An Exploratory Study of Married Working Women, Work-Life Balance; Problems and Solutions

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Abstract: Purpose: The main purpose of this research is to explore the problems faced by married working mothers in Karachi, who are educated and have professional qualification but find it difficult to continue their jobs especially after becoming mothers. What are those factors that held them back from moving forward in their professional life? Further we have also analyzed those women who were able to continue even after becoming the mothers. In this way we have concluded that what is the work place or family solutions these women have and if all of the women provided with some of these facilities then they don't have to let go their career and professional lives.Design/Methodology/Approach: This research is qualitative in nature. The sample size of 12 has been selected which is evaluated through structured interviews. Later on the basis of interviews the emerging themes and patterns have been studied. It is based on post positivistic approach. The issues these women are facing in the current dynamics might change in future as these facilities will be taken for granted by their organizations.Findings: It has been noticed that those women who are provided with work place facilities such as Daycare facilities for their children, work from home facility (at least once a week), support from in laws and support from others (could be extended family members or neighbors). Such women seem to be more productive and they are able to enjoy a healthy work life balance as compare to those who do not have any such facilities.Originality/value: These work place solutions can be ground-breaking work for educated Pakistani women who want to pursue their career throughout (before and after getting married) and can be fruitful for the society.

Keywords: Work Life Balance, Work Life Conflict, Job Satisfaction, Job Performance

INTRODUCTION

Background

Human resource management (HRM) is about engaging, holding on to and inspiring the workers within the company. In addition to these tasks, human resource (HR) adapts on their employee's incitement by imparting them with trainings and solutions that can help them maintain a healthy work-life balance. This is the reason why Human Resource experts usually struggle hard to retain and magnify their company's efficiency. In present day, contemporary world the managers work hard to attract and sustain their employees by maintaining a Work-Life Balance. WLB is a broad term that revolves around "work" and "life", which finally ushers to the better performance within the organization as well as their employee's life.

Out of various definitions; the below mentioned seems to be the appropriate; "A rational combination of Work and Life alliance in such a way that people working in the organizations can enjoy the other aspects of life which are: personal, social and family life. (Bailyn, Drago and Kochan, 2001). It is not only about maintaining a balance between personal and professional life but it is also about setting realistic number of hours an individual can work for in order to maximize their potential. When we talk about married Working Women of a traditional society like Pakistan, where the responsibilities of a woman who's a wife, a mother, a professional increases ten folds. In such a scenario they need support from families as well as from the organizations (their work place) as well. There is no such thing as most appropriate balance as what might seems appropriate today will not be tomorrow. Life is much easier when we talk about single people but it completely changes once they get married, especially in case of married working women with children; it also varies whether they are in the early years of their career compared with when they are close to retirement. Since everyone is different from one another therefore their priorities are different, due to which the definition of work-life balance differs from person to person.

It is not easy to maintain a healthy balance between your work life and personal life. Every institute has to play their part in order to achieve this goal. Organizations can achieve this target by providing day care facilities to their employees, at the same time people living in joint families especially in a society like Pakistan can lend a helping hand to these working mothers. Many organizations play their part by providing fixed working hours after which employees have no obligation to stay back at their work place, but it is not always the case. With the emergence of technology even though after coming back home employees are expected to be available on their mobile phones 24/7. Which is not possible for working mothers as they have other responsibilities at home, this causes tension and stress for them? Working late hours to finish the unfinished work, and going home late causes repentance among the working mothers and they live with the guilt of not being able to give time to their family and children. Organizations should provide a win-win situation in order to get full returns from their employees which leads to high self-esteem.

According to Lockwood (2003), it has become a popular notion that more and more employers are paying attention to providing a Work Life Balance to their employees. The Human Resource professionals are constantly on a look out to provide optimistic and realistic solutions to keep this balance at the same time by keeping them motivated to keep their morals high and satisfied. By providing these work place trends they are able to retain the skillful and knowledgeable employees within the organizations. Work life balance can only be achieved when an employee can obtain the demands and requirements of the domain of paid work which should be in accordance with the demands from family and social life. A "balanced" life can only be obtained when responsibilities and aspirations in one realm do not have an adverse effect on activities in the other realms. Various researches have concluded that family traits are likely to have a paramount influence on perceptions of work life balance. Child care responsibility is one of the family factors that have been found significant in several studies. Expectations held by family members and friends for an individual to prioritize the family role over the work role, and take on additional family role responsibilities to the detriment of his or her job, have been linked to increased levels of work-home interference, which directly affect work life balance status of an employee. A typical family environment encouraging the members especially the female cadre to sacrifice their work performance for the sake of their family responsibilities is negatively associated with Work Life Balance.

In recent times it has been observed that long working hours and work over load is a common factor within the organizations especially in the corporate world that smudge the boundaries of home and work, therefore one affect's the other. Such an imbalance has a negative influence on an individual with respect to their work. There are certain characteristics which have been observed are responsible for employee retention especially female married working women especially working mothers are; fixed or flexible working hours, support provided by the supervisors or co-workers, and the existence of family friendly work policies which also

include day care facility for mothers with young children; are some of the factors if present in any organization are able to retain more and more female employees.

Literature Review

The concept of Work Life Balance transpired in the period of 1960's and 1970's as a research concept. By the 1980's it was observed that mostly the married women were facing the trouble of having a work-life balance, especially the mothers. The empirical researches conducted in America between the periods of 1969-1987 the number of working hours had increased so much so to "an extra month per year". These workers with increased working hours feel as if their work place has been substituted with their house and vice versa. As a result it leads to more stressful life as they have to do it at the cost of neglecting their families. (Perry Jenkins, Repetti et al. 2000).

It is notices that parent employee conflict usually arises from women as compared to men because women are still held responsible for the child care. (Mallard & Lance, 1998) Women job related well-being is negatively related with performance of family emotion work. (Wharton & Erickson, 1995).The conflicts related to home to work has a stronger relationship among women who are in routine jobs (Schieman, McBrier& Gundy, 2003). It was not very long ago when it was considered that women from low income families only go out of the house and do a job to earn money compulsorily and at the same time were supposed to fulfill their household responsibilities. Where as in United States (to compare with) it is a very general norm and common so much so that it is considered as a normal life style. Currently both the females as well as males face the problem of balancing their lives but the situation gets more difficult for married women. (Bielby, 1992).

In the light of researches conducted in the European countries it has been observed that people from all the classes of the society have joined the workforce either male or female. They both struggle hard to provide a healthy life to their children and at the same time strive hard to maintain a balance. It becomes more difficult for them to fulfill their responsibilities when the performance is being judged by the number of hours they are spending at their work place. In a longer run these employees feel exhausted and start suffering though stress. They mostly have to take their office work at home, which causes strain. It is becoming a matter of serious concern how these employees especially female working mothers can manage their ever increasing work pressures, needs to be answered. (Van der Lippe, Jagger et al. 2006). Various factor affecting the work life balance includes number of working hours, children and their age bracket, class within the society, situation of household and the type of society the live in. The European Union countries have tried to generate the policies to provide a healthy work-life balance. (Crompton and Lyonette, 2006).

The capital approach to work is gender-blind, it completely overlooks the feminized work of social reproduction conducted in the private circle which is practiced and constructed as feminine making the process difficult into work and training problematic for those who have caring responsibilities specially mothers of young children.Considering that work life and family life are two different reels has been obsolete. They both are part of the same system and fall under the boundaries which allows them to have a ductile life. If not so it leads to job retardation and job discontentment. Research has proved that these stresses leads to work-life conflict and have an overall negative impact on everything. (Voydanoff, 2004).

Responsibilities and gender with respect to Work – Life Balance

Societies have a vital role to play when we talk of Work-Life Balance. There are different cultures prevailing in different societies, they have varied policies which has an impact on both men and women workforce with respect to Work-Life Balance. Though it has been observed that in the current scenario where the pressure on job have increased, it becomes difficult for both the genders to maintain a balance, but married working women face it more than their male counterparts as their responsibilities does not end when they reach home, the traditional responsibility of childcare and other domestic chores are considered to be their jobs as well. (Van der Lippe, Jager et al. 2006). Gareis, Barnett et al. (2003) discussed that females who opt for higher

education and invest heavily in their careers growth tend to be a victim of stress and depression if they have to leave their jobs in order to fulfill their family responsibilities as compare to those women who are less career oriented. The professions that demand long working hour women have to trade off their time against family life. As compared to men women prefer working fixed number of hours when confronted with Work-Life conflict. (Reynolds 2005). These sacrifices and compromises made by women results in less career growth and compensation. (Gareis, Barnett et al. 2003).

Work - Life Balance affected by number of hours

Number of hours required to fulfill a task plays a key role in everybody's life. We have a fix number of hours that is 24 hours in a day out of which we have to a lot the time to each task in such a way that we can achieve the goals by day end without compromising on anything else. It is understood that those who give more time to their paid job are compromising on their family life and leisure. (Van der Lippe, Jager et al. 2006). Many try to overcome this conflict between their work life and family life try to overcome this gap by reducing the number the hours they work, or they opt for part time jobs which have less or fixed number of hours. This is a common trend among women who have pre-school children and have other household responsibilities. At the same time women who have working partners wish to have a reduction in their working hours. (Reynolds 2005).

Work pressure causes Work Life Conflict

Work related pressure is one of the most important factors which play its part in creating the Work-Life conflict. Employee when not able to finish the desired task at work has to take it home, this is one of the most evident sign of work life conflict. These are the employees who are mostly found complaining about maintaining a healthy Work Life Balance as their professional work creates a hindrance with their personal life as well as family and social life. They are mostly exhausted and stressed. (Allan 2007). Long working hours not only harms the corporeal but the intellectual health of employees as well. (Spurgeon, Harrington, and Cooper 1997). Working for long hours in paid jobs are directly proportional to the absences due to medical sickness (Ala-Mursula, Vahtera et al. 2006).

The notion of high performance has gained a huge importance with the passage of time because it has been considered as the most important factor for the success of the organization. On the other hand Work-life conflict which is caused due to the stress occurred as a result of work overload ultimately results in reducing the performance of the employees. Pierce, Gardner, Dunham & Cummings (1993) also viewed that extra job-task, role-ambiguity and role-conflict also impacts individual adaptability and learning power somehow causing issues in handling their work- life balance.Various researches that have been conducted to find the relationship between stress and performance have resulted in a negative correlation between the two variables. It has been observed that the employees with a greater number of job stress usually have less job satisfaction or their job performance is low. Therefor it has been taken under consideration that Work-life conflict causes a hindrance between an employees work performance as well as their ability to perform social and family responsibilities. (Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro, & Boles 2004).

Work Life Conflict and Work Family Conflict

The abstract of Work-family conflict and Work-life conflict have been used in place of each other quite often while going through literature but it has been notices that Work-life conflict is wider in dimensions than the latter. The factors held responsible for this type of conflict are "time" and "strain" based conflicts. Time based conflict arises when ones requirements from his job become so much so that the employees find it difficult to take out time to fulfill the responsibilities they have towards their family. Strain based conflict arises when performance of any employee operating within the organization is directly proportional to the problems, challenges and conflicts arise at home as well as at their work place. Not only that their productivity is also linked with their performance which not only include their work performance but also their interaction with other colleagues and individuals working together. Noor and Maad (2008) have tried to explain the conflict between Work and life. They tried to examine around 300 employees in Pakistan with respect to stress and

the employee's turnover. What they observed was that there existed a positive relationship between the work life conflict and stress. It was noticed that the employees wanted to leave the organization and were not comfortable in continuing their job at the same place due to the stress factor. It has also been observed that in such an environment there has always been a need to implement different policies and practices to overcome those stress causing factors. (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2007). Various researchers have also point it out that the companies and organizations should acquire those policies and practices which are helpful in reducing the stress casing factors. A number of research studies have shown that employees facing Work family conflict have the following in their lives; first and foremost factor is higher level of stress, their performance at work and interactions at family level reduces. This is the biggest cause of work and family life dissatisfaction. (Rotondo, Carlson, & Kincaid, 2003).

Work Life Balance and employee Satisfaction

Another researcher Eaton (2001) have noticed that those employees who claim to have a healthy work life balance are the ones who have shown improves productivity at their work place. As a result they seem to have a satisfactory performance at their work place and seem to have no or very little conflict between their work and family responsibilities. Another researcher have suggested that the policies responsible for attaining work life balance are very helpful in maximizing the employee's commitment toward work. It has also been observed that as the level of satisfaction in terms of work life balance increases it also increases the employee turnover and also results in higher levels of job performance. (Eaton, 2001). Anne (2007) has emphasized on that women who have higher work demands and work related stress, finds it difficult to maintain their work and family life and suffer through more stressful life as compared to their male counterpart. Another researcher has point it this way that women experienced more work life conflict than the male members of the society as they have dual roles to play in the house as well as at their work place (Grzywacz et al., 2007) which in a longer run affects their health.

Research Methodology

Research Design:

The very nature of this research is qualitative, which is helpful for the researcher to gain the deeper understanding of participants lived experience (Goulding, 2005). Not much data is available (in the context of Pakistani Organizations) as not much work has been done in Pakistan with respect to Work-Life Balance therefore emphasis has been given to secondary data collection. A deliberate sample of 12 women was selected for this study, who are educated with at least master's degree (especially married women) and have children. The selected sample was a purposive choice consisting of working mothers either in the corporate or non-corporate sector of Pakistan.

Propositions

There are three propositions of the study.

- First is that as more and more females are gaining the professional education they want to pursue their career in their desired field where it is their right to enjoy a healthy Work-Life balance.
- Secondly, as they are married and have children they require some cooperation from the organization they are working at in terms of flexible working hour, some sort of day care facility where they can bring their children. Also it can be beneficial if they will be given a leverage to work from home at least once or twice a week.
- Thirdly, they do require some support from their family (as in Pakistan people prefer living in joint families). After getting married women are expected to be responsible for everything in the house irrespective of either they are working or not working. Responsibility of house hold chores should be equally distributed among all the family members.

Procedure

Following is the process developed for this study:

- After going through various topics this specific topic became the area of interest. Keeping in view the various types of policies and practices which are taken under consideration in order to provide Work Life Balance especially to the married female employees.
- After finalizing the topic the downloading of research articles took place through the renowned databases like Jstor, Emerald, Elsevier, Taylor & Francis and lot more on the topics similar to my research topic.
- In the next step structured interviews took place. For which a total of 12 females were selected 6 from the corporate sector and 6 from the non-corporate sector.
- Finally the analysis is conducted in which various themes were generated on the basis of emerging patterns.

Population:

The population criteria are selective and hold the following attributes;

- Married Working Women (with children).
- They are educated and qualified with at least master's degree.
- They are currently employed in either the corporate or non-corporate sector in Karachi.

Sample and sampling design:

A stratified random sample has been taken from each group as the population is divided into two subgroups namely corporate and non-corporate sector. At the end of the survey the information has been gathered from a total of 12 employees.

Measurements and Instruments:

Secondary data has been gathered through semi structured interviews. Which is evaluated on the basis of number of hours, support from the supervisors, day care facility, transportation facility, work from home etc.

Ethical Considerations

- Ethical issues are one of the major aspects which should be taken under consideration while conducting out any research.
- In case of secondary data some participants were not happy in providing their names so a pseudonym has been used.
- Personals political orientations or opinions will not be misused in anyway. It will be kept confidential.
- In addition, it should be kept confidential in order to ensure trust between both the parties.
- The methods and techniques employed should be appropriate.
- Researcher's views should be kept aside at least for the research period.

Results

The demographic profile shows that half of the women of the population sample belong to the non-corporate sector and the other half belong to the corporate sector. Codes have been generated in order to keep the identity confidential. All of them are married and have children. Majority of the participants of the sample have obligations in terms of senior dependents in their family. On the basis of interviews conducted it has been observed that all the females who were interviewed from the non-corporate sector were qualified in the field of their passion, some of them were even working in their desired field such as banks and other FMCGs but they all had to leave their jobs after becoming mothers as they had no support either from their in laws or there was no arrangements from their work place such as Day care facility. Whereas on the other hand it was observed that those who were able to continue their jobs as in case of Corporate Women were the ones who

had some sort of support either from their in laws, or they had Day care facility or there was some support from others such as their mothers.

Table 1: Demographic profile

S.no	Name	Qualification	Current or most recent job	Marital status	Household composition
Non-corporate Sector					
1	NCW1	Doctor	School Teacher	Married	3 children
2	NCW2	MBA	School Teacher	Married	3 children
3	NCW3	MSc	School Teacher	Married	2 children
4	NCW4	MA	School Teacher	Married	3 children
5	NCW5	MSc	School Teacher	Married	2 children
6	NCW6	MBA	School Teacher	Married	1 child
Corporate Sector					
7	CW1	MA	Manager	Married	2 children
8	CW2	MBA	Director	Married	2 children
9	CW3	MBA	Banker	Married	2 children
10	CW4	CA	Director	Married	1 child
11	CW5	ACCA	Manager	Married	1 child
12	CW6	MBA	Manager	Married	1 child

(NCW= Non-Corporate Women; CW= Corporate Women)

Findings

The results that are gathered through extensive interviews have grouped into various themes to discuss the research questions.

Table 2: Themes

Research Questions	Support from Literature	Themes	Emerging themes
How difficult do you find it to maintain a healthy work-life balance?	(Grzywacz et al., 2007)	As said by NCW1; I had to work very hard to meet the expectations of my in-laws.	In Pakistani society women needs support from their husbands as well as his parents.
If provided with flexible working hours provide a healthy balance to these women?	(Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2007) (Reynolds 2005)	When given the option of working from home I found it easier to continue my job as a banker. (CW3)	
Does alternate jobs with less working hours give you a satisfaction?	Anne (2007) (Allen et al., 2000; Rotondo, Carlson, & Kincaid, 2003).	Instead of sitting home and do nothing it's better to opt for teaching in a school.(NCW6)	

Formulating work life balance

In the light of the interviews conducted it showed that each participant understood and conceptualized work-life balance as a wish to acquire a comprehensive quality of life. It also varied among corporate and non-corporate women. Mostly among Non-Corporate women it was noticed that their family responsibilities, life after marriage and especially after children posed a different set of challenges. As one of them said

I had to work very hard to meet the expectations of my in-laws. (NCW1)

This above mentioned comment connects with the primeval cultural values of Pakistan. A society where the primary responsibility of a girl is to look after her husband and his family. Therefore it becomes really difficult for the married women to find a satisfactory balance between job and family responsibilities. Majority of the women who were able to continue their jobs in the Corporate Sector were the ones who reported that their spouse and family were being very cooperative in maintain a healthy work-life balance. As one of them shared her views as:

My husband has been very supportive and my mother has a pivotal role to play in my career as my mother looks after my children after coming back from the school and I don't have to worry about them, and even if I work 8 hours a day I can maintain a healthy work life balance.(CW3)

Another put it this way;
A healthy work-life balance is a must in life. If you do not have it you are never able to do justice to either to your work or to your personal life and family. (CW4)

She has connected the phrase "**healthy work life balance**" with the concept of "**success**" in professional as well as personal life. It is also quite clear from the above excerpt that these women are very much clear and aware of the benefits of healthy work life balance. At the same time majority of them agreed that time commitment towards their family is of primary importance. Whereas the combination of socio-cultural family values are equally important in defining work-life balance.

Family responsibility and flexible working hours:
One of the common factor that has been observed among all the participants of the Non-Corporate Sector, of which majority are school teachers, and also among some Corporate Sector Women as well was that after becoming a mother it was difficult for them to work full time and they were opting for flexible working hours.

After having my second child it had become very difficult for me to manage responsibilities between my work and children. When I discussed it with my boss he allowed me to work from home at least once or twice a week. (CW2)

Another one put it this way;
After having my second child when I resumed work, my manager never asked me to sit late hours although I am a Banker and in banking sometimes you have to do late sittings especially when it's time for closing but they never encouraged me to sit late. (CW3)

Whereas; at the same time another participant said;
After having my first born I had to reconsider continuing my job (as a banker) as there was no Day Care or flexible working hours facility at my work place. Therefore after coming back from my maternity leave (which is just 40 working days in Pakistan) I had to resign. (NCW2)

Alternate job options and work satisfaction:
In a traditional society like Pakistan the best place and job for a married woman is considered as her home and taking care of the house and children as there is very little or no support from the in laws and even from husband for their wife. Their career is of no importance to them. In such cases mostly women either end up becoming house wives which keeps on triggering them as after all this is not what they wanted from life. Or once their children started going to school they have also opted to teach; either in the same school or in

another one, but when questioned that; Are you satisfied with your job? They all more or less said the same thing that they are not happy with their jobs but something is better than nothing. Another one said;

Instead of living with the feeling of being wasted at home, it is better to teach at least my children and I come and go together. They are in front of my eyes all the time. (NCW6)

Techniques and challenges of work-life balance:

Challenges

Pakistan is a patriarchal society where men are not supposed to share the household responsibilities. It is due to the fact that right from a very early childhood they see that both men and women are socialized in different ways. This differenced in socialization leads to an imbalance of gender roles within the social environment as to how society develops expectations among men and women within the society. One of the key challenges that working women face is the discouragement from their male partners as well as from their in laws especially after having their children, in order to continue their careers and maintain a healthy work life balance. As the number of responsibilities becomes ten folds after having children and that is where an extended support from the family and Organization they are working at is needed. Some women have also complained that living in the joined family has been a bigger challenge for them as they have to over stretch themselves. If the husband's family is not happy then they become least cooperative and do not let you work and all the efforts made by these women go down the drain.

Techniques

In the light of the interviews conducted it was observed that all the women have acquired some strategies to maintain a healthy balance between work and life. Majority of who have emphasized on how effectively you manage you time. As one of them expresses;

You have to take out time for your family, work and for your own self as well. It all depends upon how effectively you are able to do it. (CW4)

But all the corporate women have agreed that they would have never been able to continue their jobs if there was no support from the organization in terms of flexible working hours and day care facility or support from their families.

Discussion and Conclusion

Working women face a challenge of keeping a balance between their work and family responsibilities. On the basis of qualitative analysis following themes have emerged:
- Formulating work life balance
- Family responsibility and flexible working hours
- Techniques and challenges of work life balance

In all the themes that have emerged from the qualitative data have concluded that it is not easier for a women to pursue her career after getting married and especially after having their children. Pakistan is a society where life of women whether married or unmarried revolves around family traditions and beliefs. Morris et al. (2006, p.241). In a traditional society like Pakistan when a married mother decides to continue her professional life it is a must that she cannot just do it, there is a huge support needed from the family (in laws) as well as from the organization she is working at especially if the children are younger and even if they are school going.. As suggested by White et al. (2003, p. 358) employees should think that "amalgamation of you professional and personal life is an on-going process not a destination".

Limitations and Future Directions

This report has been conducted on a limited number of women (sample size 12). It attempts to address the gap suggested by (Shelton, 2006) that little research is available to highlight the issues of working women with respect to work life balance. The entire sample size is working in the demographics of Karachi either Corporate or Non-Corporate women both. The validity of this research is limited in terms of current times and dynamics. As it has been observed that more and more females are entering into the work force on the basis of skill set and knowledge, may be in future employers will be making such rules and policies which are more employee friendly in terms of flexible working hours and other facilities.

Abbreviations: HRM: Human resource management; HR: Human resource

Availability of data and material

The dataset used and analyzed during this study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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