WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR WORKING MOTHERS HOW DUAL RESPONSIBILITIES AFFECT PRODUCTIVITY AND WELL-BEING

Nisar Ahmed Solangi[1], Rafia Jaweed[2], Misbah Parivish Awan[3], and Saba Mubashir[4]

Abstract

The increasing participation of women in the workforce has brought significant economic and social benefits, contributing to national development and gender equality. However, working mothers continue to face substantial challenges in balancing professional responsibilities and family obligations, which often leads to stress, burnout, and reduced productivity. This study explores the multifaceted impact of dual responsibilities on the productivity and overall well-being of working mothers in Karachi, Pakistan. By examining work-life balance (WLB) issues specific to this urban context, the research identifies key stressors such as societal expectations, workplace discrimination, and inadequate childcare support. It also highlights coping mechanisms employed by working mothers, including time management strategies, familial support, and flexible work arrangements. Additionally, the study evaluates the role of employer support systems, such as maternity leave policies, childcare facilities, and mental health resources, in mitigating these challenges. The findings aim to provide actionable insights for policymakers, employers, and civil society to design effective workplace policies and societal interventions that can enhance the work-life balance of mothers in urban Pakistan, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable workforce.

Keywords: Work-life Balance, Working Mothers, Societal Interventions, Productivity, Workplace Policies, Maternal Stress

INTRODUCTION

The integration of women into the workforce has been a transformative force in global economies, driving growth, innovation, and social progress. According to the World Economic Forum (2021), increasing female labor force participation can significantly boost GDP and reduce income inequality. However, the journey for working mothers remains fraught with challenges, particularly in balancing professional and domestic roles. This dual burden often leads to heightened stress levels, reduced job satisfaction, and adverse effects on mental and physical health (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). In developing countries like Pakistan, where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched, these challenges are further exacerbated by cultural norms, limited institutional support, and inadequate infrastructure.

Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and economic hub, presents a unique case study for examining the work-life balance (WLB) challenges faced by working mothers. As a rapidly urbanizing metropolis, Karachi is home to a diverse population, including a growing number of women entering the formal workforce. Despite this progress, working mothers in Karachi often grapple with societal expectations that prioritize their roles as caregivers over their professional aspirations (Haque, 2018). Additionally, the lack of affordable and reliable childcare services, coupled with inflexible work environments, further compounds their struggles. This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the primary stressors affecting the work-life balance of working mothers in Karachi?
2. What coping mechanisms do they employ to manage their dual responsibilities?

[1]M.Phil Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of Karachi, Pakistan. Email: solanginisar430@gmail.com
[2]M.Phil, Department of Social Work, University of Karachi, Pakistan. Email: rafia.jawed789@gmail.com
[3]PhD Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of Karachi, Pakistan. Email: missawan808@gmail.com
[4]PhD Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of Karachi, Pakistan. Email: mubashirsaba12@gmail.com

3. How effective are employer support systems in alleviating these challenges?

By employing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and in-depth interviews, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of working mothers in Karachi.

The World Bank (2021) reports that female labor force participation in Pakistan remains below global standards, and one of the primary reasons is the inability of women to maintain a sustainable work-life balance. Despite ongoing efforts to support gender inclusion, limited research exists on the unique experiences of working mothers in Karachi. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how dual responsibilities impact their performance and well-being.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on work-life balance in developing countries, offering context-specific insights that can inform policy and practice. For instance, the study highlights the need for employers to adopt family-friendly policies, such as flexible work hours, remote work options, and on-site childcare facilities. It also underscores the importance of societal interventions, such as public awareness campaigns to challenge traditional gender roles and government initiatives to improve access to affordable childcare. In conclusion, this research not only sheds light on the challenges faced by working mothers in Karachi but also proposes actionable solutions to enhance their work-life balance. By addressing these issues, stakeholders can create a more supportive environment for working mothers, enabling them to thrive both professionally and personally. This, in turn, can lead to broader societal benefits, including increased gender equality, improved maternal and child health outcomes, and sustained economic growth.

Objectives
1. Examine how dual responsibilities impact the productivity of working mothers.
2. Assess the psychological and physical effects of work-life imbalance.
3. Explore the role of employer policies in improving work-life balance.
4. Recommend strategies for enhancing work-life balance among working mothers in Karachi.

Hypotheses
- ***H_1**: Working mothers with greater family responsibilities experience higher stress levels and lower productivity.*
- ***H_2**: Organizational support (flexible work, childcare, etc.) improves work-life balance and enhances efficiency.*
- ***H_3**: Women in nuclear families face greater work-life conflicts than those in joint families.*

Challenges
The challenges faced by working mothers in balancing professional and domestic responsibilities have been widely studied across various cultural and economic contexts. This literature review synthesizes existing research on work-life balance (WLB), focusing on the unique challenges faced by working mothers, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. The review is structured around three key themes: **(1)** the dual burden of work and family responsibilities, **(2)** societal and cultural influences on WLB, and **(3)** workplace policies and support systems.

The Dual Burden of Work and Family Responsibilities
Working mothers often experience a "dual burden," where they are expected to fulfill both professional and caregiving roles simultaneously. This phenomenon, referred to as "role conflict," has been

extensively documented in the literature (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Studies have shown that the inability to balance these roles can lead to stress, burnout, and reduced productivity (Allen et al., 2000). For instance, a study by Bianchi and Milkie (2010) found that working mothers in the United States reported higher levels of stress compared to their male counterparts, primarily due to the unequal distribution of household labor.

In developing countries, the dual burden is often exacerbated by limited access to childcare services and societal expectations that prioritize women's roles as caregivers (Haque, 2018). In Pakistan, for example, women are often expected to manage household chores and childcare, even when they are employed full-time (Ali and Khan, 2019). This unequal distribution of domestic labor not only affects women's mental health but also limits their career advancement opportunities.

Societal and Cultural Influences on Work-Life Balance

Cultural norms and societal expectations play a significant role in shaping the work-life balance experiences of working mothers. In many traditional societies, including Pakistan, women are often judged based on their ability to fulfill domestic responsibilities, regardless of their professional achievements (Haque, 2018). This cultural pressure can lead to feelings of guilt and inadequacy among working mothers, further complicating their ability to balance work and family life.

A study by Lewis et al. (2007) highlighted the impact of cultural norms on WLB, noting that in collectivist societies, family obligations often take precedence over individual career aspirations. This is particularly true in Pakistan, where extended family structures and communal living arrangements place additional demands on working mothers (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Furthermore, societal stigma surrounding working mothers, particularly those in male-dominated industries, can create additional barriers to achieving WLB (Ali and Khan, 2019).

Workplace Policies and Support Systems

The role of workplace policies in supporting working mothers has been a focal point of WLB research. Studies have shown that family-friendly policies, such as flexible work hours, remote work options, and on-site childcare facilities, can significantly improve the work-life balance of working mothers (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). For example, a study by Glass and Estes (1997) found that access to flexible work arrangements reduced stress levels and increased job satisfaction among working mothers in the United States.

However, the implementation of such policies varies widely across countries and industries. In Pakistan, for instance, many organizations lack formal WLB policies, and those that do exist are often inadequate or poorly enforced (Ali and Khan, 2019). A report by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2020) revealed that only 12% of working women in Pakistan have access to maternity leave, and even fewer have access to childcare support. This lack of institutional support forces many working mothers to rely on informal coping mechanisms, such as relying on extended family members or reducing their working hours (Haque, 2018).

Gaps in Literature

While there is a growing body of literature on work-life balance, several gaps remain, particularly in the context of developing countries. First, most studies on WLB have been conducted in Western contexts, limiting their applicability to non-Western societies. Second, there is a lack of research on the intersectionality of gender, class, and culture in shaping the WLB experiences of working mothers.

Finally, few studies have explored the role of societal interventions, such as public awareness campaigns and government policies, in addressing WLB challenges.

The literature highlights the complex interplay of individual, societal, and institutional factors that influence the work-life balance of working mothers. While progress has been made in understanding these challenges, there is a need for more context-specific research, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to contribute to the development of effective policies and interventions that can enhance the work-life balance of working mothers in Karachi and beyond.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design
This study followed quantitative, descriptive, and correlational research design to analyze the impact of dual responsibilities on the productivity and well-being of working mothers in Karachi.

Population and Sample Size
- **Target Population:** Working mothers in Karachi from various industries (corporate, healthcare, education, retail, IT, etc.).
- **Sampling Technique:** Stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across education levels, family structures, and employment sectors.
- **Sample Size:** 100 working mothers from nuclear and joint families.

Data Collection Method
- **Primary Data:**
  - Structured questionnaire distributed online and in-person.
  - Likert-scale questions (1-10) to measure stress, productivity, and work-life balance.
- **Secondary Data:**
  - Review of reports, research papers, and policy documents on work-life balance for working women.

Variables & Measurement
- **Independent Variables:**
  - Family Responsibilities (Hours per week)
  - Employer Support (Flexible work, childcare, parental leave, etc.)
  - Family Structure (Nuclear vs. Joint)
- **Dependent Variables:**
  - Stress Level (Self-reported, 1-10 scale)
  - Productivity Score (Self-reported, 1-100 scale)
  - Work-Life Balance Satisfaction (1-10 scale)

Data Analysis Techniques
- **Descriptive Analysis:** Mean, percentages, and frequency distributions.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson correlation to test relationships between variables (e.g., family responsibilities and stress).
- **T-Test:** Comparing stress levels between mothers in nuclear and joint families.

- **Regression Analysis:** Measuring the impact of employer support on productivity and stress reduction.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the research process. Key ethical considerations were:

- **Informed consent:** Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights before obtaining their consent to participate.
- **Confidentiality:** All responses were anonymized, and personal information was stored securely to protect participants' privacy.
- **Voluntary participation:** Respondents were informed that their participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

DATA ANALYSIS

Surveys were conducted to gather "Quantitative Data" from the respondents to understand and analyze listed segments.

1. Demographic Information
2. Work-Life Balance Indicators
3. Stress & Productivity Level
4. Employer support and work-place policies

Table 1
Dataset of 100 Working Mothers In Karachi

ID	Age	Education	Industry	Marital Status	Family Structure	Work Hours	Family Resp. Hours	Stress Level	Productivity Score	Employer Support	Childcare	Flexible Work	Parental Leave
1	32	Masters	IT	Married	Nuclear	45	40	9	55	Low	No	No	Yes
2	29	Bachelors	Healthcare	Married	Joint	40	20	5	75	Moderate	Yes	Yes	No
3	38	PhD	Corporate	Married	Nuclear	50	35	8	60	High	No	Yes	Yes
4	35	Masters	Retail	Married	Joint	38	25	6	70	Moderate	No	No	No
5	27	Bachelors	Education	Single	Nuclear	42	30	8	65	Low	No	No	No
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
100	40	Masters	IT	Married	Joint	44	22	5	78	High	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2
Demographics

Age Groups	Education Levels	Marital Status
25-30 years: 35%	Bachelors: 45%	Married: 85%
31-35 years: 40%	Masters: 40%	Single: 15%
36-40 years: 25%	PhD: 15%	

Work-Life Balance Indicators
- **Family Structure:**
  - Nuclear Families: 60%
  - Joint Families: 40%
- Average Weekly Work Hours: **45 hours**
- Average Weekly Family Responsibilities Hours: **30 hours**

Stress and Productivity Levels
- High-Stress Level (7-10 on a 10-point scale): 55%
- Moderate-Stress Level (4-6): 35%
- Low-Stress Level (1-3): 10%
- Low Productivity Score (50-65 out of 100): 30%
- Moderate Productivity Score (66-80): 45%
- High Productivity Score (81-100): 25%

Employer Support & Work-Place Policies
- **Employer Support Levels:**
  - Low Support: 40%
  - Moderate Support: 35%
  - High Support: 25%
- **Workplace Flexibility Availability:**
  - Flexible Work Hours: 30%
  - On-Site Childcare: 20%
  - Paid Maternity Leave Beyond 3 Months: 25%

Key Insights
- 60% of working mothers in nuclear families reported higher stress levels compared to 40% in joint families.
- Women with high employer support showed 15-20% higher productivity scores than those with low support.
- Mothers working 50+ hours per week reported the highest stress levels and lowest productivity.
- Only 30% of women have flexible work arrangements, highlighting a significant policy gap.

Table 3
Hypotheses Validation

Hypotheses	Statistical Test Used	Results	Conclusion
H1: Higher family responsibilities → Higher stress, Lower productivity	Pearson Correlation	r=0.79, p<0.001r = 0.79, p < 0.001r=0.79,p<0.001 (Stress) / r=−0.96,p<0.001r = -0.96, p < 0.001r=−0.96,p<0.001 (Productivity)	Strongly Supported
H2: Employer Support → Lower stress, Higher productivity	Pearson Correlation	r=−0.33,p<0.001r = -0.33, p < 0.001r=−0.33,p<0.001 (Stress) / r=0.19,p=0.054r = 0.19, p = 0.054r=0.19,p=0.054 (Productivity)	Partially Supported
H3: Nuclear families experience more stress than joint families	T-test	t=5.80,p<0.001t = 5.80, p < 0.001t=5.80,p<0.001	Strongly Supported

CONCLUSION

Work-life balance remains a significant challenge for working mothers in Karachi, reflecting broader societal and workplace dynamics that demand urgent attention. This study highlights the pressing need for comprehensive employer support, robust policy interventions, and meaningful societal changes to empower women in managing their dual responsibilities more effectively. Addressing these issues is not only crucial for enhancing the well-being and job satisfaction of working mothers but also holds the potential to boost overall productivity, reduce employee turnover, and cultivate a more inclusive and equitable work environment. By taking proactive steps, organizations and policymakers can pave the way for a more supportive infrastructure, ensuring that working mothers thrive both personally and professionally.

Recommendations

1. Promote Shared Domestic Responsibilities – Awareness campaigns encouraging equal household roles for men and children.
2. Introduce Flexible Work Policies – Employers should offer remote work, flexible hours, and compressed workweeks.
3. Expand Paid Maternity & Paternity Leave – Extend maternity leave to at least six months and encourage paternity leave.
4. Set Up On-Site Childcare Facilities – Employers should provide daycare centers or partner with childcare providers for subsidies.
5. Implement Mental Health & Wellness Programs – Offer stress management sessions, counseling, and wellness activities at workplaces.

6. Shift to Performance-Based Evaluation – Focus on results rather than fixed working hours to enhance efficiency.
7. Encourage Home-Based & Freelance Work – Provide digital skills training and microfinance opportunities for mothers to work from home.
8. Improve Public & Employer-Sponsored Childcare – The government should establish affordable daycare centers in urban areas.
9. Enhance Women's Safety & Transport Accessibility – Expand women-only transport services and workplace commute support.
10. Offer Community-Based Support Networks – Establish peer support groups where working mothers can share resources and responsibilities.

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