

AI-Driven Factors Affecting the Work-Life Balance of Working Women in Sri Lanka's Development Sector: The Influence of AI Usage, Organisational Support and AI Digital Skills

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Abstract: Work-life balance among professional women in Sri Lanka is shaped by deep-rooted cultural expectations and demanding workplace conditions. In the development sector specifically, project-driven workloads and donor accountability pressures make these challenges even harder to manage. The rapid spread of artificial intelligence (AI) into organisational processes adds another layer of complexity, yet its actual effect on work-life balance among women in this sector has not been properly studied in the Sri Lankan context. This study examined three AI-related predictors of work-life balance: (1) AI usage at the workplace, (2) organisational support for AI use, and (3) AI digital skills, with work-life balance as the dependent variable. The theoretical framework drew on the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), Border Theory (Clark, 2000), and Role Theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978). A Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods design was used, combining quantitative data from 100 female development sector employees with qualitative data from five in-depth interviews. Multiple regression analysis confirmed that AI usage ($\beta = 0.682$, $p < .001$), organisational support ($\beta = 0.725$, $p < .001$), and AI digital skills ($\beta = 0.593$, $p < .001$) each showed a significant positive effect on work-life balance. Qualitative findings reinforced these results. The study contributes empirical evidence from an underexplored context and offers practical guidance for individuals, organisations, and policymakers navigating AI adoption in the development sector.

Keywords: *AI Digital Skills, Artificial Intelligence, Border Theory, Development Sector Sri Lanka, Mixed Methods, Organisational Support, Technology Acceptance Model, Working Women, Work-Life Balance,*

Introduction

Background

Sri Lanka's development sector forms a broad network of public, non-governmental, and international institutions responsible for planning and implementing programmes that promote economic growth, social equity, and human wellbeing (UNDP, 2021). Unlike the private sector, where profit is the primary driver, development work is fundamentally about social value creation reducing poverty, advancing gender equality, and building resilient institutions. The sector operates across government-led programmes implemented through line ministries and statutory authorities, as well as 651 nationally registered NGOs and 1,119 district-level NGOs, INGOs, and civil society organisations (NGO Secretariat, 2023).

For the purposes of this study, the development sector is defined as the constellation of public, non-governmental, and international organisations whose primary mandate is social value creation including poverty reduction, gender equality, post-crisis recovery, and sustainable development rather than profit maximisation (UNDP, 2021; World Bank, 2022). This includes government-led development programmes, local NGOs, INGOs, and civil society organisations (CSOs) operating across Sri Lanka.

What makes this sector particularly demanding is the nature of the work itself. Development professionals must meet diverse donor requirements, manage tight deadlines, adapt to changing priorities, and maintain close community engagement (OECD, 2019; UNDP, 2021). Women in this environment carry a double burden managing professional responsibilities alongside disproportionate unpaid domestic work (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Long working hours, inflexible deadlines, and an expectation of constant availability make it genuinely difficult to separate work from personal life.

AI tools including automated scheduling platforms, project management applications, and generative AI such as ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot are increasingly being adopted in development organisations. While these technologies can ease administrative workloads and improve efficiency, their actual impact on women's work-life balance remains unclear. AI may reduce workload pressures, but it can also create new challenges: greater digital demands, performance monitoring, and an expectation of constant connectivity. There is a real risk that AI reinforces, rather than reduces, existing gender inequalities (Tarafdar et al., 2019).

Problem Statement

Working women in Sri Lanka's development sector face a compounded set of pressures arising from the intersection of high-demand professional environments, persistent gender-based domestic expectations, and the accelerating adoption of AI-enabled work tools. Despite the sector's significant female workforce, the specific mechanisms through which AI-related factors usage, organisational support, and digital skills shape women's work-life balance remain empirically unexamined in this context. This constitutes a critical gap, given that evidence from comparable settings suggests that AI adoption can simultaneously offer productivity benefits and generate new stressors, with gendered outcomes that are shaped by organisational culture, training provision, and domestic role expectations (Tarafdar et al., 2019; Cramarencu et al., 2023; Perera & Sewwandi, 2024).

Evidence shows that women in executive roles in Sri Lanka often experience significant wellbeing challenges due to heavy workloads and conflicting responsibilities (Perera & Sewwandi, 2024). The sector's demanding project timelines, strict donor requirements, and frequent field engagements compound these difficulties.

The growing use of AI adds another dimension to the problem. Tools that track performance, assign tasks automatically, and keep employees constantly connected can make work more demanding rather than less. Although some studies suggest that AI can improve efficiency and reduce stress (Begum & Mishra, 2025), the actual impact on women's work-life balance in Sri Lanka's development sector is not clearly understood.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to examine the effect of AI-related factors on the work-life balance of women employed in the development sector in Sri Lanka. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. To examine the effect of AI usage at the workplace on the work-life balance of women employed in Sri Lanka's development sector.
2. To assess the influence of organisational support for AI adoption on the work-life balance of female development sector employees.
3. To determine the effect of AI digital skills on the work-life balance of working women in Sri Lanka's development sector.
4. To propose evidence-based recommendations for strengthening AI integration and HR practices in ways that better support women's work-life balance in the development sector.

Significance of the Study

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on how AI adoption shapes work-life balance for women in the Sri Lankan development sector a context that has not been adequately studied. The findings carry practical relevance for development organisations, HR practitioners, and policymakers. By identifying which AI-related factors most strongly predict work-life balance outcomes, the study equips organisations to invest strategically in digital training, flexible working policies, and supportive supervisory practices. For policymakers, it highlights the systemic barriers including unequal gender norms and inconsistent policy implementation that must be addressed for AI adoption to deliver equitable benefits.

Literature Review

Definition of the Development Sector

The World Bank (2022) further conceptualises development work as intervention aimed at focusing loan term economic growth, reducing poverty and strengthening institutions. For this study, the 'development sector' comprises four categories of organisations operating in Sri Lanka: (1) government ministries, departments, and state-funded development projects; (2) local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) registered under Sri Lankan law; (3) international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) operating with donor funding; and (4) civil society organisations (CSOs). These organisations share a common mandate of social value creation, distinguishing them from profit-oriented private sector entities (UNDP, 2021; NGO Secretariat, 2023).

Work-Life Balance: Definitions and Theoretical Frameworks

Work-life balance has been a subject of growing scholarly interest since the 1980s, when dual-income households became the norm for many families (Barnett, 1999). Clark (2000) defined work-life balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with minimum role conflict. Greenhaus and Allen (2011) further emphasised outcomes over time allocation, suggesting that genuine balance involves how satisfied people feel across both roles. In the Sri Lankan context, Perera and Opatha (2014) validated a work-life balance scale for

executive-level employees, confirming that the concept encompasses work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, and subjective sense of balance across multiple life domains.

Three theoretical frameworks inform this study. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), holds that individuals adopt technology based on its perceived usefulness and ease of use. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) explains how AI can act as a resource that reduces workload and supports balance, while also having the potential to intensify demands. Work-Life Border Theory (Clark, 2000) explains how individuals manage the boundaries between work and personal life, which AI complicates by enabling constant connectivity (Ashforth et al., 2000).

AI Usage at the Workplace and Work-Life Balance

Research increasingly identifies AI as a significant factor in shaping employee work-life balance. AI-powered tools have been shown to streamline workflows, reduce time spent on repetitive tasks, and enhance productivity (Gupta, 2024; Agarwal & Goel, 2024). A quantitative correlation study found a moderate positive relationship between AI usage hours and work-life balance (Frontiers in Health Informatics, 2024). However, the relationship is not straightforwardly positive. Technostress where constant digital connectivity blurs work-personal life boundaries is particularly relevant for women with caregiving responsibilities (Tarafdar et al., 2019).

Organisational Support and Work-Life Balance

Organisational support is consistently identified as a key mediator of how AI adoption affects employee wellbeing. Leadership support, clear communication, and positive organisational culture all play important roles in helping employees maintain healthy balance, particularly when new technology is being introduced (Parker & Wall, 1998; Raghuram et al., 2019). A study of female nurses in India found that limited training increased initial stress and raised concerns around privacy and algorithmic bias (International Journal of All Research Education and Scientific Methods, 2025).

AI Digital Skills and Work-Life Balance

Employees who possess stronger AI digital skills are better positioned to use these tools as genuine productivity enhancers, thereby reducing cognitive workload and improving work-life balance outcomes (Sousa & Rocha, 2019). Cramarenco et al. (2023) found that employees who continuously upskill in AI-related competencies demonstrate greater job resilience and improved wellbeing, whereas those facing skill obsolescence report higher job insecurity and poorer work-life balance.

Gender, Work-Life Balance, and the Sri Lankan Context

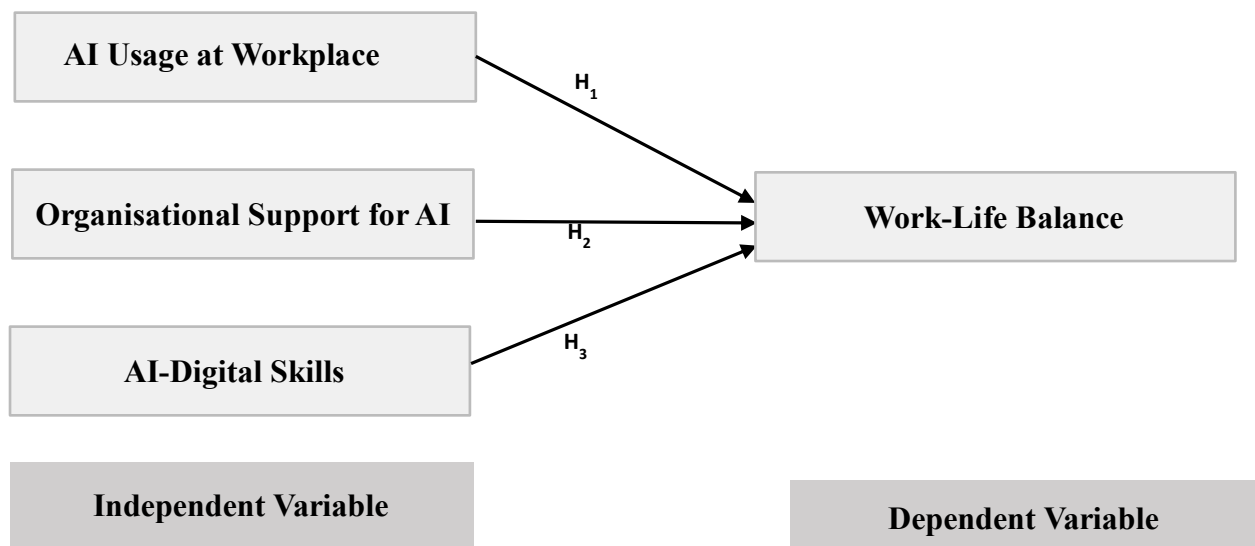
Gender continues to shape the experience of work-life balance in important ways. Despite growing female labour force participation, expectations that women manage household and caregiving responsibilities persist, creating a double burden for working women (Moen et al., 1995). In the Sri Lankan context, this double burden is reinforced by cultural norms placing domestic responsibility primarily on women (Amarakoon & Wickramasinghe, 2010; Opatha, 2010). Opatha (2004) identified workload as the most significant cause of work-life imbalance in Sri Lankan organisations, particularly among managers.

Methodology

Research Design

A Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods design was adopted for this study. This approach involves first collecting and analysing quantitative data, then using qualitative data to contextualise and explain the statistical findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Work-life balance was the dependent variable. Three independent variables were examined: AI Usage at the Workplace, Organisational Support for AI, and AI Digital Skills. The study was grounded in a pragmatic research philosophy.

Conceptual Framework



Independent Variable 1: AI Usage at Workplace The extent to which employees integrate AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot) into daily tasks like automation, communication, and data analysis. Adoption levels depend on organizational resources and digital maturity.

Independent Variable 2: Organizational Support The formal and informal mechanisms provided by employers to help staff manage personal and professional demands (e.g., remote work, flexible hours, supportive supervisors, and a culture prioritizing balance).

Independent Variable 3: AI Digital Skills Employee competence and adaptability regarding AI technologies. Based on the *Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)*, higher digital skills increase the perceived usefulness and ease of use of AI, leading to effective adoption.

Dependent Variable: Work-Life Balance An employee's overall satisfaction and success in managing both work and personal responsibilities. It measures schedule flexibility, family time, stress levels, and the ability to disconnect from work.

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

- H_A 1: There is an Impact of AI Usage at Workplace on Work Life Balance of Female Workers in Development Sector
- H₀ 1: There is no Impact of AI Usage at Workplace on Work Life Balance of Female Workers in Development Sector
- H_A 2: There is an Impact of Organizational Support on Work Life Balance of Female Workers in Development Sector
- H₀ 2: There is no Impact of Organizational Support on Work Life Balance of Female Workers in Development Sector
- H_A 3: There is an Impact of Digital Skills on Work Life Balance of Female Workers in Development Sector
- H₀ 3: There is no Impact of Digital Skills on Work Life Balance of Female Workers in Development Sector

Sample and Data Collection

The target population comprised all female employees working in Sri Lanka's development sector, including government-led programmes, local NGOs, INGOs, and civil society organisations.

Sampling Strategy: The quantitative phase employed convenience sampling, drawing on accessible networks of female development sector professionals across multiple provinces. A total of 100 respondents were recruited from 13 organisations. Convenience sampling was selected because the study population female professionals in diverse development organisations does not maintain a centralised registry from which a probability sample could be drawn. This approach is consistent with established practice in exploratory mixed-methods research in the Sri Lankan HR context (Perera & Opatha, 2014). The qualitative phase used purposive sampling: five participants were selected based on experience with AI tools, career seniority, and family circumstances to ensure diversity of perspective. Five interviews were considered sufficient to achieve thematic saturation within this focused qualitative component (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

A structured online questionnaire was distributed using an 18-item Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) across all four constructs. Qualitative data from interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis, incorporating narrative and content analysis elements to identify recurring patterns and themes.

Reliability and Validity

Content validity was established through a systematic review of the existing literature and adaptation of validated instruments from prior work-life balance research in the Sri Lankan context (Perera & Opatha, 2014). The questionnaire items were reviewed by subject matter experts prior to administration. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha: AI Usage ($\alpha = 0.81$), Organisational Support ($\alpha = 0.79$), AI Digital Skills ($\alpha = 0.83$), and Work-Life Balance ($\alpha = 0.78$). All values exceed the 0.70 threshold recommended for social science research (Nunnally, 1978), indicating satisfactory reliability across all four constructs.

1. Data Presentation and Analysis

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 100 respondents across six variables. The majority of respondents were aged 30–49 years (69%), held a master's degree or above (47%), and were married (51%). Respondents were drawn from government ministries/departments (33%), local NGOs (32%), INGOs (18%), and CSOs (17%). Most had 2–10 years of experience (69%) and worked in hybrid arrangements (47%).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 100)

Variable	Category	n	%	Notes
Age Group	20–29 years	24	24.0	
	30–39 years	37	37.0	
	40–49 years	32	32.0	
Education	50+ years	7	7.0	
	Diploma / Certificate	21	21.0	
	Bachelor's Degree	32	32.0	
	Master's Degree	40	40.0	
	Doctoral (PhD)	7	7.0	
Marital Status	Single	37	37.0	
	Married	51	51.0	
	Divorced / Separated	8	8.0	
Organisation Type	Widowed	4	4.0	
	Govt. Ministry / Dept.	33	33.0	
	Local NGO	32	32.0	
	INGO	18	18.0	
	CSO	17	17.0	
Experience	Less than 2 years	16	16.0	

Variable	Category	n	%	Notes
	2–5 years	29	29.0	
Work Mode	6–10 years	40	40.0	
	More than 10 years	15	15.0	
	Fully on-site	20	20.0	
	Hybrid	47	47.0	
	Fully remote	12	12.0	
	Field-based	21	21.0	

Source: Primary Survey Data, 2024.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed for all 18 Likert-scale items ($N = 100$). Across all four constructs, mean scores were consistently positive, ranging from 3.77 to 4.03.

For AI usage at the workplace (Q7–Q10), means ranged from 3.81 to 4.01. Task completion efficiency (Q8, $M = 4.01$) received the highest rating.

For organisational support (Q11–Q14), means ranged from 3.87 to 3.95; family-friendly policies scored highest (Q13, $M = 3.95$), while gender-sensitive practices showed the greatest variability ($SD = 0.99$).

For AI digital skills (Q15–Q18), means ranged from 3.78 to 4.00; adaptability to AI-based systems rated highest (Q18, $M = 4.00$). For work-life balance (Q19–Q24), the reverse-coded stress item registered the highest mean (Q22, $M = 4.03$), while the ability to disconnect from work was rated lowest (Q21, $M = 3.77$).

Hypothesis Testing

Three hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation and simple linear regression analyses. Table 2 summarises the results.

Table 2: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results ($N = 100$)

H	Independent Variable	r	R ²	Adj. R ²	β	Decision
H ₁	AI Usage at the Workplace	.682**	.465	.460	.682***	H _{a1} Accepted
H ₂	Organisational Support	.725**	.526	.521	.725***	H _{a2} Accepted
H ₃	AI Digital Skills	.593**	.352	.345	.593***	H _{a3} Accepted

Note. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. All models: $F(1, 98)$, $p < .001$. DV = Work-Life Balance.

Organisational support demonstrated the strongest bivariate association with WLB ($r = .725$, $p < .001$), explaining 52.6% of the variance ($R^2 = .526$). AI usage significantly predicted WLB ($\beta = .682$, $p < .001$), accounting for 46.5% of the variance. AI digital skills showed a moderate-to-strong positive relationship ($r = .593$, $p < .001$), accounting for 35.2% of the variance. All three null hypotheses were rejected.

Qualitative Findings: Thematic Analysis

Five in-depth interviews were conducted and subjected to rigorous thematic analysis. Transcripts were coded inductively, with codes refined through iterative comparison until four stable themes emerged. Representative interview extracts are presented below to illustrate each theme; interpretive commentary follows each quotation to demonstrate how the data informs the theme rather than merely presenting quotes in isolation.

Theme 1: Persistent Gender Expectations in the Workplace

All five participants described ongoing pressure to meet both professional and domestic standards simultaneously. Cultural expectations that women manage the home remain deeply embedded and are rarely challenged at the organisational level. A Finance Manager from a government project in Colombo reflected: “Even when I

completed a successful project, the first question from my husband was whether dinner was prepared. My professional life is invisible at home. I carry both worlds at the same time.” This resonates with Hochschild and Machung’s (2012) concept of the second shift and underscores that AI-driven efficiency gains at work do not automatically translate into reduced domestic burdens for women.

Theme 2: AI as a Double-Edged Tool

Participants valued the efficiency AI tools brought, but many found that digital platforms meant they were reachable at any hour. A Field Coordinator from an INGO in the Northern Province noted: “My phone never stops. AI makes some things faster, but I never really feel like I’m away from work.” This pattern whereby efficiency gains are offset by always-on expectations is consistent with Tarafdar et al.’s (2019) technostress framework and Mazmanian et al.’s (2013) ‘autonomy paradox.’

Theme 3: Uneven Organisational Support Across Institution Types

INGO staff generally had access to more family-friendly policies and flexible hours. Government employees, by contrast, often worked in hierarchical settings where requesting flexibility was seen as a sign of limited commitment. A Monitoring and Evaluation Officer in an NGO shared: “I’ve stopped asking for flexible hours. AI does help reduce the workload, but we haven’t had proper training everything is ad hoc.” This gap between policy provision and practical access aligns with Cooper and Quick’s (2022) structural support argument.

Theme 4: Undervaluation of AI-Assisted Work

Several participants described supervisors questioning whether their outputs were genuinely their own. A Programme Officer from a Western Province NGO reflected: “I spent days carefully refining this report, but instead of acknowledging the effort, my supervisor asked if I had used AI to create it.” This pattern reflects an emerging workplace tension where AI’s presence has contributed to a culture of doubt rather than recognition.

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion of Findings

The key finding of this study is that all three AI-related factors AI usage, organisational support, and AI digital skills significantly and positively predict work-life balance among women in Sri Lanka’s development sector. This is consistent with findings from other contexts. Gupta (2024) similarly found that AI adoption predicts improved work-life balance and reduced stress in Indian organisations. Sousa and Rocha (2019) argued that digital skill competency is a core professional skill that directly affects individual wellbeing.

The quantitative results, however, tell only part of the story. Qualitative findings reveal a clear gap between what policies say and what happens in practice. Flexible working arrangements exist formally in many organisations but are not consistently applied, particularly in government agencies and smaller CSOs. Gender norms also continue to create an invisible ceiling on the benefits AI can deliver women may use AI to save time on work tasks, but that time is often absorbed by domestic responsibilities at home (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

These findings should be interpreted with certain limitations in mind. The convenience sampling approach and urban-weighted sample limit generalisability to rural and field-based development sector workers. The cross-sectional design captures associations at a single point in time and cannot establish causal direction. Furthermore, while Cronbach’s alpha values indicate satisfactory reliability, more nuanced validity assessments (e.g., confirmatory factor analysis) are recommended in future studies.

Conclusions

This study confirms that AI-related factors significantly influence work-life balance for women in Sri Lanka’s development sector, with organisational support emerging as the strongest predictor ($R^2 = .526$). The results align with the JD-R Model’s proposition that resources including AI tools and organisational backing reduce the negative impact of job demands. However, the benefits of AI are contingent on employees having the digital skills to use these tools effectively and on organisations creating environments where those tools are implemented thoughtfully and equitably. Structural factors persistent gender norms, limited training access, rural-urban disparities, and inconsistent policy implementation continue to constrain the positive potential of AI for women in this sector.

Recommendations

For Organisations in the Development Sector

Digital skills training should be a core organisational priority, not a one-off intervention. Training programmes need to be practical, matched to the tools employees actually use, and accessible to women across all roles including field staff. Organisations should also monitor the consistent application of flexible working policies and ensure that access does not depend on individual managerial attitudes. AI tools should be introduced in consultation with staff, with clear expectations set around use, boundaries, and after-hours connectivity.

For HR Practitioners and Line Managers

Managers play a central role in whether work-life balance policies translate from paper into practice. Supervisors should actively support staff in managing workloads and navigating AI tools and should apply policies fairly across the team. Training needs should be assessed at the individual level, since digital confidence varies significantly. Where staff need additional support, introducing AI without that support will increase stress rather than reduce it.

For Policymakers and Government Ministries

National guidelines on digital skills development and flexible working standards are needed, along with mechanisms to address gender-based barriers to technology use. Structural challenges specific to rural and field-based staff including connectivity, safe transport, and mobility should be addressed as part of inclusive national development strategies. Integrating work-life balance and digital equity indicators into accountability frameworks for government-funded programmes would help ensure staff wellbeing is monitored alongside programme outcomes.

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