

**PERCEPTION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE –
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MARRIED WORKING
WOMEN IN EDUCATION SECTOR**

Ali Raza Shah

PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, SZABIST, Karachi

Dr. Har Bakhsh Makhijani

Professor, Department of Media Studies, BUKC, Karachi

Abdul Karim Suhag

MS Scholar, Department of Sociology, SZABIST, Karachi

Navira Salim Mirza

MS Scholar, Department of Social Science, SZABIST, Karachi Campus

ABSTRACT

Work-life balance is the right balance between personal and professional aspects of life. Married working women in the education sector face challenges to keep their work-life balanced. The purpose of this research was to understand and explore the perception of the work-life balance of married working women in the education sector. The objectives of this research were to understand the idea of work-life balance of married working women in the education sector, the obstacles they face in achieving work-life balance and how do they achieve it. Phenomenological study tool of qualitative research has been applied in this research. A semi-structured interview questionnaire has been used as a data collection tool. Data has been collected on convenience-based purposive sampling from three married working women in the education sector. During the analysis of the data, three themes and their subthemes have been identified from the data collected. The data analysis indicates that the perception of the work-life balance of married working women in the education sector is balancing between different spheres of life, managing the time and decision making. Moreover, these women face various challenges such as taking multiple roles, managing personal and professional life, work dynamics, making compromises and facing physical and mental health problems in achieving work-life balance. Additionally, sacrificing, focusing on the responsibilities at hand and spouse support as some of the coping strategies highlighted by married working women to achieve work-life balance.

Keywords: Work – Life Balance, married working women, Education sector.

INTRODUCTION

The roles of women have seen a drastic change over the last few decades. Women, especially in urban areas, are expected to share economic burden of the family owing, inter alia, to increased costs of living and general level of awareness. Therefore, corporate workforce has witnessed an enormous increase in number of women. Though it has raised the status of women in the society by giving them financial independence, there are some resultant challenges which women are facing. Prominent among such challenges is the achievement of Work-Life balance.

Saeed & Farooqi (2014) argue that the education sector demands wide range of responsibilities that are potentially challenging for people working in this sector. Those who belong to this profession face many obstacles in creating an effective work-life balance. It becomes difficult for them to balance their work, family and social responsibilities effectively (Saeed & Farooqi, 2014). Moreover, in this regard, Fatima & Sahibzada (2012) argue that it has become challenging for women in many professions creating a balance in work and family responsibilities. They further argue that people working in education sector commonly experience struggle between family and work responsibilities (Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012).

Women, particularly in the eastern societies are expected to take care of their families. In fact, it is considered their primary responsibility. Resultantly, working women are entangled between societal expectations of family roles and professional commitment necessary for desired upward career trajectory. They are witnessing an increased level of anxiety and stress to balance these two spheres of their lives – family and work. Therefore, it is imperative to understand their experiences of this Work-Life balance phenomenon.

Married working women face work-life balance problems in their careers which create problems in their personal and professional life. Owing to the patriarchal mindset, it is hard for married working women, particularly in a country like Pakistan, to create a balance in their work-life. Culture, traditions, perceived religious restrictions and domestic roles aggravate the situation for married working women. This phenomenological study of married working women aims at understanding and exploring the phenomenon of work-life balance in the context of married working women in the education sector.

The purpose of this study is to understand and explore perception of work-life balance of married working women in the education sector. In this research, the work-life balance is generally defined as a right balance between professional and personal aspects of life.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To understand and explore the idea of work-life balance of married working women.
- To understand the obstacles in achieving work-life balance for married working women.
- To identify and explore the ways in which married working women achieve work-life balance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is there the idea of work-life balance of married working women?
- What are the obstacles in achieving work-life balance for married working women?
- What are the ways in which married working women achieve work-life balance?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant in the sense that it gives an insight into the phenomenon of work-life balance from women's perspective in the education sector; it identifies the common problems faced by women in this sector in order to attain work-life balance and how they overcome these obstacles. Moreover, the study provides about married working women's definition of work-life balance that helps them in the education sector to appropriately understand the phenomenon of work-life balance. In short, the study widens the general horizon of people's understanding of work-life balance particularly in the context of female gender and help women achieve work-life balance in the education sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women started struggling when they started working as since time immemorial their role was concentrated on childbearing and mothering. Both the family and work responsibilities have to be fulfilled by the married working women. This creates obstacle for

them to achieve work-life balance and resultantly affected their work commitments (Rehman & Waheed, 2012).

The increased participation of women in workforce has made them financially independent and socially elevated. However, it has brought with it certain challenges as well. One such challenge is the lack of work-life balance (Noor, 2004; Guendouzi, 2006). Women, owing to their disproportionate family responsibilities, find it more difficult than men to balance the professional and personal spheres of their lives (Bird, 2006). These increased family engagements adversely affect the career prospects of women and serves as a big obstacle in their upward career trajectory (Cross & Linehan, 2006).

According to Byrne (2005) work-life Balance refers to the 'juggling of five aspects of our lives at any one point in time: work, family, friends, health and spirit (or self)'. Life is 'balanced' when one aspect of life does not adversely affect other aspect(s) of life. However, researcher and academicians particularly focus on the two aspects of life: work and family. Resultantly, work – life is considered to be a balance between these two spheres or aspects of life.

However, the concept of work-life balance is not clearly defined (Guest, 2002). Guest (2002) has further maintained that the very term of work–life balance is an ambiguous term. He explains that different spheres of life are overlapping in nature and responsibilities with respect to family change at different stages of life. However, work aspect of life seems to dominate the other aspects of life.

Work–life balance though originated in the West is no more something alien to the eastern cultures and countries. It is primary due to the impact of the process of globalization (Lewis et.al., 2007). However, the situation for women in Islamic countries is different from those in the West. Women's activities in almost all of the Islamic countries are subject to the limits demarcated by patriarchal system. Professional life spheres of women in Islamic countries are particularly affected by two factors: cultural norms of veil (*Parda*) and honor (*Izzat*) (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). Veil (*Parda*) implies that women's primary role is within the boundaries of home while men's primary role and responsibilities lie outside the walls of home. The notion of honor (*Izzat*) presents a woman as a source of the honor of the family and, therefore, needs to be protected and guarded. It results in limited role of women particularly in the economic sphere of the society. Moreover, women who overcome these factors face other

challenges like lack of proper transportation (Roomi & Harrison, 2008).

The situation is not different in Pakistan. Society as a whole disapproves of women's active participation in the economic arena of the country and this explains why women are less professionally working in proportion as compared to men in the country (Kamal, 1997). Kamal (1997) rightly points out that women's engagements in family are considered their duty rather their important economic contribution. The norms of the society further exert pressure on women to focus more on the household chores and less on their professional commitments. Their primary responsibility, as it is widely believed, is to be children's caregiver (Baughn *et.al.*, 2006). It is evident from the fact that women's participation in employment is not proportionate to their share in overall population of the country; women constitute around fifty percent of the population while their share in the labor force is less than one-fourth (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Phenomenological study approach of qualitative research is employed in this study because it is an appropriate design to get insights into the lived experiences of the respondents (Goulding, 2005). Qualitative research is followed because the purpose of the study is exploratory in nature i.e. to explore and understand the perception of the work-life balance of married working women in the education sector in Karachi. A convenience-based purposive sample of three married working women from the education sector is selected. The sample is limited to three respondents as saturated point is reached with the three respondents.

Semi-structured interview was used as data collection tool. Interview questions were based on research objectives. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Thematic analysis was done through open coding to identify the patterns in the respondents' responses.

Analysis of Interview Data: In this phenomenological study of working married women from the education sector, we sought to understand and explore their perception of work-life balance, problems they faced to achieve work-life balance and how do they achieve

work-life balance. In this regard, we organized the data into following themes and subthemes.

Perception of Work-Life Balance among the working married women in the education sector: The first theme is perception of work-life balance among the working married women in the education sector. This research study tried to find how women perceive and define work-life balance. The objective was to understand the perception of work-life balance among the working married women in the education sector. It has been mentioned in the literature review that married working women have to fulfill their work and family responsibilities (Rehman & Waheed, 2012). Moreover, according to Beyne (2005), work-life balance is balancing of five facets of life: family, work, friends, health and self. Moreover, this theme is organized into three subthemes: 1) work-life balance between different spheres of life 2) Managing the time and 3) Decision Making.

According to the respondents, work-life balance means adapting daily routines in a way that divides their time equally between their professional and personal responsibilities. They have to manage their routines between their work and personal and social life.

Work-Life balance between different spheres of life: Work-life balance for some of the respondents was balance between two spheres of life while for some it included more spheres. For some of the respondents, work-life balance included balance in two spheres of life i.e. work and family. One is given and the other is chosen. However, for other respondents' work-life balance encompasses balance between immediate family, relatives and friends. For one of the respondents, who is also studying, work-life is to make all three spheres work, family and studies to work in cohesion.

Managing the time: For the respondents, managing time between different spheres of life was crucial for work-life balance. For work-life balance, they have to do justice with all spheres simultaneously. They admitted that they have to leave for their work and come back from work on time in order to maintain that balance. Furthermore, it was also revealed that in case, if they fail to manage their time effectively between all spheres of life, they will lose the balance and stumble.

Decision Making: At times the respondents have to make decisions and choose between different spheres of life. They have to

prioritize which sphere means the most to them. They have to postpone least prior things for the holidays or the weekends.

The overall perception of work-life balance for working married women in the education sector is a roller-coaster ride as it is like juggling for them as one of the respondents highlighted while responding to our interview question.

Challenges faced by working married women in achieving work-life balance: The second theme is challenges faced by working married women in achieving work-life balance. According to Rehman & Waheed (2012), women started struggling for work-life balance when they started working as since time immemorial their role was concentrated on childbearing and mothering. Moreover, women, owing to their disproportionate family responsibilities, find it more difficult to balance the professional and personal spheres of their lives (Bird, 2006). Hence, it was pursued to understand and explore the challenges and their consequences these women face to achieve work-life balance.

This theme is further divided into five subthemes.

i) Taking Multiple Roles

In order to have a balanced life, working married women in the education sector have to take multiple roles in their day to day routines. It is challenging for them to do multi-tasking. Apart from their job in the education sector, they have to cook, look after their children and for some; they also have to drive their children to schools and bring them back.

ii) Managing personal and professional life

Managing personal and professional life holds significance in work-life balance for working married women in education sector. They have to deal with what needs to be addressed and what needs to be forgone. Some of these women have to ignore their personal needs at times to manage professional needs. At times they have to stay back to deal with certain issues at their work place. Because of this their family gets affected.

iii) Work Dynamics

Work dynamics is one of the perceived obstacles faced by these women in achieving work-life balance. For these women, every day is

a different day. Working hours vary from day to day. While fulfilling all the responsibilities simultaneously, sometime their routine gets disturbed.

iv) Compromise to achieve work-life balance

Married working women in the education sector have to compromise in order to achieve work-life balance. These women have to be anti-social to meet certain deadlines which put strain on the relationships with relatives. They are unable to take vacations just to relax and unwind because of the family responsibilities.

v) Physical and Mental Health Problems

These working married women face physical and mental health problems because of the multitasking. Stress, personal health issues, insomnia and blood pressure are some of the common health issues faced by them. It is not because of the family responsibilities only as they believe that work environment is also tough for them and if they do not perform well, there is somebody always ready to replace them. Therefore, they have to work hard in order to give their best. Consequently, their physical and mental health gets affected. These issues get aggravated when one has to study along with performing these aforementioned responsibilities.

COPING STRATEGIES OF WORKING MARRIED WOMEN IN ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The third theme is coping strategies of working married women in achieving work-life balance. In this research study, working married women from the education sector were also asked to highlight coping strategies to achieve working-life balance. In this regard, they were asked to tell the important factors which can facilitate them achieve work-life balance.

This theme is further organized into three subthemes.

i) Work-life Balance requires sacrifices

These working married women from education sector highlighted that work-life balance for women is an idealistic situation. Work-life balance requires sacrifices because when they decided to work, they had to make sacrifices on part of either the family life or professional life. Given their work and family responsibilities, they are

unable to meet their friends and parents very frequently. Thus, they have to make sacrifices to achieve work-life balance.

ii) Focus on the responsibility/responsibilities at hand

“Leave work on time and while you are home do not think about work,” responded one of the respondents. Focusing on the tasks at hands is significant to achieve work-life balance for working married women in the education sector.

iii) Factors important in achieving work-life balance

According to the working married women in the education sector, family and spouse support is one of the most important factors in achieving work-life balance. An encouraging and understanding spouse plays a significant role in working married women’s work-life balance.

Moreover, other important factors to achieve work-life balance include mature personality, decision making, education and communication skills. However, flexibility at the work place also holds significance in achieving work-life balance in working married women’s life.

CONCLUSION

To conclude the findings of this research work, it is important to be aware that the respondents are at the same page, despite the differences in their level of intellect, or maybe owing to different cultural backgrounds, however ground rules for the course of this research were set in the structured questionnaire in order for the interviewees to have a greater understanding of what is required as an answer of them and also to ensure that they understand the true meaning of the scope of the question and answer according to their own experience, as our subjects of this research. Furthermore, during the Literature Review of this research work, it came to surface that one set meaning for the term ‘work-life balance’ does not exist and it is merely an idea of perception what one may see to be a balance between work and life. Others may see it as managing work with life, while some may think of the complete opposite where they desperately need to manage life with work. While extensive literature was reviewed in order to find a meaning with a majority consensus, throughout the course of this research, the respondents themselves

stated that work-life balance meant adapting daily chores and routines in such a way that it divides and allows for equal and needful time to be given according to their personal and professional obligations and responsibilities. That not only allowed for the simple breaking down of data provided by the respondents, but further also enabled this research to formulate a new meaning of the term 'work-life balance.'

Regardless of this, some had their circumstantial grounds for believing work-life balance to be a management of work, family and responsibilities, one particular respondent feels that if you are working, taking care of the family and studying together with all of this combined, is a balance of the work-life. But one more thing to note herein is that, for that particular respondent under the definition of work, her obligation to study has also been placed, not for anything else, but anything that an Asian woman does that is to be outside of her family, is automatically either work, or a state which is self-inflicted, as the general notion is that women don't need to work and preferably are better off at home taking responsibility for their duties as sisters, wives and mothers.

In order for the respondents to manage their work and personal life, they had to prioritize their family above and over everything else, so that may not be a hindrance in their work-life, that is mostly because any disruption in the cycle of a family life, automatically has an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of any worker at work. Leading up to them having to maintain their time and attention division, in such a way that their first priority must at any cost remain family, as they may be emotionally compelled (not necessarily explicitly, but through gestures and/or actions) to perform their tasks required of them at home, before their attention is divided towards anything else, as any bump in the smooth flowing of the family life can prove to be quite fatal to a woman's life.

Another yet very important factor that allows for women to maintain a work-life balance is through their ability to make decisions. This enables them to prioritize most important tasks till least, or something which is of higher preference, more urgent, needs more attention. Other things by them are and have to be postponed unless and until more immediate things are attended to more immediately. This also makes them postpone some plans for the weekend, or a holiday, therefore making them dependent upon their time and responsibility constraints, things which are on the top of the priority

list. To say the least, in this priority list, let it be noted that Family and all responsibilities that are encompassed with anything related to the term itself, cannot be ignored, delayed, overlooked, overshadowed as that is what is primarily required of women. On the other hand, women seem to make a preference list so as to suit their routines so that both spheres of life can be tackled, on one hand the family (the main agenda of a woman's life) and professional working environment as well. Owing to the extremely competitive job market, nowadays women are seen actively participating in workforce environments and that only makes the drive for them to progress in their careers as much as possible and those who remain focused, find it fairly easy to make and maintain a balance between the two.

As women's participation in the economy of the country is necessary for general societal uplift, steps should be taken to make work environment more conducive for women particularly for married women. For instance, working hours should be made flexible for them and day care facilities should be established at workplaces. Steps like these will not only help women achieve work life balance but will also encourage other women who are not currently working to start working. In this way, the overall financial standing of our society will increase.

AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

The study as discussed above is exploratory in nature. It has only identified the factors which are considered important for the achievement of work – life balance by married working women. Based on these factors, a quantitative research should be done to quantify the impact of each factor on the work – life balance of married working women. Such quantitative study or studies will help researchers and academicians to prioritize the factors and make decisions according.

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