

Research on the perspectives and experiences of Australian Muslims on work-life balance and health and well-being

Whether we are young or old, male or female, we all have a fixed amount of energy to use each day. How we distribute this energy between our responsibilities in life influences our ability to achieve work-life balance. Work-life balance has become a key feature of much current government, media and academic debate. While there is diversity on its exact meaning, work-life balance generally refers to our perception of having achieved a good balance between work and non-work domains (study, family, religion, community and leisure). Work-life balance has been linked to a number of positive outcomes including high marital and family satisfaction and functioning, high job satisfaction, high productivity, increased organisational commitment and a high level of psychological health and well-being. On the other hand and more disturbing however, are the negative consequences associated with difficulties balancing work and non-work responsibilities, labelled as work-life imbalance. Work-life imbalance has been associated with a number of negative health outcomes including depression, stress, anxiety, poor food choices, sleep problems medication uptake and reduced life satisfaction.

Although the plethora and diversity of research into work-life balance has given invaluable insights, such extensive research has resulted in emphasis on certain areas of inquiry while neglecting others. For example, most research has been conducted on white, English-speaking Anglo-Saxon populations. Whether the explanations developed through this research represent the experiences of us, Australian Muslims is questionable. As Australian Muslims, we have unique values, beliefs, and norms that are different to the white Anglo-Saxon populations, on whom most research has been carried out. Despite our population growth and positive contribution to the Australian community, there is currently little understanding about how we, as the second largest ethno-religious minority group, experience the contemporary Australian society. Furthermore, no research is available on how we experience work-life balance and the implications of this on their work and psychological/physical health and well-being. Because of this lack of understanding, workplace policies designed to promote balance and enable workers to have control over their work and non-work lives have been generally implemented to meet the needs of non-Muslims.

For example, while a number of work-life policies such as childcare, family support program, counselling services, health programs, exercise facilities, and job sharing have been introduced, policies and programs designed to meet the unique social and religious needs of Australian Muslims are absent. Given this significant issue, the size and significant growth of Australian Muslims, and the health-related consequences of work-life balance/imbalance, there is a need to progress research that seeks to better understand how we experience work-life balance/imbalance. This understanding is crucial in order to progress from understanding what is shaping our health and well-being towards creating a quality working life, which each and every Australian Muslim deserves.

Based on this gap in our understanding, Mr Adem Sav and Dr Mohamad Abdalla from Griffith University are conducting a large scale research project investigating the work-life balance experiences and health and well-being of Australian Muslims. The research project is part of a PhD study and involves Australian Muslims, who are employed in various organisations and industries complete a short 10 to 15 minute survey about their views and experiences. The surveys will be distributed via various methods in early March and April this year. At present, the research project is examining the experiences of Australian Muslim men, with focus on Muslim women occurring at a later stage. The research project is being carried out for research purposes only and all information participants' supply is strictly confidential and all findings of the study anonymous.

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