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Striking Work-Life Balance: A Global Struggle

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Striking Work-Life Balance: A Global Struggle



When it comes to establishing work-life balance, it's easy to see why it's hard. If you have a supportive family, chances are your employer isn't. If your workplace has great policies in place, your own relatives may be frustratingly hands-off. In the American capitalist society, more and more women are compelled to work while still being expected to care for the family.

But the truth is that no single culture is the best when it comes to balancing work and family.

"It's important to avoid buying into the myth of the Super Woman or Super Man," says [Governors State University's](#) Professor Ujvala Rajadhyaksha. A native of India, where extended families help raise children, she had to quickly adapt when she found herself raising her son in the U.S. "I was dislocated from my family when I moved here, so that made me more willing to reach out and get the support I needed," she said.

Dr. Rajadhyaksha knows it's not unusual to think "the grass is always greener" when it comes to finding a good work-life balance. An associate professor of management in the [College of Business](#) (COB), she is among a team of researchers who looked at 10 countries to see what cultural problems create the biggest hurdles in the household and workplace.

After interviewing 2,800 people in India, the United States, Australia, Canada, Indonesia, China, Taiwan, Turkey, Israel, and Spain, the scholars found that while families everywhere struggled to strike a balance, cultural expectations play a role, too.

"The fact is that in Asian — and more broadly — Eastern countries, family demands are significantly more associated with conflict," Rajadhyaksha said. "On the other hand, in Western, or Anglo, countries, work factors play a more important role.

"In the U.S., it's common to look at countries like Indonesia and Spain, where extended families help, and think, 'They must have a much easier time than I do.' But people in non-Anglo countries look west and think, 'Workers there have better rights,' "she said. "People always think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence."

There are ways to improve the situation no matter where you live, which the researchers describe in the book, "The Work-Family Interface in Global Context." Rajadhyaksha will also share them online from 2:15 to 3 p.m. Oct. 7 at [Business Week 2020](#), a virtual two-day program hosted by Governors State University's College of Business. The annual event showcases faculty and industry expertise and connects students and alumni with business leaders.

Improving work-life balance will take a multi-level approach, Rajadhyaksha said. "There should be public policy changes. And at the organizational level, companies would not only have to offer policies, they would also have to make sure HR trains supervisors so that employees use them," she said. "With families, you have to get them to accept practices like hiring paid help for cooking, child care or elder care."

At an individual level, working parents need to learn to make better use of technology and to improve their time management skills, she said.

"Whatever support there is, though, it has to be aligned. Employees can work super hard, but if all the other levels of support aren't there, it's not working."

For more information about Dr. Rajadhyaksha's presentation at Business Week 2020 or to register, [click here](#).