Work-Family interface and women school heads: A Pakistan case

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The question of how work-family conflict affect working mothers in traditional societies has been one of the foci of research during recent decades. This area of academic interest has mainly been explored in corporate organizational contexts but is less investigated in the context of women educational leadership in traditional cultural milieu. The current qualitative study explored the work-family interface: conflict and balance regarding women school heads in a traditional society i.e. Peshawar, Pakistan. Data was collected from 15 female school heads using semi-structured interviews. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that most of the women school heads experienced conflict in keeping a balance between workplace responsibilities and their family obligations. The problems women school heads encountered in keeping a balance between workplace and family centered responsibilities included the dual burden of responsibilities and the resultant socio-psychological tensions, a sense of frustration and guilt resulting from neglect of responsibilities regarding care for family and children, and an overall mental and psychological stress as a result of coping with the dual nature of their undertaking as working women. This study has important implications for women school heads, their employers and policy makers dealing with school education *.*

Keywords: work-family conflict, work-family balance, dual responsibilities, children suffering, stress, Pakistan

Work-life balance is an intricate issue that has been a focus of adequate academic interest (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003). Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) argue that work-life balance is achieved when someone is satisfied with their work and family roles. Since the 1960s, work-life balance has been an area of ample academic research in terms of focus on work-family conflict or work-family overlap (Williams, Berdahl, & Vandello, 2016). Work-family conflict occurs when an individual is unable to reconcile both the roles (Greenhaus & Beutell,

1985). Three kinds of work-family conflicts have been identified in the research literature: time based, strain based and behavioral based (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time based conflict occurs when a person is preoccupied and spends more time in one role leading to a compromise on their other roles. Strain based conflict takes place when a person feels stressed or strained in one role and finds it hard to act in the other role. Behavioral based conflict happens when a particular behavior required in one role becomes unsuited in other role.

Internationally, with the spread of information technology and economic globalization, more and more dual career couples, especially mothers, are entering the paid work force. This trend is getting momentum in the developing countries like Pakistan. According to Malik, Ahmad, and Hussain (2010) the factors responsible for this trend include economic pressures, increase of education level and more and more job incentives for females. Although the phenomenon of work-family interface has been one of the extensively studied areas in the developed world (Bagger & Li, 2012; Beutell & Schneer, 2015; Williams, Berdahl, & Vandello, 2016), the issue needs to be explored in the Pakistani context in some detail (Malik, Saif, & Awan, 2011; Rehman & Waheed, 2012). There is particular need of an exploration of this issue in terms of working women in the Pakistani context, since female education is increasing and more and more women work force are coming into competitive job market. According to the official record (KPESED, 2015-16) there are a total 75 female government school heads of high and higher secondary schools in district Peshawar, Pakistan. There are a total 182 government school heads in district Peshawar, among them 107 are male and 75 are female (KPESED, 2015-16).There are separate schools for male and female students. The process of becoming school heads is similar for both males and females. There promotion criteria is seniority along with required professional degree (M.Ed.) and academic qualifications (MA in any subject). As the public sector schooling system is not inclusive in terms of gender, male and female teachers usually do not have to compete for leadership positions. Instead the career progression path for both genders is similar and the competition is within gender rather than across gender. Female teachers, therefore, face no competition from males or the vice versa. For the purpose of this study 15 female school heads were selected to explore their experiences relating to the work-family conflict.

Literature Review
Socio-economic and educational considerations are pushing more and more mothers and married women into the job market in traditional societies. Child care and home responsibilities are still considered as women domain in traditional societies despite their increasing participation in economic earning for the family outside home (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). This has often resulted in work-family conflict for women, particularly. Santos (2015) who studied the perceptions of Portuguese male and female academics in relation to work-family balance, through in-depth qualitative approach found that men argued for a more active role for women in terms of their home-responsibility and childcare while , women respondents found it difficult to keep a balance between their professional and home-responsibilities.

Bird and Schnurman-Crook (2005) found that males viewed home and children as the foremost responsibility of females. Emslie and Hunt (2009) studied the experiences of males and females in relation to work-family interface and came up with the conclusion that women faced more problems and tensions especially when their children were young. Howard, Butterfield, Borgen and Amundson (2015) found that women experienced difficulties in keeping a balance between work and family and their private life. Perveen (2013) conducted a content analysis of eight essays relating to women career, professional identity, and work and family balance and found that women who had the support of their family and their employer institutions were better at maintaing a balance between work and family in comparison to those who did not have this support..

Cho, et al., (2015) explored the lived experiences of 18 Korean women leaders in different service professions and found that most of the women have been experiencing work-family imbalance, though all the women accepted that their main role is to take care of children and home as well. Qureshi and Ravieya (2007) argued that Pakistani women school leaders faced problems maintaining a balance between work-family responsibilities. Sadiq and Ali (2014) reported that pressure from the employers and home roles put Pakistani women under the burden of dual responsibilities which resulted in mental, psychological and emotional stress. Similar were the findings of Umer and Rehman (2013) who also argued that lack of work life balance led to frustration and displeasure among working women.

Located in South Asia, Pakistan is still a predominantly traditional society, where roles are often defined by gender. Work-family balance and conflict in the Pakistani context has been studied in different social sectors including banking (Syed, Arain, Schalk, & Fareese, 2015; Sharjeel, Siddiqui, & Khawaja, 2016), health care (Gulzar & Khalid, 2016), highr education (Naz, Fazal, & Khan, 2017; Umer & Rehman, 2013) and female school teaching (Mukarram, Akbar, Jan, & Gul, 2012). Not much research literature is available in the Pakistani context related to female school heads work-family balance and conflict. The present study aimed to fill this gap, by exploring women school heads' experiences and perceptions about their work-family balance and conflict.

Method
This study adopted qualitative research design for in-depth exploration of the issue (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; CresWell, 2012). The research respondents were 15 women school heads serving in a semi-urban area in the north-west of Pakistan. The sample consisted of female school heads who: (a) were leading schools in challenging situations and had issues in terms of keeping a work-family balance, and (b) had spouses who too worked (c): had young children to raise.

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select the sample (Waters, 2015). Waters (2015) argues that while using snowball sampling strategy, there are some issues to which researchers should pay due attention. Waters suggests that it is important to keep in mind how much resources, time and research expertise the researchers have at their disposable. Walters cautions against the possible lack of generalization of findings in snowball sampling. Waters (2015) also argues that snowball sampling is useful where the topics being explored are not of very sensitive nature. This was the case in the study as the topic did not deal with issues of sensitive personal nature. The respondents in this study did not seem to perceive any negative consequences in terms of sharing their views. This too was a positive side of the use of snowball sampling. Waters (2015) also suggests the use of this technique in studies where the researchers are insiders. This too was the case in this study and hence the suitability of this technique for data collection. Assistance was sought from an acquaintance female insider who facilitated access to some of the respondents in the beginning of the data collection process. Access to further respondents was sought with the help of the initial respondents that led to a snowballing process till saturation point later on in the analysis process. The respondents' ages ranged from 35 to 53 years with the average being 40 years (see Table 1).

For data collection semi-structured interviews were conducted in the offices of respondents. Most of the interviews lasted for about 30 to 50 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and later on transcribed. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis and Rigorous and Accelerated Data Reduction (RADaR) Technique (Watkins, 2017; Saldana, 2009). The data so analyzed passes through different phases of revisions, called 'data reduction' where condensed and precise textual data is

presented. Since the quantity of the data was manageable, therefore, the RADaR technique helped to accelerate the analysis process. The technique was utilized using Microsoft Office, which helped in sharing of the file via emails, as compared to other complicated data analysis software. The first step in RADaR is to ensure the similarity of all data files. This was already the case as all data came from similar type of interviews. The second steps is to arrange the data in tabular form for better and more logical understanding. This was done with the data in this research. The third step is based on a systematic reduction of data in tabular form leaving only texts from interviews that are essential for theme support and explanation. The fourth and fifth steps are essentially based on further data reduction and theme elaboration in the light of research objectives and research questions of the study. These steps were followed systematically and themes were refined and finalized.

In order to maintain validity and reliability in this current qualitative study, the respondents' views were presented with accuracy, complete understanding and correct reporting (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Keeping ethical issues in mind, informed consent was signed by the respondents where anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were protected (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Table 1

Respondents

S.No.	Pseudonym	Age	Headship experience duration (years)	Marital status	S.No.	Pseudonym	Age	Headship experience duration (years)	Marital Status
1	Asmat	50	18	Married	9	Alia	51	17	Married
2	Shazia	45	07	Widow	10	Laiba	53	16	Married
3	Wafa	40	13	Married	11	Gulnaz	45	08	Married
4	Zakia	45	01	Married	12	Farha	47	11	Married
5	Nazia	43	05	Married	13	Razia	50	11	Married
6	Ruhi	52	01	Married	14	Zubayda	47	10	Married
7	Tina	50	05	Married	15	Huria	35	07	Married
8	Lubna	51	06	Married					

Findings

Findings revealed that most respondents (13 out of 15) had been struggling to have balance between work-family responsibilities since both the roles are demanding and needed commitment. Some of the respondents reported that they had been under double burden. Other respondents stated due to their job responsibilities, their children have been suffering. Some of the respondents identified that they were under stress as they could not pay due attention to their homes. Two of the respondents, however, stated that they had balance between the work-family relationships. Overall, the findings of this study could be categorized into three themes.

Pressure of dual responsibility

Dealing with the dual responsibilities of home and workplace was identified as one of the major problems faced by the female school heads. Most of the respondents stated that because of

their dual responsibilities they were facing double burden. The following quotations from the respondents' interviews elaborates this theme:

> Asmat: *I get up early in the morning, do all the home's chores. About 8 am, I leave home for school… I come back up to 2 pm, then I have to do home's chores without any rest. This is my routine. I am under double work burden: work and home.*

> Shazia: *When I was young my husband died, my children (one son and two daughters) were small, so I had to perform the dual role of mother and father, and I had to take care of my job and home. Since then I have been facing these demanding responsibilities.*

> Zakia: *Doing job and then taking care of home and children put me in a position where I feel to be under the burden of double responsibilities. That is really difficult for me.*

While doing job in the society where taking care of home and children is the main responsibility of the females, women have to face different problems. Therefore, managing home and leading a school are the responsibilities that often leads to situations that are difficult to manage.

> Wafa: *If you want job in this traditional society, then you have to deal with the related problems. Yes, we are under the double burden of school headship and home responsibilities. Both the roles at the same time are demanding.*

> Nazia: *I personally feel over-burdened by the load of the work and responsibilities of job and home relationship. But we have to manage it one way or another.*

Leading school is a responsible job, where school heads have to face multiple challenges at work place, but at the same time, these women had to take care of their homes in traditional socio-cultural set up in which they lived. This situation seems to have put them in a position where they felt the pressure of their dual role.

Children suffering and guilt feeling

One of the main concerns of the women school heads was the welfare of their children. The respondents pointed out that due to their lead role, which was time consuming, the biggest worry was lack of time for their children:

> Zakia: *One of the biggest drawbacks of my job is that my children miss me at home and also in family functions which I cannot attend due to my job.*

> Nazia: *Leading a school is one of the difficult assignments in this district where government has imposed a lot of checks and balances. But being a women you have to manage your home also. In this situation, my children have been affected negatively. I regret this negligence. I wish I pay more attention to my home.*

The respondents showed concerns about their home and children. Most of the respondents stated that since they were in responsible positions in their schools, they had to pay due attention and allocate adequate time for their job. This seemed to have negatively affected their home and children:

> Ruhi: *Since leading a school is a demanding job in terms of timing and dedication, therefore, my family suffers. I cannot pay full attention to my home and children. My daughters see my work load and they miss me at home for longer duration…you have to pay this price.*

Some of the respondents showed anger and regret over their negligence of their homes and children; for instance:

Tina: *I regret that due to my job my home has suffered. I do not give the much needed attention to my home. I try to have balance between both the roles but practically it is impossible. I feel guilty in this regard.*

Respondents identified their children and especially small kids as the worst affected ones in the process. To do for this they sometimes brought their young children to school but this did not seem to work well in the absence of childcare facilities there. It was really difficult to manage both the roles:

Lubna: *It is difficult to have balance between leading a school and paying attention at the same time to your home. The most important issue is when your children are small. I have been leaving my kids with in-laws or aunts. Some of our colleagues [other female school heads and teachers]) take their kids to school to take care of them.*

Stress and frustration

Stress, feeling overworked and frustration were identified as some of the outcomes of the dual roles and responsibilities that the women heads had to deal with. The following are some of the quotes reflecting these issues:

Alia: *The balance between taking care of home and managing a school is a difficult task. My school is located in a faraway rural area, therefore, I have to travel a long distance between home and school. I reach home late.   Sometimes my children get ill but I have to leave them and go to school. This has been a stressful situation for me.*

Another respondent stated that she usually leaves home earlier and come home late. She stated that she had to travel a long distance between home and school. This has negatively affected her children and home responsibilities. As a result she has been told by her husband to leave the job for the sake of children:

Laiba: *Women are under stress due to job and family responsibilities. I was several times told by my husband to leave the job for the sake of home… our financial conditions demand to continue the job in this old age.*

Razia   *Often, I personally feel mental stress since maintaining balance between two tough responsibilities is difficult one.*

One of the respondents replied that since home responsibilities are primarily given to women, therefore, if women wanted job they had to be ready for the consequences and one of them was mental stress:

Gulnaz: *Being a woman, if you want job you have to face and deal with the related problems. The demanding responsibilities of home and leading a school leads to an imbalance. To bring the balance which is impossible, I think, that leads to stress, ultimately.*

One respondent held a view that keeping balance between work-family relationships is very difficult. Interestingly, she added that it was unnatural for a woman to remain absent for almost a day out of home and neglect home and children:

Farha: *I think, it is really tough to have balance between job and home. If you don't pay attention to your home you will be a loser, your home will suffer and this has been happening with the females who are leading schools.* She further added: *a woman's natural place and responsibility is home.*

Factors helping keep a balance

In contrast to most, two of the respondents stated that they had balance between work-family responsibilities. This was mainly due to family and husband support and enough financial resources. The reasons one of them gave was the support of her husband, other relatives help, and having only one child:

Huria: *Basically, my situation will be different from the rest of the females. My husband is a college professor, who has been helping me a lot. We have a daughter whom we send to day care center. I have hired a lady who takes care of my home when we are out of home.*

Another respondent pointed out that the most supporting factors in her balance between work-family relationships was joint family system and the location of her school near to her home. Therefore, she did not have to travel a long distance.

Zubayda: *We are living in joint family set up. As I leave for job, other family members take care of my home. Since I am posted near to my home, so I reach home earlier, that is a great facilitating factor for me.*

Overall, findings from this study indicated that most of the women school heads experienced work-family conflict. As a consequence, these women school heads felt overburdened and overstressed due to their dual responsibilities. They needed to manage their homes and children and their school leading roles. Both the responsibilities seemed to be time consuming and often frustrating. The findings indicated that due to their busy and tough schedules, children of most of these female school heads suffered in terms of lack of time and involvement from their mothers. This seems to have resulted in stress and frustration among these women. The study indicated that some of the women school heads have balanced both the roles with the cooperation of their husbands, availability of day care facilities and the help they could have in the joint family system.

Discussion

With the rapid economic and social changes, ever more women are entering the work force in developing societies like Pakistan. Studies on women leadership suggest that women are experiencing significant social expectations in relation to family obligations and job related demands, which often leads to feelings of being overburdened (Young & Mcleod, 2001). The findings of the current study showed that female school heads working in a traditional society, are expected to take care of their children and homes, which is a typical situation for them. This finding is consistent with studies conducted in the similar context by Jain and Nair (2016) and Fahlen (2014), who reported that women in traditional set up face work-family conflict more than men. The findings of the current study revealed that most of the women school heads experience different levels of conflicts which have been identified by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). The current study indicated that most of the respondents were pre-occupied with their jobs, leaving less time for their families that has resulted in time based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This study also indicated children of working women suffer in terms of not getting proper time and attention from their mothers. This is congruent with findings of Muasya (2016), Jain and Nair (2016) and Rubel, Kee, and Rimi (2017) who concluded that

those women experience more work-family conflict whose children are pre-school or infants, therefore, in their studies women demanded late arrival and early exist to and from their job places.

Stress which is inherent in work-family imbalance has been the area of research that has received considerable attention of the researchers (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). According to Phillips and Imhoff (1997), Carvalho and Chambel (2017) and Rubel, Kee, and Rimi (2017) when work-life conflict occurs it leads to burnout and mental stress among the people as a result family matters and issues are compromised. Findings of the current study also seem to support these researches as stress and frustration were reported as outcomes of the dual role and overwork by the respondents.

In contrast to most of the women school heads, two of them reported to have balanced both of their roles. This balance was achieved with the help of their husbands, joint family support and having nuclear family. This finding is in agreement with the work of Drummond, et al. (2016) who reported that work-life conflict decreases and job and family satisfaction increases with the support of family and other support system for working women. This is in sharp contrast to the rest of the women school heads who do not have in place such kinds of active support mechanism. It needs, however, to be noted that this kind of support (from husbands and other family members) is not often the case and hence cannot be generalized to a majority of working women in the society. Interestingly, one of the women school heads argued that women's natural place is home, as she gets out of home, it becomes unnatural and the result will be conflict in both the roles. For most of the women managing both the roles at a same time, put them under the dual burden-to take care of home and doing job. As a result these women felt guilty and stressed (Sarfaraz & Khalid, 2015). This phenomenon of work-family conflict, particularly dual responsibilities, reported in this study has been termed as 'second shift' by Hochschild and Machung (2012, p. 260); that is being on duty at workplace and home and vice versa.

Conclusion and implications

It could be concluded from this study that women school heads in traditional social milieu often experience wok-family conflict. Dual responsibilities, feeling of guilt related to perceived neglect of their primary (home based role), lack of proper appreciation, family and institutional support and lack of facililities in the social structure leads to disappointment and frustration for working women in traditional, developing socieites.

This study contributes in terms of increasing our understanding about the issues and problems of women leaders in general and women school heads in particular in the Pakistani context. There are a number of implications of this study for employers and policy makers. The study may also highlight ways and means for alleviating women school leaders' problems and for adding to their leadership capacity building. One way to deal with the issues faced by women school heads in particular and working women in general may be to devise and implement policies that help working women have some balance regarding their work-home roles and responsibilities. Another way could be assisting them in availing workplaces near to their residences. This might help reduce women school leaders traveling time, and fatigue and ultimately their frustration. Awareness may be created on the governmental and social level in terms of sensitizing family members and society as a whole regarding the social, moral and emotional needs of working women in general and women school heads who have younger families (children) in particular. This might also have a positive impact on their professional efficiency and their physical and emotional wellbeing. Besides, better residential and transportation facilities may also mitigate the stress faced by working women in this case and in cases with similar contexts in and outside Pakistan.

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