

WORK- FAMILY LIFE ADJUSTMENTS

Work- Family Life Adjustments: Experiences of Working Mothers at LESCO

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ABSTRACT

Whereas 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 techniques was conducted in Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO). Five in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion was used for data collection. On the basis of thematic analysis of the data, grounded theory on the process of work-family life adjustments had been developed in this research. The results showed that adjustment was a long, tiring and extremely challenging process as work had its own demands which were quite different from family responsibilities. In the process of making adjustment, working mothers had to compromise their sleep, desires, and health. Working mothers narrated their strategies for responding to work and family pressures amicably and efficiently. These strategies included: flexible and positive attitude, acceptance of family support and co-operation, time management, and catharsis. The ladies were looking for enhanced family/spousal cooperation and organizational support to make their family life comfortable and relaxed.

Key words: work-family life, adjustments, working mothers, challenges

INTRODUCTION

The world communities are changing their lifestyles, cultural values and habits with the rapid industrialization, technological advancement and modernization. Presently access to latest knowledge and information through education is easily available for both men and women. Increasing participation rates of women at higher levels of education (Mangi, 2011) and exposure to mass media of communication have broadened their vision, increased awareness and opened new horizons for their empowerment and growth. 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 show that women employment has increased to 15.6% in 2010-11 from 14.01% in 2007-08 (Bibi, 2010). Increasing proportions of female participation in the labor force has created bigger challenges for women in the incorporation of new roles and responsibilities as well as managing their time with child bearing and child rearing years (Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

Work-Family Life Adjustment

Whether working on the job or at home, women have to play diverse and simultaneous roles by frequently switching on from one role to the other. Working on the job is a performance of professional duties assigned by the organization and work at home includes their family and domestic duties. Researchers have concluded that women need to confront the professional duties and family responsibilities with a congruent approach (Valimakaki et al. 2009). Taking a lead from such observations about work-family adjustment, this study has tried to explore the process working mothers adopt to make adjustments in their work and family life.

Though men at large appear to have accepted the women as additional earning hand; they are yet to extend them cooperation in performing domestic responsibilities. Resultantly working mothers have to make several adjustments to maintain healthy balance in their family living requiring integrated efforts with work and family life (Wickham, 2008). Consequently the pressure on organizations to respond toward employee's family responsibilities has also been increasing (Goodstein, 1994). It's a proven fact that family and spousal support is essential in keeping a balance in her work and family life (Valimaki et al.2009).

In order to be successful in balancing work and family life, working mothers have been found to be making several marital partnerships with their spouses inclusive of sharing house work, mutual involvement in childcare, joint decision making, equal financial influence and sharing emotional stress (Zimmerman et al.2003). The present study has identified the strategies being used by the working mother to cope with the challenges they encounter in managing their work and family life.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are:

- To understand reasons for women joining the work force.
- To understand the process of their adjustment with work and family life; and to identify strategies adopted by the working mothers in managing their work and family obligations.

Literature Review

Reasons for Female Work Force Participation

The quantitative study by Faridi et al.(2009) in Punjab identified that all the education levels except basic level of education up to middle level have positive and significant impact on the women joining labor force. The study indicates that education greatly empowers women. Educated husband also has a positive and significant impact on wives' employment. Another study by Khan & Khan (2009) analyzed that husband low level of income with increase in children education expenses forces married women to join workforce and become additional financial resource.

Coleman (2012) found that economic benefits of women employment are clear: more women joining work force increases a nation's output and is an important contributor to household income. Recent studies indicate that women's resources are mainly utilized towards family welfare; especially nutrition, education and health.

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 role expectation from working mothers. India is no different than Pakistan. A qualitative study conducted by Misra (1998) found that at work a woman 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 wants 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 the most confusion, tension and create many other problems for her. A career 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.

The flexible opportunities provided at place of work or work- life balance policies of the organizations assist the working women to unite the domain of the profession and family (Lewis & Humbert, 2010). Moreover, the challenges for the organizations are to find out the adequate integration between domestic and work life by work-family arrangements (Peeters et al. 2009) by providing equality policies, statutory entitlements, maternity leave, career leave, parental leave and non-statutory arrangements like flexi-time, e-working, job sharing, team-time working (Glass Estes & McCarthy, 1997).

Afzal et al.(2010) had explored the topic of work family life integration among mid-career women in the city of Faisalabad. The study recognized that the working mothers were

responsible in performing their domestic and professional roles, besides personal well-being. The proper incorporation of both roles was plausible with the stipulation of flexibility from both work and family system joint or nuclear. Family was their first priority. All women had intense feelings of motherhood, though their careers were also of high importance for them as they found it rewarding and satisfying. The study also determined that child care was very sensitive and a delicate job. Quality time spent with children create long lasting effects on their lives.

METHODS

The research has followed qualitative research method which is useful in getting living experiences of individuals through multi method of data collection in order to explore and gain insight into the work-family adjustment process. This research was a case study in which working mothers at LESCO were taken as subjects. Purposive sampling technique had been used and respondents were selected on the basis of pre-determined criteria. The criteria were: current working mother aged 28- 35 years, having at least one child under 5 years, and living in a nuclear family. It was also taken into account that these women had multiple responsibilities and challenges at home and they should be able to describe the process of work-family life adjustment in detail. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion were used for data collection. Total of 5 in-depth interviews were conducted in this research. The duration of each interview was 50-60 minutes and was audio-taped. After every interview oral de-briefing was given for validation. Focus group discussion was conducted by involving 5 working mothers. The discussion lasted for 80 minutes. The data responses were collected, transcribed and grouped. Initially themes were established from the transcribed data in order to generate set of key concepts regarding the work-family life adjustment of working mothers. From these themes, codes were generated from which interpretations and explanations have been offered.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Women joining the work force

The analysis of the data suggested three major reasons that influence women to join workforce: economic, incidental and education. It had been derived that economic reason was the most important factor amongst all which persuaded them to join workforce.

The findings show that women are left with no choice but to join the workforce and become an earning hand in case of being elder in the family in the absence of a main male earning hand. They took this responsibility to support their family financially. *“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”*. For some others higher economic needs drove them into the workforce. They wanted to opt for better quality life or wished to help their husbands financially. *“After my marriage I felt in-appropriate that whole family is dependent on one male member. The prices were escalating rapidly and I could see many women joining workforce and contributing towards home uplift, so I also decided to join workforce to make our living comfortable”*. Furthermore,

husband was also considered as a motivational factor for the wife to join workforce. *“My husband also motivated me to apply for this job because of good salary and other fringe benefits”.*

Second reason that persuades women to join workforce is incidental and self-empowerment. It seems that women want to join workforce when they feel they have plenty of time at home and they can also get support from their families. This way she also gets empowered. *“After my marriage I was 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”.* However, whether they enter the workforce for free time or with persuasion, it ultimately became their priority.

Third reason for the women to join workforce is their education. They didn't want to waste their parents' investment as well as their own time spent in their studies and therefore they join work force. *“I decided to join work to utilize my studies. I had done my masters so I didn't want to waste my studies”.* She also gets self-satisfaction when she contributes towards her family and self.

Self-perception in relation to work

The analysis of the data shows 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 problem of long working hours and at times they also have to stay late for extra work especially where office timings are strictly followed. *“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 on till late hours to complete extra work”.* Being a working mother they demand relaxation of time from work. According to one of the respondents *“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 which causes their late arrival in offices. This becomes a strong demotivation factor for them. They also have to listen harsh comments from their bosses and colleagues. *“I reach my office late because of switching the busses. So I used to reach office till 9:00 a.m. and have to bear harsh words”.* They want some transportation facilities too. *“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 draw line at workplace. *“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”.*

This study was conducted at public sector and according to one respondent; *“Public sector provides lot of other benefits that private sector does not offer”.* This statement shows 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. *“Yes electricity and medical is free in addition to my pay”.*

Work also provides them self-confidence and a reasonable amount of money to spend. It also empowers them. *“It makes me confident and provides me sufficient money to spend it freely”.*

Self-perception in relation to family

This study shows that beside office work, a working mother has to perform all activities that a house wife performs without having any relaxation. *“At home I have to perform all household 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: *“In my view working at home is much more demanding than at office”.* These multiple roles made them over-burdened. *“Being a working mother I feel myself overburdened due to multiple works”.* This dual responsibility of work and home makes it a 24 hours job for the working mothers which ultimately make their life mechanical. *“To be a working mother is a 24 hours job with very little time to rest.”*

Finding shows that male support is very necessary for working mothers. In this study everyone had the support of their spouse *“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 his trusts upon me although he knows that I work with male yet he never imposed any restrictions on me.”* It is evident from the study that working mothers realise the importance of their husband’s support. However husband support is more or less confined to emotional support. *“Sometime my husband looks after children but it happens occasionally”.*

Results show that working mothers do not want their family especially children to be neglected. They believe they are giving them quality time. *“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, prepare their tests etc. I also play and watch television with them”.*

Adjustment Process

“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. *“Managing work and family life is very challenging and it makes us rigid and emotionless”* said one respondent. Working mothers have to make a lot of compromises especially when they have to leave their young children at home. *“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 house and then reach office”.* Another response with reference to work-family adjustments: *“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 get sick his demands are enormous”.

During adjustment process working mothers feel self-pity; they cannot give proper attention to their diet and health. It seems as if they are leading a mechanical life. *“In order to make adjustments in work and family, I have compromised with my wishes, emotions and health. I think I have been lost somewhere while making adjustment between home and work”.* Another big problem that working mothers are facing is the frustration after performing multiple responsibilities which ultimately affect their emotional and physical health. It has also becomes a major factor towards living a compromised life. Most of them complain for constant headache, back pain, stress and health deterioration. *“Some 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”.*

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. *“Work and family both demand time and vigilance. We lose focus on work if we do not get focused all the time”.* Furthermore according to one of the respondents *“I think positive attitude, acceptance and cooperation allow me to manage my work and family life efficiently.”* A few respondents said that they have to be emotionally and physically strong to perform multiple roles. *“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; that’s why men suffer more heart attacks as compared to women because they keep everything secret. But women cannot live without sharing. This keeps us light and healthy”.*

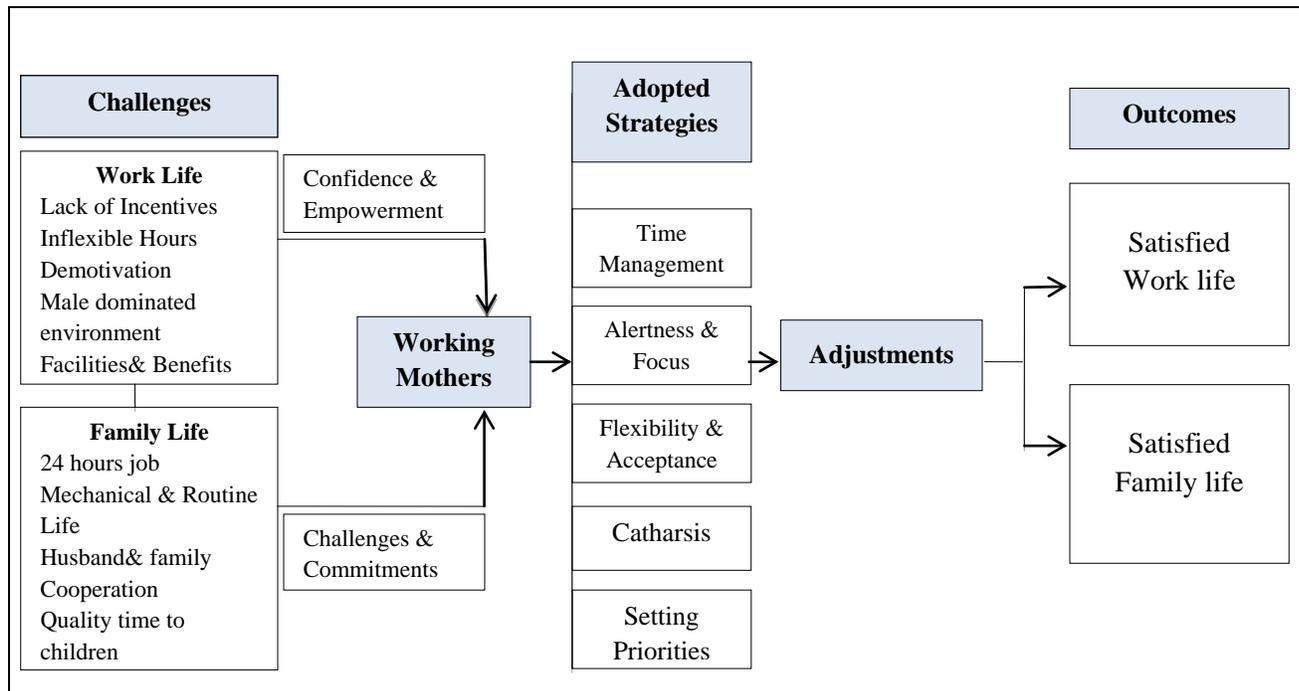
This study has revealed that working mothers are much more time conscious than men because of their compelling responsibilities. *“Time management is very important because when I fail to do one thing in time, it affects my entire schedule. I try to complete my work within timings but if I have to bring it home I do it at late night.”* *“Time management is very important for me otherwise work and family life cannot be managed properly.”* It appears that these women also define and make their priorities. Family is the first priority for every working mother. *“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.”* They don’t want to neglect their family for work.

Flexible attitude also plays a major role in the adjustment process. Working mothers have to accept everything as it comes. If children get sick they have to accept it and make adjustment in their work and family life. *“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.

Figure 1: Process of Work - Family Life Adjustment



Discussion

This study explores the experiences of working mothers in making adjustments between their work and family lives in context of LESCO.

Findings show that there are three main reasons that influence women to join workforce: economic, personal education and incidental. Economic reason is the most important factor among all. Mostly women start work to become an extra earning hand in the family due to economic pressures (Khan & Khan, 2009). After marriage they continue with the job to make extra income. Presently men also demand working lady as wife so that she could support the family financially, though they are not willing to compromise with the household duties (Sharpe, 1984). Findings also show that husbands have no objection to his working wives as they understand that the extra income would be spent on their family. Research shows that women's resources are mainly utilized towards family welfare; especially nutrition, education and health than men (King, & Mason, 2001). Secondly, educated women join workforce to utilize their education and also to empower themselves. These women help their families financially to accomplish quality life standards. Research shows that women are

more likely to participate in economic and business activities as their level of education increases (Faridi et al.2009).Thirdly, women join workforce incidentally. They get an opportunity or been offered a job and join it to gain some experience or to pass time. This type of reason is not found in the literature may be because less studies has been conducted in Pakistan.

Findings show that lives of working mothers are very tough as they have to perform multiple tasks simultaneously. Researches have found that women need to confront the professional duties and family responsibilities congruently (Valimakaki et al. 2009). It has been found that adjustment process between work and family is very challenging and demanding. At work women face work pressures like long working hours, lack of incentives, lack of appreciation and demotivation. Rigid work timing is a major issue faced by working mothers because very few organizations allow flexible timings for the employees. Working in a male dominant environment is another big challenge. Hence lack of sufficient time, gender bias, social and cultural norms as well as family responsibilities are the challenges women face to achieve balance(Rehman & Roomi, 2012). However work also provides them self-confidence, financial and medical benefits. Previous research shows that profession and economic empowerment support the women in building their self-confidence and in meeting with their needs and of their families (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987).

Working mothers admit that family cooperation from other family members is very important in keeping work- family relations strong. Females need support from the family system and spouse to make an appropriate assimilation both in family and the workplace (Valimakaki et al. 2009). However this study shows that this help is confined to mere verbal commitments or assistance to children related affairs only. Men are more likely to take some part in grocery shopping and children's education, but very little beyond that (Khattak, 2001). During the adjustment process working mothers feel that they have to compromise their personal wellbeing after having been involved in somewhat mechanical and routine life. In this process they have to sacrifice their wishes, emotions and health. They sometime 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 also get frustrated after performing multiple responsibilities which ultimately affects their emotional as well as physical health. In order to make adjustments, working mothers living in the nuclear families take help from their families or some time opt for day care centers facility.

Working mothers adopt several strategies to maintain balance in their family lives. Mostly they have to draw clear line between work and family life. First and foremost is that these women need to be alert and focused all the time. They use positive attitude, flexibility and cooperation in the adjustment process. Working mothers always define their priorities. Family is the first priority for every working mother. However, time management is the key to success for each one of them. Finding shows that if these women get extra office work then

they first fulfill their family responsibilities and then complete their office assignment by compromising their sleep. All these strategies are supported by literature (Zimmerman et al.2003). Facility of flexible timing is only available when boss is lenient and understands their problems. Working mothers under flexi- time option find it easy to balance both domains. Research shows that the flexible opportunities or work- life balance policies assist working women to integrate the profession and family domains (Lewis & Humbert , 2010). Working mothers do share their feelings with their colleagues, friends and sisters for purposes of relaxation.

Although it was evident that working mothers encounter lot of challenges in the adjustment process but still they are satisfied with this situation and want to continue this status. Working women also suggest that young married women should join workforce either as an entrepreneur or an employee. They should empower themselves and should learn to respond to work and family pressures and use strategies to achieve balance.

Conclusions

Women join work force for multiple reasons and economic reason is the most important among all. Education empowers and polishes their potentials and incidental reason provides them opportunities to gain experience.

Work and family life adjustment happens 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. Since long Pakistani society has accepted women as an additional financial resource, however, the role of the male still needs to be re-defined. As a matter of fact in the process of making successful and workable adjustments, family support and husband co-operation plays a vital role. In the process of making adjustment, working mothers have to compromise their sleep, sentiments and health. Working mothers also get frustrated after continuously leading a routine and mechanical life which affects them emotionally and physically.

Finally the strategies being adopted by working mothers in making adjustments with their work- family relations includes positive attitude, acceptance, family co-operation, attentiveness, flexibility, time management and catharsis. Although these women efficiently utilize these strategies to achieve a balance in work-family life but still more spousal help, organization support in the form of flexi time-options and appreciation is required to make them efficient, comfortable and relaxed.

Recommendations

Following recommendations are being proposed which may be considered to empower the working women/mothers;

1. It has been proved that family support and appreciation is very essential for working mother/ women. Father, brother and husband should extend moral and physical

support to encourage their family's working women. It has been accepted all over the world that if women of the house are contributing financially then men also contributes towards household jobs to make life comfortable and happy. Provision of education, encouragement and opportunities by family members, supportive husband and in-laws can creates an environment where a working women can commands respect and admiration and make a balanced work and family life.

2. Family and organizational support plays an important role in maintaining balance in working mother's life. Therefore women should be encouraged and empowered by the family and organization to continue with their jobs in order to continue strengthening their family socio-economic structure and living standard.
3. Counselling /Trainings should be organized by the respective organizations to support working mothers in making adjustments in their work and family life. A positive and supportive culture should also be developed within the organizations to encourages and reward these women.
4. It has been found in this study that little relaxation in the office timings makes the working mothers life much comfortable. The working mothers also feel difficulty in leaving their small children at home. Therefore Office/ work management should provide flexible time facility in their organization for working mothers in public and private sectors. Also the management should provide child care facility at the work places with trained staff. Furthermore, organizations should facilitate working mothers with transportation and job sharing opportunities. If employee is satisfied he/ she will contribute positively to enhance productivity and efficiency of organizations.
5. Government should also formulate friendly and supportive policies to encourage working women in achieving balance in their work- family life.

Avenues for Future Research

1. The study suggests that career mothers who have gone through this process should be consulted and also single working women (divorced/widowed with school going children) to find out their strategies for work-family life adjustment. In addition to it longitudinal studies may also be conducted to see the change and new opportunities provided by their organizations.
2. This study was conducted at public sector organization (LESCO). The same study could be carried out in private sector organizations. This may help in comparing the adjustment process of work and family life across two sectors.

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