



# Work-Life Balance: The Expectations and Perspectives as a Female Interventional Cardiologist

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## Introduction

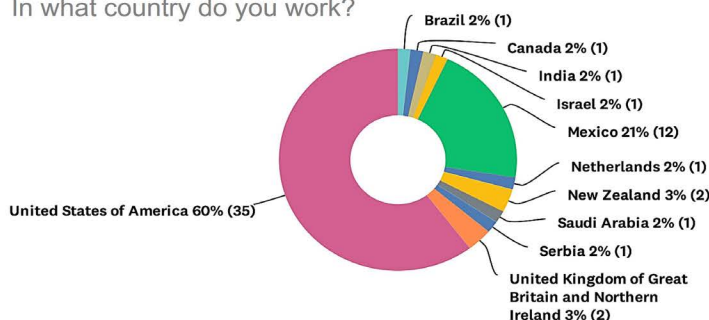
Work-life balance (WLB) refers to the harmony and interference that occurs between work and personal life. WLB can also simply be defined as the equal time of priority to personal and professional activities. This has become a primary concern to all of us wishing to have a good quality of life. A more complex term, Work-life integration (WLI) has become known in more recent years; and refers to the integration of life and work creating synergy between them. WLI works only if it is combined by "balance" in both areas, otherwise there is the concern that it would be difficult to maintain work-life boundaries.

Being women interventional cardiologists seeking career advancement we manage multifaceted roles and responsibilities, and promotion into leadership positions has been marked with increased pressure and frustrations regarding women's roles and our desire to balance our work and non-work lives.

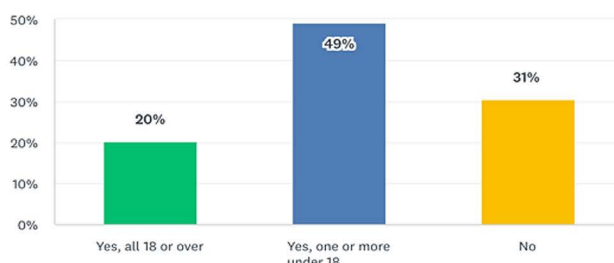
Studies over the years demonstrate the differences in WLB in physicians and especially female physicians. In serial studies by Shanafelt et. al, with the latest one in 2020 and included over 7,500 physicians, the results showed that physicians had a lower rate of satisfaction with WLI than the general US working population (43.6% vs 62.5%; OR, 0.46; 95% CI, 0.421 to 0.512; P<.001). On multivariable analysis of the 2020 data, being female and working more hours per week were independently associated with higher rates of burnout and lower degrees of satisfaction with WLI.<sup>1,2</sup>

FIGURE 1 Demographics

In what country do you work?



Do you have any children?



## Interventional Women Cardiologists in 2023 and WLB: Objective Data

We decided to understand the current rate of WLB among female interventional cardiologists and some life and work factors that may affect our perception of WLB.

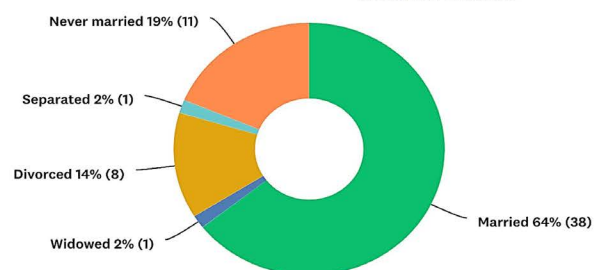
We sent a survey to female congenital interventional cardiologists around the world, participation was anonymous and voluntary. The survey was sent on March 16th, 2023, and 59 responses were collected by March 24th, 2023.

Fifty-nine female interventional cardiologists from 11 different countries completed the survey, 60% of them work in the United States. Seventy-six percent are working full time and in academic centers, 64% percent of them are married and 69% have one or more children (49% with children younger than 18 years of age, **Figure 1**).

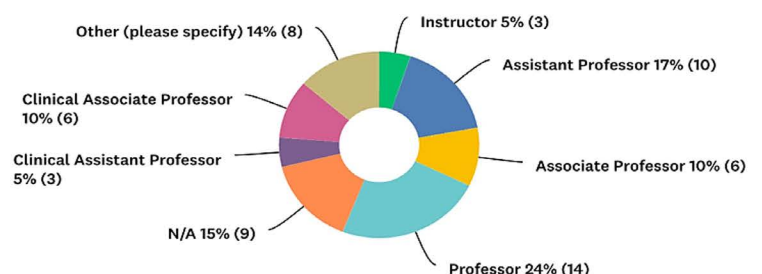
Only 44% of the interventional cardiologists that answered the survey are satisfied with their work life balance. In contrast, for 78% of them, WLB is extremely or very important. Fifty-nine percent of the women interventionists are somewhat happy or very happy with the opportunities for advancement at their organization, when multivariate analysis was performed, the more unhappy with the advancement opportunities at their organization, the more likely to be unsatisfied with the WLB (**Figure 2**).

Eighty percent of the surveyed answered that they think that they have to work harder than their male colleagues to accomplish the

Marital status



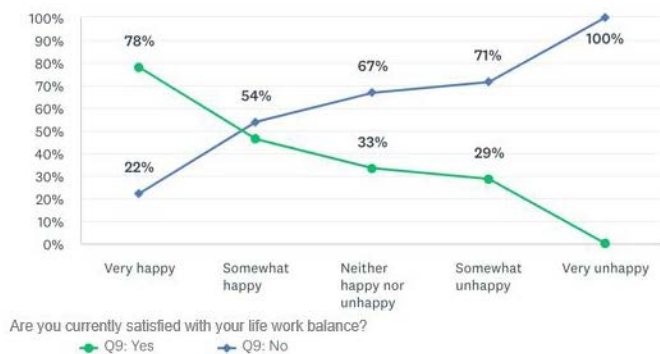
Current academic ranking





How happy or unhappy are you with your opportunities for advancement at your organization?

Answered: 59 Skipped: 0



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FIGURE 2

same work (**Figure 3**). When multivariate analysis was performed, having kids younger than 18 years old, work in academic practice, and being unhappy with the opportunities for advancement at work were associated with less likely to be satisfied with the WLB. Sixty-four percent of the surveyed said that decreasing the number of hours at work would allow them to accomplish WLB, while 52% said that learning to say “no” was critical to accomplishing this goal. All of the surveyed have hobbies that include sports, music, gardening, and art.

– Jenny E. Zablah, MD

## When and How to Say “No”

Cultivating a proper work-life balance is essential to success in both facets of your day, in that you are better able to devote yourself to each respective component when you understand and implement boundaries. A vital aspect of distinguishing your work and personal lives is being able to say no; when you recognize your own limits and make the sometimes-difficult decision to prioritize yourself when faced with favors, you can better commit yourself to the things you are already doing. No one wants to seem unfriendly or unwilling to help those around them, but you cannot properly contribute to society when you stretch yourself too thin.

Simply put, the quality of your work will deteriorate for the sake of quantity. Instead, it is important to realize what is feasibly possible for you to accomplish at a level you would be proud of, and to avoid mistreating yourself by crossing into the realm of the impossible. In fact, saying no can be as simple as—quite literally—saying no, apologizing, and explaining your rationale. Offering a less demanding

alternative for yourself can also convey your intentions, characterizing you as responsible and thoughtful while still allowing you to maintain your work-life balance. Emphasizing that the timing of the request is difficult, rather than the nature of the question or the individual posing it, is key. In this manner, saying no can facilitate the preservation of an even proportion of professional and personal tasks in your day-to-day life.

– Priti M. Patel, MD

## Keeping Our Hobbies and Our Work/Family...is There Enough Hours in the Day?

When recently interviewed about my directorship in a specialty program, I was asked “what are your hobbies?” I had to stop and truly think – what do I do as a hobby? Certainly, childrearing doesn’t seem quite hobby-like. For me, and true for many, my health had taken a backseat to nearly every activity. Patient calls? Covering for a colleague? Mystery reader at school? Balloon arch for a birthday party? All prioritized. Even if this meant staying up until late into the night to sacrifice sleep to do so. What I realized, however, is no one would make me get back to things I once loved, but rather this was my responsibility. Hobbies for me now include things that have dual meaning and purpose. To take on running and yoga as a hobby enables me to maintain my health and mental balance. Continuing to be a co-leader in Girl Scouts allows me to spend time with my eldest while camping or hiking (once two of my favorite hobbies) and sewing costumes for my children allows to me to feed the creative that once was vibrant. The musician in me is enveloped in listening to music while writing cath reports. As our children age,

time for hobbies will change but at stages where their social lives are more active than a college freshman, time is precious. That being said, time for self-care in many forms is vital to being a good physician and good mother. Without allowing some freedom for wandering thoughts or physical activity to take priority, we lose that which made us unique and without carving out that protected time to do so leaves us wishing. For me, this can only be accomplished by literally scheduling time for myself on my calendar.

– Holly D. Bauser-Heaton, MD

## Looking to the Future as a Woman Interventionist in Training - My Expectations of Work-Life Balance

As physicians and women in the field of interventional cardiology, we aim for excellence by trying to be “able, affable, and available” – with available often being the easiest to achieve.

We need to have the ability to juggle everyone’s expectations – often leaving our own self-care to last on the checklist. There is also an unspoken expectation that as a woman you must be a “diamond-in-the-rough” able to outlast the training and come out the other side with your personality and relationships intact. So - where does that leave work-life balance? Work-life balance means something different for everyone. For me, it means meeting life and work expectations and being satisfied with the division of your time - without feeling you could or should do more. There has been a societal pivot towards awareness that maintaining work-life balance means less burn out and more satisfaction. It is important; therefore, we actively seek to maintain our external identities. Finding purpose in life and work and how best to harmonize the two is an individual process but my expectation is that it can be achieved with support and a mutual acceptance that the choice of where to draw the line between work



Scan the QR code above for detailed survey results



Do you feel you need to work harder than your male colleagues to accomplish the same at work?

Answered: 59 Skipped: 0

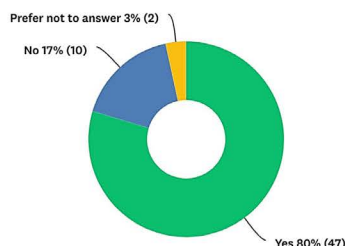


FIGURE 3

and life commitments should be that of the individual. As I am about make the transition from fellow to attending, it seems to me with more female interventionalists and more awareness that this balance matters, things are changing. It may never be perfect but enough to ensure that as women interventionalists we can not only enjoy what we do, but thrive in all aspects of our lives.

– Natalie Soszyn, MBBS

## Words of Wisdom

Don't let anyone tell you can't do it all! Because you absolutely can!!! In almost every culture, women have been the cornerstone of the family. Men went out to hunt and women did EVERYTHING else! Recent research has shown that women are better multitaskers than men.<sup>3</sup> So, believe in yourself and believe you can do it all! As a mother of three and the director of the Cath lab, this has not been easy. But at the end of the day when all is said and done, I am happy to report that I would do it all again. I will share a moment that put it all together for me. One day I was very upset about something that happened at home and was sobbing and saying maybe if I had spent more time at home this wouldn't have happened. My son who was only 11 years old at that time came to my rescue and said: "Mom, you are a great Mom! Do you think that all the stay-at-home Mom's spend all the time with their kids, no they don't. When you are home, you're home and you show us how much you care in every way you can. So, get up and be proud!" Your kids will learn from your actions. They will grow up to be strong, motivated, witty, kind, independent and accountable and you will grow up fulfilled with your achievements both at home and at work.

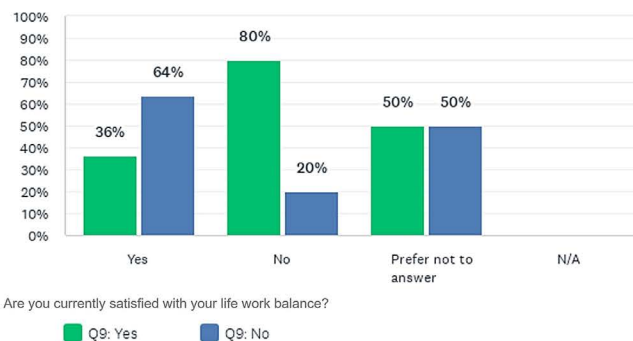
– Howaida El-Said, MD

## Dear Younger Self,

You will be happy to know that in the end, you were ultimately able to find career satisfaction, equality in pay and raise two beautiful children while continuing to work in a demanding male dominated field. This certainly came at a price personally and professionally, with lessons learned and mistakes made all along the way. You will be told that women "can't do it all," that if we choose to become mothers we will have to sacrifice either family or professional growth. Yes, you will have to make decisions and hard choices, but remember that the only person who has to be happy with the road you take is you. You will need help raising your children, but this will not mean that you will love them any less or that they will somehow feel neglected if you are not there every hour of every day. Remember that no one can actually have it all... not

## Work life balance and Equity

Do you feel you need to work harder than your male colleagues to accomplish the same at work?



even men. For they will also sacrifice family time for work, but somehow society will accept that more. Stay at home moms will criticize you for not being home, but just being home is not a guarantee that you will always be present. If you are happy and fulfilled, you will be able to help others become happy and fulfilled, including your family. When you are at work, focus on work and when you are home, focus on home. You must create boundaries and protect them fiercely. You will find this challenging.

It will be a roller coaster until they get to school and then illnesses, school pick-ups and after school activities will cause every day to feel like a mad but glorious dash. You will need to exercise patience and grace for you, your partner, and your children. Accepting that you will not make it to everything, but that your family will ALWAYS come first. Your children and spouse will know that your love is constant even if your presence is not. As your children age, you will develop amazing relationships with them and demonstrate to them that it is, in fact, possible to work and have a family. They will tell you they understand you needed help and how much they loved their nanny. You will find your people. You need to find your people. Those men, and especially women, support you, think what you do is amazing and are willing to help in times of need. You may in return, gladly provide free medical advice and endless carpools on the weekends when you are free. Always remember that home is the one place where you cannot be replaced. Remind yourself to enjoy the crazy struggle and to be present whatever you are doing.

You will spend your days at work keeping your head down and doing good work, worrying more about taking care of your patients than recognition. Understand that ultimately recognition will come. You will endure bias that you must look within yourself to overcome. Not with emotion, but with sheer facts. Remember this when you are justifying your pay increase to equal that of your male colleagues. It will be shocking to you that discrimination remains present, but you will find colleagues who support you and together you will be successful in getting equal treatment for equal work. But it will take time, patience, and persistence. You will realize you really can do whatever you set your mind to. But, you must, surround yourself with people who share your vision and want to help you get there, and then return the gift by mentoring other women to walk in your same footsteps. Accept that no one, not even you, can do it all alone, but you can still do it fantastically.

Signed,  
Your Older and Much Wiser Self

– Vivian Dimas, MD





## Acknowledgments

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## References

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