WORK- FAMILY LIFE ADJUSTMENT OF WORKING MOTHERS IN PUBLIC SECTOR: A CASE STUDY OF LESCO

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ABSTRACT

While technological changes have resulted in increasing number of women joining the paid workforce, it has also created challenges for work-family life adjustments. In order to find how working mothers meet such challenges, a research, using qualitative technique, was conducted in Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO). Ten in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion was used for data collection. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyze data. The results showed that work-family life adjustment was a long, tiring and extremely challenging process as workplace demands posed challenges which made it difficult to cope up with family responsibilities. In the process of making adjustment, working mothers had to compromise their sleep, desires, and health concerns. Working mothers narrated their strategies for responding to work and family pressures amicably and efficiently. The strategies included flexible and positive attitude, acceptance of family support and co-operation, time management, and catharsis. The ladies were looking for enhanced family/spouse cooperation and organizational support to make their family life comfortable and relaxed.

Keywords: Work-family life balance, Adjustments, Working mothers, Workplace challenges

INTRODUCTION

The world communities are changing their lifestyles, cultural values and habits with the rapid industrialization, technological advancement and modernization. Access to latest knowledge and information through education has become more convenient in recent years. The ratio of female students exceeded tremendously in the past years because of the revolutionary education reforms that provided access to educational opportunities for female population. Presently access to latest knowledge and information through education is easily available to both men and women.
In 2011, 2.6 million (more than 42 percent) high school students were girls. In 1993, women participation was about 22 percent of the total 68,000 students in the Pakistani universities; however in 2011, proportion of female students in Pakistani universities accounted for 47 percent or 1.1 million (Mangi, 2011). As a matter of fact, higher education has broadened their vision, awareness and opened new horizons for women’s personal growth and empowerment.

In current scenario, women are fully utilizing their education and potential to further empower themselves and their families by actively participating in the Pakistan work force. Recent data shows that women employment has increased to 15.6% in 2010-11 from 14.01% in 2007-08 (Bibi, 2010). Increasing proportion of female participation in the labor force has created major challenges for women to incorporate new roles and responsibilities and manage their time with child bearing and child rearing years (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). This study aims to identify the strategies being used by the working women, particularly the working mothers, to cope with challenges they encounter in managing their work family life balance. There are many facilities available for females in private sector organization that facilitate women to relieve them some of the tensions they may get at work such as day care centers or flexible working hours. However, little research is available to explore the issues related with managing work family life balance in this area especially in public sector organizations where working conditions are more stringent.

**Work-Family Life Adjustment**

Women are expected to play diverse and simultaneous roles, at workplace and non-workplace settings, by frequently switching from one role to another. Research indicates that women need to perform the professional duties and family responsibilities with a congruent approach (Valimaki, Lamsa, & Hiillos, 2009). Taking a lead from such observations about work-family adjustment, this study has tried to explore the process adopted by working mothers to make adequate adjustments in their work and family life.

Despite men at large appear to have accepted the women as additional earning hand, their cooperation in managing the performance of their counterparts at work and family life is still debatable. Consequently, working women have to make several adjustments in order to add value and maintain balance in their family living. Adjustment is not a rapid change; it is rather a process
that happens over the period of time. Even a small adjustment requires integrated efforts with work and family life (Wickham, 2008).

In order to balance the work and family life successfully, working women are expected to make several adjustments with their spouses, including the house work sharing, mutual involvement in childcare, joint decision making, equal financial influence and emotional stress sharing (Zimmerman, 2003). The present study has identified the strategies being used by the working women to cope with the challenges they encounter in maintaining balance between their work and family life. Hence, the main objectives of the research are, to understand reasons for women joining the work force; understand the process of their adjustment with work and family life; and identify strategies adopted by the working women in managing their work and family obligations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reasons for Female Work Force Participation

Faridi, Malik and Basit (2009) identified that all the education level has positive and significant impact on the women joining labor force. The study further indicates that education level of spouses also influence women empowerment as an educated husband has a positive and significant impact on wives' employment. Husband’s low level of income and increase in the children education expenses puts sufficient pressure on married women to join workforce to contribute in her family income (Khan & Khan, 2009). Faridi et al. (2009) explored the impact of education on the participation of female labor force in Pakistan. The major limitation of this study is that it is only conducted in the district of Bahawalpur. It cannot be generalizable for the entire population of Punjab.

Recent studies indicate that income of employed women is mainly utilized for family welfare; especially nutrition, education and health. Coleman (2012) found that economic benefits of women employment include contribution to household income and increase in national output.

Work –Family Life Adjustment

Work and Family adjustment is a complex issue that involves financial values, gender roles, career path, time management and many other factors. Work- Family life adjustment
requires multiple roles from working mothers. A qualitative study conducted by Misra (1998) found that a woman at workplace is expected to be committed, dynamic, competitive, straight forward, non-sentimental and a "professional”, while at home, she is expected to be sweet, soft, sensitive, adaptable, gentle, unassertive and domesticated. As an ideal woman, she has to fulfill the duties of a faithful wife, a sacrificing mother, obedient and respectful daughter in-law and an efficient and highly placed career woman. These contradictory expectations cause confusions, tension and create many other problems for her. A career oriented woman finds it difficult to do justice with both roles simultaneously. An attempt to play one of the roles with perfection leads to an inadvertent sacrifice of the other.

Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) reported that paid work has positive impacts on women such as increase in self-confidence in terms of meeting needs of their family and having more say in family matters; husbands being more considerate to them and more respect within the family. Further, working women reported for an improved atmosphere in the home because of economical ease.

Research on work-family balance also shows that organization should be concerned about their employees and help them achieve balance through different policies. Work-family benefits refer to programs and policies designed to help employees manage the competing demands of work and family life. These flexible opportunities or work-life balance policies assist a working female to deal with the domains of the profession and family efficiently (Lewis & Humbert, 2010). Moreover, organizations face more challenges to provide integration between domestic and work life, such as equality in policies, statutory entitlement, maternity leave, career's leave, parental leave and non-statutory arrangements including flextime, e-working, job sharing, team-time working (Glass & Estes, 1997).

Research shows that support and encouragement from spouse is positively related to family and work commitment. Females need support from the family system and spouse to make appropriate balance between work and family life (Valimaki et al., 2009). Spending long activity hours at workplace may make a working women exhausted and make it tiring for her to take care of children along with additional household duties.
Afzal, Zahra, Mehmood and Hussain (2010) explored the work family life integration among mid-career women in Pakistan and found that working mothers are responsible in performing their domestic and professional roles in addition to their personal well-being. The proper incorporation of two roles is possible with flexibility from both work and family system. The study recognized family as the first priority of working females.

Women are perceived to have intense feelings of motherhood. However, their career holds great importance for them too as they found it rewarding and satisfying. The study also determined that child care is very sensitive and a delicate job (Peeters, Wattez, Semerouti, & Regt, 2009). Quality time spent with children create long lasting effects on the lives of working mothers.

Recent qualitative study conducted by Rehman and Roomi (2012) identified the work family life balance factors among entrepreneur women in Pakistan. Findings of this study show that their own businesses give them flexibility, control and freedom to juggle with their family and social responsibilities. Lack of sufficient time, gender biasness, social and cultural norms as well as family responsibilities are the most significant challenges women face to achieve balance in a patriarchal society. Strategic planning, organizing and delegating are the most effective strategies women use to cope with competing roles of work and family.

Nasir (2012) defines work life balance as a sense of achievement and enjoyment per day. She further states that a person really has to work for attaining a healthy work life balance when she feels extremely exhausted, falling behind and not catching up the small things in life. The study identifies strategies for balancing personal and official spheres including time management, asking for help, positive thinking, planning daily or weekly activities and less expectations. A more recent study investigated the relationship between working mother’s job and their family life adjustments (Mitta, Sethi & Joshi, 2013). The result of the study shows that working women life style does affect her family life, hence creating necessary adjustments to balance her work and family life is critical. The study further highlights factors of intrinsic job motivation, job moods and emotions, timings at work and satisfaction with salary that may improve the work-life balance. In addition, family adjustment and marital satisfaction are also found to be a significant factor.

Sundaresan (2014) found effective work life strategies of working couples and its effect on gender and life quality. The study found that work life strategies vary among societies and family
structures. Some families prefer males to work for longer hours while women should go for part
time job and look after household. It is also found that men spent their leisure time on themselves
while women rarely have leisure time as they consume it juggling between work and family life.

Work and family life balance requires higher levels of time and energy for fulfilling
responsibilities in both domains (Murthy & Shastri, 2016). The work-family life conflicts escalate
when women encounter higher job demands at workplace, such as inflexibility of working hours
and unsupportive supervisors. The results indicate that many employees sacrifice their own
personal time in order to manage the work and family requirements. Addressing these needs
generally require women to sacrifice her personal time, health and family bonding.

As the number of female employees increasing globally, the understanding of how females
balance the work and family life has gained sufficient interest in recent years. Although many
researchers focus on work-family life balance, only few researchers have attempted to explore the
subjective assessment of perceptions or feelings of working women handling the core requirements
or the process related to work-family life balance (Afzal et al., 2010). Most of the studies are
conducted in western context while few have been carried out in Pakistan with the focus on private
sector. No research has so far explored the issue in the context of public sector of Pakistan. Current
research attempts to fill the gap by identifying the adjustment strategies adopted by working
mothers in public sector organization.

**METHODOLOGY**

This research study follows qualitative research approach, a useful method for gaining
insights of work-family adjustment processes. The study adopts case study as methodology, with
LESCO as a case of public sector organization. In depth interviews were conducted from the
female staff of LESCO. Purposive sampling technique is used as female respondents were selected
on the basis of pre-determined criteria. The qualifying criteria was current working mother aged
28-35 years, having at least one child under 5 years and living in a nuclear(single) family.

Before conducting interviews, the availability of participants was taken in to consideration
due to multiple responsibilities and challenges at their workplace and non-workplace settings. In-
depth interviews and focus group discussion were used for data collection. Total 10 in-depth
interviews were conducted to collect data for this research study. The duration of each interview
was 50-60 minutes and all the interviews were recorded. After every interview oral de-briefing was given for validation. Focus group discussion was conducted by involving eight working mothers held by the moderator. The discussion lasted for 80 minutes. The responses were collected, transcribed and categorized. Initially themes were established from the transcribed data in order to generate the set of key concepts regarding the work-family life adjustment of working mothers. From these themes, codes were generated for further data processing. With the help of the identified themes and codes, logical inferences were developed from which interpretation and explanations were offered.

**ANALYSIS**

**Women joining the work force**

After analyzing the data, it has been found that there are three major reasons that influence women to join workforce: economic, incidental and education. It is derived from the responses of participants that economic reason was the most important factor amongst all that persuaded women to join workforce.

The findings show that women had to work due to the financial reasons. Women respondents with financial need had no choice but to work to become an earning hand being eldest and have no male member in the family as an earning hand. They had to take the responsibility to support their family financially.

As one respondent stated that:

"After the death of my father I was the eldest daughter in my family so I had to search for a job to support my family."

Some females joined workforce to improve their life style. They wanted to opt for professional life to improve the quality of living or assist their husbands financially.

As quoted by Respondent 3:

"After my marriage I felt inappropriate that whole family is dependent on one male member. The prices of everything were escalating rapidly and I could see many women joining workforce and contributing financially towards home financial management, so I also decided to start working to make our living comfortable."
Furthermore, spouse support was also considered as a motivational factor for the wife to join workforce. It is evident from the data collected that working mothers realize the importance of their husbands’ support. However, husband support is more or less confined to emotional support.

One focus group respondent expressed that:

“My husband is very helpful and supportive. I honestly confess that I could not do this job without his help and support. The biggest support from him is that he trusts me although he knows that I work with male yet he never imposed any restrictions on me.”

As one respondent mentioned that:

“Sometime my husband looks after children but it happens occasionally”.

“My husband also motivated me to apply for this job because of good salary and other fringe benefits.”

Husband support was also acknowledged by few women respondents in terms of helping them to find a job.

As illustrated by Respondent 4:

“After my marriage I was just a house wife. I used to stay free most of the time so I asked my husband to find me a job. He agreed and I got this job. Indeed, it was my own choice but later on after addition of children it also became a priority.”

Another reason for women to join workforce is to utilize their education. They do not want to waste the learning skills attained through education.

One of the respondents of focus group shared that:

“I decided to join work to utilize my studies. I had done my masters so I didn’t want to waste my studies.”

**Job Characteristics as Workplace Motivation**

The data analysis reveals that women have both negative and positive perceptions related to their work. The findings show that working mothers find their job very demanding with respect
to time and energy. Most of them face problems of long working hours and or extra work especially where office timings are strictly followed.

As a respondent mentioned:

“My job timings are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. I try to finish the work till 4:00 p.m. but sometimes I have to stay late at work to complete extra work.”

Being a working mother they demand relaxed time at work. One of the respondents expressed that:

“I think the office management should consider giving little relaxation to working mothers to come little late but presently there is no relaxation.”

The study finds that these women use public transport due to which they reach late in offices. This becomes a strong demotivating factor for them. They have to face harsh comments from their bosses and colleagues.

As illustrated by a respondent:

“I reach my office late because of switching the busses. I used to reach office till 9:00 a.m. and had to bear harsh words.”

Another respondent said:

“I suggest there should be some transportation facility for the working women.”

Furthermore, working in the male dominant environment is also a challenge for the working mothers. To compete with their male counterparts, they have to be more active, extra careful and perform at extra length at workplace.

Respondent 5 mentioned that:

“Working in a male dominant environment is also very difficult for me. Everyone is curious in finding each other’s faults to take over his place. I have to be very careful, attentive and make best efforts to complete my work properly.”

A respondent from the focus group discussion explained that:

“Public sector provides lot of other benefits that private sector does not offer.”
The statements show that public sector work places provide better facilities than private sector organizations. Most of the respondents get free medical for their family and some free units of electricity according to grade level.

According to focus group discussion respondents expressed that:

“Electricity and medical is free in addition to my pay.”

Work also provides them self-confidence and a reasonable amount of money to spend.

According to another respondent:

“It makes me confident and provides me sufficient money to spend it freely.”

**Family responsibilities and connectedness**

The findings of the study show that beside office work, a working mother has to perform all activities that a house wife performs without having any relaxation.

As illustrated by a respondent:

“At home I have to perform all house hold tasks that includes cooking, washing, cleaning, ironing, kitchen work and looking after my children etc. From work, I get two days off, but there is no escape from the household responsibilities.”

Family responsibilities are equally demanding. For example, according to a respondent

“In my view working at home is much more demanding than at office.”

These multiple roles made them over-burdened and hence create a sense of work overload or burnout.

A respondent put it like that:

“Being a working mother I feel myself overburdened due to multiple tasks.”

This dual responsibility of work and home makes it a 24 hours’ job for working mothers which ultimately make their life mechanical. A respondent from the focus group discussion illustrated that

“To be a working mother is a 24 hours’ job with very little time to rest.”
Results show that working mothers do not want their family especially children to be neglected. They believe they are giving them quality time.

It is expressed by a woman that:

“I think that quality time matters a lot than staying at home for long time. So as a working mother, I take extra care of my children. I spend quality time with them in which I check their homework and prepare their tests etc. I also play and watch television with them.”

**Adjustment Process**

The findings revealed that adjustment is everything that a woman does throughout her life. Work has its own demands like punctuality, concentration, and organizing work and to deal with office politics. Whereas family requires time, money, focused attention, care, love and so many other things. It appears that adjustment process is very challenging and demanding. Respondents of focus group agreed that managing work and family life is very challenging and it makes them rigid and relatively emotionless. Working mothers have to make a lot of compromises especially when they have to leave their young children at home.

It is elaborated by a woman that:

“Workplace and domestic requirements both are very demanding, challenging and time consuming. It was really very difficult when a mother has no option but to leave her bundle of joy at home and go for work. Especially in nuclear family when I had to drop my son at my mother’s house and then reach office.”

Another response with reference to work-family adjustments illustrated that:

“If adjustment means sacrificing wishes, emotions, sentiments and health then I am doing it. There is no one to take care of me during illness. And if husband gets sick his demands are enormous.”

During adjustment process working mothers feel self-pity; they cannot give proper attention to their diet and health. They feel as if they are leading a mechanical life.

As expressed by Respondent 6:
“In order to make adjustments in work and family, I have compromised with my wishes, emotions and health. I think I have lost my real self somewhere while making adjustment between home and work.”

Another major problem is that working mothers are facing frustration after performing multiple responsibilities which ultimately affected their emotional and physical health. Most of them complained for constant headache, back pain, stress and health deterioration.

According to a focus group respondent:

“All time I get over stressed and frustrated due to over work. And because I don’t take proper rest I am deteriorating my health day by day.”

Adjustment is not an easy process. Women have to bring extra office work at home and complete it late night after performing all household responsibilities. They cannot take proper rest which makes them sick. Working mothers living in nuclear families have to take help from their families or, at times, opt for day care centers facility.

**Strategies for Adjustment**

This study found that working mothers use several strategies for making adjustments in their work and family life. One of their strategies is attentiveness and alertness. In this way, they adjust themselves according to the environment.

As illustrated by a respondent that:

“Work and family both demand time and vigilance. We lose focus at work if we do not get focused all the time.”

Furthermore, one respondent from the focus group discussion stated that:

“I think positive attitude, acceptance and cooperation allow me to manage my work and family life efficiently.”

A few respondents of focus group also said that they have to be emotionally and physically strong to perform multiple roles.

A respondent elaborated it like:
“For managing everything we have to be very strong both emotionally as well as physically.”

It has been noted during data collection that working mothers admit that they share things with their colleagues, friends and sisters to shed their emotional stress. One of the amazing response is;

“Another thing that we do is to share with our colleagues and friends who understand our problems. Men do not share things compared to women but women cannot live without sharing. This keeps us light and healthy.”

This study has revealed that working mothers are much more time conscious than men because of their compelling responsibilities.

It is expressed by a respondent that

“Time management is very important because when I fail to do one thing in time, it affects my entire schedule. I try to complete my work within timings but if I have to bring it home I do it at late night.”

Another respondent mentioned that:

“Time management is very important for me otherwise work and family life cannot be managed properly.”

It appears that family is the first priority for every working mother. They don’t want to neglect their family for work.

A respondent shared that:

“Family is my first and foremost priority. I do not merge work and family life because they lie in different spheres and I perform all my duties accordingly.”

Flexible attitude also plays a major role in the adjustment process. Working mothers have to accept several family responsibilities. For example, if children get sick they have to cut hours from their work to look after the sick kids.

A woman from the focus group discussion expressed that:
“With the passage of time we get more flexible and learn to adjust with the circumstances. We adjust ourselves according to the situation. We know there is no escape from it and we have to do it amicably.”

The process suggests that working mothers face several challenges of work and family life and then learn to adopt certain strategies to make adjustments in both domains in order to make their life little comfortable and satisfied. The whole scenario can be portrayed in figure 1.

**DISCUSSION**

This study explores the experiences of working mothers in making adjustments between their work and family life in the context of public sector organization i.e. LESCO.

The study reveals that women join work force for multiple reasons and economic reason is the most important among all. Existing research supports the idea that women earning contribute significantly to the family earning shares, hence reduce the financial burden (Khan et al., 2009). Work and family life adjustments happen to be a long, tiring and extremely challenging process. Work has its own demands which are quite different from family responsibilities. The real challenge is how working mothers respond to work and family pressures amicably and efficiently by using various strategies and adjustments. Women need to confront the professional duties and family responsibilities congruently in order to perform better on both fronts (Valimaki et al., 2009). Despite woman role has been acknowledged as a member who is contributing to the financial resources, however, the associated responsibilities have yet not been adjusted according to their needs for balancing the work and family spheres.

Cooperation from family members have been identified as a major reason for women to get the maximum motivation from. The findings from this study reveal working mothers’ aspirations for higher level of cooperation from family members especially spouses to keep the flow of official and non-official activities regular. These findings are further supported by existing research that acknowledge the role of family support as key determinant in maintaining the work-family life balance (Valimakakiet al., 2009).
The study identifies strategies being adopted by working mothers in making adjustments with their work-family relations including positive attitude, acceptance, family co-operation, attentiveness, flexibility, time management and catharsis. Working women also reported to take paid domestic help in the form of a maid or request to a family member that stays at home to take care of kids or elders. Working women also were found to avail the facility of day care centers for their children.

In the context of Pakistan, high inflationary trends have compelled middle and lower middle class women to join workforce in order to meet economic challenges of their families. Society although has accepted the working women as a substantial financial resource but it still needs to acknowledge women's contribution by showing positive attitudes towards working women at social and cultural level. Though, men at large have accepted women as additional earning hand; they are yet to extend their cooperation for women in performing domestic responsibilities. While men are increasingly making career discussions with their spouses and families, nevertheless most men do not accept their share of house hold and child care tasks. As a result, working mothers have to make several adjustments in order to add value and maintain balance in their family life.
This study has identified these challenges and adjustment processes. Compared with private organizations, the public counterparts provide more stringent constraints, including non-supportive environment and absence of employee engagement programs. The public sector workplaces generally create a stressful work environment that demand extra energy and efforts to execute work requirements. This leaves women in more demanding position to fulfill non-workplace requirements. This study provides contextual data through qualitative analysis that highlight few strategies that may help organizations to take necessary steps to accommodate working women issues. The findings can be useful in organizations to help working women achieve better performance, life satisfaction and excellence in balancing work and family life.

Firstly, it has been proven from the literature and data collected that family support and appreciation is very essential for working mother/women. Father, brother and husband should extend moral support to encourage working women of their family especially in Pakistan. It has been accepted all over the world that if women of the house contribute financially then men also contribute towards household jobs to make life comfortable and happy. Provision of education, encouragement and opportunities by family members, supportive husband and in-laws can create an environment where a working women can gain respect and admiration to balance their work and family life.

Secondly, counselling sessions should be organized by the public sector organizations to provide emotional support to working mothers. A positive and supportive culture should also be inculcated within the organizations to encourage and motivate working women. The strategies identified by this research could be used by the organization to help females in maintaining balance between work and family.

Thirdly after analyzing data, it has been found that flexible timings of job make the working mothers life comfortable. This could be implemented in LESCO to support females. The organizations should consider providing day care facilities with trained staff in public organizations to ease their difficulty in leaving children at home. Furthermore, organizations should provide transportation facilities to working mothers. If employee is satisfied, he/ she would contribute positively to enhance productivity and efficiency of organization.
REFERENCES


