

STRENGTHENING WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR FEMALE EMPLOYEES OF SMES IN SUSTAINABLE FOOD INNOVATION FOCUSED ON LOCAL RESOURCES AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in supporting national economic growth, particularly in the food industry sector, which utilizes local resources that are globally competitive. The sustainability of food MSMEs is determined by several factors, one of which is the quality of human resources (employees), especially women. Female employees in the food MSME sector face the challenge of juggling dual roles—work and family responsibilities. One issue that is receiving increasing attention in human resource management is the implementation of work-life balance. This community service activity aims to strengthen work-life balance among female employees at Nutsafir Cookies to support sustainable local food innovation that is globally competitive. The activity was carried out through a combination of observation, interviews, and simple mentoring across the preparation, implementation, and evaluation stages. The results of the community service activity at the Nutsafir Cookies SME provided business owners and female employees with an understanding of the importance of maintaining a balance between work and family life (work-life balance). This has established the implementation of work-life balance as a key strategy for improving both employee well-being and business productivity.

Keywords: food SMEs, human resources, female employees, work-life balance, local food innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) are a strategic sector that plays a vital role in driving national economic growth, creating jobs, and promoting income equality and growth among the population (Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2008). Amid increasing competition in the global market, MSMEs are required to continuously innovate, improve human resource productivity, and foster sustainable competitiveness through effective organizational management.

The success of MSMEs is determined not only by product quality and marketing strategies but is also significantly influenced by the quality of human resources, which are the primary drivers of the organization. One issue that is receiving increasing attention in human resource management is the implementation of work-life balance (Pitaloka, 2026). Work-life balance is a state in which individuals can balance the demands of work with their personal lives, thereby enhancing psychological well-being, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work productivity. The implementation of work-life balance has a positive impact on employee performance because it reduces work-related stress, boosts motivation, and creates a healthier work environment (Angreani et al., 2025).

Female workers in the manufacturing sector often face psychological barriers (Putri & Santosa, 2025), and those in the MSME sector also face psychological barriers due to the demands of juggling

multiple roles (Kalyail & Sudirman, 2025). Difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities can trigger psychological and physical stress, which can exacerbate work-related stress among female workers (Putri & Santosa, 2025), which in turn reduces employees' work engagement (Pitaloka, 2026). When time, energy, and attention are not properly balanced between work and family responsibilities, internal tension can arise, leading to mental exhaustion, impaired concentration, and reduced productivity (Putri & Santosa, 2025). Therefore, psychological interventions and gender-responsive workplace management are urgent necessities to mitigate the risk of burnout among female workers. Women's empowerment is a strategic step toward building household food security in rural development (Setiyaningsih, 2025).

The province of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) boasts an abundance of diverse local food commodities. It holds great potential for creating product innovations through food diversification and processing to bolster the role of MSMEs (Bachmida et al., 2026). One of the leading MSMEs in NTB that consistently empowers local women to process Lombok's signature grain products is Nutsafir Cookies, operated by CV Safir Indo Raya (<https://nutsafirlombok.com/>).

This company produces cookies made from local grains such as mung beans, red beans, melinjo, coconut, and lebui, a specialty of Lombok (Company Profile Nutsafir Cookies, 2026). All products use natural ingredients without preservatives or artificial colors and have obtained Halal and BPOM certifications. Currently, the company's marketing efforts not only serve the domestic market as a signature Lombok souvenir but have also penetrated international markets through digital export platforms. Another unique aspect of Nutsafir Cookies is its commitment to women's empowerment, as the entire production workforce consists of local Lombok women (<https://nutsafirlombok.com/>). The owner of Nutsafir Cookies emphasizes the importance of business compliance, particularly Halal certification, in establishing partnerships with various business partners such as hotels and airlines. The owner ensures that all stages of production meet Halal standards, from raw materials to employees' work attire (Karso, 2025).

To date, most studies on work-life balance have focused on large corporations or the formal sector. At the same time, practical research on female workers in local-commodity-based food MSMEs remains very limited. Therefore, this community service initiative was carried out to provide tangible solutions for strengthening work-life balance among female employees at Nutsafir Cookies. Through this initiative, it is hoped that a healthy work-life balance will be achieved, productivity will increase, and the competitiveness of local food products in the international market will be strengthened.

METHODS

This International Community Service (PkM) activity employs a participatory approach that actively involves partners from the needs assessment phase through activity implementation to program evaluation. Through this approach, the service team and partners collaborate to formulate solutions tailored to the actual conditions and needs on the ground. The participatory approach is considered effective in increasing participant engagement, strengthening the learning process, and promoting the sustainability of activity outcomes (Buetti & Bourgeois, 2024).

This International Community Service (PkM) activity was carried out at the Nutsafir Cookies SME (CV Safir Indo Raya) in Mataram City, West Nusa Tenggara, with the target group being the business owner and all female employees involved in the production process. The selection of this partner was based on the business's characteristic that its entire production workforce consists of women, who thus face challenges in maintaining a balance between work demands and family life. These conditions make implementing work-life balance a key strategy for improving both employee well-being and business productivity.

The activity was carried out through a combination of observation, interviews, and simple mentoring. This approach was chosen so that the community service team could understand the

real conditions faced by the partner and provide input tailored to their needs. The activity was carried out in three stages: (1) preparation, (2) implementation, and (3) evaluation, as follows:

Preparation Phase

The preparation phase began with coordination, observation, and interviews with MSME owners to gather information about the state of their businesses, workforce characteristics, and the various challenges they face. In addition, the team reviewed Nutsafir Cookies' company profile and social media to understand the company's business activities and products. This information served as the basis for developing materials and designing a mentoring program tailored to the partners' needs. Conducting a needs analysis in the early stages is crucial to ensure that the program is well-targeted and provides optimal benefits for participants (Buetti & Bourgeois, 2024).

The interviews aimed to assess working conditions, task distribution, obstacles encountered in performing work duties, and challenges in balancing work and family life. In addition, a work-life balance questionnaire based on Hayman's (2005) indicators was administered to 9 Nutsafir employees. The majority of employees had completed high school or vocational school (77.8%), junior high school (11.1%), and elementary school (11.1%).

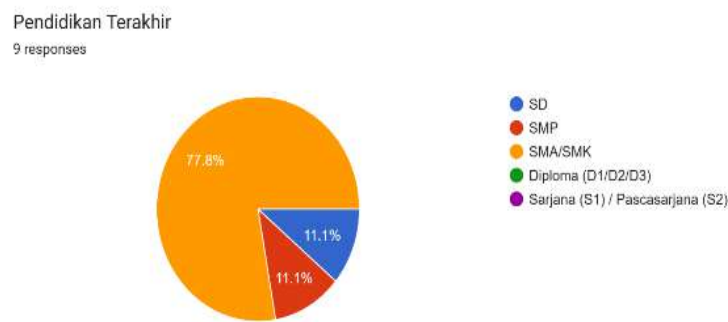


Figure 1. Employee Characteristics Based on Highest Level of Education

Nutsafir's employees include production staff, content creators, packaging staff, cashiers, and administrative staff. Most employees have been with the company for more than three years, indicating strong loyalty and good employee retention. The information gathered is used to identify partners' needs so that the content and format of the support provided can be tailored to the challenges they face.

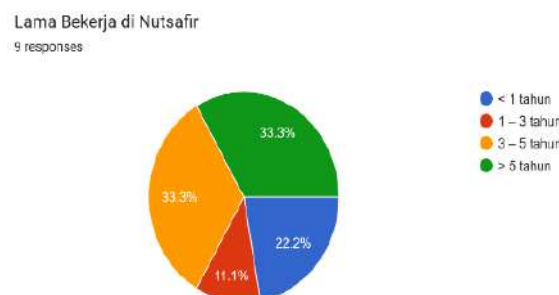


Figure 2. Employee Characteristics Based on Length of Service

Most employees feel they have a positive work experience at Nutsafir Cookies because it gives them extra motivation to enjoy their personal activities (item 13), helps them maintain a good mood from home, thereby improving work efficiency and smooth workflow (item 14), and makes them feel satisfied with their work achievements, leading to a better emotional state when they return home (item 15). The work-life balance indicator for Nutsafir employees that should be improved is their satisfaction with the time they have outside of work hours.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents' answers regarding work-life balance

Indicators	Score					Total Score	Ideal Score	Average (%)
	1	2	3	4	5			
Item 1 (Personal life suffers because of work)	0	0	4	5	0	32	45	71.11
Item 2 (Job makes personal life difficult)	0	1	1	6	1	34	45	75.56
Item 3 (Neglect personal needs because of work)	0	2	4	3	0	28	45	62.22
Item 4 (Put personal life on hold for work)	0	0	6	3	0	30	45	66.67
Item 5 (Miss personal activities because of work)	0	1	4	4	0	30	45	66.67
Item 6 (Struggle to juggle work and non-work)	0	1	3	5	0	31	45	68.89
Item 7 (Happy with the amount of time for non-work activities (reversed))	0	2	6	1	0	26	45	57.78
*Item 8 (Personal life drains me of energy for work)	1	0	2	5	1	32	45	71.11
Item 9 (Too tired to be effective at work)	0	0	3	5	1	34	45	75.56
Item 10 (My work suffers because of my personal life)	0	0	4	4	1	33	45	73.33
Item 11 (Hard to work because of personal matters)	0	0	5	3	1	32	45	71.11
Item 12 (Personal life gives me energy for my job)	0	0	3	5	1	34	45	75.56
Item 13 (Job gives me energy to pursue personal activities)	0	0	2	6	1	35	45	77.78
Item 14 (Better mood at work because of personal life)	0	0	3	4	2	35	45	77.78
Item 15 (Better mood because of my job)	0	0	2	6	1	35	45	77.78
Average Score (%)								71.26

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation Phase

The implementation phase was carried out through direct mentoring sessions with the owners of the MSMEs and several female employees of Nutsafir Cookies. The mentoring began with interviews to understand the employees' experiences and the challenges they faced in balancing their work responsibilities with their household duties. The interviews covered time management between work and family, workload during the production process, common obstacles, and the strategies they had been using to cope with work-related stress.

During the interviews, the community service team also guided discussions and the sharing of experiences. Employees were allowed to voice the problems they were experiencing, and together they sought solutions that could be implemented in accordance with workplace conditions. The mentoring was conducted in a relaxed manner so that participants felt more open to sharing their opinions and experiences.

Based on the interview results, it was found that the majority of employees are married women who bear the dual responsibility of being both workers and homemakers. Some employees are forced to take time off when their children are sick. Other family matters include parents who are ill or have passed away.

However, the measures taken by Nutsafir's owner to address these challenges include providing a flexible schedule. The monthly schedule can be adjusted to accommodate employees' circumstances. If an employee needs to take time off, they coordinate with coworkers to swap shifts. According to the business owner, employee loyalty is quite high, as employees are willing to work overtime when tasks are not yet completed.

The support team offered several simple suggestions, such as organizing tasks by priority, separating personal issues from work, making good use of break time, maintaining communication with the business owner and coworkers, and helping one another when production demands increase. The guidance also emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between work and family life.

The impact of improved work-life balance is directly reflected in enhanced operational performance and product innovation. Emotional well-being also fosters creative ideas from employees, such as suggestions for new flavor variations and improvements to the packaging of cookies made from West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) local ingredients. A better understanding of work-life balance contributes to higher-quality work performance. In addition, more conducive working conditions provide employees with opportunities to share ideas and suggestions, such as developing new flavor variations and refining the packaging design for cookies made from local commodities in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). These contributions support the company's efforts to improve product quality and foster sustainable innovation.



Figure 3. Community Service Team



Figure 4. Interview with Employees of the Nutsafir SME



Figure 5. Community Service Team, Owner, and Employees of the Nutsafir Cookies SME

Evaluation Phase

The evaluation phase is conducted after the mentoring activities are completed to determine the benefits experienced by the participants. The evaluation results show that participants have begun to understand the importance of time management, maintaining good communication in the workplace, balancing work and family life, and finding simple solutions they can apply in their daily activities. Evaluation is important because it provides insight into the program's benefits and helps in designing activities that are better aligned with partners' needs in the future (Buetti & Bourgeois, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The community service activity at the Nutsafir Cookies SME helped business owners and female employees understand the importance of maintaining a work-life balance. Employees were encouraged to start adopting simple habits such as managing their time, setting work priorities, and maintaining good communication with family and coworkers. These steps can help reduce work-related stress and support a better balance between work and personal life.

Mentoring also helps business owners understand their employees' circumstances so they can build a more comfortable, supportive, and productive work environment. The owner of the SME Nutsafir Cookies is advised to consistently promote work-life balance through flexible work schedules, proportional workloads, open communication, regular evaluations of employee well-being, and compensation for employees who demonstrate loyalty, high commitment, and strong performance. These efforts are expected to improve employee well-being, which in turn will lead to increased productivity and the sustainability of SMEs.

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