Work-life balance policies in Lima: A critical view of their impact on family equity

Políticas de conciliación laboral en Lima: una visión crítica de su impacto en la equidad familiar

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Abstract

The study falls within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." In this context, the objectives of the study were as follows: to analyze the impact of work-life balance policies in Lima on the distribution of family responsibilities, examine their influence on the division of gender roles, assess their effect on productivity and job satisfaction, and their contribution to family stability in 2023. Based on these objectives, a quantitative research was carried out that included a sample of 218 respondents from a population of 500 women. The results showed a non-significant positive correlation ($\rho = 0.117$, $p = 0.085$) between work-life balance policies and the distribution of family responsibilities. No significant correlation was found ($\rho = -0.041$, $p = 0.550$) with the division of gender roles. The correlation with productivity and job satisfaction ($\rho = 0.069$, $p = 0.309$) and family stability ($\rho = 0.048$, $p = 0.477$) was also positive, but not significant. In conclusion, work-life balance policies in Lima may be having a moderate, but not statistically significant, impact on family responsibilities and stability.

Keywords: work-life balance, family stability, gender equality.

Resumen

El estudio se enmarca dentro del Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) 5, a saber: "Lograr la igualdad entre los géneros y empoderar a todas las mujeres y las niñas". En este contexto, los objetivos del estudio fueron los siguientes: analizar el impacto de las políticas de conciliación laboral en Lima sobre la distribución de responsabilidades familiares, examinar su influencia en la división de roles de género, evaluar su efecto en la productividad y satisfacción laboral, y su contribución a la estabilidad familiar en 2023. Con base en estos objetivos, se llevó a cabo una investigación cuantitativa que incluyó una muestra de 218 encuestadas de una población de 500 mujeres. Los resultados mostraron una correlación positiva no significativa ($\rho = 0.117$, $p = 0.085$) entre las políticas de conciliación y la distribución de responsabilidades familiares. No se encontró una correlación significativa ($\rho = -0.041$, $p = 0.550$) con la división de roles de género. La correlación con la productividad y satisfacción laboral ($\rho = 0.069$, $p = 0.309$) y la estabilidad familiar ($\rho = 0.048$, $p = 0.477$) también fue positiva, pero no significativa. En conclusión, las políticas de conciliación laboral en Lima podrían estar teniendo un impacto moderado, pero no estadísticamente significativo en las responsabilidades familiares y la estabilidad.

Palabras clave: conciliación laboral, estabilidad familiar, igualdad de género.

Introduction

Reconciliation policies, rather than questioning the traditional role of women in caregiving, often reinforce these responsibilities. Measures such as maternity leave, financial benefits, flexible working hours, and employer discretion in adjusting work schedules tend to reflect a cultural shift that has not yet achieved a true equitable division of domestic and caregiving tasks (Armijo, 2018).

Despite efforts and policies aimed at increasing female participation in the labor market, significant gender gaps persist. In Latin America, the female labor participation rate is 27 percentage points lower than that of men, both in the private and public sectors (Berniell, 2021). Women, particularly mothers, continue to be the primary caregivers, which often underestimates their contributions and perpetuates inequalities in access to formal employment, social security, and social welfare. Additionally, a higher percentage of women are found in unpaid work conditions as family workers (OSLC, 2020).

The right of women to not be discriminated against in the workplace due to their reproductive capacity, including motherhood, remains an outstanding challenge. Despite legislative and regulatory advances aimed at ensuring their protection, this factor continues to be crucial in gender gaps (Cuesta, 2009).

In Peru, wage disparities between men and women have intensified in recent years, revealing deep inequalities in the labor market. According to data from the Peruvian Institute of Economics (IPE) and the National Household Survey (ENAHO), the income gap between men and women grew from 19% in 2020 to 25% in 2021. This increase highlights that women face not only lower incomes but also a disproportionate burden of household responsibilities. According to ENAHO, 21.5% of the economically active female population (EAP) worked in the past year in roles such as unpaid family workers or domestic employees. These roles, which include tasks in a family business without salary or performing household chores without remuneration, underscore the exclusion of these women from fair economic compensation (COMEX, 2022).

At the local level, a study by the National Authority of Civil Service (SERVIR) provides a more detailed view of wage gaps in Peru. This study reveals that, in public administration, the wage gap between men and women decreased from 24% to 16% between 2008 and 2015. However, the gap in the formal private sector stands at 29%, significantly higher than in the public sector. SERVIR notes that the gender wage gap in the public sector tends to be smaller in occupations requiring higher levels of qualification and increases as educational levels decline. The gap is most significant in auxiliary positions and decreases in professional, managerial, or technical roles.

One reason for the reduction in the wage gap between 2014 and 2015 was the increasing participation of women in specialized careers, which represented 75% of the total public servants during that period. These positions offer higher average salaries compared to technical roles, which tend to have lower salaries and less participation.

The report by SERVIR indicates that while part of the wage gap can be explained by objective characteristics such as work experience, hours worked, and area of residence, the portion unexplained by these characteristics may be attributed to gender differences. Thus, the wage gap is closely related to the distribution of gender roles in society, demonstrating how traditional social constructs assign women a predominant role in domestic activities.

Therefore, the objective of gender equity policies should focus on developing strategies that consider gender representation as a central axis for achieving sustainable development. It is essential to design policies that close gaps in the distribution of caregiving roles and promote real equity in access and labor participation (Defensoria del Pueblo, 2019).

The study of gender equity policies in the workplace reveals a complex intersection between the established social order and other orders such as economic, ethnic, and religious. According to Palomar (2004), the discursive order of gender is a social construct rooted in a particular context, based on sexual difference and closely related to multiple social dimensions.

In this regard, a relevant study conducted by Harvard University, which covered 25 countries between 2002 and 2012, showed that women dedicate significantly more hours to household and family care compared to men. In the United States, for example, women invest approximately 30 hours per week in these tasks, while men, depending on whether their mothers worked during their childhood, dedicate between 8.5 and 16 hours per week. Despite these differences, the time spent by men remains notably lower than that of women (Nobel, 2015). This imbalance highlights how traditional gender expectations and roles impact the distribution of domestic responsibilities.

For all the reasons outlined above, incorporating gender equity into the public agenda must remain a priority. It is important to remember that this progress is the result of decades of efforts by the women's movement, which has achieved greater visibility and legitimacy. This advancement has been crucial in strengthening the commitment to the fight against poverty and has fostered greater collective participation and civic organization, with the aim of dismantling the power structures that perpetuate inequalities (Silvera, 2001).

Objectives

The general objective of this research study was: “To determine how work-life balance policies in Lima impact the distribution of family responsibilities in 2023.” This objective aims to comprehensively analyze how current policies in the city affect not only the distribution of family responsibilities among household members but also how these policies influence various aspects related to the balance between work and family life.

Additionally, the following specific objectives were established:

a) To determine how work-life balance policies in Lima impact the division of gender roles derived from family responsibilities in 2023. This specific objective focused on examining how work-life balance policies affect the distribution of family responsibilities between men and women. It seeks to understand whether these policies contribute to a more equitable redistribution of household tasks and whether they influence the modification of traditional gender roles.
b) To determine how work-life balance policies in Lima impact productivity and job satisfaction derived from family responsibilities in 2023. This objective aimed to evaluate the effect of reconciliation policies on the productivity and satisfaction of employees who have family responsibilities. It explored whether the implementation of reconciliation measures improves job performance and employee satisfaction by alleviating the conflict between work demands and family responsibilities.
c) To determine how work-life balance policies in Lima impact family stability derived from family responsibilities in 2023. This objective sought to investigate the effect of reconciliation policies on family stability, considering how these policies may influence family cohesion and well-being. Based on this objective, the analysis examined whether reconciliation policies contribute to improving family dynamics and reducing stress associated with balancing work and family life.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the research is theoretically justified within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN in 2015. This agenda offers a crucial opportunity for countries to advance the improvement of lives for all people, with a special focus on leaving no one behind. Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda centers on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. This goal is not only a fundamental human right but also an essential component for building a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. The research aligns with this goal by examining how work-life balance policies can contribute to gender equality and the overall well-being of families.

From a practical perspective, the research is justified by considering the concept of the “glass ceiling,” introduced in 1986 in an article in the Wall Street Journal. This term describes an invisible barrier in the hierarchical structure of companies that limits the advancement of women to leadership positions due to their caregiving responsibilities, despite their education and professional background. The existence of this glass ceiling results in lower economic compensation for women and contributes to the persistent gender wage gap. This concept illustrates the need for effective work-life balance policies that can overcome these barriers and promote real

equity in the workplace, alleviating the economic and professional disadvantages that women face due to their family responsibilities.

Methodology

The proposed research is classified as basic since it seeks a deep understanding of a specific topic: work-life balance policies in Lima and their impact on the distribution of family responsibilities. According to Gómez (1982), basic research aims to generate detailed understanding of concrete phenomena, seeking results with practical applications that can inform and improve existing policies and practices. In this case, the research's objective was to examine how current policies affect the distribution of family responsibilities, providing valuable insights that can contribute to the formulation of more equitable and effective policies.

The approach adopted for this research is quantitative, focusing on the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns and establish relationships between variables. According to Guerrero (2016), the quantitative approach is based on the collection of categorical data and its statistical analysis to describe and understand social phenomena. This approach allows for an objective and measurable evaluation of work-life balance policies and their effects on the distribution of family responsibilities. Additionally, the research is classified as descriptive, as it aims to detail and describe the characteristics and effects of the policies in question, providing a clear and detailed overview of the impact of these policies on the reality of families.

Regarding the variables, the independent variable considered was work-life balance policies. According to Idrovo (2006), these policies aim to balance work and family life and improve employee well-being, although there remains an agenda pending in terms of their equitable development and application.

The dependent variable was the distribution of family responsibilities. Despite the increasing female participation in the labor market and the weakening of the patriarchal structure, family responsibilities continue to predominantly fall on women. Ribeiro (2004) indicates that male participation in domestic tasks remains limited, even in contexts where female employment is high and wives earn more than their husbands.

The target population for the research consisted of 500 individuals. To ensure representativeness and accuracy in the results, the sample size was calculated at 218 respondents, based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A conservative proportion of 0.5 was assumed to maximize the sample size, ensuring that the results were representative of the total population. This calculation was based on the standard formula for determining sample sizes in quantitative research, aiming to avoid biases and ensure that each individual had an equal probability of being selected.

Data collection involved the administration of surveys, complemented by formal conversations and inquiries. The surveys were designed to capture quantitative data through a structured questionnaire, which was distributed among the sample of 218 individuals. This questionnaire encompassed previously identified study categories, facilitating the acquisition of detailed and standardized information. Data collection also included the use of observation, questionnaires, and scales, in accordance with established techniques in social research literature (Sánchez, 2022).

Regarding data analysis, a descriptive-quantitative method was employed, suitable for describing characteristics and trends within the studied population. The collected data were processed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify patterns and trends in the responses. This method allowed for a detailed and quantifiable understanding of the studied variables, facilitating the interpretation of results and the formulation of evidence-based conclusions.

In managing documents and interviews, participant and informant anonymity was ensured to protect their privacy. Furthermore, the research adhered to ethical standards established by the Universidad César Vallejo, ensuring the absence of conflicts of interest and guaranteeing the integrity of the data and study subjects. The rigorous application of these ethical principles was fundamental for the validity and legitimacy of the presented study.

Results and discussion

Regarding the results, it is important to note that normality tests are fundamental statistical procedures used to determine whether a dataset follows a normal distribution, characterized by its symmetry and frequency in natural and social phenomena. These tests are essential in statistical practice, as many analytical techniques, such as regression and analysis of variance, assume that the data are normally distributed. Validating this assumption allows researchers to confirm the applicability of their statistical methods and ensure the accuracy of their conclusions.

In this context, a pilot test evaluated two variables: “Work-life balance” and “Distribution of family responsibilities,” using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests. For the Work-life balance

variable, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was 0.215 with a significance value of 0.061, suggesting that the null hypothesis of normality was not rejected at the 5% significance level. However, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a statistic of 0.805 and a significance value of 0.004, indicating a deviation from normality. For the Distribution of family responsibilities, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was 0.238 with a significance value of 0.022, and the Shapiro-Wilk statistic was 0.817 with a significance value of 0.006, both indicating a possible deviation from normality, with a stronger significance evidenced by the Shapiro-Wilk test regarding non-normality.

The analysis of the processed data revealed that both for Work-life balance policies and for the Distribution of family responsibilities, the sample consisted of 218 valid cases, with no missing data. This situation ensures the integrity and validity of the analysis, allowing for a complete and accurate evaluation of the variables.

The descriptive analysis revealed important characteristics of both variables. For Work-life balance policies, the mean was 1.90 with a standard deviation of 0.789 and a somewhat asymmetrical distribution. The kurtosis of -1.371 indicated a flatter distribution than normal. For the Distribution of family responsibilities, the mean was 1.95 with a standard deviation of 0.804, and the distribution showed almost no asymmetry with a kurtosis of -1.448, suggesting greater flatness compared to the distribution of Work-life balance policies.

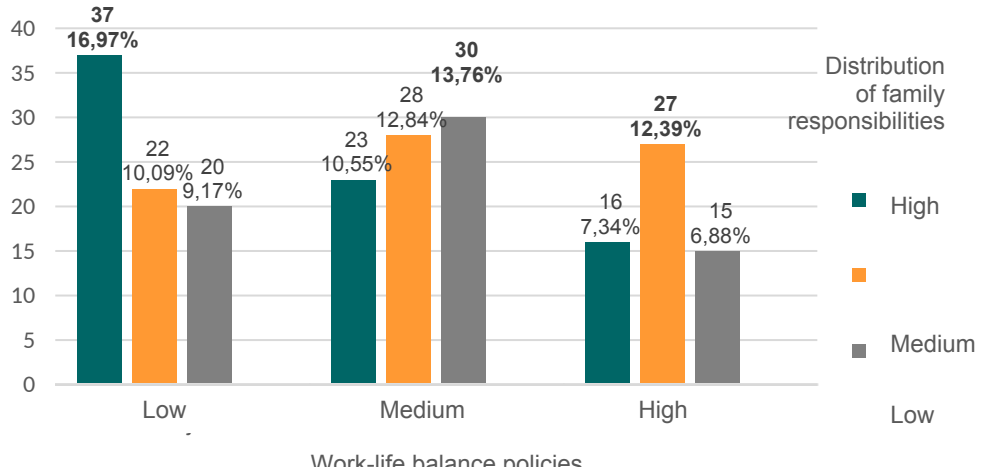
Additionally, the normality tests applied to the processed data showed that both variables, Work-life balance policies and Distribution of family responsibilities, did not follow a normal distribution. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic for Work-life balance policies was 0.236 with a significance value of 0.000, and for the Distribution of family responsibilities, it was 0.230 with a significance value of 0.000. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test also confirmed these conclusions with statistics of 0.798 and 0.797 respectively, both with significance values of 0.000. The Lilliefors significance correction was applied to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to adjust the critical values, as the parameters of the normal distribution were estimated from the sample. In summary, the data suggested that neither of the two variables followed a normal distribution in the studied sample.

Thus, the descriptive analysis of work-life balance policies in Lima and their impact on the distribution of family responsibilities reveals that, despite legislative and social efforts, significant gender gaps persist. Recent studies highlight how motherhood negatively affects women's job opportunities, leading them to informal and flexible jobs that perpetuate gender stereotypes and an unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities. This analysis underscores the need to strengthen comprehensive policies with a gender perspective and educational programs that promote an equitable distribution of family and labor responsibilities, emphasizing the importance of substantial cultural change to achieve true gender equity in Lima's society.

Figure 01 presents a cross-tabulation relating work-life balance policies to the distribution of family responsibilities, classified into low, medium, and high levels. The results indicate that in contexts where work-life balance policies are low, most individuals tend to have a low distribution of family responsibilities. In the case of medium work-life balance policies, a more balanced distribution of family responsibilities is observed, although there is a slight inclination towards a high distribution. Conversely, in contexts with high work-life balance policies, the distribution of family responsibilities tends to be medium, with fewer cases in the high category. These findings suggest that current work-life balance policies are more associated with a medium distribution of family responsibilities than with a high one.

Figure 1

Work-life balance policies / Distribution of family responsibilities



The relationship between work-life balance policies and the division of gender roles is examined in Figure 2. In contexts with low work-life balance policies, the division of gender roles is balanced across low, medium, and high levels. For medium work-life balance policies, there is a slight concentration in the low and high levels of gender role division, indicating a potential polarization in perceptions of gender equality. In contexts with high work-life balance policies, there is a slight tendency towards a lower division of gender roles, though the difference is not pronounced. This suggests that work-life balance policies have a moderate impact on the perception and practice of gender equality.

Figure 2

Work-life balance policies / Division of gender roles

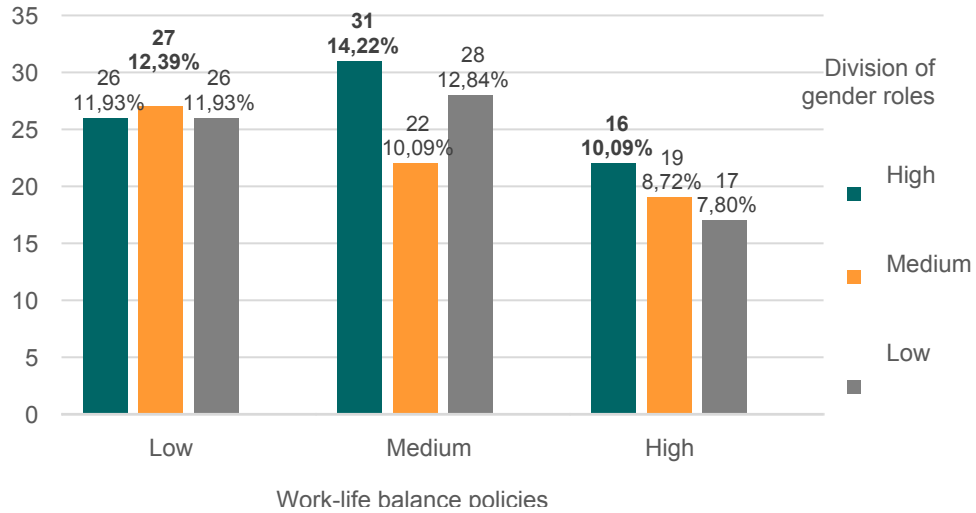


Figure 3 explores the relationship between work-life balance policies, productivity, and job satisfaction. In contexts with low work-life balance policies, most cases exhibit low productivity and job satisfaction, although some cases show high satisfaction and productivity. For medium work-life balance policies, the distribution is more balanced across levels of productivity and job satisfaction. In contexts with high work-life balance policies, there is a slight tendency towards higher productivity and job satisfaction, but a considerable number of cases also report low satisfaction and productivity. This indicates that work-life balance policies have a moderate impact on productivity and job satisfaction, with a slight trend towards improvement in contexts with more robust policies.

Figure 3

Work-life balance policies / Productivity and job satisfaction

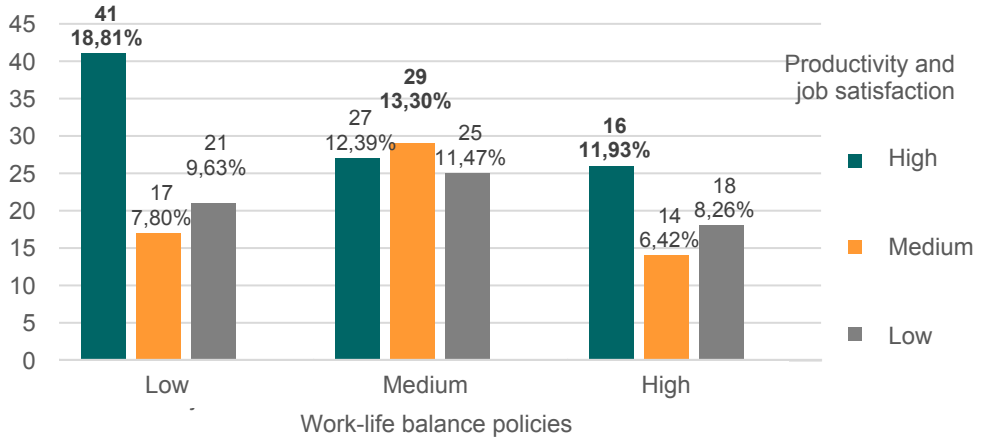
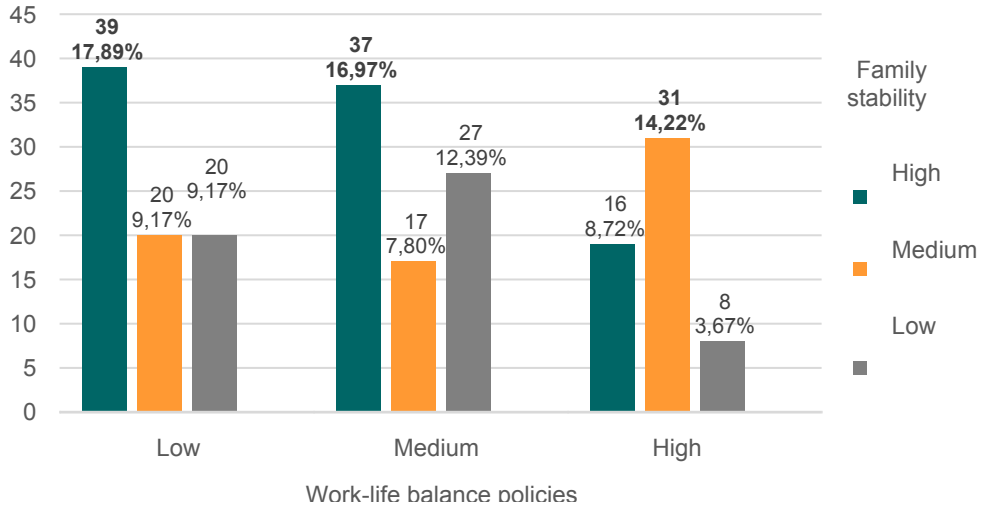


Figure 4 examines the relationship between work-life balance policies and family stability. In contexts with low work-life balance policies, family stability tends to be low, with fewer cases in the medium and high categories. For medium work-life balance policies, there is a higher concentration in low family stability, but also a significant number of cases in the high stability category. In contexts with high work-life balance policies, family stability tends to be medium, with fewer cases in the low and high categories. This suggests that more robust work-life balance policies are associated with greater family stability, although this relationship varies depending on the specific level of the policies implemented.

Figure 4
Work-life balance policies / Family stability



The analysis indicates that work-life balance policies have a moderate impact on various areas, such as the distribution of family responsibilities, the division of gender roles, productivity and job satisfaction, and family stability. However, this impact is not strongly linear and may be influenced by other factors, suggesting the need to consider multiple dynamics when designing and evaluating work-life balance policies.

The analysis of the consequences of motherhood in the labor market in Latin America reveals several challenges and concerning patterns that reflect how gender inequalities continue to influence professional and economic opportunities for women. Evidence suggests that motherhood negatively impacts women's job offers and expectations, pushing them into more flexible and informal jobs, which perpetuates occupational segregation and contributes to gender inequalities.

Furthermore, the detailed analysis of work-life balance policies and their impact on the distribution of family responsibilities in Lima in 2023 reveals critical aspects that underscore the need for profound reforms tailored to the local context.

Work-life balance policies in Lima, which include maternity and paternity leave, flexible hours, and telework, represent a positive step towards gender equality. However, the effectiveness of these policies varies between the public and private sectors. While the public sector shows greater adoption, the private sector faces barriers such as internal resistance and lack of infrastructure.

Resistance in the private sector to adopting work-life balance policies may stem from perceptions of costs and disruptions to daily operations. This highlights the need to design specific strategies to overcome these barriers and foster an organizational culture that values work-life balance.

The positive but weak correlation between reconciliation policies and job satisfaction ($r = 0.063$, $p = 0.353$) suggests that these policies may not be achieving the expected impact regarding job satisfaction. The unclear impact on productivity may also concern companies that prioritize short-term economic results.

Additionally, the weak correlation between reconciliation policies and the equitable distribution of family responsibilities in Lima indicates the need to examine cultural and structural barriers that could be limiting the impact of these policies. Cultural norms and traditional expectations regarding gender roles may be influencing the effectiveness of the implemented policies.

It is essential that work-life balance policies are designed inclusively and equitably, encompassing all categories of workers, including those in informal sectors or small businesses. Addressing the specific gender and family needs of all employees is also fundamental.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of reconciliation policies are required to adjust and maximize their impact. This includes considering the cultural adaptation of policies to ensure they genuinely influence the equitable redistribution of family responsibilities.

Moreover, to achieve true equity in the distribution of family responsibilities, it is crucial to promote positive masculinity models that encourage active male participation at home.

Conclusions

1. The overall analysis shows a positive but not statistically significant correlation ($\rho = 0.117$, $p = 0.085$) between work-life balance policies in Lima and the distribution of family responsibilities in 2023. This suggests that, while there is a trend towards improvement, the impact of these policies on the distribution of family responsibilities is not statistically significant. Therefore, current policies may have a moderate effect, but are insufficient to achieve an equitable redistribution of family responsibilities.
2. Regarding the first specific objective, there was no significant correlation ($\rho = -0.041$, $p = 0.550$) between work-life balance policies and the division of gender roles in family responsibilities in Lima in 2023. This result indicates that current work-life balance policies are not clearly influencing the modification of traditional gender roles within the family. This highlights the need to review and adjust policies to more effectively address the division of gender roles.
3. Concerning the second objective, the positive but not statistically significant correlation ($\rho = 0.069$, $p = 0.309$) between work-life balance policies and productivity and job satisfaction related to family responsibilities suggests that, although there is a favorable trend, the influence of these policies on productivity and job satisfaction is inconclusive in this study. This may indicate that current policies, while potentially beneficial, have not yet achieved a significant impact in these areas.
4. With respect to the third objective, the positive but not statistically significant correlation ($\rho = 0.048$, $p = 0.477$) between work-life balance policies and family stability derived from family responsibilities in Lima in 2023 suggests that the policies may be contributing slightly, but not significantly, to family stability. This underscores that, although there are indications of improvement, the actual impact of the policies on family stability is still not strong enough to be considered significant.

In summary, these findings indicate that while work-life balance policies in Lima may show some positive effects, these are not statistically significant in most evaluated aspects. The lack of significance in the correlations suggests that current policies may not effectively address the underlying needs related to the distribution of family responsibilities, the division of gender roles, productivity, and family stability. To achieve a more significant impact, it is recommended to review and adapt work-life balance policies to more deeply address gender inequalities and the specific needs of workers in Lima.

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