressure and deadlines?
- Yes, significantly
 - Yes, to some extent
 - No impact
 - No, it has worsened
9. Do flexible working hours lead to more frequent distractions or interruptions in your work?
- Yes, significantly
 - Yes, to some extent
 - No, it reduces distractions
 - No, it has no impact

Employee Stress Reduction/Well-Being

10. How does flexibility in working hours affect your stress levels?
- Significantly reduce stress
 - Reduce stress
 - No effect

- Increase stress
- Significantly increase stress

11. Do you feel more motivated and engaged in your work when allowed flexible hours?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. Do flexible working hours influence your overall physical and mental well-being?

- Significantly improve well-being
- Improve well-being
- Reduce well-being
- Significantly reduce well-being

13. Do you feel supported by your manager/supervisor in utilizing flexible work arrangements?

- Yes, fully supported
- Yes, somewhat supported
- Neutral
- No, not supported
- No, strongly discouraged

Employee Work-Life balance

14. Do flexible working hours improve your ability to balance work and personal responsibilities?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15. What challenges do you face with flexible working hours? (Select all that apply)

- Difficulty in coordinating with colleagues
- Reduced access to resources at work
- Difficulty separating work and personal life
- Other: _____
- Significantly hinder collaboration

16. Do you feel that flexible working hours reduce conflicts between work and personal life?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

Strongly disagree

17. How satisfied are you with the current flexible work arrangement policies at UNECA?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Neutral

Dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

18. Do you face any challenges with flexible work arrangements, such as maintaining boundaries or managing time effectively?

Yes, often

Yes, sometimes

Rarely

No

19. What factors limit your ability to benefit from flexible work arrangements? (Select all that apply)

Workload demands

Managerial policies

Lack of communication tools

Personal inability to adapt

Other: _____

20. Have flexible working arrangements improved your overall job satisfaction?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

6.2.3 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions will be conducted to explore employees' perceptions of flexible and normal working hours, focusing on their impact on job satisfaction, productivity, stress, and work-life balance. The following topics will be discussed:

1. Comparing Flexible and Normal Working Hours
 - What type of work arrangement do you currently have (flexible or fixed)?
 - Have you experienced both flexible and fixed schedules? If so, how do they compare?
 - Which work arrangement do you feel helps you be more productive? Why?
 - Do you believe flexible working hours improve or hinder teamwork and collaboration?
2. Impact of Flexible Work Hours on Job Satisfaction and Well-Being
 - Do you feel more motivated when you have control over your working hours?
 - Has flexible working improved your mental well-being and overall happiness at work?
 - What are the biggest challenges you face when working flexibly?
3. Flexible Work and Stress Management
 - Do you feel that flexible working hours reduce workplace stress? Why or why not?
 - Have you ever experienced burnout? If so, do you think flexible hours could have helped prevent it?
 - Do you find it easier to recover from stress when you have control over your schedule?

4. Work-Life Balance and Meeting Personal & Professional Demands

- How do you balance personal and work responsibilities when your schedule is flexible?
- Do you believe flexible work arrangements contribute to a better quality of life?

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