Dwelling Possibilities: Career Perceptions of Single Women at Mid-Career in Education Sector of Pakistan

* Gouhar Pirzada, MPhil Scholar

** Dr. Yaar Muhammad, Assistant Professor (Corresponding Author)

*** Yasmeen Aman, MPhil Scholar
_____

Abstract

This research study explores the perceptions of single women at their mid-career stage in the education sector of Pakistan. The Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) has been used as a theoretical framework to interpret the research data gathered through semi-structured interviews with five participants (single women) working in public and private sector educational institutes in Pakistan. The interviews covered four main aspects, out of which three aspects were borrowed from KCM (Balance, Authenticity, and Challenge) and an additional aspect of Perceived Organizational Support (POS). The result of the study supported all four aspects. Data gathered on these four aspects reflect five major themes (satisfaction, balance, challenge, development, and support) that were common in the responses of all participants. This research provides useful insights and an in-depth understanding of single women's mid-career perceptions in Pakistan's education sector in a male-dominated society.

Keywords: Career Perception, Kaleidoscope Career Model, Single Women, Pakistan, Education Sector

Introduction

The increasing recognition of gender differences and the changing nature of professional careers have increased researchers' attention around the world (Mainiero & Gibson, 2018; Sullivan & Carraher, 2018) and now there is growing literature available exploring the influence of career choices on women professions (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). However, little attention has been given to the career development of working women in the context of Pakistan, how Pakistani professional women think about their professional careers, and what challenges are faced by single women while balancing work and family affairs at their mid-careers. One of the main reasons for the scarcity of existing research studies on the topic is the cultural barriers to non-Pakistani researchers. It is difficult for western scholars to access and secure Pakistani women professionals' trust (Tu, Forret, & Sullivan, 2006). As a result, the current literature is comparatively richer when it comes to understanding and applying career theories for women in the west—however, significant gaps in understanding Pakistani professional women's career choices exist. The issue becomes more pertinent to single women in their mid-career stages, working in the education sector of Pakistan.

Considering the above gaps that existed in the current literature and exploring the application of using a western career model, the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) has been applied to analyze the data collected from women at their mid-career stages. The kaleidoscopes model provides important insight into the women's decision-making process about their careers. This model suggests the role played by the components like authenticity, balance, and challenges faced by women during their career choices and family decisions (Sullivan & Carraher, 2018). Although the KCM model uses the elements of both the Protean model (Hall, 2016) and the Boundaryless career model (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and highlights the differences due to gender and individuals' career choices. Yet, there is a significant gap in applying this model outside Western countries' context (Mainiero &

_____

*   Department of Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore
      Email: gouhar.pirzada@step.edu.pk
**   Department of Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore
      Email: edyaar2008@yahoo.com
***Department of Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore
      Email: yasminzia9@gmail.com

Gibson, 2018), particularly in the context of a developing country like Pakistan, which is generally perceived as a male-dominated society.

Gender difference is certainly considered as a major factor that creates challenges for women who are managing their careers, leading to issues like women experiencing gender discrimination and glass-ceiling towards their progression, career disruption, and issues of harassment at the workplace. Among other issues, this study explores the responses of Pakistani women about these difficulties too. Additionally, some of the problems that these women face are not solely rooted in gender discrimination; they are rather caused due to the challenging professional environment of Pakistan. However, there are major differences in coping with organizational structural and environmental problems due to gender differences (Syed, Pio, & Ali, 2013).

Problem statement

Choosing to opt-out at the pragmatic endurance stage is common among women. Keeping in view the cultural and societal context of Pakistan, it is very difficult for single working women to survive and excel in her career. Women face many challenges like less salary, stigmatization, glass ceiling, family burdens, and strict organizational policies etc. so the current study addresses the issue and highlights the issues and challenges faced by single women at the mid-career stages.

Research Questions

Career choices are an extremely important decision as work stress is a major cause of stress in an individual life. It is seen over the past few decades that workplace stress is rapidly increasing (Fink, 2016). Job stress is the second most common reason for stress. In the case of women, the stress replicates because of their dual responsibilities at work and home. This study aims to identify the aspects that affect the career choices of single women in Pakistan.

(1)   How do single women make decisions about their professional career and on-going career choices?

(2)   What organizational barriers or challenges constrain their academic career advancement?

(3)   How do family issues and work responsibilities interact to affect their academic career development?

Significance

This research is significant as it contributes to understanding the problems faced by single women at the pragmatic endurance stage. It reflects on the women's priority and their decision-making process. The current study highlights the reasons for women's dissatisfaction and opt-out approach during the pragmatic endurance stage. This can help at the personal, family, organizational and societal level to understand the barriers faced by single women. This research can also help in understanding and supporting women's priorities and their narrative about personal and professional life.

The next section discusses the literature review regarding career perceptions, perceived organizational support, KCM, and its associated aspects that include authenticity, balance, and challenge. Section three describes research questions, and the subsequent section explains the methodology adopted for this study. The next section consists of the analysis, leading to the discussion in section five. Lastly, this paper discusses the limitation, future research, and conclusion of this study.

Literature Review

Career Perceptions

Career perception is the decision-making criterion that helps to choose a professional career to fulfill individual needs (Gokuladas, 2010). The decision-making criterion depends on different factors that include a person's competencies, individual skills, the field of occupational activity, and individual preferences for different career choices.

Carpenter and Foster (1977) highlighted three main factors that are associated with the decision of career choices. These factors include extrinsic, intrinsic, and interpersonal factors. Firstly, extrinsic factors include all those aspects that are directly linked to developing perceptions about an individual's career choices for future roles. These factors include but are not limited to the salaries & wages, job security, employer brand, job availability, remuneration, and prestige of the job (Gokuladas, 2010). Secondly, some factors are specifically related to the job and profession. These factors include but are not limited to working conditions, growth opportunities, innovativeness, authority & control, the content of the work, training & development opportunities. Lastly, some factors involve moral support that affects early exposure to the profession. Mostly, these factors relate

to moral support from family, friends, and close relations (Willis, Shann, & Hassell, 2009). These factors are important to consider when studying the perceptions of specific gender as it affects the growth and development in their professional career.

Kaleidoscope Careers Model (KCM)

Three broader aspects of the Kaleidoscope Careers Model are included to study for this research. In the Kaleidoscope Careers Model, (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007b, 2008) developed three parameters that are Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge (ABCs). Other than the factors discussed in the previous section, the career model of Kaleidoscope also discussed key factors that are considered important for mid-career women in the education sector. This model provides useful insights about participant's decision-making criteria about their professional and personal issues at the same time.

Authenticity

Authenticity is defined as, to be honest with oneself between personal growth and problems of work and non-work related issues (Wang, 2020). In the KCM, authenticity is an individual's need to show their behavior and attitudes according to their honest inner feelings. It is a method that helps to evaluate the true inner self, knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, and responding with the best information at a particular time (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007a). Authenticity is shown through behaviors with work or non-work strengths and getting personal pleasure through different activities that truly reflect the inner self of that individual (Mainiero & Gibson, 2018). There are different ways of expressed authenticity. On one side, women's authenticity takes the form of creative or leisure activities, while on the other it takes the form of being true to oneself at work. For others still, it is realized after a long time usually at the end of raising a child or after retirement (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007a)

Balance

Balance is defined as the decision-making criterion to form a coherent whole from different aspects of one's life from both work and non-work problems (Wang, 2020). Sullivan and Arthur (2006) refer to individuals' need to achieve successful proficiencies by managing work and family issues, and to create an intersection of work-life that continually adjusts attention in both work and non-work issues (Powell & Greenhaus, 2012). Mostly, women take the role in the family related to household tasks and take care of the family and children. Therefore, it is significant for professional women to achieve success when managing work and family tasks. This achievement becomes more difficult and important to achieve for single women. Additionally, balance refers to a set of feelings that relates to compromise and being good enough that helps professional women to feel more comfortable to handle them instead of getting the feeling of being perfect. Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) describe different ways that help to understand the broader concept of balance. Some women believe that balance cannot be described as it is a temporary feeling but still highly satisfactory. While some women relate balance with money as it helps to solve the issue of resources. Others think that balance is associated with non-work issues, for example, a fit between work and family roles, or prioritizing the family first.

Challenge

Challenge is defined as involving in activities that restrict the person to show control, autonomy, and responsibility while growing and developing professionally (Wang, 2020). The parameter of challenge reflects the restrictions from the person's views to involve in intrinsically motivating work (i.e., learning and promotion), to continue career options, to grow and develop skills, to make progress in one's career, skill-based or linear progress (Mainiero & Gibson, 2018). Sullivan and Mainiero (2007) found that in early career options, the challenge lies as a 51 critical parameter. It is an important driving force in many career decisions (Mainiero & Gibson, 2018). Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) found that a challenge is viewed in different ways. Some view it as a strong motivator that encourages growth in the work. While some see it as a proof of identity to encourage confidence by achieving a successful outcome and some see it as an opportunity to grow and to make life fit in the labor market. Some individuals view challenge as achieving expertise in the specific domain and others believe that challenge is making a difference in some lives. There are many different ways to view the work challenge in different contexts as persons have different experiences with their professional life. Sullivan and Mainiero (2007a) view challenge as a major driving force for career development. The aspiration to contribute to society and the professionalism to motivate others through your work are major driving forces that encourage the participant to keep growing and

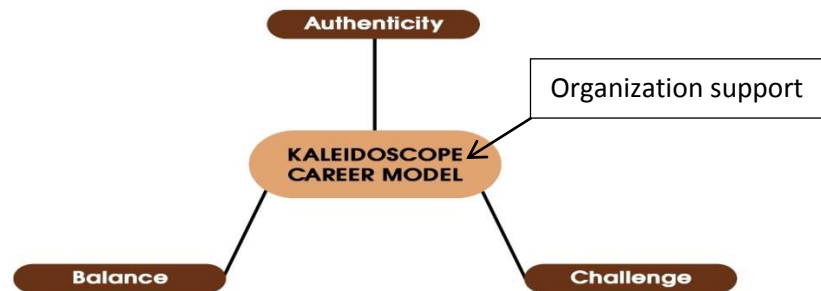developing their professional skills that would help to increase their employability and to gain promotions.

On the other side, literature also argues that the challenge might become a barrier that affects an individual's career growth (Elley-Brown, Pringle, & Harris, 2015). Some scholars argue that professionals' needs (such as career aspirations, learning desire, and promotion requirements) for a challenge of women might decrease in their middle careers (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). One significant reason is that their need for balance might increase. Like a kaleidoscope, as one part moves so the other parts change (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007b). The increase in the balance is one of the essential reasons that cause a change in the need for work challenges particularly for single women in their mid-careers.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Individual's perceptions are also affected by the support of the organization they received from their workplace. Perceived Organizational Support (POS) also meets socio-economic needs to achieve greater identification and dedication to the organization, playing a key role in developing individual career perceptions. It is also related to the individual's commitment to their work and subjective well-being. The existing research determines the relationship between the antecedents and precedents of POS organization support theory can be evaluated (Kurtessis et al., 2017). POS refers to the degree to which organizations care for and value their employees to work for organizational motives and should be valued and appreciated for their motivation and commitment to work. POS has positive connectivity to the work commitment because it has a positive impact on the overall well-being of the employee. Research has reliably shown how organizations are interested in having an employee who feels supported. In particular, POS is identified with a wide range of work frameworks and practices of great representatives (e.g. work performance), which is also adversely affected by injurious mental frameworks and work practices (e.g. turnover) (Caesens, Stinglhamber, & Ohana, 2016), particularly in case of single women.

Theoretical framework

The Kaleidoscope model is used in this study to explore the perception and choices of single women regarding their careers, especially at the pragmatic stage. With special reference to this study organizational support is added to explore a different perspective of women regarding their career choices and perception.

Dimensions of Kaleidoscope Career Model

Methods

A phenomenological hermeneutics research design (Langdridge, 2007; Vagle, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018) was adopted, keeping in view the exploratory nature of this research study. This design helps in developing deep insights into psychosocial issues (Langdridge, 2007; Bryman, 2016). Although women play a significant role in the education sector, the contribution of single women in this sector is an underexplored area particularly in the context of Pakistan. Therefore, it was realized that the phenomenological hermeneutics adopted itself collects the emotions and thoughts of the respondents using predetermined concepts. This design helped to collect rich and detailed responses with different thoughts of single women that help to identify the broader themes of the research. The widely adopted and one of the important methods adopted of data collection in phenomenological hermeneutics

research is through interviews (Bryman, 2016). As a data collection strategy, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five single women working in different educational institutes across the country.

The snowball sampling technique (Berndt, 2020) was used to collect data. Data were collected from 5 participants working in the educational sector of different educational backgrounds and experiences. Both in-person and Zoom interviews were conducted. Some Zoom interviews were conducted due to lockdown and physical unavailability of the person. The demographic information of the participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants.

Respondent	Age	Experience	Status
Respondent 1	40	20	Single
Respondent 2	40+	8	Divorced
Respondent 3	-	10	Single
Respondent 4	44	22	Single
Respondent 5	40	12	Divorced

For conducting semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018) with five participants, participants were first introduced to the aims and objectives of the study and then the scope of the study was explained to them. The anonymity of the participants was promised and it was explained that they could leave the interview at any point in time if they feel uncomfortable (Seidman, 2019). Technical terms were explained and after the willingness showed by the participants, interviews were conducted. Participants were free to share their experiences without any hindrance and time restriction.

Some probing questions were also used to understand the depth of their words (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Short points and notes were made at the time of the interview while for detailed analysis interviews were recorded. Every interview started with demographic questions. This strategy helped in collecting the demographic data and also to make the respondents comfortable. After this informal type of questions, the formal interviews were conducted. The recording and notes were used to transcribe the interviews.

NVivo software was used for the transcription and analysis of the document. After transcribing the interviews open coding was done to generate codes from the data (Saldaña, 2021) and pattern coding was done to find out the major themes running in data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). These themes were then used to answer the research questions. Pattern coding is a technique of finding, analyzing, and writing themes within the data in qualitative research. Computer-Assisted Data Analysis Software Package (CAQDAS) was used to ensure transparency and to avoid ambiguities as it had been previously found useful (Muhammad & Brett, 2019, 2020). CAQDAS (e.g., NVivo) provides many advantages in terms of systematicity and transparency in qualitative data analysis (Muhammad & Brett, 2015; Muhammad, 2015; Muhammad & Brett, 2017); therefore, NVivo software was used to properly handle and efficiently examine the collected data for this research (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). As a result of thematic analysis, the themes were developed which are discussed in the next section.

Findings

Thematic analysis is a popular approach to qualitative data analysis. It is a simple and flexible approach to analyze qualitative data. Multiple codes were categorized in a theme, based on similarities. The major pattern prevailed in the data highlight factors like satisfaction, balance, challenge, development, family support, friend supports, financial issues and burden etc. These patterns were made by merging multiple codes based on their similarities and repetition in the data provided by the respondents. Pattern coding was used to generate different themes. The major themes that prevail in the data are satisfaction, development, balance, challenge, and support.

Multiple codes were categorized in a theme based on similarities.
1. Satisfaction (Reward, Appreciation, Commitment, Motivation, Suitable job role, Personality, Dream job, and Priorities)
2. Balance (Life events, Family background, Family expectations, Efforts, Future planning, and Family pressure)

3.   Challenge (Conflicting roles, Harassments, Gender bias, Competitions, Communication gap, Financial pressure, and Societal pressure)
4.   Development (Empowerment, Experience, Growth, Learning, Expectations, and Coping strategies)
5.   Support (Family support, Friend support, Organizational support).

Word cloud

The following word cloud (Figure 1) represents the thoughts of the respondents. The prominent words like responsibilities, commitment, career, financial, satisfaction, support, family, development, and others reflect light on women's thoughts while decided about their careers. These backend thoughts affect women's career choices and progression. Similar reflections can be seen in the thematic analysis of the study.

Figure 1: Word cloud based on interview transcript data.

Findings

Satisfaction: If I am satisfied, I want to contribute more.

Satisfaction is the most important part of an individual life. Only a satisfied soul can live happily and make others happy. Job satisfaction has a serious impact on individual life satisfaction (Judge & Watanabe, 1993; Bernarto et al., 2020). Job satisfaction incorporates a variety of aspects like Reward, Appreciation, Commitment, Motivation, Suitable job role, Personality, Dream job, and Priorities. These aspects were repeatedly shared by the respondents as the parameter of the true feelings of an employee about his job. All these factors have a significant effect on increasing or decreasing an employee satisfaction level. When employees are performing job roles according to their attributes and choices, it gives a sense of pleasure and increases satisfaction level. This sense of pleasure and satisfaction give them motivation and commitment to priorities their jobs and achieve goals. The mid-career stage is called a stage of pragmatic endurance. While studying it through the lens of the kaleidoscope model satisfaction is the mirror image of authenticity. Usually, females at mid-career are segregated between motherhood, family responsibilities, static career growth, and financial pressures. With all such responsibilities, it is highly important to keep women motivated to pursue their careers. Females at this stage have a high level of knowledge and experience but are usually unsatisfied and demotivated due to personal and professional problems. They simply believe their decisions are affected by others (family, seniors, managers, or society) acts and choices (Simpson, 2004). While performing double responsibilities of job and family, it is extremely difficult for women to handle conflict roles and unjustified workloads with very little or sometimes no appreciation. Women often don't get their fair share of reward either due to gender biases or the glass ceiling. The acknowledgment of an employee's work by management is an amazing feeling. Either it is in the form of appreciation or better financial compensation; it alleviates performance level, their satisfaction level, motivates them about their work; maintains their excitement level and gives them an urge to be praised etc. By controlling these behaviors, organizations can play their part in increasing the satisfaction level of working women at the pragmatic stage.

The pragmatic endurance stage can be supported by increasing job satisfaction levels among working women and helped them in opting for their careers by providing fair rewards, suitable roles, employee personality aspects, and priorities. These aspects create a high sense of satisfaction among females and increase their motivation to pursue their careers (Pfister, Jacobshagen, Kälin, & Semmer, 2020). They show a high commitment level to improve their skills and grow professionally. According to most respondents, their job satisfaction level depends upon all these aspects. For example, respondent 1 revealed,

> Yes, I am. As far as the content of my job is concerned, its scope, and the major responsibilities that I perform, I am very much satisfied. I love to share my knowledge. I am researching different sectors of teaching to further improve my teaching skills. I want to cascade my learning and knowledge to my students (Respondent 1)

Balance: Never having enough hours in the day.

The balance between work and family life is a point of concern especially for females as they have double responsibilities. It is supported by literature that women opt-out at the stage of pragmatic endurance due to family responsibilities and pressures. The economic cost of the turnover of experienced professionals is significant. Moreover, it plays a major role in the brain drain phenomenon (Bussell, 2008). They need a supportive family to grow in their careers. Family background, expectations, pressures, responsibilities, family traditions, and life events are the major causes of women's disenfranchisement to peruse their careers. Untiring efforts to be a perfect homemaker and a perfect mother is a constant source of stress and pressure (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). In the case of a single woman, the pressure automatically doubles as there is no partner to support them. Single women are bearing double responsibilities of parenthood as being a mother and a father too. They are facing additional problems rather in the job market (Antoniou & Drosos, 2018).

All respondents in the study revealed that family responsibility is their topmost priority. This is the main reason behind the non-linear career progression of women because career progression is a linear model designed from a gendered society perspective. It's a linear career progression model without any gap but females have to take breaks in their career progression due to family responsibilities. This often stops women from reaching higher management positions (Linehan & Walsh, 2000). All respondents always prioritize their family responsibilities. Sometimes they do not take up a good opportunity due to increased burden and long working hour's commitment. They put extra effort and commitment to manage their work-life balance. Balanced work-family circumstances give a feeling of fulfillment to the respondents and enhance their motivation and commitment towards their careers. Literature also supports these findings as job and family performance of females depend upon the balance, satisfaction, and effectiveness (Wayne, Butts, Casper, & Allen, 2017). These results are also supported by the kaleidoscope model used in the study. As one of our respondents said,

> It is very hard for me to keep this balance. The little time I get after job hours and preparation of teaching assignments, I just devote that to my family. I make it a point to spend at least some time with them every day. Very little time yet quality time! (Respondent 4)

Challenge: Life itself is an adventure for me.

The workplace could be challenging for anyone but in the case of women, the numbers of challenges are much more as compared to men. Challenge is one of the very important parts of the kaleidoscope model. The most common challenges faced by all respondents at the workplace are a male-dominated mindset, harassment, gender bias, glass ceiling, and lower salary packages, etc. These issues prevail around the globe but in a typically male-dominated society like Pakistan, it is extremely pressurizing for women to be single and working simultaneously. Workplace discrimination, the glass ceiling, and gender biases restrain many talented women to progress in their careers (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009). Respondents believed that financial management remains the toughest bit for single women or single mothers. They need to work rigorously to support their family that affects their work-family balance. Financial pressure and time management both contribute to increasing the stress level of single women. Single mothers are often in guilt for either committing to long working hours or doing multiple jobs to meet financial obligations. Isolation, pressure, anxiety, and depression are common symptoms among single women especially divorced women. For example, respondent 3 revealed,

> I never try to do a lot of adventures in life. Life itself is an adventure. Over the years,
> I have gone stronger but still, there are times when I need help and assistance from
> my brother. There are certain tasks that I feel I just can't do so I don't just attempt
> these (Respondent 3).

There's a dearth of women working in leadership positions in higher educational institutes. The reason is the linear career progression model that is widely considered to be only suitable for men. It is proven from the literature that workplace harassments, mobbing, bullying, and workplace attitudes contribute a lot to increasing the turnover rate (Węziak-Białowolska, Białowolski, & McNeely, 2020). The social nomenclature of society contributes a lot to women's career choices and progression. In Pakistan, a lot of women are still not allowed to follow the career of their choice. Even at the workplace, women are not given important tasks or promotions to senior-level management. Women have to put extra courage and effort to make their mark. As explained by one of the respondents; "This is something that I have fought with. I have always thought that men think that they are the only ones who can raise the voice" (Respondent 5).

Development: There is always room for improvement.
Women at the pragmatic endurance stage opt-in careers due to the desire for personal development. However, this requires a lot of effort and time to manage professional responsibilities to manage personal development goals. Personal development incorporates several factors like career growth, learning, financial stability, empowerment, and experience. Women have different expectations and coping strategies to deal with family and societal pressures. The relentless desire of women for personal development can help women to achieve their goals. Literature shows that it's the individual factors that play a major role in contributing to women's growth and development. Fulfillment of personal development goals enhances their confidence, commitment, motivation, and satisfaction (Francis, 2017). Stigmatization is one of the biggest hurdles faced by respondents in achieving their developmental goals. Gender norms of the family and society play a very significant role in shaping the mindset of the people about single women. Respondents believed that the interpretation of singleness is more pressuring and traumatic for a woman and taking care of the family and performing household responsibilities are considered as the central element of femininity in Pakistan. However, they believed that only relentless courage and internal motivation can help women in achieving their goals. From the view of one of the respondents,

> The world is changing a lot. There is always room for improvement. I intend to take a
> lot of training, a lot of courses that improve my leadership qualities and enhance my
> scope for another five years, and then I would be able to do this. (Respondent 2)

Support: Supportive family is a blessing.
Support and motivation are the factors that play a significant role in the success of a person. In the case of women, support is an essential element in career growth. Performing dual responsibilities need a lot of courage and support. All respondents of the study specifically focused on family support as elaborated by one of the respondents,

> I do get all the support. I am much closed to my sister who is away from Pakistan. I
> do not get any physical support as such but whenever I am in need, I do get financial
> support. I live far from the home of my brother. I am very thankful to my family for
> all the support. (Respondent 5)

Another majorly discussed factor was organizational support. Workplace politics, inequality, and favoritism are not new concepts. They are present in every workplace. These practices are highly distressing for the respondents. They perceived that these not only affect the employee's performance but the organizational performance as a whole. The non-supportive behavior of management and colleagues was frustrating for respondents. They believed that even competent and hardworking women will feel low and depressed if the management and his team members don't support them. They asserted that mistakes are part of human life—Everyone does mistakes, but insulting and mocking individuals for small mistakes is unethical. They believed that very clearly threatening employees on small mistakes creates a sense of job insecurity among employees.

Besides, they believed that supportive administration plays an important role and creates a sense of eustress among women. A supportive supervisor is every employee's wish. When an organization and its management support their employees it simply gives an amazing feeling to employees, increases their loyalty, reduces the chances of turnover, enhances the sense of

responsibility and better performance among employees etc. Many respondents pick the opt-out approach due to extremely demanding and unfriendly organizational cultures. They suggested that providing facilities as daycares, flexible timings, maternity leaves, and justified work burdens can help women to follow their career rigorously.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study aims to understand the challenges and barriers faced by single women during their mid-career stage. The above finding gives an insight into the women's perception of career at the mid-career stage. According to the KCM, men and women face authenticity, balance, and challenges throughout their careers. This research shed light on organizational problems, family issues, and culture that restrict single women's career choices for their professional development. The interviewees mentioned career changes. The dimensions of authenticity, balance, and challenge can help as signposts to ensure smooth career transitions. The findings of the research highlighted a few points. Firstly, these findings provide the answer to the research questions as clearly identified the aspects that help and restrain women's career progression. The five themes identified in the above analysis play a significant role in the decision-making of single women about their careers. They also elaborate on the challenges and barriers faced by women in the educational sector during their career progression. These results are consistent with the existing literature. Previous studies have also highlighted similar issues in women's career growth (Thanacoody, Bartram, Barker, & Jacobs, 2006; Jogulu & Wood, 2011). Secondly, these provide an insight into women's feelings about what roles families and organizations play to lessen their burden (Powell & Greenhaus, 2012). These findings can help policymakers in developing women-friendly culture and policies, which help to keep women satisfied and motivated even during the stage of pragmatic endurance. Satisfaction during the pragmatic endurance stage leads to opt-in career choices for women. As more women reach the leadership stages or policy-making process, it's beneficial as they can be more vocal about their rights. More women in leadership positions will lead to women-friendly policies. (Caiazza, 2004; Moreau, Osgood, & Halsall, 2005)

Choosing a career is an important decision of an individual life. This decision can stress an individual irrespective of their gender. But the decision-making is not the only hard part. For the working woman, adjusting to professional life and getting recognition is quite hard and stressful in our patriarchal society. This life must be made easier for females as it is for males but how these challenges can be overcome. Firstly, this research aimed to use the Kaleidoscope Career Model to provide useful insights for single women in the education sector and for the institutes to assist their Human Resource Department (HRD) and policymakers to attract and attain female professionals in their organizations. Secondly, in the finding section, different aspects were discussed regarding the current working situation of women in the educational sector. It was evident from the respondent's answers that they perceive career as quite challenging. The study focused on highlighting the challenges and provides their solution. Thirdly, as women are working in private institutes in which their perceptions of career development are restricted by institutional hierarchy and their policies. There is limited research available that focuses on an in-depth analysis of compatible work-related policies in private as well as public institutes to support single women career perception. Therefore, in this research KCM was selected so that it could guide policymakers to create useful policies to highlight their needs for challenge, balance, and authenticity in the working environment. All these results are supported by previous studies (Bain & Cummings, 2000). Last but not the least, human resources policymakers in public and private institutes could consider the situation of Pakistani culture and the Pakistani Education system that help to provide multiple opportunities to women. Institutional policies need to be drafted and implemented accordingly.

Future Recommendations

This research directed some ways in which future research could lead to our understanding of single women career perceptions.

(1)   There is a need for organizational support for single women working in the education sector particularly in public sector institutes. There is a need for studies to understand the family issues of such women and to find ways to increase their productivity within an organization that help them in maintaining a balance between work and family lives.

(2)   Due to the lack of research on single women in the education sector, future research is needed to develop more understanding of associated aspects in single women career perceptions.

Additionally, male dominance is one of the major factors that were highlighted as a major factor that restricts single women's growth and development. Research should highlight more ways that help to eliminate the perception of male dominance in our society.

(3)   Single women are more persuaded if they have family support. The perception of the family ultimately develops the perception of single women. In a developing country like Pakistan, family culture and mindset are a major force that restricts or becomes a driving force in developing the perception of single women. Nonetheless, future research should direct ways that would enrich our understanding of single women career perceptions.

References

Antoniou, A.-S., & Drosos, N. (2018). Single parenthood and career-related issues. In T. K. Babalis, Y. Xanthacou, & M. Kaila (Eds.), *Family issues in the 21st century. Single-parenting in the 21st century: Perceptions, issues and implications* (pp. 143–166). New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Arthur, M. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (1996). A career lexicon for the 21st century. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 10*(4), 28-39.

Bain, O., & Cummings, W. (2000). Academe's glass ceiling: Societal, professional-organizational, and institutional barriers to the career advancement of academic women. *Comparative Education Review, 44*(4), 493-514.

Bernarto, I., Bachtiar, D., Sudibjo, N., Suryawan, I. N., Purwanto, A., & Asbari, M. (2020). Effect of transformational leadership, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction toward life satisfaction: Evidences from Indonesian teachers. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology, 29*(3), 5495-5503.

Berndt, A. E. (2020). Sampling methods. *Journal of Human Lactation, 36*(2), 224-226. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0890334420906850. doi:10.1177/0890334 420906850

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). *Doing interviews* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. London: Oxford University Press.

Bussell, J. (2008). Great expectations: can maternity coaching affect the retention of professional women? *International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching Mentoring, S2*, 14-26.

Caesens, G., Stinglhamber, F., & Ohana, M. (2016). Perceived organizational support and well-being: a weekly study. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 31*(7), 1214-1230.

Caiazza, A. (2004). Does women's representation in elected office lead to a women-friendly policy? Analysis of state-level data. *Women Politics, 26*(1), 35-70.

Carpenter, P., & Foster, B. (1977). The career decisions of student teachers. *Education Research and Perspectives and Australian Journal of Higher Education Nedlands, 4*(1), 23-33.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). London: Sage publications.

Elley-Brown, M. J., Pringle, J. K., & Harris, C. (2015). *How some women are opting in: A new perspective on the kaleidoscope career model.* Paper presented at the Academy of Management Proceedings.

Fink, G. (2016). Stress, definitions, mechanisms, and effects outlined: lessons from anxiety. In G. Fink (Ed.), *Stress: Concepts, cognition, emotion, and behavior* (pp. 3-11). San Diego: Elsevier.

Francis, V. (2017). What influences professional women's career advancement in construction? *Construction Management Economics, 35*(5), 254-275.

Gokuladas, V. (2010). Factors that influence first-career choice of undergraduate engineers in software services companies: A south Indian experience. *Career Development International, 15*(2), 144-165. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/13620431011040941

Grant-Vallone, E. J., & Ensher, E. A. (2011). Opting in between: Strategies used by professional women with children to balance work and family. *Journal of Career Development, 38*(4), 331-348.

Hall, J. S. (2016). *Identifying the variables that impact the nontraditional career choices of women.* (doctoral dissertation), Ohio University, Ohio

Jackson, K., & Bazeley, P. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications Limited.

Jogulu, U., & Wood, G. (2011). Women managers' career progression: an Asia Pacific perspective. *Gender in Management: An International Journal, 26*(8), 590-603. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/17542411111183893

Judge, T. A., & Watanabe, S. (1993). Another look at the job satisfaction-life satisfaction relationship. *Journal of applied psychology, 78*(6), 939.

Kotwal, N., & Prabhakar, B. (2009). Problems faced by single mothers. *Journal of Social Sciences, 21*(3), 197-204.

Kurtessis, J. N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M. T., Buffardi, L. C., Stewart, K. A., & Adis, C. S. (2017). Perceived organizational support: A meta-analytic evaluation of organizational support theory. *Journal of Management, 43*(6), 1854-1884.

Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological psychology: Theory, research and method*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Linehan, M., & Walsh, J. S. (2000). Work–family conflict and the senior female international manager. *British Journal of Management, 11*, S49-S58.

Mainiero, L. A., & Gibson, D. E. (2018). The kaleidoscope career model revisited: How midcareer men and women diverge on authenticity, balance, and challenge. *Journal of Career Development, 45*(4), 361-377.

Meeussen, L., & Van Laar, C. (2018). Feeling pressure to be a perfect mother relates to parental burnout and career ambitions. *Frontiers in psychology, 9*, 2113. doi:https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02113

Miles, M., Huberman, M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). New York: Sage Publications.

Moreau, M.-P., Osgood, J., & Halsall, A. (2005). The career progression of women teachers in England: A study of barriers to promotion and career development. Retrieved from https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/the-career-progression-of-women-teachers-in-england-a-study-of-th

Muhammad, Y. (2015). *Pakistani national identity, cultural diversity and global perspective: A policy trajectory study of the national curriculum for secondary school Pakistan Studies in Punjab.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Tasmania, Tasmania.

Muhammad, Y., & Brett, P. (2015). Beyond binary discourses? Pakistan studies textbooks and representations of cultural, national, and global Identity. *IARTEM e-Journal*(Special Issue Dec.), 74-100.

Muhammad, Y., & Brett, P. (2017). Some challenges in teaching citizenship in an Islamic context: Pakistan Studies teachers' perspectives and practices in relation to teaching about Identity. *Citizenship Teaching and Learning, 12*(3), 279–298.

Muhammad, Y., & Brett, P. (2019). Addressing social justice and cultural identity in Pakistani education: A qualitative content analysis of curriculum policy. In *Education, ethnicity and equity in the multilingual Asian context* (pp. 235-253). New York: Springer.

Muhammad, Y., & Brett, P. (2020). Infusing cultural diversity into Pakistan Studies textbooks: An analysis of textbooks and teachers' perspectives. In M. S. Pervez (Ed.), *Radicalization in Pakistan: A Critical Perspective* (pp. 61-76). London: Routledge.

Pfister, I. B., Jacobshagen, N., Kälin, W., & Semmer, N. K. (2020). How does appreciation lead to higher job satisfaction? *Journal of Managerial Psychology*. Retrieved from https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JMP-12-2018-0555/full/html.

Powell, G. N., & Greenhaus, J. H. (2012). When family considerations influence work decisions: Decision-making processes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 81*(3), 322-329.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). London: SAGE Publications Limited.

Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (5th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Simpson, R. (2004). Masculinity at work: The experiences of men in female-dominated occupations. *Work, employment and society, 18*(2), 349-368.

Sullivan, S. E., & Arthur, M. B. (2006). The evolution of the boundaryless career concept: Examining physical and psychological mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 69*(1), 19-29.

Sullivan, S. E., & Carraher, S. M. (2018). Using the kaleidoscope career model to create cultures of gender equity. In *Research Handbook of Diversity and Careers* (pp. 227-240). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Sullivan, S. E., & Mainiero, L. (2007a). The changing nature of gender roles, alpha/beta careers and work-life issues: Theory-driven implications for human resource management. *Career Development International, 12* (3), 238-263.

Sullivan, S. E., & Mainiero, L. (2007b). Women's kaleidoscope careers: a new framework for examining women's stress across the lifespan. In P. L. Perrewé & D. C. Ganster (Eds.), *Exploring the work and non-work interface*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Sullivan, S. E., & Mainiero, L. (2008). Using the kaleidoscope career model to understand the changing patterns of women's careers: Designing HRD programs that attract and retain women. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 10*(1), 32-49.

Syed, J., Pio, E., & Ali, F. (2013). A multi-level perspective on equal employment opportunity for women in Pakistan. *Equality, Diversity Inclusion: An International Journal, 32* (3), 289-309. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-12-2012-0110

Thanacoody, P. R., Bartram, T., Barker, M., & Jacobs, K. (2006). Career progression among female academics. *Women in Management Review, 21*(7), 536-553. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420610692499

Tu, H. S., Forret, M. L., & Sullivan, S. E. (2006). Careers in a non-Western context: An exploratory empirical investigation of factors related to the career success of Chinese managers. *Career Development International, 11*(7), 580-593. doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430610713454

Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research*. London: Routledge.

Wang, S. (2020). *Choices or constraints? Applying the kaleidoscope career model to the careers of female doctors in china.* (doctoral dissertation), University of Northumbria, Newcastle, UK.

Wayne, J. H., Butts, M. M., Casper, W. J., & Allen, T. D. (2017). In search of balance: A conceptual and empirical integration of multiple meanings of work–family balance. *Personnel Psychology, 70*(1), 167-210.

Węziak-Białowolska, D., Białowolski, P., & McNeely, E. (2020). The impact of workplace harassment and domestic violence on work outcomes in the developing world. *World Development, 126*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104732

Willis, S. C., Shann, P., & Hassell, K. (2009). Pharmacy career deciding: making choice a "good fit". *Journal of health organization and management, 23*(1), 85-102. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/14777260910942579