

Work-Life Balance Practices and Employee Performance Among County Governments in Kenya's North Rift Region

Peter Kiplagat Kiptum¹, Dr. Pamela Eng'airo², Dr. Nehemiah Kosgei³

¹Department of Marketing and Management, School of Business and Economics,
The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya,

^{2,3}Department of Marketing and Management, School of Business and Economics,
The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.

Corresponding Author: Peter Kiplagat Kiptum

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance (WLB) has become an increasingly important human resource management concern because persistent conflict between work and personal responsibilities may undermine employee effectiveness, whereas supportive work arrangements may enhance employee performance. This study examined the relationship between selected work-life balance practices and employee performance in county governments in Kenya's North Rift Region. Specifically, the study examined work-family priorities conflict, flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs, and leave policy as predictors of employee performance. The study was guided by Role Theory, Work-Family Border Theory, and Social Exchange Theory. A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was adopted, comprising a quantitative correlational component and a qualitative explanatory component. The target population comprised 7,252 employees from selected county governments in Elgeyo Marakwet, Uasin Gishu, and Nandi counties. Using Yamane's sampling procedure and proportionate stratified random sampling, 379 employees were selected for the

quantitative component. Of the 379 questionnaires distributed, 329 were returned and 306 were usable, representing a usable response rate of 80.7%. In addition, nine senior managers participated in key informant interviews. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(4,301) = 82.734$, $p < .001$, explaining 52.4% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = .524$; adjusted $R^2 = .518$). Work-family priorities conflict was negatively and significantly associated with employee performance ($\beta = -.328$, $p < .001$). Flexible work arrangements ($\beta = .297$, $p < .001$), leave policy ($\beta = .234$, $p < .001$), and employee assistance programs ($\beta = .168$, $p = .001$) were positively and significantly associated with employee performance. Work-family priorities conflict emerged as the strongest predictor in absolute standardized terms, followed by flexible work arrangements, leave policy, and employee assistance programs. The qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results by highlighting heavy workloads, unclear role expectations, limited flexibility, inadequate awareness of employee assistance programs,

and challenges in accessing leave. The study concludes that work-life balance should be treated as an organizational performance issue rather than solely an employee welfare concern. County governments should reduce structural sources of work-family conflict while institutionalizing feasible flexible work arrangements, strengthening employee assistance programs, and improving the accessibility and administration of leave.

Keywords: *Work-Life Balance; Employee Performance; Work-Family Conflict; Flexible Work Arrangements; Employee Assistance Programs; Leave Policy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is central to effective public service delivery and the achievement of Kenya's devolution objectives. County governments provide essential services including healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, and social welfare; hence, employee productivity, commitment, and service efficiency have significant implications for citizen welfare and institutional effectiveness (Puspitawati et al., 2025). However, county governments continue to experience performance challenges associated with workload pressures, absenteeism, inconsistent human resource practices, and resource constraints (Public Service Commission, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

Work-life balance practices have gained increasing attention as employees navigate competing professional and personal responsibilities (Yolanda & Hendijani, 2025). Persistent difficulties in managing these responsibilities may contribute to work-family priorities conflict, stress, reduced job satisfaction, and lower employee performance, whereas supportive organizational practices can enhance employee wellbeing and performance (Chebet & Awino, 2023; Agunda et al., 2024). These concerns are particularly relevant in public-sector organizations, where employees operate within formal administrative structures while facing

growing demands for efficiency, accountability, and quality service delivery (Saipi, 2024). However, the effectiveness of work-life balance practices may vary according to organizational conditions, which remain uneven across Kenyan public institutions, particularly county governments (Jebitok, 2024; Otieno, 2023; Mwangi, 2024; Kosgei & Maende, 2024).

Despite growing scholarly attention, important conceptual, contextual, and methodological gaps persist. Limited studies have examined the relationship between specific work-life balance practices and employee performance, particularly within Kenyan county governments. Furthermore, much of the existing evidence is drawn from private-sector and developed-country contexts and relies predominantly on descriptive methodologies. This study therefore examined the effects of work-family priorities conflict, flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs, and leave policy on employee performance in selected county governments in Kenya's North Rift Region, while providing context-specific evidence to inform human resource policy and enhance public service delivery.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Work-Life Balance and Employee Performance

Work-life balance (WLB) refers to the extent to which employees manage work and personal responsibilities without experiencing persistent conflict, overload, or psychological strain. Contemporary scholarship views WLB not as an equal division of time between work and non-work domains, but as the capacity to fulfil competing responsibilities while maintaining well-being and effective functioning. This perspective is particularly relevant in public-sector organizations, where bureaucratic procedures, workload pressures, and formal working arrangements may constrain employees' control over work demands.

Employee performance refers to the effectiveness and efficiency with which

employees execute assigned responsibilities and contribute to organizational objectives. In this study, performance is operationalized through task completion, service efficiency, and job commitment, dimensions that are particularly relevant to effective county government service delivery.

The relationship between WLB and employee performance is multidimensional. Work-family priorities conflict may deplete employees' time and psychological resources, whereas flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs, and supportive leave policies can facilitate the management of competing demands. WLB may consequently influence performance through reduced stress, enhanced job satisfaction, stronger commitment, and improved concentration. Krishnan, Loon and Tan (2018: 652–662) and Soomro, Breitenacker and Shah (2018: 129–146) demonstrate the relationship between WLB, work-family experiences, and employee performance. More recent studies similarly associate WLB with employee well-being and performance outcomes (Jamilah et al. 2024: 182–192; Puspitawati et al. 2025: 472). However, effectiveness depends on organizational implementation, managerial support, and accessibility of WLB practices.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

2.2.1 Work-Family Border Theory

Work-Family Border Theory explains how individuals manage transitions between work and family domains. Clark (2000) conceptualizes work and family as distinct but interconnected spheres separated by boundaries that may vary in permeability and flexibility. Employees continually cross these boundaries while attempting to satisfy expectations in both domains. Where organizational arrangements permit flexible movement between domains, employees may manage competing responsibilities more effectively. Conversely, rigid organizational structures may make boundary management difficult and intensify work-family conflict.

The theory is particularly relevant to work-family priorities conflict and flexible work arrangements. Flexible schedules and family-friendly employment practices can increase the permeability of work-family boundaries, enabling employees to respond to family obligations without necessarily compromising occupational responsibilities. In contrast, rigid bureaucratic arrangements may strengthen boundaries and increase conflict. The theory therefore provides a useful explanation of why organizational practices may influence employee performance.

Nevertheless, Work-Family Border Theory has limitations. Its treatment of work and family as relatively distinct domains may oversimplify contemporary lives in which community, social, leisure, and personal-development roles intersect with employment and family responsibilities. It may also overemphasize individual boundary-management capacity while giving insufficient attention to organizational structures, institutional cultures, socioeconomic conditions, and power relationships. These limitations are particularly relevant in bureaucratic public institutions, where employees may have limited discretion over working arrangements.

2.2.2 Role Theory

Role Theory explains employee experiences in terms of multiple social roles and the expectations attached to them (Biddle 1979). Employees may simultaneously occupy occupational, family, parental, and community roles. When expectations are incompatible, role conflict occurs; when demands exceed available capacity, role overload may arise. Such conditions may generate stress and reduce the resources available for effective work performance.

Role Theory therefore provides a direct explanation of work-family priorities conflict. Employees who experience excessive or incompatible demands may experience emotional strain, reduced concentration, absenteeism, and diminished

job performance. Organizational interventions such as flexible work arrangements and leave provisions can reduce role conflict by enabling employees to temporarily adjust occupational demands while fulfilling family or personal responsibilities.

The theory has, however, been criticized for portraying individuals as relatively passive recipients of role expectations. Contemporary employees may actively negotiate, reinterpret, or resist role demands. The theory also gives comparatively limited attention to emotions, identity, organizational power, and cultural influences. Its usefulness is consequently strengthened when combined with theories emphasizing organizational boundaries, and exchange relationships.

2.2.3 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory, associated with Blau (1964), explains organizational relationships in terms of reciprocal exchanges. Employees who perceive that their organization provides valued resources and support may reciprocate through greater commitment, loyalty, and performance. Work-life balance practices can therefore be interpreted as organizational investments in employee well-being.

Employee assistance programs and leave policies are particularly consistent with this perspective. Counselling, stress-management support, financial assistance, and adequate leave provisions communicate organizational concern for employees' welfare. Employees may respond by demonstrating greater commitment and productivity. Conversely, inaccessible support services, delayed leave approvals, or inadequate welfare provisions may generate perceptions of organizational neglect and weaken reciprocal relationships.

The theory is nevertheless criticized for presenting social relationships predominantly in terms of costs, benefits, and reciprocity. Such an interpretation may underestimate emotions, cultural norms, altruism, intrinsic motivation, and unequal

power relations. Its emphasis on individual exchange relationships also provides limited explanation of institutional structures and systemic inequalities. The present study therefore combines Social Exchange Theory with theories addressing role demands, and organizational boundaries.

2.3 Work-Family Priorities Conflict and Employee Performance

Work-family priorities conflict arises when work responsibilities interfere with employees' family and personal obligations. It may be manifested through role overload, time interference and emotional strain. The literature generally associates persistent work-family conflict with lower job performance because employees have finite temporal, cognitive and emotional resources. Greenhaus and Beutell identify time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based mechanisms through which work and family roles can become incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985: 76–88).

Recent empirical evidence supports the negative performance consequences of work-family conflict. Aldhafeeri, Abou Hashish and Abo Shereda reported an inverse relationship between work-family conflict and job performance among nurses, while Akman and Kodalak linked role overload to work-family conflict, job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions (Aldhafeeri et al. 2025: 614; Akman & Kodalak 2025: 122–137). De Jesus similarly found that work-family conflict was associated with poorer employee performance in a judicial setting (de Jesus 2024: 1–20).

In the Kenyan context, Mutheu found that excessive working hours, rigid schedules and inadequately designed leave arrangements negatively affected productivity in commercial banking (Mutheu 2023: 49–66). Kipkoech also identified work-family pressures among healthcare workers in Kericho County. Although these studies provide useful evidence, their organizational contexts differ from county governments, where bureaucratic procedures, public accountability and staffing pressures can

create distinctive patterns of work-family interference.

The present study therefore conceptualizes work-family priorities conflict as an organizationally relevant constraint rather than merely an individual-level problem. Heavy workloads, unclear responsibilities and insufficient mechanisms for dealing with family emergencies can increase conflict. Where such conditions persist, employees may sacrifice family time, experience emotional strain or remain physically present at work while mentally preoccupied with personal responsibilities.

H1: Work-family priorities conflict has no significant effect on employee performance among employees of selected county governments in Kenya's North Rift Region.

2.4 Flexible Work Arrangements and Employee Performance

Flexible work arrangements allow employees to adjust when, where or how work is undertaken, subject to organizational requirements. The present study focused on remote work, flextime and compressed schedules. These arrangements can reduce commuting pressures, increase autonomy and facilitate employees' management of family and personal obligations. Shifrin and Michel's meta-analytic review links flexible work arrangements with employee health outcomes, providing support for the broader argument that flexibility can be an important organizational resource (Shifrin & Michel 2022: 60–85).

Empirical evidence generally indicates a positive association between flexibility and employee outcomes. Orishede and Ndudi reviewed flexible work arrangements and concluded that telecommuting, flextime and related practices can improve employee performance (Orishede & Ndudi 2020: 86–103). Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma and Nwokorie similarly associate flexible work arrangements with improved work-life equilibrium, reduced stress and better organizational outcomes (Austin-Egole et al. 2020: 50–59). In Kenya, Kipkoech found that flexible working arrangements explained a

meaningful proportion of variation in employee performance in a county referral hospital, while Andeyo, Otuya and Misigo reported a strong positive relationship among non-teaching employees in public universities in Western Kenya (Andeyo et al. 2024: 214–228).

The literature nevertheless points to an implementation problem. Flexibility may be formally permitted but practically unavailable because of bureaucratic culture, limited technology, supervisory resistance or concerns about accountability. This distinction between availability and effectiveness is important. A practice can have a strong potential relationship with performance even where employees have limited access to it.

The current study addresses this issue by measuring both perceived availability and performance effects. This makes it possible to distinguish between the current state of flexible work provision and the performance gains associated with greater access. Such evidence is particularly relevant to county governments considering whether flexible working is compatible with public accountability and service delivery.

H2: Flexible work arrangements have no significant effect on employee performance among employees of selected county governments in Kenya's North Rift Region.

2.5 Employee Assistance Programs and Employee Performance

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) are employer-sponsored interventions intended to assist employees with personal, emotional, psychological, financial or health-related problems that may affect work performance. The present study examined counselling support, stress management and financial advice. EAPs are relevant to work-life balance because personal problems frequently spill over into the work domain, while accessible support can help employees manage these pressures.

Joseph, Walker and Fuller-Tyszkiewicz's systematic review found that EAPs can improve employee outcomes, particularly

functional performance and presenteeism, although effects vary across outcomes (Joseph et al. 2018: 1–15). In Kenya, Archmedes found positive performance effects associated with employee assistance initiatives at Kenya Ports Authority. Abong'o and Wekesa also reported positive effects of EAPs on employee motivation in Kenyan public universities (Abong'o & Wekesa 2022: 365–401). More recent evidence indicates that EAPs can influence quality of work life and stress, providing a plausible pathway to improved work performance (Melandari & Jannah 2025: 39–48).

However, EAPs are effective only when employees know about them, trust the services and can access them without stigma. Underfunding, fragmented provision and weak communication may substantially reduce their organizational value. In public-sector settings, EAPs may also be affected by procurement arrangements, staffing structures and the availability of professional counselling services.

The present study therefore treats EAPs as a component of organizational support rather than as a stand-alone welfare intervention. The expectation is that employees who can access counselling, stress-management and financial-support services will have greater capacity to manage personal pressures and remain focused on their duties.

H3: Employee assistance programs have no significant effect on employee performance among employees of selected county governments in Kenya's North Rift Region.

2.6 Leave Policy and Employee Performance

Leave policy provides employees with formal opportunities for rest, recovery, illness management, family responsibilities and other personal needs. Effective leave systems may prevent excessive fatigue and allow employees to temporarily disengage from work responsibilities when personal demands require attention. In this study, leave policy was assessed through annual, parental, sick and compassionate leave,

together with clarity and accessibility of leave provisions.

Empirical studies generally indicate positive relationships between leave arrangements and organizational performance. Chungo and Anyieni found that different forms of employee leave were associated with organizational performance in a Kenyan setting (Chungo & Anyieni 2019: 157–168). Ezeani and Udentia similarly reported significant positive effects of leave policy on employee performance in universities in south-eastern Nigeria (Ezeani & Udentia 2025: 14–35). Rachel and Osimen found a positive relationship between maternity leave policy and organizational performance, although the relationship was relatively weak (Rachel & Osimen 2023: 815–824).

Leave can influence performance through recovery, reduced work-family conflict and improved job satisfaction. Employees who can take annual leave for recovery, sick leave when unwell and family-related leave when necessary are less likely to remain at work while distracted, exhausted or unable to concentrate. Conversely, delays in approving leave can convert a formal benefit into an ineffective policy.

The literature therefore suggests that the effectiveness of leave policy depends on adequacy, accessibility, clarity and implementation. The current study examines these elements together, allowing the analysis to move beyond the mere existence of leave provisions.

H4: Leave policy has no significant effect on employee performance among employees of selected county governments in Kenya's North Rift Region.

2.7 Research Gap and Contribution

The literature reveals four interconnected gaps. First, there is a contextual gap. Much of the evidence on work-life balance and performance originates from private-sector organizations, universities, healthcare institutions or countries outside East Africa. Although Kenyan studies exist, relatively limited empirical evidence focuses on county governments, whose bureaucratic structures,

public-service mandates, staffing arrangements and resource constraints differ materially from those of private organizations.

Second, a conceptual gap exists because previous studies frequently treat work-life balance as a composite construct or investigate individual practices independently. Limited research simultaneously examines work-family priorities conflict, flexible work arrangements, EAPs, and leave policy and distinguishes their specific dimensions.

Third, a methodological gap is apparent. Much of the existing evidence relies on descriptive, correlational, or cross-sectional designs. Although some studies employ PLS-SEM and regression analysis, comparatively little research on the relationship between individual work-life balance practices and employee performance.

Fourth, a theoretical gap remains. Previous studies have drawn upon Role Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Spillover Theory, and Work-Family Border Theory. There is limited integration of these perspectives into a unified explanation of how work-life balance practices operate within bureaucratic public institutions.

The study therefore contributes by providing context-specific quantitative evidence from 306 employees across three county governments, demonstrating the relative strength of four work-life balance practices in explaining employee performance. It also contributes theoretically by applying Work-Family Border Theory, Role Theory and Social Exchange Theory to a devolved public-sector context. Practically, the study identifies which practices require priority attention and translates the results into specific human resource interventions for county governments.

Importantly, the study does not assume that all work-life balance practices have equivalent effects. The simultaneous regression model permits comparison of standardized coefficients and therefore identifies which dimensions represent the

most important performance-related constraints or resources. This is useful to county policymakers operating under resource constraints because interventions can be prioritized according to empirical importance.

3. MATERIALS & METHODS

3.1 Research Design and Philosophy

The study adopted a pragmatist research philosophy and a descriptive correlational research design within a mixed-methods approach. Pragmatism was appropriate because the study sought practical understanding of the relationships between work-life balance practices and employee performance using both quantitative and qualitative evidence (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The quantitative component examined the relationships between work-family priorities conflict, flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs, leave policy, and employee performance, while key informant interviews provided contextual explanations of the quantitative findings. The descriptive correlational design enabled the study to describe existing work-life balance practices and performance without manipulating the organizational environment. The study employed a cross-sectional approach, with data collected at one point in time. Therefore, regression coefficients indicate statistical associations rather than definitive causal effects. The article focuses exclusively on the direct relationships between work-life balance practices and employee performance.

3.2 Study Setting and Population

The study was conducted in Elgeyo Marakwet, Uasin Gishu and Nandi County governments in Kenya's North Rift Region. The counties were selected because of their strategic location within the region and the diversity of their public-service and administrative environments. The total target population was 7,252 employees, comprising 595 from Elgeyo Marakwet, 3395 from Uasin Gishu and 1,902 from Nandi. By

employment level, the population consisted of 170 senior managers, 530 middle-level managers, and 5,192 lower-level employees. The study focused on county government employees because their performance directly affects the delivery of devolved functions and public services. The setting also provides a useful institutional context in which to examine work-life balance because county employees operate within formal public-service procedures while facing service-delivery demands that can extend beyond conventional working schedules.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample of 379 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula at a 5% level of precision:

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

Where: n is the required sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision. With $N = 7,252$ and $e = 0.05$, the resulting sample was approximately 379 respondents.

Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation of senior managers, middle managers and lower-level employees (Cochran, 1977). The sample comprised 19 senior managers, 60 middle managers and 276 lower-level employees. Questionnaires were distributed across the three counties. Of 379 questionnaires distributed, 329 were returned and 306 were usable, producing an 80.7% usable response rate.

For the qualitative component, nine senior managers were purposively selected for key informant interviews, with three drawn from each county. All nine participated, yielding a 100% interview participation rate.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured key informant interview guide. The questionnaire contained six sections measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging

from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire measured four work-life balance constructs and employee performance. Work-family priorities conflict was measured using role overload, time interference and emotional strain. Flexible work arrangements were measured using remote work, flextime and compressed schedules. EAPs were measured using counselling support, stress management and financial advice. Leave policy was measured using annual, parental, sick and compassionate leave, as well as policy clarity and accessibility. Employee performance was measured through task completion, service efficiency and job commitment.

Key informant interviews were conducted with senior managers to provide contextual information concerning the availability and implementation of work-life balance practices. Interviews were conducted for approximately 30–45 minutes and were thematically analyzed. The qualitative strand was used to explain patterns emerging from the quantitative results rather than to estimate statistical relationships.

3.5 Pilot Testing, Validity and Reliability

The instrument was piloted in Baringo County, which was outside the study area but had comparable demographic and organizational characteristics. Thirty-eight (38) respondents, representing approximately 10% of the main sample, participated in the pilot.

Content validity was assessed through expert review involving two university supervisors and three county human resource practitioners. Construct validity was examined using exploratory factor analysis, supported by KMO and Bartlett's tests.

The reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha was 0.872 for work-family priorities conflict, 0.851 for flexible work arrangements, 0.893 for employee assistance programs, 0.864 for leave policy and 0.882 for employee performance. The overall questionnaire alpha was 0.945. All coefficients exceeded the 0.70 threshold used in the study,

indicating satisfactory to excellent internal consistency.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 30 Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondent characteristics and describe the study variables. Inferential analysis employed multiple linear regression to estimate the direct effects of the four work-life balance practices on employee performance. The direct-effects regression model was specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$$

where Y represents employee performance; X₁ represents work-family priorities conflict; X₂ represents flexible work arrangements; X₃ represents employee assistance programs; X₄ represents leave policy; β_0 is the intercept; β_1 – β_4 are regression coefficients; and ε is the error term.

The statistical significance of individual coefficients was evaluated at $p < 0.05$, while ANOVA assessed the overall significance of the regression model. Diagnostic procedures were undertaken to assess the assumptions of regression, including normality, multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity.

Qualitative interview data were coded and analyzed using thematic analysis following the six phases of Braun and Clarke (2006). The qualitative findings were subsequently used to complement and contextualize the quantitative results.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study followed applicable research ethics requirements. Ethical approval and relevant institutional authorizations were obtained before data collection. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and the information collected was used solely for academic purposes. Data were stored securely and reported without personally identifying participants.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Response Rate and Respondent Profile

Of the 379 questionnaires distributed to employees in Elgeyo Marakwet, Uasin Gishu and Nandi County governments, 329 were returned (86.8%) and 306 (80.7%) were completed and deemed suitable for analysis. All nine targeted key informants participated in the interviews, giving a qualitative participation rate of 100%.

The respondents comprised 168 males (54.9%) and 138 females (45.1%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. The largest age category was 35–44 years (35.0%), followed by 25–34 years (30.7%); together, these groups accounted for 65.7% of respondents. Those aged 45–54 years represented 17.0%, while respondents below 25 years and those aged 55 years and above represented 9.2% and 8.2%, respectively.

In terms of education, 47.7% of respondents held bachelor's degrees, 24.8% diplomas, 18.3% master's degrees, 5.9% certificates and 3.3% PhDs. Thus, 66.0% had at least a bachelor's degree. Regarding tenure, 40.5% had worked in county government for more than five but not more than ten years, 32.0% had up to five years of experience, and 27.5% had more than ten years. Consequently, 72.5% had more than five years of county government experience.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

The descriptive results indicated substantial differences in the availability and perceived adequacy of the four work-life balance practices.

Work-family priorities conflict recorded a high composite mean of 3.85 (SD = 0.82). The highest-rated item was the need to sacrifice personal or family time to meet work deadlines (M = 4.11, SD = 0.85), followed by interference of work schedules with family responsibilities (M = 4.02, SD = 0.88). Emotional exhaustion associated with balancing work and family responsibilities also recorded a relatively high mean (M = 3.95, SD = 0.95). The findings therefore demonstrate that work-family conflict was a

prominent experience among respondents, particularly through competing time demands and the prioritization of work deadlines over personal and family responsibilities.

Flexible work arrangements had a low composite mean of 2.61 (SD = 0.96), Remote work recorded a mean of 2.34 (SD = 1.12), flextime 2.56 (SD = 1.08), compressed work schedules 2.21 (SD = 1.15), and the ability to alternate between office and home working 2.18 (SD = 1.09). Despite their low availability, employees recognized the potential contribution of flexibility to productivity, indicating that low availability did not necessarily reflect low perceived value.

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) recorded the lowest composite mean at 2.43 (SD = 1.02), financial advice services (M = 2.21, SD = 1.15), mental health awareness and support (M = 2.32, SD = 1.19) and stress-management programs (M = 2.38, SD = 1.21). Counselling support recorded M = 2.45 (SD = 1.18), while awareness of how to access EAP services recorded M = 2.48 (SD = 1.24). The findings indicate that EAPs were either unavailable, inaccessible or insufficiently communicated to employees. Awareness of EAP availability was also limited.

Leave policy recorded a moderate composite mean of 3.38. Employees positively evaluated the contribution of leave to work-life balance and productivity (M = 3.81) and job satisfaction (M = 3.78). However, parental leave adequacy was rated comparatively low (M = 2.87), while policy clarity and communication were moderate (M = 3.34). Thus, leave policy was more developed than flexible working and EAPs, but implementation gaps remained.

Employee performance recorded a relatively high composite mean of 3.86 (SD = 0.78). Commitment to achieving organizational goals (M = 4.05, SD = 0.83), completing assigned tasks within expected timelines (M = 3.95, SD = 0.86) and delivering services efficiently and professionally (M = 3.91, SD = 0.85). Contribution to efficient service delivery recorded M = 3.88 (SD = 0.88), while productivity improvement over the previous year had the lowest mean (M = 3.68, SD = 0.96). Overall, respondents therefore reported relatively high levels of task completion, commitment, service efficiency and professionalism.

4.3 Direct Effects Regression Results

Multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the simultaneous direct effects of work-family priorities conflict, flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs and leave policy on employee performance.

The regression model produced $R = 0.724$, $R^2 = 0.524$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.518$, with a standard error of the estimate of 0.342. Thus, the four work-life balance practices collectively explained 52.4% of the variance in employee performance. The adjusted R^2 of 51.8% indicates that the model retained substantial explanatory power after accounting for the number of predictors.

The ANOVA results showed that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(4,301) = 82.734$, $p < 0.001$. The null proposition that all regression coefficients were simultaneously zero was therefore rejected. The explained sum of squares was 38.742 compared with a residual sum of squares of 35.258, indicating that a substantial proportion of the observed variation in employee performance was accounted for by the predictors.

Table 1. Direct effects of work-life balance practices on employee performance

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p-value	95% CI for B
Constant	1.284	0.156	—	8.231	<0.001	0.977–1.591
Work-family priorities conflict	-0.312	0.048	-0.328	-6.500	<0.001	-0.406–0.218
Flexible work arrangements	0.284	0.052	0.297	5.462	<0.001	0.182–0.386
Employee assistance programs	0.156	0.047	0.168	3.319	0.001	0.064–0.248
Leave policy	0.218	0.044	0.234	4.955	<0.001	0.132–0.304

The results show that work-family priorities conflict had a statistically significant negative effect on employee performance ($B = -0.312$, $\beta = -0.328$, $p < 0.001$). Holding the other predictors constant, a one-unit increase in work-family priorities conflict was associated with a 0.312-unit decrease in employee performance. The standardized coefficient identifies work-family priorities conflict as the strongest predictor in the model. The confidence interval excluded zero, further supporting the statistical significance of the relationship.

Flexible work arrangements had a significant positive effect on employee performance ($B = 0.284$, $\beta = 0.297$, $p < 0.001$). A one-unit increase in flexible work arrangements was associated with a 0.284-unit increase in employee performance, holding the other predictors constant. Flexible work arrangements were the second strongest predictor, suggesting substantial performance potential despite their low availability.

Employee assistance programs also had a significant positive effect ($B = 0.156$, $\beta = 0.168$, $p = 0.001$). Although statistically significant, EAPs had the smallest standardized coefficient among the four predictors. This result suggests that their potential contribution was constrained by low availability, limited awareness, weak utilization and implementation gaps.

Leave policy had a significant positive effect on employee performance ($B = 0.218$, $\beta = 0.234$, $p < 0.001$). Improvements in the adequacy, clarity and accessibility of leave policy were associated with higher employee performance. Leave policy was the third strongest predictor.

The ranking of the standardized coefficients was therefore: work-family priorities conflict ($\beta = -0.328$), flexible work arrangements ($\beta = 0.297$), leave policy ($\beta = 0.234$), and employee assistance programs ($\beta = 0.168$). All four null hypotheses were rejected.

4.4 Qualitative Findings for the Direct Relationships

The nine key informant interviews provided contextual explanations for the quantitative findings. Three broad patterns emerged. First, respondents attributed high work-family conflict to heavy workloads, unclear roles and inadequate support during family emergencies. Second, implementation of flexible work arrangements was constrained by bureaucratic resistance, inadequate technological infrastructure and concerns regarding accountability. These findings helped explain why flexible work arrangements were rated relatively low despite their strong positive relationship with performance.

Third, EAP utilization was constrained by limited awareness, inadequate funding and stigma surrounding counselling. This contextual evidence was consistent with the low EAP composite mean of 2.43. Limited employee involvement in decision-making remained a concern.

The mixed-methods findings were therefore largely convergent. Quantitatively, work-family conflict had a high mean and a negative relationship with performance ($M = 3.85$; $\beta = -0.328$), while qualitative evidence identified heavy workloads, role ambiguity and limited family-emergency support as contributing conditions. Flexible work arrangements showed a positive relationship with performance ($\beta = 0.297$) despite relatively limited availability ($M = 2.61$), with interviews identifying bureaucratic resistance and technological constraints as key implementation barriers. EAPs had the lowest availability rating ($M = 2.43$) and weakest positive direct effect ($\beta = 0.168$), with interviews highlighting awareness, funding and stigma challenges. Leave policy was moderately rated ($M = 3.38$) and positively related to performance ($\beta = 0.234$), while qualitative evidence identified parental-leave gaps and bureaucratic approval delays.

Overall, the results demonstrate that work-life balance practices were significant predictors of employee performance in the selected county governments, with work-

family priorities conflict representing the most substantial negative predictor.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Work-Family Priorities Conflict and Employee Performance

The investigation into the relationship between work-family priorities conflict and employee performance recorded a high composite mean of 3.85, while regression analysis showed a significant negative direct effect, with employee performance ($\beta = -0.328$, $p < 0.001$). Work-family priorities conflict was also the strongest predictor of performance among the variables examined. In practical terms, employees who experience greater difficulty reconciling work responsibilities with family and personal obligations are less likely to sustain high levels of performance.

The finding is consistent with previous empirical evidence. Mahmood et al. (2025), Hetrick, Haynes and Clark (2023), Tchouchu, Bigool and Tchouchu (2025), and Agunda, Were and Mboya (2024) similarly report adverse associations between work-family conflict and employee performance. The finding also extends evidence from the Kenyan public-sector context, including Chebet and Awino (2023), by demonstrating that the problem remains significant within county governments in the North Rift.

The result is particularly important because the descriptive findings indicate that conflict was not simply an abstract perception. Respondents reported frequently sacrificing personal and family time to meet work deadlines ($M = 4.11$), while work schedules frequently interfered with family responsibilities ($M = 4.02$). This pattern is consistent with Role Theory, which explains that competing expectations associated with multiple roles can generate strain and reduce the resources available for effective performance. It also supports Work-Family Border Theory, which suggests that rigid boundaries between work and family can increase conflict when employees have limited capacity to move between the two domains.

The qualitative findings add an important institutional explanation. Key informants identified heavy workloads, unclear job roles and inadequate support during family emergencies as major sources of conflict. Thus, the results suggest that work-family conflict should not be treated solely as an individual employee's inability to manage competing responsibilities. It is also an organizational design issue. Where staffing pressures, rigid schedules and demanding workloads persist, individual coping strategies may have limited effect. The significance of this finding for county governments is therefore that improving performance may require reducing unnecessary sources of role conflict rather than relying exclusively on conventional performance-management mechanisms.

5.2 Flexible Work Arrangements and Employee Performance

The analysis underscores the crucial role of flexible work arrangements in influencing employee performance, showing a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.297$, $p < 0.001$), making flexible work arrangements the second strongest predictor of performance. Yet the descriptive results present an important paradox: flexible work arrangements were not widely available, with a composite mean of only 2.61.

This combination of low availability and relatively strong positive effect is substantively significant. It suggests that flexibility represents an underutilized organizational resource rather than an ineffective practice. Employees who had access to flexible working arrangements reported better performance, even though opportunities for remote work, flextime and compressed schedules remained limited. The qualitative evidence explains this gap through bureaucratic resistance, inadequate technological infrastructure and concerns about accountability.

The finding supports Social Exchange Theory because flexibility can be interpreted as an organizational resource that signals trust, consideration and support. Employees

who perceive that their employer accommodates legitimate personal needs may reciprocate through greater commitment and effort. It also reinforces the logic of Work-Family Border Theory: flexible arrangements can make the boundary between work and family more permeable and manageable, thereby reducing the disruption caused by competing roles.

The results consequently challenge the assumption that performance in county government necessarily requires physical presence under rigid schedules. Rather, the findings suggest that performance can be improved when flexibility is accompanied by appropriate accountability mechanisms and supportive supervision. The practical significance is therefore not that all county employees should work remotely, but that counties should identify roles for which flextime, hybrid work or other forms of flexibility can be introduced without compromising service delivery.

5.3 Employee Assistance Programs and Employee Performance

The third research question examined the effect of employee assistance programs on employee performance. EAPs had a significant positive relationship with performance ($\beta = 0.168$, $p = 0.001$), although their effect was weaker than those of work-family conflict, flexible work arrangements and leave policy. At the same time, EAPs had the lowest availability rating among the work-life balance practices ($M = 2.43$).

This combination suggests that the relatively modest statistical effect should not be interpreted as evidence that EAPs are unimportant. Rather, the findings indicate that their potential is constrained by limited implementation. Respondents reported weaknesses in counselling, stress management, financial advice, mental health support and awareness of available services. Qualitative evidence similarly identified inadequate funding, limited awareness, stigma and bureaucratic barriers to utilization.

The finding is broadly consistent with previous research showing that EAPs can improve employee well-being and work outcomes, but that utilization and effectiveness depend substantially on accessibility and employee confidence in the system. The implication is that the presence of an EAP on paper does not necessarily constitute meaningful organizational support. Employees must know about the service, trust its confidentiality and be able to access it without unnecessary exposure or administrative barriers.

One plausible interpretation, supported by the study's qualitative evidence, is that EAPs often operate through specialized professional or institutional mechanisms rather than through direct supervisors. Indeed, confidentiality concerns may cause employees to deliberately avoid involving supervisors when accessing counselling or related services.

Thus, the results suggest that strengthening EAPs requires institutional credibility, confidentiality and professional independence more than simply encouraging supervisors to promote them.

5.4 Leave Policy and Employee Performance

The fourth research question examined the relationship between leave policy and employee performance. Leave policy had a significant positive effect on performance ($\beta = 0.234$, $p < 0.001$). Respondents generally regarded leave provisions as moderately adequate, although parental leave was rated comparatively poorly.

The finding indicates that leave should be understood not as an interruption to productivity but as a mechanism supporting sustainable performance. Opportunities for rest, recovery, illness management and family responsibilities can help employees return to work with greater capacity and concentration. This interpretation is consistent with Social Exchange Theory because fair and accessible leave provisions can strengthen employees' perception that the organization values their welfare.

However, the results also reveal a distinction between having a leave policy and being able to benefit from it. Qualitative evidence identified bureaucratic approval delays and gaps in parental leave. The effectiveness of leave policy therefore depends partly on implementation at departmental level. A formally adequate policy may have limited value if supervisors discourage its use or administrative procedures make access unnecessarily difficult.

5.6 Theoretical Implications

The findings support the complementary application of Work-Family Border Theory, Role Theory and Social Exchange Theory. Role Theory explains the strain arising from competing role demands; Work-Family Border Theory explains how organizational boundaries and flexibility influence the management of those demands; and Social Exchange Theory explains why employees may respond positively when organizations invest in their welfare.

The strong negative relationship between work-family priorities conflict and performance provides empirical support for Role Theory and Work-Family Border Theory. The positive effects of flexible work arrangements, EAPs and leave policy support the Social Exchange perspective that organizational support can generate reciprocal employee responses.

The study therefore extends the application of these theories to Kenya's devolved public sector. The findings indicate that theoretical mechanisms developed largely outside the county-government context remain useful, but their operation is shaped by bureaucratic culture, resource limitations, administrative procedures and the practical implementation of HR policies.

5.7 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings have direct implications for County Public Service Boards, county executive departments and human resource managers. First, workload assessment should be institutionalized, particularly in high-demand departments such as health,

agriculture and infrastructure. Workloads should be assessed against staffing levels, job descriptions and service-delivery requirements. Role clarity should be strengthened to reduce unnecessary overlap and role overload.

Second, flexible work arrangements should be formalized where operationally feasible. Policies should specify eligibility, approval processes, expected outputs, monitoring arrangements and accountability mechanisms. Investment in secure digital platforms and reliable communication technology is necessary where remote or hybrid work is permitted.

Third, EAPs should be strengthened through professional counselling, stress management, financial wellness services and employee-awareness campaigns. Confidentiality should be emphasized to reduce stigma. County governments should also consider preventive rather than purely crisis-oriented wellness programs.

Fourth, leave policies should be reviewed to address identified gaps, particularly parental leave adequacy, policy communication and emergency-leave procedures. Administrative delays should be reduced and approval processes made transparent and predictable. Overall, the findings suggest that employee performance should not be improved solely through performance targets and appraisal systems. Performance is also shaped by the organizational conditions within which employees are expected to achieve those targets. Work-life balance practices therefore constitute part of the institutional infrastructure of public-service performance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that work-life balance is not merely an employee-welfare concern but an important organizational performance issue within county governments. The evidence from Elgeyo Marakwet, Uasin Gishu and Nandi counties shows that unresolved work-family priorities conflict undermines employee performance, whereas flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs and effective

leave policies contribute positively to performance.

The study makes three principal contributions. First, it extends evidence on work-life balance beyond predominantly private-sector and non-African settings by focusing on county governments within Kenya's devolved public sector. Second, it demonstrates the relative importance of four work-life balance practices within a single empirical model, showing that reducing conflict and expanding supportive practices are complementary rather than competing strategies. Third, it highlights the distinction between policy availability and effective implementation, particularly for flexible work arrangements and EAPs.

For county governments, the findings imply that employee performance improvement should begin with systematic workload assessment and reduction of avoidable work-family conflict. Flexible work arrangements should be institutionalized where service requirements permit, supported by technology and clear accountability mechanisms. EAPs should be adequately funded, professionally delivered and communicated to employees, while leave policies should be clear, accessible and implemented without unnecessary delays.

The study also demonstrates the value of combining statistical evidence with contextual qualitative information. The quantitative analysis identifies the magnitude and relative strength of relationships, while the interviews explain why some practices remain underdeveloped despite their positive performance potential.

The study is cross-sectional and relies substantially on self-reported measures; therefore, the findings establish associations rather than definitive causal effects. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, objective performance indicators and comparative studies across additional counties and sectors. Nevertheless, the evidence supports a clear conclusion: work-life balance is not merely an employee welfare issue but a strategic component of

workforce effectiveness and public-service delivery in county governments.

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