

**‘BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY: SUBJECTIVE
EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN VADODARA CITY’**

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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Tarjeet Kaur Ahluwalia

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES

FACULTY OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SCIENCES

THE MAHARAJA SAYAJIRAO UNIVERSITY OF BARODA

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As per PhD ordinance 8(v) I am submitting the summary of the thesis

Ms. Tarjeet Kaur Ahluwalia

Doctoral Candidate

Department of Human Development and
Family Studies

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of
Baroda

Prof. Rajalakshmi Sriram

Professor Emeritus and Guide

Department of Human Development and
Family Studies

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of
Baroda

Through:

Prof. Shagufa Kapadia

Professor and Head

Department of Human Development and Family Studies

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda

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Introduction and Review

Work and family are two very important domains of an individual's life and assume priority over other facets. Defining work-family balance appears to be a simple deed until the depth of the term is understood. At a simple level, a balanced life is when people have a satisfying experience in all areas of life, and use resources such as personal energy, time and commitment to be well distributed in both areas, work and family/life. It is also a state when individuals have the satisfaction and are able to work both at home and in the workplace with minimal role conflict (Prasetya & Wacana, 2016)

Frone (2003) in a review paper on work-family balance explained work-family balance as a multidimensional construct and defined it from two perspectives, first the direction of the influence between work and family (that is work to family versus family to work) and second the type of effect (conflict vs facilitation) i.e. work to family conflict/enhancement, family to work conflict/enhancement. Work-family balance does not only means to reduce the work-family conflict but also to enhance or elevate work-family facilitation. The use of integrated, multivariate models of balance between work and non-work roles give a comprehensive picture of work-family balance. It also states the importance of measuring the relevant directions or dimensions of balance because the direction and the effect are also related to the individual's health and wellbeing. Such an approach is even more important in the present context, considering the demographics of women's employment, especially in the middle class.

In a report by International Labour Organization, India ranks in the bottom 20 in a list of 131 countries in female labour force participation with only 3% in legislative, management, and senior official positions. Senior level female employees in India are just 5 per cent compared to the global average of 20 per cent. Forty-eight percent women drop out of the workforce before they reach the middle of their careers (Malhotra, 2016). India has the lowest national female labour force and the worst progression for junior to middle-level position in case of employed women.

Most studies in India on employed married women report economic need as the primary reason to work for which they opt for full-time careers with already existing family roles and are committed to their jobs just like the men (Dubey, 2010). The employment of women supports the family and raises their standard of living, enables them to provide good educational facilities to children, a better diet for the family members and allows them to save for future economic security. For some women, it is a way to provide an additional income for the survival of the family and for some other women it gives a meaning to their lives (Ahmed,

Nirmala, Reddy, Siddaramu, & Vrandu, 2010; Crompton & Lyonette, 2006; ILO, 1970; Orbach & Custer, 1995).

Success stories of women entrepreneurs and working women are available, however, as the ‘superwoman’ syndrome is on the upswing. It becomes important to understand their navigation through the process of balance, their ups and downs, the kind of resources and support in family and workplace, women’s agency and self-efficacy and its resultant outcome. Based on the research shift from work-family conflict to work-family balance; the shift from the negative to the positive side of work-family balance; the positively evolving profiles of women and the role of work-family balance in their success leads us to more knowledge about the experiences of women residing in Vadodara city and their efforts to achieve their work-family balance. The study is an addition to the literature on work-family balance from the human development perspective as it explains a phenomenon that matters to women and their wellbeing. It also exhibits women’s control over the decisions for their personal benefit such as their work-family balance.

Method

The current study is descriptive in nature with an interpretive stance. It describes the level, nature and the processes of work-family balance from the employed women’s point of view based on their lived realities.

Research Design

The current study was designed using a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design as it can best capture the extent of work-family balance, positive and negative spillover. In the beginning, the method is employed to give an idea of the nature and level of spillovers, followed by processes that help generate explanations for it. It is a two-phase design where quantitative data collection was a priority, followed by qualitative data which was collected after the preliminary analysis. The preliminary analysis of quantitative data facilitated the researcher to identify the specific aspects that needed to be studied in detail and to understand the process elements in the phenomena. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data were then integrated to interpret and elaborate on the results of the study, as also endorsed by Alavi & Håbek (2016); Dilaver (2015); Schoonenboom & Johnson (2017).

Sample

The researcher was interested in married employed women residing in urban areas. The criteria for the inclusion of sample for phase one were women aged 35-45 years; employed in the government sector, private sector and those self-employed; residing in a joint and nuclear family; married for at least five years; graduate or post-graduate education with work experience of 5 to 10 years. The study used the principles of purposive sampling as it aids in yielding information that is peculiar to the studied group and helps examine critical cases for the research (Sandall, 1998).

Tools for Data Collection

Work-family balance scale- To know the level of work-family balance in employed women, a standardized scale developed by Rincy and Panchanatham (2010), Department of Business Administration, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu was used. The scale provides insights into women’s perceptions about the positive and negative spillover of work and family and helps understand and critically analyse the crossover between work and family. The scale possesses acceptable validity and reliability. It is a five-point scale with 46 items and four subscales:

- (i) Intrusion of family into work (10 items);
- (ii) Intrusion of work into the family (18 items); (iii) Work enhancing family (7 items);
- (iv) Family enhancing work (11 items).

Self efficacy/agency scale- The researcher reviewed literature on self- agency, decision making in women and developed a three-point scale to understand the agency-self-efficacy of employed women with reference to their decisions related to workplace, family and their own self. The scale consists of twenty items, of which seven items are related to family demands and expectations; seven items related to workplace demands and expectations; six items related to women’s own needs and demands vis a vis women’s agency or control over those decisions. The scale was content validated by an expert in Psychology and Human Development and Family Studies and women felt opined that it captured the essence of their agency.

Pilot test

A Pilot test of the instruments for data collection acts as a buffer for the researcher to avoid the errors in the data collection process. The work-family balance scale and agency-self efficacy scale was pilot tested by the researcher to develop familiarity with the items in the scale and its administration on the field.

Preliminary Analysis

Data was pre-coded and was entered in IBM SPSS 23. For data cleaning, crosscheck was done between the data entered in SPSS and the raw data collected. Later, the total score for 46 items was calculated using SPSS. The total work-family balance score was then classified into high, moderate and low to determine the level of WFB in women. The scores for the sub scales were also divided into high, moderate and low to determine the extent of spillover of each subdomain.

The researcher reassessed the qualitative data based on the quantitative results to identify the criteria for participants to be included in phase two. The aim of sampling for phase two was to take account of women’s experience about their work-family balance in such a way that a variety of experiences are covered. Twenty-eight participants were chosen based on their personal demography, variations in responses in the work-family balance scale and level of agency- self efficacy and nature of responses on the scale.

To generate data on various dimensions of work-family balance through a free-flowing conversation, the researcher developed a **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**. The interview guide was prepared considering the responses of women in work-family balance scale and agency-self efficacy scale and other aspects that provide information about women’s experience of work-family balance. The interview guide was validated by an expert in the field of Human Development and Family Studies. The tool guided for probes wherever necessary and certain questions were designed to seek an explanation for their peculiar or specific response in phase one. It was through thematic analysis that the interview data was analysed.

Results and Discussion

- Study findings show that more than 50% of women reported high work-family balance, 44% could balance to a moderate extent and only 6% reported low work-family balance.
- The results (three-way ANOVA) show that years of women’s work experience, family type and their sector of employment do not cause any significant differences in the level of work-family balance of women.
- Pearson's correlation coefficient indicated a significant positive relation between women’s agency- self- efficacy and their level of work-family balance (0.336- Significant at 0.01 level). Women with higher agency-self efficacy were able to maintain high work-family balance but women with moderate to low agency- self-efficacy exhibit moderate to low work-family balance.

- High reliance on problem focused coping style was more evident in women with high work-family balance (93% times) in comparison to women with moderate work-family balance (79% times) and women with low work-family balance exhibiting it (73% times). Cunningham & Rosa’s (2008) findings endorse that an individual’s proactive personality benefits when a person exerts control over the occupational stressors. This indicates general use of selection, optimization and compensation behaviour to reduce conflicts between work and family (as also found by Baltes & Heydens, 2003).
- Positive attitude and supportive conduct towards women’s work, understanding and cooperative family members and help for chores and child care in family facilitates efficiency and productivity in their work.
- Motivating workplace, maternity leave, understanding boss, friendly and cooperative colleagues enable the fulfilment of family demands and parental roles.

Greenhaus & Powell’s (2006) explanation about multiple roles and responsibilities resulting in enhancement aligns with findings of the current study. One being the instrumental path where the skills from one domain get transferred and applied to the other. Second is the affective path, where the transfer of skills leads to high performance and positive effect i.e. facilitation and enrichment of women’s balance process. Frone’s (2003) explanation that social support like supporting boss and colleagues, supportive spouse or other family members reduce the family to work or work to family conflict which was also evident in the current study.

Rajadhyaksha (2012) in the research *Work-life balance in South East Asia: The Indian experience*, stated that Indian joint families are assumed to be providers of support, but the findings of the study do not prove it to be completely true for all women living in joint families.

- Demanding in-laws, demanding husband and exclusive burden of childcare and chores along with an insensitive boss, lack of cooperation from colleagues, no maternity leave and no scope for professional development make the two domains of work and family compete with each other resulting into work to family and family to work conflicts.

The findings Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan (2005) revealed that work overload was positively related to work-family conflict.

Conclusion

Participants' responses clearly indicate that work and family are integrated and run parallel in one slide and cannot be considered as two separate spheres. Role overload arising out of lack of support for childcare responsibilities and other workplace benefits, limited scope for progress, demanding and non-flexible working timings were related to the conflict component. Spousal and family support, motivation for work and family friendly supervisors and co-workers had a positive effect on the facilitation of work-family balance. Proactive personality, agency and self-efficacy of women moderated the relationship between the controllable and non-controllable stressors arising out of work-family conflict.

The study also shows that though middle-class women's lives have changed substantially due to education and employment; family's failed adaptations to release women from the exclusive burden of caretaking roles and restrictive gendered attitudes still sometimes become roadblocks for exercising their agency and self-efficacy, making it difficult to achieve balance.

Observations that emerge from the experiences of the study -

- **Women and Gender Stereotypes**

The study highlights a mixed picture of women's conformity to gender stereotypes. It can be observed that women have entered into higher positions and different occupations that provide them with a higher status and respect, but the set notions of women being the primary caretaker and homemaker have not been completely wiped away. However, this is not to say that family was not important to them, but they rationally and logically think of the role divisions and negotiate for equality in role divisions. Thus, gender roles might be predefined but acceptance and rejection of it is a dynamic process based on women's own social orientations.

- **The cost for seeking family support**

The current study reveals that gender roles expectations and support extended by family operate parallel to each other. Most women had family support in terms of involvement of husband and in-laws in childcare and domestic chores, motivation and encouragement for their work, and the cooperation of children, in-laws and husband to maintain their work schedule. However, the support extended by the family is always reciprocated by the women in terms of economic contribution towards family, acceptance and adjustment to family culture, work benefits like maternity leave, opportunity to travel to a foreign country, better lifestyle and better educational

facility to children. They could compromise on their work front, like forego promotions, transfers, take a job with less working hours and demands. On the personal front, they just ignore their own self, compromise on their health, and sacrifice every personal luxury to accommodate to the demands of the family, because they feel an obligation towards them. All women reported family support to be the most important factor to succeed in professional and personal life. Thus, family support is an asset for employed women, but the costs need to be negotiated or analysed.

- Men and women's work-family balance

Most women reported that their husbands support and share domestic chores and childcare responsibilities. The support enabled women to meet the requirements of work and family (Sriram, 2019a, b; Sriram & Navalkar, 2012,2013; Sriram & Sandhu, 2012).

To state that men are completely absent from family roles would be incorrect. In the current study, it was observed that women always negotiated and sought their husband's support and were successful to a great extent. It was only in the cases where the husband had a touring job, had long duration of working hours, had no respect for women's work, or when their involvement was deliberately not expected, then the husband's role was a miss which caused difficulties for women. But most, women reported that their husbands to be supportive and understanding towards them. Thus, men can be fathers, husbands, just like mothers and wives, they just need acceptance and motivation to carry out their non-gendered roles.

- A truly Supportive Workplace

The workplace for employed women becomes like the second family away from home. This necessitates that the second family is supportive and motivating just like their own family. However, the scenario is different in reality. The sector of employment does not make much difference to women, but the attitude if the colleagues and the fact that women are also working just like men, in addition to taking care of their family roles, becomes an important component to judge if the workplace is conducive for women. Most women employed report difficulties of childcare arrangements, lack of flexibility in work timings and lack of time off, but the workplace takes hardly any initiatives to address or even listen to women's concerns and difficulties.

Work-family balance is a continuous process which demands maintenance. A slight avoidance or disturbance in the process disrupts the cycle. The study initially raised the question- if work-family balance is essential. I personally feel work-family balance is not

something that is mandated but it evolves gradually with time and practice. It is a process that is a part of every individual directly or indirectly. Once an individual gets an idea of handling things, it gets inculcated in their routines and it automatically becomes easier to manage with time. It should be noted that the levels of work-family balance in women do not define women. It is just an element inclusive in their daily routines.

In my words - Work-family balance is a modus operandi to deal with the expectations of work and family by exercising personal agency-efficacy.

Future Direction in Research

Further research in this area needs to be done with

- Women employed in more physically strenuous jobs like traffic police, constables, women working as helpers at homes about their work-family balance.
- Beliefs and practices of men/husband towards employed women’s role of a caregiver or primary caretaker
- Children’s perceptions of their employed mothers and the effects of mother’s employment on children

Mixed methods research definitely adds to the credibility and authenticity of the study but qualitative studies are more necessary to know the nuances of women’s work-family balance as it provides explanations and the details of the phenomena.

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