Work-Family Conflict among Married Female Professionals in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT:
Over the past few decades, a significant change in the nature of employment and family patterns has been observed globally. The objective of this paper is to determine how work requirements affect family by exploring the phenomenon of the work-family conflict (WFC) and how the family demands impinge the work life – the family-work conflict (FWC) by examining the key issues leading to this critical issue. The qualitative phenomenological case study method is used, the data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews from 50 female respondents working in 12 private and public organizations of Pakistan. The findings showed a strong negative relationship between long working hours and lack of spousal support with work-family conflict. The findings recommend that an effective way to reduce the work-family conflict is through developing a positive and comfortable working environment for employees. Furthermore, the findings stressed the need to frame guidelines for the administration of work family conflict at the organizational level as it is associated to the job contentment and performance of the employees.

Keywords: *Work-family conflict, Phenomenological qualitative case study, Qualitative method, Female working employees, Job satisfaction, Pakistan*

INTRODUCTION

Work-family conflict (WFC) is a world-wide problem regardless of the countries and traditions in the whole universe. However, the extent and nature are probably different in different countries with various cultural features. WFC is transforming into a serious issue both in the emerging and developed economies. WFC is a common and persistent issue of contemporary life in many nations. Experts, researchers, academicians, and policy makers are quite alarmed about this issue and resultantly they are paying more attention to create a balance between work and family life. As an imbalance between family and work life is harmful to both for the organization and individual employee.

Work-family conflict is also defined as a phenomenon "which represents the extent to which an individual's perception participation in one role interfere his/her ability to meet the responsibilities of another role" (Frone and R, 2000). "Work family is a form of inter role conflict in which the role pressure from work and family domain are mutually incompatible in some respect, that is, participation in work (or family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (or work) role" (Bethge and Borngräber, 2015). Work-family conflict is considered as bidirectional, where family can interfere with work i.e. family-to-work conflict and work can interfere with family

i.e. work–family conflict (Matthews, Sowdy and Barnes, 2011). Family-work conflict affects the ability of a worker to fully participate in workforce (Keene and Quadagno, 2004). Particularly this sort of inter–role conflict may lead to family strain (Hong Kong By-Census, 2001). According to Frone and R, (2000) family distress, family over load, and strong family commitment foster family-to-work conflict. For the women, family and work both are very important. Women experiences work family conflict, as their integral part of work, but their experiences are not necessarily the same as they frequently have different commitments in the both work and family arenas (Bagozzi, 1978; Frone et al., 1992).

Over the past few decades, a significant change in the nature of employment and family patterns has been observed globally. Moreover, a large number of parents are participating in the workforce as dual earner or single parent families, as contrasting to traditional single parent's income and in this situation they have to balance between work and family. Consequently, they have to face conflict between work and family role. Furthermore, time pressure often leads to work family conflict and in this situation everyone deals with critical work tasks and family responsibilities and they have to rapidly balance this situation (Milkie and Peltola, 1999).

Due to an increase in the employment opportunities for women the issue of work family conflict is increased and became more considerable. It is obvious in advanced era, that it is associated with changes in productivity, house hold work, rise in higher education, and increasing trend of female participation (Gupta, Koshal and Koshal, 1998). As few organizations are offering flexible time schedule which allows female employees to merge their family responsibilities and work demands. However, long working hours and rigid time schedule definitely create problem for female employees to keep balance between work demand and family role. If there are flexible hours for female employees, they can easily meet their family expectations. Therefore, organizations having rigid work timings are also another cause of work family conflict especially for low pay earning female employees. (Milkie and Peltola, 1999). Flexible work arrangements may benefit

employer more than their employees. Flexible office hours make possible for women employees to focus on their work as well as to take care and support their family (Mellahi, 2001; Ng and Chiu, 1997).

Significance of the Study

Past research studies have shown that work-family conflict is recognized as a bi-fold complex phenomenon (Frone et al., 1992). However, the findings till date have highlighted some unresolved problems that require more investigation. Firstly, there is a need for more in-depth research studies in order to examine the main factors causing WFC that effects working women in Pakistan. Secondly, several studies have emphasized on the need for research that determines the impact of organizational support required to balance family and work demands. The objective of this study is to fill the research gap in the existing literature by examining the main antecedents of the WFC in the perspective of organizational support for work related tasks and for family demands.

In order to meet the objectives of this research, we have structured our study as follows: section 2 is a literature review; section 3 presents the methodology applied; section 4 represents the findings and results discussion; section 5 includes the conclusion, and the last section 6 have the references.

Literature Review

The past studies on WFC are complex and voluminous. It is widely recognized that inter-role conflict is more stressful problem for parents in comparison to childless coulpes (Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1990). A comprehensive review of this literature is beyond the scope of this study therefore, the study narrates few significant research studies from the past. As, recently research has focused more on investigating work-family issues due to the fluctuating nature of family and work requirements. Achour and Grine (2015) revealed that WFC caused low productivity, high absenteeism, high turnover, lower morale. The strong relationship among work attitude, job satisfaction, and conflict variables significantly influences WFC (Cohen and Liani, 2009). However, a study also revealed that organization and individual characters play a significant role

in determining the WFC and there is no relation between WFC and outcome of employees (Yardley and Markle's, 1997).

Grant, Wallace and Spurgeon, (2013) indicated different factors between e-working including access to technology, ability to work in flexible hours, and individual competences and revealed that unpleasant effects were found on women due to overworking and lack of family time. Similarly, Montgomery, Panagopolou, & Wildt, (2010) described job having more focused on display rules creates severe burnout psychosomatic complaints and they revealed that WFC partially mediated the relationship between the hidings of negative emotions and burnout. In addition to this a study also highlighted that imbalance in work role creates problems in contribution of family role causing work-family conflict (Houseknecht and Macke, 1981). On the similar lines, Greenberger and Goldberg, (2001) explained that work and family demands are equally incompatible and meeting demand to one field create difficulties to meet other domain which causes work family conflict and also found that WFC causes psychological disturbance particularly in female employees. According to Piotrkowski, (1999) psychological and structural interference related to working long hours results in lowering working stamina of employees and ultimately, they are unable to meet their family expectations. Likewise, Parasuraman and Greenhaus, (1990) confirmed that work family conflict is closely associated with life stress.

Role is associated with a set of defined activities and conflicts between role occurs when pressures from one role make it difficult to meet the demand of another role (Rotondo & Kinsaid, 2008). Impact of work family conflict among working women in Taiwan was examined and found that work family conflict is strongly associated with lower jobs, dissatisfaction of family, high levels of stress, and more serious physical ailments (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Consistent long working hours leads to WFC (Khan, 2014). Individual's propensity to face high level of distress, depression, feelings, anger, disgust, and fear also boosts the effects of work-family conflict (Westman, 2001). Similarly, a study found that family stress leads to work conflict and job stress lead to family conflict (Yardley and Markle's, 1997). Anxiety

and depression among female employees are positively associated with work to family conflict. Female experiences more anxiety associated with spillover and it is also studied that conflict and agony were also found to share strong relationship among female employees with routine jobs (Ng and Chiu, 1997).

Work-family conflict, as the basis of stress, has been associated to several adverse effects and has transformed into an issue that institutions are unable to ignore (Higgins et al., 1992). A study revealed that women who have low role conflict have highest scores in mental condition and role contentment (Wortman et al., 1990). Similarly, Houseknecht and Macke (1981) found that family support to working women lead to better spousal adjustment.

Few researchers have also tried to explain how the issue of WFC can be tackled, therefore, a study found that the elimination of work family conflict is possible only through work family facilitating factors which could reduce stress level leading to positive mental health (Piotrkowski, 1999). Similarly, a study revealed that by spending quality time with close friends and family, having friendly work policies, and overseer support could also lead to reduce the work-family conflict (Hyde, 1981). Noticeably, there are different family-friendly work engagements that might be executed, however the foremost flexibility, i.e. managing work time, is considered as the key job characteristic (Ng and Chiu, 1997).

In view to previous research studies, it is proved that work-family conflict is a major problem which is faced by almost all female employees and it generates negative outcome like depression, fatigue, absenteeism at work, and intentional turnover as well. Therefore, to explore the factors causing work family conflict in the public and private organizations operating in Pakistan is the objective of our study. By taking into account the significance of managing WFC an effort has been done to address the following main research questions of the study.

RQ1.What kind of work-family conflict do you experience being a female employee?

RQ2. In your view, what are the major factors causing work-family conflict in your life?

RQ3. Are you dealing with some persistent issues that you are unable to resolve?

RQ4. Do you consider yourself more family-centered or work-centered?

Theoretical Framework

In view of family systems theory, families are developing system of networks among family members. Behavior of one individual of a family can only be completely understood in view of the behaviors of other family members and the way they interact with each other (Peterson, 2005). This is consistent with the idea of life course framework in which lives are connected and in which situations of others have strong impact on our own lifestyle by having close relationship with them. Similarly, it was found that when one spouse is dealing with an issue, the other should empathize and accept extra responsibilities (Elder, 1994). Consequently, it may affect their own perception towards work-family conflict and family-work conflict (Westman, 2001). The current study follows the family systems theory and aims to analyze the major factors leading to this critical issue. The conceptual framework of our study comprised of seven factors playing a key role in causing work-family conflict (figure 1).

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study we have used qualitative phenomenological study design to explore the issue of the work-family conflict and the family-work conflict. The reason behind selecting phenomenological study design is that it assists to explain how humans experiences a specific phenomenon as in this case WFC is analyzed. As, this study endeavors to determine the causes of WFC by making phenomenology more accessible and as a result more effective research methodology is applied in this field of research. This qualitative approach also set aside preconceived assumptions and biases regarding human feelings, and their past experiences. To meet the objectives of this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted because it leads to in-depth analysis of sensitive cases as opposed to statistical information and permit a better understanding of organizational complications (Achour, Grine and Nor, 2014). We have adopted in-depth interview technique as it allows a researcher to examine the social realities at the back of problems and increases deeper insight into the existing phenomena as personal interaction take place through interview method and therefore, it is the best way to gain valid and reliable information. Hence, face to face interviews were conducted to collect the data because it permits to analyze the answers of the respondents along with their expressions. This study is based on primary data. The data were collected from a sample of 50 female working employees having age between 30 to 50 years. The sample selected for this study was initially identified with the help of social networking with professionals. The sample was selected with snowball sampling technique (Singleton and Straits, 1999), in which each participant was inquired for introduction to two coworkers or friends. In Asia this approach works very well, where business is formed on the basis of close relationships and trust, and where questionnaires are often considered as suspicious (Weiss, 1994). Participants were inquired a series of primarily open-ended questions that pointed towards their family and work demands, accompanied by demographic data regarding their qualification, age, number of children, age of children, average hours required for work. Before conducting the interviews from the respondents, official permission was taken from the respective authorities.
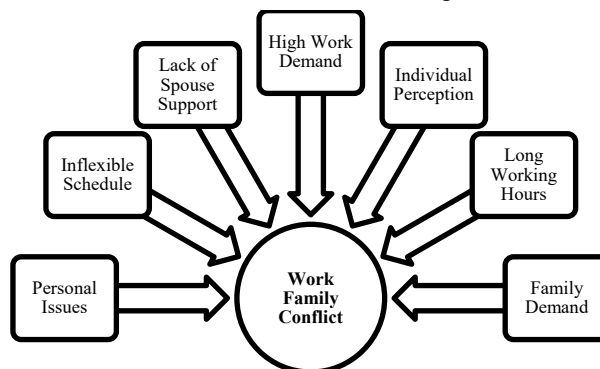

Figure 1: Major factors leading to work family conflict

Table 1: Demographic data of respondents

Age	Children
Mean 42.5 years, range 25-50	Maximum three
Qualification	34 – nine years and under;
Postgraduate – 28	31 – 10 to 16 years;
Graduate – 15	13 – 17 to 21 years;
Diploma – 7	4 – greater than 21 years.
Salary Range from Rs 25000 to Rs 75000, mean Rs 43,520	Average Working Hours Range 24-60, mean 47.4

Source: Authors own calculations

Table 2. Factors leading to work family conflict

Causes of WFC	Respondents	Percentage
Long working hours	46	93%
Family demand	24	48%
Individual perception	40	80%
High work demand	43	86%
Lack of spouse support	47	94%
Inflexible schedule	21	42%
Personal issues	43	86%

Source: Authors own calculations

In view of results (tables 1 and 2), it is found that the average salary of respondents were Rs 43, 520, out of 50 only 10 respondents worked for 40 hours per week with mean value (49.5), majority of them (43 out of 50) were postgraduates and all were having children (average of three).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In view of obtained answers to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 it is found that out of 50 respondents, 94% working female employees are lacking spousal support as one of the prime persistent and unsolvable causes of WFC. 93% respondents think longer working hours leads to WFC. 42% agreed with inflexible schedule for causing WFC, 48% considers family demand a major factor of WFC. 86% female employees believe that high work demand, 80% consider individual perception, and 86% respondents assume that personal issues are the causes of work-family conflict. The results revealed that most of the females are facing difficulties associated with their family role and balancing work conflict. Both work to family conflict and family to work conflict are quite complex to

manage for full time working female employees whose involvement in their family activities are unpaid.

Few examples of respondents' answers to RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 are;

- *"My job keeps me very busy. I am required to work long hours, late at night and often at weekends. I am facing lot of stress as my job requires full precision. I have to work under pressure and have to meet deadlines. Due to all of these work working requirements I am unable to meet my family demands."*
- *"I am completely satisfied with my job. It requires full responsibility but, now I am adjusted. I feel quite privileged in doing my job, however, I cannot manage appropriate time for my family which sometimes bother me."*
- *"My mother-in-law picks the children up from our home to school, gives them bath, ready them for school, prepares breakfast, lunch and dinners and feed them. Mostly, I join them at the end of their dinner and I am not satisfied with my job."*

In response to RQ4, our results indicated that in view of priorities, majority of respondents were found to be biased towards their family. Few examples are;

- *"If I get free from my job and reach home at 7 pm or 8 pm I have to perform domestic chores. I am realized by my family that it is my foremost duty to fully manage all domestic chores. Sometimes, I feel guilty for not being at home with my children, or not doing what other mothers can do. This creates conflict."*
- *"Some people told my husband that, as I am a working women therefore, I will never give priority to my family and I am a fully work-oriented woman. My husband also doesn't understand me besides this I am sharing the financial burden with him by doing this job. He often gets angry when I reach home late. Being a working women it is quite difficult to maintain a balance between work and family life."*

In view of our findings, we suggest that, Pakistani women are considered more responsible for their family demands in spite of the fact that they are sharing the financial burden of their spouses and are the earning hands of

their family. Pressure of long working hours in weekends is also undertaken to cause work family conflict and family to work conflict. In the context of difficulty both work to family conflict and family to work conflict are opposite in zero sum game. The key factors of work-family conflict are long working hours, family demand, individual perception, high work demand, lack of spousal support and inflexible schedule. Some respondents explained that the problem of WFC also depends on women's time management and preferences of work. The output revealed that females having younger kids have major tendency of distress over family issues. They all are very regretful for not giving enough time and attention to their family, children, and spouse, they further expressed that major constraints to their work performance are household chores and family commitments. This research thus revealed the major reasons causing work-family conflict faced by female employees and also exposed its impact on their lives.

The outcome of the study is supported by former empirical evidences. For example, long working hours are highly correlated with work family conflicts has also been narrated by (Alam, 2010). Work schedules inflexibility causes WFC has also been explained by Grant, Wallace, & Spurgeon, (2013). Family to work conflict happens when more time is spent on doing family tasks (Frone & R, 2000). Working women having 6 or under age children faces more conflicts rather than the mothers having older age children (Hyde, 1981). Consistently doing work late night, long hours in course of completing important duties and tasks that take too much time and keep female employees away from their personal lives are also one of the key factors leading to work-family conflict.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of this research indicates that WFC has transformed into a serious issue for the married female workforce in Pakistan. Married women feel guilty in playing multiple roles as a professional and a mother. Their main issue is to properly manage both work and family roles. Work-life balance is the balance maintenance between responsibilities at home and at work. Work family balance allows an employee to tackle multiple duties both at home, workplace and at social level as well. The research further

exposed that long working hours, high family demands, inflexible work schedule, unsupportive spouse, and a rigid organizational environment increases the chances that female employees will face conflict between their family and work role.

The study is limited to Pakistan and limited professions are undertaken that can be enhanced in terms of scope by extending to other cities and cultures. The findings of this research have practical implications for institutions. It will make organizations and their administration more aware regarding the value of family-friendly work time management for facilitating working women to handle their conflicting roles of employee, spouse and mother. In this way, organizations can gain competitive advantage, in the perspective of retaining best talent, by assisting the hiring and holding of hardworking female workers through the execution of feasible family-friendly work time management. The outcome of this study may also help private and public organizations to understand the impact of WFC on their tasks, they may start giving importance to flexible work environment and understand personal issues of their female employees and cooperate with them to solve their problems. In this way they can keep their female employees more loyal and sincere with their organizations which will ultimately increase their work productivity. Future research should analyze different samples to replicate this study and check the generalizability of our findings. This study calls for more qualitative research and a diversion towards the improvement to time management and tackling conflict situations.

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