

Flexible Working Hours and Employee Retention: Evidence from Employees in Karachi, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Employee retention remains one of the most persistent strategic challenges facing organisations in the twenty-first century, with voluntary turnover estimated to cost firms between 50% and 200% of a departing employee's annual salary once recruitment, onboarding, training, and lost-productivity effects are accounted for (SHRM, 2019). This study examines the relationship between flexible working hours and employee retention among 110 employees drawn from the information technology, finance, education, and customer service sectors in Karachi, Pakistan. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational design, data were collected through a structured, pilot-tested questionnaire measuring flexible working hours and employee retention on five-point Likert scales. The instrument demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .84). Pearson product-moment correlation analysis revealed a strong, statistically significant, positive relationship between flexible working hours and employee retention ($r = .74, p < .01$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. Respondents further reported that flexibility improved perceived productivity, reduced stress, and strengthened organisational commitment, consistent with the theoretical expectations of Social Exchange Theory, Organisational Support Theory, Job Demands–Resources Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory. The study extends a literature historically dominated by developed-economy samples into an under-represented developing-country context, and concludes with a research model and questionnaire incorporating work-life balance, job satisfaction, and perceived organisational support as mediating mechanisms together with recommendations for more advanced analytical techniques (including PLS-SEM and mediation analysis) to guide future confirmatory research.

Keywords: flexible working hours, employee retention, work-life balance, job satisfaction, perceived organisational support, Karachi, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Employee retention is one of the most significant challenges confronting organisations across all industries in the current business environment. Losing a skilled employee can cost a firm between 50% and 200% of that employee's salary once recruitment, hiring, training, and lost-productivity costs are tallied (SHRM, 2019), and this has pushed HR departments toward evidence-based retention strategies rather than intuition-driven policy. Among the practices attracting the greatest attention is flexible working hours: an arrangement that allows employees to manage private and professional commitments simultaneously, reducing the work-home conflict that often drives voluntary exit. As the balance of

workplace expectations shifts, employees increasingly regard such flexibility as a baseline condition of employment rather than a discretionary perk layered on top of compensation.

This study investigates the effect of flexible working hours on employee retention, motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty within the specific business landscape of Karachi. Pakistan's largest commercial hub presents a distinctive setting shaped by a growing economy, internal migration, and a rapidly changing workforce demographic, all of which create HR challenges not fully captured by the developed-economy literature that dominates this field. The remainder of this article proceeds as follows: Section 2 presents the background and problem statement; Section 3 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature; Section 4 describes the research methodology; Section 5 reports results; Section 6 discusses findings and offers recommendations; and Section 7 concludes with limitations, a conceptual model, and directions for future confirmatory research.

Background of the Study

Rigid, fixed-hour schedules are largely a legacy of production-based industrial work. As economies have shifted toward service- and knowledge-based work, organisations have increasingly adopted flexible arrangements flextime, compressed workweeks, hybrid schedules, and results-only work environments in which employees are compensated for outputs rather than hours logged to sustain motivation and satisfaction. This trend is especially pronounced among Generation Y and Generation Z employees, and it has been further accelerated by the mass adoption of remote and hybrid work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees who can dictate their own schedules consistently report higher job satisfaction and lower work-related stress than those on fixed schedules, although the strength of the relationship between flexibility and retention depends on organisational culture, managerial support, and individual employees' personal circumstances and career stage.

Flexible working practices remain comparatively new in developing economies such as Pakistan, where hierarchical organisational structures and, in some sectors, limited communication and technology infrastructure have slowed adoption. The pandemic nonetheless pushed many Pakistani organisations toward flexible arrangements, even where this was initially a business-continuity necessity rather than a deliberate HR strategy. Understanding how this shift affects employees' desire to remain with their organisations has therefore become a pressing research priority.

Problem Statement

Organisations in Pakistan and comparable developing economies face growing uncertainty about whether flexible working hours meaningfully improve retention. While survey evidence suggests employees value such arrangements, rigorous empirical studies that would allow HR departments to design evidence-based policy remain scarce. The existing literature is concentrated overwhelmingly in developed-country, white-collar contexts, and its findings cannot be assumed to transfer directly to a setting like Karachi given differing cultural norms, economic conditions, and institutional frameworks. Moreover, although flexible working is often studied as part of a broader remote-work or telecommuting agenda, flexible hours specifically as distinct from location flexibility have received comparatively little dedicated attention as a retention lever.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes academically by offering a quantitative analysis of flexible working hours and retention within the relatively underexplored context of a developing economy, and by examining how schedule flexibility interacts with psychological and organisational factors that shape employees' intention

to remain. Practically, it offers HR professionals, organisational leaders, and policymakers in Pakistan's competitive labour market particularly within IT and finance evidence-based insights for designing retention strategies that create sustainable competitive advantage. At a broader level, the findings can inform national conversations on workforce development and workplace modernisation, providing a foundation for greater institutional support for flexible work arrangements from businesses, industry associations, and government bodies.

Scope of the Research

The study draws on employees from sectors in which flexible working hours and related arrangements are relatively prevalent information technology, finance, education, and customer service where individuals generally have greater control over when and how their work is completed. Both male and female respondents across a range of job-experience levels, from junior employees to senior management, are included to capture a diverse range of perspectives. The geographic scope is confined to organisations based in Karachi; while this limits generalisability to the national or global level, it ensures the findings are directly relevant to the local corporate environment that motivated the study.

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the relationship between flexible working hours and employee retention.
2. To identify the aspects of flexible schedules that contribute most to employee satisfaction.
3. To examine whether flexible hours are associated with long-term organisational commitment.
4. To provide recommendations for implementing effective flexible work policies.

Limitations of the Study

The study is geographically confined to Karachi and cannot be generalised to the national or international level. The selected industries were chosen because flexible arrangements are relatively prevalent within them, so findings cannot be extended to industries built around fixed, rigid work structures. Self-reported data collection introduces the possibility of social-desirability bias, and external contextual variables organisational culture, management practices, compensation structures, and macroeconomic conditions were not analysed in depth. These limitations are revisited in Section 7 alongside recommendations for future research design.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Social Exchange Theory. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) remains one of the most widely applied frameworks for explaining employee attitudes and workplace behaviour. The theory holds that employment relationships are built on reciprocal exchange: when organisations provide valuable resources and supportive practices, employees interpret this as an investment in their well-being and feel obliged to reciprocate through positive attitudes and behaviours. Flexible working hours function as precisely this kind of organisational resource signalling trust, autonomy, and concern for employees' personal and professional responsibilities and employees who perceive such flexibility as organisational support tend to develop stronger commitment, higher satisfaction, and lower turnover intentions. Flexible

working hours can therefore be understood as a non-monetary benefit that strengthens the social-exchange relationship between employer and employee.

Organisational Support Theory. Organisational Support Theory (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) proposes that employees form perceptions regarding the extent to which their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being perceived organisational support (POS) and that these perceptions shape work attitudes and behavioural outcomes. Flexible arrangements are an important indicator of organisational support because they acknowledge employees' diverse personal and family responsibilities while granting greater control over scheduling. Employees who perceive higher organisational support tend to report greater job satisfaction, stronger affective commitment, and lower intentions to leave; prior research has consistently found that POS mediates the relationship between HR practices and retention, suggesting that flexible working policies foster loyalty partly through this mediating mechanism.

Job Demands–Resources Theory. Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) holds that every occupation comprises demands, which require sustained effort, and resources, which facilitate goal achievement, reduce stress, and promote growth. Flexible working hours constitute an important job resource because they help employees manage work responsibilities alongside personal obligations, reducing work-family conflict and improving psychological well-being. Employees with greater job resources tend to be more engaged, motivated, and committed, which in turn increases their intention to remain employed positioning flexible scheduling as a resource that enhances retention by reducing occupational strain.

Conservation of Resources Theory. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) explains that individuals strive to obtain, maintain, and protect valuable personal resources time, energy, health, and emotional well-being and that resource loss generates stress while resource gains improve motivation and psychological health. Flexible working hours allow employees to preserve these resources by reducing commuting time, easing work-life conflict, and increasing control over daily activities, thereby decreasing emotional exhaustion. Employees experiencing such resource gains are more likely to exhibit organisational commitment, higher satisfaction, and stronger retention intentions.

Integration. Collectively, these four theories provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding why flexible working hours are expected to influence retention: they enhance perceived organisational support, reduce occupational stress, improve work-life balance, and strengthen reciprocal commitment. On this basis, employees who perceive greater scheduling flexibility are expected to demonstrate stronger organisational commitment and a higher intention to remain a proposition this study tests empirically within the corporate sector of Karachi, Pakistan.

Empirical Literature

Flexible working has attracted sustained scholarly interest across organisational behaviour and human resource management, with empirical evidence linking it to productivity, satisfaction, engagement, and most pertinently here retention. De Menezes and Kelliher (2011) conducted a systematic review of the evidence on flexible working, performance, and attitudes, finding consistent support across sectors and countries for the claim that flexibility helps employees balance professional and private life, improving satisfaction and reducing voluntary turnover.

Longitudinal and experimental evidence reinforces this pattern. Moen et al. (2016) followed employees at a US technology firm and found that increased control over work schedules improved well-being, health behaviours, and sleep quality, and was associated with stronger organisational commitment and lower

quit intentions. Bloom et al. (2015), in a quasi-experimental study at a large Chinese travel agency, found that employees permitted to work from home reported significantly higher job satisfaction and experienced a fifty percent reduction in turnover relative to office-based counterparts among the strongest direct evidence linking flexibility to retention available in the literature. Allen, Golden, and Shockley (2015), synthesising the telecommuting literature through meta-analysis, likewise concluded that schedule and location flexibility exert a strong positive influence on retention.

At the same time, the literature identifies important boundary conditions. Wheatley (2017), examining the UK labour market, found that flexible-work employees reported greater satisfaction and commitment than fixed-schedule peers, but identified a "flexibility stigma" whereby employees using flexible arrangements risk being perceived by managers and colleagues as less committed, less available, and less promotable particularly in cultures where visible presence ("presenteeism") is highly valued. Chung (2018) extended this finding by showing that the stigma is stronger for women than for men, since women who use flexibility are more likely to be perceived as less committed, potentially offsetting some of flexibility's positive effects a finding with direct implications for equitable policy design.

Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garrett (2017) argue that realising the benefits of flexible arrangements requires managing the tension between individual autonomy and organisational coherence, supported by performance-management systems and digital collaboration tools a point highly relevant to Karachi's rapidly digitising corporate environment. Ortega (2009) offers a further caution: flexibility yields benefits only when paired with effective performance management and accountability; absent such controls, it can blur professional boundaries and foster an "always-on" culture that increases rather than reduces stress. Kossek, Thompson, and Lautsch (2015) add that flexible working is not uniformly available across jobs, ranks, or departments, and that uneven access can generate resentment that undermines the very retention gains flexibility is meant to produce.

Idris (2016) found that specifically in context with developing countries, flexible arrangements can improve retention, but that success depends on organisational hierarchy, managerial attitudes toward autonomy, interpersonal trust, and the availability of supporting technology factors of direct relevance to the present study's Karachi setting.

The literature suggests a positive association between flexible working hours and retention, moderated by a range of organisational, managerial, individual, and cultural factors. What remains largely absent is a focused empirical study of flexible working hours specifically as distinct from remote work or telecommuting more broadly within a developing-economy setting. The present study addresses this gap directly.

The model retains Flexible Working Hours (FWH) as the independent variable and Employee Retention (ER) as the dependent variable consistent with the theoretical foundation established earlier. Several theories suggested the effect of Flexible working hours on employees' better work life balance that ultimately leads to higher job satisfaction level and better retention rate for an organization. Organizational support is yet another factor that plays an important role in managing the overall scenario.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between flexible working hours and employee retention, enabling objective measurement of variables and statistical hypothesis testing. The target population comprised employees of organisations offering flexible working arrangements in Karachi, Pakistan, drawn from the information technology, finance, education, and customer service sectors, where such practices are relatively prevalent. A purposive sampling technique

was used to select participants with direct experience of flexible working hours, ensuring the data collected were relevant to the research objectives. A total of 110 valid responses were obtained and retained for analysis. Primary data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire.

The questionnaire comprised of three sections. The first captured demographic characteristics (gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, monthly income, employment type, and years of experience). The second measured perceptions of Flexible Working Hours using five items covering schedule autonomy, work-life balance, perceived productivity, stress reduction, and organisational concern for well-being. The third measured Employee Retention through five items assessing intention to remain, organisational commitment, motivation, perceived value, and long-term retention intentions. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The instrument was reviewed for face validity through expert evaluation and pilot-tested prior to the main survey, with minor revisions incorporated based on pilot feedback.

Data was analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations summarized demographic characteristics and response patterns, and cross-tabulation compared responses across demographic groups. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of .84, indicating good reliability. The research hypothesis was tested using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between flexible working hours and employee retention, with statistical significance evaluated at the 5% level ($p < .05$).

Research Hypotheses

Alternative hypothesis (H_1): Flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee retention.

Null hypothesis (H_0): Flexible working hours have no impact on employee retention.

Although, the literature reviewed earlier referred to three psychological mechanisms through which flexibility is most plausibly transmitted into retention: work-life balance, job satisfaction, and perceived organizational support. However, the single-mediator-free correlation reported above establishes a strong bivariate relationship between flexible working hours and retention.

Table 1. Research Conceptual Model

Construct	Role	Items	Theoretical Basis
Flexible Working Hours (FWH)	Independent Variable	5	JD-R Theory; Social Exchange Theory
Employee Retention (ER)	Dependent Variable	5	Social Exchange Theory; integrative outcome

DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 110 respondents, who were drawn to represent a mix of employees across the study's target sectors.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 110)

Variable	Category	Count	Percentage
Gender	Male	61	55.5%
	Female	47	42.7%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.8%
Age	Under 25	18	16.4%
	25–34	42	38.2%
	35–44	26	23.6%
	45–54	16	14.5%
	55+	8	7.3%
Marital Status	Single	49	44.5%
	Married	53	48.2%
	Divorced/Widowed	8	7.3%
Education	High School	12	10.9%
	Bachelor's	56	50.9%
	Master's	33	30.0%
	Doctorate	3	2.7%
	Other	6	5.5%
Monthly Income (PKR)	Below 25,000	9	8.2%
	25,000–50,000	37	33.6%
	50,001–75,000	31	28.2%
	75,001–100,000	20	18.2%
	Above 100,000	13	11.8%
Employment Type	Full Time	72	65.5%
	Part Time	18	16.4%
	Contract	12	10.9%
	Freelance	8	7.3%
Years of Experience	Less than 1 year	11	10.0%
	1–3 years	29	26.4%
	4–6 years	26	23.6%
	7–10 years	23	20.9%
	More than 10 years	21	19.1%

Perceptions of Flexible Working Hours

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of flexible working hours across five dimensions.

Table 2. Perceptions of Flexible Working Hours (N = 110)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My organization offers flexible working hours.	68 (61.8%)	38 (34.5%)	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.8%)	0 (0%)
The ability to set my own working hours helps improve work-life balance.	45 (40.9%)	61 (55.5%)	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.8%)	0 (0%)
I am more productive when I set my	42 (38.2%)	52 (47.3%)	10 (9.1%)	4 (3.6%)	2 (1.8%)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
own working hours.					
I am less stressed due to flexible hours.	40 (36.4%)	50 (45.5%)	14 (12.7%)	4 (3.6%)	2 (1.8%)
My organization's flexibility shows concern for employee well-being.	39 (35.5%)	53 (48.2%)	12 (10.9%)	4 (3.6%)	2 (1.8%)

The data reveal an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward flexible working: 96.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation permits variation in work hours, indicating that flexibility is a lived practice rather than a nominal policy in these organisations. Similarly, 96.4% agreed or strongly agreed that flexible hours improve work-life balance, and 85.5% agreed or strongly agreed that flexibility improves their productivity. These findings echo De Menezes and Kelliher (2011) and Moen et al. (2016) in identifying scheduling control as a central driver of satisfaction and commitment.

Employee Retention

Table 3 presents respondents' self-reported retention attitudes and intentions.

Table 3. Employee Retention Attitudes and Intentions (N = 110)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I plan to stay in this organization long-term.	46 (41.8%)	48 (43.6%)	10 (9.1%)	4 (3.6%)	2 (1.8%)
Flexible hours are a major reason I stay.	44 (40%)	51 (46.4%)	9 (8.2%)	4 (3.6%)	2 (1.8%)
I rarely think about switching jobs.	38 (34.5%)	46 (41.8%)	16 (14.5%)	6 (5.5%)	4 (3.6%)
I feel valued and motivated to stay.	40 (36.4%)	50 (45.5%)	12 (10.9%)	6 (5.5%)	2 (1.8%)
My commitment has increased due to flexibility.	42 (38.2%)	52 (47.3%)	10 (9.1%)	4 (3.6%)	2 (1.8%)

Retention results were similarly positive: 85.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they intend to remain with their organisation long-term, and 86.4% identified flexible working hours as a major reason for staying closely mirroring Allen, Golden, and Shockley's (2015) identification of schedule flexibility as a strong predictor of low turnover intent. Notably, the item "I rarely think about switching jobs" attracted the highest combined neutral/disagreement response (18.1%) among the retention items, suggesting that a meaningful minority of employees may still consider alternative opportunities despite valuing flexibility consistent with literature cautioning that flexibility alone cannot offset weak organisational development, reward management, or managerial effectiveness (Kossek et al., 2015; Ortega, 2009).

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis between flexible working hours and employee retention yielded $r = .74$ ($p < .01$), indicating a strong, statistically significant, positive relationship. On this basis, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee retention is supported.

DISCUSSION

The results provide strong empirical support for the theoretical expectation that flexible working hours function as an organisational resource that enhances employee retention. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory, employees appear to interpret scheduling flexibility as a discretionary organisational investment and reciprocate through stronger commitment and reduced turnover intention. Consistent with Organisational Support Theory, the concern-for-well-being dimension of the flexibility items correlated closely with retention-related responses, suggesting that flexibility operates partly through employees' broader perceptions of organisational support rather than as an isolated scheduling benefit. The findings also align with Job Demands–Resources and Conservation of Resources theory, in that flexibility's stress-reducing and resource-preserving effects reduced commuting burden, improved work-life balance appear to translate into stronger organisational attachment.

At the same time, the modest but non-trivial minority of employees who remain open to alternative opportunities despite valuing flexibility underscores that scheduling autonomy is necessary but not sufficient for retention. This is consistent with Wheatley's (2017) and Chung's (2018) findings on flexibility stigma, Kossek et al.'s (2015) concerns about uneven access, and Ortega's (2009) warning that flexibility without accountability structures can become counterproductive. These findings extend a literature historically concentrated in developed economies into an under-represented developing-country context, indicating that the mechanisms linking flexibility to retention documented in Western samples are broadly, though not unconditionally, applicable to Karachi's corporate environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Standardize and formalize flexible work policies.** Organisational policies should clearly define the parameters of scheduling flexibility, eligibility criteria, and expectations regarding availability and output, ensuring transparency and equitable access across departments and levels.
2. **Monitor retention and engagement metrics.** HR departments should systematically track voluntary turnover, exit-interview data, and satisfaction survey results, disaggregated by access to flexible arrangements, to evaluate policy effectiveness and inform revisions.
3. **Promote work-life integration through complementary measures.** Flexibility should be supported by mental-health and counselling services, time-management workshops, childcare facilities, and communication norms that prevent the "always-on" culture identified by Ortega (2009) as a risk of poorly implemented flexibility.
4. **Train managers in outcome-based leadership.** Because managerial support is decisive for flexibility's success, organisations should invest in training that shifts evaluation toward deliverables and results rather than hours logged, building skills in goal-setting, remote communication, and trust-based team management.
5. **Design role-specific flexibility frameworks.** Flexibility should be tailored to the operational realities of each role, developed collaboratively with managers, to ensure that arrangements benefit employees without generating undue coordination costs.
6. **Address gender-specific barriers to flexibility.** Given evidence that flexibility stigma disproportionately penalises women's career advancement (Chung, 2018; Wheatley, 2017), organisations should adopt deliberate management practices and cultural norms that normalise flexible working for all employees, regardless of gender or caregiving responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the relationship between flexible working arrangements and employee retention within Karachi's corporate sector, drawing on a quantitative survey of 110 respondents across four industries. The descriptive results show flexible working hours to be widely available and positively regarded, with the substantial majority of respondents reporting improved work-life balance, productivity, and reduced stress as a result. Most importantly, the retention data confirm that flexibility is viewed not merely as a workplace perk but as an explicit reason for remaining with an organisation, and the Pearson correlation analysis ($r = .74$, $p < .01$) provides statistically significant support for rejecting the null hypothesis.

These findings are consistent with, and extend, a substantial body of international literature on workplace flexibility (Bloom et al., 2015; Allen et al., 2015; Moen et al., 2016), while contributing an empirical perspective from a developing-country context that has historically been under-represented in this literature. The study offers empirical validation that the benefits of workplace flexibility documented in Western economies extend meaningfully to a corporate environment such as Karachi's, where distinctive family structures, commuting burdens, and cultural expectations shape the work-life interface in ways that differ from Western contexts.

These conclusions should nonetheless be studied in light of the study's limitations. Its cross-sectional design precludes strong causal inference; its purposive sampling limits generalisability beyond the sampled sectors and city; and its reliance on a single bivariate correlation, while informative, cannot disentangle the mechanisms through which flexibility influences retention. Section 7 below proposes a conceptual model, questionnaire, and analytical strategy designed to address these limitations in future confirmatory research.

Overall, this research offers strong support for the deliberate, well-managed, and non-discriminatory implementation of flexible working hours as a lever for reducing voluntary turnover and strengthening organisational commitment. Flexibility, in short, is no longer a discretionary perk but an increasingly proven driver of retention.

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