



RESEARCH PAPER

Challenges of Balancing Career and Motherhood: A Qualitative Study of Female Academicians working in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to qualitatively analyze female academics' challenges of balancing career and motherhood. The research findings revealed that female academicians face work-family conflict. Normative images of motherhood do not relax women from the responsibilities of multidimensional tasks of children and household. It was also shown that due to the collectivistic context, female academics get help from colleagues, in-laws, and the workplace in the form of social support and relaxation in working hours. The study further revealed that mothers face mental exhaustion and sleeplessness in their struggle to balance work and family life. Enrollment in any higher study program has a defining role in the fabrication of work intensification and reducing time for concerns of personal and social life. To cope with these entire situations, they try to work harder and longer and exchange career advice through colleague networks.

Keywords: Child Care, Gender Norms, Lived Experience, Professionalism, Work-Family Nexus

Introduction

Globally, emerging socioeconomic changes have influenced family dynamics and a substantial growth in the proportion of dual-earner families has increased, in developing countries including Pakistan (ILO, 2013; Cohen & Liani, 2009; Reddy et al, 2010; Ahmed, et. al. 2015); Schneider & Waite, 2005). In Pakistan, the percentage of working women has increased from 16.3% in 2000 to 24.3% in 2013 (PBS, 2013). These statistics reflect that almost seven million female workers in the country have joined the workforce within the period of 13 years in different fields like education, the military, government, medicine, etc. The recent statistics of the gender-wise distribution of teachers reflect that women prefer to work as teachers or academicians more as compared men, as the percentage of female teachers was (58%) compared to male teachers (42%) (PBS, 2013).

One of the reasons for women joining academic institutions was that the academic career had been supposed to be extremely secure and satisfying as compared to other occupations (Kinman & Jones, 2003). In addition, academicians have flexibility and independence in their professional tasks (Kinman & Jones, 2003; Bell, Rajendran & Theiler, 2012). These traits were considered the major factors behind the selection of academia as a career choice by women in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the growing competition has increased stress for academicians in the last couple of decades (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua, & Stough, 2001; Perry, et al., 1997).

Academic work has been increasingly becoming more challenging and demanding, mainly in higher education institutions (Kinman 2008; Bell, Rajendran & Theiler, 2012). The

main reasons are long working hours, growth of replica or evening program, tight deadlines, and performing multiple roles and responsibilities simultaneously, i.e. teaching, research, consultation, management of different educational events, and supervising of research work of students (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004, Kinman 2001; Bell, Rajendran & Theiler, 2012; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005). In addition, the new policy initiatives introduced by Higher Education Commission of Pakistan such as to have a doctorate degree for early promotion have mounted extra pressure on academicians. Because of the highly competitive environment and multiple responsibilities, academicians tend to experience work-life conflict, particularly the academicians who are married and have children (Dickson-Swift, et al., 2009; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; Tytherleigh, et al., 2005; Winefield, et al., 2003).

Literature Review

Work-family nexus is an emerging major concern among employed mothers because of facing a multitude of varied social statuses and related responsibilities. Scholarly literature highlighted two explanations for work-family conflict for mothers. First, the time spent in the non-traditional role of paid work, women may feel more conflict because of internalized gender norms. Second, childcare and housework are considered the sole responsibility of a mother that must be either completed prior to or after the workday, and the timing of such tasks creates conflict with paid work. In most cases, women cannot afford to drop their jobs due to different reasons, such as to live a quality life, meet the financial needs of the family, status in society, empowerment, etc. Therefore, in order to manage both domestic work and paid work, the mothers bear continuous pressures from both professional and family spheres, and it becomes a case of 'dual burden' according to sociologists.

In addition, Well-established academic career standards have universalized that academic career achievements, recognition, and promotion are heavily determined by faculty research productivity. Empirical studies that were designed to understand how the gender of academics interacts with their career decisions and career progress, revealed that academic women are far more likely than male colleagues to agonize about the implications of childbearing and childrearing for their career advancement (Wilson, 1995; Gerdes, 2006). It has been found that a large section of women continues to accommodate the demands of working life in response to gender asymmetry in the division of family obligations (Gerson, 1986; Crompton, 2006). Particularly when women are married and have young children at home then they disproportionately take up the responsibility for child care that reduces their time, focus, and energy for research productivity (Hunter and Leahey, 2010; Stack, 2004; Fox, 2005).

A possible explanation for the creation and perpetuation of gendered domestic structures can be attributed to the enduring role played by broader traditional values related to gender role expectations. The analysis of the reviewed studies drew attention to the influence of the gendered organization of unpaid domestic duties on career choices and outcomes, also suggest that women's willingness to take up the additional unequal burden of family care is largely influenced by gender role socialization, and socio-cultural expectations (Baker, 2012; Crompton, 2006; Muzaffar, et. al. 2018)). These traditional gender outlooks appear to resist incorporating any changes occurring in the gender order in terms of increasing the participation of women in the labor economy (Connell, 1996). These theories suggest that conventional gender role ideology seeks to maintain the separation between work and family and appreciate women's roles as dutiful wives, mothers, and homemakers and endorse them to put efforts not to get away from their legacy of domesticity (Nguyen, 2013; Lu et al. 2006). Women tend to internalize these cultural images of appropriate motherhood, and womanhood, through lifelong habitation, socialization, and institutional arrangements (Crompton, 2006). Subsequently, women traditionally feel obligated to assume a lead in performing family duties more than men.

While women's career aspirations, commitments, and achievements are compromised and subdued to maintain this cultural femininity (Luke, 2002).

Although studies are available showing the association between pre-defined indicators of work and family conflict, yet there is a paucity of research findings which shed light on subjective interpretations of changing dynamics of professionalism and its influence on children. Moreover, the role of gender norms of collectivist cultures in regulating the work-life issues of working mothers is less discussed in academic debate (Casper et al., 2007; Razzaq, 2012). To fill this gap specifically in the Pakistani context, the researchers are interested to conduct qualitative research to understand the perspective of working mothers on (i) diverse dimensions of their professionalism, (ii) social, personal, and moral obligation to take care of children with the profession, and (iii) how multiple responsibilities constrain their capacity to build a career and childcare management on parallel grounds.

Material and Methods

Extensive research in work-family dynamics has utilized quantitative methods creating a gap in the qualitative knowledge in this area. In light of this, greater use of qualitative methods has been recommended in order to improve theory development in this area (Casper et al., 2007). For the current study, 225 studies were reviewed out of which only 13% utilized qualitative research techniques which reinforced the need to investigate work-family dynamics from a qualitative paradigm. As our research team was interested in taking an emic and inductive perspective that provides subjective realities and detailed insight into the personal experience of women academicians regarding work and life conflict, the qualitative research design was adapted for the study.

Semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with the participants to gain a detailed understanding of the experiences of working women. Since, interviews also have the opportunity to probe and to ask emerging relevant questions during data collection (Urban & Trochim, 2009), this technique was adapted for data collection. A literature review and two pilot interviews led to the development of an interview guide that had eight broad areas of investigation. Respondents were given the opportunity to express themselves in both Urdu and English language.

The inclusion criteria of the current research were women teachers who had at least one child and were employed full-time as lecturers or assistant professors. Initially, a list of female faculty members and their contact information was formulated from directories of five public sector universities in Lahore. Initially, brief telephonic interviews were conducted to confirm their eligibility on the basis of inclusion criteria and to gain consent regarding the nature of the study as well as audio recordings of the interviews. A total of twenty academicians were interviewed till reaching the point of saturation. Anonymity was ensured by assigning a pseudo-name to each interviewee. Mostly, the academician mothers were highly concerned with work-family conflict and discussed it in detail. Most teachers had two to four children, aged between six months to 20 years. There was only one participant who was a single parent, the rest held marital status as married.

The data were directly translated from Urdu to the English language by the researchers. Translations were randomly shared among the research team in order to ensure the accuracy of the translation. Major categories and themes emerged through analyses based on a combination of notions in the literature, questions in the interviews and developing concepts grounded in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Memos featuring the respondents' expressions and feelings further facilitated synchronization of the data analysis. Researchers utilized the approach of 'Imaginary Dialogue' with the participants during the process of data analysis in order to ensure active reflexivity as it facilitates the researcher to 'keep on a dialogue' with the data in order to understand the connection of

non-verbal expressions and contextual attributes with subjective interpretations given by respondents about their lived experiences (Neumann, 2005).

Results and Discussion

The women academicians were asked to share about the nature of their work, how it was conflicting with motherhood; how they felt when they did not fulfill social, personal, and moral obligations to take care of their children with the profession, and how their multiple responsibilities hindered their capacities to become a “successful professional” and “good mother” on parallel grounds. Five themes emerged regarding factors responsible for work-motherhood conflict: (i) implications of challenging professional lives for female academics; (ii) motherhood: care and career; (iii) a typical working day: working always and everywhere; (iv) child care: the dynamics; and (v) a house of stress: higher studies, children and publications.

Implications of Challenging Professional Lives for Female Academicians

Employment and career advancement in academia are traditionally perceived as highly prestigious for women in Pakistan. This viewpoint of women’s career choices in academic institutions is reinforced by relatively stress-free and autonomous nature of tasks in academia in contrast to other occupations (Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012). However, gradually the best jobs for women in Pakistan particularly in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have become more demanding and challenging in alliance with neoliberalism and internationalization of higher education.

Uniformly respondents expressed that their profession is becoming more demanding and stressful. Some of the senior academic mothers recalled the relatively stress-free initial years of their career while reinforcing the current dynamics of longer hours, stress to follow deadlines, huge enrolments, increasing demands for efficiency, growing involvement in non-teaching duties, and constant pressure for research and publications. These dynamics have drafted academia as a complex and tough profession, especially for academic mothers alongside their non-professional obligations. One of the senior academicians commented on her young colleagues having family along with rising work expectations:

“I have concern for young faculty members who are completely overwhelmed by the effort they have to put into ensuring the balance between demands of work and family. Although, they do it very well, but they suffer from stress and exhaustion which is really alarming and reducing wellbeing in their lives.”

A younger faculty member experienced greater difficulty to manage her roles after completing her Ph.D. then she found in the past:

“My experience after doing PhD revealed that when you think now it’s going to get easier or simpler you couldn’t simplify it as it is mounting further with new demands and pressures. In academia it seems like a chain. The more you do, the more you are asked to do.”

The findings revealed that academic work was progressively becoming more challenging and stressful. It is congruent with research literature during the last two decades (Kinman 2008; Bell, Rajendran & Theiler, 2012). SH’s seemed disparate while pointing to the amplification of contemporary workloads:

“I got to a point where I was exhausted, there was nothing left in the reservoir of my mind expect to count the classes I taught and number of projects I supervised and monitored. I reflected and I thought where my personal life was?”

The mothers in this study with small kids were positioned with impassable prospects of professional growth and achievements due to their constrained capacity to build career and child care management on parallel grounds. MA discussed the cost of being a mother as it was tough for her in the years when her children were young to ensure the international traveling for conferences, publications, and networking that ultimately are necessary for her professional growth. FA is also criticizing the increasing pressures of the academic career:

“You look at things and think, ‘How much am I ready to sacrifice?’ I am not going to compromise my children totally. I am not going to sacrifice my health to be this exceptional researcher. No. I am not going to dump the whole of who I am onto how many times I am published.”

The academicians revealed that their work-family conflict intensified their professional life was shadowing on the rest of life of working mothers. This is consistent with Wells, Hobfoll & Lavin (1999) who argued that change itself is not the source of stress, but change resulting in a loss of valued resources is most problematic.

Motherhood: Care and Career

Jacobs and Winslow (2004) concluded that high expectations at the job fabricate multifaceted implications for professionals and particularly for women. Raddon (2002, p. 387) also commented that ‘women academicians with children are both positioned and positioning within complex and contradictory discourses’, notably the discourses of the ‘successful academic’ and the ‘good mother’. Similarly, the research participants described their problems and challenges faced in becoming a good mother along with full-time employment. They voiced numerous concerns of motherhood were highly influenced by the competitive demands of the profession while their perceived image of a good mother was upset by their heavy workload. ZU says:

“No one can replace a mother. There are some things that only mother can do for her children. I used to teach my children in the evening since this was extremely important as without taking personal interest in your child’s education, their good performance in studies can never be ensured. However, their studies were badly ignored because of intruding office tasks in the evenings with family affairs.”

Younger women were tackling with the challenge of having children and struggling to earn PhD. SA shared how vigorously interplay of work and childcare demands put her in a struggle for balance:

“Child care accompanied by career growth is a dynamic process, and the balance is probably the hardest part to achieve, on daily basis, you have new demands and diverse task of care and career to be accomplished.”

A coworker on the same campus also described how her career targets affected her important decision relating to family life:

“I decided to have a small size of family for my career aspirations. When my second child was born, it was not challenging at first but then it became pretty clear that it would be difficult to grow professionally with more children.”

In the traditional context of Pakistani society, becoming a mother and have a large family size after marriage stands high significance and privilege for women. Yet, working women are getting through the stressful challenges of work. That is why all mothers in this study shared that they were compromising on their personal and socially desirable status to become mothers of more children in order to meet the expectations of professional and

dedicated faculty members of the university. It has been showing how the impersonal demands and pressures of the profession were invading the decisions related to the personal and emotional domains of working women.

Many of the interviewees highlighted their practice to compromise and postpone the special needs of their children in situations wherein the demands of work were incompatible with these concerns. In these circumstances, most of the time they have been suffering from the lack of choices to ensure the balance between work and childcare needs as the nature of professional work has been transforming much more challenging and demanding. Though coping with the dilemmas of work intensification was quite taxing for both mothers and children and resultantly both of them faced psychological and physical ill-being.

A Typical Working Day: Working Always and Everywhere

Descriptions of routine of the academic mothers indicate a sequence of activities that they have to perform daily. This was mainly due to evolving professional life in higher educational institutions wherein female academicians manage the family life along with highly competitive bureaucratizes work settings. The subjective interpretation around lived experiences of work- family conflict as per the working mothers' narrative regarding their lived experiences of multitasking can be understood through the theoretical positioning of this study in the global literature on work-family conflict among faculty members. This has been categorized by Wolf- Wendel & Ward, (2003) into two forms of studies: 'outcomes research', which is typically quantitative and measures the association between family status to publication rates and other dimensions of work-family conflict. The second is a more holistic approach that qualitatively examines the way motherhood touches a woman and her academic career with its emphasis on academicians' experiences and narrations about their situations of work-family interplay. This study clearly falls into the second group because its epistemological approach is to understand the lived experiences of motherhood concerns besides their ever-increasing pressures of professional status through in-depth qualitative interviews.

In the cultural context of Pakistan, women after marriage are mainly obligated to the household chores and child care due to the dominance of gender role ideology. According to the informants, the underlying contribution of their status shift from unmarried to married has brought them to the domestic sphere with significant role expectations related to motherhood.

"Married life is more difficult to manage as compared to unmarried life. Marriage added the countless tasks of children, husband and in-laws to my personal and job tasks which made me experience overburden and stressed out."

Respondents remarked that although they were full time university academicians with very pressurized short-term and long-term career demands and goals, however, this does not relieve them from having the main responsibility of child care and household. SH gave a detailed description of her routine of multitasking:

"On a typical working day, I wake up early morning. After praying, prepares children's school uniform, breakfast, and lunch. Waking up my youngest son who is 5 years old up takes a lot of time. Then I see them aboard their school van. On returning home I meet my kids and hear about their day. As soon as I'm done with the various chores of the day, I go straight to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Alongside, I keep an eye over my kids' studies and their homework. At around 9 at night, my household tasks are done. I don't really get any time to sit down all day."

Almost all respondents agreed that they used to experience a great hassle in morning time while preparing their school-going children or kids at their care taker place along with their own preparation to leave for work. All respondents told that they woke up quite early although they went to bed quite late.

Similarly, AY shared about her non-stop working on routine basis:

“On a typical working day, I wake up around 5:30 in the morning. My elder son goes to pre-school, so I wake him up, make his breakfast, and get him ready. Then I get ready myself. We leave house with my husband. First, we drop our son to school and younger one at day care, and then my husband and I reach department. He is also enrolled in PhD program here. I start work; be it teaching classes or to work on my PhD research. Returning home, I have to do various household tasks for children and husband. After dinner, my first concern is to put my older son to sleep because he has to wake up early next morning. I get free from household chores at around 11 or 11:30 pm if I work non-stop.”

In Pakistani context, the importance of family and its related duties have essential standing in the lives of working mothers along with their careers. So far a typical working day was differently experienced by the mothers in this study while living in joint family structure wherein they have to perform numerous culturally-bound obligations related to in-laws apart from their personal and professional commitments. This is consistent to the theoretical debate of collectivistic culture which raises ideological perceptions among people of a society to surrender their personal interests in order to gain collective group concerns (Kimmelmeier, et al., 2003). In Pakistan, collectivistic gender norms imply that a married woman is not only responsible to take care of her husband and kids but also answerable to look after other members of her husband's family. The contexts of traditional gender role ideology and the way they shape the dynamics of the work-family nexus among working mothers in Pakistan is well echoed in the following narration by BU:

“Returning home, I am so tired and really wish to have a nap. But I have to sit with mother in-law and listen to her about how she managed my children and my home in my absence on daily basis. As I live in a joint family, I am supposed to be responsible for taking care of my husband's parents. I am responsible for cooking food for all family members. It is quite feverish and time bound responsibility especially when there is no one who could compensate my absence and prepared food for all. I feel myself under pressure and stressed out. Even sometimes, I lose concentration in official meetings. Although I have a maid who helps me in the kitchen but she goes back to her home at 5 pm. In the absence of a custom of a combined dinner, food is served to everyone on his/her desired time which takes lot of energy and time. It makes me tired and thus I find myself lethargic and not capable to work on my pending articles for publication in the evening.”

Hence, the intensity of responsibilities is critically linked with a number of family member specifically dependent family members. While discussing the continuum of obligations, MA says:

“The only thing that is consistent is too little time and too many tasks and I am always working until I go to sleep. In global south, traditional societies like Pakistan, Work- family conflict impose some exceptional dynamics wherein professionals, particularly working mothers, face stressors and pressure from multiple domains. Particularly, indigenous ideological structures and institutional arrangements direct and shape the gender role to put many normative onuses on females.”

Child Care: The Dynamics

Parenting is considered as a socially constructed set of practices (Munson, 2015). The perceived child care responsibilities as central feature of parenting was also being underscored by the changing demography of family structures. As some respondents narrated that the trends of small family size and shifting of family structures from joint to nuclear family arrangements set the settings wherein more one-to-one time is expected from mothers to spend with children (Crouter & Booth, 2014).

Child-care, especially when mothers are on their duties, is of particular concern for female faculty. Participants greatly experience difficulty in managing their work and child care when they started their academic career. Quandaries of child care are very challenging for respondents having small kids and full-time employment simultaneously. They have to develop a sustainable arrangement suitable to their multitasking and boundary-less responsibilities. IR shared her experiences of managing work with her newborn child:

“When my son was born, there was no daycare facility at my workplace. I faced a lot of problems in raising him and became a rolling stone between work and home. I always felt like I was fighting expectations of one domain against the other for time. I was under a lot of mental stress at that time. It’s now less painful than it was before, when everything seemed like emergency management and now I am into a routine and experience taught me how to manage.”

Almost all respondents considered their full-time working hours a situation which made the child-care management more composite and troublesome. Since their office timings, children school hours or day care timings were not compatible, they have to arrange alternative support systems for childcare. Some of them expressed their inconvenience to use these services that did not match with faculty mothers’ expectations and preferences. FA spoke her reservations about inconvenience about timing of day care:

“Hours (of daycare) are definitely not good as I have to pick my child at 3pm even sometime my important official tasks are continuing even after 3pm.”

Bell, Rajendran & Theiler (2012) found that perceived job stressors (e.g., immediate deadlines and being under pressure to complete tasks) had led through the academicians to take unfinished work to home for completion. Correspondingly, the respondents reported that the ever-growing amplification of work impose deadlines and time-bound assignments on frequent basis to work on them in home even after returning from office. However the academic mothers experienced spillover of work, and especially having less time to look after children responsibilities.

The mothers in the study found themselves in a constant struggle to integrate work, childcare, and home management. Not surprisingly, all women gave a consensual opinion about the stretching role of professional demands as compared to family and child care responsibilities. Correspondingly, the respondents reported in this study that they had to transfer office tasks in family time because of time-bound office demands in order to complete them alongside diverse domestic and childcare duties.

As IR shared how the intensive teaching load affects her capacity to manage child care:

“It is distressing to teach in the evening; the babysitters are not usually available at that time, I remain with no option as in if I have to teach then I have to teach.”

Not surprisingly, two of the oldest public sector universities from where we conducted interviews, did not have day care facility for its female teachers. Formally, there

is no specified flexibility for working mothers. SN; another respondent from the same university shared her experience regarding day care and its related difficulties:

“It is very important that the institutions may establish a daycare center for employees and formal flexibility in workhours too. Once my colleague had no arrangement for her kid and she had to bring him to class and a complaint was lodged against her. On human grounds, it was very unfair and she truly had no other option.”

Yet, many of the respondents not only identified their crisis related to child care during their duty hours but they also recommended suggestions. They aspired to have a workplace more suitable to maternal concerns and should provide daycare facility for working mothers. They further emphasized that a female employee who breast feed her baby needs more flexible work timings. With reference to their suggestions, changes are required at policy level. They have felt needs of formal policy making for family friendly provisions through which they can be in better position to integrate work-family balance.

A House of Stress: Higher Studies, Children and Publications

The findings reveal that participants are highly motivated to cultivate every aspect of their children’s social and intellectual needs under the influence of normative and cultural expectations of appropriate mothering. Many respondents repeatedly recounted that their fatigue undermined their capacity to experience a quality communication and time with their kids. Feeling of distress had been developed in mothers due to their constrained interaction and communication with children after returning from office and becoming busy again in household tasks that demanded to attend them.

AS gave a vibrant account of the combined pleasure and problem that young children represent:

“My long working hours from 9 to 4 put me under great feeling of guilt, and I feel like I am not doing justice with my kids. The children are not concerned with what their mother do. For them she’s just their mother, and they want her attention. My children aspire to tell me everything that occurred during day-time in my absence. As I entered home they still grip my legs and hands. They wish me to listen to them. Especially the little one takes my face in her hands and make me look into her eyes and just listen to her. At that moment, I wish to wipe out everything related to my job and its pressures from my mind.”

Mothers have great concern regarding psychological effects that their children might experience due to the continuation of their engrossment in tasks across the work and family domains. Some respondents told about the fluctuations in their children’ personalities due to their high involvement in multitasking and less availability of time for their kids in their early years of life.

“I do feel that because of the exhaustion and busy schedule of work, my interaction with my younger son is affected. When one is mentally occupied, obviously, it affects the interaction. I think there is some negative effect on my children because I have limited time to share with them even after returning home as I get busy in household tasks. When my third child was two years old, I started fulltime job. He’d cry and wait for me when I left him behind. Even now, the other two somehow manage to get their way, but he has become passive and introvert. This makes me feel very bad, since they are all equal for me.”

The preceding discussion and related accounts revealed working mothers’ experiences related to the dynamics of interaction with their kids in intensified pressures of

professional life. Our analysis suggests that socio-cognitive needs of children at an early age require more time of mothers to nourish them as well at professional place, they were spending beginning years of their career that demand extensive time and energies from them to proof their professional integrity and commitment.

FJ started PhD program in later stage of her career and shared a much stressed experiences of studies with her teenage children:

“Being busy in PhD studies, if one of the kids wants to talk, I tell them to talk later. Sometimes they feel that I don’t talk to them. However, they are older now, so they understand my responsibilities but still, they need attention.”

The study also found that children with working mothers are not always positioned in advantages as was previously believed. Even though a debate can be evolved on mothers’ claim that they try to grow professionally in order to provide better prospects to their families at the expense of their quality of life. The respondents, who were enrolled in any higher study program were significantly facing problems related to quality relationship and communication with their children. FA shared her feelings of regret about misdealing her children due to her physical and mental stress:

“Every time I do something, I think about why I’m doing it and what the outcome will be. For example if I’ve scolded the kids when I’m tired, later I do think that it isn’t their fault and that my own routine caused it. I try to keep my mood swings under control.”

The women who were juggling the years of acquiring higher degree in academic career with young children called this time period ‘the brain dead years’. AY said sadly that why her younger daughter wanted to be a housewife; because she finds me always so busy and so tired. Beside the emotional disturbances that children might experience due to the long absence and busy routine of mothers, the physical health and its related needs were also suffered. Especially for the working couples living in nuclear settings, it was outwardly a critical issue to manage child care in their absence. Therefore, they have to carry their kids in morning while leaving house for work.

“I think my children’s health is affected by my work. We have to leave early every morning with the children on a bike, Sometimes; it is cold and sometimes hot. The continuous travelling itself is a burden. In the winter my children’s health is quite disturbed.”

As SA shared her feeling of helplessness while her child was ill and still she had to manage work demands.

“A few days ago, my daughter caught fever and at the same time I had to organize a compulsory seminar for the students. I could not take off from office. So, I handed her to my mother-in-law and I rushed to my department and worked non-stop... when I got back after 4 hours, her temperature had gone high and that moment I felt quite miserable.”

A consensual opinion was generated from the interviews that the shortage of time to perform their family and employment activities always had to be compensated by squeezing quality interaction with kids. Almost all respondents enunciated their concerns about managing a balance in work and domestic life which might make them having a self-actualized and satisfied self.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, work–family research has largely focused on managerial occupational groups (Ahmad & Muddasar, 2012; Casper et al., 2007; Eby et al., 2005). Consequently, academics are underrepresented in the literature related to the work-family interface. Moreover, Taris et al. (2001) argued that research evidence regarding primary and secondary school teachers cannot be generalized to the university setting, as dynamics of work nexus tend to be more challenging at the university level and the distinctive combination of teaching and research is an important source of job stress among academicians. Previous research is mainly based on positivism and employed quantitative methodologies which tend to divorce the situational context and subjective interpretations.

The unique findings of this study suggested that academic mothers were increasingly obliged and interested to cultivate every aspect of their children’s social and intellectual abilities under the influence of normative and cultural expectations of appropriate parenting. In this regard, women complained that scarcity of time and rising pressures of jobs and higher studies deprived them to be well-connected with their kids.

Currie et al. (2000, p. 289) explain a “peak masculinist discourse (one which functions from the uppermost of the organization) to regularize high workloads and primary obligation to the institution”. Similarly, Wolf-Wendell & Ward (2003, p. 113) expressed that “the professorate assumes a uniqueness of purpose”. In connection to these studies that have been conducted purely in the western context of professionalization and im-personalization, the respondents of this study spoke similarly about the un-empathetic responses of their super-ordinates towards their familial and maternal concerns. These traits of organizational stiffness and changing to impersonalized culture might be attributed to the inclination of higher educational institutes to adopt international standards of services and evaluations.

Another important finding of the present study concluded that the influence of toughness of work- place tasks along with extra administrative/clerical work, is very strong on female academicians along with the fulltime job of motherhood in Pakistani society. It has been found that work and family seemed compatible when the expectations of work were not excessive. Yet, the findings presented here suggest that the demands of academic life are becoming excessive and are making it difficult for individuals to succeed at work while having the time to be caring and responsible parents. It is hoped ultimately that the results of this research will contribute to initiate more efficient institutional reforms that promote a better balance between work and family concerns by establishing limits on the apparently limitless demands of academic jobs.

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