Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS)
Vol. 40, No. 2 (2020), pp. 1063-1074

Work-Life Interface of Pakistani Women Entrepreneurs: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to provide qualitative insights into work-life interface of Pakistani women entrepreneurs that recognizes the unique socio-cultural barriers to women entrepreneurship in Pakistan. It also examines the strategies opted by entrepreneurs to manage various work-life conflicts. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with 50 women entrepreneurs in fashion industry; these were transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically through QSR Nvivo 10. Our study finds that women entrepreneurs experience work-life conflict and facilitation, such that work-life interface is multidimensional. Along with time management techniques and flexible work arrangements, Pakistani women entrepreneurs utilize social capital to cope with work-life conflict. More importantly, women entrepreneurs tend to establish "hired help" for their work in home and business vicinities. Moreover, women entrepreneurs also obtain an array of marital, social and psychological resources from family that provide benefit for their businesses, which contributes to their business success positively. The study reports that work-to-family facilitation helps in strengthening the bond with family members by the proliferation of the family's well-being. The results also indicate the multi-dimensional nature of the work-life interface. This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge on the nexus between gender and entrepreneurship. The findings of this study provide insights that can enhance the success of ventures by females by providing a clear and better understanding of the barriers and coping strategies.

Keywords: Work-life Conflict, work-life facilitation, coping strategies, women entrepreneurs, Pakistan

I. Introduction

During the last decades, Work-life interface (WLI) has received far-flung attention of business and management researchers (Bellavia & Frone, 2005; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Andrew, Bagger, & Cropanzano, 2017; Putnik, Houkes, Jansen, Nijhuis, & Kant, 2018; Nomaguchi & Fettro, 2019) in multiple sectors including health care (Munir, Nielsen, Garde, Albertsen, & Carneiro, 2012), banking (Faiz, 2015), education (Beigi, Shirmohammadi, & Stewart, 2018), both manufacturing (Bowen, Govender, Edwards, & Cattell , 2018) and service (Mansour & Mohanna, 2018), and both public (Spell, Haar, & O'Driscoll, 2009) and private organizations (Martinengo, Jacob, & Hill, 2010). Overriding the distinct research aims, contexts, samples and methodologies, the mainstream WLI literature has a general consensus that entrepreneurship combats work-life balance (Rehman & Roomi, 2012). but there is relatively scarce research on the issues of entrepreneurs related to work and family (Jennings & Mcdougald, 2007; Adom, Asare-Yeboa, Quaye, & Ampomah, 2018; Welsh & Kaciak, 2018; Poggesi, Mari, & De Vita, 2019). Moreover, work-family conflict can be a multidimensional, evolving, dynamic, complex experience contingent to unique socio-cultural contexts and personal circumstances (Özbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, & Bell, 2011; Faiz, 2015; Khandelwal & Sehgal., 2018). Indeed, researchers are calling for various context specific explorations for the concept of work-life balance for entrepreneurs (Rehman & Roomi, 2012; Faiz, 2015; Khandelwal & Sehgal., 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore work-life interface among women entrepreneurs of Pakistan.

The societal values and norms based on traditional gender-specific roles impose additional pressure on women entrepreneurs in managing their ventures along with family responsibilities (Roomi, Rehman, & Henry, 2018). The condition is more challenging for the women living in male dominated patriarchal society i.e. Pakistan where firmly embedded customs and practices prevail in society as well as in workplace. These socio economic and cultural grounds confines women to work outside their home (Syed, Ali, & Winstanley, 2005; Faiz, 2015). However, despite such challenges, women entrepreneurs strive to manage highly dynamic entrepreneurial role along with highly demanding familial and societal roles in order to gain economic wealth. Khandelwal & Sehgal (2018) have highlighted the facilitation for women of her multiple roles through the mechanism of family-to-work facilitation (FWF) and work-to-family facilitation (WFF) to accelerate the success of women enterpreneurs. The aim of this exploratory study is to provide insights into work-life interface by incorporating both conflicts and facilitations from family and business domains while recognizing the structural and socio-cultural barriers to women entrepreneurship in Pakistan. The study also endeavours to report the coping strategies in overcoming the work-life conflicts faced by women enterpreneurs of Pakistan.

II. Theoretical Foundation

Several theories like Social role theory, Segmentation, Compensation, Spillover, Border theory have been propounded to explain the linkage between work and family life (Kumar & Janakiram, 2017). Border theory (Clark, 2000) provides theoretical foundation for the current study. According to this theory, roles of each person takes place within specific domains of life, and these domains are separated by physical, temporal, or psychological borders. The theory highlights the issue of “crossing borders” between several domains of life, especially home and work domain (Clark, 2000). According to the theory, the permeability and flexibility of these borders affect the ease of transitions,

the level of integration, and hence influence the level of conflict between these domains. When domains are relatively integrated then transition is easier, consequently more conflict between work and family. Conversely, when domains are segregated then transition is more grueling, and hence less conflict between work and family is expected (Bellavia & Frone, 2005).

Work-life interface can better understand by conflict, facilitation, and balance constructs. The "cross-domain effects" helps in illustrating the constructs of conflict, facilitation, and balance in relation of work and family life i.e. involvements and decisions in one domain are capable of influencing the outcomes in the other domain (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). This approach of "cross-domain effect" assumes a bidirectional influence creating the potential for four conjoint outcomes between the work and family domains i.e., family positive-work positive; family positive-work negative; family negative-work positive; family negative-work negative. (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

Table 1: Operational definitions of the constructs

Concept	Constructs	Dimensions	Operational Definition
Work-life interface	Work-life Conflict (WLC)	Work to family Family to work	Inter role conflict (time, strain, psychological and behavioral) in which the demands of one role (work/family) interfere with the performance of other (family/work) role and responsibilities (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985)
	Work-life Facilitation (WLF)	Work to family Family to work	The extent to which roles in one domain (work/family) benefit from the positive developmental resources and psychosocial capital derived through the involvement in another role (family/work) (Carlson et al., 2006)

III. Women entrepreneurship and work-life Interface

Entrepreneurial ventures are on escalating trend among professional women in order to attain autonomy and flexibility (Rehman & Roomi, 2012) and to better integrate business and family roles (Khandelwal & Sehgal, 2018). Integrated Perspective advocates that women cannot segregate their business as separate economic system from their personal lives (Brush, De Bruin, & Welter, 2009). Parasuraman et al., (1996) reported that gender is a critical feature in determining the direction and level of work-family interface. Furthermore, Women entrepreneurs exhibit low business involvement as compared to male entrepreneurs due to significantly more responsibilities family (Parasuraman et al., 1996). Social support theories advocate that entrepreneur's satisfaction with work-family balance is nurtured by the interpersonal support offered by family members (Eddleston & Powell, 2012). Based on these arguments highlighted in the literature, the current study has come up with the following research questions in order to fill the gap for Pakistani women entrepreneurs.

Q1: What are the dimensions of work-family conflict experienced by women entrepreneurs?

Q2: Which coping strategies do women entrepreneurs utilize in order to manage work-life conflict?

Q3: What are the dimensions of work-family facilitation experienced by Women entrepreneurs?

IV. Research Method

This phenomenological study is aimed to address the paucity of empirical research focusing on the work-family interface of women entrepreneurs of Pakistan. Qualitative methodology was considered as most suitable method keeping in view the exploratory nature of the study. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to address the research questions for gaining insight into individual perceptions.

A. Sample and Data Collection

The sample consisted of 50 women entrepreneurs belonging to the fashion industry of Pakistan. Based on the gender specific definition of entrepreneurship of Anwar, & Rashid (2012), the sample of this study includes women entrepreneurs who are utilizing their resources and knowledge for managing their business operations (formal or informal, registered or non-registered, home based or office based) on daily basis and have a business set up for more than one year. We have selected women entrepreneurs from fashion industry as Pakistan development update reported that 75% on women entrepreneurs in Pakistan are concentrated in service sector i.e. salons, apparel and education (World Bank, 2017). Accordingly, respondents were initially selected based on membership in SMEDA (small and medium enterprises development authority) and further through a purposive and snowball sampling strategy. We purposefully selected 50 women entrepreneurs from fashion industry i.e. dress designers, shoes and bag designers, jewelry designers, fashion product exporters, fashion consultants, fashion photographers and small/medium-sized fashion retailers like boutique and salon owners. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted in Urdu and English languages as per the convenience of the participants. Only four interviews were conducted on Skype due to the difficulty to reach to the participant at distant location. Two pilot interviews were conducted to refine the interview guide. All the interviews were recorded in phone memory with the permission of participants and transcribed verbatim. Average duration of the interviews was 75 minutes. Table 2 represents demographic profile of all the participants.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic variables	Total sample	%
Gender		
Female	50	100
Marital status		
Single	8	16%
Married	34	68%
Divorced	2	4%
Widow	6	12%
Age		
<20	1	2%
21-30	15	30%
31-40	21	42%
41-50	11	22%
>50	2	4%
No. of years in Business		
1-5 Years	31	62%
6-10 Years	6	12%
11-15 Years	4	8%
16-20 Years	5	10%
>20 Years	4	8%

Years of Marriage		
< 1 Years	1	2%
1-5 years	9	18%
6-10 Years	8	16%
11-15 Years	8	16%
16-20 Years	3	6%
>20 Years	13	26%
Highest Education Level		
Matriculation	7	14%
Higher Secondary School	8	16%
Graduation	24	48%
Masters	9	18%
M.Phil.	2	4%
Occupation of Husband		
Business	14	28%
Private Employee	5	10%
Government Employee	10	20%
Partner in same business	2	4%
Landlord	3	6%
No. of Children		
1	4	8%
2	17	34%
3	9	18%
4	6	12%
>4	2	4%
Family Structure		
Joint	22	44%
Nuclear	28	56%

Most of the women entrepreneurs are married i.e. 68%; thirty four percent of them were having two children while only four percent had more than 4 children. 42% of the women entrepreneurs in the sample are aged between 31-40 years. All participants were educated and most of them possessed graduation degree i.e. 48%. The entrepreneurial tenure of more than half (62%) of the participants was 1-5 years have been in the business for 1-5 years, whereas; only 8% were doing business for more than 20 years. Majority of the women entrepreneurs i.e. 56% lived in nuclear household arrangements while 44% lived in joint family with their in-laws.

V. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through content analysis technique. Nvivo 10 was used for meticulous arrangement and systematic analysis of data (Khandelwal & Sehgal, 2018). Authors assigned line by line codes to the interview transcripts in order to identify in-depth meanings and hidden patterns in the data (Creswell, 2014), allowing new themes to emerge from data in addition to the predetermined categories. Table 3 represents the structure of data, demonstrative evidence for the emerging themes and theoretical dimensions to provide a clear understanding of the findings.

Table 3: The Data Structure

Concept discussed	Emerging themes	Theoretical dimensions	Categories
▪ Sharing the ideas that time constraints increases level of conflict ▪ Intersection of family responsibilities, religious festivals and work constraints	Time and strain based conflict	Work to family	Work-life Conflict
▪ Discussing the fear of security issues ▪ Experiences intersection of family responsibilities and working hours	Child care issues	Family to work	
▪ Observations about responsibilities towards work, society, family and time ▪ Becoming aware of family needs and career aspirations that tend to compromise on self	health issues, frustration, anxiety	Work to Self-contemplation	
▪ Perceptions of venture success ▪ Motherhood responsibilities in relation to the social recognition ▪ Gratitude from family	Family bonding	Work to family	Work-life Facilitation
▪ Protection from male family members ▪ Opposing gender socialization ▪ Perception of support from family that benefit business activates	Physical & Psychological Support from social capital	Family to work	
▪ Personal pride that lead to the self-recognition ▪ Mindset that personal happiness is essential	Subjective Well-being and self-development	Work to self-esteem	
▪ Perceptions about hired help ▪ Help from family members/partner reduce pressure on work ▪ Sharing ideas about cultural aspects on leaving the kids at daycare ▪ Discussing child abuse/security issues and reliable family custodians	support from social capital	Family to work	Coping Strategies
▪ Delegating responsibilities to staff in order to manage conflict ▪ Preparing team for uncertain circumstances ▪ Hiring staff to manage workload	Building reliable team	Work to family	

VI. Research Findings

Findings of the study are being discussed under two broad categories i.e. WLC and WLF.

A. Work-life Conflict

Work to family conflict: Despite greater schedule control and flexible working hours, Women entrepreneurs face strain and time based conflict due to intense involvement in the entrepreneurial roles. A dress designer aptly illustrated this:

> *"Last year there was so much work load for Eid that in Ramzan I have to had all my Iftaar at work station. My kids kept waiting for me all Ramzan to have Iftaar with them and do some shopping with them for Eid" (P23)*

Understandably, WFC was seen to be relatively high for married entrepreneurs due to the over bounded responsibilities that keep them occupied with thinking about the family along with the business obligations.

Family to work conflict: Evidently, married women entrepreneurs experienced significantly more FWC due to the pressures from multiple roles especially in Pakistani culture where security conditions are getting adverse for kids in terms of pedophile treats, child abuse and harassment cases. For instance, a participant mentioned that:

> *"Due to the increase of security and harassment issues in Pakistan, I don't rely on drivers or van service for pick and drop of my kids. So I have to do it by myself. This is really tough for me to manage time for my business. I go to office then rush towards their school at off time then I drop them to academy then again I go to my office. I have taken all the burdens on myself but it is vital too" (P25)*

Work to self-contemplations: A new theme emerged from data that was not related to family or work but influenced both domains i.e. work and family. This new theme was self-contemplation i.e. health issues, frustration, anxiety etc. In the attempt to manage pressures from multiple roles, some women blamed themselves for their deteriorating health, thus disregarding any role for structural issues. One participant quoted that

> *"I have diabetes so have to take special care of my diet. But when I go to market then my diet disturbs. Tailors and adda workers sometimes ruin the designs that boost my blood pressure and sugar level" (P34)*

B. Coping Strategies for work-life conflict

Building Reliable team: The advantage of autonomy and flexibility allows women entrepreneurs to manage their time effectively. However, various work and family responsibilities cannot be managed by schedule control and flexible working hours. For such issues women entrepreneurs rely on the proactive support from the team or employees.

> *"I was at outdoor shoot. It was quite an expensive set up and all team and models were ready when I got a call that my son has fallen from stairs. My sister asked me to stay calm as she was with him. But being a mother I was panicking. I left my shoot immediately on my assistant and went to the hospital" (P45)*

Support from social capital: Support from joint-family system and domestic helpers (maids) are popular coping mechanisms for managing work-life conflict. Familial support in child-care is reliable and free. Grandparents comfortably play a supervisory role for domestic helpers too. In nuclear family system, spouse support is of key importance. For instance:

> *"I leave my kids to my mother-in-law. She fed them and takes care of them when I am not at home" (P-12)*

> *"Me and my husband have set our routine in such a way that he picks the children from school and have lunch with them. Then he goes on work and I came home and prepare dinner and helps them in their homework" (P43)*

C. Work-life facilitation (WLF)

Work to family facilitation: Business or work facilitates benefit entrepreneurs' lives in terms of family development, capital gain and psychological well-being. The sense of pride among family members due to the success of entrepreneur helped to strengthen her bond with the family. The mother of participant 48 was a dermatologist and P48 started her career as a beauty consultant along with her mother adjacent to her clinic. Later on, she established the chain of her own salons. She quoted:

> *"My work makes me independent. I have learnt how to deal with different people. My mother and I have long conversations discussing our business problems. She proudly introduces my achievements with her friends. I feel myself more connected with my family because of my business" (P48)*

Family to work facilitation: Along with the financial resources, women entrepreneurs spoke about obtaining various physical and psychological resources from family kinds of that have worked in favor of their business. In Pakistani Culture, Women oppose gender socialization practices and involve their male family member to handle the issues that require male envelopment. For instance:

> *"My brother handles all the matters in which male are involved like plumber work, electricity issues, tax returns, FBR matters. All I have to do is to call him" (P3)*

In Pakistani context, women entrepreneur in extended family help other women to develop the entrepreneurial intention in order to be independent. For instance, one entrepreneur who was widow, she credited a woman in her in-laws who inspired her entrepreneurial mind set and not only encouraged her but give her references to start her venture. She stated:

> *"Initially a relative in my in-laws helped me to enter in this business. She was doing the same business since long so I got contacts of suppliers from her. I go to them for buying stuff and material and now they deliver all the ordered material at doorstep. They never ditch in measurements and quality of the stuff" (P34)*

Work to Self-esteem: Lastly, self-esteem emerged as a key aspect, resulting from positive involvement in business. The success of women entrepreneurs provokes her subjective well-being that boosts her confluence, independence and self-esteem.

> *"I found me self-identity because of my work. People know me by my work. People respect me because of my accomplishments. They see me as one of the top Pakistani women entrepreneur, which is a pride in itself" (P29)*

VII. Discussion

Involvement of women in multiple roles leads them to navigate their career to entrepreneurship in order to attain autonomy, flexibility and control (Anwar & Rashid, 2012). Hence, the involvement of women in their familial role affects the extent of their conflict i.e. Unmarried women are relatively less involved in familial role due to less responsibilities towards their families hence they experience less WLC, as compared to married women entrepreneurs who have child care responsibilities procuring greater psychological involvement in the family domain. This is more evident in Pakistan's high context culture where their traditional role of women as homemaker is firmly embedded in society (Afzal, Zahra, Mahmood, & Hussain, 2010). The study also found that prevailing situation of child security have influenced the work-life conflict for mothers as it refrain from seeking support from male assistants and helpers.

In line with the role-sharing and role-reduction strategies suggested by Shelton (2006), the current study also found family-supportive work arrangements in relieving time and strain based conflict for women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, instrumental support in childcare offered by grandparents is seen as more effective and reliable than hired domestic help. Whereas, spouse support was seen vital in nuclear family set up as well-developed institutions for child care are rare in Pakistan. While spouse support in household is relatively less acknowledged in Pakistani culture (Faiz, 2015), our findings retract the previous assumptions as the study witness positive spouse support in the modern nuclear family set-up in Pakistan today, offering psychological, physical and emotional societies work-family facilitation to women entrepreneurs. Our findings also empirically support the notion of multiple dimensions of work-family interface (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Along with WFF and FWF, the results also indicate that self-esteem and self-identity are mechanisms of work to self-development and well-being. Despite all the challenges and conflicts women entrepreneurs are privileged in their respective businesses, the financial and social capital supplied through the family domain helps in promoting the performance in business domain to trigger the success of their venture and contributing to the economy overall.

VIII. Conclusion

The thematic findings emerging from the qualitative analysis highlighted that work-life interface of women entrepreneurs is not bi-directional, i.e. family to business or business to family. But it is multi-directional involving "self" as another important domain. Women entrepreneurs cope with their work-life conflict by seeking help from social capital along with the "hired help" from domestic helpers and employees. Furthermore, facilitation from both domains plays a vital role in developing self-esteem and subjective well-being in Pakistani women entrepreneurs. The sample of this exploratory study included women from fashion industry of Pakistan that restricts the generalizability of the findings, yet the findings of the current study can be used for further exploratory research to compare the challenges of work-life interface for women entrepreneurs belonging to different industries and socio-economic cultures.

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